MARK TWAIN'S LOVER'S QUARREL WITH GOD;
OR, SATIRIZING ALL GOD'S CHILDREN:
MARK TWAIN'S USES OF RELIGIOUS SATIRE

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ABSTRACT

Mark Twain's Lover's Quarrel with God;
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Starting from the premise that Mark Twain repeatedly returns to modal religious satire to challenge the misguided idiosyncrasies of American Protestantism, this project explores Mark Twain's bimodal, religious positionality as an empathetic "insider" and a skeptical "outsider." It also investigates his uses of religious satire by analyzing his rhetorical form and content, both general satiric content and specifically regarding the practices of nineteenth-century American Protestant Christianity. His assault on hypocrisy and mendacity reveals Twain to be a reformer who desires a pragmatic theology and more authentic religious practices for America.

This project begins by establishing a working theory on the nature and function of satire and irony by discussing the foundational insights of John Dryden, Jonathan Swift, and Søren Kierkegaard in the context of several contemporary theorists. Focusing on Mark Twain, chapter two analyzes Twain's satiric development by elucidating Twain's own explanations for several of his newspaper squibs from the 1860s. Chapters three and four analyze the functions of verbal irony, metaphor, and wordplay in Twain's construction of modal satire. These chapters examine frequently anthologized works—"Buck Fanshaw's Funeral," "A Cat-Tale," *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg"—exploring Twain's reconceptualized role for realistic, satiric literature that

invites the reader to participate in societal reformation through artistic contemplation, which rejects the romanticized role for literature that merely reinforces morals by prompting emulation. In chapter five, R. Laurence Moore's and Charles Knight's research informs the thesis for Mark Twain's trickster position as an insider to the religious community—whom he satirizes with a shared knowledge, language, and values to reaffirm those values and how they are practiced—or alternatively as an outsider who uses that same knowledge and language to challenge hypocrisy and reinterpret current values. This paradoxical tension in Twain's satires makes plausible that, as revealed through his published writings, Mark Twain hoped for a heaven that he struggled to believe in, which kindled in him a lover's quarrel with God. Thus, the final chapter applies the insider-outsider and lover's-quarrel paradigms to *Huckleberry Finn*, "Letters from the Earth," and *Extract from Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven*.

For all my teachers

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INTRODUCTION

Mark Twain's attitudes toward God and Christianity—and even more so those of Samuel Clemens, the man behind the mask—have prompted scholarly debate for well over a century, in part because his daughter Clara painstakingly shaped his popular image in the fifty years after his death, working with Twain's literary executors to sanitize or keep hidden any text that would be seen as irreligious. Mark Twain himself and his tendency toward irony, humor, and double-edged use of modal satire throughout his long literary career have further complicated any study of Twain's relationship with religion. Ron Powers, noted Twain biographer and fellow scion of Hannibal, Missouri, expands on the difficulty any writer has distilling meaning from the legends of this literary behemoth:

> Mark Twain's greatest achievement as the man who found a voice for his country has made him a challenge for his biographers. His words are quoted, yet he somehow lies hidden in plain sight—a giant on the historic landscape. He has been so thoroughly rearranged and reconstructed by a long succession of scholarly critics that the contours of an actual, textured human character have been obscured. And his voice, not to mention his humor, has gone missing from many of these analyses. (Powers 6)

Samuel Clemens also complicates the scholarly process in several ways. For instance, he creates an unreliable trickster persona, Mark Twain, to narrate or at least "author" his works. The ubiquity of irony and humor repeatedly destabilize and frustrate conclusive meaning. Although a genius autodidact, Clemens never fully developed the ability to expound abstractly on his observations and intuitions—his formal schooling ending before he entered

his teenage years. A man of contradictions, he vacillated from seriously considering joining the religious ministry and referring to himself in jest as "The Reverend Mark Twain," while later in his life, he unleashed an all-out assault on a Protestant theology of the kind that emphasized literal readings of the God of the Old Testament. Twain criticized these aspects of religion in America most articulately in the first-person narration of Satan, a persona that clearly echoes its author, whom scholars would forever link with Twain as "the pen warmed up in Hell" (Powers 3, 53, 89).

However hellish in actuality, the logic and versatility of Twain's ironic voice rings true as ever across three centuries: "If Christ were here now there is one thing he would not be—a Christian" (Notebook 1897 qtd. in Schmidt); and a year later, "There has only been one Christian. They caught him and crucified him—early" (Notebook 1898 qtd. in Schmidt). Understandably, Christians of Twain's milieu would not rest easily hearing such things, and yet he seemingly lets Christ off easily when compared to his other satiric victims: in the former statement, Christians with whom Twain's Christ will not associate and, the latter example, Christians unworthy of the title. Further contradictions complicate any sure interpretations of Twain's quips. In a 17 July 1889 letter to his wife Livy, Twain wrote, "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" (qtd. in Schmidt; Twain, *The Love Letters* 253-54). In the essay "Three Statements of the Eighties," published posthumously in *What Is Man and Other Philosophical Writings*, Twain writes of the possibility of a benevolent God and a corresponding heaven: "I think the goodness, the justice, and the mercy of God are manifested in His works: I perceive that they are manifested toward me in this life; the logical conclusion is that they will be manifested toward me in the life to come, if there should be one" (56-59). And yet his

grammar sets up the possibility that if there should not be a heaven, then perhaps there also is no God or that "His works" are not imbued with "goodness," "justice," and "mercy." Such irony and ambiguities are essential in understanding Twain—the inconclusive possibilities of meaning always hiding behind the literal denotation. Later in the essay, he continues, "I am not able to believe one's religion can affect his hereafter one way or the other, no matter what that religion may be. But it may easily be a great comfort to him in this life—hence it is a valuable possession to him" (56-59). On the one hand, he speaks as an insider with compassion toward the personal benefits found in religion; on the other, his statement seems distancing, offering the soft judgment that someone's personal belief may be quite irrelevant once this life is over. The boundary line on which Twain positions himself is ethical and humane—that in matters of belief we offer compassion and patience toward others. Yet Twain's critique has rhetorical force, for the reader is not spared the brunt of his skepticism. The layers of irony diminish any certain conclusion as to Twain's relationship with organized religion, and yet here he affirms the existential merits in belief, or at the least extends some compassion toward humanity. And although seemingly relativistic, Twain's quip is in fact quite pragmatic; it implies that, since beliefs are of little importance after we die and since they have the potential to improve life here, then why wouldn't human beings engage in the work of cleaning up our theological and religious beliefs and practices as a boon to humanity?

These sayings also illustrate the unique positionality of Mark Twain regarding religion; he is of two minds: born into this society, he speaks with the language of a religious insider; however, his aims are not to reify a conservative religious hegemony but to seek to move readers to a realization of hypocrisy and toward self-reformation. From this perspective, Twain's writings on God, the Bible, and Christianity are optimistic and hopeful,

but taken literally, they point toward a lackluster deconstruction with an underlying hint of a trickster's seething antagonism. But as Ron Powers reminds us in the opening quotation, we are often at a loss to find the real author's thoughts in Mark Twain's words. A meticulous humorist and platform performer, Twain knew the power of playing with readers' perceptions of the literal. He worked to shape and preserve his public persona, relegating some works as experiments that remain unpublished out of fear they should bring excessive unwanted public disdain, yet others he intentionally releases, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* for instance, although its content would likely offend some. In the 1901 essay "Corn-Pone Opinions," Twain concludes, "We all do no end of feeling, and we mistake it for thinking. And out of it we get an aggregation which we consider a boon. Its name is Public Opinion. It is held in reverence. It settles everything. Some think it the Voice of God" (*Tales* 295). Twain recognizes that we (himself included) possess the capacity for self-deception and too easily surrender our intellectual independence for popular acceptance. When discussing religion, Twain must consider these influences that would challenge his ideas. Recognizing that these feelings, or sentiments as Twain might have preferred to call them, are powerful motivators, he finds that fostering realistic sentiments is the engine to move readers to reflect on "the moral sense" (Camfield 383-34, 542-45). Humor, satire, irony—Twain's literary arsenal is neither passive nor conclusive; it is disruptive, aggressive, playful, and destabilizing. Yet the reward Twain offers to readers is an existential revolution; his realism is life-giving because it puts the onus on each reader to embark upon an authentic examination to question those "corn-porn opinions." Twain offers a friendly voice in the darkness that encourages, "Turn on the light."

Samuel Clemens's life-long religious affiliations have been well established by scholars. Reared by a Presbyterian mother and a freethinking, deistic father, Twain was uniquely prepared to comment on the new movements of Christianity that emerged, flourished, and faded in the second half of the nineteenth century (Powers 29; Bush *Mark Twain and the Spiritual Crisis* 21-54). The religious divergence of his parents between orthodoxy and secular rationalism aptly symbolizes the ability for Twain's writing to portray Christianity from both insider and outsider perspectives. While Twain clearly writes with humorous aims about religion, scholars still debate the nature of his underlying preconceptions and motives; some even have attempted to align Twain with their political or religious camps (e.g. Caroline Harnsberger or Stanley Brodwin who interpret Twain through the lenses of apostasy and deistic rationalism, respectively). Others such as Joe B. Fulton claim that it is unhelpful, even futile, to look for parallels between Twain's writings and his personal beliefs (xii), especially in light of his ever-changing religious moods, which Stanley Brodwin argues are merely provoked by Calvinistic guilt (228). An alternative reading of Twain's relationships with friends and family, his socio-religious milieu, and the manner and method of his writings reveals his religious satires to be the product of his moral vision as both friend and skeptic of Christianity as he aims to spark reform by introducing essential doubt into the minds of its adherents.

Building on this scholarship, this study explores Twain's bimodal religious positionality as simultaneously speaking as an empathetic "insider" and a skeptical "outsider"; it investigates Mark Twain's various uses of religious satire by analyzing his rhetorical form—as it looks at metaphor, language, irony, tone, among many—and content, both general satiric content and specifically regarding the practices of nineteenth-century American Protestant Christianity. While many scholars argue that Mark Twain assaults

religious institutions and even Christian belief itself by positing a form of deism or even atheism, Twain, rather, throughout his career, returns repeatedly to modal religious satire to challenge the misguided idiosyncrasies of American Protestantism (Bush *Mark Twain and the Spiritual Crisis* 1-19). The aforementioned quotation—"that religion may be…a great comfort" and "a valuable possession"—confirms that Twain sees pragmatic and existential value in religion. In their purest form, Twain's religious satires consequently demand that the theology and religious practices of his day be logical and relevant to both internally and in the context of current scientific, philosophical, and cultural developments. In addition to his pursuit of the genuine and practical, Twain also seeks to challenge what he sees to be the destructive forces of religious practices and institutions, most prominently global missions and evangelism that promise, in addition to salvation, a prosperous and transformed society; as Twain sees it, however, Christianity in practice tends toward dehumanizing, disenfranchising, and hoodwinking entire peoples, often to the benefit of western imperial powers. His assault on hypocrisy and mendacity reveals Twain to be a reformer who desires a pragmatic theology and religious practices for America.

Yet this study does not aim to derive a systematic theology from Mark Twain's words—could such a thing even be attempted from its vastness; instead, it embarks toward a better understanding of the vision, motives, and concerns informing the nexus of religion and satire. Recognizing that Samuel Clemens through his persona Mark Twain is not only a product of his time, but also fits into the nineteenth-century tradition of American social and religious reformers, this project explores the trajectory of Mark Twain's use of satire artistically as a vehicle for reflection and reform. It asserts that, although he may pose as an antagonistic religious outsider, Twain's satiric speakers more often position themselves on the border as frustrated insiders within the American Protestant tradition.

This interpretation aligns with Frederick Kiley and J. M. Shuttleworth's argument that satire "is actually conservative…It cherishes a sound society, good traditions, and wise, viable institutions" (1). The irony at the center of Twain's humor and satire is rooted, not merely in his desire to tell a good joke or to entertain, but rather in his artistic temperament and way of seeing the world. As Twain writes in "How to Tell a Story," "The humorous story is strictly a work of art—high and delicate art—and only an artist can tell it; but no art is necessary in telling the comic and the witty story; anybody can do it" (*Tales* 391). Writing on Mark Twain's literary response to the Civil War, Neil Schmitz begins, "Humor, at its best, forgives and resolves a grievous wrong…humor doesn't deny or defend; it transacts; it negotiates" (75). Twain's humor is never *merely* humor. At its least, it is art; when excellent, it is dynamite.

To achieve these goals, the initial portions of this project apply the insights of studies in satire, irony, and humor to determine the scope and form of Twain's art, examining the driving forces behind his work, frustrations, aims, and desired effects. Chapter one explores a working theory on the nature and function of satire and irony by discussing the foundational insights by John Dryden, Jonathan Swift, and Søren Kierkegaard; it concludes building on their ideas with several contemporary theories, particularly those of Jean Piaget, Paul de Man, Charles Knight, Dustin Griffin, and the comedian Jon Stewart, among others. Returning to focus on Mark Twain, chapter two begins by placing the insights from the abovementioned theorists, with the addition of Rubin Quintero's work on modal satire, in dialogue with Twain scholars, most prominently Philip D. Beidler and R. Kent Rasmussen, among others. Turning to the texts themselves to offer close readings of this genre as it develops throughout Twain's canon, chapter two provides an analysis of Twain's own

explanations for several of his early satiric pieces from his Washoe newspaper reports in the early 1860s, which he republished with explanations when editing the Buffalo *Galaxy* in 1870, and then applies his theories to the early squib "How to Cure a Cold," first published in San Francisco in 1863, the year Samuel Clemens became Mark Twain.

Chapters three and four build on the definitions and analyses established in the opening chapters to emphasize the functions necessary for the construction of satire: namely, verbal irony, metaphor, and wordplay in the construction of satire, the endearment of the narrator and the inclusion of the audience. These chapters examine frequently anthologized works—"Buck Fanshaw's Funeral" and "A Cat-Tale" in chapter three; *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg" in chapter four—with specific references to the research of Twain scholars Ron Powers and Stephen Railton as well as the theories of Jacques Derrida and Sacvan Bercovitch, the latter's theories of the trickster in American literature serving to conceptualize how Mark Twain establishes and maintains his posture as a satiric narrator. Moreover, the analyses of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885) and "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg" (1899) provide guideposts that demarcate the development of Twain as a satirist in his early career to the more mature, nuanced, pointed, and at times acerbic assaults in his final years.

Chapter four also marks a narrowing of focus beyond defining satire and establishing a model for Twain's brand of satire, in particular the essential role placed upon the reader to reconceptualize the social role of literature as reformation through contemplation rather than reinforcement by emulation. Hereafter, the project zooms in on several key moments in the writings of a more mature Twain—*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg." In these stories, Twain focuses his satires on the overarching persons, teachings, and practices that typify Protestantism in his lifetime:

Christianity as a hallmark of American manners, public virtue versus private sin; debates on predestination and the sovereignty of God, and loving thy neighbor, to name a few.

Returning to theory and biography, chapter five pans the camera across Twain's life and works, laying out a framework to understand Mark Twain as a multifaceted satirist with the ability to variably position himself either as an insider or an outsider to the religious community. From his position as an insider he satirizes the community with shared knowledge, language, and values in order to reaffirm those values and how they are practiced. In contrast, from his position as an outsider he uses that same knowledge and language to challenge hypocrisy and reinterpret the values and, through satiric irony, to open the possibility for their rejection or replacement. This chapter posits that Twain can and does function both within and without religious communities and that, as a satirist, he manipulates his position to move his readers to encounter his satiric message. To accomplish these ends, this chapter also lays the groundwork for future explorations into Twain's satires by assembling key biographical, religious, and cultural contexts that elucidate the American religious practices that impelled an incensed Mark Twain to write satire and position him as both insider and outsider on the borders of this community.

The arguments of religious historian R. Laurence Moore and literary theorist Charles A. Knight provide the context and heuristics to interpret Twain's satiric stance on religious issues. Likewise, Twain's letters to his older brother Orion Clemens and to his literary comrade William Dean Howells give hints to Twain's attitudes and positionality when writing satire, which find corroboration in Twainian biographers and critics. Together, these establish Twain's use of religious satire not only as a reforming social agent, but also as a mirror of his own inner struggles to reconcile belief and behavior with epistemology and doubt in a manner that is authentic and yet life-giving. This interpretation echoes the

argument of Harold K. Bush, who views Twain as "an apocalyptic writer focused on 'Christian' concerns" whose darkest writings are an attempt to reify the ancient practice of shalom in his world (*Mark Twain and the Spiritual Crisis* 78). Mark Twain, like Nathanial Hawthorne and Herman Melville in the preceding literary generation, focused in his darkest works on the problem of evil and suffering, what Stan Goldman refers to as "protest theism" (qtd. in Bush, *Mark Twain and the Spiritual Crisis* 73). To reconcile these views of Twain with preceding scholarship, Bush concludes,

> To put it in a biblical frame, protest theism involves calling into question God's commitment to bringing about a world of shalom. One can only protest if one believes he knows how the world ought to be. The obvious presence of unexplained pain and suffering seems on its surface to be perhaps the strongest argument against the world ever becoming what it ought to be. (*Mark Twain and the Spiritual Crisis* 73)

The paradoxical tensions in Twain's satire—between peace, wholeness, and hope on the one hand and evil, pain, and suffering on the other—invite a new pathway for reading these texts, opening the plausibility that, at least in his writings, Mark Twain hoped for a heaven that he struggled to believe in, which kindled in him a lover's quarrel with God (a title playfully borrowed from Lawrence Thompson's seminal 1952 monograph *Melville's Quarrel with God*). The final chapter (six) applies the insider-outsider and lover's-quarrel paradigms to Twain's works to examine the religious education of Huck Finn, the satiric travelogues of Satan in "Letters from the Earth," and the humorous *homecoming* of Captain Stormfield in his journey to heaven.

Altogether, these pages explore the nuanced and wondrous relationship that Twain had with ancient and still-developing generic and modal satire, and they delineate a

schematic by which to understand the complicated nature of Twain's relationship with Religion in America and her communities of faith by establishing the exploratory, life-giving power of satire and irony.

CHAPTER ONE

ON THE NATURE OF SATIRE

Toward a Theory of Satire

Before embarking on an analysis of Twain's satires and his statements on religion in America, the stage needs to be briefly set by establishing key definitions, for to understand Twain's satiric message requires an understanding of satire itself, its development, and its uses. With this in mind, let us first explore the ideas of two prominent satirists in literary history—John Dryden and Jonathan Swift—to establish a framework for the literary foundations of satire in the two centuries immediately preceding that of Mark Twain. Thence, the chapter explores the more recent generations of scholars and their contributions to the establishment of satire as a codified field of literary studies. Having established their integral insights, the chapter turns to explore the father of modern conceptions of irony, Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, for his work establishes irony, and thereby satire, as generative forces capable of bringing existential freedom to a society. Finally, this exploration of satire and irony takes root in the words and practices of one the of leading satiric voices of our era, Jon Stewart.

Writers as well as literary scholars have proffered a nimiety of definitions for satire. John Dryden in his 1693 "Discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire" lays out for The Lord Chamberlain, Charles Earl of Dorset and Middlesex, the initial classical aims of satire:

> This is what I have to say in General of Satire…. That the word Satire is of a more general signification in Latin, than in French, or English. For amongst

> the *Romans* it was not only us'd for those Discourses which decry'd Vice, or expos'd Folly; but for others also, where Virtue was recommended. But in our Modern Languages we apply it only to invective Poems, where the very Name of Satire is formidable to those Persons, who wou'd appear to the World, what they are not in themselves. For in English, to say Satire, is to mean Reflection, as we use that word in the worst Sense; or as the *French* call it, more properly, *Medisance*.

Dryden uses this definition to preface his translation of *The Satires of Decimus Junius Juvenalis*, which he writes for The Lord Chamberlain, who possesses the royal authority to censure publications. Dryden's distinction is important as he is forced to rhetorically position his translation of Juvenal as different than that of contemporary satires by arguing that Roman satire serves society by denouncing vice and folly and acclaiming virtue. Dryden contrasts this lofty aim of satire by confessing how, in his contemporary context, satire had become less about moderating vice in society and become increasingly a wanton weapon to attack a person by offering a lampooning, mimetic impression or promote "scandal or malicious gossip," as Jack Lynch translates *medisance* (Lynch). Dryden represents the problem faced by all satirists: that when audiences (even one as small as "The Lord Chamberlain") perceive this art form as immoral, writers must find ways to justify its use. This practical reality problematizes our attempts to define satire, for satirists aim at defending its existence from a point of subjectivity.

By contrast, Dr. Samuel Johnson in his *Dictionary of the English Language* (1775 edition) considers the genre of satire only in the context of formal verse and comments on the problem that it is often confused with other genres: "Satire: a poem in which wickedness or folly is censured. Proper *satire* is distinguished, by the generality of the reflections, from a

lampoon which is aimed against a particular person; but they are too frequently confounded" (qtd. in Quintero 5). Much more recently than Dryden and Johnson, H. M. Abrams in *A Glossary of Literary Terms* offers a useful definition to ground the discussion of Twain and satire. Abrams writes,

> Satire can be described as the literary art of diminishing or derogating a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking toward it attitudes of amusement, contempt, scorn, or indignation…it uses laughter as a weapon, and against a butt that exists outside the work itself…Satire has been justified by those who practice it as a corrective of human vice and folly….Its frequent claim…has been to ridicule the failing rather than the individual, and to limit its ridicule to corrigible faults, excluding those for which a person is not responsible. (187)

Satire functions aesthetically and rhetorically to place the reader in a precarious and often antagonistic relationship with its subject, or "butt" of the joke, for greater purposes than mere amusement (additionally, the reader could also be the target of the joke). And if the satirists are themselves to be believed, satire is reformational, a corrective that seeks to create audience allegiance toward a value, virtue, behavior, or way of life. Worth noting is the classic definitional dodge—the claims by satirists that this genre's positive benefits are generally defensive and may serve to distract from ulterior artistic or social motives. Adding further complication, satire can also assume many forms either functioning modally, as indirect satire couched within another genre, or generically, as direct or formal satire that often addresses problems using the first person speaking against a specific target.

Satire by its very nature is problematic for those seeking to define its aims, characteristics, and effects. Much scholarly ink has been spread delineating its various

natures, forms, and uses. Considering its broad classical forms, satire can be harsh and biting, in the case of Menippean or Juvenalian satire, or it can be a pleasurable, self-deprecating rebuke, in the case of Horatian satire. The spark of satire lies in its uses of irony and other literary devices to show readers that the matters portrayed in the text are not as they could, or even should, be. And while satire may have a moral element, it does not necessarily need to be moral. In fact, the values established by the satirist need not be moral at all and in fact could be downright destructive. A reductive reading of satire would push readers to *go thou and do the opposite* of the issue being satirized. Rarely will the "opposite" present itself as a tidy binary. More likely, however, the satirist will push an interpretive onus onto the readers; thus, characters become figures for contemplation and not necessarily for emulation. This is one of the many ways that satire uses irony and ambiguity to destabilize meaning and, thus, pushes its readers to find ways to understand other possible outcomes and options for living. The very nature of satire provides a place for readers to reflect, to consider other possibilities for the way things could be. In this sense, satire provides a perfect medium not to reify hegemonic values, but to covertly subvert them, by raising questions about human behavior, about philosophical and theological conclusions, about political institutions, about how we live and why—the list could go on. But satire creates an entertaining literary framework to think and reflect on how we might want to live life.

For instance, in Jonathan Swift's immemorial 1729 essay "A Modest Proposal," it is not sufficient that its readers conclude that cannibalism is wrong; in fact, the issue of satiric emphasis is not cannibalism itself. The lasting value of the piece is centered in the value of human life that the reader is forced to reject or affirm. As the authorial persona pushes the reader further up a logical-ethical chain, the reader might conclude that, since eating babies is wrong, society must reevaluate how we value humanity and how we adjust our lives to

reflect those values. Readers of satire, therefore, will find it difficult to be intellectually passive about such situations. Even when they do know that the piece is satiric, they will necessarily be pushed into a position that affirms or rejects the argument presented. Seen in this light, satire, predominately, raises questions and illuminates paths for further explanation. Perhaps, then, it is fair to conclude that a reader's contemplation is a paramount aim of satire, allowing him or her to read satire without demanding that the satirist have a clear direction for the reader's reform. Satire is not directly didactic. The satirist points out negative outcomes and, in general, gives guideposts or hand gestures rather than directing the reader with specific where-to-go, what-to-do instructions.

This view of satire, however, does not negate potential interpretive pitfalls. For failing to recognize a work's satirical nature, readers might respond with animosity toward the speaker rather than search for new insights on the subject. Thus, each satiric opportunity is poised for failure. For example, what if readers assume that Swift's speaker actually wants them to promote "this necessary work" or simply dismiss the satire as a mere travesty that mocks insurmountable social and moral ills? What if readers falsely conclude that a satiric work is merely a humorous tale for children, as could easily happen with Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*? Or what if readers fail to read with an eye for irony and *ironically* miss the joke? Are the satirist's jabs aimed at reform or toward new insights, then, diminished altogether?

These interpretive uncertainties cut both ways, and by focusing on the potential shortcomings of satire, we can miss the author's craft and the artistry. Perhaps satire's internal interpretive impediments make its success all the more noteworthy, for it is in satire's limitations that its true nature is demarcated. To realize that a text is satiric, readers must recognize that the narrator is speaking satirically (Knight, *The Literature of Satire* 38, 41-

42). The writer will give clues as to meaning: The reader will realize that the speaker is seemingly opting out of the necessary contractual requirements for effective communication, but in fact is attempting to co-create meaning with the audience, in keeping with W. Barnett Pearce and Vernon Cronen's practical communication theory on The Coordinated Management of Meaning or CMM (Em Griffin 66-81). Pearce and Cronen's theory postulates that meaning is contingent on the intersection of multiple narratives and the recipient's "local knowledge." When CMM is applied to the analysis of satire, its emphasis on the manner of communication over the specific context as well as the importance of the effect the message has on the recipient (specifically in terms of how and what parts of the message are "reproduced") makes clear the necessity of the audience in the social construction of the author's satiric meaning (Em Griffin 66-72). For instance, when failing to detect satire, readers, depending on their confidence or ability, may assume that either the speaker or even they themselves are incompetent communicators. But most writers do not function on this fatalistic level; they generally write in the optimism that people can and are willing to communicate, that the initiators have certain expectations for their audiences, and that the readers hope to receive some benefit. What initially could be seen as flawed communication always contains in itself an ironic signal—a wink that the author is speaking on multiple levels. In this manner, satire serves to encode "secret" knowledge as doublespeak. To see the satiric message, readers must imagine a world different than the one satirized and to conceptualize the possibilities in our primary reality. If readers are unable or refuse to see the satire and some of its interpretive possibilities, then the satire is not intended for them, and the satirist has merely confused, amused, or angered these readers. While satire may have the ability to awaken those moderate readers who are still forming their opinions about the issue generated, it is more likely to connect with those agreeing with

the satirist's perspective. Thus, satire, when most effective, is "preaching to the choir"—present and future members both included.

Satire, nevertheless, requires that individuals have the desire (or at least the openness) to think deeply about these issues, to pursue alternative ways of imagining their world. But wit and wisdom are not enough to bring people to a point of realizing the truth behind satire. Some readers will react to the message and reject the whole of the work. Other readers will not fathom how the questions and ideas posited by the work may be valid because the satiric connotations and conclusions are taboo or problematic (and often presented "inappropriately" to provoke an audience's ire). The result is that tranquil recollection may never occur if readers respond by rejecting the entire work altogether. Yet even in this instance, satire has the ability to work on the conscious and subconscious minds long after that rejected reading.

Satire demands that a reader come prepared to ask probing questions searching for possible answers, both of which vary from text to text and context to context. When interpreting a work of satire, readers must ultimately arrive at a conclusion as to the text's literal and figurative meanings. Yet to arrive here, he or she must ask questions about the subject matter and its presentation; the reader must use personal knowledge and play a believing-doubting game. The satirist's reliance on the reader empowers the reader to become an active participant in the interpretive work with the text; thus, readers of satire undergo more than an aesthetic experience, for an encounter with satire requires each reader to bring all of his or her faculties to bear upon the text. Readers must look at the text literally, look deeper in context and subtext, and still deeper into philosophical meaning to evaluate how the ideas seem incongruous with what they value or know about the subject. Or in the case of a *roman à clef*, readers must find the analogous parallels between the text and

the context. For without the presence of incongruity, grounded in irony, there can be no satire. The satirist is, of course, misdirecting readers at times to make possible meanings more subtle, yet in satire, the writer is responsible for directing the reader while the reader is obligated to bring to the interpretation knowledge, life experience, and an expectation for irony. In this way, satire relies quite heavily on the reader. The author cannot provide this information or the irony would cease to be implied and thereby diminish enjoyment. But the reliance on the reader is the Achilles heel of satire: if the reader does not have the requisite knowledge, if the reader cannot fully interpret these ideas to his or her satisfaction (and gives up), if the reader arrives at faulty conclusions or must seek out the requisite knowledge to arrive at the proper interpretation, satiric meaning will not be imparted from author to reader.

The interpretive process might follow this line of questioning: the reader might ask, *How is this text talking about me? Or about people I know? Or about an "outsider" group of which I am not a part?* (e.g. *How personal is this text going to be?*) *Does this text challenge deeply held beliefs about the way the world is? Is the satire confronting any incongruence between how I live and what I believe or say about the way that we should live? Is the satire amiable and friendly—does it seem to be supporting things that I know to be true and affirming those values? Or is it hostile—is the nature of the satire deconstructive and seeking to destabilize a dominant (hegemonic) discourse? Does the satire's ironic decentering point to another alternative about the way things should be? Is it optimistic or pessimistic (Horatian or Menippean)?* By no means comprehensive, this illustrative list of possible questions and many others will yield many answers yet might not necessarily move hostile, or even inattentive, readers to uncover all possible meanings. Nevertheless, readers must question the text.

As mentioned above, the potential for satire's failure is ubiquitous, yet satire may live beyond an initial failure to achieve the broad-sweeping results for which the satirist aims. For

this reason, it is helpful—as in the case of the great satirists such as Jonathan Swift, Jon Stewart, and, yes, Mark Twain—to look at the uses of satire through a writer's lifetime, perhaps more like a series of newspaper columns or a long-aired television show, as in the case of Stewart. Each of these mediums has the power to shape an audience both in the momentous lightning bolts as well as by the perpetual carving of a smooth-flowing stream. In other words, those profound moments when satire has the power to influence readers support the theory that rhetoric in the spoken and written word can transform individuals, communities, and societies. Setting aside hopes of instantaneous societal change, satires seldom elbow readers beyond an initial shock or witty revelation. Instead, satires are more likely to serve as the still, small voice provoking readers to think more deeply about how they conduct their daily lives and mental practices. Consider the long-lasting quality of "A Modest Proposal" and how it shapes the thoughts of the next generations. Centuries later, we still point to these satires as though they were touchstones that reify the vision of the culture that we would like to have. Yet at the same time, each satiric work implicitly acknowledges that such visions too often remain hopeful abstractions.

Critical Theories of Satire

Literary criticism provides several other ways of reading satire. For example, reception theory can identify the timely and timeless nuances in Twain's satire, especially as it uncovers the rise of Twain's personal religious doubt and the crises of the age that inspired his art and as the theory traces how his readers experienced and interpreted his writings in the time of their release and in generations thereafter. Moreover, reception theory also affords Mark Twain studies new avenues for understanding religious satire by laying out how we might balance our study between authorial artistic intent and reader-response theory's

analysis of the audience's interpretations. According to James L. Machor and Philip Goldstein,

> reception study undertakes the historical analysis of the changing conditions and reading practices through which texts are constructed in the process of being received. Both modern and postmodern reception study defend the historical against the purely formal approach, undertake the historical study of a text's diverse readings, and repudiate the autonomous norms and values of traditional theory. (xiii)

Furthermore, the careful study of a work's reception enjoins that present scholarship recognize the distortions in our own attempts to contextually understand Twain's position in light of past scholarship and according to current literary and critical trends.

Alternatively, genre criticism in satire offers several arguments that balance the aesthetic elements of satire with its essential rhetorical posturing. John R. Clark and Anna Motto, in their introduction to the anthology *Satire—That Blasted Art*, challenge the assumption that satire is "a kind of angry didactic rhetoric" best studied by emphasizing the satirist's message (4). Instead, they insist, first, that satire is artistically constructed, worthy of the same formal attention as poetry, and, second, that good satire is subtle and will not be overtly evident but uncovered by recognizing reversals and distortions in the text (Clark and Motto 5). They argue that the satirist needs a mouthpiece or persona: just as Jonathan Swift needs the character of Lemuel Gulliver, so too does Samuel Clemens need his nom de plume Mark Twain and characters like Huck Finn, who, being further removed from the author, can offer commentary on our world. Clark and Motto's definition of satire seeks to understand how the satirist, like a trickster, subverts the usual literary aims of climax and catharsis by leaving readers flummoxed by anticlimax and unresolved plot (Clark and Motto

19). They also acknowledge the sobering truth, confirmed by satirists themselves that, "supposing there were lessons in satire, audiences wouldn't be capable of learning them!" (Clark and Motto 3-4).

Whereas Clark and Motto argue for a balanced view of satire studies that considers both its manner and matter (and heavily influenced by New Criticism), Leon Guilhamet in *Satire and the Transformation of Genre* argues that, although a genre is often caricatured by *typical* themes, critics should analyze satire's synchronic (timeless) features before examining the diachronic (timely and historical) uses of satire (ix, 3). Forming his argument around semiotic and structuralist theories, Guilhamet builds on an Aristotelian foundation, not in terms of classifying the traits of the genre but to emphasize satire's heart as a linguistic *mimesis* (rather than social *mimesis*). Adapting Aristotle's concept of *praxis*, which defines art as an imitation of action, Guilhamet underscores, more specifically, how satire focuses on a specific action—that of human written language, which satire emphasizes above and beyond nature and human action (x). From this perspective, Guilhamet emphasizes the artistic qualities of satire arguing that it "draws much of its artistic power from its generic tradition" (3).

Typical of many genre studies on satire, however, Guilhamet pays no attention to Mark Twain yet does offer many key demarcations between satire, comedy, and parody, emphasizing that the successful "satirist reinterprets the ridiculous in an ethical light" (8). By following the classical patterns of oratory, the satirist, according to Guilhamet, attempts to order the chaos apparent in society, which often involves a mixing or blending of genres (6-16). Mark Twain, when studied in this light, can be seen as having been born into and participating in nineteenth-century American religious culture while artistically transcending it: he can be studied as an artist crafting both synchronic (timeless) as well as diachronic (timely) satire. This distinction also accounts for Twain's blending of narrative elements and

adapting genres to create modal, indirect satire—what Guilhamet refers to as "the satiric" as differential from "the comedic" (6-7). This distinction is important, as we will see, when building on these definitions to consider Twain as *both* humorist and satirist.

Guilhamet distinguishes between comedy and satire, citing Aristotle, by noting how the content explores intent and efficacy to enact harm to others. Both attempt to point out the "ridiculous," what we might call the ironic, but "comedy presents its ridiculous objects as things of no importance, the harmlessly ugly or base, satire interprets the ridiculous as harmful or destructive, at least potentially" (Guilhamet 7). Moreover, Guilhamet goes on to explain that, "In comedy, on the other hand, we are shown a fool who is just part of the nature of things. But the object of satire is unnatural, perverse in some specific way…. Comic butts are fools, satiric butts are knaves" (Guilhamet 7). In comedy, the fool is tolerated because he or she is "harmless" and is part of the expected order of things, and thus, Guilhamet maintains, comedy has an element of timelessness about it with a delivery that allows readers to find catharsis through laughter (Guilhamet 7-8). Satire, conversely, is generated by a different catalyst and thereby has a very different literary manner: because the satirist perceives the knave to be capable of harming others, the manner of the art is more "timebound" and thus aims to push its audience away from catharsis and toward the ethical (Guilhamet 7-8). Yet problematically for audiences, satire employs the same devices as comedy, but what comes off as harshness or indignation is essentially an attempt to push readers to refuse to accept the satiric object as part of the "natural" order. Or, as Guilhamet posits, "Satire, thus, depends on the reader's ability to take a comic and serious view of an object at the same time" (9). The resultant doubling effect moves satire away from fulfilling Aristotle's initial definition of literature (tragedy) as an imitation of an action, and instead, points out its forcefulness as found in its ability to imitate another art form (comedy) to the

extent that audiences can discover other interpretive possibilities, which Guilhamet refers to as "verbal mimesis" (9-12).

Building on Barbara Herrnstein Smith's ideas of "fictive discourse," Guilhamet asserts that the reader's ability to identify verbal mimesis, to distinguish between imitative or "fictive discourse" rather than natural discourse, will disclose the presence of satire in the text (12-13). Readers will successfully identify satire when they deduce that the rhetoric is not based on our primary reality but on an imagined or supposed secondary reality. Because fictive discourse is "disruptive" to the logic and rhetoric of natural discourse, it signals the presence of satire. And the degree to which "fictive discourse" is present in the text will also indicate whether the work should be interpreted as generic, direct satire or as modal, indirect satire. In other words, when fictive discourse dominates the text, then the text should be read as generic satire. Conversely, concludes Guilhamet, "If, however, the fictive devices remain subordinate to the purpose of natural discourse, there is no deformation and, consequently, no generic change from rhetoric to fiction. The primary distinction between modal satire and generic satire is that in the former there is no generic transformation" (12-13). When studying Twain, readers will likely identify satiric elements sprinkled throughout the texts, a form of modal satire, rather than an entire work focusing on one satiric point such as "A Modest Proposal."

One final point from Guilhamet, in addition to identifying how readers identify the presence of satire and then begin to distinguish between modal and generic satire, readers must be aware of satire's ability to not only use discourse ironically but to also manipulate whatsoever literary genres and devices it chooses, as the satirist determines is useful for the readers (13-14). Guilhamet draws a demarcation between simple and complex satire, seeing the former as "unmixed," a term allusive to eighteenth-century satirists. These satires

attempt to "deform…the rhetorical structures with strategies calculated to disrupt the normal logic of the rhetorical text" (Guilhamet 13). The shift from unmixed or simple satire to mixed or complex satire is achieved when the satirist inserts other "genres and styles so that the form becomes preeminently mingled satire" to the point "that no one category can represent it satisfactorily" (14). The result, according to Guilhamet, is "the reduction or deflation of satiric objects and the magnification of their perversity and consequent harm" (15). Whereas comedy accomplishes the identification and ridicule of folly, satire moves beyond these aims to demand its censure; it prompts an *anagnorisis* in the audience when they can move beyond seeing the ironic or comedic and comprehend the need to address these follies. Modal satire, then, the form most frequently used by Twain, is indirect and complex for it is necessarily mixed with other genres—a portmanteau of styles that can both entertain and flummox the reader.

In addition to recognizing the role of the reader, scholars need to be aware how much ethical demands they make of satire. Framing satire entirely within a moral framework is reductive and misses the transformative power of satire. While it possesses the capacity for moral instruction, satire certainly need not be limited to that realm. Unfortunately, most satire theory from the seventeenth through the twentieth centuries did not test this perspective. In his helpful primer, *Satire: A Critical Reintroduction*, Dustin Griffin criticizes much of conventional theory of satire from the twentieth century for assuming that satire necessarily employs polarizing, moralistic, virtuous rhetoric. Before expanding the definition of satire, Griffin summarizes that traditional, "conventional" theories of satire assert four essential assumptions:

> (1) that the bipolar praise-and-blame pattern is at the core of a satire; (2) that the thematic center is some moral standard against which deviations are measured; (3) that the satirist appeals to, and thereby confirms and assumes we share, some traditionally sanctioned values; and (4) that the satirist works like the preacher-rhetorician to persuade his audience to virtue. (36-37)

The language of blame and praise, moral standards, shared values, appeals to virtue—these are textbook descriptors of satire. Yet this definition overlooks the genre's creative capacities and diminishes those other genres better suited to achieve these moral aims. Additionally, were rhetoric and reform the primary aim of satire, then the interpretive ambiguity it instills in readers would promote the argument's doom. Griffin illustrates this problem by returning to a familiar example:

> And Swift, though he plays with the conventional idea that the satirist seeks to "reform" the world, seems concerned finally to "vex" it: that is, to ruffle or disturb its smooth surfaces. No one can doubt that *Gulliver's Travels* and *A Modest Proposal* are "moral" satires. Yet it would take a confident critic to declare that we can draw from Swift's work clear conclusions and moral directives…. (27-28)

While the possibility for a moral is always present in the rhetoric, its certain existence and unambiguous application are not. Elaborating on this problem, Griffin concludes that, since traditional satire theory emphasizes the rhetorical elements of satire, its *need* for the text to contain a moral diminishes the aesthetic aims of literary arts, to which satire also belongs:

> If the satirist's job is to assure us, in no uncertain terms, that the established norms about good and bad, right and wrong, are solidly in place, one wonders how satire ever attracted any mature readers or retained their

> interest. It would not be surprising if readers, instructed to look for clearly stated moral messages and clear-cut distinctions between vice and virtue, found even a satirist like Horace "pedestrian, obvious, and boring." (36)

Here, Griffin argues that we know that satire piques the readers' interest precisely because its terms are vague or at least unexpected; its literary and aesthetic structures are not immediately obvious, and its message (or what we should do about it) is hermeneutically open to various interpretations and applications. Successful satire cannot be boring, but thrives on irony and the artistic flourish as well as rhetorical ambiguity. The connection with satire as "vexing" also explains readers' heightened interest. By contrast, traditional theoretical assumptions of satire, Griffin argues, ignore the power of satire to create uncertainty, polyphony, and ambiguity, which together move readers (and even the satirist) to consider new alternatives rather than reifying preconceptions (41). Griffin writes,

> Even if we wish to call the satirist a rhetorician, we need not think of satiric rhetoric simply as the communication of previously codified moral knowledge or the persuasion of a reader toward a particular course of action.…[R]hetoric can be, and historically has been, conceived of in quite different terms and that we may arrive at a fuller understanding of the way satire works if we think of rhetoric of inquiry, a rhetoric of provocation, a rhetoric of display, a rhetoric of play. (41)

Using Griffin's theory that satire functions best in the rhetorical realms of "inquiry," "provocation," "display," and "play," we can arrive at new understandings of Twain's uses of satire. Firstly, the satirist must be irked by something worthy of being attacked. But the aims of such a satiric assault need to be seen with more nuance, for the satirist may in fact value the object satirized; and the reader's ire is provoked by the inability to see the ideal

vision to be attained for this satiric target. Satire, as Griffin writes, should be seen as "an 'open' rather than a 'closed' form, that it is concerned rather to inquire, explore, or unsettle than to declare, sum up, or conclude. Elements of playfulness and performance likewise shift our attention from satire's ostensible end to its means" (95). Twain's reputation as humorist and performer neatly aligns him with Griffin's definition of satire, and to see the openness of satire requires an ability to see ironically.

Concerning Irony

Irony is arguably *the* essential ingredient that allows satire to work in both formal and informal modes. William Harmon defines irony as "[a] broad term referring to the recognition of a reality different from appearance" (*A Handbook* 11th ed. 298-99). Verbal irony in particular, as opposed to dramatic irony, functions by allowing writers and speakers to voice statements that have multiple, often conflicting, meanings. Thus, although ironic meaning is often antonymical to the original statement, the competing interpretation should not be seen as a semantic either-or binary. Instead, irony creates possibilities of meaning and, consequently, is paramount to the success of satire, for to communicate that things are not as they could or should be, the satirist must be able to point to the possibility of alternatives, however ludicrous a presented alternative may seem.

The ironist's presentation of both "could" and "should" alternatives is important, even if those alternatives are themselves ironic. As aforementioned, too often satire has been interpreted as a moralistic weapon to attack vice. Yet to read all satire as a directive to censure one thing and choose another specific path limits the creative force of this art form, for the germ of irony (and consequently satire) is to prompt readers to imagine a different existence or even a different world, which is accomplished by refocusing readers on a vision

of what "should not be" or what "could be"; satire prompts readers to realize that what "is" is untenable but what "could be" has yet to be realized or is waiting to be imagined. Clearly, in matters of censure, ironists and satirists are proclaiming prohibitions against specific behaviors and, in these satires, "should" better fit the tone of the attack. But when satirists instead push readers to consider new ways of thinking, the satire and the irony therein suggest an abundance of possibilities.

As an example, let us return to Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal," wherein the essay's success relies on the sustained irony of the narrator, who maintains a coherent perspective and consistent, "reasonable" tone. In literally arguing for the nation to commence consumption of Irish babies at one year of age to supplement their food resources, the proposal itself gives a "should be" directive that, in its grotesque hyperbole, pushes readers to see latent irony in the speaker's message. Thus, the ironic message of the essay would fail were it to rely on a "should be" reification, primarily because what it claims to reify (cannibalism) is not a common cultural value for Swift's audience. This solution is necessarily ironic, a "should not be," for it applies to the "deplorable state" of the Irish, especially regarding their poverty, crime, hunger, begging, etc. Because Swift's persona offers a hyperbolic and not a realistic solution, each reader must consider from an individual vantage point what solution "could" work in light of the societal and moral problems Swift identifies. In the essay's penultimate paragraph, Swift places the onus on his readers,

> After all, I am not so violently bent upon my opinion as to reject any offer proposed by wise men, which shall be found equally innocent, cheap, easy, and effectual. But before something of that kind shall be advanced in contradiction to my scheme, and offering a better, I desire the author or authors will be pleased maturely to consider two points. First, as things now

> stand, how they will be able to find food and raiment for an hundred thousand useless mouths and backs. And secondly, there being a round million of creatures in human figure throughout this kingdom, whose whole subsistence put into a common stock would leave them in debt two million of pounds sterling adding those who are beggars by profession to the bulk of farmers cottages, and labors with their wives and children in effect…. (2034)

Swift's two points demand that readers consider how to feed, clothe, and employ the Irish. Although Swift does offer by apophasis a list of "other expedients" that the readers dare not bring up, thereby implying that these alternatives might be those issues truly in need of society's attention, Swift does not give a clear alternative to his ironic proposal that the children be "sold for food." The satire, then, liberates readers to move away from an unfortunate reality toward a new "could be," which in this instance, they themselves can determine. Irony, consequently, decenters the authority of the status quo both inside and outside the text, for its force is primarily deconstructive. It allows for new ways of seeing and points away from something distained, but not necessarily toward a preferred vision or toward a way to accomplish this vision. And in breaking the reader's gaze, satire allows readers to look around and take a fresh account of their society. Thus, the ironic and satiric strength of Swift's "A Modest Proposal" resides in the animosity that readers feel toward the callousness of the speaker and in the sympathy fostered toward the Irish, particularly Irish children. Moreover, if readers do not like the world envisioned by the speaker, they then must also call into question the ways in which it is analogous to theirs. This scenario exemplifies how irony functions to highlight the incongruities among the proposed, and hopefully never-actualized, world of Swift's speaker; the current situation in Ireland; and

how things *could be* or even *should be*. But a new vision of what *might* be or *ought* to be actualized is only dimly outlined.

That the satirist presents alternative possibilities of what "could" be is important. Too often, satire has been interpreted merely as a moralistic weapon to attack vice; however, to frame all satire as a directive to reject one thing and choose another specific path limits the generative, creative, force of this art form, which rather seeks to prompt readers to consider what "could be"—to consider what they want life to look like. Clearly, in matters of censure, satirists are speaking prohibitively against specific behaviors, and in these satires, "should" more aptly denotes the force of the attack. Yet satirists often push readers to consider new ways of thinking, and thus satire and the irony therein become suggestive of an indeterminate number of interpretive possibilities.

Irony, therefore, always invites supposal: in rejecting Swift's cannibalistic Ireland and having agreed that the current situation is "deplorable," readers are goaded to suppose a new, more humane Ireland. (C. S. Lewis used the term "supposal" rather than allegory to describe his *Chronicles of Narnia* and other works of fantasy and science fiction. Supposal has the advantage over allegory or other genres such as the *roman à clef* in that it need not maintain a one-to-one relation between the fictional world and the reader's world and, moreover, can be discarded when it no longer proves useful [Lewis, Dec. 1959 letter to Sophia Storr qtd. in Wagner 99]). In this sense, the supposal generated by irony can be moralistic, but only in so much as the reader is also receptive to reading morally or has moral convictions to be summoned. The same is true of satire, as irony is the driving force behind this genre. In both ironic and satiric art, the force of the rhetoric catalyzes readers to question and explore possibilities and provides ways to envision society anew. Irony

embraces the subjectivity of the reader, but also relies on the reader's imagination, creativity, and desire for a more perfect world.

Kierkegaardian Irony

Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard in *The Concept of Irony*, his 1841 doctoral dissertation, delineates the ways in which irony becomes a catalyst for an individual to move from the aesthetical life in pursuit of personal pleasure to live an ethical life that seeks the fullest of personal existence. Paul Strathern argues that Kierkegaard, rather than succumbing to mere rational exploration of the problem of existence (being), "insisted that every individual should not only ask this question but should make his [or her] life his [or her] very own subjective answer to it" (Strathern 9-10). In other words, seeking to motivate individuals to live an ethical, authentic, actualized life, Kierkegaard focused on how viewing the world ironically could prompt individuals to move beyond abstract, intellectual questions about what it means to exist and, instead, make the shift toward pragmatism and praxis: the individual, when able to view life ironically, would then cease trying to define life existentially and use life experience to find answers to those questions. For the Kierkegaardian existential pragmatist, then, seeing the ironic in every situation of life, in oneself, and in society, etc., provides the stimulus to live in a way that authenticated one's beliefs and actualized an abstracted philosophical agenda. For Kierkegaard, an ironic vision prompts action, which for the existentialist is essential because *to do is to know*; action brings the possibility of significance. Unknowingly, Kierkegaard provides an answer to the satirist's problem to motivate people to move beyond intellectual questions and actively change their world.

As Strathern also notes, Kierkegaard discloses the shortcomings of rational philosophical systems in that they can only account for the parts of human existence that are

rational and these rational conclusions necessarily preclude human subjectivity (9-10). The solution Kierkegaard proposes is to arrive at the point of ideal subjectivity through means of irony; in particular, Kierkegaard argues that Socrates personifies irony by embodying the synthesis of "usefulness" and "the Ideal," which Kierkegaard analyzes though the writings of Xenophon and Plato, respectively. (For this study, it is important to mention here that both Kierkegaard and Twain focus on irony because of its ability to make connections between personally held values and actions, though Twain's adherence to the tenets of nineteenth-century realism is a departure from Kierkegaardian existential idealism.) As Kierkegaard writes in *The Concept of Irony*,

> Socrates' existence is irony….The point, the stroke rendering the irony into irony, is extremely difficult to catch hold of. With Xenophon one may readily assume that Socrates was fond of going about and talking with every sort of person, because every external thing or event is an occasion for the always battle-ready ironist. With Plato one may readily allow that Socrates touches the Idea, except that the Idea does not open itself to him but is a limit. Each of these two interpreters has naturally endeavoured [*sic*] to render Socrates complete: Xenophon by dragging him down into the shallow regions of the useful, Plato by catching him up into the supernatural regions of the Idea. But irony is the point lying between them, invisible and extremely difficult to hold fast. On the one hand, the manifold of actuality is just the ironist's element; on the other hand, his course through actuality is hovering and ethereal, scarcely touching ground. As the authentic kingdom of ideality is still alien to him, so he had not yet emigrated but is at every moment, as it

> were about to depart. Irony oscillates between the ideal self and the empirical self…. (Kierkegaard 157-58)

Kierkegaard's interpretation of irony as both a separating and unifying ideal, distinct from actuality is essential to understanding the role of satire as pushing its audience, first, to reflect on a supposed working of notions or values and, second, to consider how a society might frame and establish both values and practices in actuality. But to achieve these aims requires that the irony be supported firmly in the ways specific to understood cultural phenomena. Or to restate Kierkegaard's argument, irony necessarily must rely upon the phenomenological to communicate, for an audience can only grasp the speaker's ideal notions through specifics. Thus, the concept explored ironically and the phenomena in which it appears are inseparable. (The language used to analyze metaphor might be helpfully applied here, with the concept or idea being the tenor and the phenomena being the vehicle.) Thus, we may know the ironic significance of each phenomenological instance, but we can only understand the instance through a personal, subjective engagement with the concept of irony itself. In this sense, irony transcends the phenomenological through its generative, self-perpetuating character. Or as Kierkegaard explains elsewhere in *The Concept of Irony*,

> Now if irony is a determination of subjectivity, one will immediately perceive the necessity of two appearances of this concept. Moreover, actuality has given the name of irony to both of them. The first is naturally where subjectivity for the first time asserts its right in world history. Here we have Socrates, that is to say, by this we are shown where to seek the concept in its historical appearance. But after subjectivity had exhibited itself in the world it did not disappear without a trace, the world did not sink back into its previous form of development; on the contrary, the old disappeared and

> everything became new. Should a new manifestation of irony appear, moreover, it must be insofar as subjectivity asserts itself in a still higher form. (Kierkegaard 260)

Following Kierkegaard's logic, when irony appears, it always begets more irony. While the ideal becomes ironic by the context of specific phenomena, it is the ironic that perpetuates new ways of seeing both ideality and reality because, once a human being subjectively internalizes an ideal, she or he can only express that ideal ironically since that ideal can never be fully realized in reality. Yet the presence of an ironic ideal, because it never achieves true ideality, will permanently alter how we see that ideal and human abilities to achieve the ideal. Nevertheless, irony simultaneously gives value to the ideal by the actuality it possesses in our daily lives. Herein Kierkegaard has located the interpretive difficulty irony presents: namely, since irony and the ironic position lead to a plethora, if not an infinitude, of interpretative positions, how is the reader to identify all of these positions, move beyond interpretive inconclusiveness and identify the ways in which certainty of meaning are not reached? In irony's room of mirrors, the interpretative is both self-multiplying and more minute the further you look into the reflections. Thus, irony makes exhausting, if not impossible, the scholarly aim of an exhaustive interpretation. For once the phenomena have been shown to be incongruous with the ideal, such truth claims are necessarily decentered, as irony shows the deconstruction of the very values as they are practiced. Irony always points out the absence of the ideal.

The importance of the individual's subjective understanding of irony takes on added usefulness when studying Mark Twain and his literary context of American Realism. William Harmon identifies the resistance to nominalism and idealism as a hallmark of American Realism (465-59). Because abstractions and idealism, whether supernatural or metaphysical,

cannot be ironic in that they are already deemed "perfect," writers like Twain portrayed the phenomenological in ways that allow a plausible response from characters (and readers) so as to heighten both the situation's irony as well the character's pragmatic response—more on this later.

Through his in-depth analysis of the nature and forms of irony in discourse, Kierkegaard initially identifies how many figures of speech function ironically when what is said is meant to be interpreted in its antonym: "to say the opposite of what is meant" (264). An example of this antonymic form of irony is sarcasm. But Kierkegaard goes on to explain how the ironist knows that "…in all forms of irony…the phenomenon is not the essence but the opposite of the essence. When I speak[,] the thought or meaning is the essence, the word the phenomenon. These two moments are absolutely necessary, and it is in this sense that Plato has remarked that all thinking is a dialogue" (264). Here, Kierkegaard inadvertently identifies the seminal problem for the ironist: that in referring to an ideal (as a thought) it must manifest itself in language, which is necessarily phenomena and, consequently, unstable. The potential for confusion and miscommunication is paramount—an essential characteristic of the ironic—and provides another instance in which irony produces greater irony. Thus, when encountering irony or, more specifically, satire, the audience is often left uncertain as to what they should assert, even when able to detect the tone: to assert the ideal, to affirm the phenomenon pointed out by the irony, or some other alternative. Kierkegaard reflects on this ironic situation by defining how both subject and speaker attain a freedom in the absence of certain meaning:

> When next I consider the speaking subject, I again have a determination present in all forms of irony, namely, the subject is negatively free. If I am conscious when I speak that what I say is my meaning, and that what is said

> is an adequate expression for my meaning, and I assume that the person with whom I am speaking comprehends perfectly the meaning in what is said then I am bound by what is said, that is, I am here positively free. Here applies the ancient line: *semel emissum volat irrevocabile verbum* [from Horace, *Epistles* 1.18: "The word once let slip flies beyond recall"]. (264)

The freedom for the speaker is found in acknowledging that he or she has little to do once the ironic has been uttered since interpretation is left to the reader. Additionally, Kierkegaard goes on to explain that irony inherently has the capability to fail to communicate because in its nature irony potentially "cancels itself": "It is like a riddle and its solution possessed simultaneously" (264). Readers are then left in ambiguous positions, and, try as the ironist may, this misunderstanding cannot be necessarily prevented. Kierkegaard explains Janus-faced irony in this manner, "When it sometimes happens that such an ironic figure of speech is misunderstood, this is not the fault of the speaker, except insofar as he has taken up with such an underhanded patron as irony which is fond of playing pranks on its friends as its enemies. We say of such an ironic turn of speech: it is not serious about its seriousness" (265). Irony then, according to Kierkegaard's definition, masks its seriousness beneath the guise of play; it creates and perpetuates ambiguity; yes, it communicates, but in a manner, that leaves the recipient wondering if more was intended. Wonder and play, possibility and discovery are always latent in ironic phenomena.

The reader must understand that irony's playful guise is essential in exploring the dichotomy between existence in actuality and existence in ideality, two defining characteristics of Kierkegaardian irony. In his explanatory notes for *The Concept of Irony*, Lee M. Capel makes clear the distinctions expressed in Georg William Frederick Hegel's synthesis of "actuality…as the unity of essence…and existence" (Capel 410, see note 31).

Capel furthermore contextualizes Kierkegaard as one who went beyond Hegel to loosen the distinction that rationality must be "actual" and vice versa (410). Citing Hegel's 1817 encyclopedia *The Logic of Hegel*, Capel argues, "…Kierkegaard is speaking from the ordinary point of view which knows that, as Hegel also allows: 'that existence…is in part mere appearance, and only in part actuality'…. As existence is not yet commensurate with actuality, so there remains a task for irony" (Capel 410). By making the claim that "irony assaults," Kierkegaard, then, points to irony's transformative power, for irony challenges the following claims: that human reason is objective and necessarily authoritative, that subjectivity is a lesser means of knowing, and that what human beings assert to be actuality is fully rational and veritable. Instead, irony permits pure reason to be seen as a façade and for those appearances of "pure reason" to be deconstructed—a goal that easily aligns with Twain's sense of literary realism.

Also functioning at the center of Kierkegaardian irony are Hegelian "negative concepts," which Lee M. Capel concludes are, according to Kierkegaard, "concepts of the nature of Hegel's categories of Essence. He [Kierkegaard] held that the attempt to express them directly, that is, apart from their proper locus in the individual human being and other organic structures, is 'self-consuming'" (Capel 366, see note 27). For further elucidation on this point, scholars of Kierkegaard point to his Journal from 1850 wherein he writes,

> It is a fundamental error to suppose that there are no negative concepts. The highest principles of all thinking or the proofs of them are, after all, negative. Human reason has limits; there lie the negative concepts. The border warfare is negative, designed merely to repulse the invader. But people have an infantile and conceited idea of human reason, especially in our age, since they never speak of a thinker, a reasoning man, but of pure reason and such like,

> which do not even exist, inasmuch as probably no one, be he Professor or what have you, is pure reason. Pure reason is a fantasy and a phantastical lack of boundaries that finds itself at home where, in the absence of negative concepts, one conceives of everything like the witch who ended by devouring her own stomach. (Kierkegaard, *Papirer* qtd. in Capel 366-67, see note 27)

This image of the witch devouring her stomach illuminates the force that Kierkegaard identifies within Socratic irony and, more generally, for all irony: that irony is best served to examine the boundaries of what we do not know by testing the degree to which we are able to see *what is, what is not*, and the discrepancy between what we claim exists and actually does. If pure reason is a fiction, then irony best serves us by disclosing the reality of that fiction. Here lies the existential power of irony: namely, to force witnesses of irony to see the subjective actuality that lies beneath the false claims of objective ideality in reality. This existentialism in Kierkegaard's uses of irony parallels the pragmatic, materialistic, realism in Twain's satiric works, for both goad their readers away from idealization of value and virtue (and the associated sentimentalization) and toward a reflection of how our truth claims are lived out in their coexistence with our pragmatic everyday reality. In their uses of irony, both highlight how what we call ideal never actually exists in reality; both afford readers the opportunity to reshape our reality or revise our ideals to match what we see in life.

These Kierkegaardian negative concepts, when used constructively toward subjective ends, reveal the underlying metaphysical tension surrounding the nature and uses of irony. In his desire to live the ethically religious life over and against the aesthetic life (a definition of the aesthetic life being determined by other social and hegemonic dictates), Kierkegaard sees irony as "a disciplinarian" to assert a new ideality, whereas Socrates and the romantic ironists

saw irony as "an end in itself in the absence of demonstrable universal purposiveness," according to Reed Merrill in his article "'Infinite Absolute Negativity': Irony in Socrates, Kierkegaard and Kafka" (Merrill 231). Separating the negative force of irony into "corrective" and "philosophical irony," Merrill argues that Kierkegaard prefers the philosophical over the corrective (citing Norman Knox's definition of philosophical irony as "pure irony") for the very reason that corrective irony, whether negative or positive in nature, is dominated by an agenda and driven by "didactic" or "deterministic ends" (Merrill 222-23). In this sense, corrective irony is used to reify a competing understanding of how the ideal should be applied in actuality or what that ideal should be, but it originates with a deductive principle and seeks to establish it as hegemonic certainty. But philosophical or "pure" irony would do more to serve the needs of satire and reason in general, for it breaks rules to aid audiences in better understanding the limits of what we know and cannot know and provides an opportunity to create new ways of understanding. As Merrill writes, "'Pure' [or philosophic] irony, in contrast, is dialogical, pluralistic, paradoxical and ambivalent; it is open-ended and polyphonic, dialectically unreliable and unconventional, and philosophically indeterministic" (223).

Corroborating Merrell's thesis on pure irony, Dustin Griffin's definition of irony, likewise, highlights the function of satire: namely, that it prompts discovery and inquiry, for at their best, irony and satire are generative and reveal new ways of seeing and interpreting phenomena rather than forcing a "corrective" lens upon our world (36-41). Pure irony, conversely, speaks for itself and is self-evident. It is the recognition of incongruity; thus, it functions as an ideal method for satirists who want to avoid societal censure and disdain, for pure irony and pure reason locate the ironic elements in reality. Otherwise, corrective irony could lead to agenda-driven propaganda or even polemic. And as John Keats reminds us,

"We hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us" (qtd. in Young). Pure irony may have a corrective result, but as it is not driven by these aims, leaves the reader to determine what correctives could or should be made. This technique is one of the "manners" of Mark Twain's satiric aesthetic (as could be said of Jonathan Swift or Jon Stewart).

But the negative force of irony, in particular philosophic irony, is essential to promoting Kierkegaard's goal of subjective, actualized, existential living, yet this goal has a downside: it can promote an ironic approach to every possible actuality and ideality resulting in what Kierkegaard called "the snares of relativity" (qtd. in Merrill 225). This perpetual ironic view of everything is a negative feedback loop in which some external force must break in to the cycle in order to change the inevitable outcome, an essential theory to understanding how Twain's satires work. Thus, the subjective freedom found in "infinite absolute negativity" needs to be countered by subjective existentialism in a manner "that the individual's response to infinite and indeterminate flux is to create personal values in face of life's instability," as Reed Merrill describes Kierkegaard's application of Socratic irony (224). But the power of philosophic or "pure" irony is that it liberates the individual to make choices about his or her actualized application of his or her notions of the ideal. By making these deliberate, subjective choices, Kierkegaard claims that the individual can escape perpetual relativity, though he may have been too reductive of Socrates' position (Merrill 224-25). According to Merrill, when seeing pure irony present in satire, readers can assume the essential role of taking action—of seeing how the world might look differently, rather than giving into the futility of perpetual irony (224-25). In the face of irreconcilable relativity and the un-ironic acceptance of actuality as pure ideal, Kierkegaard claims, again paraphrased by Merrill, "…that the irony of life is that one can never discover connections between the finite and the infinite, [and] Kierkegaard 's response was to replace ethical universalism and

lived existence with a personalistic 'religious' faith in a power not to be fathomed" (224-25). While irony does not predicate a religious decision, by any means, it does allow the reader to enact his or her subjective will over and against culturally held objective ideals that would dominate and prescribe how the individual acts within his or her society. This liberating quality is essential to understanding the power of irony.

Placing Kierkegaardian irony alongside that of Socrates and Franz Kafka, Reed Merrill summarizes the nature of irony's liberating spirit:

> Irony is the mechanism which manifests the relationship of the finite to the infinite, and the writings themselves illustrate attempts to verbalize concretely what is impossible to describe in words. At the same time, their writings [Socrates', Kierkegaard's, and Kafka's] elucidate the often agonizing, frequently comical attempt to objectify the subjective processes by thinking out loud, even though the words themselves, being decayed past, can only serve as often grotesquely distorted memories of ideas. In addition, their writings elucidate the dialectical process of trial and error, argument and counter-argument, in the form of ironizations of the search for meaning and value. (226)

"Search," "trial and error," "subjective processes of thinking out loud"—these are the essential liberating qualities of an ironist and, likewise, of the best satirists and humorists.

Similarly, Lee M. Capel in his introduction to his translation of Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Irony* conveys this sentiment in his definition of "infinite absolute negativity": that it leads an individual from humiliation and infuriation to the point of realization and authenticity. Capel writes,

> This "infinite absolute negativity," as the way of modernity, was read back into antiquity by Kierkegaard and identified with Socratic irony: the method of questioning in order to *humiliate*, and answering in order to *infuriate*, a process culminating in the shock of intellectual awakening at once the spin of reversal and the spark of recognition, the overmastering *repulse* from which one is thrust backward from the blinding heat of infinite striving into the shaded chiaroscuro of patient endeavour [*sic*], the vertigo between pride and humility, the movement of inward transformation which Kierkegaard ultimately terms "mastered irony" and asks that it be applied to the individual in the interests of a whole personal and authentic existence. (33)

Reed Merrill adds to this idea of liberating irony by concluding that the ironist is brought to a point of "self-knowledge and self-mastery" through completely succumbing to the ironic forces employed. He writes,

> For Kierkegaard, as for Socrates…, irony is the source of subjectivity which can lead one indirectly to self-knowledge and self-mastery, rather than to Hegelian or Kantian idealism, to vague romantic notions of ego transcendence, or worse still, to concepts of orthodox legalism. What Kierkegaard states [in *The Concept of Irony*] concerning Socratic irony […]: "Socrates did not merely use irony, but was so completely dedicated to irony that he himself succumbed to it." (228)

The ironist (and thereby the satirist) must constantly live between either the duality of the liberty of self-reflection and self-actualization and liberty of ideological relativism, on the one hand, or the possibility of liberating one system to establish, whether knowingly or not, another. The use of irony to achieve this honest reflection is bereft of such possibilities.

Kierkegaard gives another view on this negative ironic duality by arguing that "…irony is healthiness insofar as it rescues the soul from the snares of relativity; it is a sickness insofar as it is unable to tolerate the absolute except in the form of nothingness, and yet this sickness is an endemic fever which but few individuals contract, and even fewer overcome" (*The Concept of Irony* 113-14). But the reward to the individual possessing an ironic point of view is freedom, which can lead to new possibilities or to despair—descriptors that aptly apply to Mark Twain at various stages of his life. And the ironist must live in this tension, "…lighter than the world, but he still belongs to the world" (Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony* 180).

Yet, positively, being pulled in multiple directions allows the ironist to see multiple images simultaneously and to hold in tension the various paradoxes that comprise human existence. As Reed Merrill concludes,

> The ironic sensibility recognizes that the world is always complete and incomplete at the same time, but the Kierkegaardian dialectic is also informed by the ironic sphere of existence which is a model of both infinitude and certitude…. The resulting series of ironic tensions guarantees that there never will be objectively realizable ends as long as a person exists, but that inwardness, subjectivity, and the passion for knowing will sustain an individual in his state of paradoxical tension and tentative suspension. (230)

The qualities that Merrill lists of the ironist—"inwardness, subjectivity, and the passion for knowing"—become the demarcating traits of the imaginative writer of irony, such as a satirist like Twain. Merrill goes on to argue, "Imagination is the driving force, the medium through which thought, feeling[,] and will attempt to adjust the idea and the real." (Merrill 238). The subjective imagination becomes the ironist's best offense and defense against a

society's irreconcilable idealities and actualities, and it serves as a means to offer readers an alternative to despair or denial by striving, or as Emerson asserts in *Nature*, to "Build, therefore, your own world."

Thus, at least in the Kierkegaardian sense, irony becomes a lens to see anew, questioning in what form we could make manifest our existence. The choices we make concerning the revelations resulting from seeing ironically will pragmatically and existentially, then, confirm the nature of our existence. But irony becomes the means to see and understand the subjectivity of our position in relation to the ideal or the perceived ideal. What we might call our abstract goal, especially in our inability to achieve that goal. Once we begin looking for the ironic, we will tend to continue to see all things ironically because we will succumb to ever-increasing uncertainty and ambiguity. This ludic play leads to new ways of seeing and fosters the aesthetic experience for the readers of ironic art, namely, for this study, satire. Thus irony, for all its deconstructive, de-authorizing, negative capabilities, still promotes liberty in both artist and audience as it promotes the new revitalized choices and actions that follow new insights. Paradoxically, then, irony always carries within it a dualistic pessimism and optimism about its subject: a pessimism that things are not as they could be; an optimism that things could be made new. Holding these attitudes in tension is a hallmark of Mark Twain's satire.

The Role of the Kierkegaardian Ironist and the Uses of Irony

In addition to identifying the negative yet liberating qualities of irony as well as the subjective role of the individual response to its ambiguous forces, Søren Kierkegaard further theorizes on the uses and metaphysical qualities of irony. Regarding its uses, Kierkegaard argues in *The Concept of Irony* that irony has both an antagonistic quality as well as the ability

to produce pleasure and satisfaction for the ironist, and hopefully for the audience as well (266-69). Perhaps the most obvious factor determining the uses of irony is the ironist's own position toward the subject. As Kierkegaard states, "Either the Ironist identifies himself with the nuisance he wishes to attack, or he enters into a relation of opposition to it, but in such a way, of course, that he is always conscious that his appearance is the opposite of what he himself subscribes to, and that he experiences a satisfaction in this disparity" (Kierkegaard 266). In other words, the ironist's subject-object positionality either identifies with the problem as an insider or he serves as antagonist as an outsider, but in the latter, derives an ironic pleasure because, as Kierkegaard argues, you cannot truly be an outsider if you are going to identify with the ironic: bicameral perhaps, but never an outsider exclusively. Additionally, Kierkegaard identifies the ironist's *satisfaction* when establishing an ironic position. (When applied to Twain, his position as insider and outsider is best understood as more of a trickster's ploy crafted for his pleasure, rather than as mere rhetorical posturing.) Thus, these pleasurable ironic games explain its essential presence in humor, satire, and other literary genres that place irony at its core.

Granting the assumption that irony is a central quality of satire, it is imperative to identify the various positions the ironist might assume and the various applications of irony with the satiric work, both generic and modal. In *The Concept of Irony*, Kierkegaard establishes that the guise behind which the ironist speaks is the essential stance behind which to maintain an ironic position. While the ironist might be speaking from "the higher circles" for the sake of isolating part of the audience (Kierkegaard uses the example of "kings or rulers [who] speak French so as not to be understood by commoners"), most uses of irony are "self-purposive" and exist to identify the ironic because, according to Kierkegaard, the disclosure of irony is essential to the metaphysical nature of irony (266-67, 272). This

position and the attitudes of the ironist become problematic for the audience and intentionally so, for the relationship of the ironist to the subject is often part of the means of accomplishing the irony. Kierkegaard envisions the ironist's posturing as proffering a "personal satisfaction" since an ironist, whether in the role as an insider or an outsider, is able to see the emptiness and foolishness in the discrepancy between the ideality and actuality (266). In these moments, the use of irony to attack becomes doubly ironic, for the audience cannot conclusively determine the relationship between the speaker and the subject. The ironist may identify with the source or assume an antagonistic character, since when speaking ironically, the ironist does not necessarily speak from the position of what he or she in fact supports. These instances naturally give way to unreliable or naïve narrators and become the norm when the author is speaking ironically, which may account for Clemens's creation of Mark Twain as a means to speak on religious issues both as insider and outsider. Nevertheless, the ironic position of the speaker to the subject contributes to the pure "satisfaction" proffered by the ironic disclosure. Without further qualifying this equation, we might generally conjecture that, using Kierkegaard's formula, the greater the discrepancy revealed in the irony and the greater the audience's weaknesses upon which the ironist preys, the greater the pleasure for the ironist, and hopefully, with their newfound insight, for the audience as well. The temptation would be to see sadism beneath this satisfaction, found in denying audiences the pleasure experienced by having wishes met and instead tormenting them by awaking them to reality as seen through the satirist's perspective. Many a Twain scholar has identified in his writings the "pen warmed up in hell" motif as *the* appropriate lens to interpret the vitriol of Twain's work. But the audience's confusion over the speaker's ambiguous positionality or the inability to read irony in the present situation and the resulting isolation faced by the misunderstood ironist—a principle which

Kierkegaard's personal life exemplifies well—may be an acceptable compensation for the primary gift that irony bestows to the ironist: that is, the ability to live a well-examined life, free from the constraining blindness brought on by a society's mendacious incongruity between ideality and actuality. Not coincidentally, Mark Twain also shares the existential aim of both Socrates and Kierkegaard, to live an examined life.

This process of existential awakening in the presence of irony is comparable to Jean Piaget's theories of cognitive development, in particular his emphasis on the need for the individual to experience disequilibrium between individual conceptions of the self and the world when they conflict with new information and experience. According to Piaget, the encounter with disequilibrium and the drive to return to equilibrium, what in other disciplines might be called peace or tranquility (and what Harold K. Bush in *Mark Twain and the Spiritual Crisis of His Age* refers to as the Hebraic idea of "shalom"), serve as a catalyst to reshape personal theories of self and the world. Piaget and subsequent educational theorists have gone to great lengths to apply this concept to education, specifically pedagogical content knowledge and age-specific curricular scaffolding. Sharon Hodde Miller explains this concept by looking at The New Testament Gospels and how the ministry of Jesus models Piaget's theory:

> Jesus loved to disequilibrate his listeners. Depending on the audience, he over-turned traditional notions about the law, about holiness, and about the Kingdom. Jesus was constantly disequilibrating people.
>
> Jesus' example reminds us that the form of disequilibration will vary depending on the hearer. Saying a "hard truth" to someone who already disagrees with you is not disequilibration. Your opponents expect you to condemn them, so it will come as no surprise.

When comparatively applied to Kierkegaard's theories of Irony, Sharon Hodde Miller's observation highlights the importance of prodding audiences with cognitive dissonance so that they are invited into an awakening to conversation and new insights, which may hopefully be transformative.

Kierkegaard's ironist seemingly intuits these psychological principles to bring pleasure and wisdom to others. In the audience's encounter with the disequilibrating force of irony, Kierkegaard underscores that the pleasure of irony is a secondary gift and is incomparable to an individual understanding and actualizing the ideal principle illuminated by the ironist. In this spirit, the ironist demands that things be true to their nature and, thus, creates a framework in which the object opposed destroys itself by being decentered from its own essential definitions. Yet to speak from an ironic position, however, requires that *the* primary characteristic of the ironist be an eagle-eyed awareness "to discover such weaknesses everywhere" (Kierkegaard 266-67). While some ironists may intentionally obfuscate meaning, seeking instead to isolate some of their potential and actual audiences from apprehending the message, Kierkegaard highlights humility and concern for others as *the* qualities that dissuade the ironist from taking an elitist or isolationist position. To illustrate this point of view, Kierkegaard argues, in unelitist fashion, that ironic awareness "is attainable for every other individual" yet "naturally remains the enviable lot of a chosen few" (338). Rather than merely justifying the ironist's act of alienation, Kierkegaard, in an extended discussion on the irony of Socrates, identifies Socrates as *the* exemplar of an ironical proselytizer: "His behaviour towards it [Hellenism] was always Ironical; he was Ignorant and knew nothing, constantly seeking enlightenment from others. But in thus allowing the established to endure, it therefore perished. This tactic he maintained to the last, a fact which was especially apparent when he stood accused [at his trial for impiety]" (281).

Kierkegaard's illustration is helpful in answering another question at the core of studying satire: as irony may be used without the seeming awareness of either the speaker or the audience, the question remains, *how should the ironist awaken the irony in others?* Or in the case of Twain, if deadpan makes manifest irony, how are the audiences to realize its presence and participate in the ironic moment? Regrettably, Kierkegaard's solution focuses not on the problem but instead on the ironist's personal sense of vocation, for immediately preceding the celebration of Socrates as an ironist seeking to foster enlightenment in others, Kierkegaard asserts that the ironist, whether knowingly or unknowingly, must serve ideality.

Kierkegaard sets up John the Baptist as Socrates' foil, highlighting his inadvertent employment of irony to subvert first-century Judaism. In his interpretation of John the Baptist's actions, Kierkegaard delineates the primary goals of the ironist as becoming increasingly aware of the presence of ironic action so as to identify the tools of ideality. He writes,

> But for the ironic formation to be perfectly developed, it is essential for the subject to become conscious of his irony, to feel negatively free when he condemns the given actuality and to enjoy this negative freedom. In order for this to occur, however, objectivity must be developed; or rather when subjectivity asserts itself, irony appears. Subjectivity feels itself confronted by the given actuality, feels its own power, its own validity and significance. But in feeling this, it saves itself as it were from the relativity in which the given actuality seeks to hold it. To the extent that this irony is world historically [*sic*] justified, the emancipation of subjectivity takes place in the service of the Idea even though the ironic subject is not clearly conscious of this. (280)

Aware of multiple interpretations of reality, the ironist pretends to see the subjective reality so that he or she can undermine its validity. These ideas are analogous to Homi K. Bhabha's directive to use your hybridity to your advantage and go into the enemy's camp to achieve your goals (qtd. in Bressler 266-67).

But Kierkegaardian irony, while latent with potential liberation, also begets destabilization of the ironist as well. As Kierkegaard writes it, the *telos* of the knowing ironist, such as Socrates, is madness, for "his zeal in [irony's] service consumed him, and last he, too, was seized with irony: everything spins around him, and becomes giddy, and all things lose their reality" (281). From this example, Kierkegaard generalizes the principle that the "Ironist is also a sacrifice required by the world process…but zeal in the service of the world spirit consumes him" (277-78). More specifically applied to Socrates, because he challenged the Hellenistic notions of the gods, their culture demanded his life of him, yet his death becomes a catalyst for others to be awakened to the ironic. His final scene, the death of Socrates, illustrates then "the negative freedom" in the work of the ironist.

As a juxtaposition, William Butler Yeats in "The Second Coming" imagines a falcon "turning and turning in a widening gyre." This scene aptly illustrates the "madness" of "negative freedom," which the ironist first experiences and then perpetuates. Readers glimpse in irony's downward, outward spiral of meaning "the negative freedom" that liberates us from the dictates of meanings but does not establish any certainty of meaning. Herein lies an essential characteristic of irony. As Kierkegaard states, "…it is negativity because it only negates" (278). Thus, irony begets irony and places the ironist on the course of continual observation of the ironic; rather than generating something new, irony destabilizes the establishment. Or in Kierkegaard's words,

> As the Ironist does not have the new within his power, it might be asked how he destroys the old, and to this it must be answered: he destroys the given actuality by the given actuality itself. Still, it must not be forgotten that the new principle is present in him *κατα δυναμιν* [i.e. "according to his power"] as possibility. In destroying actuality through itself, however, he places himself in the service of the irony of the World. (279)

By showing how *what is* is not what it seems to be, irony serves humanity by destroying actual phenomena when they fail to conform to the dictates of the ideal. As seen in this passage, the purpose of irony is not to point to a specific new ideal but to create space for the apprehension, interpretation, and application of the ideal—although a bogus form of irony could be used propagandistically to subvert or reify a hegemonic power.

Reframing Kierkegaard's vision of the ideal in contemporary language, "ideal" should be understood as imagined subjectively and translated rhetorically from speaker to audience using discourse and rhetoric; conversely Kierkegaard would be imagining the ironist objectively perceiving the ideal and then living it out subjectively in everyday existence to move others to see the ideal more objectively. John C. Caputo's description of the aims of deconstructive philosophical criticism is a helpful analog for understanding the workings of irony: he writes, "…everything in deconstruction is turned toward opening, exposing, expansion, and complexification, toward releasing unheard-of, undreamt-of possibilities *to come*, toward cracking nutshells wherever they appear" (31). This decentering of the actual phenomena comes at some cost to the ironist: namely, an insatiable eye for the ironic that pushes the ironist away from the facades of inadequately actualized phenomena.

Caputo's insight into the deconstructive qualities of irony, especially in its difficulty to construct a philosophical worldview, may help to account for the frustrations and

ambiguities in Mark Twain's response to religion and, more specifically, in the deepening darkened tone that scholars claim characterized his final decades. In a 2008 interview, novelist David James Duncan, elucidating on the destructive qualities of the overactive awareness of the satirist, sees Twain as a poignant model. Responding to a question asking if "satire is too sharp-edged a sword?" Duncan theorizes,

> When aimed at another mere mortal, yes. And satirists end badly. Swift himself says so. Look at Twain. A sad man. He really suffered the effect of wonderful statements like "Faith is believing what you know ain't so." He lost a fortune, a wife, two of his children [sic (lost three of his four children, in fact)], and had nothing with which to answer his grief but his own wit. There's a danger to the satiric life. My own satiric streak began to wither because of spiritual fear. (qtd. in Dale Brown 42)

Later in the interview, Duncan discusses his personal struggle to believe and "live graciously beneath all the baggage of the church," a struggle that he discloses he would never "deal with" (51-52). Here, Duncan pinpoints the all-consuming force of the ironic sensibility:

> Americans will reject anything about which it's possible to be ironic. But you can be ironic about *everything!* It's no basis for rejection! For example, Mark Twain was ironical about religious faith. He lived in the Gilded Age and was half-nauseated by the kind of feel-goodism you find in, say, William Dean Howells. But I think Twain is somebody who allowed his powers of irony and his keenness of observation to talk him right out of any kind of spiritual consolation. (qtd. in Dale Brown 51-52)

Irony consumes the ironist; even as Kierkegaard cites the liberating "madness" of Socrates, his optimism at irony's potential must be counterpointed by Duncan's personal (and

subjective) observation that the well-examined life can have its seemly tragic consequences. Kierkegaard himself died in his early forties, presumably because he compromised his personal wellbeing to live ironically and achieve his literary and philosophic aims, consequently, working himself to death.

The ironist, nevertheless, is more than a martyr in the cause against mendacious interpretations of the ideal; according to Kierkegaard, he (or she) is part prophet and part hero, yet always a servant of the ideal. Using Hegelian dialectical reasoning, Kierkegaard argues for a synthesis of two figures—the prophet, envisioning a new future but never a part of it; and the hero, fighting for the new and seeking to destroy the traditional ways. Melded together, they are the ironist, who knows that past and present do not align and lives in that ambiguity and tension—that together reveal a cultural or intellectual shift. Granted, these figures may seem to be outsiders to their community and seen as futuristic, anti-traditionalist, and uncommitted; however, they each maintain their insider status, for they are always holding on to the hope that the present can be made more perfect. Thus, the ironist is both a progressive and a pragmatist, and irony, then, functions practically, only becoming theoretical so as to make the theoretical more practical. As the synthesis of prophet and hero, only the ironist, whom Kierkegaard frequently denotes as "the ironic subject," can bring the fully truth-giving weight of irony to bear upon the culture. Kierkegaard describes the synthesizing work of the ironist in vaguely transcendent language (which is in keeping with his context of eighteenth and nineteenth century romantic philosophy):

> Still, the old must be displaced and seen in all its imperfection, and here we meet the ironic subject. For the ironic subject the given actuality has completely lost its validity; it has become for him an imperfect form which everywhere constrains. He does not possess the new, however, he only

> knows the present does not correspond to the Idea. He it is who has come to render judgment. The ironist is in one sense prophetic, to be sure, for he constantly points to something future; but what it is he knows not. While he is prophetic in this sense, his position and situation are nevertheless the opposite of the prophetic…. The ironist…has advanced beyond the reach of his age and opened a front against it. That which shall come is hidden from him concealed behind his back, but the actuality he hostilely opposes is the one he shall destroy. Towards this he directs his consuming gaze…. (277-78)

The ironist, and thereby the satirist, recognizes that the current ways of seeing and being are anachronistic and need to be abolished or revised to meet the new conditions of a new era. The weakness of the ironist is found in his or her inability to look beyond the shortcomings of the present without knowing what things ought to look like. Thus, the ironist "attacks" the present, relegating it the past to make a new way for the future.

Yet to answer the defining metaphysical question—"What is irony?"—is more difficult to answer from a study of Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Irony*, for he speaks ironically much of the time, modeling the philosophy he elucidates and seeking, thereby, to awaken in the reader a kindred ironic spirit. Paul de Man repurposes Kierkegaard's title for the 1977 title of his essay on the same subject because, as he argues, *The Concept of Irony* is "the best book on irony that's available" (163). De Man's essay "The Concept of Irony" is his own ironic discussion on the concept; it is ironic, as he writes, "because irony is not a concept" (163), because it functions both as a trope, a turning away from direct or obvious meaning, and "as all kinds of performative linguistic functions" (164-65). De Man notes that each philosopher—Friedrich Solger, August Wilhelm Schlegel, Hegel, and Kierkegaard—in turn complains that his predecessors "really didn't have much to say about it" (164). If we follow

de Man's lead and for a moment delve deeper into Kierkegaard's treatise, we find that Kierkegaard, perhaps because he comes at the end of this line of philosophers, does have some inklings as to the metaphysical workings of irony, and though his insights are highly descriptive, they do lay out several key notions on how irony operates, a definition by observation and inductive theorization.

In the hands of a practiced ironist, irony functions to see the emptiness, weaknesses, and foolishness in a society, with the aim of providing freedom, which in turn perpetuates the ironic spirit (Kierkegaard 266-69, 339-40). In addition to the aforementioned "Infinite Absolute Negativity," which Kierkegaard argues lies at the center of the workings of irony, it provides a deep and lasting freedom for all who perceive the irony and decenters authorities as though they were merely presumed. He writes,

> But the outstanding feature of irony…is the subjective freedom which at every moment has within its power the possibility of a beginning and is not generated from previous conditions. There is something seductive about every beginning because the subject is still free, and this is the satisfaction the ironist longs for. At such moments actuality loses its validity for him; he is, free and above it. (Kierkegaard 270)

A glimmer of irony provides the speaker and the perceptive audience with new possibilities to discover new meanings in the everyday. With the understanding of self-perpetuating freedom, Kierkegaard concludes that this freedom provides for the ironist an opportunity to make a willing choice about how to live, which he develops in his later writings into the idea of the subjective will and existential thought. For Kierkegaard, the way of irony becomes a means to bring personal, recurring pleasure, to find authenticity in life, to "actualize actuality" (338-40). Kierkegaard makes it clear that the freedom found in irony cannot

unearth quick morals or certain truths, for the nature of irony is always looking behind the phenomenon to invite a new but yet determined actualization of the ideal. He writes,

> When irony has been mastered it no longer believes, as do certain clever people in daily life, that something must always be concealed behind the phenomenon. Yet it also prevents all idolatry with the phenomenon, for as it teaches us to esteem contemplation, so it rescues us from the prolixity which holds that to give an account of world history, for example, would require as much time as the world has taken to live through it. (341)

Though irony is a means for freedom, it does not point to any certain truths, for all things are held ironically, or as Kierkegaard writes, "It must be borne in mind, however, that moral determinations are essentially too concrete for irony" (272). He makes this point clearer by identifying an unwelcomed temptation to conceive of irony as functioning in the same way that the moralist identifies hypocrisy, but irony and hypocrisy, though making a similar statement about the appearance of things, are essentially different (273). As aforementioned, true or "pure" irony is "theoretical or contemplative" seeking to make observations by "seeing the ideal behind the phenomenon" and "always trying to get outside the object" because the object has no essence or absolute reality, according to Kierkegaard (273-74).

In several places, Kierkegaard attempts to qualify these theoretical notions of irony by juxtaposing its functionality with visual art and poetry, going so far as to cite Solger's theory of aesthetics, who, in Kierkegaard's words, "makes irony a condition for every artistic production" (273-74, 336-37). Thus, building on Kierkegaard's theory, the liberating force of irony is at work in art's ability to work mimetically and to free the artist to see and create anew. As Kierkegaard expounds,

> Irony is now pervasive, ratifying each particular feature so there is neither too much nor too little, so that everything receives its due, so that the true equilibrium may be effected in the microcosmic situation of the poem whereby it gravitates towards itself. The greater the oppositions involved in this movement, so much the more irony is required to control and master those spirits which obstinately seek to storm forth; while the more irony is present, so much the more freely and poetically does the poet hover above his composition. Irony is not present at some particular point in the poem but omnipresent in it, so that the visible irony in the poem is in turn ironically mastered. Thus, irony renders both the poem and the poet free. For this to occur, however, the poet must himself be master over irony. (Kierkegaard 336)

As irony begets irony, it becomes all-pervasive in each artistic endeavor. Kierkegaard's theory about the increasing amounts of satire and control corroborates with the degree to which actuality resists ironic challenge, and it accounts for the greater apparentness of irony in satiric art. For the artist and audience to gain freedom, the irony must dominate the art, making itself "visible" and thereby liberating to all. In his monograph, Kierkegaard argues that, when creating art, the artist must be successful at mastering irony in that moment for the work to be great. The artist's momentary mastery of irony, which Kierkegaard envisions as a great permeation of irony for the individual, provides a clue into the success of works like Twain's when speaking ironically in ways that model for the reader how to approach cultural authorities (such as religious mores and institutions) with an ironic attitude. Moreover, it accounts for the artistic and literary techniques that dominate Mark Twain's

satiric works and explains why, when dealing with more serious issues in satire, Mark Twain will pour out irony to liberate readers from their societal and cultural entrapments.

Jon Stewart as a Contemporary Exemplar of the Satirist

With the understanding that irony is the fuel driving the engine of satire, genre studies set out to identify the presence of satire and its uniqueness in mode and purpose that distinguishes it from comedy and other ironic literary modes, such as parody and burlesque. This demarcation is a necessary step in recognizing and analyzing the satirist's chosen manner. But the aims and uses of a satiric demeanor can be harder to identify because they are driven by situational exigencies as well as the specific aims of the satirist and the subject matter satirized. The contextualization of the satirist and satire, then, is paramount toward arriving at a successful interpretation of a text. Thus, before exploring Twain's satiric manner and matter, it might be helpful to establish several points on the role of the satire: first, a primary aim of the satirist is to make the ironic more apparent (developed at length in the preceding discussion of Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Irony*); second, satirists generally have an agenda, an aim, or a way of seeing; third, the satirist must create an aesthetic experience for the audience so as to engage with the ideas; fourth, the satirist's role in speaking to his or her audience is not always welcome and must be carefully mediated if it grows hostile; fifth, a satirist is not only a satirist, for the art takes precedence to ideas; and sixth, the satirist must be willing to be a trickster to achieve his or her aims.

These ideas can be readily derived by analyzing the discourse of one of America's preeminent satirists, Jon Stewart. In a heated interview on Sunday 19 June 2011 between *The Daily Show*'s Jon Stewart and Chris Wallace on his weekly program *Fox News Sunday*, their discussion of liberal bias in the media shifted quickly into heated debate. In this venue,

Stewart serendipitously, as one of the leading contemporary satirists in the U.S., offered definitions of satire and comedy to defend his position as an artist and thwart Wallace's accusations that Stewart is primarily a political polemicist.

Initially, their debate escalated when Wallace attempted to corner Stewart into acknowledging that his description of Fox News—"a biased organization, relentlessly promoting an ideological agenda under the rubric of being a news organization"—should conversely be applied to other mainstream media outlets, more specifically liberal media outlets, identified by Wallace as "ABC, CBS, NBC, Washington *Post*, New York *Times*." "Would you say the same thing about them," Wallace pressured Stewart, "that they are in your words 'a propaganda driven delivery system relentlessly pushing a liberal agenda'?" Stewart's oft-repeated response throughout the interview, in the face of Wallace's insistence that mainstream media is overall liberal, delineated that "the bias of the mainstream media is towards sensationalism, conflict, and laziness." The dissonance between their ideas, moreover, reveals the dissonance between the agendas of these mediums—satiric comedy contracted with television news. As a result, Stewart is concerned with identifying hypocrisy in news organizations, often found in the incongruity between those who claim to be objective and those media lions who actually approach this goal. Stewart in this moment makes clear that his aim, and the aim of the satirist, is to make the ironic more apparent.

Among many examples to support Stewart's thesis of the media's emphasis on "sensationalism, conflict, and laziness," he highlights the manner in which the twenty-four-hour news networks covered Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi's regular press conference in the wake of then-Congressman Anthony Weiner's first sexting scandal in June 2011. Of the major networks' coverage of the speaker's press conference, CNN's Wolf Blitzer's commentary drew Stewart's ire for lamenting that, to cover the Weiner scandal, CNN had to

cut to Pelosi rather than have substantive discussion of real issues like health care and the economy. The un-ignorable irony that Stewart took as evidence for media sensationalism came the moment Pelosi opened her press conference saying she would not talk about the allegations against Representative Weiner and would instead be talking about jobs and the economy. Stewart was quick to spotlight how the networks immediately cut away from the press conference in search of something more sensational so as to keep their viewers engaged. Stewart's satire, as practiced here, highlights the uses of satire to define metaphysical realities: in this instance, how journalistic media outlets claiming to foster substantive exploration of issues need to, in fact, avoid sensationalism, especially when the opportunity presents itself. Stewart's critique would be quick to lose its force if the mainstream media outlets would acknowledge that their pursuits of higher ratings pushes them to be more sensational.

But Stewart did not stop his vitriolic interpretation by merely identifying hypocrisy in the media. He, instead, turned his ire back onto Wallace and mainstream news media at large: "The embarrassment is that I'm given credibility in this world because of the disappointment that the public has in what the news media does." In the germ of this barb, Stewart points out an essential aim of the satiric comedian: to point audiences to see the incongruities between what is and what is claimed and what ought to be, and, more importantly, to frame the context in a way that allows audiences both to recognize and to feel the ramifications of this reality, if in fact the satirist's perspective is correct or even preferred. But an interpretive tension exists in that moment if readers hold the satirist to the objective standard as those in the news media. Thus, every passionate citizen faces the challenge of whether or not, as Twain's title character, David Wilson, of *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson* says, to "Tell the truth or trump, but get the trick" (epigraph to chapter 1).

Seeming to miss the trick, Wallace repeatedly accuses Stewart of touting a political rather than comedic agenda. Now perhaps Wallace is right, and it is impossible to keep the comedian's political opinions out of political comedy, but it seems more likely that Wallace's critique is rooted in a desire to bait and entrap the messenger rather than concede to Stewart's understanding of the nature of comedy, art, and the creative process (and Stewart's expectation that artistic standards should not be applied to journalists, especially when tempted to turn news into entertainment). Wallace also fails to acknowledge that humor and satire do function as a societal corrective, a way of seeing anew, and that comedy need not be objective or adhere to journalistic standards to be effective. Of these points, Stewart is very willing to educate Wallace as to the nature of comedy, which he exemplifies at many points through this interview.

Not all satire or comedy needs to push its audience toward a specific course of action or belief. In fact, it will often simply push readers away from the ironic elements it identifies. This quality of satire can be seen in Stewart's defense of the second, and more pointed, attack made by Wallace in this interview. Here, he was not merely attempting to corner Stewart into admitting that all mainstream media is "liberal," but instead, his attack shifted in focus onto Stewart himself as an "ideologue," aiming to be a "political commentator" and a "political player." Stewart's immediate retort to these titles was a calm but emphatic, "You're insane," thus muting Wallace and diminishing his comments. Stewart, then, attempts to tutor Wallace in the essential differences between comedy as art and comedic propaganda and polemic:

> Here's the difference between you and me. I'm a comedian first. My comedy is informed by an ideological background, there's no question about that. But the thing that you will never understand, and the thing that in some respects

> that conservative activists will never understand, is that Hollywood, yeah, they're liberal, but that's not their primary motivating force. I'm not an activist. I am a comedian. And my comedy is informed by ideology, there's no question about that. But I'm not an ideologue.

Stewart argues that the artist is foremost an artist and is not merely concerned with agenda, a theme upon which he would further elaborate later on in the interview. The artist's work, according to Stewart is about telling a story, about entertaining, about practicing and honing the craft—hopefully in a way that contributes to the artist's financial wellbeing, which was certainly one of Twain's primary comedic stimuli. But being an artist is also about doing things that prompt his or her audience to engage in an aesthetic experience, about moving people to recognize what it is that the artist is witnessing or experiencing. Through comedy, the comedian asks an audience to find the humor in human experience. The ambiguity and double-speak at the heart of satire enables the satirist at the first sign of trouble to claim, "I was only joking." Satiric comedy as art relies on pretense and posturing.

In his next statement, Wallace, serendipitously, challenges Stewart for hiding behind the façade of being "only a comedian" and thereby avoiding responsibility for his statements: "I want to thank you for saying that [referencing the preceding Stewart quote] because Baltimore *Sun* TV critic David Zurawik…says that is your dodge: 'Stewart is never held accountable in his media criticism, is he? When he is wrong, he goes into the tap dance of saying he's only a comedian and shouldn't be taken seriously.'" Here, Wallace via Zurawik has identified another essential characteristic of satire and comedy: that, as the artist focuses the audience's attention onto the issues, he or she needs to keep those issues and the art paramount in the conversation and avoid becoming the focus of any latent animosity. Hostile readers are seldom willing to make intellectual or behavioral shifts and, instead, tend

to entrench and reinforce their previously held beliefs: they become less open-minded and remain foreclosed to the artist's insights.

A 2009 study conducted by Heather L. LaMarre, Kristen D. Landreville, and Michael A. Beam at The Ohio State University explored the role of audience bias in interpreting political messages. In their article, titled "The Irony of Satire: Political Ideology and the Motivation to See What You Want to See in The Colbert Report," they conclude that the participants, regardless of personal politics, generally found *The Colbert Report* to be humorous and entertaining. When the participants were asked to identify the politics of Stephen Colbert, the host of the program, however, LaMarre, Landreville, and Beam found that "conservatives were more likely to report that Colbert only pretends to be joking and genuinely meant what he said while liberals were more likely to report that Colbert used satire and was not serious when offering political statements. Conservatism also significantly predicted perceptions that Colbert disliked liberalism" (212). This study highlights the problem that humorists and satirists of Stewart's and Twain's ilk face: audiences do not respond to the work as the author prefers; while audiences are often open to being shaped by author and text, they come with their own preconceptions that may foil the artist's aims.

Satire and comedy, nevertheless, become particularly effective rhetorical devices at moving friendly audiences toward new positions while also encouraging hostile audiences to explore a scenario in a medium of nonbinding "pretense." This comedic "dodge" is a necessary ploy afforded to any artist when facing a hostile audience, and yet the ploy invites readers to identify the irony working to make the art comic or satirical, and those eagle-eyed readers will be quick to see such assertions as red herrings. Thus, the ability for the artist to claim that "it was all a joke" or "I am writing fiction, after all," remains a necessary quality of doublespeak.

At no point in the interview does Stewart equivocate at Wallace's accusations of dodging responsibility, again, delivered via Zurawik's critique. The comedic dodge is never the only means of defense afforded the artist. When humor is ineffective, the artist may choose a less subtle form of rhetoric. Thus, in his retort, delivered with a tone of self-assured modesty, Stewart reveals his quick comedic wit by assuming culpability while also correcting Wallace's terms:

> When did I say to you, "I'm only a comedian"? I said, "I'm a comedian first." That's not *only*. Being a comedian is harder than what you do. What I do is much harder. I put material through a process, a comedic process. I don't just sit and narrate.

In articulating that he is not "*only* a comedian" but rather "a comedian first," Stewart emphasizes the need to ensure that audiences note that a comedian, such as Stewart or Twain, is multifaceted, concerned primarily with a comedic, artistic process, though the context may be political and though the artist may certainly have political opinions. Stewart's distinction demarcates the ways in which comedy offers a way of seeing: one that requires more than the mere political talk-show commentating or reading the news, thus making the artist, comedian, and satirist more than a commentator, especially as "political commentator." Twain himself makes this distinction in "How to Tell a Story," when he distinguishes in the opening paragraphs that telling a humorous story requires artistry and the ability to read the audience, which he contrasts to a comic or witty tale that unpacks puns and punchlines rather than entertaining through the ironies of timing and the manner of delivery.

This last epithet, Stewart as "political commentator," highlights Wallace's aforementioned judgment against Stewart, a judgment Wallace reasserts again here, "But you

are a political commentator. The comedy has a political—[cut off]." Rather than arguing for or against the notion that "it's all politics," Stewart (in a stance I will also adopt) simply acknowledges, "Some of it [is political]," which enables Stewart to maintain the ambiguity of his comedic vision and push interpretive responsibility back to his audience. By leaving the interpretive loop open, Stewart models that it is the ethical and responsible comedian who can address political consensus while reminding audiences that comedy, regardless of its content, is nevertheless comedy and must be interpreted in this rhetorical spirit; comedy is a lens through which to view a substantive matter but is not the substance itself. In this way, comedians are multifaceted and polyphonic, while also providing another paradigm by which to understand and interpret the world.

To maintain his claim that he is a comedian first and not a "political commentator," Stewart deflects Wallace's (and Zurawik's) accusations that he dodges responsibility when, throughout the interview, he adopts a humble tone, which consequently, positions Wallace as the aggressor more interested in winning than in discussing ideas. Neither is Stewart's *mea culpa* sycophantic, pathetic, nor banal: "The embarrassment is that I'm given credibility in this world because of the disappointment that the public has in what the media does—not because I have an ideological agenda." Mark Twain had similar experiences and responded by feigning ignorance or becoming the butt of the joke; he seldom asserts his superiority over his audience, and when he does, it can be seen ironically. This confident humility is the humorist's strength. The deadpan approach of Mark Twain's authorial persona keeps his audience connected with him, pushing us to want to identify with a voice in the literature. And so, Twain and Stewart each provide ways to see through their ironic lens, however flawed that lens may be.

This inability for Wallace and Stewart to discuss calmly the ideas in Stewart's comedy discloses another difficulty when interpreting comedy and satire: namely, how a hostile audience may respond to the messages in the art in ways that intentionally subvert and diminish the impact of the artist. In the interview, this diminishment is echoed in Wallace's ill-defended motif asserting Stewart's ubiquitous liberal "political" aims and, more generally, forcing this artist to offer a defense rather than exploring what the artist seeks to discover and communicate. When this interview is contextualized, it is clear that Wallace assails Stewart to force a confession out of Stewart, however unsuccessfully, in retaliation for *The Daily Show*'s continued mockery of Fox News and other conservative political issues. Seen from this perspective, then, Wallace's first serious question in the interview opens with, "[Y]ou love to take shots at Fox News," to which Stewart readily acknowledges, "Yes, I do." And although, at the end of the interview, Wallace claims that his repeated questioning of Stewart's politics is because "I'm just trying to understand you," Stewart still asserts that Wallace's primary aim is only "to delegitimize criticism against Fox by suggesting that it's coming from a place of contrived political—" saying as much to Wallace. Stewart's thought, however, remains unfinished; Wallace cuts him off with hollow appeals for "understanding" each other. However confident and modest a comedian may be—however willing to assume responsibility, directly challenge accusations, or resist interpretive closures—the hostile interlocutor will always be a thorn to the artist. Wallace's audience may be too willing to accept the humorist's insights because they are authorized by the audience's core beliefs. They may, alternatively, see antagonists like Wallace, even when spouting one-sided representations of ideas, as champions of their values.

These exchanges between Wallace and Stewart also illuminate the problems that a comedian faces when addressing a hostile audience, one quite willing to subvert the work's

satiric aims and interpretations. Stewart takes a magnanimous position toward Wallace, stays on message, and disallows Wallace's attempts to silence or misrepresent him. Stewart trusts the audiences' intelligence to interpret the art as each member would prefer. This confidence humanizes both the artist and the audience and, under this influence, rhetorically positions Stewart in his deference to entrust the interpretation to his audience.

Illustrating the struggles a comedian may face with a hostile audience, Wallace and the production team at *Fox News Sunday*, in the editing of the interview for broadcast, confirm their desire to diminish the interpretive force of Stewart's interview by reducing the original twenty-four-minute interview, released separately on *Fox News Sunday*'s website, down to just under fifteen minutes. Clearly, the requirements of television production require editing, but its manner is a rhetorical decision nonetheless. The on-air result was a choppy montage of Stewart being grilled by Wallace and offering only fragmented, inchoate responses. On *The Daily Show* for Monday 20 June 2011, the day after his interview with Wallace aired, Stewart offered his audience an alternative interpretation of Wallace's motives and encouraged them to "look at the unedited version online, where my emotional states don't seem to change so arbitrarily. The arguments are a little clearer and a little less [like] a scene from 'Woman on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown'" (Stewart, "Fox News Channel—Fair & Balanced"). By freely submitting himself to the audience's interpretations and, at the same time, their prejudices, this comedian and satirist avoids being a polemicist or propagandizer, and by trusting an audience's ability for independent thought, they take ownership of the interpretive process. Thus, Stewart in this moment elucidates how the effective artist will embrace the seminal notions of humanism by trusting in the audience's ability to perceive and interpret the message. Mark Twain assumes a similar posture in his satiric performances.

A comparative analysis of the edited and unedited interview exemplifies the powerlessness that the humorist has over a hostile audience. The edited version itself becomes comedy when the comedian Stewart, as portrayed by the editors at Fox News, seemingly participates in a self-lampoon. In these moments, the artist must trust that the quick-witted audience will see through the humor and the misrepresentation to find joy in identifying the ironies of the situation. For in his powerlessness, the artist plays on the sympathies of the audience, which in effect not only reaffirms the artist's trust that the audience can and will interpret rightly but also reveals the ironic tensions that the questions raised in the rhetorical art are self-evident and, as the artist now models, can be confided in. The strength of comedy, then, resides in the paradoxical tension between simultaneous certainty and ambiguity, between humility and confidence, between seriousness and laughter. By comparison, Clemens develops his persona "Mark Twain" to ingratiate himself to his readers by assuming a posture of powerlessness, all the while maintaining narratorial control. The relationships between the artist and audience must necessarily then be characterized by trust, however hostile the audience may be.

Traditionally, satirists have justified the acerbity of their art by emphasizing its deeper moral aims and ability to aggressively "rend the heart," (to paraphrase Swift's self-authored epitaph) especially when facing a hostile audience. This dialogue between Chris Wallace and Jon Stewart serves to challenge traditional definitions of satire and comedy, in which artists, particularly in the Renaissance through the Long Eighteenth Century, offered many an *apologia* to justify their art rather than as an objective study of the genre. For example, John Dryden in "A Discourse on the Original and Progress of Satire" argues to the Lord Chamberlain that he will be using a Roman approach to satire and thus bring out its more moral quality. When historicized, their statements on satires supposed moral aims reveal that

these writers faced censure unless they aligned their works to the social and ethical mores of their times and are thereby rhetorical justifications for using this "aggressive" art form. Conversely, an analysis of Stewart's earlier comment that he is not "only a comedian" could alternatively reveal that Stewart may in fact prefer to hide behind his comic mask and will only reluctantly assume responsibility for his statements now that he has been forced into the open. Were cheap laughs or the quick barb Stewart's only interest, he could have avoided any debate by claiming he was merely joking and apologize for offending Wallace. Instead, Stewart articulates very clearly that comedy and satire, when functioning either generically or modally, are aimed at affecting some change.

Bulwarking Stewart's defense, specifically against Wallace's assertion that he "want[s] to be a political player," stands the acknowledgment that, although a satirist may wish to retain some immunity from criticism, the satirist's compulsion to speak is greater. To achieve this goal and simultaneously defuse Wallace's allegations of having political aims, Stewart challenges Wallace, "You are wrong. You're dead wrong. I appreciate what you're saying. Do I want my voice heard? Do I want my voice heard? Absolutely. That's why I got into comedy." But whereas eighteenth-century British satirists defended their art by claiming its essential moral quality, Stewart denounces any primary political aims and acclaims his satire as a means of communication. In this sense, satire doesn't exist for mere amusement, jokes, or laughter; instead, it attempts to say *something* about *something* and is primarily about promoting discourse. However politically incorrect in its manner or matter, political satire establishes a paradigm in which the audience assumes the role of political analyst and player. Thus, the satirist becomes a political catalyst by prompting audiences to assume responsibility for their lives and seek reformation. (An aside—perhaps it is not coincidental that comedy becomes a dominant art form in the early Athenian democracy, as an important

medium for promoting self-inquiry and reflection among the citizenry.) Using Mark Twain as his model, Stewart considers whether or not the satirist is primarily an artist or a political pundit.

> Stewart: No. I do comedy. […] What am I at my highest aspiration? Who am I? Am I Edward R. Murrow or am I Mark Twain? At my highest aspiration?
>
> Wallace: Oh, of those two, Mark Twain.
>
> Stewart: Right….
>
> Wallace: But…Twain had a lot of political impact.
>
> Stewart: Was that his main thrust? Am I an activist in your mind, an ideological partisan activist?
>
> Wallace: Yeah.
>
> Stewart: OK. Then I disagree with you. I absolutely disagree with you if that's the case. And I don't think—
>
> Wallace: And I think you take shots at both, although I think it's mainly to maintain credibility and you're not as comfortable with it. You take shots at Obama and the liberals. You like to make fun of conservatives.
>
> Stewart: You can't understand, because of the world you live in, that there is not a designed ideological agenda on my part to affect partisan change, because that's the soup you swim in. I appreciate that. I understand that. It reminds me of, you know—you know, in ideological regimes. They can't understand that there is free media other places because they receive marching orders.

Here Stewart identifies another challenge when using comedy and satire as a means for societal transformation: as previously stated, its success is entirely reliant on the audience's reaction and interpretation. In this repartee, Stewart implicitly raises an important question: what do you do when your audience refuses to recognize that there may be comedic voices who don't manipulate, coerce, or massage their material for ideological, even propagandistic, means? Chris Wallace exemplifies the difficult question by, on the one hand, seeking to hold the comedian Stewart to the guidelines of journalistic integrity, which Stewart claims does not apply to a satirist, while, on the other hand, Wallace misses that the point of comedy is not to be fair but to say something about the ironic or, as in one of Stewart's retorts, about "absurdity":

> Wallace: I'm suggesting that there's good stuff and bad stuff. I'm suggesting that there is bias, and that you only tell part of the story.
>
> Stewart: Oh, there's no question that I don't tell the full story. I mean, I don't disagree with that. But I don't not tell the full story based on a purely ideological partisan agenda. That's my point. My point isn't "my stuff doesn't stink."
>
> Wallace: I think your agenda is more out there, and you're pushing more of an agenda than you pretend to.
>
> Stewart: Ah, I disagree with you. I think that I'm pushing comedy and my ideological agenda informs it at all times. Now that agenda or my ideology is at times liberal, at times [it] can lean more conservative, but it's about absurdity. It's about absurdity and it's about corruption. And that is the agenda that we push. It's an anti-corruption, anti-lack of authenticity, it's anti-contrivance. And if I see that more in one area than I do in another, well

> then—but I defend every single thing that we put on that show. And I'm not dodging you in any way by suggesting that our main thrust is comedic— [cut off].

Jon Stewart argues for a brand of comedy that perpetrates and perpetuates a conversation about issues and ideas: "It's about absurdity and it's about corruption. It's an anti-corruption, anti-lack of authenticity, it's anti-contrivance." Stewart, even as he aligns himself with the vein of Twainian satire, places himself within the domain of ethical realism, for by presenting ideas in an ironic yet entertaining manner for his audience to reflect upon, Stewart's comedy invites his viewers to investigate ideas and make their own changes. The aim of satire, then, is not to deconstruct for its own sake (an activity that might be more aptly applied to invective, sarcasm, or parody); satire like Twain's and Stewart's will be an informed exploration into a subject. It is in the nature of satire to prompt a response, although it may seem to function without subtlety by forcefully provoking that reaction. Yet Stewart identifies that the satirist may find himself or herself the object of attack by critics who do not want to interact with the content of the art. What Stewart defends is *art for idea's sake,* not *ideas for art's sake*. In light of Stewart's argument, his and Twain's comedy aims to push ideology and its implications out into the open for public discourse; it would seek to silence only those who would limit the conversation to one perspective.

But the conversation comedy hopes to instill is not always so easy to keep open. In the final moments of the full version of the interview with Wallace, Stewart offers an interpretation for the interviewer's motives, namely, to attack the satirist for bias and thereby minimize the matter and meaning of the satire's critique:

> Stewart: …I assume that part of this is to delegitimize criticism against Fox by suggesting that it's coming from a place of contrived political --

Wallace: I'm just trying to understand you.

Stewart: Is that really true?

Wallace: Yes.

Stewart: Because here's the thing that surprises me about that. I've existed in this country forever. There have been people like me who satirize the political process and who have satirized—what was it that Will Rogers said? "How crazy is it when politicians are a joke and comedians are taken seriously?" I've existed forever. The box that I exist in has always been around. The change is the box that you guys—you've moved closer to me. But I'd like to know what I'm doing that's really different than what you've seen previously from satirical comedians that work in the political milieu. What is different about it that makes you so perplexed?

Wallace: No, I'm not—I'm not—I'm not saying that I'm perplexed.

Stewart: …you're trying to figure out what I am?

Wallace: What I'm trying to say is that all I wanted to do—You're making it sound like I'm trying to delegitimize you to legitimize FOX.

Stewart: What is the purpose of trying to—

Wallace: That assumes a kind of—and this is where I think you're wrong and you don't get it –

Stewart: That may be right.

In this final exchange, Stewart, by admitting that he could be mistaken, directly contradicts Wallace's early accusation that Stewart is hiding behind his comedy so as to avoid taking responsibility for his satire. If Stewart is "hiding," he is doing so by placing himself in the long tradition of satiric comedians. His use of the conditional "may" allows audiences to

arrive at the conclusion as to which of the two, Wallace or Stewart, is right. The questions Stewart issues in the final moments—"What is different about it that makes you so perplexed?" and "What is the purpose in trying— [cut off]?"—these keep the conversation open and allow the other party to take responsibility for his or her words and ideas; just as Stewart doesn't hide behind the art and takes responsibility for what is said, he also asks the audience to take responsibility for the interpretive process and seek to determine what is right. As one of the self-acclaimed "satirical comedians that work in the political milieu," and I would broaden this definition to include the social milieu, Jon Stewart, having placed himself alongside Mark Twain, makes clear that satiric art is attempting to do more than preach or argue. It aims to ask good questions and identify the ironic or the absurd; it invites audiences to join the satirist in the process of creation and discovery.

CHAPTER TWO

MARK TWAIN, SATIRIST

Identifying the presence of satire in works of literature, particularly those by Mark Twain, presents readers with several challenges. Because Mark Twain often writes modal, indirect satire rather than direct, formal satire, its presence is more easily identified in those situations where he attacks the flaws, failings, or abuses perpetrated by institutionalized religions. Take for instance his portrayal of medieval Roman Catholicism in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* or Protestant missionaries to Hawaii in *Roughing it*. In these moments, he uses satire under its traditional paradigmatic standards in which anger and outrage drive the plot. At times when the moral is unclear, however, we may be tempted to label the work burlesque rather than investigating the demands of nineteenth-century narrative satire. Furthermore, when a satire's moral and import are veiled, ambiguous, or equivocal, it may be a sign that Twain has brought into his sights a topic for his most vitriolic irony.

Illuminating the scholarly debate, Twain's own reflections on his early attempts at satiric journalism in the 1860s reveal him to be an intentional satirist who strategically lays out "guideboards," as Twain calls them, that invite the perceptive reader to join in the author's journeys through the ironic. Mark Twain as persona and author establishes a sympathy with his readers by positioning himself as "one of us"—an insider with aspirations and shortcomings that are representative of his readers. Perhaps he succeeds by acknowledging that his satires sometimes do fail and that he took advantage of his readers' trust. Authentic and imperfect, Twain relies on this kinship with his readers to teach us how

to home in on the presence of tropes such as irony or hyperbole. In the first few years of Samuel Clemens's newfound identity as "Mark Twain," he cultivates a multifaceted persona that both deceives and reassures the reader. Initially, however, his satires misfire; the dynamism of his frontier style is untamed and requires a broader, more Eastern cosmopolitanism to gain the long-staying subtlety and richness that will typify his mature style.

Before exploring Twain's ideas, a sample of the scholarly conversation will establish the nuances of his reputation as a humorist over and against his identity as a satirist. Philip D. Beidler's entry on "Satire" in *The Mark Twain Encyclopedia* (1993) typifies the scholarly uncertainty in interpreting Twain's uses of satire. Beidler concludes,

> If we accept the idea of satire's traditional location in the shared confidence, on the part of certain writers, about the relationship between humorous literary expression and the correction of social error, we must conclude that Mark Twain was never really a satirist in the broad cultural sense, for example, in the sense that Aristophanes or Fielding were satirists. Perhaps in a most general sense, like Swift, he could be said to have written relentless satires of folly. Or we might say that he often wrote incidental satire of an extremely high order but that he never possessed a comprehensive vision of satire. (654)

Perhaps due to the concise focus of his article, Beidler, unfortunately, does not develop these assertions. Furthermore, readers need to be careful to recognize that, just because Twain's satires may not necessarily point out the means for "correction," it doesn't mean that he isn't connecting with or exploring the ironic elements in society. Beidler is unclear about what Twain would need to say or do to have a "comprehensive" vision of satire.

Certainly, we wish that Twain would have developed a treatise on satire somewhere in his oeuvre, as does John Dryden. Such artist statements are helpful, but, as Dustin Griffin remind us, satirists often are writing on the nature of satire not because it articulates their satiric vision but because they wish to persuade censors and hostile audiences of the legitimacy of their art (14-30). While Beidler's portrayal of Twain as a writer of "incidental satire" might neatly categorize the satiric elements in Twain's writings, namely by diminishing them, it is clear that Twain continually returned to the satiric mode throughout his career.

The differences between a work being written in the satiric genre and a work containing satiric elements are worth revisiting. The satires of Horace and Juvenal and those eighteenth-century models were careful to fulfill the forms of formal verse or prose satires. Yet, in the last few centuries, satires in the English language have moved away from these forms, perhaps because they are difficult to sustain or because readers are more inclined to embrace the ideas when writers couch them in the genres of novel and short story. And yet, if we take seriously that a goal of satire is to offer a pleasurable, ironic rebuke, with the added possibility of exploration and discovery, then we can conclude with confidence that those goals can be accomplished through a myriad of literary and rhetorical means.

The reason for Twain's use of "incidental satire," using Beidler's phrasing, is easily contextualized. Charles A. Knight argues that the rise of the novel coincides with satire's shifts from being generic in form to functioning modally within other genres, namely the novel (Knight 3-4). Rubin Quintero similarly surmises that "such an adaptive genre, somewhat existentialist in nature (i.e., in practice, one might argue that its existence precedes its essence), has found so many niches in popular culture and has become a favored vehicle for assuming a critical posture of a less powerful but contentious underdog or of a selflessly

interested, shrewd observer" (9). By the mid-nineteenth century, literature had undergone a middle-class revolution that diminished the highbrow qualities of the long eighteenth century and given prose fiction prominence. Yes, Twain did write several distinct burlesques and satires, the origins of which Kent Rasmussen explains thusly: "burlesque was a popular and well-understood form in America, particularly on the frontier, where Mark Twain learned his craft" (48). Twain was well aware of his role in writing for a middlebrow American audience and adopted these ironic modes into this tales and stories. According to Rasmussen,

> He consciously wrote burlesques, a notably early example being Mark Twain's burlesque autobiography (1871). Until he found his own voice, he was inclined to burlesque well-known writers such as Shakespeare. Burlesque permeates his whole body of writings, particularly early sketches, such as "Aurelia's Unfortunate Young Man" and "Lucretia Smith's Soldier." Burlesque elements appear even in his major works, such as the "King's Camelopard" episode in *Huckleberry Finn.* An example of an extended late effort is "A Double-Barrelled Detective Story," which contains a savage burlesque of Conon Doyle's Sherlock Holmes. (48)

Twain recognized early in his career that he needed to write for a broad, populist audience, familiar with Shakespeare, the Bible, and Sherlock Holmes, a lesson well learned from writing newspaper copy from his teens into his thirties. In 1885, he quipped in his notebook, "My books are water; those of the great geniuses is [*sic*] wine. Everybody drinks water," which he would later revise in a 15 February 1887 letter to friend William Dean Howells as "High and fine literature is wine, and mine is only water; but everybody likes water" (qtd. in Schmidt). Arguably, Twain doesn't write "formal satires" because he finds them unvendible.

Yet more importantly, Twain's adaptation of modal satire into his literature establishes him as a great innovator in the transmogrification of satire from a formal to an indirect form.

Perhaps readers should not take a trickster at his word when he claims, even early in his career, that he aims to write satires. More disconcerting, however, in either labeling or denying Twain to be a "satirist," scholars are caught between the problematic status of satire's presence as literary genre or as an artistic mode. Some scholars only consider satire as a formal genre, which Twain seldom uses. Were Twain to write the Swiftian formal satires of folly that Beidler seeks, he would have given evidence that he views satires functioning neither as a literary genre nor as a consummate literary craft, but rather as means to express his ironic vision, or as Lou Budd calls it, Mark Twain's social philosophy. The conventional explanation for "Twain's lack of satiric vision," as Beidler summarizes, is also less than satisfying: "That America even after its great technopolitical coming of age was too thin a culture for a satirist to understand what *it* was; or that Mark Twain's deep confusions about his own role as a literary person and an American person prevented him from understanding who he was" (654). And yet Twain's first and last novels, *The Gilded Age* and *Extracts from Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven*, function as sustained social satires, as are many episodes in the picaresque *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, so much that it could be taken as a satire of the Antebellum and Reconstruction South (Rasmussen 418-19). While Beidler's synopsis does correctly identify the major developmental shifts in American culture in Twain's era, he seems to be more concerned with explaining why Twain was not a satirist and could not have written satire rather than to account for his vision and how he conceived this role of his humor. A scholarly inability to identify an ordering principle in Twain's work does not mean he lacks one.

Since the earliest division of Twain studies between the perspectives of Van Wyck Brooks (*Ordeal of Mark Twain*, 1920) and Bernard DeVoto (*Mark Twain's America*, 1932; *Mark Twain in Eruption*, 1940; *Mark Twain at Work*, 1942), many scholars have aligned themselves with their two divergent theses: Brooks regarded Twain as a pessimistic, "hack" writer who by pure luck (and not genius) was able to transcend his role as a Western journalist and humorist to strike literary pay dirt in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*; DeVoto, instead, found in Twain an American genius who was essential in creating a unique American literature and American voice. The oft quoted quip from Earnest Hemingway's *The Green Hills of Africa* echoes this debate:

> All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*. If you read it you must stop where the Nigger Jim is stolen from the boys. That is the real end. The rest is just cheating. But it's the best book we've had. All American writing comes from that. There was nothing before. There has been nothing as good since. (*The Hemingway Reader* 468)

Voiced by Hemingway's persona to the European ex-pat Kandisky, who only remarks that "Mark Twain is a humorist," these words convey the many tensions that center on scholars who, like Brooks and Beidler, portray Twain as a flawed writer: on the one hand, he creates the best work of American literature and gives rise to all (not quite as good) literature that follows; on the other hand, however, Twain has given us a "flawed" masterpiece in *Huckleberry Finn*, the final third of which must be cast aside. These definitions are motivated not by a desire to understand or contextualize Twain but, instead, by the need to define the greatness of a man or a culture, to identify cultural influences and their impact on our literature (or its lack of influence). Yet, when scholarship too participates first and foremost in subjective questions of "greatness," it diminishes its own usefulness.

In the context of this scholarly debate, consider the conclusion of Beidler's essay in which he argues that Twain's satire is merely humorous, that he writes more burlesque than satire, that Twain "makes fun of that which is not funny for the fun of making fun" (655). The irony and satiric motive present in this image of Twain seems to have been lost on Beidler, for he claims that, as the fun in Twain's work and writing evanesced, so too did his ability to write satire. Yet making light of the unfunny seems to be neatly aligned with the goals of a satirist.

To support his argument, Beidler cites Twain's 1879 letter to William Dean Howells, as an important shift in Twain's satiric development. In this letter (further discussed in chapter five), Twain remarks that he is not in a good enough mood to write good satires, of which Beidler concludes, "But by now, as Twain rightly noted, things were no longer funny in a way that could support a *comic* sense of humor that might still make satire possible. Instead, humor had become the constant bedmate of anger. This accounts surely for the almost maddening satirical ambivalence…of desperate middle works" (Beidler 654-55). Beidler clarifies this desperation by saying that "In many ways, indeed, one might say that, with the abandonment of search [*sic*] for a moral center, the notorious beginning of the end of *Huckleberry Finn* is truly the beginning of the end of Mark Twain the satirist" (Beidler 655). Since Twain never loses the focus of his moral center, it is here in this vein of Twain scholarship that I wish to mine more deeply: namely, Beidler's interpretation of a seeming ambivalence as contradictory to the satiric vision and the need for a clear moral stance to be present in a "satiric" work for it to both be considered successful and to be considered satire. Perhaps the commonality that could reconcile Beidler's position would be to see the frustration in Twain's ambiguity to be aligned with the provocative nature of satire rather than requiring moral reproof as evidence for satire's presence in the work. For as Dustin

Griffin argues, satire need not have a clearly stated moral purpose to function as satire but can take on more important rhetorical roles of provoking audience action and stimulating further "inquiry" into the subject and, I would add, promoting mindfulness and self-discovery:

> Quite apart from these objections to the conventional theory of satire's moral rhetoric, we should resist reducing the satirist to the kind of single-mindedness and tunnel vision that we expect to find in no other writer (in our practical criticism—as opposed to our theory—we of course acknowledge that satirists, like everybody else, are ambivalent and aware of complexity). Even if we wish to call the satirist a rhetorician, we need not think of satiric rhetoric simply as the communication of previously codified moral knowledge or the persuasion of a reader toward a particular course of action.…[R]hetoric can be, and historically has been, conceived of in quite different terms and that we may arrive at a fuller understanding of the way satire works if we think of a rhetoric of inquiry, a rhetoric of provocation; a rhetoric of display, a rhetoric of play. (39)

These satiric possibilities release scholars of satire from needing to find a moral justification for every element in the work; satire is more than righteous indignation aimed at social and personal reform. While Mark Twain is often playful and "makes fun of that which is not funny for the fun of making fun," to refocus on Beidler's critique, he is not *only* a comedian nor does he shy away from foreground ethical concerns. Perhaps we might listen to Twain's own words in his February 22, 1902, letter to Helen Picard: he writes, "Yes, you are right -- I am a moralist in disguise; it gets me into heaps of trouble when I go thrashing around in

political questions" (qtd. in Schmidt). And as we will later explore, the same might be said of Twain "thrashing around in [all] questions," be they political, moral, social, or even religious.

The Role of Satire at The Birth of "Mark Twain"

Under the heading "Memoranda" in the June 1870 edition of *The Galaxy*, the magazine which he edited and contributed to during the brief thirteen months he lived in Buffalo, New York, immediately after he and Livy married, Twain wrote a short essay, "A Couple of Sad Experiences," which reveals not only why he avoids the confounding problems of writing formal satire but also shows his plan for writing modal satire. (Twain would subsequently republish this essay in the 1875 collection *Sketches New and Old* as three consecutive pieces – "How I Edited an Agricultural Paper," "The Petrified Man," and "My Bloody Massacre" – removing the names of his satiric victims.) In "A Couple of Sad Experiences," Twain recounts the publication of two "failed" satires, "The Petrified Man" and "My Bloody Massacre" (published in *The Territorial Enterprise* on 4 October 1862 and 28 October 1863, respectively), both of which certainly seek to censure folly, at least as Twain seems to portrays these issues, but he does so in the modal form of indirect satire. These pieces are scholarly and literary gems for they give insight into the satirical mind of Twain in how he composed the original pieces for a Virginia City (Nevada) readership, their literary life after publication and, consequently, Twain's reflection on them as an established eastern journalist writing with clearer hindsight.

Stephen Fender argues that it was in the cauldron of the newly forming American West where Mark Twain "began to search for a style; a style of living as well as of writing" (737). Fender notes that Clemens's letters sent home during his 1853 trip east to Philadelphia and New York as a journeyman printer are characterized by a reverence and lack of irony.

The teenage Clemens's sentiments, according to Fender, originate in a respect demanded by the historicity and patriotic reverence for these eastern cities and their culture, as compared to the seemingly uncivilized areas west of Missouri. But even more than his eastern travels, the experiences that he would have a decade later in Territorial Nevada change and reshape his focus. In analyzing Sam's 1861 letters written from Nevada to his sister Pamela Moffett in Saint Louis, Fender identifies a newfound excitement uncharacteristic of Twain's earlier account of eastern American culture. Now this shift could be accounted for by Twain's development as a writer and thinker in the previous eight years. Fender concludes, however, that "the stakes must have seemed higher [to Clemens]. The possibility of striking it rich in timber or silver was much keener in anticipation than that of succeeding as a printer in Philadelphia…. Then there is the exhilaration of the wilderness…. The prose style is jumbled too" (739-40). To explain these changes in Twain's style, Fender identifies in Clemens a soon-to-be newfound role as intercessor between his eastern and western milieus; Fender writes, "the narrative voice takes the side now of the East, now of the West, because it mediates between the two" (742). And regarding tone, Twain's letters shift quickly from setting up a joke to "becom[ing] deadly serious by the time he finishes the paragraph" (Fender 742). This equivocating tone would become a hallmark of Twain's style: despite quick, humorous jokes, the writing's trajectory is away from the easy guffaw toward a darker, more serious artistic impression. Not coincidentally, Fender concludes, Virginia City and Carson City in the Nevada Territory were not without their arts: for instance, theatres in each city staged both Shakespearian plays as well as low farce (Fender 743-45). These polarizing elements were essential for Twain's development of his ironic, satiric humor.

Yet, according to Fender, Virginia City, as a burgeoning cosmopolis of "immigrants," created art that was highly regional in content but lacked a distinct local color,

in that it "largely ignore[d] details of custom and speech" (Fender 745). This developing culture provided Clemens with the platform to develop his narratorial voice, which on 3 February 1863 would be penned as Mark Twain in a local daily paper, *The Territorial Enterprise* (Quirk, *Tales* 7). This narrator had to remain "cool and unaligned" to balance the many vocal and cultural personalities discovered in the Washoe (Fender 745). This ironic outsider narratorial perspective would remain ubiquitous throughout Twain's long literary career and would contribute to his iconic deadpan mask as a guise from which to unload his satiric ire.

"Letter from Carson City," Clemens first pseudonymous piece to be authored under the appellation "Mark Twain," is indicative of Twain's characteristic narrative style and tone. The letter initially sets out to describe an evening's social events at the home of J. Neely Johnson, former governor of California, but quickly shifts to satire and lampoon, sometimes directed at the speaker himself. Ron Powers sees in this piece Twain's "first successful appearance of the elementary Twainian device: the half- or fully fictionalized 'other'" (117). In "Letter from Carson City," Twain *others* Clement T. Rice, a reporter at a rival Virginia City paper, naming him "The Unreliable," yet the literary distortion is so complete that even the narrator on his first venture into print emphasizes his own unreliability, which he lampoons in opening lines: "I feel very much as if I have awakened out of a long sleep. I attribute it to the fact that I have slept a greater part of the time for the last two days and nights. On Wednesday, I sat up all night in Virginia, in order to be up early enough to take the five o'clock stage on Thursday morning" to Carson City (*Tales* 3). After a sleepless night and a daylong stagecoach ride, Twain attends the party, his judgment clearly suspect. After Twain invited himself to the party and imposed himself upon the hospitality of the Governor, the opening anecdote describes him expending an hour staring down a mirror with Horace Smith, Esq. until it cracks. "Horace Smith's reflection was split right down the centre. But

where his face had been, the damage was the greatest—a hundred cracks converged from his reflected nose," as Twain records it (*Tales* 4). He supposes that, although the room was quite comfortable, the winter weather could have been the catalyst of this phenomenon. The matter-of-fact, destabilizing deadpan of Twain's narration will stand as his hallmark trope for nigh on fifty years.

At this point in the "Letter," irony begins to subsume the narrator. Here, the Unreliable—Twain's pseudonym for Rice—enters the party in a similar manner to Twain's from an hour earlier, and the Unreliable receives the narrator's full disgust and ire: "That creature has more impudence than any person I ever saw in my life" (*Tales* 4). Twain describes the Unreliable as wearing Twain's clothes and in whose presence the narrator dare not leave the punch bowl unguarded: "wherefore we staid there and watched them until the punch entirely evaporated," presumably into the gullet of the Unreliable and his unreliable narrator, Mark Twain. Their travesty is repeated on the dance floor, at the buffet table, later at the piano. Although each mirrors the other's performance, Twain never lets his doppelgänger look the better of the two.

This twinning or foiling of Twain's narrative voice is vital to the reader's detection of irony. Powers describes how this "counterpointing voice, convey[s] temperaments, points of view, even self-criticisms, that are not available to the narrator himself. With his roots in the Southwestern frame story, this Other completes a dialectic that deepens the story and allows the reader to collaborate, constantly deciding which voice is more persuasive" (117). From his earliest, Twain cannot help but torment the reader by destabilizing meaning, instilling hermeneutic doubt that invites reflection and co-creation of meaning. In this way, Twain's use of the ironic "other" resembles Socratic irony. And as Powers purports, the "Unreliable" man in "Letter from Carson City" would become a type that reappears throughout Twain's

canon: as "Brown," "Blucher," and "Harris" in his travelogues; as Eve's and Adam's mutual unreliability in *The Diaries of Adam and Eve*; and even as Huckleberry Finn, a counterpoint to Tom Sawyer and Mark Twain himself (Powers 117).

The ironic outflow in Twain's early works reveals the willful risks he playfully takes, aiming to incite the reader to new interpretive epiphanies. According to Stephen Fender, "…his narrative style in his western sketches remained neutral and the behaviour [*sic*] observed was allowed to declare its own absurdity" (745). Twain's detached attitude, learned early in his career, forged in him the ironic proclivities that charged his satire with insights, on the one hand, especially when the absurdity was discovered by the reader, yet on the other hand, seemed to be flat journalism when the insight failed to find its mark. "The birth of Mark Twain" in 1863 and his short stint writing on the editorial staff of Virginia City's *Territorial Enterprise* serendipitously taught him how to write with double-speak by broadening him beyond a Missouri or Eastern audience (Fender 748).

The West liberated Twain's creativity and allowed unlimited freedom for literary experimentation. According to Ron Powers, "Out west, there were no rules, no frowning Calvinist pieties—only energy and freedom" (113). Erica Jong, in her introduction to Twain's anonymously published and privately circulated Elizabethan satire *[Date 1601] Conversation as It Was by the Social Fireside, in the Time of the Tutors*, concludes that, if a writer cannot use the full spectrum of language, including vulgarities and profanities, then he or she is unable to fully unleash creativity; for "In championing 'deliberate lewdness' he bestows the gift of freedom upon himself" (xxxiv-xxxv). In other words, scholars should not understate the parallels between the bawdy unrepressed Elizabethan Court, the fast-and-loose journalism of the newly-formed western territories, and Twain's quest for authentic realism

that undergirds his irony and satires. It is too easy to misinterpret Twain's genuineness and authenticity as irreverence when transplanted into an eastern, more cosmopolitan society.

This interpretive play between satirist and reader charts new depths on the risks that irony requires. For example, whether or not readers see irony in the relationship between the narrator and the Unreliable in "Letter from Carson City" or the presence of satire and hoax in the "failed" Washoe squibs—"The Petrified Man" and "A Bloody Massacre Near Carson"—these works still address social concerns significant to Twain and reveal the scope of his willingness to take risks in his early literary experiments. According to Stephen Fender, the cosmopolitan qualities of Virginia City challenged Twain to write for "a local readership so diverse that one would not entertain all of it without offending some" (748). Thus, "A Bloody Massacre Near Carson" provides evidence of Twain learning how to be comfortable causing offence (Fender 748). For this reason, Fender considers "A Bloody Massacre" to be Twain's "first stylistic slip in Nevada" as it exhibits a "questionable taste," but nevertheless, it is written to provoke a response from this readership; in this story, Twain no longer "stunted his aggressiveness" and thus forfeited "a plausible pretext for a pose of academic [or journalistic] neutrality" (748).

In summary, "A Bloody Massacre Near Carson" presents a hoax under the guise of secondhand news relayed to the newspaper's editors by Abram Curry regarding a local resident, Philip Hopkins, who goes mad after his stock investments go bust. Hopkins then dispatches his wife and seven of nine children with blunt force trauma from an axe and a club, after which he slices his throat and expires moments after he arrives on horseback in Carson. When Twain reminisced about this experience in *The Galaxy* eight years later, titling his memoir of the 1863 publication "My Famous 'Bloody Massacre,'" he innocently describes his "failed" essays by claiming,

> I certainly did not desire to deceive anybody. I had not the remotest desire to play upon anyone's confidence with a practical joke, for he is a pitiful creature indeed who will degrade the dignity of his humanity to the contriving of the witless inventions that go by that name. I purposely wrote the thing as absurdly and as extravagantly as it could be written, in order to be sure and not mislead hurried or heedless readers….

Twain's description of his motives connotes a feigned naivety and seems a bit disingenuous. Yet this moment describes Twain's attempts to "make nice" with his readers, but in the end, explains how his readers failed to understand the ironic elements present in the work. Later he takes the blame for his problems: he buried the lead of the story and "tagged [the 'moral'] on at the bottom, and the reader, not knowing that it is the key of the whole thing and the only important paragraph in the article, tranquilly turns up his nose at it and leaves it unread" ("A Couple of Sad Experiences"). This explanation does little to explain how the format of Twain's *Territorial Enterprise* news pieces do in fact take the form of an all-out frontier hoax.

When interpreted through Twain's 1870 explanation, his failure to headline the "nub" of the story, which focuses on the corporate corruption whose deception led to one man's financial ruin, despair, and homicidal tendencies, his early satire is lopsided. Twain explains his epiphany in *The Galaxy* "Memoranda," "One can deliver a satire with telling force through the insidious medium of a travesty, if he is careful not to overwhelm the satire with the extraneous interest of the travesty." Travesty differs from satire primarily in that it is a false, distorted representation. H. M. Abrams defines it as a form of low burlesque that "mocks a particular work [i.e. some *thing*] by treating its lofty subject in a jocular and grotesquely undignified manner and style" (18). Yet satire is flexible as either a mode or as a genre and easily absorbs other literary techniques—or is absorbed by them if the balance is

not maintained. According to Twain, because the travesty dominated the satire, the reader, unaware that the story was to be taken as burlesque and satire, instead concluded it was news of a real-life grotesque.

Perhaps Twain's struggle to keep the travesty in service to the satire can be explained by the vivid realism of these types of events in his own life. These details are not far from the events Sam Clemens witnessed in his childhood. The grotesque, gothic imagery in "A Bloody Massacre" echoes violent beatings and mutilations of two slaves in Hannibal; Sammy's traumatizing ordeal of peering through a keyhole to watch the autopsy performed on his father's body; and the gory, public murder of Sam Smarr, which occurred less than a block from his boyhood home and would later serve as the template for the murder of Boggs in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (Powers 37-38, 42-44). All of these events occurred before Sam turned twelve years old.

But the goal of Twain's Nevada hoaxes is not simply to horrify through shock and awe, for the western hoax, as perfected by Twain's *Territorial Enterprise* colleague Daniel DeQuille, functions more like a riddle in which readers had to read carefully to realize it was a fiction and not an outright deception. The hoax aimed, therefore, to dupe a major east-coast newspaper editor (read *cultured* and *civilized*) who missed the joke and reprinted the story as an actual happening, which Twain achieved in "The Petrified Man" when it was carried by the London *Lancet* (Fender 748-49). In this way, Twain plays trickster through his hoaxes, tempting the cultured and civilized literati to publish the piece as a way of proving the ridiculousness of the culture in the American West but, in doing so, they set themselves up for mockery.

Twain's satires and hoaxes, or so he claims, provide a signal that irony is afoot. In the case of "The Petrified Man," the eponymous man dies while in the act of thumbing his nose

and remained so all the while fossilizing, a process that requires a great amount of time. This incongruity is the sign for the reader. With "The Bloody Massacre," the setting is contextualized by fictitious place names or by places that locals would have recognized could not have existed in relationship—Twain creates a "great pine forest between Empire City and Dutch Nick's," knowing his discerning readers would realize that no pine trees grew in the region and that "Empire City" and "Dutch Nick's" are but synonyms for the same place. But readers must sleuth through the nonsensical elements in the story because Twain, at least in "Bloody Massacre," buries his lead. This early satire aims to lambaste the disreputable corporate practice of inflating stock prices to increase stocks sales to unsuspecting investors, who later discover the scheme only when their investment proved to be unvendible (Powers 126-27). In "The Bloody Massacre," Twain's attempt to satirize the "dividend-cooking system" is hidden from the reader as Twain details the horrific accounts of "Abram Curry," presumed eyewitness: "About ten o'clock on Monday evening Hopkins dashed into Carson on horseback, with his throat cut from ear to ear, and bearing in his hand a reeking scalp from which the warm, smoking blood was still dripping, and fell in a dying condition in front of the Magnolia saloon. Hopkins expired in the course of five minutes, without speaking." Following this initial description, the ghastliness intensifies with each sentence. By ironic juxtaposition, if the main focus of the article is to satirize corporate cooking of dividends, Twain certainly doesn't spoil the game until several hundred words later in the final third of the story buried beneath layers of "factual" explanatory commentary. Echoing the naturalism in the next generation of American writers, Twain sets out to connect corporate stock manipulation to the psychological trauma and consequent breakdown suffered by investors. Here, however, the subtle incongruity between Twain's

portrayal of the homicides and investment fraud is easily overshadowed by the blood-sickening scene.

"A Bloody Massacre in Carson" was unsigned when he published it in the *Territorial Enterprise*, its only attribution being the eyewitness "Abram Curry," a tactic Twain would use time and time again to move attention away from his authorial hand in telling a "found story." In this instance, Twain's sleight of hand distracts readers from his position as author and speaker by focusing them on an "authority" whom they will accept as truthful, simply because Twain as narrator presents the voice as reliable. (The most approachable example of Twain's narratorial framing is his decision to tell *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* from a first-person point of view, which distracts us from the fact that Twain is indeed telling the story.) Readers are, thus, literarily hoodwinked. Biographer Ron Powers conjectures, "Most [original *Territorial Enterprise*] readers seem never to have made it that far down into the story. The details of the 'murders' were too much to stomach" (126). And although Twain left the original story unsigned hoping to achieve some degree of anonymity, as Powers recounts it, "the next day's edition [of the *Territorial Enterprise*] carried a brief notice over Mark Twain's byline, titled 'I TAKE IT ALL BACK'" (126). In truth, Twain's satiric aims may have failed because he alluded in vivid detail to a string of ax murders that occurred in the area five months earlier (Powers 127). The satiric joke Twain attempts in this story is that ax-murder sprees in Nevada are instigated by corrupt executives in publicly traded corporations. Although the story is entrapped by its own hyperbole and is in danger of slipping into burlesque or even travesty, this early Twainian satire does well to exemplify its own potential failures, especially if the audience is subsumed by the journalistic sensationalism to such an extreme that these ironies elude them, thus diminishing their chances of discovering its more serious ethical meanings.

Seven years later in "A Couple of Sad Experiences," his reflective memoranda published in *The Galaxy* and later republished in *Sketches New and Old* (1875), Twain instructs his readers in how to read these satires: herein, Twain carefully delineates all of the "guide-boards," as he calls ironic signifiers, that he sets up for readers to recognize the satiric intent in "A Bloody Massacre Near Carson." First, Philip Hopkins, the protagonist, was a known bachelor; second, his home was a "stone-dress mansion just at the end of a great pine forest between Empire City and Dutch Nick's" (though in the original *Enterprise* article, "A Bloody Massacre Near Carson," Twain describes Hopkins's residence as "an old log house" with "a garret"—which Twain later remembered as "stone-dressed"). In his 1870 explanation, Twain makes it clear that local *Enterprise* readers should have remembered that "there was no dressed stone house in all Nevada; …there wasn't a solitary tree within fifteen miles of either place; and finally, it was patent and notorious that Empire City and Dutch Nick's were one and the same place, and contained only six houses anyhow, and consequently, there could be no forest between them…." While these ironic "guide-boards" may not have been obvious absurdities to his readers, especially those in other locales who read the story reprinted in their local papers, the third signifier of satire is most obvious: namely,

> that this diabolical murderer, after inflicting a wound upon himself that the reader ought to have seen would have killed an elephant in the twinkling of an eye, jumped on his horse and rode *four miles*, waving his wife's reeking scalp in the air, and thus performing entered Carson City with tremendous éclat, and dropped dead in front of the chief saloon, the envy and admiration of all beholders.

For readers to see the presence of satire, they must become aware of ironic incongruities in the text. But in this instance, Twain is writing in a significantly different tone and genre than

the original news story. By describing Hopkins as "diabolical" and his suicidal self-inflicted wound as so powerful that it "would have killed an elephant in the twinkling of an eye," Twain lets the reader in on the joke and shares his secret perspective with all, whereas the 1863 essay titillates with horrific details and plays on our worst fears. As a result, Twain turns the joke on the reader while he takes the upper hand on those readers who miss the "guide-boards."

As Twain retells it in his 1870 "My Famous 'Bloody Massacre,'" he and Dan DeQuille went to breakfast at their "customary table in the 'Eagle Restaurant'" and watched as their fellow diners began reading his "little satire": "Most of the citizens dropped into it a breakfast, and they never finished their meal. There was something about those minutely-faithful details that was a sufficing substitute for food." Twain then caricatures "two stalwart innocents with that sort of vegetable dandruff sprinkled about their clothing which was the sign and evidence that they were in from the Truckee with a load of hay." Twain's description of their appearance and reading the newspaper, while humorous, shifts the interpretive blame on their inability to read carefully: "From the way he was excitedly mumbling, I saw that the heedless son of a hay-mow was skipping with all his might, in order to get to the bloody details as quickly as possible; and so he was missing the guide-boards I had set up to warn him that the whole thing was a fraud." Here, Twain makes his readers out to be fools, and the physical comedy that follows rewards his 1870s readers by welcoming them as insiders to his satiric frame of mind. In the balance of interpretive responsibility between writer and reader, Twain places the onus on readers to follow his cues and, thus, learn to see ironically. Yet, his explanations of his readers' miscommunications come off as patent excuses and claims of innocence, as grandiose hyperbole: "The idea that anybody could ever take my massacre for a genuine occurrence never once suggested itself

to me, hedged about as it was by all those tell-tale absurdities and impossibilities…." Rather than extending a contrite confession, Twain pushes responsibility onto the reader, echoing Twain's original 1863 essay in which he never admits to the joke. Thus, he finds himself in a humiliating position when the satire fails to be apparent to readers. Although Twain sidesteps his literary responsibilities as an author of flawed satire, this episode, nevertheless, points to the precariousness of the author's and reader's interpretive role to find meaning through poorly aimed satire.

"A Bloody Massacre Near Carson" is evidence of Twain's early, though flawed, attempts to write convincing satires. As aforementioned, Twain, in his 1870 *Galaxy* "Memoranda," recollects that morning breakfast with fellow reporter and humorist Dan DeQuille and encapsulates the main struggle for this satirist-reader relationship: "He [the reader] *never got down* to where the satire part of it began. No body [*sic*] ever did. They found the thrilling particulars sufficient. To drop in with a poor little moral at the fag-end of such a gorgeous massacre, was to follow the expiring sun with a candle and hope to attract the world's attention to it." When it misses the mark, satire is an anachronistic candle and not the brilliant sunset. And yet the sensationalism Twain's squib caused, which required a retraction in the newspaper's next issue, and the disclaimer in which a San Francisco newspaper prefaced its reprinting by doubting the story's veracity—together these point to the fact that not all readers of Twain were blind to the financial satire therein, nor was the ax-murderer story forgettable in the least. The artistic grotesque made the satire captivating and memorable, though perhaps for voyeuristic reasons rather than its moral aims. But satire that is reprinted is satire that has another moment to shine. Moreover, this early satire led Twain to this important literary axiom, with which he closes his essay in *The Galaxy*: "But I found out then, and never have forgotten since, that we never *read* the dull explanatory

surroundings of marvellously [*sic*] exciting things when we have no occasion to suppose that some irresponsible scribbler is trying to defraud us; we skip all that, and hasten to revel in the blood-curdling particulars and be happy." Twain realizes that readers do want to enjoy the joke, even if it is on them, and he plays to human gullibility—*caveat emptor!* His final lines proceed to warn the reader that his next month's "Memoranda" (July 1870) will contain a squib titled "How I Edited an Agricultural Paper Once" of the same ilk as "A Bloody Massacre Near Carson" and "The Petrified Man," and they have been forewarned to read it well, looking out for the "guide-boards."

Although the satire fails while the hoax succeeds, this debacle reveals Twain's intent to write satire, in this case venting his spleen on the defrauding practice of "cooking the dividends." Moreover, this incident illustrates how satirists find pleasure in the challenges of connecting with readers, for Twain provides the necessary clues for readers to follow and by providing pleasurable distractions along the way. David E. E. Sloane explains the uniqueness of Twain's early pieces and how they affected his sense of self and artistry: "Twain is doing exactly what British critics even then had identified as one of the secrets of American humor: lawlessly merging two incongruous items with a large mixture of irreverence" (51). Moreover, these earlier tales provide evidence that Twain is consciously writing satire and couching the moral and the satire modally inside the manner of telling a well-crafted yet shocking narrative.

"How to Cure a Cold"; or, Getting to Know Twain's Satiric Manner

The abovementioned works by Twain provide evidence for his development as a humorist and ironist and lay a foundation to understand the ways in which he wrote satire. "How to Cure a Cold," another of Twain's early comedic newspaper sketches, serves as a

model by which to begin understanding how his satires work. It illustrates Twain's satiric gaze, which employs subtle, nuanced didacticism couched in humor and irony to propel readers to search for additional, unanticipated meanings. Originally published in *The Golden Era*, a San Francisco weekly, and later collected in his 1880 edition of *Sketches, New and Old* as "Curing a Cold," Twain's September 20, 1863, sketch "How to Cure a Cold" provides another early example of how he prepares his readers to identify that he is speaking satirically.

True to its title, "How to Cure a Cold" offers a humorous look at the many folk remedies for common medical maladies, such as a cold. The piece becomes humorous when the speaker, in this sketch Mark Twain, combines these remedies to ironic and often catastrophic effects. As a first-person narrator, Twain starts by denying he has a desire to write as a mere humorist, and then he affirms that he will write for his readers' instruction. He, or at least this persona, claims, however fallacious he may be, that he is setting out to write a didactic, pragmatic essay—"for their instruction…profit…and tangible benefit." (It's hard at this point not to hear echoes in these words of the opening lines of Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal.") Twain's tone is compassionate, that of offering guidance and assistance to his audience, for he writes that "restoring to health one solitary sufferer…" will be rewarded "with the sacred delight a Christian feels when he has done a good, unselfish deed" (*Sketches, New and Old* 300-305). In his opening rhetorical strategy, Twain aims to establish an ethos for his persona as an ideal, altruistic Christian and, moreover, distances himself from being a mere humorist, for such a reputation could diminish his moral authority. Thus, Twain sets himself up as a particularly ironic model for emulation, whose motives are guided by a desire to aid humanity.

In the second paragraph, however, the tone shifts when the narrator's utterances hint of hyperbole: "Having led a pure and blameless life, I am justified in believing that no man who knows me will reject the suggestions I am about to make, out of fear that I am trying to deceive him." The opening clause is ironic and would have been to many of Twain's religious readers in that he claims to have risen above the oft quoted dictum, "There is none righteous, no, not one" (*Authorized King James Version*, Romans 3.10). Such a heretical statement could cue his readers to recognize that he is a pompous, untrustworthy narrator. Moreover, readers now familiar with Twain's *nom de plume* might also link this opening to other recent pieces he wrote, namely, "Petrified Man" (Oct. 4, 1862) and "Letter from Carson City" (Feb. 3, 1863), both of which employ unreliable narrators.

In "How to Cure a Cold," the main clause of the opening sentence weighs the reader down with semantic fatigue. "Justified" can function in both legal-ethical and religious contexts; thus, when combined with his sinlessness, the term hints to a plausible explanation for his actions. Yet, in this context, readers might reasonably conclude that "he doth protest too much." Furthermore, in his self-justification, he permits himself to "believe" that his suggestions will be rejected by "no man who knows me." These statements evidence an overly confident speaker, but perhaps naively or deceptively so, which further undermines the speaker's credibility. His use of the negative phrase "no one who knows me" affords the speaker a semantic loophole in that he does not disclose if anyone actually knows him or if those who know him are easily duped, for he does not speak again of their character. "Reject" also functions to avoid the speaker's need to take responsibility: namely, he does not have to admit the possibility that, while no one will reject his ideas, no one will also believe what he argues for—about how to cure a cold. When combined with these ironic interpretive shifts, the final phrase "out of fear that I am trying to deceive him" focuses the

readers on the speaker's self-awareness of potential deception due to Twain's overly emphatic tone. Twain uses these words in ways that fit within a word's denotation but that press the interpretation to imply connotations more appropriate to various contexts and are especially disjointed with those of "curing a cold." The many openings for misreading in this section invite the reader to see ironically and, by doubting, to see possible meanings beyond the speaker's literal statements.

As exhibited in "How to Cure a Cold," one of the more complicating parts of Twain's satires is the role and position of the speaker through which he presents his ideas. A study of Twain's use of the *nom de plume* is essential to understanding how satire works for Twain. What happens when an author becomes not only a narrator but also a character? What happens when readers realize that the author has intentionally created distance from them, that the author is trying to diminish his or her authority? What happens, in the case of Samuel Clemens, when the author's private life is trumped by his pen name, to the point that Clemens was often referred to as "Mark," by even his closest friends? In crafting a satiric narratorial voice, Twain further complicates the typical interpretative problems that accompany satire: he himself plays a narrative role in the text as Mark Twain, narrator, storyteller, commentator, and at times, first actor. He identifies himself as the author (Samuel Clemens) who perpetuates the narrative, but is also part of the problem, who himself does not see the crisis at hand. The allegiance of author and narrator is further complicated in Twain's novels, as in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, wherein Huck is both created by Twain as his satiric mouthpiece, and yet is completely separate from him. Thus, it is important to consider the role of the mouthpiece in the mouth of a satirist: the naïve narrator, the framed story, the story within a story.

The purpose of a narrator is to guide the reader through the text, to provide the reader with information about character, place, history, setting, context, tone, mood, voice, etc. The narrator is the single most important element that establishes fiction as different from drama, taking into account the general fact that drama was written to be performed. But the narrator frames each and every thing that the reader receives in the text. Moreover, Twain assumes the role of authority as the narrator and main character in his early texts (*Innocents Abroad, Roughing It, Sketches: New and Old, The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, Life on the Mississippi*, to list a few of many), and yet he often exposes a caricature of himself to self-lampoon. In this manner, he shapes the audience's experiences both from inside and outside the text, but does so with a coyness that disarms and destabilizes the reader's interpretive certainty.

In the context of "How to Cure a Cold," the speaker's adamant yet magnanimous tone also jars the reader who might at this point anticipate the forthcoming topic to be more serious than the commonplace and idiosyncratic cure of the most everyday of illnesses. These ironic shifts wink to the reader that a satiric discourse may be present in these paragraphs, yet the irony is subtle enough that readers, uninterested in considering how their "speaker" could be less than religious, can at least find the ironic humor in the speaker's contribution to the vast catalog of quasi-remedies to cure a cold. And preceded by these sentiments, the opening two paragraphs of this essay are framed by the final sentence calling readers to do as the speaker says: "Let the public do itself the honor to read my experience in doctoring a cold, as herein set forth, and then follow in my footsteps" (*Sketches, New and Old* 300-305). While these words *could* sally a venture into a rhinovirus-free lifestyle, the reader instead may be left with many questions and doubts as to whom this speaker is and whether or not he is trustworthy, not to mention why his medicinal advice merits our

adherence. These concerns aside, the speaker's optimism and self-confidence may be enough to woo readers to continue reading, regardless of their skepticisms, which Twain learned when writing of the bloody massacre.

While the first two paragraphs of "How to Cure a Cold" establish the ethos of Mark Twain's persona, the third abruptly transitions into the inciting action of the plot. Rhetorically, the tragic events Mark Twain's persona faced establish pathos in the reader for his having lost the essentials of the American life:

> When the White House [a hotel] burned in Virginia City, I lost my home, my happiness, my constitution, and my trunk. The loss of the two first named articles was a matter of no great consequence, since a home without a mother, or a sister, or a distant young female relative in it, to remind you, by putting your soiled linen out of sight and taking your boots down off the mantelpiece, that there are those who think about you and care for you, is easily obtained. And I cared nothing for the loss of my happiness, because, not being a poet, it could not be possible that melancholy would abide with me long. But to lose a good constitution and a better trunk were serious misfortunes. (301)

And yet he affirms the American ideals of a felicitous domestic life (seen in the women's care of their men in their home) and a resilient happiness (which will return to Twain since he is not a romantic poet whose melancholic spirit is unebbing). These themes demarcate an American resiliency and establish in the speaker qualities that could raise his merits and ethos for his readers. This tactic is typical of Twain when establishing a connection between his persona and his readers: he poses as an archetypal American who shares common concerns with his readers.

But Twain's ideal portrayal of Americanness is undercut when the reasons for his illness are juxtaposed with his claim to be "pure and blameless" in the preceding paragraphs and, thereby, worthy of emulation. In explaining how "On the day of the fire my constitution succumbed to a severe cold, caused by undue exertion in getting ready to do something," Mark Twain sets himself up as a heroic figure who has suffered much. However, through the semantic ambiguity of the phrase "to do something," he destabilizes his authority. A man set upon doing something of merit would certainly remember it; to leave it unmentioned is to leave too much uncertainty for the reader. The following sentence continues to establish the tension between a narrator who has suffered in attempting to put out a fire, but is at the same time a buffoon in that he "suffered to no purpose…because the plan I was figuring at for the extinguishing of the fire was so elaborate that I never got it completed until the middle of the following week." Certainly, Twain is well-intentioned, a constant that will remain in his persona throughout his oeuvre; this trait establishes a sympathy in some readers, but at the same time, the pity will be blended with disrespect or even apathy with the reader's realization that the narrator brought many of these calamities upon himself.

In light of the narrator's ironic and disproportionate amount of time taken when responding to an emergency, Twain might have more aptly titled this tale "How Not to Put Out a Fire," rather than "How to Cure a Cold." For when placed alongside the overarching socio-religious context of the opening paragraphs, the speaker's intelligence must be called into question, regardless how good his intentions may seem. This use of the naïve narrator will become a leitmotif in Twain's canon to reveal his ideas on the nature of the American individual. Shrewdly, Twain does endear himself to his readers: he is like them (in his passion and values, as well as vices); moreover, he is analogous to easily recognizable cultural

archetypes (in his progressive drive to solve major medical and social ills—i.e. the common cold). As his passion overtakes his intellect and he personifies a comical vision, the humor of which diminishes Twain's emulative qualities, his persona portrays an image of authentic Americanness. For Mark Twain, at least in "How to Cure a Cold," contains in similitude the characteristics of individualism, authenticity, naivety, vision, determination, and helpfulness, to name a few traits. This Janus quality in Twain's character is ubiquitous throughout his oeuvre, which also typifies his satiric form. Thus, to the unsuspecting reader, the persona of Mark Twain is humorous and endearing, but to the reader who recognizes the irony in the narrator's discourse, he or she may raise questions such as *How is Twain like me?* or *If we are alike, do I want to be compared to such a man in every way?* or, more specifically of this story, "How to Cure a Cold," *Should a man affirming these beliefs behave in such an illogical, foolish manner?*

Facing what seems to be a clever anecdote, the reader, then, is placed in the interpretive role with increasing doubt yet with little help from the narrator as to what the reader should think or do. In this way, Mark Twain dodges hermeneutical responsibility; he plays "dumb" as he hides behind his straight-faced deadpan—deadpan so successful that the reader is uncertain as to the narrator's actual knowledge of the irony in his actions and statements. If the successful satiric narrator provides the reader a wink and a nod to signal the shifting ironic tone and possible existence of satire, then Twain's manner is subtler—a half wink and a bobbing head that can be easily ignored or written off as colloquial humor if the reader prefers not to read the work satirically. This narratorial phenomenon illustrates an essential problem for writers and readers of satire: W*hat if the reader does not recognize the satire intent in the text?* (Arguably, the inverse would be problematic as well—*What if the reader assumes satire is present when it is not intended*—but such readings would be more humorous or ironic in their own right rather than attempting to incite outrage in readers.) Thus, if we read

"How to Cure a Cold" as a model of Twain's early satiric technique, Twain's claims infer his trustworthiness; however, his identity as Christian, altruistic, morally good, an ideal American, etc., is undermined by the irony latent in his words and self-described deeds. Moreover, the instructions he delivers in the remainder of the story, while certainly humorous, belie a useful conclusion (which in the beginning Twain asserts he will provide) and, furthermore, when combined with misdirection and irony, frustrate the reader's own hermeneutic efforts to apply Mark Twain's ways of curing a cold to his or her individual life.

As Clemens develops "How to Cure a Cold" upon these initial paragraphs (explicated above), Mark Twain as both speaker and authorial persona takes on the representation of an infirmed man so desperate to find relief that he is quick to take up every illogical or whimsical suggestion offered by those he encounters as his cold runs its course. As is typical of journalism from this time period, Clemens via Mark Twain assumes an autobiographical attitude by establishing a plausible real-world persona (Mark Twain), a setting with familiar places (The White House Hotel, Virginia City, Lake Bigler, San Francisco), and commonplace occurrences (California earthquakes, hot springs, homebrewed remedies, baptisms, and imbibing a daily half-gallon of whiskey—the latter of these Twain claims as the actual cure of his cold).

At the time Clemens wrote "How to Cure a Cold," he was in his late twenties, which establishes an approximate age for the authorial persona and portrays him as a man lacking in personal experience to the degree that he is willing to accept any and all advice he receives. The fourth paragraph of "How to Cure a Cold" illustrates this problem all too well, as does the penultimate paragraph, where he is twice told about the half-gallon-of-whiskey cure that he attributes as the remedy that finally "cures" him. As Clemens transitions into the tale's complication, he presents his narrator as lacking the wisdom to logically separate the

two solutions presented to him by his friends: "go and bathe my feet in hot water and go to bed" and then "to get up and take a cold shower-bath" (*Sketches, New and Old* 300-305). Self-effacing, Twain includes himself with other "average" American men by displaying the idea that if one solution might work, two or three, or as many as you can find, might be better (though some readers might see his behavior as "below average"). Regarding the half-gallon-of-whiskey cure, Twain is quick to listen to both the woman at the hotel and his friend who each tell him "to take a quart of whisky every twenty-four hours" (*Sketches, New and Old* 300-305). Twain's solution is to listen to them *both* and take "half a gallon"—enough liquor to become drunk several times over, encouraging a hyperbolic, ironic interpretation of not only this passage, but also, in its context, the entire story. Each of these instances, together with the many that follow, expresses a grotesque irony that diminishes the desirability of these American character traits.

In addition to (or perhaps instead of) seeing Twain's persona as young and naïve, readers might also conclude that Twain is either so sick that cognition has waned or is an impulsive fanatic, confirmed by his obsessive claim that "I seldom do things by halves," with such a deeply obsessive or even impulsive temperament that he is quick to try every suggestion offered him, perhaps both. Twain's nice-guy, agreeable persona also redirects some culpability from him and places it on the advice given to him as well as on the circumstances. Nor is the need to affix blame necessarily great because the "catastrophe is minor" and he is "healed" by the passing of time (by which he recovers from the treatment). Moreover, Twain's absence of personal experiences in curing the cold might duly increase the reader's sympathy toward the suffering narrator.

The development of the reader's sympathy is essential to understanding the strength of Twain's satires, even as his tone darkens in his later works. Granted, readers may not

always see Twain as "like us," but, when shaped by pity, they will find that Twain provides the necessary words they need to identify the ironies, in this case, found in Twain's claim to be worthy of emulation while he does and says things in a manner that clearly will perpetuate the opposite of the goal, and in this story, causing him more pain and injury. The ironic positionality of Twain as persona is an essential characteristic of Twain's satire. Twain as a persona is of "average" intelligence (and "below average" at times); he is good-hearted and honest; yet he does not let on that he sees the irony in his words and deed, nor does he learn from his mistakes. In keeping with his style of deadpan delivery for which Twain was famous in his "stand-up" lectures, the narrator does not overtly state a moral but leaves it to be inferred by the audience and reader and thus establishes additional layers of interpretive ambiguity and humor that promote audience participation.

Further complicating Twain's satiric tone, the narrator does not altogether refrain from giving sound advice. Returning to "How to Cure a Cold," though on the surface merely humorous, it does comment on the state of medicine in the mid-nineteenth century, and more specifically, the folk "home"-remedies employed to "aid" the infirmed. In Twain's final instructions to the reader, he "offer[s] for the consideration of consumptive patients the variegated course of treatment [he has] lately gone through," which does little to build confidence in his narrative and advice, for his final sentence, however comical in tone, is dark and quite terminal: "Let them try it; if it don't cure it can't more than kill them" (*Sketches, New and Old* 300-305). Several of his "treatments" clearly will do no harm, or at least not much: bathing in hot and then cold water, eating so much at a restaurant that he scares the owner out of town, drinking gin mixed with molasses and onions, and sitting in steam-baths. None of these "remedies" cure his cold, and it is unlikely the reader would have expected them to aid Twain much, if at all. (Many nineteenth-century cold remedies of this

time involved complicated concoctions and applications that would have made Twain's prescription seem tame.) The remainder of Twain's list of remedies, however, is at the least uncomfortable and at worst, potentially fatal, ironically playing with the notion that it wasn't the cold but the treatments that would ruin you. Twain's experimentation with drinking "a quart of salt-water, taken warm" caused him to "[throw] up his immortal soul," a traumatic effect for a "pure and blameless," self-professed Christian, as the narrator humorously claims. Perhaps it is for this reason that Twain dissuades his readers, specifically "those who are troubled with the distemper I am writing about," from taking such a "severe" "remedy." He himself concludes, "If I had another cold in the head, and there were no course left me but to take either an earthquake or a quart of warm saltwater, I would take my chances on the earthquake" (*Sketches, New and Old* 300-305). In this moment, Twain's criticism masks his feelings toward the advice of his would-be friends, in that, "After the storm which had been raging in my stomach had subsided, and no more good Samaritans happening along…" (302). While "The Parable of the Good Samaritan" (see Luke 10.25-37) has traditionally been interpreted to reveal the Good Samaritan as a figure for emulation by first-century Christians, Twain's comment, when juxtaposed with his desire to face an earthquake rather than more saltwater aids, destabilizes the goodness and preferred position of this biblical hero. Here, Twain subtly opens the door for satire on the eagerness of Christians to help others, following the moral mandate, in that, as they are ill-equipped to offer genuine aid, they inevitably cause more harm than good. Yet by not outwardly condemning Good-Samaritan figures, Twain affords the readers contemplative (and humorous) space to reflect inwardly on how they are acting by comparison and, in looking beyond themselves, to explore the position of such "helpfully unhelpful" persons in their communities. Thus,

Twain asks readers to consider what nurtures and forms such persons and what might be done to remedy this situation.

Also under the category of the narrator's ironically "helpful" advice, he lists the other damaging remedies readers may wish to avoid: these include, first, the sheet-bath administered on a frosty night that promotes hypothermia and, second, the "decoction composed of molasses, aquafortis, turpentine, and other drugs" administered by a "lady who had just arrived [in Nevada] from over the plains" and "appeared to be a hundred and fifty years old" (302). Possessing certain destructive qualities, *aqua fortis* is today more contemporarily known as nitric acid, a chemical compound used in Twain's Nevada for dissolving heavy metals such as silver. While such treatments bring a gothic and grotesque tone to "How to Cure a Cold," the greater emphasis is on a heightened ironic situation. Although Twain unrelentingly celebrates his robust, indefatigable constitution, and given the overt opening attestations of his religiosity, the narrator confesses how this woman's medicine "robbed [him] of all moral principle" and how "[u]nder its malign influence [his] brain conceived miracles of meanness, but my hands were too feeble to execute them" (302-03).

When contextualized thusly, the matter and manner of Twain's satire is built upon twinned tensions within this woman's cold remedies: proffering the patient the ability to conceive of ever-increasing moral failings, while at the same time depleting him or her of the physical capacity to enact such plans. This tension is made manifold in Twain's confession that "until I took that medicine I had never reveled in such supernatural depravity, and felt proud of it" (303): His claim to a "pure and blameless life, mentioned in the story's opening, is called into question by twice mentioning the horrors he would like to commit and in which he found pride to consider. His character is doubly defended in this scenario, his

moral failings conveniently attributed to the decoction remedy, and his awareness of his joy in these guilty pleasures gives him a preventative opportunity to reaffirm his "pure and blameless" aims. The reader once again experiences the doubt of Twain's assertions on his high moral virtue when Twain reveals problematically that he enjoys thinking about such depravity. Twain implies here that readers should welcome such self-knowledge of one's own propensity for wrongdoing, which Twain exemplifies by describing how he would have "tried to rob a grave" had he the strength, yet his illness in fact keeps him "blameless."

Twain would return to this motif in his 1899 novella "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg" in which a mysterious stranger tests the virtue of the prominent citizens, who fail to remain virtuous and, in their public disgrace, prompt the town to rethink their motto that alludes to the Lord's Prayer, "Lead us not into temptation" and revising it to fit their new-found knowledge of their corruptibility: "Lead us into temptation." In both stories, Twain successfully satirizes the claims religious individuals and communities make for their moral superiority by highlighting the veracity of a corruptible human nature. Such claims, made by Twain himself as narrator in both "Hadleyburg" and "How to Cure a Cold," are to be questioned and doubted, however laughable the thought may be of a home-brewed cold remedy driving a "respectable" Christian man (and newspaper reporter) to "rob the graveyard" under its influence.

Seminal to his satiric style is Twain's ability to guide readers through the narrative in a manner that prompts willing readers to reflect upon these narratives from an ironic point of view and, thus, as possible conveyances of satire. His presentation of these episodes behind the pretense of an unknowing, deadpan narrator destabilizes interpretation and keeps the reader from perceiving the tale "How to Cure a Cold" as mere polemic; instead, Twain's satiric manner offers an aesthetic to engage both the reader's critical eye as well as the

imagination. Twain's satiric manner invites readers to see the weakness in our societies, as well as, by mimesis, in each reader's own character. In seeing these cracks, the reader finds an opportunity to be stirred with indignation toward action, which many writers, including Jonathan Swift, point to as the aim of satire—sentiments he penned for his own epitaph: "Here lies the body of Jonathan Swift…where fierce indignation can no longer rend the heart. Go forth, traveller, and imitate, if you can, this dedicated champion of liberty." Such words are equally fitting for Mark Twain.

CHAPTER THREE

MODAL SATIRE AND THE TWAINIAN TALE:

METAPHOR AND WORDPLAY

IN "BUCK FANSHAW'S FUNERAL" AND "A CAT-TALE"

If metaphor is the language of art and metonymy the language of logic, then the former shatters the standard images and definitions of the literal world by presenting new, imaginative visions and phrases that elicit a variety of responses in readers. Mark Twain builds much of his satire and humor on these metaphoric techniques, assaulting conventional language to establish new ways of viewing human experience. As previously established, the irony present in many of his satiric pieces is often difficult to interpret because it functions modally and is embedded within word play and verbal irony. "Buck Fanshaw's Funeral" (1872) and "A Cat-Tale" (1880) are two of many examples amongst Twain's fiction that explore how Twain employs verbal irony with figurative tropes to open up new interpretive possibilities.

Early in his literary career, Twain establishes his admirable ability to mimic and mold the speech patterns of an American locale, as seen in stories such as "Jim Smiley and His Jumping Frog" (1865) or "Cannibalism in the Cars" (1868). In these stories, published decades before publishing the brash "Explanatory" remarks on dialects that prefaces *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, discussed later, Twain confirms his genius as a chronicler of both the mining camp at Boomerang, the setting of "The Jumping Frog," and Congress, whose members populate the railcars and who become food for cannibals or the cannibals themselves. In "Buck Fanshaw's Funeral" and "A Cat-Tale," Twain continues to explore the

artistry of dialect by showing the artistic applications of slang to create personal identity and metaphors for the American experience. By including in his sketches many examples that focus on slang, Twain potentially jeopardizes the effectiveness of the text's humor and satire, if, like the minister in "Fanshaw" or "Papa" Mark Twain himself in "A Cat-Tale," the reader misses the figurative connotations. This danger is a humorist's dread, for it has the potential to leave readers frustrated and confused. But the risk inherent in irony's metaphoric violence is necessary for satire and humor to be effective. And, true to the double entendre of Mark Twain's penname, signifying "two fathoms" and used primarily as a navigational term on the Mississippi River for that tenuous place between safety and danger, the satirist must balance each quip with ample agitation to provoke new meanings while retaining sufficient lucidity to ensure that the snapper sticks. If this assault on fixed linguistic meaning, however, produces an effective metaphor, the result is art.

As defined by Ferdinand de Saussure, "language is a system of signs that expresses ideas" and "is a product that is passively assimilated by the individual" (76-77). Language is a culturally defined "system of signs in which the only essential thing is the union of meaning and sound images" (76). In keeping with Saussure's definition of language as "homogenous" and "concrete," a speaker born into a cultural language system at first relies on it to understand and order his or her experiences. The individual's speech is "heterogeneous" insomuch as it conforms to or rebels against the laws of language. While these linguistic rules function to promote basic societal function, over time they too are encumbered by rote, literal denotations of words, in which a given situation ensures a prescribed verbal response or at best, a limited number of choices. According to the self-preserving laws of a language system, harmonious communication in a society will seek to diminish creative efforts to affix a new signifier to an established signified. The artists and poets in a culture, then, must reject

clichéd, insipid signifiers and create fresh, imaginative meanings. ("Meanings" here is important because it denotes the unfathomable possibilities in a single reassigned signifier.) As creative modifications to existing language become accepted and meanings adopted by the prescribed laws of language, new artists must continue the unending work of wordsmiths, unceasingly striving, as Ezra Pound penned, to "make it new."

Metaphoric and Linguistic Violence in "Buck Fanshaw's Funeral"

In chapter 47 of his travelogue *Roughing It*, a chapter often found anthologized under the title "Buck Fanshaw's Funeral," Twain unleashes characteristic satirical attacks on religion, politics, culture—specifically Western and Yankee idiosyncrasies—and everyday American humor. The plot of this tale focuses on a presumably fictitious episode in which the Nevadan Scotty Briggs must find a minister to conduct a funeral for his recently deceased friend Buck Fanshaw; however, the minister he approaches is from the Northeast and unfamiliar with the linguistic uses in the West, which complicates their attempts to communicate. Here, as is often the case in Twainian satire, the linguistic and semantic wordplay undergirds the tale's satiric thrust. For his words ironically and sarcastically take on new, unintended, and sometimes amusing incomprehensible meanings, explored in "Buck Fanshaw's Funeral" throughout the hapless conversation between Scotty Briggs and the minister, which preeminently pits the metaphoric violence of fast-and-loose Virginia City, Nevada, slang against the banal literalism of the clergyman's textbook, East-coast English.

In the tale, mining-camp Washoe slang shows Twain's "violent" overthrow of standardized language to make way for new metaphoric meanings. As a humorist, he continually approached this problem by creating new ways of seeing humanity that register with his readers. To achieve this "matter of verbal exactness," Twain employs the Virginia

City rough Scotty Briggs to verbally assail the unnamed, out-of-touch minister—the Western slang slinger versus the polished Eastern parson. Although the events in Twain's travelogue take place in the early 1860s, Twain, at the time of writing *Roughing It* in the early 1870s, was settling into his new, "respectable" Yankee community in Hartford, Connecticut. At this point, Twain's audience is national not regional; his readers are more likely to identify with the minister, whose ineffective learning Twain is quick to lampoon. But Twain's narrative does not settle merely for ridicule. Seen in this context, "Buck Fanshaw's Funeral" confirms that, early in his career, Twain enacts metaphoric violence against language to instigate the evolution of new and humorous meanings in American English—Northeastern American English in particular. But in expanding semantic meanings, Twain is careful not to alienate the readers, but with irony and ambiguity, to welcome them to search for and play with possible meanings, thus becoming co-creators with Twain. This linguistic genesis is possible if, according to Louise M. Rosenblatt, readers deduce the possible meanings through a "transactional experience" that spurs them to bridge the imaginative gap and participate in creating meaning (qtd. in Bressler 66-67). Yet, as a close reading of "Buck Fanshaw's Funeral" reveals, when the minister fails to deduce what Scotty's slang signifies, their diction stultifies and grows vulgar. However, it also promotes pleasure as the reader deduces meanings that the characters themselves cannot. The tale also becomes satirical in its mode when the story delineates an anachronistic position for an East-coast seminarian in fulfilling his clerical calling in the Western territories. Yet the satire does not overtly condemn any person in the story (and ironically, Scotty finds a place as a Sunday-school teacher in the minister's church at the story's end). This amusing tale thus points to places for readers to discover the ways in which the minister's preparation is sorely inadequate to fulfill his religious responsibilities.

Twain accomplishes these aims through the careful manner of composition. Whereas Twain complains that readers of his early satires too frequently miss the nub (aforementioned in the section on his "Memoranda" in the Buffalo *Galaxy*), by the time of writing *Roughing It* in 1872, Twain had learned to clearly reveal the story's main point, which he inserts early in the tale's exposition within a "parenthetical" remark—not, in fact, set off by parentheses:

> Now—let us remark in parenthesis—as all the peoples of the earth had representative adventurers in the Silverland, and as each adventurer had brought the slang of his nation or his locality with him, the combination made the slang of Nevada the richest and the most infinitely varied and copious that had ever existed anywhere in the world, perhaps, except in the mines of California in the "early days." Slang was the language of Nevada. It was hard to preach a sermon without it, and be understood. Such phrases as "You bet!" "Oh, no, I reckon not!" "No Irish need apply," and a hundred others, became so common as to fall from the lips of a speaker unconsciously—and very often when they did not touch the subject under discussion and consequently failed to mean anything. (60)

In his note, Twain places slang into three distinct categories. First, proper interpretation of slang is essential for communication, even among people from different cultural backgrounds, especially "to preach a sermon." Second, the people of Nevada, for the most part, are creative, natural artists, and quick to rebel against the rules of Standard English usage. Their slang is "unconscious," "copious," and "common." Finally, the locals did not always expect all metaphors to succeed: "when they did not touch the subject under discussion and consequently failed to mean anything" (60). Nonsense was permitted and

easily overlooked. Phonemes and morphemes, grammar and syntax that do not align with recognizable semantic patterns are ignored, allowing for "creative" meanings to be constructed out of what remains. Like the lyrics of the medieval troubadours, slang provides an individual with the means to create autonomy through unique metaphor and the authority over the conception of the signified.

(As an aside, the paragraph quoted above also highlights Twain's insider religious status and foreshadows the discussion in chapters five and six. Twain can clearly see what the minister cannot successfully communicate, and, as confirmed in the comedic outcome of the tale, Twain used this insight didactically to point to a path by which the minister could find success in establishing a congregation. And he presents the manner satirically as an imaginative laboratory to collaborate with readers toward finding a positive outcome while commenting on how those who are unaware of the exigencies of successful communication are on a path toward mission failure.)

Throughout their repartee, Scotty Briggs's dialogue with the minister illustrates the problem of creating fresh linguistic meanings that can be commonly shared. Each speaks in a style representative of his life experience and their dialogue symbolizes the difficulty of communicating between the metaphoric and literal minds, especially when the diction of the literal-minded minister is hampered by his own stale religious jargon and he is unaware of his inability to share ideas. To emphasize this point, Twain juxtaposes Scotty's eccentric attire – "a fire helmet, flaming red flannel shirt, patent leather belt with spanner and revolver attached, coat hung over arm, and pants stuffed into boot tops" – to the complexion of "the pale theological student" (60). Newly arrived in the territory, the minister is again a "student" having yet to discover the linguistic freedom that life in the West offers. He symbolizes the logical, boring uses of dictionary denotations and the jargon of religious traditions that

prohibit vulgarity and stifle artistic creation. On the other hand, Twain characterizes Scotty by stark contrast:

> Indeed, it was commonly said that whenever one of Scotty's fights was investigated, it always turned out that it had originally been no affair of his, but that out of native good-heartedness he had dropped in of his own accord to help the man who was getting the worst of it. He and Buck Fanshaw were bosom friends, for years, and had often taken adventurous "pot-luck" together. On one occasion, they had thrown off their coats and taken the weaker side in a fight among strangers, and after gaining a hard-earned victory, turned and found that the men they were helping had deserted early, and not only that, but had stolen their coats and made off with them! (60)

Scotty, "a stalwart rough," embodies a willingness to assist others, has "a warm heart and a strong love for friends," and reveals the enjoyment that comes from communicating creatively with others (60). Through Scotty's idiosyncrasies and the minister's stuffy formality, Twain questions the usefulness of education and communication, and he emphasizes the otherworldliness of the Washoe and its inhabitants.

Following the inquest for Buck, "a meeting of the short-haired brotherhood" (a mid-nineteenth-century colloquialism for the local firefighters' company) appointed Scotty as "a committee of one"—based on both his former friendship with Buck and his distinct communication skills—to the simple task of hiring a local minister to officiate the funeral (Shoemaker 41-44). The plot centers around this simple task between Scotty and the minister, to be accomplished in their dialogue through four necessary steps: (1) Are you a preacher? (2) My friend Buck is dead. (3) Buck was religious. (4) Can you preach a sermon for the funeral? Clearly, their exchange could comprise much less text than it does in the

tale, but Twain's telling of it illustrates the hilarity of stunted communication: Scotty's speech is composed of the slang of his milieu, and the minister's jargon inherited from an east-coast religious seminary. Here, the literal and the metaphoric clash, obfuscating meaning.

Scotty's inquiry is inaugurated by an immediate assault on language: "Are you the duck that runs the gospel-mill next door?" (61). This mixed metaphor jars the reader with images of a duck (or a "quack") as the proprietor of a religious workshop. The minister knows his own identity and that the church stands "next door," but he fails to incorporate his knowledge into Scotty's metaphor. Scotty's second attempt – "the head clerk of the doxology-works next door" – registers some recognition in the minister as it parodies religion as producing worshipping widgets instead of a community of believers. Yet the minister fails to return a satisfactory quip and, instead, resurrects hackneyed metaphors that reek of religious cant: "I am the shepherd in charge of the flock whose fold is next door…. The spiritual adviser of the little company of believers whose sanctuary adjoins these premises" (61). Scotty "scratches his head," befuddled by these trite euphemisms. By juxtaposing these two idioms, Twain points out the ironic, humorous failure of both attempts at communication. Thus, Scotty admits defeat to the minister assuming his metaphors are simply beyond understanding: "You ruther hold over me, pard. I reckon I can't call that hand. Ante and pass the buck" (61). In his acquiescence, Scotty simply returns the conversation to the death of Buck and the upcoming funeral stating not-so-plainly, "You see, one of the boys has passed in his checks and we want to give him a good send-off, and so the thing I'm on now is to roust out somebody to jerk a little chin-music for us and waltz him through handsome" (61). While Scotty's meaning is lost, the minister recognizes the literary device and asks for a "simplified" return to the literal:

> My friend, I seem to grow more and more bewildered. Your observations are wholly incomprehensible to me. Cannot you simplify them in some way? At first I thought perhaps I understood you, but I grope now. Would it not expedite matters if you restricted yourself to categorical statements of fact unencumbered with obstructing accumulations of metaphor and allegory?

But the minister's erudite, and "very correct," elocution further separates the minister from this future parishioner. Again, sensing defeat, Scotty concedes, "I'll have to pass, I judge…. You've raised me out, pard" (62). His misunderstanding is immediately echoed by the clergyman's idiom, "I still fail to *catch your meaning*" (italics added), which is stale and falls flat (62). Since Scotty can "neither trump nor follow suit," their metaphoric dual halts: "The clergyman sank back in his chair perplexed. Scotty leaned his head on his hand and gave himself up to thought" (62). Through the dialogue thus far, neither the minister's vocation nor the forthcoming funeral has been established for Scotty.

Missing the minister's plea for literalism, Scotty begins again and designs a new metaphor, incorporating the language of a mining-town card player: "I've got it now, so's you can savvy…. What we want is a gospel-sharp. See?" (62). Yet Twain keeps up this charade, for Scotty's new applications of everyday language again befuddles the seminarian, who replies, "What?" Only as Scotty serendipitously slips into literal language is the clergyman's identity finally deduced; his "Gospel-sharp. Parson." solicits the response "Oh! Why did you not say so before? I am a clergyman – a parson" (62). And with Scotty's exclamation "Now you talk! You see my blind and straddle it like a man. Put it there," the first order of business is accomplished and then sealed with "a shake indicative of a fraternal sympathy and fervent gratification" (62).

Having found the right man, Scotty commences again to explain Buck's death and the upcoming funeral, but with little success. Thrice, he waxes metaphorical, each time simplifying the imagery toward the cliché: "one of the boys has gone up the flume," "throwed up the sponge," and "kicked the bucket" (62). Confusion erupts until the parson, finally *catching the meaning*, responds with religious jargon and the Old English anachronism, "bourne" (meaning "boundary"): "Ah—has departed to that mysterious country from whose bourne no traveler returns." Scotty cannot understand, and the minister's creative dissonance drives Scotty back to the literal: "Return! I reckon not. Why pard, he's *dead*!" (62). Always preferring the metaphoric, Scotty is unconvinced of the literal meaning of the minister's self-assertive, "Yes, I understand." To clear up any possible confusion, Scotty explains, "Oh, you do? Well I thought maybe you might be getting tangled some more. Yes, you see he's dead again—" perhaps a play on the Christian idiom "born again." His meaning cannot be determined since the minister cuts him off to begin a series of questions and answers—with the minister seeking literal clarification, with Scotty constructing a grand (and entertaining) narrative. In his final interruption, the preacher tenuously stumbles upon the purpose of Scotty's visit: "Preach the funeral discourse? Assist at the obsequies?" (63). His guess striking home, Scotty exclaims, "Obs'quies is good. Yes. That's it – that's our little game" (63). Although Scotty's commission is fulfilled, the *game* does not end because Twain relentlessly continues the literary tête-à-tête into extra innings.

Typical of Twain (see "Jim Smiley and His Jumping Frog" as another prime example), the target of the satirist's joke is indeterminate, for each in turn—Scotty, the minister, and the reader—becomes frustrated by the ironic and figurative uses of language. First, Twain captures the reader's awe, as the imaginative creation of this conversation reveals the genius in Twain's ear and pen for recording dialogue and local-color speech

patterns. An easy escape for the reader would be to assume that Twain is a humorist, showing off and entertaining his audience, an interpretation that diminishes none of the aesthetic pleasure. The inquisitive reader, however, might speculate as to how the verbal irony may be nodding toward a satiric reading: with his east-coast, top-notch education, the minister is ill-prepared for fulfilling his religious mission in the mining communities of the American West. (Another, though unlikely, alternative satiric reading is that the minister, either intentionally rude or out of politeness, understands Scotty but does not let on that he does.) When seen in light of the high diction and erudition of the minister's answers, his actions are heartless and sinister; he becomes a trickster enjoying the scene as it unfolds. Moreover, if the minister did understand his interlocutor, then he is either himself pathetic, unable to communicate, or cruel by adding to the confusion. It is also unlikely that Twain would unleash a satire on Scotty, with little means or motive for "improving" himself; moreover, nothing in Scotty's discourse is out of context. If merely a lampoon, the tale becomes malicious, a cheap joke. While Scotty certainly utters humorous lines and is in a humorous situation, it is the minister with all of his education, travel, and experiences who should be able to bridge this communication void. Yes, the minister is an outsider, a fit figure for lampoon, yet Twain avoids writing caricature. And he goes further to play off of readers' sensibilities, perhaps even to the point of satirizing them. He engages readers' sensibilities by motivating them to respond with pity or contempt to the actions of each character, overcome by situational irony. An alternative possibility, both responses hold validity. Altogether, Twain accomplishes these interpretive possibilities by the ironic shaping of plot, characters, and language into a comedic resolution of their lighthearted misunderstanding.

The power of slang to induce new meanings and interpretative possibilities may frustrate those like the minister, whose character exudes precision from the years of training in theological and biblical interpretations. Yet his and Scotty's descriptions in this final exchange on Buck's religion reinforce the doubleness of metaphor. Does being "one of the whitest men that was ever in the mines" with his exclamatory usage of "No Irish need apply!" make Buck a moral man, a dead man, or a racist (64)? Oft repeated in the story, this expression comes to serve as a kind of refrain, used by Buck before his death and now used by Scotty, thus uniting both characters. As explained by the narrator (i.e. Mark Twain), this expression takes on additional significance when emphasized in the final lines of the story. Here, the narrator underscores the idiosyncrasy of slang, "as Scotty had once said, it ['No Irish need apply'] was his [Buck Fanshaw's] word," and for this reason, Scotty saw fit to use it as the final words at the eulogy (66).

In a broader context, the racism and classism explicit in the slogan "No Irish need apply" further colors Buck's and Scotty's characterizations. The cultural history of the phrase locates its origins in America amongst nineteenth-century business owners who aimed to simultaneously communicate both employment requirements and their xenophobic and anti-Catholic attitudes regarding Irish immigrants (Jensen 405-29). While the phrase seems rather ill-fitting for a funeral, Buck's fondness for the phrase may have been due to the popularity of an 1860s Irish folk song of the same name, in which the phrase "No Irish need apply" ("NINA") in fact functions as a refrain (Jensen 407-09). In his essay "'No Irish Need Apply': The Myth of Victimization," Richard J. Jensen argues that cultural memory among Irish Americans attests to the widespread use of this slogan in "Help Wanted" signs posted between the mid-nineteenth century through to the mid-twentieth century, yet he found no evidence of such signs being used outside of England beginning in the 1790s (Jensen 406).

While Jensen concedes that the isolated instances of this anti-Irish prejudice existed in America, the popularity of the notion and the lionizing of the phrase in folk songs served to create solidarity and ethnic identity in the new cultural landscape of America. In fact, far from being persecuted, Jensen cites several instances where Northeastern Protestant captains of industry invested in factories that benefitted from (and were a benefit to) the abundance of Irish immigrant labor; moreover, Irish immigrants and their descendants came to dominate several blue-collar and pink-collar industries such as longshoreman and maid.

By contrast, in John F. Poole's popular song, penned in 1862 or 1863, a first-person Irish immigrant retaliates with physical violence against a Chicago businessman for including "No Irish need apply" in a job advertisement (qtd. in Jensen 408-09). In the first three stanzas, having successfully defended his dignity and ensured the right for the Irish to work, the Irish immigrant proceeds in the final three stanzas to sermonize on America's founding principles of equality, on the nature of the Irish to be generous, and, as the song was written in the context of The Civil War, on the fighting spirit of the Irish and how only the "Rebels" would be foolish enough to think "No Irish need apply" (qtd. in Jensen 408-09). The refrain exists to reify Irish identity and to preemptively challenge any discrimination in the workforce.

In "Buck Fanshaw's Funeral," the refrain "No Irish need apply," rather than creating unity and challenging prejudice, instead amplifies the ambiguity of Buck's and Scotty's attitudes and hints at their passionate natures: Are they Irish and proud of their heritage? Unlikely, as Buck and Scotty's names are more likely English and Scottish. Are they Confederate Rebels? Possible—Twain did pen this story during the darkest days of The Civil War—but also unlikely. Instead, Twain leaves its meaning indeterminate, yet humorous, though the two clearly loved the song and at least found pleasure in the tune; thus, Twain

humanizes their characters. Such aesthetic choices show Twain's careful character development to compliment his use of indirect modal satire.

Twain deepens the ironic use of "NINA" as a motif when Scotty attempts to provide the minister with evidence of Buck's good character and, in doing so, discounts the potential anti-Catholic and anti-Irish elements, or at least that is what Scotty aims to do as he recounts the time "when some roughs jumped the Catholic bone-yard and started in to stake out town-lots in it" and Buck "went for 'em! And he cleaned 'em, too!" (Twain, *Tales* 64). This line deepens the satiric thrust, in that the West emphasizes a person's actions as confirmation of character. These miners are pragmatic—what you do defines who you are—in this case, a man attacking squatters taking up residences in a cemetery. The preacher, however, is interested in professions of faith, beliefs, and later in Buck's memberships and affiliations. He quickly moves past Scotty's anecdotal evidence yearning to clear up the point of Buck's "religious convictions," "Had deceased any religious convictions? That is to say, did he feel a dependence upon, or acknowledge allegiance to a higher power?" Highlighting the humor in their miscommunication, the narrator follows the minister's questions with a two-word paragraph, "More reflection." After which, Scotty confesses, "I reckon you've stumped me again, pard. Could you say it over once more, and say it slow?" And the preacher ironically complicates things further by rephrasing the question: "Well, to simplify it somewhat, was he, or rather had he ever been connected with any organization sequestered from secular concerns and devoted to self-sacrifice in the interests of morality?" Once again Scotty, whose mind has been primarily trained in the miners' slang, is befuddled and in return begs of the minister that they start again: "Let's have a new deal" (64). In this scene, the minister's query on Buck's religious fervor, morality, and goodness again frustrates Scotty's creative, although uncultured, language.

In his final evidence for Buck's religious morality, Scotty's patience with the preacher's limp interpretations grows short. With "Cheese it, pard; you've banked your ball clean outside the string," Scotty silences the minister and begins his final defense of Buck in which he lets fly an expletive deemed uncouth in the East: "I'm d—d [damned] if he didn't…" (65). (Twain's elision of the middle of "d*amne*d" communicates that, though Scotty utters profanities, Twain has kindly sanitized the vulgarities for his sensitive, East-coast readers.) Immediately repentant of his profanity, Scotty apologizes to the minister, tries to repair their acquaintance, and closes the deal with a handshake: "You've treated me like a gentleman, pard, and I ain't the man to hurt your feelings intentional. I think you're white. I think you're a square man, pard. I like you, and I'll lick any man that don't. I'll lick him till he can't tell himself from a last year's corpse! Put it *there!*" (65-66). Here again, his compliments exude double-entendre: does "white" imply pure and honest or sickly and dying; does "square" connote fair and reputable, or naïve and simple; does threatening to "lick" another who disagrees with Scotty lead to literal or metaphoric violence? From the preacher's habit of misreading language, the answer might be *all of the above*. We do not fault the under-educated westerner for failing to deduce meaning from the learned lingo of the educated minister, who himself should readily grasp higher thinking and analogies. By juxtaposing these dueling metaphorists, Twain's humorous tale establishes this subtle satire: the inability of outsider clergy to comprehend local discourse can alienate those people from religion.

Ironically, in the epilogue, Scotty's metaphoric prowess enables him to enter the religious realm and deliver "intelligent direction" to both Virginia roughs and Christians alike, even though he was "the only convert" in the minister's congregation. In Twain's ironic universe, the minister is a near failure in Virginia City while the ruffian is a better Christian than the schooled minister. To speak the language of the people is to unlock

windows into other worlds. Literal, metonymic language, while instructive, fails to entertain or enliven. As Twain narrates the epilogue of this tale, Scotty rises to the role of Sunday-school teacher, his class "progressing faster than the other classes." The ability to craft metaphor, even "riddled with slang," can enliven the most mundane Sunday-school class of "pioneer small-fry" (66). For Twain, the creative use of figurative language, which Scotty exemplifies, has the potential to enthrall "little learners with consuming interest that showed that they were…unconscious…that any violence was being done to the sacred properties" of the Old Testament story in Scotty's lesson—or of language writ large (67). And of course, Twain, in keeping with his typical satiric mode, piques the reader's interest by saying that he himself "heard him [Scotty] tell the beautiful story of Joseph and his brethren to his class 'without looking at the book.'" Having given us this epilogue, Twain, playing trickster, teases by "leav[ing] it to the reader to fancy what it was like, as it fell, loaded with slang, from the lips of that grave, earnest teacher…." As an authorial persona, Mark Twain, repeatedly denies the reader's gratification throughout his oeuvre by writing satires that elicit exceptions and disappointment in both readers and characters; all the while, these satires also provide an ironic amusement for Twain and readers who appreciate the joke.

Storytime with Papa Twain; or, Wordplay with a Trickster

In his 1895 essay published in *Youth's Companion*, "How to Tell a Story," Mark Twain authored, "I do not claim that I can tell a story as it ought to be told. I only claim to know how a story ought to be told…" (*Tales* xxxv, 391), a claim which discourages readers from trusting him too quickly while also enticing them to read further into Twain's works to become better readers. To support his assertion, Twain concludes this essay by recounting a dramatic performance of "The Golden Arm," a feat which he staged numerous times on his

speaking tours, most notoriously (and to his daughter's great embarrassment) while Susy was a student at Bryn Mawr. Set on The Plains, this tale focuses on a man who exhumes his recently deceased wife to retrieve her golden prosthetic arm. As he sets out toward home, he is overtaken by a storm and is haunted by an eerie voice calling out, "W-h-o—g-o-t—m-y—g-o-l-d-e-n arm?" The plot follows the man as he returns home and his growing terror as the voice grows louder until, in the final scene, he is accosted in his bed. In the course of its telling, the tale intensifies its suspense to spur increasing concern for the haunted man. But in Twain's written account of his performance, he dramatically inserts pauses and exclamations to intensify the effect on the audience, most notably in the final lines when, he would, as he claims, "stare steadily and impressively into the face of the farthest-gone auditor—a girl, preferably." After a poignant pause, he would then "jump suddenly at that girl and yell, 'You've got it!'"

While this description in "How to Tell a Story" establishes Twain as a master of dramatic oratory, imagine the horror of your father pulling this prank before your college peers and professors. As Stephen Railton recounts the episode, Twain performed at Bryn Mawr in 1891 and Susy begged him not to tell "The Golden Arm," at this time "probably his favorite performance piece, but Susy came to hate it" (Railton). Ron Powers biographizes the scene: "Upon her father's arrival, she implored him not to tell the story. Sam promised her that he would not. And then he did" (Powers 536-37). Sam's desire to please a crowd won out. Upon taking the stage, Twain began the story, at which point, Susy, in tears, abruptly left the auditorium (Railton).

This biographical scene between Twain and Susy parallels Twain's literary uses of a reader's expectations and disappointments within his satires. For Twain, the point of crafting a well-told story is found in the pleasure that both Twain and the reader share in the ironic

linguistic and imaginative games that put Twain in the Adamic role as namer and creator of words and first among patriarchs, while the reader is strung along as by a puppeteer's hand. It makes sense then why Twain would proclaim, "The humorous story is told gravely"; it is "high and delicate art" (qtd. in Powers 155). "…the teller does his best to conceal the fact that he even dimly suspects there is anything funny about it…" ("How to Tell a Story" qtd. in Powers 155). To tell a humorous American story, then, Mark Twain often assumes this role as a trickster to provoke his readers' laughter and later reveals that the tale's nub is directed at them. His audiences may easily cringe at a conniving trickster were Twain not able to soothe their suspicion and frustration with laughter while at times making himself the butt of the joke. As Ron Powers concludes, the success of Twain's frame narrator relies on his "benign…guileless sincerity [that] invites the hearer's (and reader's) charmed affection, instead of scorn" (155).

Offering an account of playful banter between the father and trickster "Mark" and his daughters "Susie" and "Clara," Twain's posthumously published "A Cat-Tale" evidences his pleasure in triggering both the audience's and his own embarrassment. (Two textual matters are of note. First, "A Cat-Tale" has been published with both hyphenated and unhyphenated versions of the title. Shelley Fisher Fishkin in *Mark Twain's Book of Animals*, Bernard DeVoto in his edition of *Letters from the Earth and Other Uncensored Writings*, and Twain in his original manuscript held at The Bancroft Library at The University of California Berkley each employ the hyphenated form; however, Tom Quirk, Lou Budd, and first printed edition in 1959 by The Book Club of California do not hyphenate the title. Although my project references Quirk's 1994 edition, I have chosen to hyphenate the title in alignment with the original manuscript. Second, in this tale, Twain spells the name of his eldest daughter, Olivia Susan Clemens, as "Susie," although her name is most often written as

"Susy." For this section, I have employed the spelling "Susie" for Mark Twain's character and "Susy" to refer to Samuel Clemens's daughter.) The tale is a dramatic dialogue between "Papa" and his daughters that frequently interrupts a bedtime story featuring a nimiety of "cat-" prefixed words, often employed in highly ingenious, although at times inappropriate, ways. A modern fable, the tale focuses on the widow Catasauqua and her "beautiful family of catlings" comprised of two sons, Cattaraugus and Catiline. The plot, or what there is of a plot, follows a haphazard path towards no clear point, even though the narrator does present several elements of conflict. The narrative focuses on the accidental burning of Catasauqua's home and, with the ample insurance money, its elaborate rebuilding. The vivid description of these events in the tale's exposition is followed by what the narrator claims are typical everyday events: the trio sings a morning song and Catasauqua gives her sons a spelling lesson. When she steps out, Catiline smokes on his "cat-pipe," which causes a stern rebuke from Cattaraugus and is followed by heated words between them. Later, Twain doubles back, claiming that he is mistaken, that a "cat-pipe" is not used for smoking but is "a squeaking instrument used in play-houses to condemn plays"; therefore, in his restatement, Catiline was only pretending to smoke, presumably to instigate a quarrel with his brother (*Tales* 153). After this point, the plot dissipates into a catfight that never climaxes or resolves because Susie incessantly asks that her father explain the meaning of words, most of which when checked in the dictionary, have been used quite barbarously. Consequently (and quite intentionally), the plot is not of primacy in this story, neither does it emphasize the feline characters. The true conflict and character development are located in the narrator's performance and in the audiences' responses to his inability to complete the narrative due to its complex structure and his inappropriate uses of diction. Moreover, "A Cat-Tale" stands as an ironic, deconstructed tale within a tale. Yet it reveals the games Twain is willing to play

at both his own and his audience's expense while at the same time portraying Twain as a humorous, harmless trickster who in the end fails to complete the story because he has told so many falsehoods that his daughters relentlessly ask questions and reveal that his "facts" are prevarications. As the plot destabilizes, "A Cat-Tale" becomes a brilliant burlesque of a children's bedtime story that also contains a primer on how (and how not) to tell a story.

Tom Quirk places the writing of this posthumously published tale in 1880—the year Susy turned eight, Clara turned six, and the Clemenses' third daughter Jean was born. Quirk concludes that, as a product of that time, it "may adequately render the depth of paternal feeling, the sort of daily fun, and the reassurances of quiet family attachments that Twain cherished" (Quirk, Introduction to *Tales* xxiv). As is often the case in a Mark Twain tale, the game played is linguistic and Papa Twain has the upper hand: he employs slant and exact meanings of pedantic jargon as well as fictive nonsense to tease readers' ideas of the meaning of words and their proper usage. But as the tension rises, Twain will expunge all animosity to provide release for both daughters and readers—though escape might be a better option for Twain since the catharsis is at the narrator-author's expense. Nevertheless, his very genuineness disarms our desire for truth, and our laughter dissuades probing academic scrutiny, which is fortunate, since, although entertained, we are left without meaning in the dénouement.

Although "A Cat-Tale" reveals Twain to be a paternal storyteller and teacher, the trickster is also one of his many faces. In the telling of this narrative, Twain acts as a tease who fails to deliver on expectations and thus must assuage the readers' potential malice. This hilarious, nonsense tale interweaves quippy and often inaccurate definitions that cultivate knowledge and skepticism in his daughters, Clara and Susie. Upon an initial reading of "A Cat-Tale," readers might be tempted—as I first was—to assume that his diction is created

merely to mimic erudite discourse. Certainly, Twain devised this tale with a broader audience in mind, and his innocent motives must be questioned the moment he signs the introductory note "M.T."—not the dad, Samuel Clemens, but the entertainer Mark Twain. His bedtime story might, as a trickster designed, lull readers to follow the girls in playing daddy's game or instruct the brain in following his language. In this way, the story serves a secondary didactic role to instruct his readers on the way to approach his work. Moreover, he provides a multitude of interpretations and rereadings, appealing to readers through a humorous bedtime story or to those needing a brain tease: either we can be satisfied with a humorous story or follow the zigzags and whorls as his word choice invokes pleasurably inconceivable images. Both please the speaker and result in enjoyment for all.

As a preface for the tale, Twain begins with an explanatory footnote in which he assumes center stage in this tale, claiming that his girls consider his bedtime stories to be better than a "paregoric," and ever gracious, Twain offers his story as a "narcotic" to aid other children in finding rest. (Although some have preferred to take Twain's framing of the story as an authorial footnote, most recently in Shelley Fisher Fishkin's 2010 collection, *Mark Twain's Book of Animals*, Tom Quirk grants it a prefatory position in his 1994 Penguin Classics collection of Mark Twain's *Tales, Speeches, Essays, and Sketches*. The original manuscript supports either interpretation: Twain asterisked the title followed by a hand pointing a finger to the side of the page and the word "OVER"; the reverse side contains the "Foot-note" then concludes with the instruction, "over again" [Twain, "Cats and Billiards"].) With claims that his stories offer a "narcotic" or "paregoric," the trickster begins spinning his web of mirth. With slumber as the *stated* effect, the narrator Twain begins to slip inexact meanings of jargon and erudition into the narrative, proving to himself (if we are too drowsy to notice) that he is prepared to rewrite the dictionary to elicit laughter from his children—

perchance his real goal. For instance, while "paregoric" might mean "any soothing medicine," it more exactly describes a "tincture of opium" used "to stop diarrhea in children," which raises images of his daughters, drugged and sleepy-eyed (Flesner and Hauck 1410). These multiple meanings of "paregoric" signify to the reader that something more comic may be afoot in this tale: Twain's discourse is more concerned with performing a well-told, albeit improvised, story and with lulling children to sleep, rather than with exact denotations and diction. In other words, Twain deigns to soothe us to sleep through his *fluid* use of language, until the dissonance seems ironic, and like the girls, we grow increasingly excited.

As it originates in the mind of a deadpan narrator, the tale's potential for failure is an acceptable risk. In each etymological contortion, Twain foreshadows Jacques Derrida's "freeplay of the structure" of language between the signifier and the signified, freely de-centered for the cause of entertainment (247). Befitting *freeplay*, laughter and joy pour out of the discovery of seldom used words as he begins fixing and redefining them for new contexts. Even the classification of this tale is destabilized: "A Cat-Tale" is not a pure satire, unless the object of ridicule is the parent who attempts to outsmart children but ultimately fails to meet their needs—not much of a satiric target. For the tone of the tale is too light and playful to fulfill the definition of a satiric attack; moreover, the only injustice the storyteller commits is against himself, making the piece more a travesty of storytelling or a self-lampoon than a satire. Tom Quirk finds a "tender version of self-parody" functioning at the heart of this tale, all the while the narrator's antics "convey some sense of Twain's deep affection for his daughters, Susy and Clara, and the quality of his domestic life" (Quirk, Introduction to *Tales* xxiv). Then, a *burlesque* of a storyteller with narratorial self-parody might better serve to classify "A Cat-Tale," in that Twain as both author and narrator aims

to tell a clever bedtime story by showing off his brilliance and impressing his daughters with his dictionary-like knowledge.

But when Susie keeps requesting that her father give her the definition of words, she in a sense challenges his slip-shod uses of language, flummoxing him and, thereby, ending the story. At its close, the story remains a mere sketch, and with the storyteller's silence, it comes up short on the requirements for plot and character development. For Susie (and the reader) stops trusting the first-person narrator, when it becomes apparent that Twain's words here are understood not merely in terms of rote, prescribed definitions "so set down in the big dictionary," conveniently resting in Papa's lap (*Tales* 145). (Since his adolescent days working in a print shop, the importance of dictionaries for Twain cannot be understated. When Samuel and Orion Clemens were traveling by stage coach from St. Joseph, Missouri, to Carson City, Nevada, in 1861, Orion included "six pounds of Unabridged Dictionary" among his twenty-five-pound limit of personal belongings [*Roughing It*, Chapter 2]. Twain later revealed that they could have much more easily purchased and had it shipped in less than a day from San Francisco.) While these scenes in "A Cat-Tale" call the narrator's intelligence into question, the playful diction, nevertheless, communicates meaning through the relationships between words, between father and daughters, and between trickster and audience, all proceeding with Poe-like, mathematical precision toward the desired effect—laughter.

In pursuing this end, "A Cat-Tale" reveals Twain's proclivity to use language ironically, while hoping to entertain readers by creating new and novel meanings of words. And because a trickster is playing throughout this tale, the reader is often the brunt of the jokes, especially when we realize that we must crack open the dictionary to follow him to make meaning and merriment, which in turn pushes Twain to find new methods of turning

frustration into pleasure. This moment also reveals how his ultimate goal is to awaken readers to interpretive possibilities. He must even, as we see in the final line, be willing to become the butt of the joke by playing the fool and allowing Susie to catch his misuse of language with her well-put retort, "Well, papa, what does *that* mean?" (155). In this final exchange, Twain's use of "catacaustic" does not fit with the dictionary definition and brings about a befuddling confusion where our only defense is to laugh. With these words, the trickster's "simplicity and innocence and sincerity and unconsciousness…are perfectly simulated," as Twain describes his ideal vision for storytelling in "How to Tell a Story" (*Tales* 393).

We must not be fooled by Twain's self-scapegoating. He feigns the fool. Although each esoteric word and definition is meant to obfuscate truth, Twain showcases his ability to use words apart from denotative and connotative meanings and use them freely to be neither exact nor veritable but instead entirely ironic and humorous. According to Sacvan Bercovitch, Twain's ingenious technique of teasing the reader is the work of a master trickster. Bercovitch writes,

> So here's the trickster setup, American-style, of *Huckleberry Finn*: the deadpan artist is Mark Twain, wearing the Comic Mask, doing his best to conceal the fact that he even dimly suspects that there's anything grave, let alone sinister, about the story—and he succeeds famously. Then, as we laugh, or after we've laughed, we may realize, if we're alert, that there's something we've overlooked. We haven't seen what's funny about the fact that we've found it all so funny. This trickster has conned us, somehow diverted our attention away from the real point, and we have to go back over the story in order to recognize its nub. (56)

In fact, truth in one of Twain's tales often cripples the snapper's punch by obfuscating it with what Twain calls a "demi-synonym" in "A Cat-Tale" (146). Twain pushes readers to reread, and enjoyably so. With each word and definition, the readers are lulled into trusting the trickster's dictionary in which *they* join with Twain as the butt of the joke. Then the oddness of the word tickles our ear until, as we seek for Webster's truth, we hear Twain chuckling back—*Made you look!*

In "A Cat-Tale," Twain's etymologies fall into two distinct categories. First, as seen in the word "paregoric," Twain uses an existing word, but its usage seems slant or deceptive, when compared to the denotation: is "panagoric" a soothing medicine, a narcotic, or a cure for diarrhea? Other times, he selects the *exact* word that fits the context, yet like the first group, its hyperbolic length or aurality also elicits laughter. Words in this category are "concatenation," "catenated," "catalpas," and "catadupe," among others. And by using words appropriate to their denotations, Twain mollifies the reader toward trust. This vacillating between correct and incorrect definitions points to his goals—pleasure and entertainment.

Because of the esoteric, often anachronistic nature of Twain's vocabulary, readers at first glance might misread Twain's diction as a wordsmith abandoning the dictionary to play in the realm of neologisms. Beware! It is the trickster's desire to deceive the reader into assuming that Twain is conjuring syllables and morphemes to haphazardly create new words and definitions with the aim of destabilizing interpretation. However amusing this wordplay may seem, Twain is poised to school the sloppy reader, for "the big dictionary" in Papa's lap is always unabridged and seemingly inexhaustible, since every word he uses in "A Cat-Tale" also appears therein. Dictionary in hand and alert in wit, Twain eagerly waits to manipulate the interpretive habits of his society, knowing that his showy, overabundance of erudition

will demand that readers either play along or seek confirmation in the dictionary (Bercovitch 62).

As an example of how Twain warps definitions, the word "caterwaul"—to cry like a cat—while existing, is used aurally as a homophone in the story to mean a "cat-wall," which surrounds the "catadrome." Similarly, derisive and shrill "cat-calls" are "handier than bells" while "catamounts" kindle images of mountain lions bearing the protagonist Catasauqua up and down the stairs like a porter. With great guffaw, Catasauqua sings and "accompani[es] herself on the catarrh," or as interpreted in this context, she sings with a runny nose and phlegm in her throat. Twain's diction is denotatively inexact. Nevertheless, readers are likely to forgive Twain for these insignificant puns and might even enjoy discovering them, as they tantalize both his innocent daughters and readers with exaggerated scenes, confirming ironic wordplay as a hallmark of Twain's humor.

While we expect Twain to twist meanings, Twain's list of properly used, erudite words unexpectedly lengthens with each turn to "the big dictionary" (145). Some words are even obsolete. For instance, etymologists derive "catercousins" from the French "cater" meaning "fourth," so literally Twain produces "quarter-cousins," though the word eventually came to be applied to intimate friends in the English Renaissance (*OED* 982). Twain rightly calls "catalactics" a "demi-synonym" that he unearths from John Ruskin's *Unto This Last* meaning "science of exchanges," which Ruskin proposes as a replacement for the phrase "political economy." Twain, thus, tempts the reader without intimate knowledge of Greek or access to a lexicon to ask whether a half-synonym is in fact a Twainian half-truth—or a half-lie (*OED* 967). Likewise, the "catadrome" is transliterated from the Greek meaning, as Twain tells Clara, "a race-course" along with "cateogorematic," which refers to "a word: capable of being used as the word itself," such as a noun or adjective—as opposed to

"syncateogorematic" words such as prepositions or articles that cannot stand on their own (*OED* 981). In this last case, Twain first misappropriates *catemogorematic* to mean "a kind of shade-tree," embellished as "a splendid great categorematic in full leaf" (146). And he would have succeeded had Susie not asked, "What is a categorematic, papa?" (146). But upon disclosing the real meaning, Papa Twain must bend the plot to fit the correct definition, done in this case by unloading a series of reflections about the need to know the meaning of words, about how cats must use categorematic alone and not with other cats, and about Webster's authority on the subject because "he is dead, too" and thus no longer an authority—a recurring joke in many of Twain's works, particularly in *The Innocents Abroad* (147). The hilarity escalates each time Twain resorts to linguistic and narrative acrobatics to fit the word into its misappropriated context. And Twain, in failing to repeat the trick, makes himself the butt of the joke as the word game that he's played to impress his daughters makes him play the fool. Willing to humor Susie and Clara at his own expense, the target of this trickster's joke, according to Sacvan Bercovitch, "is the adversarial interpreter" who might scan dictionaries for the exact meaning, but gives pleasure to those willing to let go of exact meaning while the trickster plays his games with them (Bercovitch 63).

As aforementioned, some of Twain's *cat*-friendly words do match their denotations and do not require linguistic alterations. In the exposition of "A Cat's Tale," for example, Twain lists a series of *cat*-friendly plants and natural wonders that decorate the front gardens of Catasauqua's country residence:

> A stately row of flowering catalpas stretched from the front door clear to the gate, wreathed from stem to stern with the delicate tendrils and shining scales of the cat's foot ivy, whilst ever and anon the enchanted eye wandered from congeries of lordly cat-tails and kindred catapetalous blooms, too deep for

> utterance, only to encourage the still more entrancing vision of catnip without number and without price, and swoon away in ecstasy unutterable, under the blissful intoxication of its too, too fragrant breath! (147)

Here, Twain does not reach too deep, nor do his daughters catch inexact usage hidden in the flowery prose. For catálpas are ornamental trees; cat's foot ivy, a type of ground ivy; and cat-tails, bulrushes in the plant genus *typha*. With "catapetalous," its prefix "cata-" meaning "each-to-each" in the Greek, and "petalous" denoting nothing more than having petals, our trickster is merely portraying the physiological construction of a flower. Twain next describes the natural wonders of the country estate with similar erudition:

> …hither to the north boiled the majestic cataract in unimaginable grandiloquence, and thither to the south sparkled the gentle catadupe in serene and incandescent tranquility, whilst far and near the halcyon brooklet flowed between! (148)

Nothing sinister lies in "cataract" as a waterfall, and if we fear being duped by the synonym "catadupe," Twain has only resurrected a sixteenth-century reference to the Nile's cataracts from an Old French word that might literally mean "small waterfall" (*OED* 966). Even Twain's later uses of "catachrestic," "catapult," and "catso" find approximate equivalents in the *OED* to his usages (154). Thus, by using words according to their denotations, readers might marvel at the wit and learning of their storyteller or be so exhausted in the whirlwind of words that we cease questioning, letting the knavery of his children dethrone this trickster.

After receiving a peppering of humorous puns and highfalutin jargon, we might expect Twain to easily slip from erudition to neologizing, but the learning that he derides in other places in his canon, he himself possesses behind a guise of bemused innocence. The

compound word "cat-pipe," which he defines in the context of smoking and later redefines as "a squeaking instrument used in play-houses to condemn plays," he designs through the change to placate his flustered daughters (152-53). But the *OED* cross-references "cat-pipe" with "cat-call" defining nearly verbatim with Twain's definition—"a squeaking instrument used in play-houses to condemn plays" (153). Twain has proven his orthodoxy in his selection of hilarious, archaic words to laugh his children to sleep, though laughter might be more likely to have an opposite effect. If Twain is trustworthy in this word choice to achieve this end, then perhaps the reader should take him at his word remembering that, in the tale's exposition, he tells his daughters of his "purpose…to instruct as well as to entertain" (146). While humor and satire do not always need a moral, Twain often will have a greater purpose in his vision beyond mere amusement. For Twain, entertainment involves thought.

In the final scene, Twain even permits Susie to have the last word; consequently, the last paragraphs recount her entrapment in the trickster's word twistings. Here, the storyteller tries to redefine "catacaustic" (a term from mathematics and physics) to instead denote caustic remarks made by cats. When queried by his daughter as to its meaning, Twain is faithful to "the big dictionary" and reads the entry for "catacaustic"—"a caustic curve formed by reflection of light"—a definition also in keeping with the *OED* (Twain 155; *OED* 965). As Twain never prepared this story for publication, it also might be unfair to read this final exchange as Twain's intended denouement: he would often set aside manuscripts for years, as in the case of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, only to take them out years later and continue drafting. This scene between Twain and "Susie" conveys the sheepishness of the American humorist caught using the wrong word and, not seeing a way to be "unstumped," simply takes the laugh and ends the tale with Susie's exclamation, "Well, papa, what does *that* mean?" (155); the tale as told by Twain now becomes a failed soporific.

The trickster, however, having summoned laughter from all and provided us with Susie's unanswered question, "what does *that* mean?," may have achieved a hidden goal by exposing children and readers to the opportunity for further inquiry and possible discovery. With each chuckle from the audience, Bercovitch sees Twain making the reader the butt of the joke, for once the reader understands what prompted the laughter, she or he must laugh again at the ingenuity of the author's artful trickery (57). In "A Cat-Tale," Twain drags the reader through a nearly plotless dialogue riddled with twenty-dollar words and wearisome puns. His tale, however, does teach us the value of words and the lunacy of their ill use. While he and we, as eagled-eyed readers, laugh at our looking up each word, we have learned that he will never speak a *wrong* word though he may not use it the way dictionary writers would intend, but he will, true to his word, "instruct as well as entertain" (146).

Nevertheless, Twain condemns those who confuse good writing as merely using big words. He ironically echoes his rule thirteen in the opening of his satiric essay "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offences"—"Use the right word, not its second cousin" (*Tales* 379). In their original context, these rules "govern…literary art in the domain of romantic fiction" (377). However, the art of satire is the play of contradictions. In "Buck Fanshaw's Funeral," language and metaphor are assaulted and distorted to the point that they open up the narrative and the reader to discover new insights. And in "A Cat-Tale," Twain proves how, when you use a "second-cousin" word, the story is over. As we note the difference between *what is* and *what could be*, readers are taught to read ironically; moreover, we discover that Twain aims to please all with laughter that *awakens* readers instead of lulling them off to sleep.

CHAPTER FOUR

HUCKBERRY FINN AND THE FALL OF HADLEYBURG: SATIRIC SEEDS FOR CONTEMPLATION

Turning to the quintessential Mark Twain novel, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, provides a glimpse at his satiric method and manner, distinguished by his uses irony, narration, literary sleights of hand, and plot. Together these aim to move the readers to discover more about themselves and about their world. Yet as explored in the preceding chapters, sometimes Twain's provocations and trickery backfire. The potential for discovery latent in satire (see Dustin Griffin) may not find fertile soil in which to grow. The power for Twainian satire to prompt a strong response, whether positive or negative, from readers is evident in The Concord Public Library's criticism against *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* as "the veriest trash, suitable only for the slums," which testifies both to Mark Twain's capacity to make his readers squirm under his satirical scrutiny and America's reticence to receive his criticism (Cooley, "A Banned Book" 308). Libraries and schools rarely ban adventure tales because of bad grammar, yet newspapers and institutions singled out the "very low grade of morality" in the novel. The reason The Concord Public Library gave for the ban of *Huckleberry Finn*, as reported in the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* for March 17, 1885, centered in their disdain for its perceived lack of respectability and morality, as evidenced by the novel's use of dialect and regional speech patterns. To justify their actions, they argued,

> It [*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*] deals with a series of adventures of a very low grade of morality; it is couched in the language of a rough dialect, and all through its pages there is a systemic use of bad grammar and an employment

> of rough, coarse, inelegant expressions. It is also very irreverent…. The whole book is of a class that is more profitable for the slums than it is for respectable people. (qtd. in WGBH)

As Everett Emerson has interpreted this event, their New England, Victorian sensibilities were offended by Twain's depiction of America's abuse of freedom (Emerson, *Mark Twain: A Literary Life* 157). By rejecting the moral questions raised in *Huckleberry Finn*, Concord's literati ignored the danger of censorship, and in this context, their unfavorable criticism indicates an uneasiness to grapple with the novel's moral sensibilities with which Twain prods his readers' consciences.

But not all responses to satire will be negative. In the 2010 monograph *How Pleasure Works,* psychologist Paul Bloom theorizes, "Imagination is Reality Lite—a useful substitute when the real pleasure is inaccessible, too risky, or too much work" (169). Bloom links this idea to the power of narrative. "Often we experience ourselves as the agent, the main character, of an imaginary event," he writes. "…we get *transported*. This is how daydreams and fantasies typically work" (170). Applying these ideas to imaginative, narrative literature, Bloom concludes, "Psychological studies suggest that this is the natural default when reading a story; you experience the story as if you are in the character's head" (170-71). But he goes further to make the connection between empathy and the imagination: when we encounter literature, we do not merely see things through another's perspective, but we simultaneously see it through our own individual lenses (170-71). This ability to imagine a story from multiple perspectives explains why dramatic irony creates tension in audiences. We see the events from the perspective of the characters, but we can also imagine the narrative unfolding from our own. We imagine what it would be like for characters in their given situations and we also wonder what it would be like for us, with our own unique experiences

and knowledge, to be in these situations. The oft-made literary reference to Aristotle's *Poetics* wherein pity and fear are linked with the stirring and purgation of emotions is a suitable comparison here. And it provides the link to understanding Twain's uses of satire in *Huckleberry Finn* and elsewhere. Framing Twain in the context of Bloom's theory of "imagination [and literature] as reality lite," then, reconstitutes each satire as a literary laboratory in which he prompts readers to look within both the text and their individual perspectives to experiment with new ways of seeing. In the synthesis, Twain's art is the catalyst for transformation.

The prefatory "Notice" to *Huckleberry Finn* firmly establishes Twain's desire to antagonize his readers: "Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot." This "Notice" bears the ominous authorization all in capital letters, "BY ORDER OF THE AUTHOR / Per. G. G., CHIEF OF ORDNANCE." This extra-textual martial support for the author is not to be understated, however ambiguous G.G.'s identity. (Readers might associate "G.G." with General Grant, who, during The Mexican-American War, moved a cannon—more specifically, a howitzer—to a church belfry to fire upon the advancing Mexican troops. By the time Twain was preparing *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* for publication in 1884, he was in negotiations with the then-retired President to publish his memoirs with his firm, Charles L. Webster and Company. Alternatively, Grant could be a doppelgänger. If so, "G.G." could pay homage to George Griffin, the Clemenses' long-time butler at the Hartford home and a possible inspiration for Jim in the novel. Ironically, Griffin's use of "ordinance" might be limited to small arms, yet he was noted on one occasion to chase away burglars at gunpoint. The reader's misassociation of a butler and former African-American slave with a United States president

conveys Twain's sense of humor and illustrates the degree to which Twain is willing to pleasurably threaten readers into "not" looking for a "motive" or a "moral" but still seeing it and saying nothing.) Of course, the joy for readers is in also knowing that, though these prohibitions would be enforced by violent means, Twain or ambiguously named "G. G." would have great difficulty to follow through on such a threat. The "Notice," consequently, is a bluff, yet it illustrates Twain's recurring uses of verbal irony, facetiousness, and a trickster persona. Twain has communicated little with certitude in this "Notice": the denotative tenor of the empty threats conveys, instead, that the reader's emotions and actions will be manipulated in this novel and the commanding persona (i.e. Mark Twain) behind the narrator Huck Finn is not to be entirely trusted.

Furthermore, the irony in the prefatory "Notice" is established through the extreme measures to which the author is willing to go to enact violence upon his readers, however improbable these ultimatums will be carried out. With the martial language in the "Notice" and by placing the onus on readers to look or "not look" for "motive," "moral," or "plot," Twain plays tricks on the American conscience demanding that each reader respond in some way to the instructions in the "Notice." Yes, Twain's approach is indirect, but it places the presumed responsibility for the next action upon the reader, whose reading itself is a necessary result of responding to read *for* or *against* the notice, the manner of which is still each reader's choice. Thus, as the novel explores an episode in Huck's growth and progression through adolescence, *Huckleberry Finn* establishes itself as a great American *bildungsroman*, but the psychological maturation is intended for the reader as well as for the protagonist. This ability to shift the reader's focus is a trickster's greatest ploy: to create a story rigged with laughter, irony, and choices for the reader that at any moment redirects audiences to realize that the snapper is also pointed at him or her.

To achieve these redirections, Twain often uses amiable humor, a more positive form of critique, in addition to the more aggressive form of satire, whether direct or indirect. Due to modal satire's adaptability to other forms, it is an ideal groundwork on which to present amiable humor. "If amiable humor is moralizing through an indulgent and sympathetic laughter to embrace incongruity," Greg Camfield writes, "then satire is moralizing through scorn to attack incongruity" (Camfield, *The Oxford Mark Twain* 532). In other words, amiable humor opens up readers to consider the ironic, and Twain's satire moves readers to challenge that irony. With wit and artistry, Twain unfolds his satiric vision in *Huckleberry Finn* to incite self-realization. Additionally, with amiable humor, Twain also seeks to foil any retaliation by his readers and, through their reading, to move them to accept the ironic and find an appropriate response that does not target the messenger.

The moral center of this novel is neither absent, as early reviews would suggest, nor centered on the narrator-protagonist, as the reader might prefer. For Twain's prefatory "Notice"—"those attempting to find a moral in it will be banished"—deceptively implies that the novel is amoral or, worse yet, immoral. Yet *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is not Machiavellian at its core. As Twain enjoins, those hoping to establish Huck Finn as a moral touchstone "will be banished" (2). This notice functions as a *No Trespassing* sign seeking to limit a reader's actions, enabling Twain to repaint the search for a moral as a "forbidden pleasure." By reverse psychology, he dupes each reader's conscience into carefully progressing, page by page—an investigation that intensifies the reader's imaginative pleasure in Huck's adventures. This initial warning also smokescreens Huck's uncouth, low-brow character by lulling the reader with literary enjoyment rather than seeing moral implications in the novel. This strategy is the work of a trickster who presents ideas that, upon later

reflection, will jar the reader with the uncomfortable realization that he or she is also implicated in the satire.

Further exemplifying Twain's red-herring tactic of lulling readers away from the novel's moral implications, the initial "*You* don't know me…" of the narrative and the informality of Huck's first-person narration, Twain lures the reader into an immediate empathy with Huck – albeit guilty empathy—by encouraging the reader to ignore Huck's culpability in his pranks and escapades in the initial chapters. Twain creates a dilemma for readers: to avoid hypocrisy, readers seeking to condemn Huck must first make a moral self-evaluation and, at the least, admit to enjoying the irony of Huck's antics and crimes. This interpretive dilemma, moreover, marks Twain's satiric intent to induce moral reflection in his readers, which noteworthily, accompanies the reader throughout the novel.

Jim and Huck: A Model for Twainian Satire

This moral revelation begins most prominently in chapter fifteen, wherein Huck attempts to revise Jim's memories of their journey through the fog by denying that they had been separated and, thus, depicts Jim as foolish. Because Twain has also built up readers' empathy for Jim, they are able to see Huck's character and actions from Jim's perspective. By using amiable humor, Twain plays with each reader's sense of morality and, thus, sets out to trick readers by tempting them to find amusement in Huck's antics that are callous toward Jim's emotions. For example, perhaps Huck was embarrassed when he became lost in the fog, or he was unconsciously rejecting the pain he experiences when separated from Jim. (Throughout the novel, Huck repeatedly experiences "lonesomeness," yet he expresses his relief when reunited with Jim or others.) The power of first-person narration also makes this ploy more effective: because we can only see the world of the novel through Huck's eyes, we

are more likely to condone his actions. To deny his own absence and minimize Jim's concern, Huck accuses Jim of drinking, dreaming, and being a fool (70-71). As the facts evanesce into prevarications, Huck shows disregard, almost contempt, for Jim's friendship and dignity as a human; it might be easier to disregard the moral implications if Huck would treat Jim as a stereotypical Negro slave. Instead, their exchange places the reader in the awkward position of having enjoyed Huck's prank at Jim's expense. As the reader is also guilty, Twain affords reconciliation for both Huck and the reader in this instance, provided all are willing "to work [themselves] up to humble [themselves] to a nigger" (72). The scene establishes no one, excepting Jim, as a moral touchstone and, moreover, explores a series of questions on respect, racism, friendship, and honesty. To enjoy Huck's irresponsible use of freedom, readers must also dismiss his faults and shortcomings. This scene foreshadows the *Tom*foolery of the evasion chapters, and, as Jim is tormented by Huck's accusations that he only imagined their separation, it establishes a reference point from which to compare the pain that Jim must have experienced then as the boys' scheme to liberate him from the Phelpses unfolds. Twain's use of amiable humor encourages readers to accept the irony of Huck's position, however questionable it may be. Thus, while readers ignore their moral sensibilities, Huck continues to entertain until conscience catches the reader enjoying these "innocent" crimes. A reader's reaction to the novel, then, becomes a litmus test for Twain to test the society's moral sense, yet to prompt change in or indignation from the reader, Twain will need to awaken the reader to challenge the irony through the presence of indirect, modal satire.

True to his "Notice," Twain places all "motive," "moral," and "plot" not within the text but in the reader's conscience. Thus, Huck's adolescent antics and antisocial sermonettes catalyze the reader's moral sense; he performs on our mind's stage, prompting

readers—especially adult readers—to gaze inward and contrast their own character to Huck's immature attitudes and actions. Since the moral of the novel abides in the reader's awaking conscience, only a hypocrite, and then mostly likely an unknowing hypocrite, would condemn Huck. The book can only be banned if readers first kill their consciences. Written at the same time he began formulating *Huckleberry Finn*, his story "The Facts Concerning the Recent Carnival of Crime in Connecticut" contains Twain's exploration of the regulatory nature of the conscience and the horrific consequences when his first-person protagonist discovers how to emaciate and eventually murder his conscience—a scene reminiscent of his earlier hoax, "My Bloody Massacre." In *Huckleberry Finn*, by contrast, Huck's climactic decision to "go to hell" rather than betray Jim playfully upsets the conscience's traditional role as the moral guide. Huck's vacillation pits two seemingly "right" choices against the other: to conform to the Antebellum Southern moral code and return a runaway slave or to protect Jim—now his friend—from slavery and its traumatic abuses. As Twain would later write in his notebook, "*Huck Finn* is a book of mine where a sound heart and a deformed conscience come into collision and conscience suffers defeat" (from *Notebook #35* qtd. in Barbara Schmidt). Throughout the novel, Twain compels the reader to examine the value that American culture places on freedom, truth, morality, religion, racism, family, and authority. Here the novel moves beyond amiable humor and gains strength through indirect, modal satire.

In 1885, the same year as the American publication of *Huckleberry Finn*, a frustrated Twain penned in the essay "The Character of Man" that the notion of the conscience being "put into man ready charged" is an utter falsehood; it has to be trained, developed, and practiced (qtd. in Camfield 383-84). Twain emphasizes the human ability to use emotional reasoning to justify actions and beliefs. Readers are, then, not to be too quick to interpret the

moral decisions of any character as emulative. For instance, whereas *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* offers a series of idealized and sentimentalized boyhood adventures in which all the knots are untangled, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* problematizes the innocence of Tom and Huck's adventures when Huck's moral epiphanies cannot overcome Tom's drawn-out prison-break of the already-freed Jim in the novel's final chapters, an episode that Tom exacerbates for his own enjoyment.

These evasion chapters at the end of *Huckleberry Finn* parallel the darkening tone in Twain's oeuvre, which intensifies in his mid-career and hinges in the 1880s, concomitant with the publication of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and more fully established in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889). Yet Twain's darker tone does not necessarily mean he has succumbed to despair, for while Twain's writings contain an increasing pessimism, that does not negate his satiric aims to motivate the reader to see something or to do something. Twain's pessimism, however ubiquitous, is neither total nor final. One only needs to cite examples from *The Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc*, *The Diaries of Adam and Eve*, and *Extracts from Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven* to locate many contrasting ludic passages.

A Check to Pessimism and Despair in "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg"

Before continuing our exploration of the humor and satire in *Huckleberry Finn*, let us explore how Twain, in his 1899 story "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg," develops and emphasizes his vision for individuals to learn from life's experiences, which work to shape character and conscience. Many of Mark Twain's novels, such as his first, *The Gilded Age*, or his most acclaimed, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, satirize the growing American upper and middle classes, whose increased affluence reveals a lacking of virtue. Yet Twain's mastery as a humorist often solicits more laughs than reflection, more relaxation than reformation,

however present a moral may be. Take for example Twain's response to The Young People's Society at the Greenpoint Presbyterian Church in which he aphoristically quips, "Always do right. It will gratify some people and astonish the rest" (Mark Twain MS letter to Frederick B. Merkle Brooklyn, New York, Feb. 16, 1901). The message is witty, moral, and certainly ironic. If it contains satire, it points to the reality that Twain's society no longer expects people to be moral. But such satire, if present at all, is mild. However, when compared to these amiable aphorisms, his later works, such as *What Is Man?* and *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger*, seem especially darker, more pessimistic, for therein Twain unleashes his full literary arsenal upon his readers, whom he increasingly refers to as "the damned human race."

Several scholars regard this pessimistic attitude, articulated in Jeanne M. Schinto's study of Twain's *Autobiography*, as "life studies in despair" (5). Bernard DeVoto cites *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* as Twain's last novel of regard, and he demarcates 1889, the year of its publication, as "the summit of [Twain's] personal happiness," fame, and fortune (*Twain at Work* 106). Twenty-first century critics might regard DeVoto's scholarship as the concretizing force that shapes generations of scholarship by casting the events of Twain's final decades as "symbols of despair" (DeVoto 105). Granted, Twain's health, fortune, and family—held tenuously in the best of times—crumbled during the last two decades of his life, diminishing what should have been his golden years (see biographies by Ron Powers, Harold Bush, or Everett Emerson for a more detailed discussion). While these well-recorded tragedies (for example, his bankruptcy or the death of his daughter Susy) arguably could have driven his characteristic satire toward overwhelming despair, his creativity, nevertheless, retains its humor, but now is tempered by cynicism and grounded in experiential sagacity. In this later period, Twain's satire directly targets America's mendacious morality, religion, and honor, which he hinted at in earlier pericopes such as the

Shepherdson-Grangerford feud in *Huckleberry Finn* (more on this anon). The writings at the start of Twain's tragedies in the mid-1890s (e.g. *Pudd'nhead Wilson* or *Following the Equator*) reveal the demeanor, not of a broken writer, but rather of a driven man fighting phoenix-like out of bankruptcy and family tragedy to reclaim his dreams.

In the midst of the devastation and perseverance that make these final decades, Twain unabashedly prophesies America's moral descent in his 1899 story, "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg." Therein, the town's residents are unable to make proper ethical decisions because they have spent so much time overly emphasizing one line from The Lord's Prayer, "Lead us not into temptation," which they selected as the town's motto. By placing this aphorism at the center of social and civic life in Hadleyburg, Twain satirizes the difficulty that those who wish to be perceived as good face when they are required to in fact act out that goodness. More ironically, the plot that the mysterious stranger spurs on by delivering a sack of gold to the home of Mary and Edward Richards aims to reveal that the Hadleyburgians will succumb to greed and personal gain so long as their actions will not be made public. Yet, in the denouement, they make the transition from a suspect morality, designed to sycophantically please the external expectations of the community, and move toward recognizing that they were "weak as water when temptation comes," a foreshadowing confessional that Edward ironically voices to Mary in the novella's opening pages (*Tales* 217). Twain's exploration of the moral sense in these characters reveals that we often make decisions based on what we want to feel or believe than on what will existentially prove to be of long-term benefit.

The public humiliation and disgrace of Hadleyburg in the final scene synecdochically depicts the fading façade of Gilded-Age American pride—pride in her traditions, wealth, religion, and reputation. Even the embarrassment that "the mysterious big stranger"

dispenses upon their tradition can only transform their pride in their purity into a pride of preparation for temptation—as their motto changes from "Lead us not into temptation" to "Lead us into temptation" (*Tales* 207, 255). Twain reveals the foolishness of these two stances, making every possible response appear as a disjointed balk. Hadleyburg, and thus America, lacks true wisdom that would find an easy escape from temptation in surface religion or seek to prove their steel by eagerly welcoming trials. Rather than merely desiring to avoid temptation, the mature residents of Hadleyburg would be better off to anticipate deficiencies and pitfalls, avoid them if possible, and unswervingly stand up under the pressure.

"The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg" confirms that, in the final season of his life, Twain doubts that humanity could ever attain true moral honesty. While their false confidence makes them vulnerable to temptation, their pride never diminishes. His attitude in the text, nevertheless, finds an uneasy stance between Darwinian natural determinism and moral idealism. The Hadleyburgians, therefore, characterize a greater descent than Aristotle envisions in his *Poetics*, for his vision of tragedy seeks to induce in the audience a purgation of emotions through empathy and anxiety. In "Hadleyburg," Twain dismisses these classical sentiments of catharsis and instead adopts a more modern attitude toward tragedy in which humanity accepts its inevitable demise, yet unceasingly wrestles to overcome its fate (see Sewall or Corrigan). While his literary pessimism may easily be interpreted as an old man on the brink of fatalism or nihilism, Twain's negativity in "Hadleyburg" enables him to criticize his characters' values and lifestyles in a manner that cannot be taught through tragedy. This ironic criticism, in fact, is comparable to Søren Kierkegaard's life-giving "infinite absolute negativity," previously explored in detail.

If, according to popular late-nineteenth-century natural philosophy, humanity must evolve to survive, then the citizens of Hadleyburg should adapt and reform. Their constant pride, however, remains a paramount impediment. Thus, Twain deceptively celebrates their reformed motto—"Lead Us Into Temptation"—as an ineffective one. Earl F. Briden concludes his article "Twainian Pedagogy" by arguing that Hadleyburgians desire neither moral truth nor human perfection; instead, their new motto reasserts their pride, advertising their "profound" knowledge (132-33). This interpretation of the story emphasizes the inability of humanity to reform. In accepting Twain's depiction of the damned human race, the astute reader has the option to reject the story's negativity, rather than being blinded by hubris and succumbing to temptation like Hadleyburgians. This pessimism does not mean that Twain surrenders, that humanity should cease its strivings. At the least, the story points to the hope that human beings can reject hypocrisy, accept our inability to be unblemished moral exemplars, and live honest lives.

Humanity, in "Hadleyburg" and elsewhere in Twain's canon, prefers to mask its grotesque *vertias* with impressions of what we think others want to see. Wolfgang Iser asserts the ridiculousness of creating impressions of perfection—what Twain, in the story, sarcastically refers to as "Symbols of Incorruptibility." Citing psychologist R. D. Laing, Iser asserts, "All men are invisible to one another. Experience is man's invisibility to man" (107). Because we are only able to posit educated guesses about others' perception, we interact with others based on our subjective interpretations of another's reactions to our actions. Built on layers of meaning, understanding is subjective at best, destructively deceptive at worst. Thus, Hadleyburg finds itself creating, maintaining, and recreating images that they believe people inside and outside the community desire to experience.

Twain's narratorial persona in "Hadleyburg" invites readers into the minds of two of the principle citizens, Mary and Edward Richards, to whom the mysterious stranger delivers the sack of gold in the opening of the story. Many of Mary's and Edward's interactions toward each other and with the community at large invite guesswork into the significance of the perceived social code—a code that Twain undermines throughout the narrative to make a satiric statement on how these characters wish to be perceived and how others wished to perceive them. During the climactic scene at the town meeting, his fellow citizens misinterpret Edward's efforts to speak up and clear his name as attempts to defend the accused: that Edward merely sought to clear their names of being falsely called honest, and in confessing, they might again be referred to in their town as "honorable." The Richardses, instead, do what they *assume* might clear them, as evidenced in their struggle earlier in the narrative over whether or not "to bury the money and burn the papers," leading readers to conclude that morality in Hadleyburg is contingent on social mores and deduced opinions. Thus, in typifying a Hadleyburgian antithesis, Barclay Goodson, an "outsider" in their community, is the focus of the citizens' torment and ostracism because he refuses to speculate on how to live in false honesty; ironically, he is honest about his character rather than living out honest mendacity, as the town would have interpreted it. The revision of the motto at the end of the story also confirms the haphazard guessing games the townsfolk play in reforming their image. Their readiness to be "led into temptation" will do little to provide a way of escape in those moments of enticement. Their desire to be tempted resounds more with foolishness rather than intelligence, for by welcoming temptation, they merely increase the likelihood of moral failure, though this is at least a movement toward the genuine.

Although a direct quotation from The Lord's Prayer, the town motto also alludes to the Apostle Paul's warning against temptation in his "First Epistle to the Corinthians," of which the well-churched Twain would have been quite cognizant:

> Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it. (*Authorized King James Version*, 1 Corinthians 10.12-13)

Typical of many late-nineteenth-century Americans, Hadleyburgians readily declare "Lead Us Not Into Temptation," but then blatantly disregard Paul's exhortation to prevent pride from disguising human vulnerability to temptation. Both Paul and Twain remark that resisting temptation in the midst of temptation *can* make us stronger. But as satirized by Twain, their mantra proves a flawed defense against moral failure, and their empty prayers remain effete. Regrettably, the community missed Paul's teachings immediately following the doctrine of temptation, which exhorted the church in Corinth, "Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry." The clichéd proverb "pride comes before fall" is ironically deficient in protecting the town from the stranger's schemes, but their revised motto "Lead Us Into Temptation" equally ignores the Apostle Paul's warning in the following verse. Idolatry is but one form of *temptation*, from which Pauline wisdom entreats that we "flee." A better motto for Hadleyburg instead might read *Beware Temptation, Endure Temptation, and Flee Temptation.* Hadleyburg (and for Twain, the human race,) has unwittingly fallen into temptation before the tale began, falls again in the course of the narrative, and sets itself up to fall again in the future.

From the opening exposition, Twain reveals that Hadleyburg's "honest" image to the "neighboring towns" led to jealousy where the outsiders "sneer at Hadleyburg's pride in it and call it vanity" (206). Perhaps these jeers never reached Hadleyburg's ears. If they had, their citizens would have availed themselves of the opportunity to disclose a potential "temptation" toward the sin of self-centeredness, for these disagreeable sentiments allude to a sickly morality behind their "incorruptible" honesty. Because they have isolated themselves from other impure communities, they never afforded themselves the ability to interpret others' opinions, however, "for Hadleyburg was sufficient unto itself, and cared not a rap for strangers or their opinions"—an offense that is a crime against wisdom (207).

Although the preceding paragraphs support the argument that "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg" is a satire against hypocritical religious communities, Twain's choice to employ the "mysterious stranger" trope allows him to veneer the narrative with additional layers of satire. This mysterious stranger's biblical heritage is established in part from The New Testament Epistle to the Hebrews where the author, in closing, exhorts, "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Hebrews 13.2). These first century comments hearken back to the account in Genesis of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah by two angels whom Lot welcomed into his home and, consequently, was saved (Gen. 19). The biblical lore surrounding the figure of "the mysterious stranger" would have readily been known to Twain through his Presbyterian upbringing in Hannibal, Missouri, and confirmed by his unrelenting religious satire and numerous scriptural allusions. But by highlighting their fallenness, Twain reminds readers that such strangers, if perturbed, are licensed to destroy. Thus, scholars often equate Twain's mysterious stranger with Satan (identified with the character of Howard L. Stephenson in "Hadleyburg") since, according to Gary Sloan, "Twain considered Lucifer-Satan morally

superior to Jehovah and Jesus Christ" (Sloan 82-83). From Sloan's perspective, Twain doubly damns Hadleyburg: first, for rejecting a stranger and possible angel; second, for following their pride into the stranger's schemes. Hadleyburg's failure is certain, as Earl F. Briden concludes, when "the town learns only a 'commercial' lesson from its experience: it merely adds cleverness, prudence, a cagey circumspection to its 'virtues'" (133). In this sense, Hadleyburg becomes a servant of Satan, the father of lies, by covering their false honesty with another layer of crafty mendacity. Ironically, they cannot see their choice is descriptive of a materialistic, deterministic universe.

Although "The Man" uses his foreknowledge of the town's corruptibility and comes to exact vengeance on the town, Twain never removes human agency from these characters, revealing that he never denies hope for humanity to embrace a moral ethic. In 1897, he writes, "It is more trouble to make a maxim than it is to do right" (*Tales* 200). Throughout his oeuvre, Twain seldom neglects to portray tension between his desire for morality to remain a true and guiding force upon humanity and his wavering optimism that humanity might attain this goal, however. During his final years, Twain's hope in humanity fades, tempered by an experiential sagacity when the moral tenor of his satire seems ineffective in provoking his readers to reform. Whereas sarcasm mocks, satire seeks a new path and potential reform. Yet problematically, marginalized satirists must continually rethink their medium or succumb to cynicism and despair. In 1899, the year he published "Hadleyburg," Twain was quickly becoming the most famous man alive (or at least most famous writer), so it would not be fair to consider him marginalized. Yet, while his humor in his earlier works tends to soothe his satirical disposition with amiable humor, the tone of Twain's later period darkens as he lifts the humor to fully unleash his satire against Hadleyburg and humanity. Written at the coming dawn of the twentieth century, this satiric message might have been

easily ignored by those readers more interested in celebrating a new epoch and proclaiming the greatness of American imperialism in its unprecedented successes during the Spanish-American War.

The Ironic, Iconic Huck as a Character for Contemplation

Begun more than twenty years before "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg," the more humorous, but no less satiric and much darker, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* illustrates Twain's growing use of satire and irony to move readers beyond a humorous reaction to a point of contemplative reflection. For Huck, his novel seemingly opens with new beginnings. All his former chicanery is erased in the opening with the harmless greeting, "You don't know me," as the narrator reminds readers of his former experiences in the "mostly true *Adventures of Tom Sawyer*" (7). Now wealthy from the reward he and Tom receive at the end of the previous novel and liberated from the tyranny of Pap Finn, Huck is brought under the tutelage of the Widow Douglas, Miss Watson, and Judge Thatcher. It would seem, however, that Huck's conscience is not reborn but grows only in fits and spurts. Admitting that the truth of his past is jaded by "stretchers," which he blames on Mark Twain, Huck discards civilization the moment he can no longer tolerate "how dismal regular and decent the widow is in all her ways" (7). In the second paragraph of the novel, Huck runs away from home and returns only when Tom exhorts him to "go back" and "be respectable." Still on the opening page, Huck's fickle conscience crumbles and his old nature desires to flee to "my old rags and my sugar-hogshead again," yearning to be "free and satisfied." The lunacy of Huck's desire to live in a barrel *should* jar the reader when juxtaposed to the widow's kindness – her gifts of new clothes and food at her table. While his entertaining, albeit rude, rejection of her hospitality and his mockery of religion solicit the

reader's guffaw, Huck's behavior symbolizes his role as a figure not for emulation but for contemplation, for Huck's antics and his consequent character development spark the reader's reexamination of American cultural attitudes.

An exhaustive study of *Huckleberry Finn* would trace how each scene provides moments for reflection and evaluation. For example, Huck's struggle with religion and the person of God captures the cultural dichotomy between legalistic hypocrisy and salvific grace, between nineteenth-century revivalist Calvinism and mainline sentimental social-gospel spirituality; it shows Twain's prodding to reevaluate and redefine the role and value of religion in America. Against Miss Watson's religion of rules and dogmatic morality, Huck stands askant while a sentimental spirituality such as the widow's or even Jim's is tolerable and harmless, and thereby welcome. Twain focuses the dominant nineteenth-century religious ideologies in Huck's sights to highlight their inconsistencies, which readers should evaluate in turn, since Huck isn't poised to do so. Yet his portrayal of the Widow Douglas's and Miss Watson's divergent spiritualties opens wide a unique window into nineteenth-century American religion. Here, the reader must determine the real value placed on religion and spirituality.

Huck, for example, rejects a religion of prescribed behaviors and vacillates when presented with the widow's religion of "convenient" grace. For instance, he "wanted to smoke," but the widow prohibits his "vice," declaring it "a mean practice…[that] wasn't clean" (8). Huck's response reveals his shallow immaturity as he mocks those who "get down on a thing when they don't know nothing about it" (8). Huck bolsters his outburst against imposed restrictions by divulging the widow's snuff habit. Yes, the widow is seen as a hypocrite for denying Huck a smoke, but Huck himself is never regarded as a virtuous truth-teller. Both the widow and Huck have been caught in deception, and Twain removes the

moral distinction from Huck's limited, here-and-now perspective and presents it for the reader's appraisal.

These are just a few of the many examples that establish how, from the beginning of the novel, Huck's moral sense is not to be emulated, not only because he rejects "the good place" (his euphemism for heaven) merely to spite Miss Watson's civilizing, but also because he has rejected the wisdom of history. Huck's hasty disregard for "Moses and the Bulrushes" de-centers his potential to voice either knowledge or wisdom (7-8). If our hero "don't take no stock in dead people," he cannot be trusted to learn from the past. He, consequently, isolates himself within his own limited experience and denies himself both the wisdom of the ages and the perspective of others. In the epigraph to chapter sixteen of *Following the Equator*, Twain unveils a modern application for history, which may have been invaluable to Huck: "There is a Moral Sense, and there is an Immoral Sense. History shows us that the Moral Sense enables us to perceive morality and how to avoid it, and that the Immoral Sense enables us to perceive immorality and how to enjoy it" (161). Twain never nullifies culture's need for morality, but subordinates it to enjoying life. Here again, his wit forces readers to contemplate history either as a moral teacher building virtue, or as a trickster disclosing pleasurable escapes. While it would seem that Huck might desire this sensual enjoyment, he has prohibited this possibility by defaming the wisdom of history. These questions on the purpose and value of history remain for the reader's contemplation, inspired by Huck's ignoble attitudes.

As the narrator in his novel, Huck Finn functions similarly to the persona of Mark Twain in his travelogues, wherein the narrator trains readers to see the world through his eyes, descriptively as well as interpretively. While these journeys were real for Mark Twain, Huck's travelogue on the Mississippi is for Twain and readers "reality lite" (Paul Bloom 169-

71). From the privileged "laboratory" vantage point of Socratic irony and dramatic irony, readers can imaginatively live through Huck's "irreverent" and "ungrammatical" antics. The readers' experiments can avoid the pitfalls that motivated the Concord librarians to ban the book; they can discover that the feelings and insights need not be imaginary, but can themselves become reality when we make the final links satire demands between the supposed world of the text and the actual world we inhabit.

As another example, through Huck's return from capering with Tom's gang in chapter three and his encounters with his caregivers, Twain presents two polarized religious perspectives, again without narratorial moralizing. The widow elicits obedience from Huck though revealing her worry and concerns while helping him clean up instead of scolding him. Her compassion rings dissonant with Miss Watson, who drags him into the closet to pray and instructs him in a form of vending-machine, push-button prayer, which only frustrates Huck when he sees through its mendacity. For after Huck does not receive what he prays for, he deconstructs Miss Watson's theology, by concluding that her doctrine of prayer also has yet to work for anyone else. In rejecting Miss Watson's fallacious piety, he dismisses the widow's doctrine of praying for "spiritual gifts" as having "no advantage about it – except for the other people" (15). Huck is unable to reason beyond his immediate desires, which foreshadows the narcissism of the King and the Duke and parallels a possible career for an adult Huck. At this point early in the novel, Huck's logic seems to hold credence as he has yet to encounter the violence and heartache caused by such self-centeredness, like that which will destroy the Shepherdsons and Grangerfords (scenes explored in detail in chapter six). Through these episodes, Twain gives the reader an opportunity to observe moral distinctions, not through didacticism but by portraying a flawed spirituality and giving his readers an opportunity to express empathy for Huck.

An interpretation of Huck Finn's developing moral sense in the novel must be carried out with the same careful precision that theologians for the past millennia have employed to extract key moral concepts from the problematic biblical narratives (such as "Samson and Delilah" or "Abraham's Sacrifice of Isaac"). Clemens himself notes as much in a 21 November 1905 letter to Asa Don Dickinson, then director of the Sheepshead Bay Branch of the Brooklyn Public Library. Dickinson had written Twain notifying him that The Superintendent of the Children's Department had ordered that all copies of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* be relocated to the adult collections, effectively banning them from the children's collection. The sarcasm of Twain's reply pointedly satirized his American readership and their unwillingness to trust that readers, even children, can make shrewd interpretative distinctions about the morality of characters:

> I am greatly troubled by what you say. I wrote Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn for adults exclusively, and it always distresses me when I find that boys and girls have been allowed access to them. The mind that becomes soiled in youth can never again be washed clean; I know this by my own experience, and to this day I cherish an unappeasable bitterness against the unfaithful guardians of my young life, who not only permitted but compelled me to read an unexpurgated Bible through before I was 15 years old. None can do that and ever draw a clean sweet breath again this side of the grave. Ask that young lady—she will tell you so.
>
> Most honestly do I wish I could say a softening word or two in defence [*sic*] of Huck's character, since you wish it, but really in my opinion it is no better than those of Solomon, David, Satan, and the rest of the sacred brotherhood.

> If there is an unexpurgated Bible in the Children's Department, won't you please help that young woman remove Huck and Tom from that questionable companionship?

Instead of challenging these bans, Twain places his as better than other canonical texts that are now *only fit to be read by adults*, namely the Bible. The irony within these statements presents the reader with a logical binary to either remove the Bible and Twain's works from children or permit them both to be read. Twain's assumption is most likely that the woman who removed his books from her collections would be abhorred to remove the Bible from her shelves, but he also is playing on the ironic notion that his works are akin to scripture, though his are less psychologically damaging, and, second, that he as an author can have less authority on his work than the "sacred personages" reverenced by Christians, amongst whom Twain notably has included Satan, calling into question the credence that readers of the Bible place in these characters.

Indeed, for Twain, the problematizing of Huck's character is no different than these problematic readings of the Bible, both of which require readers to accept that interpretation requires intelligence and nuanced hermeneutics. No story should be read solely to either extreme of its binary's moral imperative. Instead, these stories, including *Huckleberry Finn*, become an invitation to evaluate American cultural values, applying a moral analysis that educational theorists refer to as the highest level of learning and thinking (theories established by Benjamin Bloom in 1956) (Popham 100-01). Thus, as Huck Finn presents a spiritual attitude divergent from those normative in Twain's culture, the reader is ripely positioned to doubt Huck's claims and engage in moral debate. Contrary to his sharpest critics, Twain never intended Huck Finn to be our moral example. Instead, he directs readers to interpret *Huckleberry Finn* as a prophecy against America's desires and to evaluate the

condition and heading of, what he will elsewhere refer to as, "The Damned Human Race" (see essays such as "The Lowest Animal").

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn conveys several essential hallmarks of Twainian modal indirect satire. As in "Buck Fanshaw's Funeral" and "A Cat-Tale," Twain is amiable—always at play with language and metaphor, always cracking a joke. Twain is always looking for a reaction. But in *Huck Finn*—and in "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg" as well—he aims to show the readers how to see the world ironically and thereby arrive at new conclusions. The emotions raised are often unpleasant; the tensions he builds up are provocative and thought provoking; and the moral of his satire is obvious in its presence while ambiguous in its interpretation, inviting readers to join in the play and in the work.

CHAPTER FIVE

MARK TWAIN AND AMERICAN RELIGION: A PROTESTANT INSIDER, OUTSIDER, OR BOTH?

Throughout his literary career as son of Jane Clemens, husband to Livy, friend of the Reverend Joseph Twitchell, public performer, and literary persona, Mark Twain, the literary face of Samuel Clemens, plays both insider and outsider religious roles, often simultaneously, to push his audiences toward new possibilities of religious belief and practices. While assuming these varying postures, Twain claims a unique position as a satirist to speak to the specific problems regarding practices and beliefs in the American Protestantism of his milieu. When encountering Huck's rejection of Miss Watson's religion of rules in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* or Satan's mockery of practical theology in "Letters from the Earth," we might best characterize Twain's satire of religion as an assault on anthropocentric idiosyncrasies rather than a vitriolic attack on God himself. Through humor and subtlety, his satire shifts the onus onto the reader to moderate or even reject illogical forms of Christianity. The reader's return to a traditional form of Christian orthodoxy may not have been Twain's primary goal, however. In works such as *The Innocents Abroad,* Twain's pleasure in identifying the incongruities within a community with which he was personally well-acquainted may have been sufficient reason for his penning these satiric scenes. His critique and technique provide ample study for understanding the intersection of religion and satire in an age of tabernacle evangelism, wildcat religions, and social-gospel movements. In this context, the hilarity in Twain's work, which grows darker, more authoritative, and aggressive with maturity, provides a different type of "conscience" for American Protestantism.

Traditionally, the dominant scholarly perspective has tended to position Mark Twain as antagonistic to American Protestantism. However, the manner, matter, and aims of his satires can provide an alternative interpretation that presents Twain as an ironic, empathetic critic of his subject who seeks to develop less hypocritical and more authentic—from Twain's perspective—beliefs and practices amongst the adherents of both American Protestantism at large. In this manner, Twain inspires readers to deepen their self-reflection, particularly regarding the ways in which their beliefs and behaviors shape their aspirations, culture, and way of life. Problematizing this study, *authenticity* is, at least in part, defined by cultural and thereby subjective norms. Further complicating this situation, Twain is reticent to identify specific beliefs and practices that he deems authentic and thereby necessary for his readers to adopt and instead sets out to dismantle disingenuous beliefs and practices.

Twain's perspectives shift on these issues during his long career, and in its final decades, he confidently addressed issues quite absent in his early writings. He writes on topics as diverse as Darwinism, the age of accountability as it relates to infant baptism and damnation, the social gospel, global missions and imperialism, the woman question, the Negro question, Christian morality and ethics, and biblical interpretation. Twain's developing interest in many of these topics is readily accounted for in the many scholarly biographies. Stated concisely, Twain's growth as writer—from a local-color regionalist shaped by his experiences in the American South and West, to an established man of Hartford and New York, to eventually becoming one of the most recognizable faces and names in the world—gave him the experiences to view these issues from a variety of perspectives and with greater objectivity. Moreover, some specific life experiences deepened his personal interests. For instance, marrying Livy and raising their three daughters together made the abstract issue of women's roles and rights more immanent than it was during his bachelor days. Finally, many

of these issues, such as Darwinian evolution, Reconstruction, and imperialism, came of age with Twain. As he matured as a man and writer, Twain became more outspoken, liberal, and humane. This less parochial, more cosmopolitan Twain did not so much reject his former ideas as he moved beyond them. In this sense, he obtained a broader audience composed of many subgroups, was well-versed in their individual discourses, and addressed these groups from their boundaries. He can speak the discourse of the group which would identify him as an insider and thus move that audience to see the irony of their positions and practices and thus consider things from various positions, particularly those of an outsider. As a trickster, Twain revels in the flittering between these unstable positions.

Throughout his literary life, Twain combines satiric elements to respond with free-thinking veracity and an awareness of both insider and outsider perspectives on specific religious crises and cultural peculiarities faced by his readers. Idiosyncrasy permeates Twainian satire: the scope of his satire is shaped by his ethical realism (see Joe Fulton's monograph on the subject) and his cultural perspicacity and positionality; and the moral import of the satire is flavored by the interpretation of readers and their subjectivities. Nonetheless, Twain's moral vision is present. In this sense, whether writing direct or indirect satire, setting up Socratic ironies, or negotiating the nuances of ethical realism, Twain creates space for the reader to think new thoughts, reflect on the world, and recognize the incongruities that he addresses (ideas developed earlier). Figuratively, Twain's satires disturb the cobwebs and illuminate the moldy old furniture, but he lets the readers decide what to include in that newly emptied space, and to keep the reader honest, Twain revisits these sites to make sure that the wrong "furniture" has not been returned to that space. In other words, Mark Twain uses modal, indirect satire to pressure and shape the reader through an aesthetic

experience, leading the reader toward moral reflection and consequent decisions regarding the element on which Twain is writing.

Even the most cursory reading of Mark Twain removes any doubt that Mark Twain had strong feelings on American religion; however, the aims and philosophy behind those feelings as they shaped his literature have always been subject to scholarly and popular debate. Fresh approaches by Lawrence I. Berkove and Joseph Csicsila, Joe B. Fulton, and Harold K. Bush have investigated Twain's literary forms and lifelong relationships, respectively, highlighting an overarching affinity between the writer and the religious culture of his day. Their works temper the more pessimistic interpretations of Twain's religion offered by such renowned scholars as Everett Emerson and Hamlin Hill. Studied in contrast, such works reveal several scholarly threads that merit further study: *Was Twain an insider or an outsider to American Protestantism? Is it possible that Twain could hold both identities simultaneously? And how did Twain uniquely write satire as a means of shaping theology and religious practices in America?* (This last question will be the focus of chapter six.)

Mark Twain, in his religious satires, focuses upon ironic and incongruous behaviors in persons who identify with American Protestant communities. However, Twain's satires reflect more than the mere awareness of religious hypocrisy, for Twain desires to satirize religious persons both for inquiry into the motivations and desires behind ironic behaviors and for the pleasures such portrayals prompt (see Dustin Griffin's theories, previously discussed). Certainly, on the one hand, Twain writes direct satire to attack the mendacity deeply seated in various religious persons, postures, and practices, but this direct approach is only successful in categorizing a minority of Twain's uses of religious satires. Twain will, more frequently, satirize religious practices and persons because it serves a more humorous and altruistic mode of discovery and inquiry into who we really are, on the other hand. Thus,

when Twain uses an indirect satiric approach, the reader is left to redefine the moral's import behind Twain's intent. In *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Twain portrays Huck's actions and attitudes, however laughable, as dubious and beyond emulation, and these satiric scenes instigate contemplation. Thus, astute readers reform themselves, potentially. In these moments, Twain—as an empathetic, though at times, acerbic critic—can covertly speak inside the confines of religious norms to probe, challenge, and even redefine *those* norms. Throughout his work, Twain offers a forceful challenge to the dominant religious institutions that have grown irrelevant in his era and have become incongruous with prominent intellectual movements and unresponsive to social crises. He aims to reify the valued structures of American civilization, at least as Twain valued them, of which religion is but one part. When interpreted in this light, Twain's religious satires are the product of his moral vision as both friend to and critic of Christianity as he aims to spark reform by fostering essential doubt that builds authenticity into the minds and practices of religious adherents. The seminal tension in Twain's use of satire lies between the direct moral argument and the aesthetic exploration, discovery, and inquiry of indirect satire (see Charles Knight and Dustin Griffin). Nevertheless, Twain's aesthetic uses of satire serve as a pattern to position the reader to make moral observations and forge new decisions.

Beginning from this framework, Twain's socio-historical positionality expresses sympathetic, even empathetic, attitudes toward established religion. (This position is difficult to establish because biographers and literary scholars tend to look at the "when and where" in Twain's life before they tell you how he may have thought about religion, which leaves plenty of room for speculation and interpretation.) Yes, Twain's writing grows darker and more cynical throughout his lifetime, and, thus, it is easy to conclude that he becomes hostile and maligned towards all religion. Yet this argument leaves room for an alternative

understanding of Mark Twain as an empathetic satirist whose hope in humanity waned as his understanding of human existence became less idealistic and less sentimental and more realistic and pessimistic as he matured and aged.

In contrast, the traditional field of Mark Twain studies has tended toward portraying Twain as a religious outsider, at best, seeking to subvert or, worse, destroy nineteenth-century religious institutions and beliefs. This version of Twain is malevolent toward religion, and scholars cannot resist associating Twain with Satan, as several of his posthumously published narratives explore this character from several vantage points, most notably the first person. In recent years, several monographs have focused on the religious sides of Mark Twain and offered several new directions for Twain scholars. Breaking with the trend, Fulton's study of Twain's religious burlesque and Bush's critical religious biography together prompt many questions on the implications of Twain's positions as both a religious insider and outsider as well as on the purposes of art upon his audiences.

First, Joe B. Fulton's *The Reverend Mark Twain: Theological Burlesque, Form, and Content* (2006) offers "an organic approach, adopting the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin's attempt to unify formal and ideological approaches to literary analysis" joining it with "New Criticism and Russian Formalism" in his study of Twain's use of theological literary genres (e.g. the jeremiad or Hebraic prophecy) (xi). But Fulton, in analyzing Twain's adaptations of genres, seems to avoid the broader religious and intellectual world of Twain's readership and his reforming message. Most importantly, Fulton sidesteps around the pitfalls that studies on Twain's religious texts should avoid. As an example, Fulton explains, "This study ignores Samuel Langhorne Clemens's religious beliefs, instead considering Mark Twain's manipulations of theological form and content. Where Twain's eternal mail should be forwarded is an unanswerable question that leads nowhere, except perhaps in circles" (xii).

In addition to avoiding such theological red herrings, Fulton's scholarship engages with theory while remaining in a firm dialogue with Twain's canon.

In another exemplary work, *Mark Twain and the Spiritual Crisis of His Age* (2007), Harold K. Bush historicizes the religious practices of Samuel Clemens by examining his relationships with his parents, his wife Livy, Rev. Joe Twitchell, and neighbors such as the Beechers in Hartford (Harriet Beecher Stowe lived next door to the Clemenses). Bush, moreover, asserts that the easy temptation for scholars is to interpret the biting side of Twain's religious satire as evidence that he rejected Christianity. Instead, Bush argues that readers should understand that Clemens in fact lived out a life congruous with the late-nineteenth-century practices of Christianity: that when studying a person's beliefs, actions and utterances should be given equal weight. Bush also highlights possible influences of the Civil War, Reconstruction, and the Social Gospel movement upon Twain's shifting religious views while not ignoring those final "darker" years in which Clemens outlived many of his friends and family. Bush argues that scholars need to look at Twain's life and behavior to determine what he, in fact, posited about belief rather than fumbling to parse the truth statements of a humorist. While Fulton's and Bush's studies are helpful to understand Twain's form and context, neither explores in depth Twain's religious satire, leaving the field ripe for exploration.

One of the more recent, comprehensive biographies of Twain, Ron Power's *Mark Twain: A Life* (2005), offers to vindicate his image from the dark, sinister curmudgeon portrayed by earlier biographers such as Justin Kaplan, Bernard DeVoto, Everett Emerson or Hamlin Hill. But Powers seems to miss much of the irony in Twain's satire. For example, Powers interprets a quip from Twain's notebook, "If Christ were here now…There is one thing he would not be—a Christian" as pointing to "The seeds of [Twain's] contempt for

scriptural faith" (Powers 29). Alternatively, Powers leads to an ironic reading that, rather than identifying Twain's behavior as belittling of faith, it conveys a recognition of the incongruous nature between the Christian faith as practiced in his lifetime and the teachings of Christ in the Gospels. Twain would exploit these absurdities and others throughout his career; thus, his art and rhetoric take on a reforming role. Yet Powers disregards the accusations of apostasy that shaped Twain's reputation in the generations of scholars since 1910 and argues, "Mark Twain seemed often to behave toward that God less like a coldhearted nonbeliever than like a jilted lover. His torment was Job's torment, the transitory agony of one driven from the comforts of orthodox faith, who seeks a new faith system to fill the void" (Powers 31). The implications of Powers's argument, when applied in textual analysis of Twain's satire, unveil a portrayal of Twain that helps us see the tensions the satirist experienced when maturing beyond the impact that Missouri Methodism and Presbyterianism had on his early life and family. Powers, similarly, emphasizes the effect of Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason* upon Twain and identifies Paine as an empowering force liberating Twain to critique American Christianity without concomitantly embracing nihilism (Powers 81). Powers's reading validates the thesis that Twain's satiric critique is not so much directed against faith in God as toward popular theology and limiting conceptions of God.

This kinder representation of Twain motivates a fresh exploration into the manner, matter, and aims of Twain's satires. Portrayals of Protestant religious institutions and their leaders, late-nineteenth Protestant theology and biblical interpretation, and the daily practices of Christian families in their homes are abundant in his works. Consequently, any exploration of Twain's satires will also analyze both the modality (i.e. typology) and interpretative elements of various Protestant leitmotifs throughout his oeuvre. *The Oxford Companion to Mark Twain* in his entry on "The Bible," Greg Camfield concludes that, because

many Christians held to literal interpretations of the Bible and zealously touted their doctrine, Twain couldn't resist portraying the irony, humor, and illogical implications of their theology; thus, he returned to issues of religion as well as biblical retellings throughout his lifetime (51-53). Satire becomes a powerful tool for Twain to challenge fundamentalism. In the abovementioned categories, Twain's satires of religion pointedly attack mendacity, while more subtly challenging the naïve practices that predicate what he finds to be a humorous, albeit dangerous, *telos* for those practicing this kind of religious life.

Insider or Outsider? Twain's Complicated Relationship with Christian Religion

Returning to the other framing question for this chapter, one difficulty in interpreting Twain's religious satires originates in determining the degree to which Twain can be considered an insider or an outsider to American Protestantism. Twain's success as a satirist of American religion is derived from the fact that he is able to relate to the reader from his first-hand experiences in his childhood, second-hand experiences from his friends' and family's religious experiences, and third-hand experiences as an adult.

As previously discussed, these satires also find success in Samuel Clemens's creation of a narrator and persona—Mark Twain—who is both like and unlike his readers: alike in humility and temperament, but unlike, potentially, in his aims and vision for religious life in America. Twain as narrator is able to, on the one hand, convince the reader that he is one of them, but, on the other hand, to demonstrably challenge his audience. The tone and rhetoric in Twain's satires, moreover, communicate, *You and I are similar. Having been where you are, I'll give you literature that shows you how I see things and keeps you from staying where you are.* Yet Twain avoids going so far as to set himself or his characters up as a paragon for emulation, except that Twain has moved from a place of belief that should be revised based on a more

pragmatic epistemology. This insider-outsider dichotomy is not only part of Twain's realism, but, in his satires, also reveals his desire for his readers to embrace the truth of the human condition, in both our noble and damnable capacities—values both inherent in Christian doctrines of sinfulness and sanctification.

The emphasis Twain places on the genuine and on seeing truthfully is in keeping with the philosophy of realism, which William Dean Howells summed up in his 1891 monograph *Criticism and Fiction*: "Realism is nothing more and nothing less than the truthful treatment of material…" (73). The tendency of religion in Clemens's lifetime to romanticize or idealize, especially to the point that it distorts the truth, is a firm target of his satire (explored in detail in the coming analysis of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *Extracts from Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven*, and "Letters from the Earth). Earlier works such as "Jim Smiley and His Jumping Frog" or *The Innocents Abroad* base much of their humor on the narrator (Mark Twain) and the reader's distinction between appearances and reality. Returning to Howells's essay, the above quote, having offered a succinct definition of realism, concludes with a complisult on the truthfulness in the English novel. Howells pens,

> …and Jane Austen was the first and the last of the English novelists to treat material with entire truthfulness…It is not a question of intellect, or not wholly that. The English have mind enough; but they have not taste enough; or, rather, their taste has been perverted by their false criticism, which is based upon personal preference, and not upon principle; which instructs a man to think that what he likes is good, instead of teaching him first to distinguish what is good before he likes it. (73-74)

(Remember that Howells is responding to nineteenth-century Romantic and Victorian Novelists such as the Brontë sisters, Charles Dickens, and William Makepeace Thackeray.

Howells and Twain have very little aesthetically in common with these writers.) Twain, too, would repeatedly offer unabashed, poking critiques of other cultures (the French and German receive a bashing); but in this judgment, his longtime friend provides a lens for interpreting Twain's satiric aims. Without acknowledging the modernist assertion that "truthfulness" itself is marred by perspicacity and subjectivity, Howells reveals the problems in art and culture that foreclosed, even prejudiced, notions of what makes something a faithful representation. The English novelists, according to Howells, are not intentionally mendacious but rather have predetermined what reality and truth look like—romanticized it, in a sense—and thus cannot create realistic nor truthful representations when starting from this faulty premise. This ironic aesthetic, rooted in the romantic fallacy, motivates the realism of Howells and Twain. The satires by realistic authors are generally more amiable and indirect because they aim to awaken readers to new perspectives—after all, Howells's novels are seen by concomitant writers as "teacup tragedies," seeing in them a higher verisimilitude than traditional (and more romanticized) notions of tragedy (see Frank Norris's 1896 essay "Zola as a Romantic Writer").

Motivated by this principle, Twain's satires of religion are much more benign—a call to awaken and see anew, not so much as a rejection of the establishment as much as a reconceptualizing of it—and fashion Twain as a friendly reformer, rather than as an apostate or enemy. His outsider stances and antagonizing personality are part of his trickster persona, part of the ways of teaching readers to read ironically.

But this theory runs counter to many esteemed Twain's scholars. Everett Emerson argues in his essay "Mark Twain's Quarrel with God" that much of Twain's later work moves beyond a criticism of human constructions of the deity to comment on the deity's malevolence (43-44). To qualify this argument, Emerson primarily examines Twain's

posthumously published works. Yet a satirist's unpublished works may reveal more about his imagination than satiric aims; thus, the materials Twain intended for publication provide a clearer understanding of his satiric and cultural aims. Regarding these materials, Emerson concludes that early in his career, "…Clemens condemns…what he understood to be a false attitude towards God…" (38). Regardless of which Twain *you* see when you read his satiric sketches, Emerson's definitions seem to firmly place Twain in the role of an outsider commenting on religious practices in America. Without addressing the nuances of Emerson's argument at this point, it is nonetheless important to see that one vein of Twain scholarship clearly identifies him as a religious outsider.

Harold K. Bush in *Mark Twain and the Spiritual Crisis of His Age*, however, considers that Twain is intimately familiar with and invested in the religious world of the nineteenth century. In his introduction, Bush writes,

> Twain's literary achievement is often directly indebted to the Social Gospel's vision of cosmic hope, and Twain's use of hopefulness greatly complicates his view of the profound fallenness of humanity. The overall impact of Mark Twain's religious experience on his personal life and writings, and in particular the genteel Congregationalism that was the center of post-Civil-War Connecticut and New York, has been underestimated—an oversight that has hampered attempts at coming to grips with Twain's artistic achievement. But our critical oversight may owe as much to a recalcitrant unwillingness to stretch our concept of what really counts as "religious." … In this context, Twain becomes a much more "religious" figure than he is traditionally thought to be. And the story of Mark Twain's engagement with the "spiritual crisis of his age" will invite us to see his literary and public

> career in an entirely new light—as a profoundly moral and religious one. (Bush 18-19)

As Bush's argument unfolds, Twain's character can be seen to express an insider position with regards to American religion as a man with deep interest in its moral and spiritual wellbeing.

The inklings of Twain's ironic stance toward Christianity (similar to Kierkegaard's) can be traced to the early years of the career. Clemens's oft-quoted letter of October 1865 to his brother Orion may help to reconcile the bicameral view of Twain as both religious insider and outsider. In this letter he writes,

> I never had but two *powerful* ambitions in my life. One was to be a pilot, & the other a preacher of the gospel. I accomplished the one & failed in the other, *because* I could not supply myself with the necessary stock in trade—i.e. religion. I have given it up forever. I never had a 'call' in that direction, anyhow, & my aspirations were the very ecstasy of presumption. But I *have* had a "call" to literature, of a low order—i.e. humorous. (*Mark Twain's Letters* vol. 1, pg. 322 qtd. in Fulton 7-8; The Mark Twain Project, UCCL 00092)

What would it mean if we were to read Clemens's use of "a preacher of the gospel" ironically? It would still mean that Clemens understood the various roles of clergy and from the inside. Problematically, he focuses on needing a certain amount of "religion" to be a preacher, yet he seems to lament, perhaps sarcastically, that he didn't receive this "call," didn't get "the necessary stock in…religion." This commercial metaphor of "stock in trade" connects the religious life with quantifiable certainty in substance (stock) and ambition (call), "stock" meaning sermons and religious writings and "the call" as the will to preach. Here Clemens associates the life of the clergy with the requirements of the community for having

a "call." (While this paragraph could be interpreted as Clemens not seeing in himself the necessary requirements that religious practice demands of all Christians, namely faith or belief, consider an alternative: in the statement "I have given it up forever," the referent to "it" could be the immediately preceding noun, "religion," which implies that he lacks faith; however, the statement more probably refers back to his "ambition" or "call" to be a preacher, the other "life ambition" that is truly unattainable. The letter focuses on Clemens's vocation and a statement to his brother about giving up on religion altogether would have necessitated more explanation than Clemens gives here.)

In this letter to Orion, Clemens's definition of the clergy implicitly raises questions: *Where, then, do these religious communities find a role and position for those who do not have the requisite amount of a particular type of faith and religious trappings?* In identifying the tensions at work in these communities, Clemens demarcates two unappealing results of the requirements of certain religious communities: on the one hand, their diction and rhetoric invites a level of impassioned religious preference (maybe even fanaticism) for those who can articulate their "call" and provide evidence by "the stock in trade"; on the other hand, those who do not have these prerequisites (i.e. those without a religious "call") are diminished in the community's esteem and pushed into a position of outsiders, whether inadvertently or intentionally. But this new position does not necessarily remove insider desires, knowledge, and experiences. The letter's irony, moreover, intensifies, as seen in the manner through which Clemens chooses to position himself in relation to the "preferred" religious life: namely, that he prefers his lowly call to a life of creating humorous literature, perhaps because therein he has acquired ample "stock." He can peddle jokes, but not faith.

When Twain is writing this letter to Orion, nothing he had written or done up to this point would indicate his future greatness. He was on the cusp of it, certainly, for at the time

he had been working on "Jim Smiley and His Jumping Frog," which Artemus Ward would submit to *The Saturday Press* for publication in the 18 November 1865 issue, one month after his letter to Orion and eleven months before he would take the stage in San Francisco for his first lecture at Maguire's Opera House on 2 October 1866 (qtd. in Barbara Schmidt). Twain's career as a writer and lecturer mirror the life of a preacher, in at least these two respects, as a person of letters and a public speaker. But he was certainly resisting the preacher image.

In his analysis of Clemens's October 1865 letter to Orion, Joe Fulton, in *The Reverend Mark Twain*, sees evidence of a theological burlesque, which Clemens would develop throughout his literary career, playing with the forms of the dominant religious literary genres of his day (e.g. prophecy, hagiography, hymnody, etc.) in reverential and irreverent tones (8). As Fulton writes, "To be called a writer, but not a minister, Twain depicted his work as an author in theological terms, humorously describing himself as a preacher, prophet, and even saint" (Fulton 8), though Twain certainly would be an atypical preacher. As biographer Ron Powers recounts, in 1867 an inebriated Twain arrived at the New York City booking office of *The Quaker City* and was introduced by his friend Edward House as "The Reverend Mark Twain," a Baptist minister from the Sandwich Islands and San Francisco—an image quite in keeping with this multifaceted persona (185). Much like the dual identity between Samuel Clemens the man and Mark Twain the authorial persona, his religious satires can variably be interpreted as an insider's desire to see Americans possess a proper value of spirituality—"proper" as defined by Clemens's newly adopted middle-class, Victorian, cosmopolitan, religious liberalism—or as an outsider's assault to transform popular definitions of "proper spirituality." In this manner, when speaking to both audiences, both perspectives simultaneously apply.

Was Twain an insider or an outsider to American Protestantism? Yes, Twain himself claims both identities. When using religious language, as seen in this letter to Orion, Twain identifies both with religious insiders (the desire to preach) and on the fringes of religion (not having "the necessary stock"). The burgeoning writer would not have missed the commonalities between these parallel, though at times divergent, roles. As a moralist and critic, Twain anticipates both audiences: first, as a writer of sermons (an insider role), to produce a literature that creatively sermonizes and speaks from within the community and with the norms of the community; and, second, as a writer of humor that challenges those norms in favor of new ones. If Mark Twain is waxing ironical about his use of humor, it could also be true that he saw his calling as having social importance, not unlike the work of a preacher, with whom he compares his "call." Rather than Twain seeing a man of letters as an "anti-preacher," these two callings in fact may be more analogous than antagonistic.

Certainly, Twain heaps criticism on both those inside and those outside a religious community, but with this bicameral perspective, Twain can position his satires to speak to a broader audience; with greater complexity, nuance, and ambiguity; and with multiple interpretations and implications. Such characteristics certainly heighten the reader's aesthetic experience and provide Twain with a more malleable and, thereby, potentially receptive audience. Thus Twain, whether musing theological or caricaturing daily religious life, moves freely between insider and outsider positions. His religious satires, though characterized by ambiguity and avoiding resolution, speak with both affection and anger to force readers to reconsider their relationship with the subject of the text. Because the satirist leaves much of the interpretative work to the reader, understanding the triangulated relationships between the satirist, the audience, and issue satirized can make clearer the various entendres and

ironic readings in the satiric moment. Each of these relationships lies along its own continuum, which must be determined to establish any interpretation.

Although Mark Twain's relationship to his socio-religious milieu is difficult for scholars to map, R. Laurence Moore's article "Insiders and Outsiders in American Historical Narrative" (1982) raises helpful questions that, when applied to Twain, enable a clearer understanding of his changing religious positions. Moore inquires, "Were spiritualists inside the nineteenth-century mainstream (because they created a broad popular movement) or outside it (because they constantly emphasized the powerful opposition they aroused)?" (391). The intrigue of this question originates in the possibility that for some spiritualists, the answer is *yes* to both. This question is not necessarily best resolved with mutually exclusive, either-or answers. In applying Moore's analytic lens to Mark Twain, we can envision how this satirist simultaneously functioned in both insider and outsider roles: bolstering certain forms of belief and behavior while challenging others.

The arguments in R. Laurence Moore's article and subsequent monograph *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans* (1986) inform the terms "insider" and "outsider" appearing in this project. In this later volume, Moore develops his insider-outsider thesis by analyzing a series of American religious groups that found a foothold in a socio-religious context that many scholars assume grew out of New England Puritanism and developed into mainline Protestant groups (vii-xv). Many of these groups Moore studies—Mormons, Catholics, Christian Scientists, etc.—were vehemently satirized by Twain, but Moore also examines the growth of American popular religion as well as the unique spirituality of African-American communities. Moore argues that the labels of insider and outsider are often problematic because when he was writing in the 1980s, the dominant form of historiography focused on establishing a consensus history, which often worked to minimize

the relationship between an individual and a nationally hegemonic identity or a subaltern identity (Moore, "Insiders and Outsiders" 392-96). Moore uses the terms "insider" to refer to those whose voice is authorized and "outsider" for those seen as aberrant by the hegemonic forces in a society and its culture ("Insiders" 394-95). Moore's answer to the homogenization of American cultural nuance is to see multiple identities functioning within the individual. Moore is writing, in part, about the value of multicultural historiography when he concludes,

> After all, historical outsiders usually saw themselves as fitting stereotypical roles of heroes or victims, though not, perhaps, of villains. And many defined themselves as social radicals, or as persecuted martyrs, or as alienated underdogs. But the trouble is that outsiders quite commonly assumed all of the identities at once. Historians have no trouble quoting John Brown in ways that show the famous abolitionist analyzing himself as a victim, a hero, or a crazed fool. Before quoting words that emphasize one identity at the expense of another, however, they have good reason to think about why outsider rhetoric—or, alternatively, insider rhetoric—allows such a variety of interpretations. The rhetoric is not simple, and seldom does it in any easy way provide confirmation of or negate the points that historians often want to make in their narratives. (Moore, "Insiders and Outsiders" 396)

Moore argues for an organic unity to each speech act, even when it challenges the deductive conclusions and complicates the coherence of a speaker's identity. In the decades since Moore's work, it seems common sense to acknowledge that human beings readily assume various roles according to the needs of each situation's rhetorical goals within their discourse communities. In this sense, Moore confirms that a satirist could also be seen as an insider in

one community and an outsider to another and could position himself or herself to function, or at least to appear to function, in both roles simultaneously, as is the case for Mark Twain, particularly in regards to his portrayals of religion in America.

Moore's ideas are echoed by the work of Charles A. Knight in *The Literature of Satire* (2004) wherein he unpacks the metaphors of nationalism and exile to demarcate "the relationships between the position of the observer [the satirist] and the historical reality of the material observed [the satiric matter]" (50). The questions that Moore and Knight independently raise seek to identify how the speaker's relationships to his or her socio-religious or socio-political milieus affect the manner in which the speaker can and does address specific problems in specific ways, an essential step toward determining a speaker's insider-outsider positionality. Yet this inquiry is complicated further when the genre or mode of speech is satirical since satire, and all art, is rooted in and reflects its culture. Knight asserts that, while satire should be seen as representative of those events, unlike other forms of art, it must also

> …establish a distance from it and to reveal its false elements. Satire both explores and reflects the gaps and contradictions of its culture; it is both critic and representative of those contradictions. It attacks ideology but cannot escape them or avoid the implicit expression of alternative that may exist only within the text. It may subvert the ideologies it seems to express. (Knight 50-51)

Thus, as Twain satirizes religion and as satire relies on the absolute infinite negativity of irony (see earlier section on Kierkegaard), he complicates the conversation by allowing the validity of both insider and outsider perspectives while simultaneously destabilizing them with irony and doubt. To write effective satire requires dialogical, bimodal discourse. Or as

Knight concludes, satire is an imperfect form in that it must rely on the cultural rules and forms to criticize that culture (Knight 51). Furthermore, the need for the satirist to control a seemingly incontrollable situation moves the satirist to resort to the tools of indirection, ambiguity, irony. The uses of these tools are justified since, as Knight writes, "The construction of satiric frames becomes a means of avoiding the traps implied by the uncomfortable fact that neither language itself nor the vocabulary of literary forms can fully escape the limitations of the culture they seek to attack" (51).

In satire, the relationship of speaker, audience, and message is not only complicated by the ambiguity about whether insider or outsider messages should be preferred, but it is also confounded by the blurring of fiction and nonfiction and the mimetic and metaphoric implications for the reader. Knight offers a general model for understanding the problematic relationship amongst the satirist, the reader, and the context:

> The real (historical) author, responding to a particular set of circumstances that embody general problems or principles (or a real author fortuitously finding general principles represented by a particular set of circumstances), constructs analogous but fictional conditions described by the fictional observer (who may or may not be a constructed version of the original author). Readers must resist the temptation to see such fictional observers […] as realistic, for the discovery of meaning may be a product of that resistance. Meanings emerge when readers see fictitious observers as constructs undertaken to identify and analyze problems and to warn of their dangerous consequences; readers can then postulate the plausible or likely intentions of a real author behind the fictional text. (Knight 51)

Knight's rubric for positioning the author, reader, and satire reveals the problem that occurs when readers choose singularly to biographize and historicize the satire rather than fictionalize a work in order to read it philosophically, figuratively, or aesthetically. It is too easy to be distracted by reading satire allegorically, but those "neat" or "clever" parallels may give a false satisfaction. The imperative question of satire, then, is to first discern the undergirding principle or problem that the satire is exploring. But the riddle of satire is not so uneasily unraveled. And the indirection, in which lies satire's strength, is also its Achilles' heel, for it allows creative and secretive ways to attack the problem, but its meaning can be lost in the secrecy and ambiguity, thus failing to achieve its satiric aims. In this case, Clemens's nom de plumes and first-person narrators (e.g. Mark Twain himself, Huckleberry Finn, Hank Morgan of *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, Sieur Louis De Conte in *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc*, or *Satan* in *"Letters from the Earth"*) provide readers with such an observer to model how they might contextualize meaning to their immediate surroundings. And although it has the potential to fail as a vehicle to communicate its tenor, satire's strength originates in its invitation for the reader to play a unique interpretive role in establishing possible satiric context and meanings, as Knight argues in the final sentence of the above quote. In this sense, readers of satire are pressured to acknowledge that the interpretation of a satiric work is contextual, not in terms of identifying the people and events represented in the satire, but in connecting the fictional problems with his or her own positionality; thus, the "realest" (most real world) elements of the satire are located in the reader's discernment of problems and principles as well as in the reader's interpretation and subsequent actions. Referring back to Kierkegaard's concept of "absolute infinite negativity," satire, and all irony for that matter, always deconstructs itself. If an art form is inherently unable to fully communicate a message, then an author may have chosen it intentionally

because it achieves a different goal. Or as Knight argues, satire as a genre demands a reader's response in shaping an interpretation, and such a response pushes the reader to actually make changes in his or her life or at least assume some ownership over the issues being discussed. Reading satire becomes more than an amusement. It becomes transformational.

While scholars must seek to determine the relationships between the satirist, the audience, and the context (taking into account the implied and ideal readers for the content and the actual reader from the context), Knight doubts the ability to arrive at certain interpretations and instead inquires how the "satirist and readers can make serious judgments" when uncertainties and fallibilities are further beset by intentional indirection and irony (51). For Knight, the point of satire, then, is not primarily to establish shared values, beliefs, and actions between the satirist and the reader; instead, the goal is "shared recognitions," even if that recognition is accomplished not by "universal" value but instead by relative values accomplished through the portrayals and relationships established in the rhetoric and in the art (51-52). Satire then moves the readers to participate in various ways of seeing reality. Rhetorically, it seeks to move readers to the satirist's point of view, whether insider or outsider, hegemonic or subaltern. It becomes an artistic and pleasurable means to philosophize about culture and society, and, though satire is not limited to these two realms, they are often the immediate topic of satire, especially in the writings of Mark Twain. Thus, successful satire is dynamic and, like all art, aims to engage its audience in a manner that will shape their perceptions of reality, their conceptions of the self, and, ultimately, their behaviors (Knight 51-52).

Satiric Nationalism and the Insider Identity

Since the reader functions in a greater interpretive role for satire than for other genres, Knight argues for the importance of establishing the relationship of the satirist to his or her milieu. To identify the positionality of the satirist, Charles Knight places him or her on a nationalistic-exilic continuum, that demarcates how closely the satirist aligns with the satiric subject. A distinction that compliments Moore's study of insights in insider and outsider identities, Knight's labels of "nationalistic" and "exilic" serve as a framework for interpreting the cultural and social boundaries that are established, however implicit or explicit, by a group of people (52). These commonly held boundaries are prime demarcations along which a satirist might position his or her work and ideas (52). This heuristic can help explore when Twain's satiric voice raises religious issues from an insider-nationalistic position, speaks as an exiled outsider, or assumes a position that seems to sound both voices simultaneously.

As Charles Knight explains it in *The Literature of Satire*, "Satiric nationalism looks at a nation from the critical or sympathetic position of a member of that nation. Satiric exile looks at both the nation that had been the exile's home and the nation in which the exile now lives from the position of an outsider" (52). Knight's definition of nationalistic satire emphasizes the role of the satirist in reifying and refining the hegemony; conversely, exilic satire is always looking from the outside to challenge and critique the "nation" that, for whatever reason, caused the satirist to be positioned outside the hegemonic powers, making the writer now remember that former world, however inaccurately, and attempt to understand that world and his or her new position. These boundaries are necessarily malleable, with satire being one of the means for moving that boundary, but satire can also serve to defend these boundaries. In fact, identifying the nature of the satire as capable of

either reifying or repositioning a nation's boundary is not insignificant in understanding the position satire has within that context. As Knight expounds on this,

> The satirist may exercise a role as the voice of social responsibility, speaking on behalf of a communal consensus and excoriating those who have made themselves enemies of the people. […]. But in the case of satiric nationalism, this role is characteristically directed outside of the nation. The image of the guilty Other who represents the sins of the people is shifted from the scapegoat driven into the desert and becomes the image of another nation, another people. The work of satiric nationalism is to explore, sharpen, and complicate the image of the Other, or, more disturbingly, to see the satirist's own country as if it, in turn, were the Other (52).

Consider how Twain aligns with this definition of satiric nationalism: When read synecdochically, Knight's definition highlights Twain's intentional examination of religious teachings, behaviors, practices, etc., in America, which points out how people are behaving as "others" in ways atypical to standard American Protestant definitions. These readers and characters have positioned themselves outside of the "normative" standards, as Twain sees them, and he satirizes them, on the one hand, to admonish them to realign themselves with those religious behaviors he prefers. While on the other hand, he prompts those infractors to find a "Twain-approved" place that is within "nationalistic" (i.e. religious), insider, boundaries.

Before locating the satirist's socio-religious context within nationalism, it is helpful to establish a definition of "nationhood." At a foundational level, a nation is a group of people who identify as part of that nation, however subjective their rationale for membership, which accounts for traditional notions of race, ethnicity, locality, in their definition in less than

superficial ways (Knight 53). In his monograph, Knight establishes several variable characteristics that provide evidence of nationalism: among them include (1) a government that preserves a geographic place and the people therein, as opposed to a despot or monarch; (2) a common economy, language, religion, ethnicity; (3) clear demarcations from other nations, whether rivals or allies; (4) individuals maintaining personal investment in its well-being and, thereby, have responsibility in the nation; (5) a common currency and economic policy, which support and are supported by the nation; and (6) a pro-nationalistic ideology perpetuated through various institutions to promote loyalty to the people group (55). Using these definitions and applying them to the Golden Age of Satire in the England and France in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Knight goes on to argue that satire plays a pivotal role in constructing and shaping national identity. In other words, the writer's creation of satire and the reader's interpretation of satire shapes individual identity, which in turn shapes individual beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors, including religious ones.

This framework helps to explain the usefulness and aims of Twain's satiric elements when attempting to reshape religious beliefs and practices in America. For Twain participates in the reformation of America as a nation and in the reformation of those forces that threaten the success of that nation. An analogue can be found here to Mark Twain's anti-imperial satires of the *fin de siècle* that specifically critique American imperialism during the Spanish-American War and the subsequent annexation and colonization of former Spanish territories. Although thoroughly critical of American policies, Twain is comfortable attacking America in those areas where America fails to live up to the definitions established by her own nationalistic narrative. For instance, Americans have repeatedly returned to The Revolutionary War aphorism "no taxation without representation" as an essential justification for independence from the British Empire, yet in the annexation of the

Philippines, American imperial doctrine and practice was quick to disenfranchise the Filipinos from civil rights and self-government (see Twain's essay "To the Person Sitting in Darkness"). Twain was quick to satirize The United States Government for these policies, yet his motive was nationalistic, seeking to reestablish the essential democratic principles that defined American notions of nationhood.

Focusing the beam of Knight's definition of nationhood onto Mark Twain's portrayals of religious homes, communities, and institutions illuminates how the arts play an integral role in refining the demarcations of each sociological group, be it religious or otherwise. Knight concludes his definition of nationalism recognizing that, as a construct, nations primarily exist as fictions themselves: people believe them to be real, and it becomes the role of imaginative art, in this case satire, to create and reshape national identity by reifying or reforming commonly held values as well as working to shape the images of other nations (outsiders) and the self-image portrayed to other nations (58). The power of satire, Knight concludes, is located in its ability through attack to shape or reshape definitions, to create or disrupt homogeneity (58-59). (Knight's definition, however, which emphasizes the portrayal of nationhood and other nations, understates how satire's attack is also capable of reshaping the definition of a nation.) This demarcation is particularly helpful in understanding Twain's uses of religious satire: when portraying religious peoples, issues, and institutions, Twain reshapes both their personal and national notions of their behavior; he seeks to move them to a point at which they no longer define their religious identity and practices in a microcosm of American society but instead are repositioned to see how their ideas can be read and interpreted in a broader national context. In these moments, Twain's satires become a liberating force, not to disrupt and diminish religious practices, altogether, but to move these individuals beyond their own idiosyncrasies. To this end, Twain's

stereotyping and archetyping of institutions, individuals, interpretations, and behaviors all seek to establish a more "normative" practice. Caricature, lampoon, burlesque, etc.—these satiric techniques aim to motivate readers to investigate how the qualities they thought were positive are in fact unwelcome on a national stage because they do not fit the definition of nationhood, whether defined religiously or civically.

This liberating force of satire expands the understanding of Twain's relationship with religion: that Twain, rather than seeing religion as a crutch, sees in it an equal capacity to corrupt humanity as it can "cure" us. And what is needed is to model for people how to think and feel rightly (i.e. with right sentiment), which cures Huck from the "religious conviction" to tell the authorities that Jim is a runaway slave. Or to put it another way, while you may need morality and virtue, right thinking and behaviors, you don't really need religion, according to Twain (which in this sense does become a crutch for those who cannot see beyond it—but a valuable crutch, nevertheless). In *Huckleberry Finn*, Twain does not condemn all religious persons, like the Widow and the Judge, who believe with genuineness; however, he will poke fun at people like the Phelpses for what they do and think, but not for their honest belief. Humorous portrayals of the idiosyncratic do not always connote mockery. Twain's insights mirror his development from a Mississippi Midwesterner to a respectable Easterner to white-suited international figure. Twain's persona helps readers recognize how he is like them, how he understands them, and how his work provides a pathway for them to "reform" from their "religious" ways. All these place Twain as a writer of nationalistic, insider satire.

Satiric Exile and the Outsider Identity

While Twain certainly does exemplify the influential effect an insider has writing from a nationalistic point of view, Knight's exploration of exilic satire raises helpful contrasting questions that clarify Twain's aims and methods in his religious satires. It might also be helpful to consider Twain as a product of the transitions that Samuel Clemens negotiated as he, from the 1860s onward, grew more Eastern and cosmopolitan in his religious sentiments. From this perspective, Clemens experienced a type of self-imposed, and perhaps very welcomed, exile by removing and distancing himself from the varieties of American religious experiences on the frontier, at least exiled from the perspective of the Protestant Evangelical conservatives of his day who would determine the face of much of the Protestant American culture in Sam Clemens's childhood Hannibal, Missouri, in the 1840s and '50s. But Clemens did not simply distance himself from the religious world of his upbringing; rather, his marriage to Olivia Langdon in 1870 and their move to Hartford in 1872 placed him in position to associate with the more liberally minded residents of The Nook Farm neighborhood (Bush, "'A Moralist'" 68). In his introduction to *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, E. L. Doctorow writes that Twain's move to the Northeast had its costs: "The upwardly mobile Clemens was quick to understand both the opportunities and the obligations of his success. Received into the well-to-do Langdon family, he'd muted his views of Christianity and joined their daily prayers" (xxxii). Fortunately, limitations often prompt creativity; thus, the social necessity for Twain to restrain his irreverence may have become the catalyst that led to the production of his more mature, more artistic modal satires. The result was a more cosmopolitan, liberally-minded Clemens who had achieved an exile from his past, but it was a welcomed exile and self-imposed.

Aligning with Knight's description of exilic satire, excerpted below, Twain's works readily seem to fall into this definition because his work often speaks with aggression and negativity toward many religious traits; yet readers must be mindful that vitriol as such is quite in keeping with the nature of satire. Knight, in his exploration of exilic satire, argues the following:

> The satiric exile, in contrast [to satiric nationalism], stands outside of the nation. The exile is the satirist as outcast, the transgressive attacker, the despoiler of social harmony, the sower of discord and suspicion, the unwelcome observer who sees more about us than we perceive ourselves. Unlike the satiric nationalist, whose multiple perspective is an exercise of the imagination, the exile is forced to double vision by his exclusion from the country he had, with whatever ambivalence, thought of as home and by his arrival in a nation he cannot help [but] perceive as alien. This coerced vision gives a personal tone to the exile's satiric exploration of both nations. The dual countries of satiric nationalism and satiric exile parallel the dual location of the author as a historical person writing about historical particulars and as an imagined observer writing about imagined countries. (*The Literature of Satire* 52-53)

Twain's attempts to maintain these dual roles found success. Because Twain's "exile" is self-imposed, he possesses the ability to return to the religious communities of his former life, which is fortunate, for he then achieves a greater verisimilitude when portraying these persons, communities, and their beliefs—as when traveling on *The Quaker City* or building new relationships with the social elites in New York and Hartford—although his satires are certainly fictionalized portrayals that reflect a different, more urbane and religiously liberal

vision. Moreover, while Twain does "imagine" what these may be like, his satires are based on recurring experiences with those in these religious communities, which, furthermore, allows Twain's satire to be informed by the community while at times as an outsider speaking against it. An exilic perspective also lightens the irreverent tone of his satires and allows readers to approach them with an ironic, playful spirit. This bimodal quality of Twain's religious satires permits him to speak as an insider from within these communities and to support their values and, when he desires, to stand aloof as an outsider standing to speak against their hypocrisy.

We might also interpret Twain's religious satires as part of his desire to reform American culture and civilization, preying especially on the periphery of American spiritualism. On this point, Gregg Camfield comments that "…most of Mark Twain's remarks on spiritualism, mesmerism, faith healing, mental telegraphy, and the like are either open-minded explorations or simple caveats against confidence games" (Camfield 494). But Twain does not so much attack American religious communities and practices to enact a form of revenge upon those who have "exiled" him from a religious community; instead, he exhorts those who would see such myopic definitions of religious experience and praxis to broaden their ideas and thereby enter a more cosmopolitan, humanistic world. And yet Twain does express a religious "double vision" in his work. He satirizes a religious world that he once lived in and no longer, by his own volition, inhabits. His exilic-outsider position may in fact be a literary pretense to give his satiric, trickster voice an antagonistic flare. This explains why the attack of Twain's religious satires is not aimed at enacting revenge upon those with whom he once identified, as much as he aims to broaden definitions of what constitutes genuine religious experiences.

In volume two of his autobiography (2013), Mark Twain recounts in detail his debut as an audience volunteer for a traveling mesmerist's fortnight series of performances in Hannibal, in 1850 (2.297-300). As a boy, Sam tried for several nights with the other teenagers on stage to follow "the magician's" instructions (Twain's term), but he could not submit to the influence of mesmerism, or hypnotism as it is commonly known today. Over fifty years later, Twain recounts how at age fourteen he saw behind the magic and hijinks to become a performer himself:

> On the fourth night temptation came, and I was not strong enough to resist. When I had gazed at the disk a while I pretended to be sleepy, and began to nod. Straightway came the professor and made passes over my head and down my body and legs and arms, finishing each pass with a snap of his fingers in the air, to discharge the surplus electricity; then he began to "draw" me with the disk, holding it in his fingers and telling me I could not take my eyes off it, try as I might; so I rose slowly, bent and gazing, and followed that disk all over the place, just as I had seen the others do. Then I was put through the other paces. Upon suggestion I fled from snakes; passed buckets at a fire; became excited over hot steamboat-races; made love to imaginary girls and kissed them; fished from the platform and landed mud-cats that outweighed me—and so on, all the customary marvels. But not in the customary way. I was cautious at first, and watchful, being afraid the professor would discover that I was an impostor and drive me from the platform in disgrace; but as soon as I realized that I was not in danger, I set myself the task of terminating Hicks's [another volunteer and rival of Sam's] usefulness as a subject, and of usurping his place. (298)

As the mesmerist never let on that Sam was pretending, this night was only the beginning of their partnership, and after a few more nights, he was the sole volunteer on stage, where he contributed to the mesmerist's profitable series of performances (*Autobiography* vol. 2, p. 590). These experiences form the core of Twain's satiric ammunition—Twain listed this episode as possible material when composing *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and it echoes the "showmanship" of the king and the duke's "Royal Nonesuch." But the stagecraft in *Huckleberry Finn* has a disgraceful ending, pointing out that this anecdote from the *Autobiography* poignantly captures Clemens's adolescent discovery of the falsehood and outright mendacity behind many spiritual claims. Twain describes the aftermath of his short celebrity and reveals how it produced in him a deep distain for mendacity:

> It is curious. When the magician's engagement closed there was but one person in the village who did not believe in mesmerism, and I was the one. All the others were converted, but I was to remain an implacable and unpersuadable disbeliever in mesmerism and hypnotism for close upon fifty years. This was because I never would examine them, in after life. I couldn't. The subject revolted me. Perhaps because it brought back to me a passage in my life which for pride's sake I wished to forget; though I thought—or persuaded myself I thought—I should never come across a "proof" which wasn't thin and cheap, and probably had a fraud like me behind it. (302)

Sammy's glance behind the curtain does much to drive Twain's satires. But Clemens is not innocent of the deception he condemns, for the truth he learned is firsthand and reveals him playing trickster, walking the line between insider and outsider, nationalist and exiled. Twain comes by his double vision honestly, which when confessed, endears him to his audiences. Now with a guilty conscience, he has an emotional as well as logical motivation for his

satires and exclaims, "How easy it is to make people believe a lie, and how hard it is to undo that work again!" (302). Twain's multifaceted experiences and knowledge may motivate his response, while his complicity requires that his irreverence include a touch of *mea culpa*.

This anecdote also explains why Twain's satires are hard to label as either entirely nationalistic or entirely exilic, entirely insider or entirely outsider. Those who choose to believe that Sam was under the influence of the mesmerist and not performing his own improvisation will reject the truth with which they disagree, a group that included his mother, Jane. Thirty-five years later, when Twain confessed to her that his performance had been a ruse, "She refused to believe that I had invented my visions myself; she said it was folly: that I was only a child at the time and could not have done it," as Twain recounts it (301-04). Those from communities challenged by Twain's satiric vision may choose to resist liberalizing interpretations of his satires and read in them, instead, the voice of one outside the community who refuses to return to the community's standards of orthodoxy or homogeneity. (This theory may account for Concord Library's decision to ban *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.) But Twain generally does not level his pen at trivial minutia; such is not in keeping with the serious nature of satire. The foci of his satires are leveled on the "other" who already resides in a heterodox community or on the ironic behaviors that need to be portrayed in a new light. And for this reason, Twain carefully shapes his persona by limiting what audiences may see as "outside" the norm or unapproved behaviors so that he can still maintain a distant but real association with them.

By contrast, it may be helpful to compare how Twain aligns with Knight's theory of exilic satire, both when imposed upon the satirist as well as when the satirist chooses this identity, as in the case of the expatriate. While Twain may at times seem to be an exile in relation to and from the perspective of certain American religious subgroups, such exile is

self-imposed and resists the strict confines of Knight's definitions, in which a satirist is unlikely to return to his national community and thereby must imagine an idealized fiction around which to satirize his home community (81-82). Knight's definition, furthermore, ascribes within the very nature of the exiled satirist an "outsider status" that encourages attacks on the world from which he or she has been removed while at the same time carrying the hopes that those left behind will reason that the satirist has been exiled for unfounded reasons. Ironically, these exilic satires are always creating a fictional world based on the satirist's memories, however subjective and inaccurate, of a world that he or she no longer wishes to exist, that no longer exists in actual time, and that is built in a fictional secondary reality that stands the least likely chance of existing (Knight 81-94). Exilic satires tend to convey this bimodal goal of both conveying the bitterness and longing of a forlorn writer who wishes to attain a satiric revenge as well as a return to lovely parts of that former life (Knight 94-109). These competing tensions engage a third characteristic of exilic satire: that the desire to return cannot be achieved either because, in the case of the exile, you cannot "go back" to a past time and can only return to its present iteration, or because, in the case of the expatriate, you are unwilling to sacrifice your present location and reality for the sake of those formerly-loved things. Furthermore, if the satire's rhetoric does affect any substantial changes, then that world is altered—transformed by persons acting beyond the will and control of a satirist, whose limited power would appear muted and exhausted and yet is, nonetheless, propelled by some affection, curiosity, or moral aim.

While we can identify moments in which Twain's vitriol and affection complicate an attempt to locate his satiric aims, we would be unwise to propound that Twain is exclusively a "religious exile," a claim readily weakened by his participation in religious life in Hartford with Joseph Twitchell's Asylum Hill congregation (Powers, *Mark Twain*; Bush, *Mark Twain*

and the Spiritual Crisis of His Age). More importantly, Twain's ability to position himself as an outsider presents a narratorial posture that invites readers, many of whom would themselves identify as religious insiders, to see other possibilities for how their beliefs and daily practices are informed by religion.

In *The Innocents Abroad, or, The New Pilgrims' Progress*, Twain's first bestseller, he assumes both of these roles as insider and outsider, a nationalist yet exilic tourist. The travelogue follows the 1867 journey of *The Quaker City* and its pious passengers in their Mediterranean excursion to Europe and The Holy Land. On this voyage, Twain played roles in multiple communities. He drank champagne with cabin-mate Daniel Slote while the remainder of the passengers were attending regular prayer meetings and hymn-sings, according to biographer Justin Kaplan (39-40). He ridicules the "pilgrims" for asking if, whether on the sea or riding in Palestine, the entire group would stop for the Sabbath. Later he mocks them as "American Vandals" for chipping off fragments of every monument they visit and reading the guide books to determine what they *should* be feeling and how they *should* react to their experiences. Their need to memorialize their experiences while seeking external validation for their experiences made them ready prey for satire. Twain teased them for the reverence with which they honored those presumed holy places in rural, impoverished, immoral backwaters, places in which Twain found few redeeming qualities and ironically questioned whether this really was The Holy Land.

Mark Twain, based on his behavior, is worthy of the same ridicule he heaps upon the pious passengers, however. He is quick to jump ship and break quarantine for a chance to see the Parthenon, which he and three friends set out to conquer—by "Bribery and corruption" (337-53, 345). The sentiments of this adventure convey an enchantment that runs counter to the satire that informs many of the episodes: his exclamatory reactions to the

cathedral in Milan stand out prominently, though it is followed by the motif against the overabundance of relics, often the same relics (Milan has part of the crown of thorns; Notre Dame has an entire crown) (172-82). Thus, the satire functions modally and does not overwhelm this travelogue. Twain records other positive experiences, but they are informed by a genuine, anti-romanticized, anti-sensationalized sentiment. His modal satire here, and thereby irony and juxtaposition, humorously instructs readers how to feel and see by being their eyes and showing possible, and *American*, reactions to the vistas of The Old World.

Justin Kaplan cites a letter by fellow voyager Miss Julia Newell, who wrote (referring to either Samuel Clemens or Mark Twain) that "He is a rather handsome fellow, but talks to you with an abominable drawl that is exasperating. Whether he intends to be funny for the amusement of the party I have not yet ascertained" (qtd. in Kaplan 41). Kaplan extrapolates from Newell's comment to represent the general uncertainty on Twain's attitudes: "Neither she nor most of the others would, in fact, know whether he was amusing them or making fun of them" (41). This realization points to the power of Twain's persona: skirting the line between ally and antagonist, he is like and unlike his readers, yet remains a perennial companion.

Helpfully, Knight clearly distinguishes between exiled satirists and expatriated satirists: the former unable to return and unwelcomed by established authorities, but the latter able to return by choosing not to (81-82). But Twain, in choosing self-exile, invites the readers of his satires to adopt a similar point of view of the exile, opening paths toward a new, "narrative" way of being. Readers, too, can choose self-exile from irony and hypocrisy, maybe to find authenticity. Consider, then, how Twain, when writing on religious issues, positions himself as a satiric expatriate: able and desiring to participate in the communities satirized but choosing to speak about them from a distance—remember that the adult

Clemens, living into his 70s, rarely returned home to Hannibal. However, the persona created by Clemens in the irreverent Mark Twain positions him too neatly as an expatriate outsider whose satires are postured to purport the authority of a speaker possessing insider knowledge within the religious community.

Both Twain's insider knowledge and outsider perspectives fuel his satires of American religion, its people and practices. Therefore, we can understand that Twain, by choosing to leave behind (and separate himself from) certain elements of American religious communities, is accepting a form of exile that necessarily follows the departure from such societies (you are either with us or against us). Although Twain may have experienced such anxieties in his departure from Hannibal (and the conservative religious expectations of his mother Jane and older brother Orion), he most likely did not fear or even experience such ostracism from The Rev. Joseph Twitchell or the Hartford Divines. This difference illuminates the distinction between these two communities. Having escaped the daily onslaught of guilt, and still living with a guilty affection for those he left behind, Twain capitalizes on this tension of being outside a subset of a conservative religious community while finding a position inside a broader, cosmopolitan religious community, which allows him the liberty to study the former's ironies and satirize their absurdities (echoing Jon Stewart's distinction between art and ideology, with absurdity being the point of satire, established in chapter one).

Samuel Clemens's creation of the persona "Mark Twain" allows him the satiric voice that can be concomitantly both insider and outsider, both nationalistic and self-exilic, religiously speaking. These internal tensions establish both the persona and the satire as dynamic and imbued with doublespeak and open-ended ambiguities with which Twain seeks to broaden his audience—readers who can see various sides of an idea or argument: for

"insider" readers tempted to look outside their religious traditions to a more life-giving, less-constrained religious culture; or, for those "outsiders" looking back upon a more conservative religious orthodoxy to see their exile as beneficial while simultaneously viewing those "insiders" left behind with an amiable humor—an attitude that could foster compassion and empathy.

CHAPTER SIX

A LOVER'S QUARREL:

A BRIEF STUDY IN TWAIN'S RELIGIOUS SATIRES

Conceptualizing Twain's dual satiric position as both insider and outsider may be easier to achieve than identifying and understanding *how* Twain then uniquely wrote satire to shift religious perspectives. The literary style and rhetorical matter are complicated by the implicit interpretative role that Twain demands of readers. An incident in an undergraduate seminar I taught on late-nineteenth-century American literature provides a helpful illustration: having spent a few class periods discussing Mark Twain's shorter works, one student went so far as to tell me how much he "hated" Mark Twain. While his disdain was most likely a disguise to hide his frustrations and confusion, it reveals the difficulty readers have in knowing what to do with Twain's work. Because Twain's satires de-center the reader from definite moral knowledge, due in part to Twainian vacillations between serious condemnation and the evasive "just kidding," the student remained uncertain as to Twain's "intended" interpretation for his satiric works. The core of this student's frustration lay rooted in Twain's contradictory positionality toward the satiric matter: a dual, empathic identification with the object being satirized as well as with choosing another antagonistic alternative. As my student experienced it, the literary structure of Twain's satires leaves the reader readily able to spot the dominant themes or analyze characterization, but uncertain as to the point of irony and the interpretive thrust of the literature. Too often, if satire goes undetected in a work, that work will be interpreted as a vapid or banal narrative from a humorist merely aiming at a quick joke. Even more problematically for readers, Twain

intentionally obfuscates the presence of satire and its meaning, making those readers interacting with this literary art frustrated. And, in keeping with the functions of satire as a genre, Twain's achievement is perchance intentional.

This obfuscation is accomplished in part by the manner in which Twain positions himself as a narrator in a friendly disposition toward the persons and subjects that he satirizes, often having the same history, culture, values, or affection for these. But he also, in keeping with the nature of satire, then challenges those persons or subjects by attacking a part of the things he claims that he was once like or once supported. The problems that my student had with Twain originate in the nature and manner of Twain's mixed messages within the mode of satire. As readers, we are naturally inclined to follow the interpretive hints from the narrator, but when approaching satire, we seldom expect the narrator to draw us amiably toward the subject or persons being satirized while also facing the narrator's rhetorical push to be repulsed by those persons and things. Satirizing outsiders is easy and often expected; we find it easy to laugh at, mock, or ridicule those unlike us, for it makes us feel better about ourselves, superior even. But in Twain's work, we may also see ourselves in the objects of satire; our laughter at the satirist's attack becomes self-incriminating and self-inflicting, a guilty laughter. Herein lies Twain's satiric genius: establishing a peculiar ethos by emphasizing the similitude and difference between himself and the readers, between himself and the objects of satire, as *both* an insider *and* an outsider; modeling and perpetuating simultaneous empathy and disdain; spurring the reader to identify with the satire from multiple perspectives established in the narrative. In this sense, Mark Twain the trickster becomes our friend and our enemy, our teacher with both sagacious insight and cattle-prod wit, always in part identifying with the "me" and the "not me," with the me that I was, am, and will become.

The story in question that frustrated my aforementioned student was Twain's famous 1868 sketch "Cannibalism in the Cars" in which a first-person narrator, presumably Twain functioning as a frame narrator, encounters a congressman who relates a harrowing account of a political junket stranded in a railcar during a blizzard (*Tales* 28-36). To prevent starvation, the passengers employ parliamentary procedure to elect individuals for cannibalization. But the anticipated satiric focus on malfeasance or on the inhumanity of government officials is inverted when the conductor reveals to the flummoxed narrator that the former congressman's tale was borne of his madness. By diffusing the tale's tension in this way, Twain allows the reader a way to escape the moral incongruities being satirized. In other words, readers preferring to see Congress as morally above reproof can relegate these cannibalistic tropes to ravings of a madman; yet those whose experience with government is not so naïve will see glimpses of truth in the madness. Whether or not they can identify numerous parallels to American politics, critical readers will recognize that the satire denounces a political system in which one member readily consumes another in order to survive.

When first experiencing the elements in Twain's modal satires, readers learning to negotiate the subtleties of irony may tend toward frustration or interpretive uncertainty, while at the same time, unless they cast aside any interpretive goals, they may also reach a heightened level of engagement and attentiveness. This reader's response is in part due to Twain's use of inference and indirection in his satires to push readers toward interpretative probabilities. But more problematically, these works argue by negation and avoid a logical, straightforward manner that would direct readers toward a certain belief, a moral insight, or a behavioral directive—a technique that would firmly remove all doubt that Twain is a realist and not a romantic. Furthermore, because the themes and tropes can in no way be

categorized as trivial, as is the case with cannibalism, we must consider that Twain's satiric manner flags the important issues and prods the reader to wonder, if Twain's rhetoric moves us to see these in a new manner, *how else might things be?*

Satires of Affection and Disdain: Writing Within Competing Identities

To understand this ambiguous multidirectional technique, it may be particularly helpful to note that Twain's tendency to avoid statements of certainty in his satire is in keeping with Victorian sensibilities and is thus typical of nineteenth-century narrative satire, of which Frank Palmeri notes, "…extreme positions on both the right or the left were silenced or discouraged" (362). Palmeri goes on to helpfully characterize Twain's preferred subgenre of satire—narrative—and writes that "narrative satire in its full form criticizes one side of a cultural opposition, but also turns to undermine the position that its previous criticism has seemed to endorse. In this form of satire, neither of the opposing extremes is authorized, but each is parodied or criticized strongly. Moreover, it is usually difficult to infer a normative position between these extremes" (Palmeri 361). Or in other words, rather than reifying dominant cultural and social positions, satire aims to probe new possibilities, be they aberrant, subaltern, or avant-garde.

While Palmeri's argument helps to account for Twain's ambiguity in "Cannibalism in the Cars," satirizing religious persons and communities, their teachings and their practices can quickly find the writer facing the ire of the targeted persons and communities. In America, politics have always been fodder for satire, but the sacred, less so. Perhaps we might take Twain at his own words, remembering his February 22, 1902, letter to Helen Picard, where he writes, "Yes, you are right—I am a moralist in disguise; it gets me into heaps of trouble when I go thrashing around in political questions" (qtd. in Schmidt,

"Politics"). This same "disguise" and subsequent "trouble" are equally present when Twain goes "thrashing around in [religious] questions."

"Cannibalism in the Cars" serves as a model for Twain's satiric manner, especially in its intentional ambiguity, multifarious and ambiguous "interpretations" from a narrator who identifies both with and against the object of his satires, etc. Similarly, in his published religious satires, Twain *disguises* his moral aim with ambivalence, perhaps to hide his meaning (when speaking as an outsider) or to captivate an American audience with such vast religious diversity (when as an insider). Behind this seeming ambivalence, Twain repeatedly frustrates any attempt to determine his motive or morals (just as he does in the Prefatory Notice to *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*—no "moral," "motive," or "plot"—), and yet by withholding the possibility of moral certainty and narrative direction, he taunts his eagle-eyed readers to question their presuppositions and search for new, better probabilities.

Since these interpretive challenges can frustrate a study of Twain's modal satires, readers should anticipate their presence when Twain satirizes religion. In his 1874 marginalia in his edition of W. E. H. Lecky's *History of European Morals from Augustus to Charlemagne* (1869), Twain recorded his developing and contradictory thoughts on Christianity: "If I have understood this book aright, it proves two things beyond a shadow of doubt: 1: That Christianity is the very invention of Hell itself; 2 & that Christianity is the most precious and elevating and ennobling boon ever vouchsafed to the world (qtd. in Bush "'A Moralist…'" 55). Although it is unlikely, we must allow the possibility that Twain's comments ought to be taken as a mere summation of Lecky's argument or a dialogue with his ideas rather than Twain's concluding postulates on the matter. Notwithstanding this possibility, Twain's paradox of religion places him at the intersection of faith and doubt and continually colors his satires.

Further illustrating these interpretive frustrations, Twain, on the one hand, will make all types of folly the object of his satire, as recorded in Albert Bigelow Paine's aforementioned *Biography* of Twain, "The easy confidence with which I know another man's religion is folly teaches me to suspect that my own is also." In this scenario, Twain identifies with his satiric victim, for guilt and responsibility are placed on all, even on himself. However, Paine's next reference from Twain, on the other hand, unsettles the argument that his satire actually challenges that folly: "I would not interfere with any one's religion, either to strengthen it or to weaken it. I am not able to believe one's religion can affect his hereafter one way or the other, no matter what that religion may be. But it may easily be a great comfort to him in this life hence it is a valuable possession to him." Perhaps Twain's caveat is but a decoy, a satiric sleight of hand, aiming to paint himself as empathetic to the reader who shares an equivalence to Twain's religious futility. This and similar comments do, however, emphasize the existential pragmatics of personal religion (and echo Kierkegaard): if it brings the adherent comfort, then it is of personal utility. No doubt, the converse is also implied. His opening lines are also ironic, for although Twain claims he "would not interfere with any one's religion, either to strengthen it or weaken it," he is doing just that. Typical of a Twainian retort, his opening comment puts his audience at ease, but they are immediately destabilized by a contradictory challenge in the following sentence: that religion may have little efficacy beyond this life. This existential argument for pragmatic religion will most certainly "interfere" with another's faith, in that all communication is dynamic. While Twain's theory of religion is not satiric in genre or mode, it does achieve similar satiric aims: namely to instill doubt, to open up areas of inquiry and discovery (see Dustin Griffin).

Although Twain argues for humanism and civility for dealing with matters of religion, he himself is rather deceptive when speaking to his readers about such things. In

addition to encouraging his readers to identify with him, the authority of his persona gives his words probity, albeit interpretively destabilized through the uncertain assurances of a humorist and trickster. The negation of his contract to "do no harm" and his definition that religion is for temporal and not eternal comfort together destabilize the relationship. Moreover, they exemplify the theories by Harold Bush in *Mark Twain and the Spiritual Crisis of His Age* that Mark Twain spent his life in pursuit of *shalom*; they are also supported by Lawrence Berkove and Joseph Csicsila in *Heretical Fictions: Religion in the Literature of Mark Twain*, who conclude that he could never find religious comfort in the deeply engrained Reformed Calvinism of his Presbyterian upbringing. Twain's views of religion offer the possibility for hope in this life, yet they disappoint when actualizing that comfort; he emphasizes the materialism of freethinkers (e.g. Robert Ingersoll); in the end, he invites readers to discover more about what they believe and why. Mark Twain's is a passive "interference" that optimistically aims at the reader's strengthening or weakening belief, though even here Twain does not leave the canvas blank. Instead, he goads readers toward authenticity.

Modeling how readers might respond to Twain's empathic yet ironic probing (and arguably with fidelity to Clara's wishes to protect Twain's posthumous reputation), Paine editorializes Twain's remark, "I would not interfere with any one's religion…." Paine concludes,

> Mark Twain's religion was a faith too wide for doctrines—a benevolence too limitless for creeds. From the beginning he strove against oppression, sham, and evil in every form. He despised meanness; he resented with every drop of blood in him anything that savored of persecution or a curtailment of human liberties. It was a religion identified with his daily life and his work.

> He lived as he wrote, and he wrote as he believed. His favorite weapon was humor—good-humor—with logic behind it. A sort of glorified truth it was truth wearing a smile of gentleness, hence all the more quickly heeded. (qtd. in Harnsberger 46; Twain from Albert Bigalow Paine's *Mark Twain a Biography* 1584)

Paine interprets Twain's views on religion to be humanizing, universalizing, and benevolent; moreover, it challenges mendacity to amiably move humankind toward authenticity, as understood through irony and humor, logic and truth. To answer the second overarching question of these final chapters—*how did Twain uniquely write satire as a means of shaping theology and religious practices in America?*—both Mark Twain and, less importantly, Albert Bigelow Paine identify a few necessary qualities for satire: humor and wit, the challenge of vice and folly, the ability to identify and speak from normative and divergent perspectives. Twain's lifelong relationship with Protestantism and American freethinking pragmatism (see John Bird) imbues his perspective with additional satiric qualities: namely, that Twain wanted honest depictions of religious belief, particularly regarding "unknowable" truth, especially when it came to doctrines on deity and divinity. As in "Cannibalism in the Cars," Twain's ability to raise questions in his satires—which, while still in keeping with Victorian sensibilities, forces readers to look at a concern without knowing the author's answer—provides the necessary temperament to balance the affection for his "victims" without being subsumed by the vitriol often engendered in the satirist.

As previously discussed, Twain's reliance on amiable humor (see Gregg Camfield) to position himself as both insider and outsider toward his satiric subject establishes irony and destabilizes the certainty of interpretation. Another way to understand this bicameral nature is to examine how satire metes out affection and disdain. In keeping with the nature of

satire, affection, or "good humor" as Paine describes it, is often harder to identify. Twain's satires dominated by disdain evince patterns of several important satiric techniques. When Twain has disdain for his satiric victims, readers have little to do but pay attention and get out of the way. Some of the more obvious victims—the Catholic Church, U. S. imperialism, missionaries, and Leopold II of Belgium, to name a few—are attacked without subtlety. These instances require little interpretative work of the reader.

More often, however, Twain's dual insider-outsider identities create in his satire a destabilizing tension in the presence of both affection and disdain. The Shepherdson-Grangerford shootout in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* exemplifies this trait. In this scene, the characters pay affirming lip service to the Sunday sermon, but by that afternoon, their contradictory actions perpetuate one of the most violent scenes in the novel. Yet, Twain (in Huck's reactions) shows both an admiration and a disgust for the families in their feud. Huck's vivid descriptions establish this incongruity and emphasize their religious hypocrisy:

> Next Sunday we all went to church…. The Shepherdsons done the same. It was pretty ornery preaching--all about brotherly love, and such-like tiresomeness; but everybody said it was a good sermon, and they all talked it over going home, and had such a powerful lot to say about faith and good works and free grace and preforeordestination, and I don't know what all, that it did seem to me to be one of the roughest Sundays I had run across yet. (148)

True, the adolescent narrator lacks the religious education needed to do little more than discuss the mood established by the preaching (as "ornery" denotes one being irritable, combative, or stubborn), which contributed to one of Huck's "roughest Sundays…yet." Although Huck misses the irony between the post-church conversations on "faith and good

works and free grace" and the overall grotesque nature of the Sheperdson-Grangerford feud, most readers will find the foreshadowed darkness in Twain's prose muting the amiable satire that opens this scene: exploring the ironic state of "good" preaching in Missouri-Arkansas border regions in the Antebellum South and the ironic congregants who are quick to affirm Christian goodness and talk about the expected core denominational tenets—in this case those of Calvinism.

But adding a second irony to the first, Huck's Sunday afternoon unfolds to be much rougher than the "roughest" Sunday morning he had experienced. Its events leave Huck sickened and speechless:

> All of a sudden, bang! bang! bang! goes three or four guns--the men had slipped around through the woods and come in from behind without their horses! The boys jumped for the river--both of them hurt—and as they swum down the current the men run along the bank shooting at them and singing out, "Kill them, kill them!" It made me so sick I most fell out of the tree. I ain't a-going to tell ALL that happened—it would make me sick again if I was to do that. I wished I hadn't ever come ashore that night to see such things. I ain't ever going to get shut of them--lots of times I dream about them. (154)

The description need not continue for the satire to hit its mark. As Huck's narration shifts in tone from theological boredom to blood-sickening irrepressible memories, it is clear that Twain is all anger and no sentiment for the genteel Grangerfords for how they have psychologically traumatized Huck. Speaking as an insider (as a Southerner with a strong religious upbringing), Twain can pointedly satirize false southern gentility in amiable hope

that the incongruity between religious verbiage and practice might return to the ideal of human civility.

Religious proselytizing certainly is not the moral aim of this satiric episode, as Twain does not call his readers to take up the beliefs that Huck portrays or disdains; in fact, Huck is often unreliable as an interpreter of the satires in his *Adventures* because he is quick to tend toward the sycophantic when encountering characters in power whose beliefs challenge Huck's malleable situational ethics. It is, however, Twain's pragmatism that prompts him, and thereby us, to consider just how ineffective these Protestant teachings are in accomplishing their said aims of promoting "brotherly love," the subject of that Sunday's sermon (in chapter 18 of *Huckleberry Finn*).

But these scenes from *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* showcase Twain's ability to encourage the reader (and, in this case, Huck as a narrator) to explore the issues from not only an outside, disdainful position but also to see with an insider's empathic perspective. Writing compassionate, amiable satire in which the satirist identifies with the victim was not always easy for Twain as it required him to be of good cheer, which waned often as his travels or income did not meet his expectations or needs.

While writing *A Tramp Abroad*, for instance, Twain struggled to analyze the culture, but when he did find aspects of German life that arrested his attention, his writings were bent toward a satiric mood that did little to analyze culture unless it was from the outside and with little compassion. Living in Germany in the late 1870s, Twain was entirely an outsider and perhaps wished to remain as one, which reified his expatriate identity and most likely diminished a necessary empathy and curiosity for German culture, thus muting the witty, satiric vision evidenced in his best works. In his January 30, 1879, letter sent from

Munich to William Dean Howells, a frustrated Twain confesses how his angry sentiments muddled any attempts to write satire:

> I wish I *could* give those sharp satires on European life which you mention, but of course a man can't write successful satire except he be in a calm judicial good-humor – whereas I *hate* travel, & I *hate* hotels, & I *hate* the opera, & I *hate* the Old Masters – in truth I don't ever seem to be in a good enough humor with anything to *satirize* it; no, I want to stand up before it & *curse* it, & foam at the mouth, -- or take it and club & pound it into rags and pulp. (qtd. in Leonard 12; Mark Twain Project)

Twain invites readers to conclude that, while we might find something disagreeable which catalyzes the satire, it is the quality of goodness or affability toward the subject that is a prerequisite for Twain's satires. This point would seem to firmly place Twain's satires in the vein of amiable humor (see Gregg Camfield), until readers encounter scenes such as those in *Huck Finn*—the difference being, Twain loves people like Huck and the Grangerfords (Twain himself permanently dons the Colonel's white suit in the final years of his life). Later in the letter to Howells, Twain acknowledges that the better genre for a critique of German newspapers is not satire but to write "simply in a plain matter of fact way." In this letter, Twain divulges a possible literary aim in these European satires: that spiteful motives tend to proffer amoral vituperations rather than transformative satire and that some criticisms do not require the tools of satire to have an effect. And yet, generally speaking, anger is not necessarily incongruous with the compassion necessary for satire, although Twain's European travelogue, *A Tramp Abroad*, conveys the tones of disappointment, a mood which Twain is all too eager to share in this volume with his readers.

Twelfth-century medieval mystic and theologian, William of Saint Thierry notes in his meditation *De natura corporis et animae* (*On the Nature of the Body and the Soul*) that anger and love are not necessarily incongruous emotions. As one scholar summarizes William's argument,

> …it is *prima facie* [on first appearance] strange to associate Christian love with the irascible power, but he explains that love is compatible with human or rational anger, though not with beastly anger. Human anger is divided into zeal and discipline. These aspects correspond to the Christian dispositions of the love of God and one's neighbor, on the one hand and the hatred of vices on the other. (qtd. in Knuuttila 227-28)

When combined, these attitudes and expectations become dynamic forces that inspire and propel the satirist toward the creation of satire. In other words, the satirist's love and affection for something or someone, when tempered by reason, will respond with useful anger wherever vice corrupts the object of the satirist's affection. In this context, using William of Saint Thierry's schema and Twain's confession to Howells, we can understand Twain's ability to write satire as being rooted in both love and rational anger, but not hatred, what we might term to be a "lover's quarrel."

The stabilizing force that grounds his dual insider-outsider identity, Mark Twain's lover's quarrel motivates his satiric aim that promotes authenticity and challenges mendacity. Since Twain's satires are aimed at specific portions of a broad American population, he positions readers into an interpretive ambiguity that is rhetorically and aesthetically successful insomuch as he has invited his readers into the Kierkegaardian ethic, whose power originates in irony's absolute infinite negativity. Twain models for them how to see,

hope, and respond to the seemingly endless incongruities present in our beliefs, practices, and institutions.

Huckleberry Finn: Mark Twain's Bi-Modal Attitudes toward American Christians

Spurred on by this lover's quarrel and empowered by polyphonic insider-outsider discourse to reach multiple audiences, Twain uses these essential elements to destabilize the authority of a religious community while simultaneously redefining what it means to know religion from inside the community. These two-toned satires will still flummox readers through its interpretive ambiguities, for example, when Twain speaks through a naïve narrator or buries the satire's moral beneath the mockery of burlesque, as in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, the scene following Huck's return to the Widow's home after his capers with Tom's gang. In the opening paragraphs of chapter three, Twain adapts modal satire further by giving the reader an opportunity to observe and choose from among moral distinctions. Twain offers this choice through caricaturing the women's flawed spirituality and Huck's naïve kid-logic. Huck narrates his encounters with two contrasting theologies, each portrayed in one of the sisters:

> WELL, I got a good going-over in the morning from old Miss Watson on account of my clothes; but the widow she didn't scold, but only cleaned off the grease and clay, and looked so sorry that I thought I would behave awhile if I could. Then Miss Watson she took me in the closet and prayed, but nothing come of it. She told me to pray every day, and whatever I asked for I would get it. But it warn't so. I tried it. Once I got a fish-line, but no hooks. It warn't any good to me without hooks. I tried for the hooks three or four times, but somehow I couldn't make it work. By and by, one day, I asked

> Miss Watson to try for me, but she said I was a fool. She never told me why, and I couldn't make it out no way. (*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* 29)

Exemplifying Twain's two-toned insider-outsider religious satires, this scene illustrates the naïve narrator's semi-illogical reasonings that satirize two American religious mentalities through Miss Watson's and the Widow Douglass's characterizations. Of the two sisters, the widow easily wins Huck's respect. She doesn't "scold" and instead cleans off his messy clothes, which prompts Huck to feel remorse. By contrast, Miss Watson's behavior is odd: they pray in a closet and she encourages him to pray for whatever he wants. But Huck is a realist, and this hoped-for prosperity disappoints him, even more so as he realizes it hasn't worked for anyone else. He sees in Miss Watson's theology a manipulative spirit that demands conformity and altruism in Huck so that others benefit while he does not. At this early point in the novel, Huck is unable to reason beyond his immediate emotional desires; thus, his logic seems to hold to an adolescent credence as he has yet to encounter the violence and heartache caused by such selfishness, which destroys the Shepherdsons and Grangerfords.

This opening paragraph of chapter three also establishes Miss Watson's practical theology; her view of God is ironic and humorous: a god who demands exact obedience and is to be revered, even feared, to the point that she must give Huck a "good going-over" in a manner that would reflect a looming eschatological judgment. Miss Watson's attempt to shape Huck's theology, and thereby behavior, when she "took [him] in the closet and prayed" further reflects an idiosyncratic attempt to apply a literal interpretation of Jesus's Sermon on the Mount, as recorded in Matthew's Gospel:

> And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites *are:* for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they

> may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen *do:* for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him. (*Authorized King James Version,* Matthew 6.5-8)

Ironically, Miss Watson's directive on prayer does not reference the forthcoming verses in which Jesus speaks out against praying with "vain repetitions" nor to God knowing what we need before we ask of it, which would explain Jesus' statement against needing to pray in public and which also personalizes the theology of God the Father as one who knows our individual needs. Reflecting the genuineness of his character and perhaps his desire to be affirmed, even loved, by Miss Watson, Huck dutifully follows her instructions, though we must recognize that our first-person narrator may not be recounting her statements accurately.

In creating Huck's perspective, as a marginalized member of the community (an outsider), Twain lays out the pragmatic (and in this case negative) implications of religious praxis as it shapes vulnerable, impressionable people. Yes, these scenes are ironic and humorous, but they also subject the two women, and especially their behavior and beliefs, to the apparatus of satire. As the scene progresses, Huck describes praying for a fish-line, but only got one with "no hooks." In this and in similar ways, the pericope establishes situational irony and creates space for the reader to glimpse an ethical directive from Twain within this satiric moment, established in the moment that Huck attempts to explain Miss Watson's

closet prayer. His account becomes comical, in a way that reveals that we are very unlikely to have our desires fulfilled by habitual, repetitive praying—all filtered through Twain's adult, experiential knowledge. Moreover, it rhetorically reveals the true flaws of Miss Watson's theology and her actions, for she is quick to call this frustrated adolescent a fool and to deny him any further explanation, leaving the under-educated Huck trapped in perpetual ignorance. But because Twain doesn't add crippling guilt to the scene, readers feel the pathos of this scene and, thereby, are afforded the opportunity to question the results of such behavior in their personal lives as well as in their communities: namely, that the requisite rote obedience is suspect for alienating Huck and further intensifying his needless guilt, not to mention reifying his subaltern position in the fictional community of St. Petersburg.

The wisdom in Twain's choice for an unreliable, adolescent narrator becomes clear as he obfuscates the satire behind a façade of burlesque. Gregg Camfield, in *The Oxford Companion to Mark Twain*, defines burlesque as,

> Primarily a form of play, it indulges the anarchy of humor to yield the pleasure of disrupting conventional ideas. It usually aggressively mocks a target and in that aggression can be misconstrued as satire. The mockery of burlesque, however, not only offers no moral alternative to its target, but manifests knowledge of and often even affection for the target. (Camfield 57)

When Twain uses this indirect, modal approach, the reader, unless altogether dismissive, is left to imagine alternatives that Miss Watson could have presented to Huck. The satiric mode allows for reflection and inquiry into the practices of rearing children and does so in ways that will be received by the child while remaining faithful to the ideals of Christian teaching rather than the laughable, literalism practiced by Miss Watson. In other words, when Huck's actions and attitudes, while laughable, are dubious and beyond emulation, these

satiric scenes become fodder for contemplation. Thus, readers reform themselves, potentially. In these moments, Twain as an outsider can covertly speak inside the confines of religious norm so that readers can reshape *those* norms.

In the juxtaposed actions of the Widow Douglass, Twain presents readers with an alternative to how Miss Watson practices her judgmental, guilt-ridden theology, for the widow offers Huck compassion seldom afforded in his life: "…the widow she didn't scold, but only cleaned off the grease and clay, and looked so sorry that I thought I would behave awhile if I could." Miss Watson's behaviors and instructions appear laughable in that they seek to elicit conformity through fear and shame, whereas the widow's response prompts in Huck a sorrow borne of her compassion. In the following paragraph, Huck recounts his attempt to apply logic to both Miss Watson's "teachings" and the Widow Douglass's more moderate and figurative reading. Herein Twain may in fact be adding yet another layer of satire that attacks both perspectives: in addition to satirizing Miss Watson, he attacks the widow's attempts to "spiritualize" and "moralize" those difficult and incongruous elements of biblical theology and doctrinal interpretation. As Huck expounds on the experience,

> I set down one time back in the woods, and had a long think about it. I says to myself, if a body can get anything they pray for, why don't Deacon Winn get back the money he lost on pork? Why can't the widow get back her silver snuffbox that was stole? Why can't Miss Watson fat up? No, says I to my self, there ain't nothing in it. I went and told the widow about it, and she said the thing a body could get by praying for it was "spiritual gifts." This was too many for me, but she told me what she meant—I must help other people, and do everything I could for other people, and look out for them all the time, and never think about myself. This was including Miss Watson, as I

> took it. I went out in the woods and turned it over in my mind a long time, but I couldn't see no advantage about it—except for the other people; so at last I reckoned I wouldn't worry about it any more, but just let it go. (29-30)

The Widow's focus on the spiritual—the metaphysical—instead of the physical and offers a more plausible theology than Miss Watson's. By expounding on these theological concepts in ways that confuse and alienate Huck, Miss Watson diminishes her own authority, which she further weakens by shaming Huck into "correct" behavior with an interpretation of "spiritual gifts." Her catechism—"I must help other people, and do everything I could for other people, and look out for them all the time, and never think about myself"—shifts Huck's and the reader's focus back to the morality, which is Twain's primary concern.

Yet in writing of Huck's lack of desire or inability to deal with the issues at hand, Twain may have had a third satiric target. While some of Twain's intended readers would have identified with the culturally normative positions of Miss Watson or the Widow Douglass, most are more than likely to empathize with the narrator of these scenes, yet Huck's reaction does represent those who would not try to understand a difficult point of Protestant doctrine, and because it does not better their immediate emotional or physical situation, they pay it no further concern. As Huck is a catalyst for contemplation, not emulation, these satiric possibilities remain to challenge those who would be dogmatic like Miss Watson or those who would act like an under-educated, adolescent boy from the frontier. These elements establish an episode of indirect satire and Socratic irony, hallmarks of Twain's ability to speak on multiple levels about multiple themes to multiple audiences. Twain avoids delivering a dominant, authoritative, hegemonic interpretation to the readers. Instead, Twain establishes the tones of irony and discord, tension and possibility, which when read satirically, becomes a catalyst for a new, reader-generated hermeneutic. Not three

full chapters into Huck's adventures, and Twain has left readers to imagine whether this boy will choose the widow's path or Miss Watson's into adulthood.

Whereas direct (or generic) satire focuses the reader's attention on a specific satiric subject and points toward clear behaviors that need to be rejected or adopted, indirect (or modal) satire often leaves ambiguous both the tenor of the satire and the subject being satirized (terms previously defined). Moreover, for Twain, the efficacy of indirect satire lies in the writer's ability to provoke those readers to develop new perspectives, to begin to recognize a need for change and to experience discomfort if not making that change, all the while bathed by the writer's humor and irony. Notably, Huck, as written by Twain in the above-quoted passage, does not condemn Miss Watson's actions and directions outright, and neither does Twain nor Huck need to be so direct. Huck, instead, communicates the emotions that he experiences when he fails, according to Miss Watson, to get the requisite spiritual results and faces her acrimony. Huck's negative interactions with Miss Watson move him, at first, to emotionally distance himself from The Widow's instructions and, later, from her ideas about "Providence." Twain's elicitation of his readers' sentiment (not to be confused with sentimentalization typical of Romantic literature) toward Huck is poignant. Twain encourages each reader to see the illogical nature of praying for something that cannot be gotten. His readers also sympathize with Huck in his inability to choose the moral life when he recognizes that this decision would require him to "help other people, and do everything I could for other people, and look out for them all the time," and also extend these kindnesses to Miss Watson, who has been less than kind in her actions and attitudes toward Huck. As with Huck, readers are ironically disinclined to pursue the "right," as defined in the altruistic spirit of the Golden Rule. In other words, Twain's brand of satire gives readers imaginative and interpretive opportunities that many writers of Twain's milieu

tried to offer readers; thus, readers can be moved, become uncomfortable with their current reality and culturally preferred ways of interpreting that reality, and search for alternative reality while at the same time reading texts that describe in detail what that world should look like, as in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or *The Scarlet Letter*.

But for Twain to write in a similar Romantic and sentimental vein that would achieve the bluntness found in these canonical works would diminish the authority of his voice and remove the opportunity for his readers to find a new vision for American religion. Decades earlier, Twain began to distance himself from Calvinist dogma and drift toward free-thinking pragmatism, but he never overly stresses that readers must take this direction. Albeit, Twain writes these satires to rhetorically move readers in these new directions, and their efficacy necessarily requires readers to share a similar moral framework as the satirist himself. But the reader can, nevertheless, find in Twain's works many places to glimpse new possibilities for human experience.

We can see Twain's tactic again as the chapter progresses; he builds upon indirect satire to emphasize theological epiphanies, as Huck's continued interactions with his caregivers portray Providence as a bi-polar personality. Facing a plurality of theological options, Huck narrates that

> Sometimes the widow would take me one side and talk about Providence in a way to make a body's mouth water; but maybe next day Miss Watson would take hold and knock it all down again. I judged I could see that there was two Providences, and a poor chap would stand considerable show with the widow's Providence, but if Miss Watson's got him there warn't no help for him anymore. I thought it all out and reckoned I would belong to the widow's, if he wanted me, though I couldn't make out how he was agoing to

> be better off than what he was before, seeing I was so ignorant and so kind of low-down ornery. (30)

As Twain ideates these two "Providences" and voices them through his unreliable narrator, he places Huck, and the reader, in a position to be affected by theology itself. The difference Huck sees between these two visions of Providence is a gulf as extreme as the dissimilarity between Jonathan Edward's "Angry God" and Emerson's Oversoul. With a chuckle, the nineteenth-century reader must, nevertheless, designate Huck's decision as moral, immoral, or amoral, the latter of which the older, materialistic Twain might also have concluded. Readers, asking whether or not Huck's acquiescence to the widow's Providence is best, must eventually turn inward and ponder *what would I do?* Huck's choice is both understandable and guileless; his choice is too easy and, in some ways, too binary. Though he does not recognize that there are other options for belief and contemplates only those presented to him, readers certainly can see these "flaws" if they recognize the irony of this episode, especially in the moment that he rejects the harsh judgment of Miss Watson's Providence for the nonsensical grace of The Widow's god. Yet, problematically, to some readers, Huck's theology is built on an affective fallacy, for he wants a god who will give him a similar emotional return that he finds present in The Widow Douglass's god. Consequently, his choice between these two Providences is more intuitive and reactive than reasoned, more relational than systematic. This instance is one of many in Twain's canon that propels readers to reflect upon their most basic theological tenets by identifying their foil in fictional characters, in this case with a "low-down and ornery" adolescent (30). Perhaps it is because the narrator is naïve that we sense Twain's sympathetic quarrel over how to raise a boy with proper religious instruction and experiences, and it leaves open the interpretive possibility that Twain aims through

pathos to create in readers a strong rebuke of theology and practices like those of Miss Watson.

Chapter three of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* provides several insights into Mark Twain's uses of religious satire. He first presents a polyphony of competing perspectives in the narrative, each of them offering a different interpretation and application for a theological issue, in this case the practice of prayer and the nature of God. Although by no means objective in his presentation, after all, his choice of a first-person narration invites subjectivity and intimacy with the reader through Twain's portrayal of Huck's perspective on these two women's beliefs and behaviors. More importantly his choice to frame the sisters' Christianity through Huck's limited subjectivity offers his readers a distorted perspective that, like a carnival house of convex and concave mirrors, affords readers the opportunity to discover something new about the Protestant culture created by these women. This form of indirect, modal satire allows readers to take a more prominent role in the interpretive process, which yields insights about their world. Herein lies Twain's satiric gift: his presentation of these Christian women is informed by his insider knowledge, but he filters them through Huck's outsider perspective, which establishes ambiguity and signals irony. These interpretive uncertainties are further complicated by Huck's character—a narrator who, as a *picaro*, has no credence from which to convincingly point out the theological flaws of the widow's and Miss Watson's arguments. Instead, using Socratic irony, Twain, through Huck's narration, establishes a tone toward these women that allows readers to see in his reactions the pain, confusion, and alienation Huck endures under the tutelage of these women, however well-meaning they may be.

Consequently, at the end of this chapter, Huck finds himself spiritually and culturally adrift: he assumes he would be rejected by Miss Watson's "Angry God," but he lacks the

reassurances needed to identify with the widow's magnanimous version of God, all the while seeing himself to be "so ignorant and kind of low-down and ornery." The scene lacks a catharsis, for Huck's emotional reaction to the sisters' "teachings" intensifies his insecurities. He concludes that, however much he would like for a kindly reception from God, he can see no logical reason why God would offer it to someone like Huck. The verisimilitude of these incidents propels readers to experience disappointment, because the ideal has not been attained by any of these characters. Thus, finding no resolution for this episode within the secondary reality of Huck's fictional world, readers are likely to search for analogues in their primary reality. In this satiric moment, Twain does not answer the questions he raises, leaving the reader to self-determine how we transfer theology from one generation to the next or from a cultural insider to the uninitiated, like Huck. Moreover, Twain inconclusively investigates how Protestant theology can easily overemphasize certain malevolent impressions of God over and against a more merciful divine nature, and he explores how Huck's misunderstanding of these principles leads to further insecurity. In the following paragraphs, Twain intensifies these emotions by juxtaposing Huck's theological confusion with the psychological and physical abuse he faced at the hand of Pap Finn. The ironies in these paragraphs present a satire to readers that does not point to a clear moral infraction (excepting Pap), but instead leaves readers to construct mimetic comparisons among the incongruities in the fictional St. Petersburg, Missouri, and the world each reader inhabits.

Doubt and the Devil's Advocate: The Voice of Satan in "Letters from the Earth"

The preceding section analyzes Huck Finn's exposure to two different forms of applied theology and, thereby, evinces one of the goals of Twainian satire: to prompt further inquiry into personal and cultural beliefs and how they affect everyday lives. It initially may

appear that Twain's aim is merely to challenge hypocrisy, but by focusing on satire beyond a simplistic reaction and toward the reader's self-reflection, his work is more successful, not as a corrective arguing for a return to "orthodox" Christianity (more specifically, Twain's version of orthodoxy), but rather as a heuristic toward improved theological reasoning about both beliefs and practices.

Providing an example of Twain's stance on these issues, Albert Bigalow Paine summarily concludes the final chapter of the *Biography*. In his interpretation of Twain's religious views (sanitized for or by Clara), Paine writes that "…he [Twain] embodied his whole attitude toward Infinity when in one of his stray pencilings he wrote: 'Why, even poor little ungodlike man holds himself responsible for the welfare of his child to the extent of his ability. It is all that we require of God.'" The irony, even in this seemly innocent quip, still pushes readers toward theological reflection and onto questioning what standards of behavior we require of God. The answer is quite simple and syllogistically dependent on the premise's veracity that all fathers necessarily love their children. Thus, Twain refigures the typical theological questions from "Who is God?" toward the consideration of how human experience systematically reveals our desire for God to be the similitude of our "best selves," and not just the best selves produced by Christianity but taken from amongst all humanity. With subtlety and indirection, Twain's anthropocentric focus, rather than telling his readers to blindly accept that God's love is necessarily a paternal love, instead invites an inquiry into the possibility that God may in fact not be living up to our expectations for parents in the way, for instance, that he allows evil to prevail in the world or in the way the Old Testament God metes out judgment.

Regarding the latter, Twain goes on at length in his posthumously published "Letters from the Earth" (see "Letter X") to satirize nineteenth-century Protestant theology that

portrays God as all-loving and worthy of emulation while missing the irony that God himself breaks his own commandments. In "Letters from the Earth," as in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Twain once again employs an unreliable narrator, Satan, in this instance. This Hebrew name can be literally translated as "adversary" yet is most often associated with the Devil, whom Jesus refers to as "The Father of Lies" in John's gospel (8.44)—an epithet with which Twain and his biblically-minded milieu would have been quite familiar. Already, Satan as a narrator is more dubious than a naïve Huck Finn, for in both the religious tradition and in Twain's tale, Satan is antagonistic, at times deceptive, and perhaps malevolent. The opening pages of "Letters from the Earth" reveal that Satan has been exiled from heaven for "making admiring remarks about certain of the Creator's sparkling industries—remarks which, being read between the lines, were sarcasms" (*Letters from the Earth* 6). Through these and other lines, Twain has subtly placed the reader in the role of sleuthing through Satan's ironic sarcasms for a "moral" or some other satiric reward. Twain's readers must investigate from a defensive position, however, for the context of "Letters from the Earth" makes clear that humanity, Earth, and all therein are the "Creator's *sparkling* industries" (italics added).

Satan raises ironic, rhetorical questions that are logically compelling to the reader. Later, in "Letter X," Satan writes, "Will you examine the Deity's morals and disposition and conduct a little further? And will you remember that in the Sunday school the little children are urged to love the Almighty, and honor him, and praise him, and make him their model and try to be as like him as they can?" (*Letters from the Earth* 46). He then cites at length several Old Testament passages with each example aimed to prompt readers to question the validity of God's character as exemplary. Twain first quotes portions from the Pentateuch's Books of Numbers (chapter thirty-one) and Deuteronomy (chapter twenty) without signification as to book and chapter or to when he changes between passages. Even a short

excerpt of Twain's version illustrates Satan's unsettling aims (brackets mark where ellipses have been added to Twain's original abridgement, which includes Numbers 31.1-2, 7-21, 25-28, 31-35, 40-41, 47 and Deuteronomy 20.10, 13-16, all from the *Authorized King James Version*):

> 1 And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying,
>
> 2 Avenge the children of Israel of the Midianites: afterwards shalt thou be gathered onto thy people….
>
> […]
>
> 7 And they warred against the Midianites, as the Lord commanded Moses; and they slew all the males.
>
> […]
>
> 9 And the children of Israel took *all* the women of Midian captives, and their little ones, and took the spoil of all their cattle, and all their flocks, and all their goods.
>
> 10 And they burnt all their cities wherein they dwelt, and all their goodly castles, with fire.
>
> 11 And they took all the spoil, and all the prey, *both* of men and of beasts.
>
> 12 And they brought the captives, and the prey, and the spoil unto Moses, and Eleazar the priest,
>
> [….]
>
> 15 And Moses said unto them, [….]
>
> 17 Now therefore kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman that hath known man by lying with him. (*Letters from the Earth* 46-47)

Playing devil's advocate, Satan, as fictionalized by Mark Twain, lets God speak for himself, though without context. Understandably and ironically, God's instructions are at odds with typical teachings of nineteenth-century Protestant American communities. In the above passage, Satan has pointed out the irony present in the directive to be godly (or godlike), yet there are clearly historical events recorded in the Pentateuch that we might not wish to encourage or even tolerate in a civil society.

Neither Twain nor his Satan is unique to the late-nineteenth century in theological incongruity. These passages are particularly problematic for both late-nineteenth-century readers as well as twenty-first century theologians. Even in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century, theologians would align in two camps: one, interprets the slaughter of the Midianites as the judgment of God on a heathen nation; the other, applying higher criticism to the narrative, sees it as a *midrash* that is best read as a tale that reveals the Israelites' cultural values and interpretations on the events, highly embellished, more tale than pure history (Longacre "The Bible" 21-22; Longacre "Numbers" 314-15). Twain, however, is not a theologian but an ironist, who has found the problem that too many Christians read scripture too literally and reconcile difficulties by labeling the slaughter "just war" or "holy war" or by dodging the question's difficulties by claiming "God is sovereign" (Keil and Delitzsch 225-30). In this context, the effect of Twain's epistolary fiction is to raise doubt in the minds of his readers, when reading what to them would be a very familiar—perhaps too familiar—passage, as to the very nature of God and the difficulty in reading and hermeneuting these narratives as literal instructions for daily living. The violence and cruelty that God commands so easily justifies similar behaviors and prejudices in Christians of Twain's milieu, to the extent that his desire to challenge it became a prominent leitmotiv.

Satan fails to provide much of an explanation following his lengthy quote, perhaps convinced that inference and irony are all that readers need to accept his argument's warrant. Thus, having cited these Old Testament passages to illustrate God's immoral character, Satan then goes on to summarize the ironic tension between what humans believe and what they do, again relying on inference that ascribes blame for human behavior onto God as the creator and not to humanity the actor:

> The Biblical law says: "Thou shalt not kill."
>
> The law of God, planted in the heart of man at his birth, says: "Thou shalt kill."
>
> The chapter I have quoted shows you that the book-statute is once more a failure. It cannot set aside the more powerful law of nature.
>
> According to the belief of these people, it was God himself who said: "Thou shalt not kill."
>
> Then it is plain that he cannot keep his own commandments.
>
> He killed all those people -- every male.
>
> They had offended the Deity in some way. We know what the offence was, without looking; that is to say, we know it was a trifle; some small thing that no one but a god could attach any importance to. (*Letters from the Earth* 48-49)

Herein, Satan lays out a series of ironic tensions. On the one hand, this passage conveys that the nature of God and the nature of humanity are similar, in that we are both bent toward murder and thereby disobedience—in particular disobedience to laws that God has authored but which "he cannot keep" himself. Satan does not attempt to reconcile the tensions within this paradox on God's infinitude and sovereignty, however. He merely raises the questions,

instead, whereby the ironic is fully established, and in this moment Twain's narrator Satan personifies both tropes of the trickster and the devil's advocate. In these roles, Satan makes it clear that God as portrayed in the Bible presents an ironic contradiction, neither worthy of human worship nor to be the focal point of a religion, though Satan never makes such a direct claim—he doesn't need to. Like Milton's Satan from *Paradise Lost* or William Blake's from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, each of whom in his own way introduces doubt as well as new possibilities into their respective narratives, Twain's Satan voices the concerns of those who would try to reconcile the incongruities in the various portrayals of God's character in the Bible. We need to allow that, while Twain may or may not have held these views, the effect of presenting them in the mouth of Satan distances Twain from culpability for these logical assertions, at least amongst his more open-minded readers. Undoubtedly, hostile audiences will always find something over which to take offense. But the result is that the satiric moment decenters the reader, at least potentially, from previously held notions and provides an opportunity for a new direction, for a more authentic faith brought about by satire's ability to free readers to doubt. Of course, readers' reactions to this doubt could take on many forms. Alternatively, readers may choose obstinacy and reject Satan's insights (after all these ideas are attributed to *Satan*), or they may commit to them and adopt a skeptical view of the God of the Old Testament or move more ardently toward apostasy, or somewhere on the continuum in between. Thus, in keeping with the literary tradition (e.g. Milton's and Blake's characterizations of Satan), Twain's Satan plays the important role of an antagonist who challenges the structural norms and creates new possibilities for understanding doctrine and establishing belief.

Therefore, Twain's introduction of doubt into his readers' minds through his unreliable first-person narrators (e.g. Huck Finn or Satan or Twain himself) does not so

much undermine God's "authority" as much as it pushes readers to consider how their theology informs what they attribute to God, thereby destabilizing the reader as an authority on God. Characteristic of his many quips throughout his public literary career, Twain's aforementioned and posthumously published "penciling" recorded in the Paine biography and this scene from "Letters from the Earth" together reveal that, when Twain chooses to satirize God, he most often assaults anthropocentric idiosyncrasies regarding God rather than unleashing a vitriolic attack on God himself.

Readers must be careful not to mistake Twain's repeated interpretive ambiguities for a lack of opinions. Yes, Mark Twain has definite opinions on God. In his autobiographical dictation for Monday, 18 June 1906, Twain finishes his lampoon on Bret Harte by comparing him to "the little God." To account for this comparison, Twain lays out three different versions of the deity:

> I shall finish with Bret Harte by and by, for I am prejudiced against him and feel that I can talk about him impartially. In some of his characteristics he reminds me of God. I do not mean of any and every god among the two or three millions of gods that our race has been manufacturing since it nearly ceased to be monkeys—I mean our own God. I do not mean that Mighty One, that Incomparable One that created the universe and flung abroad upon its horizonless ocean of space its uncountable hosts of giant suns—fleets of the desert ether, whose signal lights are so remote that we only catch their latest flash when it has been a myriad of years on its way—I mean the little God whom we manufactured out of waste human material; whose portrait we accurately painted in a Bible and charged its authorship upon Him; the God who created a universe of such nursery dimensions that there

> would not be room in it for the orbit of Mars (as it is now known to the infant class in our schools) and put our little globe in the centre of it under the impression that it was the only really important thing in it. (*Autobiography* 2.127)

Sensing something incendiary in these ideas, Twain later appends a note that the "last 2 pages [of this entry] must be postponed to the edition of A. D. 2406." If these ideas inform Satan's character, they lack his sarcastic tone in "Letters from the Earth." Twain clearly has reverence for God, but has no respect for the base, irreverence that Christians have in deriving theology from literal interpretations of these biblical narratives. Based on the evidence of human history, Twain assumes that we are absurd if we think that humanity is "really important" to anyone except ourselves. Here, Twain echoes the total depravity taught to him in his youth, but has replaced the hope of redemption by a sovereign god with a more realistic, plausible deism. But he also frames this delineation on God with interpretive doubt and irony: because Twain is "prejudiced" he will be "impartial." Is it a wink that he is being sarcastic in what follows? Does his "impartiality" also apply to these portraits of God? Or is it Twain who in recognizing his subjectivity is able then to counter it, unlike those who make "the little God" and force Him to fit The Old Testament's mold? More importantly, are these the sayings of a trickster who is playing a game of *made you look*?

To conclude that Twain lays the blame at the feet of either "our own God…the Mighty One" or "the little God" misses that both of these deities are based on literal interpretations of the Bible. Twain could have benefited from the modernist and more recent postmodern contributions to theology. Nevertheless, Twain holds humanity culpable, specifically Protestant Christians, for the God they have created and now worship, and he

pities them. In the autobiographical dictation for the following day, 19 June 1906, Twain writes,

> We deal in a curious and laughable confusion of notions concerning God. We divide Him in two, bring half of Him down to an obscure and infinitesimal corner of the world to confer salvation upon a little colony of Jews—and only Jews, no one else—and leave the other half of Him throned in heaven and looking down and eagerly and anxiously watching for results. We reverently study the history of the earthly half, and deduce from it the conviction that the earthly half has reformed, is equipped with morals and virtues, and in no way resembles the abandoned, malignant half that abides upon the throne. We conceive that the earthly half is just, merciful, charitable, benevolent, forgiving, and full of sympathy for the sufferings of mankind and anxious to remove them. Apparently, we deduce this character not by examining facts, but by diligently declining to search them, measure them, and weigh them. The earthly half requires us to be merciful, and sets us an example by inventing a lake of fire and brimstone in which all of us who fail to recognize and worship Him as God are to be burned through all eternity. And not only *we,* who are offered these terms, are to be thus burned if we neglect them, but also the earlier billions of human beings are to suffer this all. This exhibition of mercifulness may be called gorgeous. We have nothing approaching it among human savages, nor among the wild beasts of the jungle. (129)

Note the first-person plural pronouns. Twain doesn't disassociate himself from this problem. He is an insider and identifies with Christians who think this way. But rather than

setting up an alternative vision for humanity, Twain's strength lies in his acerbic irony. Later in his *Autobiography* he comments on the beliefs of the immaculate conception and hell:

> If there is anything more amusing than the Immaculate Conception doctrine, it is the quaint reasonings whereby ostensibly intelligent human beings persuade themselves that the impossible fact is proven.
>
> […]
>
> 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. (131-32)

These passages identify two problems that Twain has with "our Christianity": first, people form irrational beliefs and build a theology on this foundation and from this position choose daily religious and social practices; second, Christianity in practice is often immoral. Again, Twain raises the questions and sees that all is not right. Though his tone is dark, as fitting a recovering Calvinist, he will not proselytize in the manner of Sunday schools and revival services, which Clemens experienced in his youth. And as quoted earlier, he will not force others to adopt his beliefs, for personal beliefs are a personal comfort. He chooses, instead, to write satires. As previously discussed in the analysis of "Cannibalism in the Cars," the reader conveniently has available an interpretive loophole permitting him or her to no longer

need to puzzle out a meaning. But the reader beware: writing off a character as crazy or as a devil too easily ignores the influence of irony, in this case, that there is a little truth in every lie. Instead, the destabilizing discomfort of Twain's irony remains in the reader's craw.

Perhaps Twain chose not to publish these writings from this *Autobiography* or "Letters from the Earth" knowing that it would not change the audience he thought needed it most. Scholars and even writers themselves have often portrayed satire as an ineffectual genre in that it merely provides a humorous moment or venting of anger. According to the twentieth-century vorticist Wyndham Lewis, it lacks a mechanism to propel the audience to enact actual change and seldom requires audiences to *do* anything with the warrant of the argument, if a clear warrant is even identifiable, though that clearly did not stop Lewis from continuing to write satire (qtd. in Elliott 331-33). Thus, the satirist would find it prudent to illuminate concerns about which audiences could envision and enact changes. Through humor and subtlety, Twain's satires *do* shift the onus onto the reader to moderate or even reject illogical forms of Christianity. For while portrayals of "Sacred Personages" can be satiric, the divine is always other, not human, "Not I," unmalleable. As Twain wrote in an 1878 letter to his brother Orion, "Neither Howells nor I believe in hell or the divinity of the savior but no matter, the Savior is none the less a Sacred Personage, and a man should have no desire or disposition to refer to him lightly, profanely or otherwise than with the profoundest reverence" (qtd. in Bush, *The Spiritual Crisis* 123). What can then be changed, and thereby satirized, are human conceptions of the divine and the behaviors shaped by personal and corporate theology.

All God's Children Go to…? The Satiric Journey of Captain Stormfield

While doubt and incongruity may be powerful satiric tools to prompt change in readers, Twain's religious satires are not always a negative attack. Whereas "Letters from the Earth" gives Twain a vehicle to voice "satanic" sarcasms, his last novel, *Extract from Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven* (serialized in Dec. 1907 and Jan. 1908 in *Harper's Magazine*; published 1909), poignantly explores these illogical human conceptions of eternity, and illustrates how Twain's religious satires can also play out like a life-long lover's quarrel—amiable yet pointed and agenda-ridden—as he explores how theology shapes our perceptions of reality. Accounting for the novel's origins, Twain claims, as summarized by James A. Miller, that *Extract from Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven* is a burlesque of Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's 1868 bestselling died-and-gone-to-heaven novel *The Gates Ajar* (4). Phelps's novel, her bestselling and most famous work, offers an optimistic response to the Postbellum grief at the catastrophic loss of life in The Civil War. Phelps achieves this uplifting mood by minimizing the dominant, Calvinist views of heaven, which focused on God and judgment, and she instead portrays the afterlife as a place where the dead, now in heaven, retain their physical appearance and personalities and spend a majority of their time enjoying an eternity with family and friends.

Behind his burlesque, however, Twain amiably hides moralistic themes to explore how we foolishly foster the religious doctrines of human exceptionalism, an affable yet personal deity, and limited atonement, which all dominate the lives of its adherents. Sandy McWilliams, Stormfield's guide though heaven, elaborates on the problem: "…there's all kinds here—which wouldn't be the case if you let the preachers tell it. Anybody can find the sort he prefers, here, and he just lets the others alone, and they let him alone. When the Deity builds a heaven, it is built right, and on a liberal plan" (74). In the heaven that

Stormfield visits, the rules for entry have been broadened from the Calvinistic notions of predetermination, election, and limited atonement (all of which Stormfield anticipates) to imply that heaven should not be conceived of as exclusionary. The novel's opening pages build to this irony, for Stormfield himself is expecting upon his death to go to "the other place" (Twain, *Extract* 12-13). He envisions himself as an outsider—damned—but this fictionalized heaven is inclusive, making insiders out of those exiled by religion in this life. Twain, whether through his characters or his own persona, generally finds a sympathy for them, however hopeless their situations may be. Twain often quips about the damned human race (see his 1905 essay "The Lowest Animal" or his 2 April 1899 letter to William Dean Howells) whose morality, he argues, forces the regressive revision of Darwin's theory from *The Assent* to *The Descent of Man*. Yet the heaven Stormfield visits affords solace to many "unchristian" figures: Buddha, Sakka, Confucius, Mahomet, Zoroaster, even Homer (using Twain's spellings). Unlike the celestial spheres in Dante's *Paradiso* that reinforced contemporaneous medieval interpretations of heaven, Stormfield's heaven subtly questions the orthodox Protestant rejection of universalism, a teaching that held dominance in Twain's lifetime. This vision of heaven, as captured by the novel's tone, is quite jovial, evidence of an affable humor: people misplace their halos and wings, work to overcome language barriers, experiment at will with various stages in life, face initial homesickness, and dress the "angelic" part to welcome newcomers and humor their expectations of what heaven *must* be like. Ironically, Twain adopts a congenial tone in this novel that humors readers' beliefs as well, provided such beliefs are not harmful. Twain's position uncoincidentally parallels God's stance toward those newly arrived to heaven, an impression which is much more inviting than Satan's portrayal of God as a murderous, irresponsible sociopath in "Letters from the Earth." In *Extracts from Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven*, Twain creates a heaven so

welcoming to Stormfield that, even though its inclusivity would seem heterodox to some religious groups, readers are invited to entertain a new, more inclusive moral vision of humanity and of eternity.

Though the implications of "Letters from the Earth" and *Extract from Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven* are quite different from the other, Twain's persona parallels his characterization of Satan, Sandy McWilliams, and Captain Stormfield. He depicts Satan as the fallen angel and an outsider and an exile ironically commenting on the oddities of religion as a not-so-impartial observer whose aim is to establish doubt. In contrast, Sandy McWilliams and Captain Stormfield are another side of Twain's persona—less ironist and more a giddy traveler. They attain a more complete understanding of heaven's "reality" by sharing their discoveries of heaven (though the reader will note theirs is a fictional world). Yet these personalities represent the multifaceted positionality of Mark Twain, able to adopt roles as either insider or outsider according to his artistic mood or to the needs of the satiric situation. Satan and Stormfield are also on the boundary between insider and outsider. Formerly an insider, Satan now looks from afar onto God's heaven and creation, though in Twain's narrative Satan's exile has happened before and is temporary. And Stormfield, due to his vulgarity and drinking, always considers himself as an outsider to the religious community.

By comparison, Huck Finn also shares the dual identity as both insider *and* outsider, and he too will switch roles based on the context or his immediate needs. (Take, for instance, his interactions with the Widow Douglass and Miss Watson: Huck sees himself as an antagonist to them both, yet his outsider status is only underscored the moment his mouth begins to water at the chance of experiencing the widow's vision of Providence, where he yearns to find belonging, but endures a socially conditioned form of exile). And,

like Satan and Stormfield, Huck has enough exposure to the insider's world that he can readily deconstruct the ironic statements in the religious community's statements and practices. Yet Huck, though he could become an insider, does not identify with the Protestant Christian community because he doesn't feel that he would be accepted by that God (and he doesn't sense acceptance from Miss Watson). Caught at the boundary between insider and outsider, Huck has the ability to shift between worlds and, unknowingly, offer both perspectives, though it is his naivety that gives his voice both humor, amiability, and authenticity. These are representative of the humanistic qualities to which Twain repeatedly returns, often identifying with his satiric subject so as to push readers to see that blithe acceptance of religious ideals and culture may have contributed to its error and ineffectiveness.

We might also take Hank Morgan, protagonist and narrator of *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, as a model of the dual position as insider and outsider. Though he himself is quite flawed, as is typical of Twain's realistic characters, Hank as a captain of industry is essentially an insider to the dominant nineteenth-century American culture. As a hardworking, practical, inventive, factory manager who takes initiative, Hank singlehandedly works toward building a "better" society. He is pro-capitalism, pro-individualism, pro-industrialism, pro-education, pro-Protestant, and pro-progress—the quintessential insider to American culture, and thus, represents America's hegemonic agenda in *A Connecticut Yankee*. Although Hank can use his historical knowledge to act in this world like an insider, Hank is quintessentially an outsider in early medieval Britain, and in this setting his actions offer a commentary upon both Arthurian culture and his nineteenth-century American culture. Because Hank arrived in Arthurian Britain by accident and is thereby unable to return to the present of his own free will, Hank Morgan is in perpetual exile, and as much as he tries to

recreate the industry and progress of his new world and become the king's "Boss," the collapse of his enterprise in the final chapters reveals that Hank is always an outsider. Hank's attitudes regarding medieval culture, particularly those against the (Catholic) church, provide access to the satiric vein of *A Connecticut Yankee*. In both word and deed, Hank attacks the ubiquitous ironies, incongruities, and hypocrisy present in his new world, though he rarely offers any sympathy for these people—he is their *Übermensch*. And yet, as a man of the future, Hank is not wholly "other" in the medieval world. He has the benefit of history and descends from their culture. Like Huck and Satan, Hank, too, is an outsider with insider knowledge.

We must be careful not to stretch too far the comparisons between Mark Twain's authorial persona and narrators in these works of fiction, yet we would be amiss if we failed to make the analogues between these narrators in their status as insiders and outsiders with that of Twain's. For he presents both his persona and many of his characters so that readers discover that they altogether share commonalities, particularly a shared understanding of the world of nineteenth-century American Protestantism. However, Mark Twain continually shifts his position away from the normative, orthodox, "safe," accepted lines toward a new, more authentic way of life—one that acknowledges the inconsistencies and paradoxes of Christian faith; one that embraces the life-giving essence of doubt and irony. And by identifying with his readers and conveying how they are alike, Twain establishes himself as a model, not one to be followed by rote, but a model for thinking and reflecting on, challenging and even at times enjoying the life that we have. Twain's satires seek to tear down walls that would demarcate or isolate insiders from outsiders; his works promote communication with the exiled, whose insights, if embraced by insiders, might offer a way to redefine and unite their worlds.

Twain's works tend to avoid tidy endings, and thus he skips the epilogue: "Letters from the Earth" ends without a clear conclusion about Satan's future; Huck lights out for the territory; Hank awakens from a thirteen-hundred-year slumber having survived the apocalyptic Battle of the Sand Belt, which destroyed his modern, anachronistic world; and Captain Stormfield finds that heaven is more absurd and welcoming than he had ever hoped for. Each of these characters shows the tension of living with both insider and outsider perspectives and attempting to synthesize them into a new way of life. Yet these characters have to embrace both identities; they must have an affection for both insider and outsider positions. Thus, like a lover's quarrel, they embody Twain's expression of hope to move beyond our mere "damned" nature toward human universalism that envisions a new transcultural reality.

CONCLUSION

Lying in wait within modal satire, Mark Twain's assaults on religious institutions gain a footing by standing in the societal position of both insider and outsider. The comments of Hank Morgan, protagonist and narrator of *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, effectively capture these sentiments. Through Hank's voice, Twain satirizes the power of the medieval Roman Catholic Church, especially as it diminishes a society and dehumanizes its people:

> In two or three little centuries it [the Church] had converted a nation of men to a nation of worms. Before the day of the Church's supremacy in the world, men were men, and held their heads up, and had a man's pride and spirit and independence; and what of greatness and position a person got, he got mainly by achievement, not by birth. But then the Church came to the front, with an axe to grind; and she was wise, subtle, and knew more than one way to skin a cat—or a nation; she invented "divine right of kings," and propped it all around, brick by brick, with the Beatitudes—wrenching them from their good purpose to make them fortify an evil one; she preached (to the commoner) humility, obedience to superiors, the beauty of self-sacrifice; she preached (to the commoner) meekness under insult; preached (still to the commoner, always to the commoner) patience, meanness of spirit, non-resistance under oppression; and she introduced heritable ranks and aristocracies, and taught all the Christian populations of the earth to bow down to them and worship them. (end of chapter 8, 100-01)

In this passage, Hank's criticism, when reframed more positively, highlights the American values of independence, self-assurance, personal success and achievement, and free thought. The problem is not with the virtues themselves—humility, patience, self-sacrifice, etc.—but that behind the promotion of these morals, the Christian Church has been motivated by control and coercion of the misfortunate. However pessimistic, Twain's attacks on religion are precisely aimed at the application and results of religious teaching and not necessarily at the teachings themselves. Moreover, as Neil Schmitz explains in his article on the value of humor in Postbellum America, "Humor, at its best, forgives and resolves a grievous wrong.…humor doesn't deny or defend; it transacts; it negotiates" (75). Herein lies the optimism of Twain's satire: he attacks the failings of religion without attacking the core tenets of the faith.

Seen here and elsewhere, Mark Twain's uses of religious satire have their genesis in the nexus of the many personal and cultural influences in his life. His literary works reveal recurring tensions between his desire for authenticity in American religious communities and his inability to accept Protestant orthodoxy. While he never rejects the possibility of a supreme deity, Twain focuses his satires on the outward practices of American religious life, emphasizing the essential existential role of irony and ambiguity as well as uncertainty and doubt in living authentically and pragmatically. Although Twain shifts away from seeing the world and human history through a religious lens towards a scientifically, sociologically, and materialistically informed worldview, he never abandons the long-lasting social ties that he and his family maintained with their Christian friends and with the broader religious community. From this position, he writes satires as both a religious insider *and* a religions outsider. As Twain quipped in his "Seventieth Birthday Speech" at Delmonico's, "Everyman is crammed with sin microbes, and the only thing that can extirpate the sin is morals" (*Tales*

307). Despite these claims, or perhaps because of them, Twain unabashedly rejects religious sycophancy, choosing instead to propagate common sense.

As explored in chapter one, satire is life-giving. Through each assault, it seeks to revitalize and make things new, a position that finds support in the rich satiric tradition. John Dryden's arguments underscore satire's ability to promote circumspect "reflection." Dr. Samuel Johnson accentuates its power to censure immorality. Recent scholarship, however, posits that satire need not be moral and stresses its artistic qualities above those promoting mere amusement. Satire theorist Dustin Griffin concludes that, contrary to traditional definitions of satire that emphasize its rhetorical appeal to commonly held virtue, satire is primarily aesthetic rather than rhetorical. He enlists the terms "inquiry," "provocation," "display," and "play" to emphasize the interpretive openness and multifarious uses of satire. Traditionally, it functions directly as its own genre, but shaped by the rise of fiction in the eighteenth century, it also works indirectly as a mode within other genres. Mark Twain, as is true of most nineteenth-century satirists, prefers the latter, more subtle and flexible form.

As chapter one also states, successful satire builds on irony and requires that readers actively interpret the satire within a social context. Successful interpreters must deduce from authorial clues and intentional frustrations that the speaker has ceased to communicate by the expected rules. Thus, because satire's success is always precarious, its nature is to promote hope. Insomuch as satire has the potential to ironically destabilize typical meanings, it is able to catalyze new possibilities of thought and expressions of lived thought. As seen in the theories of Leon Guilhamet and Barbara Herrnstein Smith, readers face an interpretive dilemma: to conclude that a work of literature is satiric, they must conclude that language is functioning mimetically to play ironically with the speech patterns of a discourse community rather than functioning mimetically to represent a social community in the text. As a satirist,

Mark Twain plays these games. He mixes forms and plays on his readers' interpretive expectations.

Irony is the undergirding substructure of satire. When sustained, it affirms readers' suspicions that interpretive play is afoot and conclusive meanings are unsatisfying. Thus, by destabilizing one set of interpretations, irony requires readers to suppose another. For Søren Kierkegaard, the player of these ironic games is a trickster, an ironist, who knowingly destabilizes meaning, plays an intentional game of disequilibration, and prompts readers to see ironically for themselves and thus to achieve existential freedom. The ironist's goal is not to prompt readers to accept a specific interpretation but to teach readers to interpret according to the dictates of each ironic situation. In other words, the ironist succeeds, not when the audience follows the ironist's directive, but when they become ironists themselves. The final section of chapter acclaims Jon Stewart to be an exemplary twenty-first century ironist. He demonstrates that the satirist is always highlighting the ironic and that drive focuses his agenda. His medium is artful and is bolstered by aesthetic rather than by rhetoric aims. He is willing to play the trickster and assume a variety of attitudes as needed to captivate his audience, especially when they are hostile. It is no coincidence that Stewart sees in himself a humorist's kinship with Mark Twain.

Chapter two links Mark Twain to the historical, literary roles as satirist and ironist, through which he offers a thoughtful, humorous critique. From his birth and formation in the Nevada wilds, Mark Twain has always been more than a humorist. In his local color journalism for *The Territorial Enterprise*, Mark Twain assumes a nuanced role, identifying with both his subjects and his readership while simultaneously holding himself aloof as an insider and outsider at the fringes of society. For example, in "Letter from Carson City" he subjects himself to self-lampoon when it becomes unclear whether Mark Twain or The Unreliable is

the foil of the other. Seeing the irony here, readers face the joy and frustration when this narrator does not play the typical interpretive game. Twain diminishes his narratorial authority, which emphasizes the irony of his social position at the territorial governor's party. From his first published work, Mark Twain is an ironist, and as irony begets irony, he becomes free to play with meaning and sees no need to make conclusive statements.

As a satirist, he is imperfect at the start. Chapter two also investigates the interpretive imprecision of his early attempts at satire, seen in "A Bloody Massacre in Carson" (1863), which confirms the difficulty a satirist faces to find the precise ironic tone. In this situation, readers who miss the irony of the work are most likely to interpret the massacre and Twain's misleading descriptions as grotesque and horrific. Successful satire requires subtlety, which Twain learns the hard way. Yet his 1863 sketches do illuminate several hallmarks of his craft: he diminishes his authority through the presence of an unreliable narrator; he fosters interpretive doubt for the reader through recurring ambiguity and double meanings; he endears himself to readers by associating with them rather than keeping himself socially or morally distant; and he builds his satires upon amiable humor and unrelenting, ironic wordplay.

Indeed, Twain's strength is that his satire is both pleasurable, unforgettable, and often self-incriminating. Even the youngest readers will be artfully entertained by Twain's humor and ambiguity, and thus the force of his "jokes" leave an indelible imprint upon the memory. One such scene depicts Tom in his *Adventures* manipulating his Sunday school classmates by trading miscellaneous pocket ephemera for the coveted tickets they earned by memorizing passages of scripture. Tom, hoping to garner the attention and awe of his peers, collects enough tickets to earn a coveted illustrated Doré Bible, which required the dutiful students to memorize two thousand Bible verses. As the "omniscient" third-person narrator,

Twain emphasizes the irony of this scene: "It is possible that Tom's mental stomach had never really hungered for one of those prizes, but unquestionably his entire being had for many a day longed for the glory and the eclat that came with it" (*The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* 46). The manner in which Twain describes Tom's attitude and the Sunday school superintendent's attire, demeanor, and conversation with Tom quickly moves beyond a light-toned comedic mockery and toward a satiric aim:

> In due course the superintendent stood up in front of the pulpit, with a closed hymn-book in his hand and his forefinger inserted between its leaves, and commanded attention. When a Sunday-school superintendent makes his customary little speech, a hymn-book in the hand is as necessary as is the inevitable sheet of music in the hand of a singer who stands forward on the platform and sings a solo at a concert—though why, is a mystery: for neither the hymn-book nor the sheet of music is ever referred to by the sufferer. This superintendent was a slim creature of thirty-five, with a sandy goatee and short sandy hair; he wore a stiff standing-collar whose upper edge almost reached his ears and whose sharp points curved forward abreast the corners of his mouth—a fence that compelled a straight lookout ahead, and a turning of the whole body when a side view was required; his chin was propped on a spreading cravat which was as broad and as long as a bank-note, and had fringed ends; his boot toes were turned sharply up, in the fashion of the day, like sleigh-runners—an effect patiently and laboriously produced by the young men by sitting with their toes pressed against a wall for hours together. Mr. Walters was very earnest of mien, and very sincere and honest at heart; and he held sacred things and places in such reverence, and so separated

> them from worldly matters, that unconsciously to himself his Sunday-school voice had acquired a peculiar intonation which was wholly absent on week-days. (*The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* 47-48)

While certainly comedic, Twain's many barbs—the meaningless hymnal prop, the suffering audience, the grotesque caricature of Mr. Walters's collar and cravat, the ungainly full-body turns to see the audience, the elvish shoes—emphasize the comic nature of such religious leaders. And Twain does not pull punches: the superintendent's oration is loaded up with banalities and truisms about "good little boys and girls" with "bright, clean little faces…learning to do right and good" (*The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* 48). Thankfully, Twain cannot get more than five sentences into the speech and suffices to give us a summary: "And so forth and so on. It is not necessary to set down the rest of the oration. It was of a pattern which does not vary, and so it is familiar to us all" (*The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* 48). The rest of the chapter paints Tom's antics as those of an ironic "Sunday school hero." Although he casts Tom as an embarrassment who, when tested, cannot answer basic questions about the Bible, Twain contrasts him with the superintendent's irony and folly. Twain's description is not mean-spirited or vengeful, however. In *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and many of his other earlier works, Twain's satiric moments are still well received by his readers because they are memorable, empathic, and imaginative.

Chapters three and four study several other classic sketches "Buck Fanshaw's Funeral" and "A Cat-Tale" as well as in the longer narratives *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg." In these narratives, Mark Twain provides several paths by which his readers may find pleasure and reach new interpretive discoveries. These works point to an artistic maturation in Mark Twain's craft in the decades following his years as a journalist. Behind shifting meanings and good-natured taunts, he raises a moral

imperative for the reader to contemplate how characters and their choices are suitable or unsuitable for emulation. The scenarios are commonplace: a man meets with a minister to plan a funeral for a friend; a father tells his children a bedtime story; two runaways—a white child and a black man—discover a deep friendship during their journey toward freedom; and an upstanding wife and her husband succumb to the temptations for wealth and admiration. Through each narrative, Twain avoids clear directives and so leaves the reader with little choice but to study the lesson and set out in search of alternative interpretations.

The second half of this project traces Mark Twain's artistic maturation and illustrates how his satire undeniably darkens and waxes toward the sardonic. Mark Twain's development as a writer from the 1850s until his death in 1910 confirms this deepening obsession with interpreting faith practices ironically. His early travel writings—*The Innocents Abroad* (1869) and *Roughing It* (1872)—as well as his early masterpieces—*The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884)—contain numerous characterizations and anecdotes satirizing the manners of Christians (and sometimes other faiths), but these portrayals convey his hopeful attitudes toward these "peculiar" people, without fiercely railing against them. When successful, his early satiric voice allows him to highlight intellectual or hypocritical shortcomings in religious America while escaping blame. After all, along with the great American humorists such as Jon Stewart, he is only "joking." Yet over the course of his lifetime, Twain's satiric scope widened to include historical accounts of religion in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889) and *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc* (1896). Toward the end of his life, he began to re-imagine the seminal biblical narratives, even going so far as to challenge Christian theology and metaphysics in *What is Man?* (1906), *Christian Science* (1907), and *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger* (published posthumously in 1969, this volume corrected Paine's bogus 1912 edition, *The*

Mysterious Stranger: A Romance). Yet in these later works, Twain always allows for his readership to follow the repeated dictum from "The Man that Corrupted Hadleyburg," "You are far from being a bad man: Go, and reform"—discussed at length in chapter four. By forcing the reader to doubt his or her own religious framework, Twain challenges Americans to become critical of their own beliefs and practices, and he surreptitiously indoctrinates readers in the language of irony, which informs their doubt and catalyzes reflection and reform.

Twain's endearment to his readership often relies on his ability to dance on the edge of self-ridicule, hidden behind his stoic, deadpan narration, also a focus in chapters three and four. In the years following Mark Twain's death in April 1910, his biographical information was shrewdly vetted by Clara, the only member of his immediate family to survive him. Twain's literary executor, Albert Bigalow Paine in his "authorized" biography of Twain (1912), carefully shaped the public image of the writer after his death and faithfully honored the wishes of Clara. As a result, he intentionally skewed public attitudes to emphasize a more-temperate, less-controversial man. Yet regardless of Paine's adulterations of the manuscript, the individual quotations from Twain, though often ripped from their context and lacking helpful commentary, still provide glimpses of Twain's posturing on his relationship to American Protestantism. As Paine recounts Twain, "I have found that there is no ingredient of the [human] race which I do not possess in either a small or a large way. When it is small, as compared with the same ingredient in somebody else, there is still enough of it for all the purposes of examination." Even in this autobiographical dictation, Twain as persona is posturing himself behind a duality and an ambiguity of voice and tone. Claiming to be an *everyman*; he implies his capacity to empathize, at least in some small way, with each individual regardless of culture or creed. In his introduction to this passage, Paine

repurposes the quotation to move his 1912 readers to lionize the popular memory of Twain. Paine's interpretation of Twain's quip draws on pathos by highlighting Twain's concomitant strengths and weaknesses that, according to Paine, perpetuated Twain's accomplishments and his frustrations.

Contemporary readers might find it best to resist Paine's urge to romanticize or idealize Twain's "universal" humanness, although it does benefit an author to possess the ability to understand all facets of human experience. Paine does identify the realism in Twain, who willfully sees himself as an *Everyman* who desires to (and often will) acknowledge his own similitude with that of his readers and often establishes how he is *like* and *unlike* them, topics that become a driving force in chapter five. Twain's posturing opens a new satiric avenue to address those "weaknesses," admittedly as seen by Twain and by the society with which Twain wishes to identify. Nevertheless, his actions and statements permit the probability that, as the necessities of the genre and subject demand, he will adopt an "insider" view toward religion and yet will readily shift to an outsider's perspective so as to better critique and, even at times, deconstruct "normative" social and religious practices.

While the moral force at the heart of Twainian satire can only be discounted with great difficulty, Samuel Clemens's stance toward religious beliefs and communities is inconclusive and thus welcomes critical debate. Throughout his life, Clemens was never more than an arm's length removed from Christianity. Filtered through his ironist's persona, Mark Twain, his proximity to all varieties of Christians shaped his satiric position as one who freely plays with his religious identity. He shifts between insider and outsider roles and adapts according to his trickster dictates. He is never a full-blown antagonist nor does he let readers reach comfortable conclusions that would affirm his support for religion. The result is a persona who manipulates, obfuscates, and destabilizes what his readers think of Mark

Twain, of the Christian God's relationship with humanity, and of their religious community's beliefs and ways of living. His satiric literature is a laboratory for readers to experiment with alternative perspectives on life and with other courses of action. His stories reward readers with the discovery of new possibilities. A scholarly embrace of Mark Twain as both religious insider and outsider invites new understandings of him as an ironist, humorist, and satirist. The manner and matter of his satires are shaped by a paradoxical affection and disdain—an irreconcilable paradox that lies at the center of his art and a major concern of chapter six.

In the final chapter of this work (six), Huck Finn's encounter with the Widow Douglass and Miss Watson in the opening chapters of his adventures illustrates these tensions. The emotional impact of their divergent dogmas upon Huck positions readers to see that the widow's beliefs have clear existential, pragmatic benefits. Twain, in moments like these, avoids stating which conclusion readers must adopt. When these two positions are juxtaposed, the implication is clearly not an ironic one. For Twain and Huck, a theology built on kindness and patience is always preferred to one of guilt or shame. Certainly, Twain is attacking hypocrisy and mendacity, but this goal may be disguising other, more open-ended aims. Characterizations of theology such as these provide readers with opportunities to raise questions and make discoveries. As Huck Finn falls short of playing a role model for anyone, the same holds true for other characters—for instance, Satan in "Letters from the Earth," where he plays the role of "devil's advocate." But absent from Twain's missives are other countervailing perspectives. Just as readers must view Huck's journey through Huck's eyes alone, Satan's is the only perspective Twain provides in "Letters" on the odd idiosyncrasies of human religion and theology.

Throughout his long literary life, Mark Twain unleashes satire as a powerful tool to explore the struggles with beliefs that beset him in his youth. He attempts the reconciliation

of Protestantism with the mournful tragedies that beset his family and global politics. And he openly interacts with nascent philosophies and scientific theories and discoveries of the late nineteenth century. In other words, the artistic force of satire in both mode and genre aptly communicates Twain's satiric vision while concomitantly demanding that the audience actively interpret Twain's portrayals of Christians and, more broadly, Christianity itself. Over time, he steadily grows more obsessed with how Americans live out their beliefs, and though they are often the subjects of his ridicule, he never entirely rejects them and their beliefs. Toward the end of his career, in fact, he becomes particularly concerned with human nature, theological constructs, biblical authority, and religious self-deception—going so far as to rewrite the opening of Genesis through a series of first-person narratives that star Adam and Eve, among others.

Looming despair does not vanquish our satirist, however. Passages in both his autobiography and in *Extract from Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven* reveal Twain's hand. In these works, the angry God whom Sammy Clemens was taught to fear is demoted to a product of mere human origin. Thus, *if* God exists (and *if* should be strongly emphasized), then he need not be feared, Twain writes, since "that Incomparable One…whose signal lights are so remote" is most likely too infinite and too majestic to be concerned with humanity—however grand we imagine or wish we ourselves to be (*Autobiography* vol. 2, p. 112). Twain's figure of God hides in the background of Satan's and Stormfield's travelogues, but he never comes close enough to speak nor is interested enough to join their adventures. For the realist Mark Twain, satire instigates a challenge that readers consider the veracity of the premises for their theology (orthodoxy) as well as how such a theology is applied to everyday life (orthopraxy). In this lover's quarrel, our satirist has thrown down his gauntlet,

but he has yet to draw his sword. The next move is the reader's. In Mark Twain's lover's quarrel with God, he has spoken his last. The next word is God's.

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