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**The Image and the Woman in the
Life and Writings of
Mark Twain**

by

MARY ELLEN GOAD

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The Emporia State Research Studies

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Mark Twain's Women: An Introduction

by

Mary Ellen Goad *

Any attempt to understand a writer and his works involves the search for a pattern, for it is patterns which give order and coherence to the random events of human life. In the career of Mark Twain a pattern of a particular kind of relationships with women may be observed, a pattern which has been widely misunderstood and misinterpreted, but which helps explain many of the attitudes Twain held and leads ultimately to a better understanding of his work, particularly in regard to his characterization of women. In outline, Twain's attitude towards women is simple, but in his life and work it involved complexities which have led to innumerable misunderstandings and to vilification of the women with whom Twain associated and who formed the models for the feminine characters in his books. If an understanding of the pattern of symbiosis which operated between Twain and his women serves to vindicate them of charges of mindless Victorian prudery and destructive censorship, it is probably worthwhile; if it clarifies Twain's working methods and helps explain how his female characters grew out of the women in his life, it may illuminate certain corners of Twain scholarship which have too long been darkened by misunderstanding or willful misinterpretation.

It is first necessary to understand that Twain viewed the role of the female in a particular, and, to the modern mind, strange way. He operated on the theory that the male of the species was rough and crude, and needed the softening and refining influence of a woman, or, if necessary, many women. The primary function of the women was thus the reformation of man, and Twain saw himself in particular need of reforming. However, Twain seems to have adopted a further attitude toward this reformation, one which he had begun as a boy, and the business of reform became a game in which one made promises, then suffered periodic relapses, as a sort of recreation. He seems to have adopted this double philosophy early in life, and to have practiced it with some consistency throughout his life. Three women in particular served Twain's need for reformation, or seemed to serve: Jane Clemens, his mother; Mrs. Mary Mason Fairbanks, his literary and social counselor from the *Quaker City* trip until, and even after, his marriage; and Olivia Langdon Clemens, his wife, who best personified the role Twain expected women to play. These three, along with other less significant

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but archetypically similar figures, fulfilled a psychic need for Twain, and it is through a study of how they influenced, or failed to influence, him that one comes to understand how Twain used women for his own psychological purposes and as the basis for characters in his books.
Emporia, Kansas

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M.E.G.

Chapter I

Jane Clemens: The Pattern Begins

Jane Clemens began the process of the reformation of Mark Twain long before either she or young Samuel Clemens knew there was ever to be a literary persona named Mark Twain. Little Sam was a bad boy, the antithesis of his younger brother Henry. Henry, later to achieve a kind of fame in the person of Sid Sawyer, was seldom scolded, for he seldom erred; Sam erred with regularity, and was regularly punished, pleaded with, and prayed over. As it was Jane who administered the punishments and did the pleading and praying, it was logical that Sam should associate reform with women. It was also logical that the boy should attempt to please his mother by reforming periodically. There is, however, no evidence that he reformed for very long. If giving up a sin would please his mother, Sam would certainly do so, but would just as certainly return to his old ways very soon. The pattern of sin, reform, and relapse was thus formed early in Twain's life, and Jane was the pattern for the later reformers who bulk so large and puzzlingly in Twain's career. It would be interesting to know more about this woman who provided a blueprint for the women in Twain's life, but, unfortunately, information about Jane Clemens is scarce, and much of what is available comes from Twain himself, and Twain tended to see people in the roles he created for them, and often not as they really were.

Some things about Jane Clemens are clear, however. It was she who provided security and stability in a family frequently reduced to poverty by the rather unsteady hand of her husband, John "Judge" Clemens. The Judge, an aloof and dreamy man, was close only to Pamela, his eldest daughter. The rest of the family turned to Jane for affection and discipline. Twain was later to say, "My father and I were always on the most distant terms when I was a boy — a sort of armed neutrality, so to speak."¹

Young Sam required a large share of the affection and discipline Jane provided. He was born prematurely and was sickly as a child, requiring much care from his already overworked mother.² Even as a sick child, however, Sam began what was to be a career as a tease. Bright, and probably bored, and certainly always curious, the boy became the embodiment of the good bad boy, the rascal with a good heart, and, at the same time, he established a pattern of behavior which was to continue all his life and to provide the source of later criticism leveled at his women as they struggled to reform him. As a child he was a tease, and he preserved this trait, progressing, as an adult, from

¹ Dixon Wecter, *Sam Clemens of Hannibal*, p. 67. [All direct quotations and biographical details are taken from the most reliable sources available.]

² *Ibid.*, p. 44.

doing outrageous things, grossly exaggerating, if not inventing his adventures. That he was scolded for these escapades seemed to him both right and just. He expected to be lectured.

Jane seemed to be aware of these traits in her son. She, like the later Aunt Polly, was amused, but felt Sam did need discipline. She sought to curb some of his more unacceptable behavior, and tried to keep him from even more unacceptable paths. Thus, after the death of his father, she asked Sam to ". . . promise me to be a better boy. Promise not to break my heart."³ This story, provided by Paine, may or may not be true, but certainly Jane must have asked her son to be a "better boy" many times, though not necessarily at his father's death-bed. And Sam must have made such a promise many times. But Sam would generally promise anything, meaning, at the time, to keep the promise, but rarely, if ever, managing it for long.

It is doubtful that Jane entertained any illusions about the ability of her son to reform for any length of time. She must have known him too well. But she probably realized that getting Sam to promise something might keep him out of trouble for awhile. Therefore, when Sam left home for the first time, Jane found money for him and asked him to swear on the Bible, as she said: "I want you to repeat after me, Sam, these words, I do solemnly swear that I will not throw a card or drink a drop of liquor while I am gone."⁴ He took the vow. Many have condemned Jane for asking her son to make such a promise, but particularly at that time, such an action was sensible. He was only 18, restless in his work, angry with his brother, for whom he was working, and upset because of his lack of funds.⁵ Jane knew her son, knew that without some form of guidance he would surely come to a bad end. He was simply too young and inexperienced to face the world and its various temptations alone. Having made his vow, Sam went off to seek his fortune, eventually arriving in New York. There is no evidence to show that he broke his promise there; perhaps he did not want to. But, in the event that he should need an excuse for avoiding certain types of behavior, his mother wisely provided one. Sam returned from this journey, seemingly uncorrupted, as abruptly as he had left. He began working on the newspaper again.

Another trip, this one to Keokuk to work for Orion, proved as unsatisfactory. Sam decided to leave and seek his fortune in the Amazon, first supposedly stopping to renew his promise to Jane not to drink or gamble.⁶ He did not make it to the Amazon, but he did return home in triumph as a river boat pilot. He did not feel compelled to keep his vow to his mother any more, although he did attempt to keep certain activities from coming to her attention. In a letter to Orion, he wrote:

³ Albert Bigelow Paine, *Mark Twain, A Biography*, I, 75.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

⁵ Dixon Wecter, *Sam Clemens of Hannibal*, p. 262.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

Yesterday, I had many things to do, but Bixby and I got with the two other boats and went off dissipating on a ten dollar dinner at a French restaurant — breathe it not unto Ma! — where we ate sheephead, fish with mushrooms, shrimps and oysters — birds — coffee with brandy burnt in it &c &c, — ate, drank and smoked, from 1 p.m. until 5 o'clock, and then the day was too far gone to do anything.⁷

It is most likely that the honest Orion, unable to keep a secret, would report these activities to Jane, and a lecture would be forthcoming.

Jane must have been proud of her son the pilot, and delighted in taking rides when he was at the wheel. But, although the pilot was a figure to inspire awe, he was still her son, and she still felt able to deliver a lecture when a suitable occasion arose. Sam wrote of one such incident in a letter to Orion:

Ma was delighted with her trip, but she was disgusted with the girls for allowing me to embrace and kiss them — and she was horrified at the Schottische as performed by Miss Castle and myself. She was perfectly willing for me to dance until 12 o'clock at the imminent peril of my going to sleep on the after watch — but then she would top off with a very inconsistent sermon on dancing in general; ending with a terrific broadside at that heresy of heresies, the Schottische.⁸

Jane may have made such a lecture, but one must take Twain's account with several grains of salt, recognizing his fondness for exaggeration. First, it is quite unlikely that Twain would be kissing and embracing within the sight of his mother. That sort of thing was not done. Secondly, Jane's opposition to dancing seems rather overdone and extreme. Further evidence of this exaggeration occurs later in the same letter, as he described an excursion through the New Orleans' garden, in which the ladies "To use an expression which is commonly ignored in polite society, . . . were 'hell-bent' on stealing some of the luscious looking oranges from branches which overhung the fences, but I restrained them."⁹ One simply cannot imagine Jane Clemens stealing oranges like a street urchin. This sort of exaggeration would be the forerunner and cause of much of the controversy about Mark Twain.

The Civil War brought an end to Sam's riverboat days, and, when Orion received a government appointment to go to the Nevada Territory, Sam decided to go with him. There he tried mining and newspaper work, among other things.

Soon, the bachelor paradise was ended, as Orion's wife Mollie arrived. Mollie evidently never did approve of her husband's brother,

⁷ Albert Bigelow Paine, ed., *Mark Twain's Letters*, I, 48.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 46-47.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

and, when she read some of his contributions to the Nevada paper, her disapproval deepened. She wrote to Jane that she was thankful Sam was signing himself Mark Twain, for the writings were very crude and rough. Jane was probably also shocked.¹⁰

Mollie's disapproval was probably one reason for Sam's moving to San Francisco. There he continued living the good life; the name Mark Twain had, as Sam had boasted in his letter, became known on the West Coast. On the strength of his new reputation, he was engaged to write travel letters on a pleasure trip to the Sandwich Islands. The trip provided him with an abundance of material for something, and he finally decided to try lecturing, giving his first lecture October 2, 1866. Its success enabled him to continue lecturing throughout California and Nevada. He then started to plan a trip around the world, writing letters for the *Alta California*, but first he traveled home to see his family.¹¹ While visiting Jane in Pamela's home in St. Louis, he saw the announcement for the *Quaker City* trip, and made arrangements with the *Alta* to finance his passage on the expedition.¹² Once more he left home, sailing on June 8, 1869.¹³ One of his longer letters to his family, written September 1, 1867, contained the request that they check to see if all his letters had been published. He listed them and at that point he had written thirty seven letters for the *Alta*, three for the *New York Herald* and five for the *Tribune*, and planned to write two or three more for the *Alta*.¹⁴ This would make a total of forty-five letters in three months; it is no wonder that he neglected writing to his family.

Even after the voyage was over, he was still busy. He had fallen in love. He was putting his letters into book form, he was lecturing, and many matters required his attention. He managed to write to his family about a new friend. Mrs. Fairbanks, who had, so he said, been his "Mother" on the *Quaker City*. Pamela and Jane accepted his love for Livy, but were not enthusiastic about his relationship with Mrs. Fairbanks, who was about Pamela's age. They found the domestic picture Sam presented of Mother Fairbanks' activities rather ridiculous.¹⁵

Finally, *The Innocents Abroad* was published, and Jane was astonished when she saw the dedication, which read: "To my most patient reader and most charitable critic, My Aged Mother, this volume is affectionately inscribed."¹⁶ Jane's reaction was not a happy one, as she reportedly said: "I've not been his patient reader, ever, nor an easy critic, either. Sometimes I've roasted him. And I'm a far piece from aged. I'm just sixty five years old." (She was sixty six)¹⁷ The

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, *op. cit.*, p. 261.

¹¹ Albert Bigelow Paine, *Mark Twain, A Biography*, I, 282-309.

¹² Mark Twain, *The Autobiography of Mark Twain*, p. 161.

¹³ Albert Bigelow Paine, *Mark Twain, A Biography*, I, 324.

¹⁴ Albert Bigelow Paine, ed., *Mark Twain's Letters*, I, pp. 134-35.

¹⁵ Rachel M. Varble, *Jane Clemens: The Story of Mark Twain's Mother*, pp. 281-82.

¹⁶ Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad*, "Dedication," p. v.

¹⁷ Varble, *op. cit.*, p. 282.

point is, however, that her son, Mark Twain, cast her as his aged, patient mother, a kindly soul, a bit scatterbrained, capable of reading and sometimes criticizing her much loved son. The facts are somewhat different. Jane was not aged, and there is no evidence to show that she ever read any of her son's work before it was published. She might react, and scold her son after she had read his work, already published, but she certainly never had the opportunity to change anything. There is no evidence that her son paid any attention to her criticism, if there was any. He ignored Pamela's wishes that he be less irreverent, and he ignored Jane's comments also. But the picture he created of her, the fictional image, was to live on.

Mark Twain's later contacts with his mother were few. This can be explained partially by the fact that he had his own family to look after, his own interests and responsibilities. His money supported his mother, sister, and brother. But there are other possible explanations. He had become Mark Twain, the writer and humorist; he was no longer just Sam, Jane Clemens' son. Certainly all mothers see their children grow up and change, but this change must have been difficult for Jane to completely understand. Not only had her son changed his name, he had changed his mother, or rather, he had changed what he thought his mother was. Twain may have felt rather uncomfortable in Jane's presence, simply because she was not exactly like the mother he had created. She often failed to play her part. At a distance he could write to her, to his illusion of her, but at close range, the difference between the illusion and the reality became quite obvious. Jane ". . . was unfitted for the Calvinistic niche in which Mark Twain so relentlessly placed her."¹⁸

Had she not been the mother of Mark Twain, Jane Clemens would simply be another parent, trying to do the best for her children. She could not know that years later her influence on her son would be so discussed. In all probability she would be very amused at those who credit her with so much influence, for her son usually did as he wished, with or without her approval. She did serve as an audience for her son's adventures, and as one who would either be, or pretend to be, shocked by his stories. Thus she, unknowingly, began the game Twain would continue. Others were soon to take her place, but she was the first feminine presence, and the model on whom the rest of the women in Mark Twain's life were based. Ironically, though, even the model was a creation of Mark Twain.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 344.

Chapter II

Mrs. Fairbanks: The Pattern Expands

Much has been written about the next woman to figure in Twain's life. She was Mrs. Mary Mason Fairbanks, wife of the publisher of the *Cleveland Herald*.¹⁹ This thirty-nine year old mother of two was a fellow passenger on the now famous *Quaker City* voyage.²⁰ She seems to have been a fairly well-educated woman, for the time, and she occasionally did some writing; she was guaranteed publication of her travel letters by her husband's newspaper.²¹ Mrs. Fairbanks would have been just an average tourist with some pretensions toward writing had it not been for Mark Twain. Their friendship, her influence on him, and her "censorship" of his travel letters have been the subject of much literary discussion. The debate has not been as vicious as that concerning Twain's wife, but the majority of the critics agree that she did prune offensive slang or allusions from Twain's letters. The remarkable aspect of the discussion centering around Mrs. Fairbanks is the agreement of the great majority of the critics on the contention that Mrs. Fairbanks did influence the manners, morals, and writings of Mark Twain. Although there is some debate on the extent of that influence, the influence itself is acknowledged. Only a very small minority take a different view.

It is impossible to examine the influence of Mrs. Fairbanks without first examining the majority view. It is equally impossible to understand the Twain-Fairbanks relationship unless one also examines the discrepancies brought out by the minority. However, by bringing the two together, by compromising, one can understand what influence Mrs. Fairbanks had and why she had it. Without such a compromise, the picture is incomplete, for there are at least two divergent points of view, something which is generally not recognized when considering Mrs. Fairbanks.

In this examination of Mrs. Fairbanks and her role, one must remember that, once more, the information available comes from Mark Twain. Later critics have based their observations on what Twain has written, and Twain does not always present an accurate picture.

The generally accepted theory is that with the *Quaker City* trip, Twain entered "society" and realized that he needed a woman's influence to polish his rough western manners. He appealed to Mrs. Fairbanks for help, and she gladly became his mentor. Wector sees Mrs. Fairbanks as a better educated, more cultivated person who could give Clemens motherly "counseling, supervising, petting."²² Kaplan too

¹⁹ Justin Kaplan, *Mr. Clemens and Mark Twain*, p. 43.

²⁰ Dixon Wector, ed., *Mark Twain to Mrs. Fairbanks*, p. xx.

²¹ Kaplan, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

²² Wector, *MT to Mrs. Fairbanks*, p. xxvii.

views Mrs. Fairbanks as a motherly influence, and emphasizes Twain's "willing suspension of identity," his desire to experiment with her manners and standards . . ." ²³ Fiedler's explanation is similar, but emphasizes the vestigial Puritanism operating in the relationships, with its reverence for "pure womanhood." ²⁴

The minority view is represented almost entirely by Dewey Ganzel, who, in his recent book *Mark Twain Abroad*, casts some doubt about the influence of Mrs. Fairbanks, claiming that the idea that she civilized him and showed him how to write in a more genteel fashion "is ludicrously wrong and does a disservice to both persons." ²⁵ He further points out that Twain was already a fairly accomplished and a published writer, while Mrs. Fairbanks, though published in her husband's paper, was certainly not a professional, nor was she necessarily a good writer. ²⁶

However, the most damaging point that Ganzel makes is that it would have been impossible for Mrs. Fairbanks to do the amount of refining credited her simply because she and Twain were only the most casual acquaintances until the trip was nearly over. ²⁷

The belief in their early friendship seemingly originates, as many stories seem to, with Paine, who claims that from the start of the voyage, Twain gave readings of his travel letters to the passengers, who responded by giving helpful suggestions, which he duly accepted. ²⁸ One can easily see where Wector received the idea of Twain eagerly accepting criticism "from a sympathetic elder friend . . ." Ganzel takes issue with all points of this study, and states:

A nice picture — one would like to believe it — but for the first two weeks of the voyage Clemens wrote no letters. Even if he had, it would have been a sudden departure for him to be so unsure of himself that he would seek critical advice from near-strangers. . . . ²⁹

This point is well taken, especially when one recalls that Twain was the only person of fame abroad, the other personages having cancelled. Paine's story will not work in total. If Twain wrote travel letters, as Ganzel says he did not, at the start, and if he read them, would a group of strangers really have been bold enough to offer criticism to an already fairly well-known author, a "Wild" man, the only celebrity aboard? If Twain were really as uncivilized as many critics ask us to believe, wouldn't the passengers be afraid he would run amuck if crossed? Perhaps more realistically, one might think that polite people normally do not venture to antagonize an author by criticizing his works

²³ Kaplan, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

²⁴ Fiedler, "Afterword," *Innocents*, pp. 483-84.

²⁵ Dewey Ganzel, *Mark Twain Abroad*, pp. 89-90.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

²⁷ *Loc. cit.*

²⁸ Albert Bigelow Paine, *Mark Twain, A Biography*, I, 37-28.

²⁹ Dewey Ganzel, *Mark Twain Abroad*, pp. 89-90.

until they know that author fairly well. Paine's picture seems implausible. If, on the other hand, Twain did not write any letters during the first two weeks of the trip (in a letter to his mother the day before he left, he mentions being "all written out"), then he obviously did not read them, and Paine once more obscures the facts.

In further support, Ganzel points out that:

There is . . . no reference to her in his personal correspondence, his *Alta* letters, or his memoirs before Constantinople. Neither do Mrs. Fairbanks' correspondence or memoirs give evidence of close friendship early in the voyage.³⁰

There is, however, a letter written by Mrs. Fairbanks the day after sailing which has done much to cause the early friendship belief. She wrote: "We have D.D.'s and M.D.'s - we have men of wisdom and men of wit. There is one table from which is sure to come a peal of laughter, and all eyes are turned toward Mark Twain. . . ." ³¹ She continues with a description of Twain. This particular letter was published by Paine, but Ganzel examined the original and found a possibly significant difference, one which can suggest a different interpretation of this letter. He claims that:

The quotation, unfortunately, is inexact and the impression of the original is subtly different from Paine's version. Mrs. Fairbanks refers to "Mark Twain" in quotation marks - an indication that she distinguished between the persons and the writer whom, like all of the Quaker City passengers, she called Clemens. . . . In fact, the comment does not even suggest acquaintance - as she describes the scene they were not sitting at the same table. Unfortunately, Paine's misquotation has been requoted often and used to suggest an early friendship of a very special sort.³²

The letter does suggest that she is an onlooker rather than an intimate.

There are no mentions of a great friendship with Twain in Mrs. Fairbanks' letters, personal or publishable. And, as mentioned previously, Twain was a real celebrity. Certainly Mrs. Fairbanks would have mentioned him to her *Herald* readers if he had been a close friend. Certainly it would be entirely normal to at least drop hints about speaking to the great West Coast comic. After the trip, one finds Mrs. Fairbanks confiding bits of information about Twain to her readers, even printing excerpts from his letters with some regularity. It is simply not realistic to imagine that she would not have mentioned the newsworthy Twain if there had been anything to mention. Not only do her letters show a lack of close friendship, the travel records also show the

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

³¹ Albert Bigelow Paine, *Mark Twain, A Biography*, I, 327.

³² Dewey Ganzel, *Mark Twain Abroad*, pp. 98-90.

same thing. With the exception of casual deck conversation, Mrs. Fairbanks rarely saw Twain. They did not take the same side trips. When they chanced to be in the same place at the same time, they did not seem to make any effort to meet.³³ Even Mrs. Fairbanks' best friend failed to mention Mark Twain, as Ganzel further points out:

. . . Emily Severance, who *was* the constant companion of Mrs. Fairbanks says nothing in her letters home to suggest even a casual friendship with Clemens during the first four months of the voyage, although she writes of Mrs. Fairbanks and at least a dozen other passengers repeatedly. Only in her last letter of the voyage — from Bermuda — does Mrs. Fairbanks suggest that she and Clemens had become fast friends. It was only after the journey through Palestine that one is aware of Clemens' affection for her, and affection which was to continue unabated until her death in 1898.³⁴

Seemingly, then, the belief in the shipboard friendship between Twain and Mrs. Fairbanks is based on a story by Paine, a letter misquoted by Paine, and theories built on this so-called evidence. But the main evidence comes from a letter written by Twain, plus an additional few stories which Paine provides. This letter has been partially and fully quoted by most of the Twain scholars, serving to prove Mrs. Fairbanks' influence. Twain wrote to his family:

Inclosed is a letter to me from one of our fellow passengers (the wife of the editor of the Cleveland Herald). She was the most refined, intelligent, & cultivated lady in the ship & altogether the kindest & best. She sewed my buttons on, kept my clothes in presentable trim, fed me on Egyptian jam, (when I behaved,) lectured me awfully on the quarter-deck on moonlit promenading evenings, & cured me of several bad habits. I am under lasting obligations to her. She looks young because she is so good — but she has a grown son & daughter at home. I wrote her, the other day, that my buttons were all off, again. — She had another pup under her charge, younger than myself, whom I always called the "cub." Hence her reference to cubs & bears. Lucius Moulton was another cub of hers. We all called her "mother" & kept her in hot water all the time about her brood. I always abused the sea-sick people — I said nobody but almighty mean people ever got sea-sick — & she thought I was in earnest. She never got sick herself. She always drummed us up for prayer meeting, with her monitory "Seven bells, my boys — you knew what it is time for." We always went, but we like four bells best, because it meant hash — *dinner*, I *should* say.³⁵

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

³⁴ *Loc. cit.*

³⁵ Dixon Wecter, ed., *Mark Twain to Mrs. Fairbanks*, p. xxii.

The major part of the belief in Mrs. Fairbanks' influence stems from this letter and from the tendency of most to read Twain's letters as the gospel truth. Although most critics would agree that Twain is skilled in writing humor, satire, and exaggeration, they tend to read anything not written specifically for publication as the revealed word. Is it possible for a writer to sit down and write a story, saying "I am writing humor" and then write a personal letter, saying "I will not write humor?" Although one must admit that there is a time and a place for humor and seriousness, can a man's style of writing change so drastically? It would seem more probable that Twain's letters are a further extension of his humorous style. His early letters to his family show this tendency for exaggeration and so do his later letters. This letter provides Twain's view of Mrs. Fairbanks and ". . . is projected almost entirely through the magnifying glass of his imagination."³⁶

A realistic reading of this famous letter can reveal several points for consideration. First, there is an error: Mrs. Fairbanks' children were only eleven and twelve years old at the time, which is far from being grown up.³⁷ Twain must surely have known this. Perhaps the exaggeration was made so that his mother would be less disapproving of his association with a woman only seven years his senior. He insists that Mrs. Fairbanks' young looks stem from goodness, rather than youth, not a very complimentary thing to say about a woman.

Second, the description of "Mother" Fairbanks feeding her "Cub" jam when he is good, scolding him when he is bad, and persuading him not to write about naughty things simply does not sound very real. It sounds more like a staged scene, involving a child. It is exceedingly difficult to imagine the scene being played by a thirty-two year old man and a thirty-nine year old woman, unless, of course, they are in love and indulging in a fit of baby talk. There is no evidence that the latter is true of the people involved. Therefore, one is forced to conclude that it is a scene, that is, a consciously made up or imagined episode. It is a game, and, though some seem to recognize it as such, most fail to recognize the importance of it as such. Wecter comes close to this idea when he discusses the Twain-Fairbanks relationship in reference to Mrs. Fairbanks' mothering, and writes: ". . . both acquiesced in this role, and enjoyed playing it up as the theme of a purely platonic friendship. . . ."³⁸ The only rational way to interpret this episode is that the two were playing roles, were playing a game. It was the same game Twain had played before. Once more he has invented his character, his "mother," with many of the same qualities as Jane Clemens, but with further niceties added. The character he created as Mrs. Fairbanks was much more satisfactory than that of Jane; Mrs. Fairbanks would play the game, would live the part, seem-

³⁶ James M. Cox, *Mark Twain, The Fate of Humor*, p. 67.

³⁷ Dixon Wecter, ed., *Mark Twain to Mrs. Fairbanks*, p. xxiii.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. xxvii.

ingly, whereas Jane would not. Mrs. Fairbanks followed the rules of the game; Jane was not aware that the game, as such, existed. Thus once more Twain could play at being a bad boy, be scolded, reform, then be bad again. If one accepts the theory that this was a game, the relationship becomes more understandable, but there is still Ganzel's contention to deal with that the two were not friends until late in the voyage. This can be reconciled by noting that the letter in question was written three weeks after the expedition returned.³⁹ There is no mention of such activities until after the voyage is over. This would tend to lend credence to the idea that the episode is another of Twain's exaggerations, an imagined game, certainly not one which was going on during the entire trip:.

If one accepts the idea that Twain and Mrs. Fairbanks were not good friends until late in the voyage, then one might well ask, when did she have the time to influence him as much as she is claimed to have? When and why does she get her chance to censor his writings?

The turning point came when Twain found that nearly a third of his letters had been lost in transit. To fulfill his contact with the *Alta* he had to write 22 more letters instead of the eight he had thought remained to be written. Seemingly unable to recall what he had said in the lost letters, Twain turned to copying from guidebooks, to the considerable consternation of his *Alta* editors.⁴⁰ More importantly, Twain seems to have sought Mrs. Fairbanks' aid. There is some evidence to show that she assisted Twain, for he refers in a later letter to "those Holy Land letters which you did not revise."⁴¹ This suggests that she did help to revise other letters, and the assumption is made that her duties involved censorship.

Ganzel disputes that theory, and makes the following statement:

Pressed in composition, he turned the job of copy-reading over to her. No doubt she suggested changes in diction, but her function was to do to the MSS those editorial chores of proofreading which Clemens had heretofore done for himself and would, had he not been pressed for time, still have done. Perhaps she suggested additional subjects to him, but her function was generally of a much more mundane sort. Her influence may have extended to treatment, but if so, it does not appear to have improved Clemens' writing since there is some agreement that the Palestine letters show a decline — not an improvement — in his taste. Although one might argue they would have been worse without the lady-like hand of Mrs. Fairbanks, one might more easily argue, judging from her own letters, that they might have been better without her criticism.⁴²

³⁹ *Loc. cit.*

⁴⁰ McKeithan, *op. cit.*, p. 229.

⁴¹ Wecter, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

⁴² Dewey Ganzel, *Mark Twain Abroad*, p. 274.

This view is substantiated by Wecter, when he writes: "While Mrs. Severance sharpened his pencils, . . . Mrs. Fairbanks stood by to 'correct' his copy for the press."⁴³

Paine makes two other contributions to the Fairbanks' influence myth. In one, Mr. Severance sees Twain ripping up some paper and tossing it out to sea, because Mrs. Fairbanks didn't like what he had written.⁴⁴ There is no indication when this episode took place; the implication is that it took place early in the voyage. This seems a rather theatrical gesture and one wonders how Twain could have afforded to throw away so much work. Ganzel states that "it is incredible that, pressed for time, he would . . . have *destroyed* manuscript for *whatever* cause."⁴⁵ He might possibly have marked out passages, but surely he would not have discarded the entire letter. The same objections are true to Paine's statement, attributed to Emma Bach, recalling Twain saying "Well, Mrs. Fairbanks has just destroyed another four hours' work for me."⁴⁶ Twain simply could not have afforded to lose four hours' work. Again, he probably was exaggerating.

However, the major objection to the contention that Mrs. Fairbanks was a sort of glorified proofreader seems to come from Twain himself. One can find a number of letters in which he thanks Mrs. Fairbanks for helping, reforming, and refining him, and asking for more of the same. While working on *The Innocents Abroad*, June 17, 1868, he writes to Mrs. Fairbanks: "I wish you could revise this mountain of MSS. for me."⁴⁷ This could be simply an appraisal of Mrs. Fairbanks' function as a copyreader.⁴⁸ Flattery is also present, with the implication that *she* could do a better job. He had, however, seemingly unprompted, previously reached a decision to revise the letters for book form, as he had written to Elisha Bliss December 2, 1867, in reference to the projected book: "I could weed them of other chief faults of construction and inelegancies of expression and make a volume that would be more acceptable in many respects than any I could now write."⁴⁹ Before the book was finished, he also had the aid of his fiancée in "weeding" the material of "inelegancies,"⁵⁰ though, judging from his letter, some did manage to slip by.

Twain's concept of the function of women in general required that a woman try to reform him. The game he made of this reformation was to continue all his life; it was his method of appealing to women, whether seeking friendship or matrimony. The next chapter will consider the techniques used in courtship, but before that, one might note

⁴³ Dixon Wecter, ed., *Mark Twain to Mrs. Fairbanks*, p. xxiii.

⁴⁴ Albert Bigelow Paine, *Mark Twain, A Biography*, I, p. 328.

⁴⁵ Dewey Ganzel, *Mark Twain Abroad*, p. 273.

⁴⁶ Albert Bigelow Paine, *Mark Twain, A Biography*, I, 328.

⁴⁷ Dixon Wecter, ed., *Mark Twain to Mrs. Fairbanks*, p. 30.

⁴⁸ Dewey Ganzel, *Mark Twain Abroad*, p. 275.

⁴⁹ Albert Bigelow Paine, ed., *Mark Twain's Letters*, I, 141.

⁵⁰ DeLaney Ferguson, *Mark Twain, Man and Legend*, p. 145.

the amazing similarity between letters written to Mrs. Fairbanks and to his future wife. The same techniques are present. For the rest of her life he would write to Mrs. Fairbanks: "Don't be afraid to write sermons — I am perfectly willing not only to receive them but to try to profit by them."⁵¹ This comment exactly parallels those written to Livy. In order to get a woman to try to reform him, to play the game, one first had to exhibit some need for reform, and if none was available, one had to invent some lapse in behavior. This, too, was part of the game, as it was with Jane. Twain loved to tease his mother; he would later rejoice in teasing his wife, and he followed the same practice with Mrs. Fairbanks. He admits as much in a postscript to Livy, dated October 30, 1868, writing:

P.S. I have got Mother Fairbanks in a stew again. — I nanned that lecture just for her benefit. And I sent her an absurd synopsis of it that I knew would provoke her wrath — I intimated that I was idling somewhat. I like to tease her because I like her so.⁵²

In other letters he continues this game, and occasionally adds flattery, as he writes to Mrs. Fairbanks October 31, 1868: "I'll be in Cleveland Nov. 8 — lecture there Nov. 17 — so you can get ready to scratch. I'll expurge every word you want scratched out, cheerfully."⁵³ How flattering this must all have been to Mrs. Fairbanks. But, if Twain is serious, and will remove anything she doesn't approve of, why then, is it necessary for him to keep making that statement? In other words, if he is reformed, why does he keep saying that he will reform? Why must her lectures continue? Unfortunately, only his letters, remain, so her criticisms will never be known. That, too, can be evidence that this is a game. Twain creates her reactions, which may or may not be true. But the picture is highly one sided.

That Twain enjoyed his game cannot be denied; if he had not, he would not have continued it for so many years. That he did not follow Mrs. Fairbanks' reforms must also be evident. Twain would promise anything, perhaps meaning, at the time, to keep that promise, but he rarely followed through. His reforms had a tendency to vanish rapidly.

The only way in which one can make a useful judgment about the influences Mrs. Fairbanks had on the writings of Mark Twain is by examining the travel letters themselves, then by considering the book, *The Innocents Abroad*, and observing the major differences between the two. Unfortunately, this examination does not really prove anything concretely. If Mrs. Fairbanks had the influence on the travel letters which has been claimed for her, one would expect that the letters them-

⁵¹ Dixon Wecter, ed., *Mark Twain to Mrs. Fairbanks*, p. 37.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁵³ *Loc. cit.*

⁵⁴ McKeithan, *op. cit.*, p. xi.

selves would be very proper, lacking any sort of offensive material. One has only to read the letters to find that this simply is not so. Additionally, if Mrs. Fairbanks had basically purified the letters, why did Twain feel that further revisions and further censorings were necessary before he transformed the letters into a book? This would not seem to indicate any over-confidence in his so-called resident censor. An additional difficulty in ascertaining the Fairbanks' influence is that Twain's fiancée also helped him in revising the letters.⁵⁴ Thus it is impossible to determine who did what to the letters. However, for purposes of simplicity, the revisions will be considered as a whole, rather than as those of Mrs. Fairbanks, then Livy. When considering the revisions, there is another point which is perhaps more important than a dispute about anyone's censoring Twain. This is simply the point that Twain did much revision in order to improve the style of the book. Writing letters under pressure is certainly no easy task, particularly during the last six weeks of the voyage, when Twain had to write more than 45,000 words, actually an average of 9,000 words a week, since one week was spent sight-seeing in Spain.⁵⁵ Obviously, certain stylistic niceties were sacrificed. Another reason for revisions might be that things which seemed amusing in the past might not seem so amusing in the present. It is quite understandable, or should be, that Twain would make certain changes with or without the influences of his so-called "censors." He was, after all, a professional writer.

A number of studies consider the changes made from the letters to the book. Leon T. Dickinson, who made one of the first of such studies, feels that the revisions were made for two basic reasons: the fact that Twain was addressing a different audience, and the fact that he was dealing with a book form.⁵⁶ Dickinson further claims that the book is much funnier than the letters, and attributes this to three basic revisions:

- (1) he cut out much harsh criticism inappropriate in a work predominately humorous; (2) he cut out the weaker humor and the broader humor of the letters; and (3) he developed a humor that is richer than that in the letters.⁵⁷

Further, in a book-length study, Daniel Morley McKeithan states: "Nearly every revision which Twain made in the letters when writing the book was an improvement. . . ."⁵⁸

One can read the travel letters and judge if Mrs. Fairbanks damaged them. The most famous passage she is supposed to have deleted deals

⁵⁵ Dewey Ganzel, "Clemens, Mrs. Fairbanks and *Innocents Abroad*," MP, LXIII (November, 1965), 134.

⁵⁶ Leon T. Dickinson, "Mark Twain's Revisions in Writing *The Innocents Abroad*," AL, XIX (May, 1947), 138.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

⁵⁸ McKeithan, *op. cit.*, p. xi.

with a description of how a young lady in a hoop skirt would look to those below her.⁵⁹ This would not seem to be a serious loss. One would presume that Mrs. Fairbanks would also disapprove of references to nudity or a lack of morals. If she was as influential as some believe her to have been, how did these subjects pass her censoring eye, for both subjects appear frequently in the letters? She is also said to have objected to slang, crudities, irreverence, and unkind remarks.⁶⁰ While Twain's letters do not abound with these, all certainly exist, to a greater or lesser degree. If Twain were as repentant as some believe, or as henpecked, would he have written in such an irreverent and tongue-in-check style about the Holy Land? Whatever, if any, reformation Mrs. Fairbanks effected did not seem to last very long. Twain continued in his own way, ridiculing the Old Masters, the Pilgrims, souvenir-hunting, commercialization of holy places, morals, manners, doing everything that Mrs. Fairbanks would, presumably, tell him not to do.

What many believe to be evidences of censorship do appear in the differences between the letters and the book, however, although most revisions seem to be more of a stylistic nature. Dickinson notes basically the elimination of redundancies, clarification of pronoun references, improvement of coherence, corrections of fact, and insertion of transitions for continuity.⁶¹ Also, Twain seems to have tightened his organization, to have restructured material so that the reader is able to follow descriptions more easily. For example, the letter description of Milan cathedral seems jumpy, as if Twain were describing it in a series of quick pictures, going up, down, in, and out. In *The Innocents Abroad*, Twain "combines the portions treating the exterior, and then describes the interior."⁶² Thus, he gives the material an order which is easier to picture.

Twain also makes an effort to make the phrasing of the book clearer and more varied, eliminating the over-use of certain words.⁶³ For example, the word "rusty" was used quite frequently in the letters. In the book, Twain eliminates it at least six times. Other words which were over-used in the letters and removed in the book are "jolly," "astonisher," and "swindle."⁶⁴

Another group of revisions can be called those dealing with exaggerations. These revisions deal with the change in, and elimination or addition of, various adjectives. Specifically, in letter one, Chapter VIII, "smells like the San Francisco Police Court" is changed to "smells like a police court."⁶⁵ This change also eliminates the West Coast reference, making the statement of a more universal appeal. In letter four, which

⁵⁹ Kaplan, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

⁶⁰ *Loc. cit.*

⁶¹ Dickinson, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 141.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

⁶⁵ McKeithan, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

became Chapter IX, "rusty camp followers" becomes "camp followers," "he-Moor" is changed to "male Moor."⁶⁶ Letter eleven, Chapter II, Volume II, has a number of such revisions:

"Too degrading or too disgusting": became "too degrading"; "Chance" became "opportunity"; vile traits became "bad traits"; "infinitely meaner" became "worse"; "the lowest and meanest" became "the lowest," . . . "Brutal" was dropped from "brutal, high-borne knaves," . . . "Brutes" became "miscreants"; "he has to be heartless, soulless, groveling, mean-spirited, cruel and cowardly" becomes "he must have *all* the vile means traits there are" . . .⁶⁷

In this example, one can see the tendency to eliminate some of the much-used terms, and the desire to tighten up the style, selecting one word to take the place of several.

Slang terms were also eliminated, or put in quotation marks. Since Twain's supposed mentor, Mrs. Fairbanks disapproved of slang, one might be rather surprised to find it in the letters. Nevertheless, there is a lot of slang in the letters, particularly the slang of the West Coast. It was taken out. In all probability Twain did not eliminate the slang either because of Livy or Mrs. Fairbanks, but he did eliminate it because it could be incomprehensible to the majority of the Eastern readers, or, in some cases he felt they might be offended by it. Thus in letter seventeen, Chapter VI, Volume II:

"Has got a good thing" became "has a fortune"; "stand any show" became "provoke any notice"; "cradle rockers" became "snow shoes"; "travel into the place in my sock-feet" became "walk into the place in my stocking feet" . . .⁶⁸

In letter fifteen, Chapter V, Volume II, the following changes take place: "'Strike our crowd' became 'stumble on our party'; 'I reckon' became 'I suppose'; . . . 'don't care a fig' became 'little care' . . ."⁶⁹ Dickinsons notes the omission of "mangy," "jackass," and "lies" on the grounds that such rough language might offend.⁷⁰ Also left out were references to "slimy cesspool," "stink," and "Bawdy-house."⁷¹ Some other terms that Twain seemed fond of were "liars," "frauds," "thieves," and "swindle." These terms seem grossly overused even to the casual reader, and Twain revised many of them, evidently realizing how repetitious they were.

These revisions seem to be made in order to clarify the writing, to improve its style, rather than because of censorship. Certainly the book does not suffer because of these omissions.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

⁷⁰ Dickinson, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

Twain also seemed to be a bit milder in his irreverence, and he was not quite as bitter toward the pilgrims in the book as in the letters. Dickinson states:

He did not hesitate to include in the book mild criticism and ridicule of his fellow travelers, but he stopped short of seriously criticising their religious devotion. He did like the people, and probably omitted the most serious criticism of them in order not to seem ill-natured.⁷²

Perhaps, as time passed, Twain became a bit more forgiving, although one cannot really describe his descriptions of his fellow passengers as mild.

The grammar of the letters was also revised. Despite whatever Mrs. Fairbanks did or did not do, the grammar in the letters is often terrible. The major offender is the verb "got." Twain consistently uses "he has got" or "we have got." In the book, he eliminates this, using simply "he has" and "we have."⁷³ Other errors in subject-verb agreement are also eliminated. Consequently, the book is certainly more correct. Curiously, no one has commented on Mrs. Fairbanks' abilities as a grammarian.

There are other revisions, new material is added, paragraphs are shorter, but basically, the revisions made in transforming the letters into a book are improvements in both style and diction.⁷⁴ These would seem to be very sensible revisions for a professional writer to make, and need not have anything to do with any censoring or influence.

Supporting this latter statement is a further study made of additional revisions of *The Innocents Abroad* for the British edition of 1872. Again, if Twain were revising to please a censor, he would not need to further revise for another edition. Twain may have revised further so that he could keep his book from being pirated by obtaining a copyright, but if this were so, he need not have made such extensive changes.⁷⁵ Twain made over four hundred revisions, not including spellings. Arthur L. Scott summarizes the changes made for the British edition in the following chart:

Single words changed to other words	159
Single words omitted	85
Long omissions (i.e., one sentence or more)	63
Parts of sentences omitted	41
Parts of sentences changed	35

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 151.

⁷³ McKeithan, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁷⁵ Arthur L. Scott, "Mark Twain's Revisions of *The Innocents Abroad* for the British Edition of 1872," *AL*, XXV (March, 1953), 44.

Additions (of anything: one word up to one page)	31
Long changes (i.e., one sentence or more)	20
Total Revisions	434

Most of the small changes are changes in nouns and adjectives.⁷⁶ Twain once more seems to be searching for the exact word. However, there are also more changes from slang to more formal terms, evidence that Twain could not have eliminated all the slang in his previous revisions. Some of the changes are: "‘snuffling,’ to ‘lamenting,’ ‘Humbuggery’ to ‘imposture,’ ‘jawing’ to ‘disputing’ . . ." Other changes are made in grammar and in toning down certain exaggerations. Twain also eliminates many adjectives. Scott summarizes the changes in the following statement:

About one-third of these longer changes are stylistic improvements; about 1/3 of them seek to sharpen the humor; half a dozen qualify or modify flat assertions; and the remainder serve such varied purposes as to eliminate exaggerations or contradictions, to render statements more precise, and to transform American allusions.⁷⁷

In other words, these changes are made for the same reasons that the previous ones were made: to improve the writing itself.

Mrs. Fairbanks was, in all probability, a nice woman. But there are too many alternate possibilities available for one to accept wholeheartedly the belief that she molded, refined, and censored Mark Twain. What she did or did not do, to this reader at least, does not seem to have had much of an effect on either the man or the writer.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 46-47.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

Chapter III

Olivia Langdon Clemens: The Pattern Is Perfected

I.

One of the current clichés of writing is to say that if someone had not existed, he would have to be invented. This was approximately that situation in which Twain found himself in 1867. He had created two censor figures for himself, using the raw material of Jane Clemens and Mary Fairbanks. The former, however, refused to play the role that Twain wanted. The latter, a married woman with two children and numerous responsibilities, could not be expected to devote all her time to the repair and reformation of Mark Twain. What Twain needed, or so he thought, was a full time censor, and he would no doubt have created one from somewhere. He knew the type of person he was looking for. A brief, but suggestive, description appears in a letter to Mrs. Fairbanks, written December 12, 1867: ". . . if I were settled I would quit all nonsense & swindle some [poor] girl into marrying me. But I wouldn't expect to be 'worthy' of her. I wouldn't *have* a girl that I was worthy of. *She* wouldn't do. *She* wouldn't be respectable enough."⁷⁸ Happily, at this crucial time in his life, Twain found the raw material for his new censor, mentor, mate, and mother in the person of Miss Olivia Langdon.

According to Paine's biography, Twain first glimpsed Olivia Langdon in an ivory miniature carried by her brother Charles on the *Quaker City* trip. He then immediately fell in love with her and was determined to meet her.⁷⁹ If this story were true, and there is strong evidence to the contrary, then it is significant that Twain fell in love with the image before meeting the reality.⁸⁰ It is also dreadfully romantic, almost like a fairy tale. But the most interesting thing about the story lies in the nature of a picture. The personality of a person in a picture is left to the imaginings of the viewer. Having seen Livy's picture, Twain proceeded to create her personality, giving her all the traits he had previously lavished on his mother and Mrs. Fairbanks. When he finally met Livy, he did not alter the picture he had imagined, he only added to it. Fortunately, for both Twain and Livy, the imagined ideal was not too far from the real thing in some aspects, and Livy was willing to adapt to others.

There is, however, no evidence to support Paine's romantic story, and some evidence which would seem to disprove it. If Twain fell so deeply in love with the picture, he was remarkably silent about it. He makes no mention of the lovely Miss Langdon in any of his letters. In

⁷⁸ Dixon Wecter, ed., *Mark Twain to Mrs. Fairbanks*, p. 8.

⁷⁹ Albert Bigelow Paine, *Mark Twain, A Biography*, I, 339.

⁸⁰ Cox, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

the previously cited letter to Mrs. Fairbanks, he mentions no specific girl; the letter sounds as if he is still looking for someone, not as though he had a girl picked out.

Another interesting note appears in the *New York Sun*, November 20, 1867, mentioning that a Miss Langdon joined the *Quaker City* at Bermuda.⁸¹ Ganzel unearthed this item, and goes on to speculate:

This addition suggests the possibility that Olivia Langdon joined the Excursion in Bermuda and that Clemens may, therefore, have met his future wife in person on the voyage rather than at the St. Nicholas Hotel in late December, 1867, as he states in his *Autobiography* (II, 103). Clemens' memory as reflected in the *Autobiography* is not to be trusted absolutely, and the facts of their first meeting are uncertain at best. The *Sun* article is a good contemporary authority because the information derived from Moses Beach who was on the trip from Bermuda. "Miss Langdon" may have been Susan Langdon, Charlie and Olivia's step sister, but it appears that she was already Mrs. Theodore Crane in November, 1867. It is not impossible that Olivia, a semi-invalid, journeyed to Bermuda for her health and planned there to meet Charlie and return to New York with him.⁸²

It is also possible, of course, that Beach did not know of Susan's marriage. But the point remains that if Twain were so in love with Livy via her picture, it would seem logical that he would make an effort to meet her, if it were she on board, or, meet her step sister, if the new passenger were Susan. Surely Twain would have mentioned his great affection to Charlie, and Charlie would have introduced his relation. If such an introduction took place, it is not mentioned, and would seem to have not made much of an impression on Twain. Thus Paine's picture story seems curiously inconsistent with Twain's actual behavior. Twain did not get around to meeting this girl of his dreams for over a month after his return, when a Christmas gathering of *Quaker City* friends brought an introduction to Livy.⁸³ He then managed to see her again by paying a New Year's Day call.⁸⁴ Twain mentioned this call in a letter to his mother, written from Washington, January 8, 1868, saying: "I started to make calls New Year's Day, but I anchored for the day at the first house I came to — Charlie Langdon's sister was there (beautiful girl,) and Miss Alice Hooker, another beautiful girl, niece of Henry Ward Beecher's."⁸⁵ He went on to say that he planned to visit Charlie's home as soon as he had the time, and also visit Mrs. Hooker fairly soon.⁸⁶ This is the first mention of Livy, and she isn't even mentioned

⁸¹ Dewey Ganzel, *Mark Twain Abroad*, p. 321.

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 331-332.

⁸³ Albert Bigelow Paine, *Mark Twain, A Biography*, I, 352.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 355.

⁸⁵ Albert Bigelow Paine, ed., *Mark Twain's Letters*, I, 143.

⁸⁶ *Loc. cit.*

by name. Their actual courtship did not begin until Twain's visit to Elmira in August. Perhaps Twain was keeping his feeling quiet until he got an opportunity to indulge in a full time courtship, but it is difficult to believe that Twain was madly in love with a woman and managed not to mention it for at least eight months (more, if one credits Paine's story).

Probably no one will ever clarify the events which led to the courtship of Olivia Langdon, but it did occur. Twain was, as he had mentioned before, ready, even eager, to settle down. He knew what he wanted; he had formulated his ideal.

He was not only in love with love, but with ideal womanhood — the exquisite purity, sweetness, and nobility which both Victorianism and the American tradition exalted as a mystery, transcending the moral quality of the male.⁸⁷

Twain did not need to see a picture to fall in love. He already had the picture fully developed in his mind. All he lacked was a real person to be that picture. He knew already how she should act; he knew how his dream would proceed to reform him. The lines were already written; he had even staged dress rehearsals, practicing the scenes with Jane and Mrs. Fairbanks. Finally, a combination of fate and luck brought him in August to the Langdon home where he decided that Livy would be his ideal.

When Twain met and began his courtship of her, Olivia Langdon was twenty-two, the shy and delicate daughter of wealthy coal-dealer Jervis Landon. Adored and protected by her family, Livy developed into a conventionally attractive late 19th century woman: ". . . a slender figure, pale and lovely, with great sweetness and dignity, her eyes peering with a tender myopic vagueness, her black tresses combed severely back from a high white forehead."⁸⁸ One can form his own conclusions by examining any of the pictures of Livy. She was not beautiful, but attractive, quiet looking, rather restful. She looks like a lady.

Livy's education was conducted primarily by tutors, because of her health, and it was no better or worse than that of other young ladies of the time. Her pastor was Thomas K. Beecher of the First Congregational Church.⁸⁹ Beecher was thought of as a sort of free-thinker, preaching a fairly tolerant gospel, but Livy, though exposed to this, observed a "conventional middle-of-the-road piety."⁹⁰

Livy's environment was an interesting mixture of the liberal and the conservative.

⁸⁷ Dixon Wector, ed., *The Love Letters of Mark Twain*, p. 3.

⁸⁸ *Loc. cit.*

⁸⁹ Kaplan, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

⁹⁰ Dixon Wector, ed., *The Love Letters of Mark Twain*, p. 9.

The provincial Langdons were strongly religious, ardent Congregationalists, who adhered to a daily ritual of prayers and Bible reading. They highly disapproved of the use of tobacco and alcohol, were shocked by strong language. Yet their social outlook was liberal. They had fought for the abolition of slavery and participated in the underground railway; they spent thousands of dollars on the education of the South's poor, white and colored alike; they entertained such firebrands as Gerrit Smith, William Lloyd Garrison and the Negro orator Fredrick Douglass. They were gentlefolk and rich, but they neither hoarded nor flaunted their wealth.⁹¹

Though much has been written about the differences between Twain's environment and Livy's, aside from the Langdon wealth, there does not seem to be too much difference. Jane Clemens would probably have agreed with the Langdon way of life.

This, then, was Livy. She was ". . . gentle, calm, spiritual, and refined, qualities which Clemens idealized in her and which he found all the more compelling for their contrast to his Western experiment."⁹² Or, as another critic puts it: "Sam, in love with love and entranced with a girl who had all the Victorian graces — beauty, a fine mind, and goodness — fell desperately for Livy. . . ."⁹³

Having discovered this person whose background and appearance seemed to suit her ideally for the role he had cast her in, Twain was faced with the problem of acquiring her as full-time guardian of his literary and social morality. This task was, naturally, more difficult than that of gaining his previous mentors. Additionally, her tasks would be considerably more varied.

Livy's role as mentor was to be a bit more complex than of her predecessors. Mrs. Fairbanks had been operative in matters of convention and taste; Olivia, in addition to handling these concerns, was delegated authority over regions of sex and faith. The game of love with her included not merely the task of reforming Samuel Clemens; she was to take up the burden of saving him from physical ruin and mental doubt. Constantly holding her up as the one object he could believe in and adore, he reminded her that the responsibility for his salvation lay inexorably in her hands. . . . In addition . . . she was to be his partner in a relationship physically passionate but passionately pure.⁹⁴

In order to obtain the woman he cast as the ideal, Twain began what must certainly be considered a remarkable and very clever courtship. Twain arrived in Elmira around August 24, 1868. Also visiting

⁹¹ Jerry Allen, *The Adventures of Mark Twain*, p. 158.

⁹² Kaplan, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

⁹³ Allen, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

⁹⁴ Cox, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

the Langdons at that time was Livy's cousin, Hattie Lewis, whose description of Twain's visit Wector quotes.⁹⁵

My cousin Olivia and myself felt a little nervous about entertaining an unmarried man who had written a book! At this time he had written *The Jumping Frog*. We wondered how he would look: how he would act: would he be funny all the time? and must we try to be? etc. as young ladies will. I really felt that I had one advantage over my cousin, but only one. She was rich, beautiful and intellectual, but she could not see through a joke, or see anything to laugh at in the wittiest sayings unless explained in detail — I could. . . . I soon discovered that my quickness at seeing the point of a joke and the witty sayings that I had considered irresistible were simply nothing in comparison to my cousin's gifts. Mr. C. evidently greatly preferred her sense to my nonsense.⁹⁶

Hattie Lewis went on to say that she decided early that Twain and Livy “. . . would be a most suitable match . . .” and that she curtailed her visit so that the two could have more time alone, though, before she left, she hinted to Livy that Twain would propose.

The Langdon family seemed to accept Twain and make him welcome. He represented something rather outside their experience. They did not realize at first that this unconventional humorist had every intention of carrying off their daughter. Twain evidently quickly made up his mind that Livy was the girl he would marry and, before his two week visit was over, disregarding all the proprieties, he proposed to her.⁹⁷ Livy was understandably shocked by this development; she had been brought up in a more conventional atmosphere. Thus she did the only proper thing, and refused. One must remember that this was the nineteenth century, the Victorian Era, the day of proposals made on bended knee, of fluttered fans, and of a standard refusal of the first proposal. The usual reply to a proposal was that the lady would allow her beau to continue to “hope.” The lady might accept the second or third proposal. The ritual of courtship was a very rigid one, with very strict rules which one just did not violate. But Twain did violate the rules of the game, rules he must have been acquainted with. He must have expected a refusal, for Livy was, after all, the embodiment of the Victorian graces. One wonders what would have happened if Livy had accepted that first proposal; Twain would probably have been shocked, especially since an early acceptance was not part of the game. Instead, however, of allowing Twain to “hope,” Livy granted him permission to write to her as a brother would write to a sister. Thus the courtship began, and with it, the urgings for reform began also, as Twain returned

⁹⁵ Dixon Wector, ed., *The Love Letters of Mark Twain*, p. 16.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 17-18.

to his earlier success in dealing with women and begged Livy to reform him.

The most accurate picture of this strange courtship is found in Twain's love letters, edited by Dixon Wector. One is able to see the strategy which Twain employed and see the letters to his "sister" become more and more unlike letters to a sister. In seemingly the first of these letters, written September 7, 1868, before he left Elmira, Twain told of his love, using the great majority of the cliches of love letters, and then changed tactics:

. . . I do not regret that I have loved you, still love & shall always love you. I accept the situation, uncomplainingly, hard as it is. Of old I am acquainted with grief, disaster & disappointment, & have borne these troubles as became a man. So, also, I shall bear this last & bitterest, even though it break my heart. I would not dishonor this worthiest love that has yet been born within me by any puerile thought, or word, or deed. It is better to have loved & lost you than that my life should have remained forever the blank it was before. For once, at least, in the idle years that have drifted over me, I have seen the world all beautiful, & known what it was to hope. . . .

But no more of this. . . . The words are spoken, & they have fallen upon forgiving ears. For your dear sake my tongue & my pen are now forbidden to repeat them ever again. . . . let me freight my speeches to you with simply the sacred love a brother bears to a sister. I ask that you will write to me sometimes, as to a friend whom you feel will do all that a man may to be worthy of your friendship — or as to a brother whom you know will hold his sister's honor as dearly as his own, her wishes as his law, her pure judgments above his blinded worldly wisdom. . . . My honored sister, you are so good & so beautiful — & I am so proud of you! Give me a little room in that great heart of yours — only the little you have promised me — & if I fail to deserve it may I remain forever the homeless vagabond I am! If you and Mother Fairbanks will only scold me & upbraid me now and then, I shall fight my way through the world, never fear. . . .⁹⁸

Although it seems rather rude to dissect a man's private love letters, it is sometimes necessary, and indeed helpful when endeavoring to ascertain what an elusive man like Twain is trying to do. In this particular letter, Twain established what were to be the techniques of his courtship. First he wrote of his great love, which he has agreed not to write about, and in effect, says that his life is ruined, but, no matter. All beauty is gone forever, but, never mind. All this should arouse some sympathy from Livy. These are very noble thoughts, very similar to

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

those expressed by the heroes of the popular novels of the time, and thus he put Livy in the position of the heroine. After the description of his love, he wrote that he would never mention it again; then he began addressing Livy as a "sister." This should be calculated to reassure Livy, after the preceeding outburst, since it puts Livy on more familiar ground. She had led a sheltered life, and was not used to courtship, but she did have a brother, and would, consequently, be less frightened by one who claimed to be brotherly in feeling. Next he praised not only her beauty, but her honor and purity. This is, of course, in the courtship tradition, a tradition which Twain often deplored, but frequently used. He also appealed to her sympathy, calling himself a "homeless vagabond." Somehow there is nothing quite so appealing to women, young and old, as a reasonably attractive, homeless man, particularly when he is unmarried. Women want to feed him, darn his socks, and generally mother him, and Twain knew this. He also asked her to scold him, to improve his conduct. All these elements combine in a bait which should be rather irresistible. Livy would have to write to him; she could do no less, since she had ruined his life. But, lest she not have anything to write about, Twain made suggestions as to subject matter in the same letter, saying:

Write me *something* from time to time — texts from the New Testament, if nothing else occurs to you — or dissertations on [the sin of] smoking — or extracts from your Book of Sermons — *anything*, whatever — the reflection that my matchless sister wrote it will be sufficient.⁹⁹

Livy replied and sent him a picture of herself. Twain was quick to follow up his advantage, and continued writing, reinforcing the points he had previously made, and expanding his stated eagerness to reform. Thus he wrote from St. Louis, September 21, 1868:

. . . I would be less than a man if I went on in my old careless way while you were praying for me — if I showed lack of respect, worthiness, reverence, while the needs of one like me were being voiced in the august presence of God, (I had not thought of this before) I beg that you will continue to pray for me — for I have a vague, faraway sort of idea that it may not be wholly in vain. In one respect, at least, it *shall* not be in vain — for I will so mend my conduct that I shall grow worthier of your prayers, & your good will & sisterly solicitude as the days go by. . . .¹⁰⁰

Twain continued writing using the brother-sister tactic through a brief visit to Elmira September 29, 1868.¹⁰¹ Finally he managed a longer visit, arriving November 21, and by Thursday, the 29th, Livy

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

accepted his proposal. Wecter gives a description of the events, compiled from two letters, one to Mrs. Fairbanks, the other to Joe Twichell, the pastor in Hartford, and a good friend of Twain's:

"She felt the first faint symptom *Sunday*, & the lecture *Monday* night brought the disease to the surface," he reported to Mrs. Fairbanks on November 26. "Tuesday & Tuesday night she avoided me and would not do more than be simply polite to me because her parents said **NO** absolutely (almost)," he continued to Twichell on the twenty-eighth "Wednesday they capitulated & marched out with their side-arms — Wednesday night she said over & over again that she loved me but was sorry she did & hoped it would yet pass away — Thursday. . . said she was *glad* & *proud* she loved me! — & Friday night I left, to save her sacred name from the tongues of the gossips. . ." ¹⁰²

Twain did, however, add a postscript to Mrs. Fairbank's letter the next day, lest "Mother" think Livy seem improper for accepting so soon, and lest "Mother" spread the word of the engagement, writing:

Dear Mother, you are to understand that we are not absolutely engaged, because of course Livy would not fall in love Sunday & engage herself Thursday — she must have to time to *prove* her heart & make *sure* that her love is permanent. And I must have time to settle, & create a new and better character, & prove myself in it & *I* desire these things, too. That she loves me I would be a fool to doubt. That she shall *continue* to love me is the thing that I must hope for & labor to secure. . . . ¹⁰³

After this acceptance, Twain's letters continued in the same pattern, only without the brother-sister motif. In New York November 28, he wrote: "I leave my fate, my zeal, my woe, my *life*, in your hands. . . . I believe in you even as I believe in the Savior And I shall yet be *worthy* of your priceless love. . . ." ¹⁰⁴ He continued, mentioning his worship of her, calling her his "dear little paragon," his "idol." ¹⁰⁵

In December, Twain wrote to tell his family the great news, and to his sister, he mentioned his reforms: he had stopped drinking, had eliminated all actions that were not "thoroughly right" because of Livy, who was "perfection." ¹⁰⁶

The letters Livy wrote are not in existence, but Twain partially remedied the lack by describing them to Twichell in a letter December

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

12, 1868, a letter which suggests that Twain was able to view Livy with a certain ironic detachment:

I am honor bound bound to regard her grave philosophical dissertations as *love letters*, because they probe the very marrow of that passion, but there isn't a bit of romance in them, no poetical repining, no endearments, no adjectives, no flowers of speech, no nonsense, no bosh. Nothing but solid chunks of wisdoms, my boy — letters gotten up on the square, flat-footed, cast-iron, inexorable plan of the most approved commercial correspondence, & signed with stately & exasperating decorum. "Lovingly, Livy L. Langdon" — *in full*, by the Ghost of Caesar! They are more precious to me than whole reams of affectionate superlatives would be, coming from any other woman, but they are the darlinest funniest love letters that ever were written¹⁰⁷

Having won the conditional hand of the fair lady, Twain escalated his campaign to make her his ideal. Many have commented on Livy's efforts to reform Twain, but few have realized that Twain was also intent on changing Livy. His reforms, however, took a different tack. Obviously he was uninterested in moral reform, but he did want her to be completely his ideal, so he addressed her in terms which defined his ideal. The critics of Livy have read Twain's letters to her, and have concluded that Twain felt inferior to Livy, unworthy of her, and, therefore, he had to beg her to accept him and to make him acceptable. However, even before he met her, he had told Mrs. Fairbanks that this was the sort of woman he wanted. Livy was not the first girl he had ever met; she was, though, the first who fit what Twain wanted. The picture of Livy given in the love letters has alienated those who were willing to believe that she destroyed Twain. The reason is understandable. The Livy Twain addresses is too good, too pure, too noble, too honorable. Just as the boys of St. Petersburg hated the town good boy, the critics hated Livy, feeling that no man could measure up to such standards, no man could be worthy of such a paragon. So much sweetness tended to nauseate the critics. And had Livy been exactly as Twain pictured her, she might well have destroyed him and their union might have been quite unhappy. The fact remains that they were not unhappy at all.

Twain wrote the love letters to Livy, to his ideal, and the traits he attributed to her are real, but carried a little further than the actual reality. Livy was a woman to be admired and loved, but Twain carried this very normal love a few steps further and transformed Livy into a goddess to be worshiped and feared. This transformation was not Livy's but Twain's, as he created her in the image of all he desired. Although letters show that Livy objected to being put on such a pedestal,

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34.

there was nothing she could do about it except accept the situation. Far from the usual picture of Livy deciding what Twain will be, there is a picture of Twain decreeing what Livy shall be. Livy became a thing to worship as Twain claimed that his worship of her would save him from all sin, past and present, lifting him from the very pit.

More criticism has been levelled at Livy for her letters dealing with religious and moral reform. The critics have pounced on Twain's reports of her lectures as evidence of her desire to dominate Twain. Such a belief would seem to neglect several rather major fallacies. Those who believe this rely on Twain's report, and Twain, as has already been mentioned, did not always tell the whole truth. A second explanation might be more speculative. It is impossible ever to know, of course, exactly why a person acts in any given way. It is possible, however, to make certain conjectures, based on the available facts. Evidence shows that Livy was a quiet, somewhat reserved young woman. There is no evidence to show that she had ever had any close relationships with men, other than her brother and father, previous to Twain's courtship. Suddenly, she found herself the beloved of a personable young man. This in itself would be rather unsettling. This was, moreover, no ordinary young man; he was an already famous writer, and a humorous writer at that. To this person Livy, already shy, was supposed to write. There is probably nothing more intimidating than to write to a writer, a skilled writer. Livy was not a skilled writer; the prose style in her few remaining letters is, as Twain previously noted, stiff, turgid, and extremely self-conscious. Her accounts of the day to day events read with all the excitement of a bus schedule. The problem seemed to be: what does one write to a humorist? Livy wanted to please Twain, and he, very obligingly, showed her the way. He gave her, in one letter at least, a list of subject matter, and continued, in each letter, to beg that she reform him. That seemed to be what he wanted, and Livy, lacking any other subject, and observing that reform seemed to interest him most, wrote in that vein. Those who would castigate her for doing so might well remember that Twain started it; Livy only acted on his orders. This would seem to explain why she wrote as she did, not to change Twain, but to please him. And evidence shows that her letters did please him.

The courtship continued. Livy's parents conducted an investigation of Twain's character, with his consent, and, as answers to their letters began returning, were appalled by the results. Most of the references Twain provided recalled him as the hard-drinking, profane, ungodly newspaper man of the past. However, Jervis Langdon was convinced of the suitor's sincerity and reform, and consented to a formal engagement on February 4, 1869.¹⁰⁸ Twain continued to write to Livy, emphasizing his reform and her goodness, and perfection. In a letter dated March 1, 1869, he wrote:

¹⁰⁸ Kaplan, *op. cit.*, pp. 91-92.

. . . I grow prouder & prouder of you day by day, as each new evidence comes that there is none like you in all the world. If ever a man had reason to be grateful to Divine Providence, it is I. And often & often again I sit & think of the wonder, the curious mystery, the *strangeness* of it, that there should be only *one* woman among the hundreds & hundreds of thousands whose features I have critically scanned, & whose characters I have read in their faces — only *one* woman among them all whom I could love with all my whole heart, & that it should be my amazing good fortune to secure that woman's love. . . . I have found you at last, & in you I can discover *no* blemish. It is strange, it is very strange. The hand of Providence is in it. When I cease to be grateful, deeply grateful to you for your priceless love, my honored Livy, I shall be — dead. Never before, Livy — never before.¹⁰⁹

In the same letter, Twain also wrote:

. . . You are as pure as snow, & I would have you always so — untainted, untouched even by the impure thoughts of others. You are the purest woman that I ever knew — & your purity is your most uncommon & most precious ornament.¹¹⁰

Thus Twain provided a sort of code of conduct for Livy, telling her what was most important to him. Livy remembered these things, and tried to be exactly what he wanted her to be.

Twain also enjoyed following, for a time, Livy's reforms. He certainly had experience in being reformed. The reformation of his smoking habits, which Twain had suggested early in their courtship, was to be the subject of a long argumentative letter and is typical of his reform. Twain's ideas of reforming included the fact that one must relapse periodically, or else the game was not any fun. Also involved was the idea that one must occasionally protest, lest the job of the reform seem too easy. The letter protesting the smoking reform cannot, because of its length, be completely reprinted here, but some of the high points may be included. Twain wrote, January 13, 1870:

. . . I shall treat smoking just exactly as I would treat the forefinger of my left hand. If you asked me in all seriousness to cut that finger off, & I saw that you really meant it, & believed that finger marred my well-being in some mysterious way, & it was plain to me that you could not be entirely satisfied & happy while it remained, I give you my word that I would cut it off. — I might think what I pleased about it, & the world might *say* what it pleased — it should come off. . . . Now there are *no* arguments that can convince me that moderate smoking is deleterious to me. . . . But there

¹⁰⁹ Dixon Wecter, ed., *The Love Letters of Mark Twain*, pp. 75-76.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

is one thing that will make me quit smoking, & only one. I will lay down this habit which is filled with harmless pleasure, just as soon as you write me or say to me that *you desire it*. It shall be a sacrifice — just the same as if I simply asked you to give up going to church, knowing that no *arguments* I offered would convince you that I was right.¹¹¹

He continued in this vein, summarizing his other reforms, and emphasizing that if she would *say* that he must stop smoking, then he would.¹¹² Poor Livy must have been left in a quandry, not knowing if he wanted her to say the words, or preferred that she not do so.

A sequel to the smoking reform appeared in a letter to Twichell after Twain's marriage. Twain wrote, December 19, 1870:

Smoke? I always smoke from 3 till 5 Sunday afternoons — and in New York the other day I smoked a week, day and night. But when Livy is well I smoke only those two hours on Sunday. I'm "boss" of the habit, now, and shall never let it boss me any more. Originally, I quit solely on Livy's account (not that I believed there was the faintest *reason* in the matter, but just as I would deprive myself of sugar in my coffee if she wished it, or quit wearing socks if she thought them immoral,) and I stick to it yet on Livy's account, and shall always continue to do so, without a pang.¹¹³

Twain may have even wished that Livy would declare that socks were immoral, so that he could have the pleasure of giving them up. He liked to reform, but, whenever he found a reform inconvenient, he felt free to relapse. Here he has not stopped smoking, though he mentioned that he had quit previously. However, slowly he began once more, during certain hours in the house, and constantly when he could "sneak" out to New York since there is much pleasure in doing forbidden, or partially forbidden, things. Evidently Twain managed to circumvent Livy's objections, if there were any.

Mark Twain and Olivia Langdon were married February 2, 1870.¹¹⁴ Letters after their marriage are full of their happiness and also contain outlandish statements about Livy's behavior. These stories, which Twain loved to invent, were, unfortunately, taken seriously by many Twain critics. However, the teasing aspect of these comments has often been neglected. Twain loved to pretend that his lady-like wife was a tyrant, a "fearsome Amazonian virago."¹¹⁵ He had practiced the same trick with Mrs. Fairbanks and his mother. Those who knew Livy were usually amused by such a characterization, and they also were

¹¹¹ Dixon Wecter, ed., *The Love Letters of Mark Twain*, pp. 134-136.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 136.

¹¹³ Albert Bigelow Paine, ed., *Mark Twain's Letters*, I, 179.

¹¹⁴ Dixon Wecter, ed., *The Love Letters of Mark Twain*, p. 142.

¹¹⁵ Edward Wagenknecht, *Mark Twain, The Man and His Work*, 179.

aware of the fact that Livy usually read Twain's letters before they were sent, often adding comments of her own.¹¹⁶ In addition to the affectionate teasing, these letters also show Twain's continued love for and delight in his young wife.

In a letter to Mrs. Fairbanks, February 13, Twain wrote the following description of Livy. Livy read the letter, and her comment is in brackets.

But there is no romance in this existence for Livy. [False] She embodies the Practical, The Hard, the Practical, the Unsentimental. She is lord of all she surveys. She goes around with her bunch of housekeeper's keys (which she don't know how to unlock anything with them because they are mixed,) & is overbearing & perfectly happy. When things don't go right she breaks the furniture & knocks everything endways. You ought to see her charge around. When I hear her warwhoop I know it is time to climb out on the roof. But law me, *you* know *her*.¹¹⁷

In a letter to Livy's parents, Twain fabricated a story about his bride's cooking, which must have amused them, since the newlyweds had a hired cook. Once more, Livy added her own comments.

. . . this morning she had a mackerel fricassed with pork & oysters [Livy: False] and I tell you it was a dish to stir the very depths of one's benevolence. We saved every single bit of it for the poor.¹¹⁸

Later, on March 3, 1870, he described Livy's efforts in book keeping.

I am very glad to begin to see my way through this business, for figures confuse & craze me in a little while. I haven't Livy's tranquil nerve in the presence of financial complexity — when her cash account don't balance (which does not happen oftener than once [Livy: "false"] a day) she just increases the item of "Butter 78 cents" to "Butter 97 cents" — or reduces the item of "Gas, \$6.45" to "Gas, \$2.35" & *makes* the account balance. — She keeps books with the most inexorable accuracy that ever mortal man beheld.

[Livy: Father it is not true — Samuel slanders me —]¹¹⁹

Livy also wrote of their happiness to her parents, saying: "I wish I could remember some of the funny things that Mr. Clemens says and does and besides these funny things, he is so tender and considerate in every way."¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ Varble, *op. cit.*, p. 311.

¹¹⁷ Dixon Wecter, ed., *Mark Twain to Mrs. Fairbanks*, p. 123.

¹¹⁸ Dixon Wecter, ed., *The Love Letters of Mark Twain*, p. 143.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

Although many might lament Livy's influence on Twain, few can deny that they loved one another. The letters written through the years of marriage are full of their love for one another. Their daughter Clara was to recall, years later:

It was remarkable that two people like my father and mother, possessing highly sensitive and emotional natures, managed to live that in my memory few discords stand out and those few of but a superficial nature. The explanation is that a great love existed between them.¹²¹

As the years passed, so did the reforms. A letter, written while Twain was in London, January 2, 1874, mentioned drinking in such a way that it would seem that Livy was already used to Twain's renewal of this habit. Twain wrote:

Livy my darling, I want you to be sure & remember to have in the bathroom, when I arrive, a bottle of Scotch whiskey, a lemon, some crushed sugar, & a bottle of *Angostura bitters*. Ever since I have been in London I have taken in a wine glass what is called a cock-tail (made with those ingredients) before breakfast, before dinner, & just before going to bed. . . . Now, my dear, if you will give the order *now*, to have those things put in the bathroom & left there till I come, they will *be* there when I arrive. Will you? I love to write about arriving — it seems as if it were to be tomorrow. And I love to picture myself ringing the bell, at midnight — then a pause of a second or two — then the turning of the bolt, & "Who is it?" — then ever so many kisses — then you & I in the bathroom, I drinking my cock-tail & undressing, & you standing by — then to bed, and — everything happy & jolly as it should be. I *do* love & honor you, my darling.¹²²

This is not the letter of a man who is dominated by or afraid of his wife. Not only was Twain drinking again, he was asking his wife, who had previously "reformed" him, to buy the whiskey. Obviously, the drinking reform did not last. Nor did the smoking reform, as he eventually reverted to his previous practice of smoking three hundred cigars a month.¹²³ The religious reform did not last either, as Livy began early to lose her own faith in God, and replace that with faith in her husband, whom she worshiped.¹²⁴ Livy also tried drinking a bottle of beer before retiring. Wine was served at dinner.¹²⁵ One might well wonder what ever happened to the reformed Twain. One might

¹²¹ Clara Clemens, *My Father Mark Twain*, p. 9.

¹²² Dixon Wecter, ed., *The Love Letters of Mark Twain*, p. 190.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹²⁵ Allen, *op. cit.*, p. 194-195.

also wonder why, if Livy were such a moral crusader, she did not institute new reforms. The answer is, that Livy did not change Twain, she was changed by Twain. She seems to have accepted Twain's relapses, giving him lectures only when he made suggestions that she do so. Far from the usual picture of Livy decreeing what Twain will do, one finds a picture of Twain deciding what Livy would do. Livy might urge reforms, and Twain might heed them, but if, and only if, he wanted to, and for only as long as he wanted to. Livy had her role, and Twain saw to it that everything she did fit that role. She was remolded to fit the part that Twain had designed for her. She evidently felt that the sacrifice in her own individuality was worth it, but it must have been a continual strain on her.

Although Twain seemed to have decided that he did not care to reform in the areas of smoking and drinking, he found other things for his wife to lecture him about. He began to concentrate on three main fields of reform: profanity, manners, and censorship. Mixed in with these areas one can find Twain's perpetual teasing.

Livy, rather naturally, did not sanction strong language. She was certainly not accustomed to it. Consequently, at first, Twain made a certain amount of effort to keep her from hearing such language. Her own strongest expression was to say that she "disapproved" of something. Twain was to comment: "In her mouth that word 'disapprove' was as blighting and withering and devastating as another person's damn."¹²⁶ Unfortunately, Twain's efforts at concealing his profanity from his wife worked no better than his other short-lived reforms. Perhaps the most famous episode of this nature came the day Twain threw a number of buttonless shirts out the window, escorting them with a fine string of oaths. He was in the bathroom at the time, and evidently was accustomed to shutting the door tightly, then swearing as he shaved and dressed. On this particular day, however, the door was not shut, and Livy heard what he was saying. Realizing this, he went out into the bedroom, where, much to his surprise, Livy repeated his last line for his benefit, to show him how it sounded. Her recital was so funny that both broke into laughter, and Twain reportedly said "Livy, it would pain me to think that when I swear it sounds like that. You got the words right, Livy, but you don't know the tune."¹²⁷ Anyone who has ever heard a novice swear should understand precisely what Twain meant. Perhaps a note of Twain's concept of swearing might be in order here. His swearing was fairly mild in comparison to the more modern equivalent. His profanity was more of a descriptive nature, and rarely got more profane than an occasional "damn" or "hell." The strong language of Twain's Victorian period is the language accepted and printed in even the more conservative magazines today. In a similar episode, Twain burst forth with his assorted oaths trying to find a sock

¹²⁶ Mark Twain, *The Autobiography of Mark Twain*, II, 132.

¹²⁷ Wagenknecht, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

in the dark, knocking over furniture, and waking his wife. After he told her what was happening, she calmly asked if he was using a club to find his sock.¹²⁸ After still another episode, Livy finally suggested that Twain not reform any more, since it did not seem to help.¹²⁹ Livy reached the point where she, at least, seemed to encourage Twain's use of language, and suggested that he get rid of his temper by writing outraged letters to get out of his system. The plan was for him to also tear the letters up later, as his temper cooled, but some of them did accidentally get sent.¹³⁰ As the children grew, Twain made periodic efforts to do his swearing where they could not hear him, but he was informed by his daughters that they were well aware that he used strong language, since they often listened as he was explaining things to George, the butler.¹³¹ Susy wrote in her biography of her father: "Papa uses very strong language, but I have an idea not nearly so strong as when he first married mamma."¹³² The children's German nursemaid added an international note to the household with her own German profanities, which further delighted Twain. He described her as:

. . . a sweet and innocent and plump little creature, with peachy cheeks; a clear-souled little maiden and without offense, not withstanding her profanities, and she was loaded to the eyebrows with them. . . . She was always scattering her profanities around, and they were such a satisfaction to me that I never dreamed of such a thing as modifying her. . . . to the children, the little maid's profanities sounded natural and proper and right because they had been used to that kind of talk in Germany, and they attached no evil importance to it.¹³³

Profanity, in varying degrees, became an accepted thing in Twain's household, and Livy made only token efforts to stop it.

The improvement of Twain's manners became the area of major emphasis. Livy's job was to detect any improper actions, and eliminate them. She never succeeded. Twain never could keep those reforms for any length of time. Twain, in his *Autobiography*, summarized his efforts:

I was always heedless. I was born heedless and therefore I was constantly, and quite unconsciously committing breaches of the minor proprieties which brought upon me humiliation which ought to have humiliated me, but didn't because I didn't know anything

¹²⁸ Caroline Thomas Harnsberger, *Mark Twain Family Man*, pp. 49-50.

¹²⁹ Albert Bigelow Paine, *Mark Twain, A Biography*, II, 1015.

¹³⁰ Allen, *op. cit.*, p. 226.

¹³¹ Mark Twain, *The Autobiography of Mark Twain*, pp. 210-211.

¹³² Edith Colgate Salsbury, ed., *Susy and Mark Twain*, p. 141.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

had happened. But Livy knew; and so the humiliation fell to her shore, poor child, who had not earned them and did not deserve them. She always said I was the most difficult child she had. She was very sensitive about me. It distressed her to see me do heedless things which could bring me under criticism, and so she was always watchful and alert to protect me from the kind of transgressions which I have been speaking of.¹³⁴

One must allow for Twain's tendency to be occasionally super-sensitive, and once more, for his tendency to exaggerate. The episodes Twain reported in letters describing his various sins are full of such exaggerations. He wrote to W. D. Howells December 8, 1874:

You & Aldrich have made one woman deeply and sincerely grateful — Mrs. Clemens. For months — I may even say years — she has shown an unaccountable animosity toward my neck-tie, even getting up in the night to take it with the tongs & blackguard it — sometimes also going so far as to threaten it.

When I said you & Aldrich had given me two *new* neckties, & that they were in a paper in my overcoat pocket, she was in a fever of happiness until she found I was going to frame them; then all the venom in her nature gathered itself together, — insomuch that I, being near to a door, went without, perceiving danger.¹³⁵

Both Twain and Howells liked to pretend that their gentle wives were shrews. Twain mentioned the "desperate nature of Mrs. Howells when roused."¹³⁶ In the preceding letter, Twain mentioned Livy's objection to his ties, an objection which he implied had extended over the years. He then had been married for four years. If Livy had objected, which is possible, she must not have objected very much, or else Twain must not have paid much attention to four years of objections. It is equally possible that the entire matter of Livy's objections was an invention of Twain's.

Twain also seemed to take a curious pleasure in relating his sins, and an equal pleasure in relating Livy's scoldings when she discovered the sins. In a letter to Howells, October 4, 1875, after a visit, Twain wrote:

Of course I didn't expect to get through without committing some crimes and hearing of them afterwards, so I have taken the inevitable lashings and been able to hum a tune while the punishment went on. I "caught it" for letting Mrs. Howells bother and bother about her coffee when it was "a good deal better than we get at home." I "caught it" for interrupting Mrs. C. at the last moment and losing

¹³⁴ Mark Twain, *Mark Twain's Autobiography*, II, 151-152.

¹³⁵ Frederick Anderson, ed., *Selected Mark Twain Howells Letters*, p. 37.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

her the opportunity to urge you not to forget to send her that MS when the printers are done with it. I "caught it" for mentioning that Mr. Longfellow's picture was slightly damaged; and when, after a lull in the storm, I confessed, shame-facedly, that I had privately suggested to you that we hadn't any *frames*, and that if you wouldn't mind hinting to Mr. Houghton, &c., &c., the Madam was simply speechless for the space of a minute. Then she said:

"How *could* you, Youth! The ideas of sending Mr. Howells, with his sensitive nature, upon such a repulsive or —"

"Oh, *Howells* won't mind it! You don't know Howells. Howells is a man who —" She was gone. But George was the first person she stumbled on in the hall, so she took it out on George. I was glad of that, because it saved the babies.¹³⁷

This letter is typical of many like it. It is, first, exaggerated. It is also phrased in such a way that Twain appears to be a boy being punished by his mother. He hums as he is lashed, just as Tom Sawyer would later take his beating without a sound. Twain was very fond of picturing himself and his friend as boys, pleading with their mothers, or rather, wives, to let them go out and play. In another letter to Howells, Twain wrote, asking Howells to see if his wife will *let* him stay the night, saying:

Can't you tell her it always makes you sick to go home late at night, or something like that? That sort of thing rouses Mrs. Clemens's sympathies easily; the only trouble is to *keep* them up.¹³⁸

This sounds remarkably like the excuses most people can recall making in their own childhoods as they planned to out-wit their mothers.

Livy was not the only object of Twain's teasing. He also loved to imagine the sedate W. D. Howells acting and talking like a profane drunkard, like Huck's Pap. Perhaps the best example of this is a letter Twain sent to Howells, saying:

To the Editor

Sir to you, I would like to know what kind of a goddam government this is that discriminates between two common carriers & makes a goddam railroad charge everybody equal & lets a goddam man charge any goddam price he wants to for his goddam opera box.

Tuxedo Park Oct. 4
W. D. Howells

¹³⁷ Albert Bigelow Paine, ed., *Mark Twain's Letters*, I, 265.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 239.

Howells it is an outrage the way the govment is acting so I sent this complaint to N. Y. Times with your name signed because it would have more weight.

Mark ¹³⁹

Despite Twain's claims that he was constantly doing heedless or embarrassing things, the community in which he lived, Hartford, and the Nook Farm group, seemed to accept him without question or criticism.¹⁴⁰ Only very rarely did anyone but Twain comment on his behavior in a derogatory way. Twain's criticisms seem to come from Twain, although he reports them as originating with his wife. This does not necessarily have to be true. He could be verbalizing his own social fears by pretending that Livy made the comment, or he could have told Livy that he was afraid he had done something improper, giving her a cue to begin a lecture. Livy has been shown to respond to such signals before. Once more, Twain had a game to play, and he played it with great glee.

As the children grew older, they participated in the game, too. The game was played after various social occasions and was called "dusting off pappa." The children always made sure that Livy gave Twain a lecture about whatever he did wrong. Twain eventually improved the game immeasurably, by suggesting a series of signals which could be given while he was committing some infraction. Thus he could correct himself, rather than go on increasing this error. This was a game, suggested by Twain. He thought of it, he made up the signals, and he encouraged it. The children treated it accurately as a game and as fun. Later, the children would try to catch their father being romantic. Clara wrote of their efforts:

To express affection seemed to embarrass him, which gave him a youthful, sheepish little look that added charm to his bearing. He would stand near Mother and surrepitiuously take her hand. Then, while squeezing it with vehement devotion, he would look around to see if any of the children were noticing. If his glance met our eyes, he gave a tiny toss of his head and a half-embarrassed little laugh. We found great pleasure in pretending not to see anything until it was too late for Father to escape. Then suddenly we disclosed our interest in the love scene, to the confusion of our bashful parent.¹⁴¹

This too is a game, invented by children who had observed these games all their lives. Twain loved to "sin" but he loved even more to get caught. It is very difficult to be disreputable and uncouth when no one knows about it. Thus, he always made sure that he got caught.

¹³⁹ Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 394.

¹⁴⁰ Kenneth R. Andrews, *Nook Farm*, p. 18.

¹⁴¹ Clemens, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

II.

Just as he had created Livy the reformer, Twain also created Livy the censor. He felt that his wife should read his material, and often be shocked by it. Twain needed, or felt he needed, which is the same thing, a censor, for he felt that without one, he could not produce. Livy, he felt, made his memories accessible.¹⁴² He thought that:

. . . under the protection of the reverent spirit of Olivia, the old vices and shameful habits of the intervening years are falling away, leaving the past free from evil and available to the memory. The remarkable feature of this "purification" is that it occurs without effort on his part. Olivia is thus more than a protector; she represents the presence of a grace which blesses the memory, opening a window upon the territory of boyhood.¹⁴³

Thus Livy as censor was essential. But censorship involved far more than just marking out naughty words; perhaps Livy's primary duties were those of a protector and those of an audience. She kept him from publishing certain things which she felt might hurt his reputation.¹⁴⁴ This did not usually involve profanity, but rather suitability. As any reader of Twain has observed, some of his material is poor, not because of the style involved, but because of the premise. Twain ". . . was likely to mistake banalities for choice humor."¹⁴⁵ Livy's job was to see that most of these feeble efforts did not get published. However, many people seem to think that this material was suppressed because it was dirty. This is usually not the case. Twain had a positive infatuation with death humor, found humor in smells of rotting bodies, and loved to imagine ridiculous situations. Sometimes, these things worked out, but often they were terrible. It is to Livy's credit that she recognized the poor quality of these things, and kept her husband from publishing. One can see by looking at some of the story synopsis in Twain's *Notebook* exactly the sort of thing that Livy might have been instrumental in suppressing. One such note was: "Write the Second Advent; with full details — lots of Irish disciples — Paddy Ryan for Judas and other disciples. Star in the East. People want to know how wise men could see it move while sober. John interviewed."¹⁴⁶ Perhaps the finished product might have been good, but the entire concept sounds juvenile and silly.

Twain created Livy's personality as censor, just as he had created the censors preceding her. Only when he had a censor, he felt, could he be free to write. Cox explains it in the following terms:

¹⁴² Cox, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

¹⁴⁴ Albert Bigelow Paine, *Mark Twain, A Biography*, II, 579.

¹⁴⁵ Albert Bigelow Paine, ed., *Mark Twain's Notebook*, p. 167.

¹⁴⁶ *Loc. cit.*

His humorous genius required such a resistance in order to achieve expression in the same way that Tom Sawyer required Aunt Polly's indulgent suppression in order to create the dream of freedom. Mark Twain's "humor" was itself the conversion of real tyranny and slavery into play and adventure; and Olivia had been at once his muse and censor, whom he had "converted" to serve himself instead of Beecher's God. In this figure who embodied and represented the forms of reverence and respectability, Samuel Clemens had possessed both the convention and the style which Mark Twain would endlessly impersonate. The censorship which he invited her to impose on him, far from restricting his imagination, actually freed it to move toward the "approved" world of childhood, which was at once the past of Samuel Clemens and the future of Mark Twain.¹⁴⁷

Thus Livy was invited to censor Twain, just as he had previously invited her to reform him. He also continued to call her attention, either directly or indirectly, to things which needed censoring. Although Twain might sometimes think certain things were funnier than they really were, he was still quite well aware of what one could write, and what one could not write. Within the confines of the standards of the times, Twain roamed rather freely. Livy was to act as a sort of back up to his own taste, and as an audience who would, when he wrote deliberately to shock her, react and scold.

That Twain did deliberately try to shock his wife has been proven, through Twain's own recollections, and through those of his children. Susy wrote of one such episode:

Papa read *Huckleberry Finn* to us in manuscript, just before it came out, and then he would leave parts of it with Mama to expurgate, while he went off to the study to work, and sometimes Clara and I would be sitting with mama while she was looking the manuscript over, and I remember so well, with what pangs of regret we used to see her turn down the leaves of the pages, which meant that some delightfully terrible part must be scratched out.¹⁴⁸

Twain recalled the scene, saying: ". . . it is possible that that especially dreadful one which gave those little people so much delight was cunningly devised and put into the book for just that function, and not with any hope or expectation that it would get by the expurgator alive. It is possible, for I had that custom."¹⁴⁹ In his *Autobiography*, Twain also mentioned this habit:

For my own entertainment and to enjoy the protests of the children, I often abused my editor's innocent confidence. I often

¹⁴⁷ Cox, *op. cit.*, pp. 80-81.

¹⁴⁸ Albert Bigelow Paine, *Mark Twain, A Biography*, II, 774-775.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 775.

interlarded remarks of a studied and felicitously atrocious character purposely to achieve the children's brief delight, and then see the remorseless pencil do its fatal work. I often joined my supplications to the children's for mercy and strung the argument out and pretended to be in earnest. They were deceived and so was their mother. It was three against one and most unfair. But it was very delightful and I could not resist the temptation. Now and then we gained victory and there was much rejoicing. Then I privately struck the passage out myself. It had served its purpose. It had furnished three of us with good entertainment, and in being removed from the book by me it was only suffering the fate originally intended for it.¹⁵⁰

In addition to inserting material to deliberately shock Livy, Twain was also fond of sending Howells impossible material to be published in the *Atlantic*, just for the pure joy of startling him.¹⁵¹

This writing to shock was simply an expansion of Twain's previous teasing. Everyone seemed to enjoy it. It was recreational rather than, as some have said, damaging. It, too, was a game. Although Twain mentions it only in reference to the *Huck Finn* manuscript, it would be logical to assume, in view of his great liking for teasing, that similar scenes were played with other manuscripts. It is also interesting to note that some of the material approved by Livy was taken out by Twain.

It occurs to this writer that Livy must have had a rather difficult time, being married to Twain. Although her reputation has been vindicated, and most critics do not believe in Van Wyck Brooks' claim that she utterly destroyed her husband, few critics have recognized what a really remarkable woman Livy was. She was, as been mentioned, the creation of Twain. She was what he wished her to be, reforming him when he wanted her to, and censoring him when he wanted her to. It was thus necessary for her to be constantly on the alert for signals from Twain. But if Twain wished to eliminate some reform, there is no evidence that Livy nagged at him or tried to reform him again. When he began his smoking and drinking again, she does not seem to have objected. Were she really the moralistic crusader, Twain would have been married to a shrew, rather than a remarkably understanding woman. The role of censor seems to have been the only one which lasted to any great extent through their years of marriage. Livy is presented as being shocked through all these years. This is hard to believe. His smoking, his drinking, his swearing stopped shocking her. Why then did his writing continue to shock her? Obviously he was not writing anything too horrifying, since most of his material was read to the children. Why or rather what on earth could shock Livy after all those years of living with Twain? One would think she would be immune to anything. The only rational answer seems to be

¹⁵⁰ Mark Twain, *The Autography of Mark Twain*, p. 213.

¹⁵¹ Albert Bigelow Paine, *Mark Twain, A Biography*, II, 579.

that Twain thought his wife should be shocked, and she followed his suggestion and was. Livy had done this before, she had assumed other roles, with success; the role of censor was just another part of Twain's creation of her character. Livy must have cared a great deal for her husband to have been willing to assume these roles. She must have been willing to sacrifice her own individuality to be what he wished her to be. Only a woman with great perceptiveness and equally great intelligence could have been capable of sustaining such a part.

Livy's much discussed censorship was not ruinous to her husband. If she had not performed it, he would have found some one else to do it. She did not ". . . smugly polish, purify, edit her husband and his words."¹⁵² A fairly accurate appraisal of Livy's efforts as censor comes from her daughter Clara, who wrote:

Every artist must share his work with some understanding comrade, receiving for inspiration both praise and blame. The healthy guide of constructive criticism is as necessary to an artist, however great he may be, as the nourishing administration of applause. And Mother was able to fill both capacities. How often did my father express his gratitude to the marvelous fate that had given him such a companion, one who was as deeply absorbed in his work as himself!¹⁵³

Livy was absorbed in her husband's work because he wanted her to be. Her criticism was expected also, and might or might not be taken. Often her judgments were accurate, and Twain heeded them. It was Livy who refused to allow Twain to print *Huck Finn* and *The Prince and the Pauper* in the same volume, to sell as one.¹⁵⁴ Although her reasons were not good in this case, since she thought *The Prince and the Pauper* the better book, the judgment itself was sound.

An examination of some of the censorship which Livy presumably performed, and a realization of what she left alone can provide a more rounded picture of this woman. This examination will deal with significant changes, typical changes, which Livy did or did not make.

Livy had read the manuscript of *Tom Sawyer*, and presumably made suggestions on the propriety of certain language. However, even after Livy's reading, Twain felt further editing was necessary, so he turned it over to Howells, who found things that should be omitted. Howells objected to some of the language, to the description of the dog running down the aisle "with his tail shut down like a hasp" after sitting on the pinchbug, (Howells thought it "dirty,") and to the scene in which Becky looks at the medical book. This, he felt, was too long, and Twain subsequently shortened it.¹⁵⁵ All these things had already passed Livy's inspection. Even after having two people read the manuscript, Twain

¹⁵² Ivan Benson, *Mark Twain's Western Years*, p. 153.

¹⁵³ Clemens, *op cit.*, p. 67.

¹⁵⁴ Albert Bigelow Paine, *Mark Twain, A Biography*, II, 96.

¹⁵⁵ Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

still was not satisfied, and wrote to point out another thing which Howells had missed.

There was one expression which perhaps you overlooked. When Huck is complaining to Tom of the rigorous system in vogue at the widow's, he says the servants harass him with all manner of compulsory decencies, & he winds up by saying "and they comb me all to hell." (no exclamation point.) Long ago, when I read that to Mrs. Clemens, she made no comment; another time I created occasion to read that chapter to her aunt & her mother (both sensitive & loyal subjects of the kingdom of heaven, so to speak,) & *they* let it pass. I was glad, for it was the most natural remark in the world for that boy to make (& he had been allowed few privileges of speech in the book); when I saw that you, too, had let it go without protest, I was glad, and afraid, too — afraid you hadn't observed of it? ¹⁵⁶

Twain, characteristically, allowed no one to miss anything he had done which he regarded as questionable. Howells immediately replied, saying he had not noticed the swearing, but that it should be removed. ¹⁵⁷ Livy had missed this profanity, or if she had observed it, had not objected to it, nor had her mother or aunt. Howells missed it also. But Twain knew it was there and Twain called attention to it, then changed the line, after he had called attention to it, to "they comb me all to thunder." ¹⁵⁸ Had Howells approved of the line, Twain still would probably have changed it, for it evidently worried him, since he wrote: ". . . that dern word bothers me some nights . . ." ¹⁵⁹

DeLancy Ferguson has made a study of the available manuscript of *Huck Finn*, and has observed the changes and comments made on the manuscript. These changes, he says, were made at different times, but some of them must be Livy's, although it is impossible to determine which ones are hers. There are, he claims, over nine hundred differences between the manuscript and the book, "changes ranging from single words to whole passages added or deleted." These changes are, moreover, all of the same nature: ". . . they are the work of a skilled craftsman removing the unessential, adding vividness to dialogue and description, and smoothing incongruities." The few changes which are traceable to Livy, and there are only thirty-seven, are mostly changes of single words. Twain made about two hundred changes in detail, adding material which occurred to him. ¹⁶⁰ He also eliminated repetitions of certain words. For example, "drunk" used twice in one paragraph, became "tight" and "mellow." Later, Ferguson observed that: "'Rotten eggs' . . . became 'sickly eggs,' but since 'rotten cabbages' stands in

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

¹⁵⁸ Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, p. 271.

¹⁵⁹ Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

¹⁶⁰ DeLancey Ferguson, *Mark Twain: Man and Legend*, p. 219.

the same sentence, the alteration merely avoided the repetition." Other changes occurred as Twain removed some of his images which reflected his fascination for death and decay.¹⁶¹

Chapter XXIII in *Huck Finn*, which tells of "The Royal Nonesuch," is certainly one of the Twain's more suggestive, if not obscene, scenes. One would think that if Livy were going to object to something, to suppress something, she would certainly choose this scene. However, only one comment appears in the margin of this chapter, the word "scandalous."¹⁶² The only changes made were to change the title from "The Burning Shame" to "The Royal Nonesuch" and to eliminate the "stark" from "naked."¹⁶³ Thus the description ultimately read: ". . . the king come a-prancing out on all fours, naked; and he was painted all over, ring-streaked-and-striped. . . but never mind the rest of his outfit, it was just wild, but it was awful funny."¹⁶⁴ Livy must have known what was happening in the scene, but aside from one comment, she did nothing to prevent the scene from appearing.

The other changes involve much the same things; they are basically improvements in the style and coherence of the book. There is no real evidence of Twain being censored by his wife. There is evidence that Twain was a skilled professional, intent on perfecting his work. Livy's changes are few, and force Ferguson to conclude that:

Out of the vast laboring mountain of charges that censorship destroyed his virility emerges this tiny and ineffectual mouse. Livy, instead of appearing as the abhorred fury with the shears, proves to have been armed with nothing heavier than button-hole scissors.¹⁶⁵

That Livy allowed her husband to print *Huck Finn* would seem to be proof of her tolerance. It is not a genteel book. One would think that if Livy were a true prude she would have objected to the entire concept of such a book. It has unrefined heroes, who speak uncouthly, it is revolutionary in subject, it has violence, and it contains scenes of horror that surely no child should ever be allowed to see. The book would be, one would think, the antithesis of all Livy believed in, yet she makes no objection. She does not shear it of its power, nor does she actually censor it.

More proof of Livy's lack of damaging censorship can be found by examining another book which Livy "censored." Such a work is *Following the Equator*, published in 1897. It was written as a money-maker, and it not particularly good Twain, though it does show a certain spark at times. Using notes from his 1895 lecture tour around the world, Twain forced the material into this book. Its inferiority in quality

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 224.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

¹⁶⁴ Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p. 121.

¹⁶⁵ DeLancey Ferguson, *Mark Twain: Man and Legend*, p. 225.

can be attributed to a variety of causes, primarily the personal tragedy of the death of Twain's daughter Susy, but Livy cannot be blamed for its ineffectiveness. However, the quality of the book is not this writer's major concern. *Following the Equator* would be just another little-read Twain book, were it not for one important fact: Livy was its editor. The fact set Livy critics to examining the book, in search of evidence to support their "Twain frustrated as an artist by his wife" theory.

Van Wyck Brooks, Livy's primary accuser, demonstrates Livy's role as a prudish and damaging censor by quoting from the notes that she made while editing *Following the Equator*. Twain's comments on the comments follow Livy's.

Page 1,020, 9th line from the top. I think some other word would be better than "stench." You have used that pretty often.

But can't I get it in anywhere? You've knocked it out every time. Out it goes again. And yet "stench" is a noble, good word.

Page 1,038. I hate to have your father pictured as lashing a slave boy.

It's out, and my father is whitewashed.

Page 1,050, 2nd line from the bottom. Change "breech-clout." It's a word that you love and I abominate. I would take that and "offal" out of the language.

You are steadily weakening the English tongue, Livy.¹⁶⁶

Although this would seem to be conclusive evidence against Livy, there are a number of additional factors to be considered. Brooks does not give the full story. He is prone to quote only that which will support his own thesis. These quotations are not complete. Brooks fails to mention that there are other comments intervening; he prefers to neglect them, since they do not prove what he wished to prove. The comments which he chooses to quote are not even typical.

Paul J. Carter, Jr., has examined these comments in much more depth, and published them in the article "Olivia Clemens Edits *Following the Equator*," along with his own conclusions. He finds that Livy makes sixty-two suggestions, forty-four of which deal with word usage or accuracy of detail. Only twelve deal with the highly publicized matter of "taste," and there are also six which concern tact. The remaining two involve repetition of material. Twain seems to have accepted twenty-five of the forty-four concerning usage, rejecting eleven and presumably compromising on the remaining eight. He accepted eight and rejected two concerning taste, and accepted three of the six involving tact.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ Van Wyck Brooks, "The Ordeal of Mark Twain," .In *Mark Twain's Wound*, ed., by Lewis Leary, pp. 55-56.

¹⁶⁷ Paul J. Carter, Jr. "Olivia Clemens Edits *Following the Equator*," *AL* XXX (May, 1958), 208.

Thus, out of a possible sixty-two notes, only one quarter of which could possibly relate to Livy's prudishness or her "damaging" censorship, and then only by stretching it a little, Brooks chooses three. These three are well chosen, but they are certainly not typical. It would seem that an examination of more than three of the notes would be necessary in order to determine if Livy damaged Twain's writing.

The comments which Livy made follow that should now be a fairly familiar pattern. She corrected grammar.

. . . 818 8th line from top. I don't like "used to was." See page 284: "He is not what he used to be." . . .¹⁶⁸

Certainly English teachers would agree with Livy's criticism. She was also concerned with the accuracy of detail.

. . . 1095 Perhaps you don't care, but whoever told you that the Prince's green stones were rubies, told you a lie, they were superb emeralds. . . . All right, I'll make it emeralds, but it loses force. Green rubies is a fresh thing. And besides, it was one of the Prince's own staff liars that told me.¹⁶⁹

It is interesting to note that Paine, Twain's handpicked biographer, felt the need to modify Livy's unlady-like phrase "told you a lie" to "told an untruth."¹⁷⁰

These few examples can show the general flavor of three-fourths of the comments. The suggestions involving tact were usually concerned with the advisability of using a man's name, of calling another man something, or of possibly offending someone. These changes were certainly sensible to make, simply to keep out of trouble.

It is now necessary to examine the remaining, and much talked about, twelve suggestions that seem to reflect Livy's prudery. One immediately realizes that she could not have been too prudish if only twelve of the sixty-two comments involve matters of taste. In these twelve, she suggests that he change "hams" to "hips," so that the sentence reads ". . . and squirm his hips by a side-twist. . . ." She objects to the phrase "the loose women, the tight women" and so the "tight" is eliminated. One could possibly make conjectures about Livy's apparent approval of "loose women", but there has been entirely too much of that sort of thing done by others. She also objects to the phrase "smelt like it," presumably in reference to a cattle scow, and the phrase is modified to "smelt like a kennel." None of the meaning seems to be lost. Livy tells Twain to leave out "God" as an exclamation and he does. She considers "retching & gagging & heaving" to be "too

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

¹⁷⁰ *Loc. cit.*

vulgar," and one must admit that it is a bit over-done. The sentence is changed to ". . . the cavern prisoners became immediately sea-sick, and then the peculiar results that ensued laid all my previous experiences of that kind well away in the shade."¹⁷¹ Here the understatement seems much more amusing than the original. Livy did not, however, object to the next sentence: "And the wails, the groans, the cries, the shrieks, the strange ejaculations. . . ."¹⁷² Certainly none of the total effect is lost. In another change, a "shady principal cat that has a family in every port" becomes "One of those cats goes ashore . . . to see how his various families are getting along."¹⁷³ Again, there is little noticeable change. The implication that the cat is unprincipled is not difficult to detect. Livy suggests that Twain leave out the word "embarrassing" in discussing the particulars of a native form of undress. The phrase is altered to: "Without going into particulars I will remark that as a rule they wear no clothing that would conceal the brand."¹⁷⁴ Carter points out that it is interesting that Livy does not object to the nakedness itself, but only to the word "embarrassing."¹⁷⁵

The most well-known comments are those quoted by Brooks. However, Twain did not eliminate the word "stench" all the time, nor did Livy "knock it out" all the time; Twain managed to use it at least three times.¹⁷⁶ Livy's objection to this term has been interpreted by some as a sign of her over-fastidious nature. However, in a letter to Howells, Twain mentioned Livy's approval of the term. He wrote:

. . . speaking of Hay, I said "The presence of such a man in politics is like a vase of attar of roses in a glue factory — it can't extinguish the stink, but it modified it." Mrs. Clemens said, "That will apply to Gen. Hawley, too — take it out of your letter & put it in your speech when you introduce Hawley to his audience — your speech *needs* a snapper on the end of it, for it flats out, as it is as present — & just say *stench*, that is strong enough." It was pretty good advice & I followed it.¹⁷⁷

Thus Livy not only approved of the use of the term, but approved of its use in a public address.¹⁷⁸ This is not consistent with Brooks' claim. She clearly objected to the term in the book because of its repetition, and she said so. This would appear to be an intelligent criticism, not a squeamish one. Perhaps the word "stench" is not over-used, but certainly Twain manages to devote much time to describing various unappealing smells throughout the book. Many chapters seem

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 198-201.

¹⁷² Mark Twain, *Following the Equator*, I, 318.

¹⁷³ Carter, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 203.

¹⁷⁵ *Loc. cit.*

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

¹⁷⁷ Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 137-138.

to be directed at offending the olfactory nerves, as Twain describes the filth and refuse of the Ganges, the living habits of various natives, the teeming masses, and the burial customs, to name just a few. The English tongue is not noticeably weakened by Livy's other well publicized comment about eliminating "breech clout," nor does Twain stop using "offal." One frequently wishes that Livy had made more suggestions about some of these words, for there is a great deal of repetition.

Ferguson points out an additional reason for some of Livy's suggestions. He claims that Livy realized ". . . that her husband's un-failing delight in technical processes was likely at times to lead him into boresome minutiae. He once wrote a five-hundred word letter to tell Joe Twichell how to strop his razor."¹⁷⁰ It would seem that Livy, rather than harming the manuscript, was helping it.

In considering the matter of Livy's censorship, one must consider not only the changes she made, but what she left alone. The book is actually two volumes, comprising some seven-hundred and fifty-five pages. She seems to have done very little when one considers the entire work. She did not object to the previously mentioned Ganges, with various corpses floating on it, nor to the indelicate word "sweat," nor to the very vivid description of the Thug murders, nor to the countless other references to death, decay, filth, nudity, or morality. Livy's destructive censorship seems to be a figment of someone's imagination.

An interesting comment about the censorship is made by Durant Da Ponte, who points out the use of obvious phallic imagery in a number of chapters of *Following the Equator*. Twain uses the Hindu word *lingam*, which means phallus, to describe various blatantly phallic monuments. He uses this term a total of ten times in thirty-nine pages.¹⁸⁰ The term is frequently used humorously, and Twain seems to be delighting in sustaining an off-color joke. Da Ponte seems to see the entire episode as Twain out-witting Livy's censorship, but one wonders if this is true. Livy had also seen these monuments that Twain termed *lingams*, and Livy was not stupid. It is entirely possible that Livy guessed the meaning and felt no one else would know. It is also possible that their significance escaped her entirely. Or, she may have been as amused as Twain was about the joke. It is difficult to believe that Twain could keep quiet about his joke; if past performance is any indication, he would have mentioned it just so that he could be scolded. The truth of the episode will probably never be known, but the *lingams* do stand in *Following the Equator*.

Livy's censorship does not seem to have been destructive. Her changes in *Following the Equator* are similar to the ones made in *Huck Finn* and *The Innocents Abroad*. Changes are made to clarify and strengthen the writing, not cripple it.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁰ DeLancey Ferguson, *Mark Twain: Man and Legend*, p. 273.

¹⁸⁰ Durant Da Ponte, "Some Evasions of Censorship in *Following the Equator*," *AL*, XXIX (March, 1957), 93.

¹⁸¹ DeLancey Ferguson, "Huck Finn Aborning," *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Scully Bradley, Richmond Croom Beatty, and E. Hudson Long, editors, pp. 297-305.

The whole issue of censorship is ultimately futile. Livy is blamed for keeping her husband from being another Rabelais. However, Twain would not, with or without Livy, have ever become a risqué or really rowdy writer. His idea of a dirty joke is shown in his one "obscene" effort, "1601." Its humor does not really emphasize sex, but rather excrement. He was simply not able to write about sex very effectively. Whenever he tried, the effect was leering, rather than erotic. In his descriptions of nude native women bathing, one sees a man looking on, perhaps longingly, but not a man who is going to do anything. He is always passive rather than active. Those who wish for an unfettered Twain would be disappointed if they got one.

It is necessary to consider Twain in terms of what he has, not what he was not. One must also consider Twain in terms of his own time. In comparison to the other writers of the time, Twain seems remarkably vivid and free. What other nineteenth century writer would dare to make two social outcasts heroes, or use the theme of miscegenation, or make such pointed denunciations of man and his foibles? Why should he be blamed for not using stronger language, regardless of who, wife, public, or conscience, stopped him? What one tends to forget is that at the time, the language Twain used was considered strong. Perhaps it seems tame to the twentieth century reader, after having read Faulkner, Hemingway, and Joyce, not to mention Henry Miller or D. H. Lawrence. But the nineteenth century reading public would not have permitted such language in their books. It is amazing that they accepted Twain as he was, and they never would have accepted Twain as some of his critics wish he had been. The scope and depth of Twain's work is so far beyond that of his contemporaries that the quibbles of censorship charges are as silly as a nineteenth century grammarian objecting to Joyce's punctuation in *Finnegans Wake*. Twain was what he was because he was Twain. Part of his greatness and success is due to his wife. He succeeded not in spite of her, but because of her.

Livy was his ideal. Her presence enabled Twain to perform. She provided what was necessary for his success. She was an audience for him, a helper to him. Her actions, whether reforms or censorings, were dictated by Twain, who wanted them. She was willing to assume any role her husband required, and did so when he wished. She was the star in the game which Twain invented and he was indeed lucky to have found her. It is difficult to imagine any more devoted wife. After she died, Twain wrote to friends, of the realization of what he had lost:

An hour ago the best heart that ever beat for me and mine was carried out of this house, and I am as one who wanders and has lost his way. She who is gone was our head, she was our hands. We are now trying to make plans — we: we who have never made a plan before, nor never needed to. If she could speak to us now she would make it all simple and easy with a word & all our per-

plexities would vanish away. If she had known she was near to death she would have told us where to go and what to do, but she was not suspecting, neither were we. She was all our riches and she is gone, she was our life, and now we are nothing.¹⁸²

Twain's loss was an enormous one, for he had not only lost a much loved wife, he had also lost his supreme creation. Although he tried to find another "censor," he never could. His works, after the death of Livy, are inferior to those in which he had her help. Perhaps the best description of his thirty-four years of marriage was written by Twain himself, as he says, in "The Diary of Adam and Eve": "Wheresoever she was, *there was Eden*."¹⁸³

¹⁸² Albert Bigelow Paine, *Mark Twain, A Biography*, III, 1220.

¹⁸³ Mark Twain, "The Diary of Adam and Eve," from *The Complete Short Stories of Mark Twain*, ed., by Charles Neider, p. 295.

Chapter IV

Image Into Art: The Pattern Controls

If all of the preceding analysis of Twain, his methods, and his creations has been correct, Twain was a man in control of his art. Far from being inhibited by his wife, Twain worked as he chose, and basically put on paper what he wanted. If this is true, and there seems no reason to doubt that it is, Twain should have been able to achieve whatever he desired and was capable of as an artist. Part of the time he did do what his talent made possible for him, but in one respect his work fails glaringly. Twain was simply unable to create a female character, of whatever age, of whatever time and place, who is other than wooden and unrealistic. There is no female character to match against the wonderfully vivid and lifelike male characters such as Huck Finn, Tom Sawyer, Pap Finn, the King and the Duke, Colonel Isiah Sellers, or Pudd'nhead Wilson. Even Satan in *The Mysterious Stranger* has more life than the women of Twain's books. Only once did he create a woman who even resembled a woman. Roxy, the slave in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, alone of Twain's women comes to life on the printed page, and she is ultimately turned into a painful joke.

The mystery of Twain's inability to write a reasonable characterization is deepened by the fact that he lived nearly all his life surrounded by women. As has been shown, these women were not the pale flowers of the dimity Victorian age, but living, vital women. Jane Clemens, Mrs. Fairbanks, and Livy were all, in some way or other, interesting and active. Twain's three daughters, too, must have been charming children, certainly alert and probably precocious. The Nook Farm social circle contained women of intellectual interests, and in his travels Twain met a variety of types of women, some good, some bad, but all living, breathing women. Yet when he put a woman on paper she died, and with the sole exception of Roxy, became the worst kind of moralizing bore. Twain was seemingly unable to make the same kind of transition from life to fiction of women that he was able to make with men.

The answer to the question of Twain's failure with female characters is obviously related to his habit of creating a special way of looking at the women he knew in life. He had evolved over the years a narrow, specialized role for women, and although none of the women he knew fit the ideal, Twain continued to hold it in the abstract. Livy refused to become the narrow, moralizing, reforming shrew that Twain seemed to want, and it is no doubt well that she did, for Twain could not have lived with such a woman. When he was creating a female character in a work of fiction, however, Twain was not troubled by either a refusal to fit a role or the problem of living with someone who did fit the role. He could make a character do exactly what he wanted her to do, and what he wanted was an idealization. Livy might give

up going to church or start drinking an occasional beer, but no woman in a novel would do such a thing. She would be dead, of course, as lifeless as a wooden Indian, but she would fit the pattern.

To create a stereotyped character is almost certainly to create one that has no life, and Twain recognized this in dealing with male characters. The type which formed the basis for the King and the Duke, for example, extends far back into the very beginnings of American humor, but Twain took this basic pattern and created life with it. He made the King and the Duke recognizable, particularized human beings. Becky Thatcher and Aunt Polly are types, too, but without particularization to set them off from Aunt Sally or Mary Jane Wilkes. All four are cast from the same mold. And it is here that the trouble lies: Twain seemingly saw all women as one particular pattern, leaving no room for individualization. A man might be drunken degenerate like Pap Finn or an unlettered gentleman like Nigger Jim, but a woman was a woman, merely this and nothing more.

In a sense, woman becomes in Twain's novels a kind of sub-species of man. She is: kind, considerate, courteous, loyal, devoted, reverent — a Boy Scout in a hoop skirt. If she is mature, she is the good mother, the manager of the home, the reformer of her mate. She is "honorable" and, if sometimes lacking beauty of face, always has beauty of soul. She is a sexual being only insofar as sex is related to childbearing, and no desire for any sexual relationship ever enters her thoughts. If the female is a child, she has all the good qualities of the woman, and is even spared the indignity of submitting to sex for the purposes of procreation. If the female is an old woman, she has the same qualities, except that she is safely past the nastiness of sex. In short, in every way but in relation to reproduction, woman in the novels of Twain is boring, painfully moralistic, long-haired little man. She is more nearly a caricature than a character.

Twain would have laughed if anyone had suggested that he create all the male characters in his novels on one pattern, and he would have been miserable if Livy had lived up to the idealized portrait of her that he kept creating over and over again in his novels. That he could not see the difference between his fictional women and the real women, particularly Livy, whom he knew, suggests a blindness to a particular area of existence that blocked off realistic characterization and made the great flaw of lifeless women almost inevitable. One cannot help wondering why Twain, who saw with such clarity so many of the deceptions, evasions, and hypocrisy of the world, could not see that he was being deceptive, evasive, and hypocritical in his female characterizations.

Part of the blind spot may stem from the Victorian ideals of sexuality, or, more exactly, the asexuality, of women. This was an ideal which discounted all possibility of passions on the part of a decent woman, though leaving a man free to do pretty much what he wanted, at least before marriage. It was the double standard to the highest

degree. While a man's desires might be many and varied, and the pattern of his sexuality might take various forms, there were merely two classes of women: courtesans, who were always sexually aroused and always available, and "nice" women, who were never sexually aroused and available only for procreative purposes.¹⁸⁴ William Acton summed up the prevailing attitude toward the sexuality of women in his 1857 work, *The Function and Disorder of the Reproductive System*:

The best mothers, wives, and managers of households, know little or nothing of sexual indulgences. Love of home, children, and domestic duties are the only passions they feel.

As a general rule, a modest woman seldom desires any sexual gratification for herself. She submits to her husband, but only to please him; and but for the desire of maternity, would far rather be relieved from his attentions.¹⁸⁵

Sex is thus basically pictured as evil, and a man can avert such evil only by marrying a woman who has no sexual desires and will make no sexual demands.¹⁸⁶ The logic of this kind of thinking is obviously faulty and led to the repressions and resultant excesses which have not been wholly disposed of today. The tendency of such thinking is to dehumanize woman by stripping her of a basic part of her nature. It makes her, in effect, a kind of semi-man, feeling about most things as a man does, but lacking his sexual drive.

To see woman in this light is to move at once in the direction of the stereotype, because it discounts the wide variety of sexual desire which exists in the female. Once one has taken this step of reducing women to two types, the nice, potentially marriageable woman and the harlot, it is not difficult to begin to make the same kind of limitations in all areas of human life. This seems to be what Twain, in large measure, did. The moral climate of the times made it easy and natural to remove sexuality from the makeup of a woman, and Twain's own inclinations made it possible for him to remove other human traits from women until he was left with only a form, which became the ideal. The image of the desexed and dehumanized woman was embodied in the ideal he projected into Livy. That she was not that ideal has already been established. What is important is that Twain thought of her as ideal when he sat down to write a novel. There he was free to do as he liked, and he liked to create women who were projections of Livy, who was herself a projection of his own imaginings. Removed as they are by this process from real life, it is not to be wondered at that the female characters Twain drew were so flat, unhuman, and boring.

If one accepts the premise that Twain used Livy as a model, and could not see past the mental image he had created of her, and then

¹⁸⁴ Steven Marcus, *The Other Victorians*, p. 30.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

¹⁸⁶ *Loc. cit.*

recognizes the tendency of the times to unsex and otherwise dehumanize women, his female characters become more intelligible, if not more lifelike. One may not like them any better than he did before, but at least he is more inclined to forgive Twain for having created them.

Twain's feminine characters fall into three basic groups: little girls, young women, and old women. However, the first two categories have much in common, since young women differ from little girls in Twain's vision only in terms of chronological age. The archetypal little girl is Becky Thatcher of *Tom Sawyer*. Becky makes her first appearance in Chapter Three, where she is described as ". . . a lovely little blue eyed creature with yellow hair plaited into two long tails, white summer frock, and embroidered pantalettes." Tom immediately characterizes her as an "angel" and worships her. One is reminded of Twain's self-confessed (if perhaps untrue) story of his instant infatuation with Livy, and his worship of her. The courtship of Becky by Tom is full of the traditional trials and tribulations of the juvenile affairs of the heart. It culminates in the famous Anatomy book scene, when Tom catches Becky looking at the teacher's forbidden medical book, specifically at ". . . a human figure, stark naked." When Becky sees that Tom is watching her, she shuts the book, tearing a page as she does so. Here, and only here, in Twain's world of little girls is there any hint of sexual curiosity, and the thrust of the episode turns out to be unrelated to sex, but rather to the differing ways in which boys and girls view corporal punishment. His original intention had been to raise the question of sexual interest. Livy approved of this intent, but apparently Twain still felt worried about anything that related the image of purity to the business of sex, for he asked William Dean Howells for an opinion. It will be remembered that Twain had frequently done the same kind of thing, and the result in this case was the same that it had been before. "I should be afraid of this picture incident," Howells commented.¹⁸⁷ Reassured that his tendency away from any sexual implication was the right one, Twain modified the episode in such a way that the suggestion of sexual interest is muted and becomes, more a plot convenience than a suggestion of the awakening of interest in sex.

This avoidance of the sexual continues throughout the novel. Marriage is mentioned, but not with any kind of erotic implication attached. Tom tells Huck what he will do with his share of the treasure: "I'm going to buy a new drum, and a sure-nough sword, and a red necktie and a bull pup, and get married." Huck has a more realistic view, and urges against such a course, since married people fight all the time. Tom assures him that "The girl I'm going to marry won't fight."¹⁸⁸ This seems rather contradictory, since for most of the book he and Becky have done nothing but fight. Tom then makes the distinction that he

¹⁸⁷ Albert E. Stone, Jr., *The Innocent Eye: Childhood in Mark Twain's Imagination*, p. 73.

¹⁸⁸ Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, p. 190.

will marry a "girl" rather than a "gal," and states that Huck will come to live with them.¹⁸⁹ Marriage is thus presented as a sort of juvenile house party, with Tom and his "girl" (not "gal") entertaining Huck through the years and never fighting. As a childish view of marriage this is understandable, but as an adult view it is absurd. It is, however, the image of married life that Twain projects in his books, here and elsewhere. It is a wholly asexual view of marriage; further, it is the romantic, fairy-tale view, the kind of thing Twain so deplored in the writings of Scott. Twain knew that one did not simply marry and "live happily ever after," but he projected this view in his writings. Because of the image of woman he had built up for himself and could not see beyond, he was able to render only the romantic and sexless side of marriage.

The characterization of Becky that ultimately appears is one which emphasizes negative, rather than positive, aspects of femininity. She is shyer than a boy, she cries more easily, she is more timid, and at the same time more sly. When she is angry she does not hit, but only stamps her foot. She appreciates the nobility of sacrifice but is not interested in making any sacrifices herself. She is dependent to a greater extent than a boy would be. Perhaps the most telling point about her characterization is the fact that she wears dresses; otherwise she might be misinterpreted as an unpleasant little boy. For all the characteristics that Twain give her, she does not emerge as anything other than a boring, insipid creature who would be the same whatever her sex. Twain himself seems to have become bored with her, for when she reappears briefly in *Huck Finn*, Twain is unable even to recall her name.

Other little girls in Twain's work fare scarcely better. Tom Cauty's sisters in *The Prince and the Pauper* are rather kinder than Becky, as are the royal girls in the same work. But they are possessed of pale adult qualities, not the characteristics and manners of children. Joan of Arc as a child is not a little girl at all, but something very like a little boy. Her argumentative qualities tend to remind one of Tom Sawyer. She too is idealized rather than characterized.

Fundamentally Twain was unable to write a convincing little girl. This is strange enough in a writer who could draw characterizations as skillfully as any writer in American literature. It is doubly strange because Twain was in daily contact with his own daughters, and should have been able to draw on their characteristics for his fictional portraits. He spent his time in his novels writing idealizations, however, and the little girls he created out of this ideal are neither believable or recognizably feminine.

The same is true of the next group of feminine characters, the young women. If one takes this category to include females from the onset of puberty through the age of marriage and childbirth, the one

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 190-191.

characteristic most likely to be common to all would be an intense femininity. Such women are at or near the age of being marriageable, and they are going through great physical and psychological change. These changes, and the awareness of these changes, dominate their personalities. A girl during this period of time is adjusting to the person that she is becoming. Of nearly equal importance is the change of status and change in relationship to males that a girl must adjust to. If a successful female character is to be portrayed, she must be a personality in flux, one who is now a girl, now a woman, and one who is learning to adjust to the male as a potential mate rather than as merely a playmate.

Twain wrote of a number of girls and women who fall into this category, but none of them exhibit these characteristics. His young women are not changing, becoming aware of themselves as women or of men as men. Rather, they are tall little girls or old women with young faces. Whatever Twain knew about young women, and he cannot have been unaware of their natures, conflicted with what he thought of as the feminine ideal. A young woman simply has to be defined to a great extent in terms of her sexual role, and Twain could not bring himself to use this area of personality. It was too much in diametrical opposition to his ideal.¹⁰⁰

Twain believed that his ultimate creation of the fictional woman was that of Joan of Arc. Joan is described from the beginning, however, in masculine, rather than feminine terms:

I carry in my mind, fine and clear, the picture of that dear little figure, with breast bent to the flying horse's neck, charging at the head of the armies of France, her hair streaming back, her silver mail ploughing steadily deeper and deeper into the battle, sometimes nearly drowned from sight by tossing heads of horses, uplifted sword arms, wind-blown plumes, and intercepting shields. . . . I came to comprehend and recognize her at last for what she was — the most noble life that was ever born into this world save only One.¹⁰¹

This, then, is the ideal woman: the warrior princess, dressed in armor, going off into a holy war. Except for the hair streaming back, only the feminine pronouns indicate that Joan is a woman. Granted, Joan saved France, that she was a great general, even that she was a saint. But none of those is a womanly quality. Joan becomes, in the portrait quoted above, a stylized symbol, and abstraction of goodness second only to Christ. She is not a woman, but a conglomeration of all the traits that Twain envisioned in his ideal. Of all the women he created, she is the most unbelievable, the most wooden, the one with the least life as a fictional character. Yet it was this sexless, abstracted Joan that

¹⁰⁰ Leslie Fiedler makes a similar argument in Chapter 9, "Good Good Girls and Good Bad Boys," pp. 259-290 in *Love and Death in the American Novel*.

¹⁰¹ Mark Twain, *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc*, p. 668.

Twain believed to be his most real and beautiful creation. The strength of Twain's belief in his ideal, and his inability to see beyond it, is most clearly indicated in his reverence for this boring and lifeless creature.

If Joan were the only young woman portrayed by Twain in this sexless, unreal way, one might argue that his vision was inhibited by the myth surrounding Joan, and that his literary skills were insufficient to plow through the decades of belief in Joan's saintliness and create a real character. But the same inability to characterize young women is apparent in all his work. Another woman of marriageable age appears in *Huck Finn*, although very briefly. She is Mary Jane Wilks, and she is in the novel only long enough for Huck to become infatuated with her. Despite this infatuation, nowhere does he describe her in feminine terms. She was, Huck says, ". . . most awful beautiful, and her face was all lit up like glory. . . ." ¹⁹² Beauty here seems to have no connection with sexual attraction, and it is not even Mary Jane's beauty that captivates him. It is her offer to pray for him:

Pray for me! I reckoned if she knowed me she'd take a job that was more nearer her size. But I bet she done it, just the same — she was just that kind. She had the grit to pray for Judas if she took the notion — there warn't no backdown to her, I judge. You may say what you want to, but in my opinion she had more sand in her than any girl I ever see; in my opinion she was just full of sand. It sounds like flattery, but it ain't no flattery. And when it comes to beauty — and goodness too — she lays over them all. I hain't ever seen her since that time that I see her go out of that door; no, I hain't ever seen her since, but I reckon I've thought of her a many and a million times, and of her saying she would pray for me; and if ever I'd a thought it would do any good for me to pray for her, blamed if I wouldn't a done it or bust. ¹⁹³

The business of praying for someone is, of course, strongly reminiscent of what Twain wrote to Livy during their courtship. Mary Jane here has two points in her favor: she is "full of sand" and she is willing to pray for Huck. There is nothing remotely suggestive of sexuality, even in the most adolescent way. Mary Jane is a woman because she has long hair, cries easily, and offers to pray for Huck. She is, as a matter of fact, one of the more successful of Twain's female characters, and this may be because she appears so briefly in the novel and one does not have the chance to get as bored with her as he does with Joan or Becky. Here one finds Twain at the height of his powers. Never before had he written so well, and never was he to write better. Yet in this classic book, with its many memorable characters, there is only one with the potential for a sexual identity, and she is not viewed in that way at all. The character of Huck Finn has entered the American

¹⁹² Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p. 130.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

consciousness as the greatest delineation of the character of a maturing boy ever written, but no one remembers the character of the one potentially womanly woman. Twain could capture beautifully the mind of a young boy, but all he could do with a woman was make her offer prayers.

Sandy, the only major female character in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* is equally forgettable. Her chief characteristic is her talkativeness, which even Sir Boss, the hero, grows weary of. He describes her thus:

She was a quite biddable creature and goodhearted, but she had a flow of talk that was as steady as a mill, and it made your head sore like the drays and wagons in a city. If she had had a cork she would have been a comfort. But you can't cork that kind; they would die. . . . She never had any ideas, any more than a frog has.¹⁹⁴

Despite her constant chatter, Sir Boss marries Sandy, basically to save her reputation since she is his traveling companion, and they eventually have a child. But these events are glossed over so rapidly that one gets the feeling that even Twain became bored with his creation. Sandy simply disappears midway through the story, and later reappears with her child. For all the readers knows, Sandy might have picked the child up along the roadway or bought it in a variety store, for Twain does not give any indication that it was produced through the normal biological process. Because she is so insipid and stupid, Sandy tends to diminish admiration for Sir Boss; a hero who marries such a fool is hardly an admirable hero. Only if mindless jabbering and general stupidity are considered feminine characteristics does Sandy qualify as a female. And if they are accepted as feminine characteristics they are stereotypical, unflattering ones. Sandy is reduced to the same one-dimensional, uninteresting kind of personage that other Twain heroines have been shown to be. As is frequently the case with Twain's women, Sandy is so flat and lifeless that the book would probably be the better for her absence.

Another potentially marriageable young woman appears in an unfinished fragment called "Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer Among the Indians." The woman, Peggy Mills, is described as a sweet, pretty, friendly girl, adored by her family and engaged to a former Indian fighter. Like many other Twain women, she is not very bright. She has been given a knife by her fiancée with which she is supposed to kill herself if the Indians capture her. She describes the scene:

He kept trying to get me to promise, but I laughed him off, every time, and told him if he was so anxious to get rid of me he

¹⁹⁴ Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, pp. 65-66.

must tell me *why* I must kill myself, and then maybe I would promise. At last he said he couldn't tell me. So I said, very well, then I wouldn't promise, and laughed again, but he didn't laugh.¹⁰⁵

So great is Peggy's naivete that she does not understand why she should kill herself, and so complete her stupidity that she lends the knife to one of the Indians. She tries to convert the Indians to Christianity, and gives one of them a Bible. In a beautiful piece of irony, Twain has the Indian use the Bible as a stake in a gambling game, and win a tomahawk.

Naturally, the Indians attack the camp of the whites and carry off Peggy, presumably to a "fate worse than death." The fragment ends with Huck, Tom, and the Indian fighter fiancée pursuing the Indians. Walter Blair has offered the explanation that the only possibility for a conclusion to the story was the discovery of the ravished Peggy, and that this was more than Twain could bear to think about. Faced with the problem of rape, Twain could only give up the story.¹⁰⁶ Such an explanation is perfectly logical in connection with Twain's refusal to write of women as sexual objects. If he was indeed projecting his ideal of Livy onto Peggy Mills, it would have been impossible for Twain to carry through with the story. His ideal again limited him, so much this time that he was forced to leave the story unfinished. With the other women he had been able to evade any thoughts of sexuality by simply by passing them. He could arrange for Sandy to have a baby merely by noting that she had a baby, without any mention of how it came to be. The logical conclusion of Peggy's story can be nothing but ravishment and probable death, and to this Twain could not subject his ideal. His imagination could go only so far in this direction, and then the curtain dropped.

Twain was equally unable to raise the imaginative curtain when dealing with older women; they too are stereotypes. Any woman character who has passed the child-bearing years is usually an Aunt Polly. She doesn't change; the Aunt Polly of Tom Sawyer is the twin of Aunt Sally of *Tom Sawyer, Detective*, or of Joan of Arc's mother, or of the Widow Douglas; the line goes on and on.

Aunt Polly's marital state may vary. She is usually a widow. Occasionally her husband is still alive, but in these cases, the husband is presented as a rather ineffectual boob. Aunt Polly usually gives the orders and keeps things running. She is a kindly, often slow-witted person, who endures much teasing by her off-spring or her wards. She has few real feelings, although some act may hurt her, but not for long. She takes some care of her children, although they rarely pay much

¹⁰⁵ Mark Twain, "Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer Among the Indians," *Life*, LXV (December 20, 1968), 37.

¹⁰⁶ Walter Blair, "The Reasons Mark Twain Did Not Finish His Story," *Life*, LXV (December 20, 1968), 50A.

attention to her. Her orders are rarely obeyed. She is the parental stooge, the straight man, but she never realizes it. This is the image which Twain projects of the mother figure. One can grant that there are some mothers who might fit this image, but it would be rare indeed to find all mothers acting like this. In Twain's works, they all do act like this. They all are part of the stereotype.

Twain successfully raised the imaginative curtain between his women and their sexuality only with Roxy, the almost white slave in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*. Roxy is more than sufficiently passionate: she has an illicit affair with a respectable white man, and gives birth to an illegitimate son. In his descriptions of the handsome and vital woman, Twain proved that he could indeed write of a living woman:

Only one sixteenth of her was black, and that sixteenth did not show. She was of majestic form and stature; her attitudes were imposing and statuesque, and her gestures and movements distinguished by a noble and stately grace. Her complexion was very fair, with the rosy glow of vigorous health in the cheeks, her face was full of character and expression, her eyes were brown and liquid. . . . Her face was shapely, intelligent, and comely — even beautiful.¹⁰⁷

This is a loving description, even a gloating one, and it seems to deny all that has been said about Twain's inability to deal with the sexual aspect of the female. Not only does Twain give her physical beauty, he also blesses Roxy with passions no other Twain women possess. She not only gives birth to a child through the normal sexual process, she also displays passionate feelings in relation to her child, going so far as to exchange him for the child of her employer so that her own child will live a free and rich life. This desperate protectiveness is like the protectiveness of a mother animal for her offspring, and is unlike anything other Twain women have displayed. Roxy is flawed, she makes mistakes, she has deep feelings. Here is an argument that Twain could see beyond the ideal and create life in a woman.

This argument, however, leaves out the fact that Roxy is a slave, however white she may be, and thus not really the ideal at all. Twain must have known on the intellectual level that slavery, particularly the slavery of a woman who is not only as white as her masters but spiritually their superior, does not degrade a woman. To know something intellectually and to feel it creatively, however, are two widely separate things. Roxy is a slave, and thus is far removed from the world of Livy Clemens. She is a Negro, and thus does not have to be ideal. Seeing her in this way enabled Twain to create his only multi-dimensional character. Freed from the lily-white stereotype that Twain had created, Roxy could achieve a fictional life that no other female character in Twain's work approaches.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Mark Twain, *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, p. 43.

¹⁰⁸ One of the most complete discussions of Roxy's character may be found in Henry Nash Smith, *Mark Twain: The Development of a Writer*, pp. 174-179.

Every writer has his limitations and his blind spots, just as he has the ability to see deeply and clearly about other things. To lack blindness about some things is perhaps to be inhuman. Twain had many failures of vision, but possibly his greatest was in relation to his female characters. This was a limitation which he created for himself, for reasons best left to those fond of psychiatric guessing games. He has been shown to have submitted willingly, even gratefully, to scoldings, to reforms, and to censorship, and to have searched for those who would do the scolding, reforming, and censoring. He invented a lifelong game, and played it wholeheartedly. In most of his writings the game was not harmful to him. The things he allowed Livy and Howells to cut out of his works were, by and large, things he did not care about losing. The scoldings he took did not bother him, and the reforms imposed upon him never lasted for long. Only in regard to the creation of female characters did his game do any damage.

The game hurt him because he finally could not see beyond it. The image of woman as the pure, passionless, sexless reformer, the mother of children and the saver of souls, although Twain knew it to be false, came to seem to be true. Because he felt this ideal, even though he denied it intellectually, Twain subjected himself to guilt feelings. He was imperfect, and so he blamed himself for ruining Livy's perfect life. He suffered because he did not make enough money to maintain Livy in the style he thought she deserved. He did not realize, on the deepest level, that Livy's life was far from ruined by his minor vices, and that she would no doubt have cheerfully starved along with him if that became necessary. Perhaps he could see how much better Livy was than the fraudulent ideal he had created, but he was never wholly free from the curse of that ideal.

As a result, the image of the pure and perfect woman came to be his way of seeing females in his novels, and thus he could not understand or portray a woman. He could only repeat the stereotype endlessly. Twain suffered a failure of the creative imagination here that is nowhere else evident in his works. Even his half-hearted belief in the mercenary value system of the late nineteenth century did not harm his art so much. One may believe that Grant is the greatest of leaders and still create vivid works of art. One cannot believe in a fraudulent ideal that encompasses half the human race and expect not to be harmed by it.

No one would deny Twain his status as one of the world's great writers simply because he could not create a female who was other than boring, insipid, and one-dimensional. One can, however, regret this failure of understanding, and wish that Twain had been able to push through the false ideal of woman that he began with his creation of his mother in his own image, for his own purposes. The vital and living portrait of Roxy, the one woman who was not obliged to be the ideal, suggests what Twain might have done if he had not so severely inhibited his imagination with an ideal that even he knew to be a fraud, but from

which he could not escape. One may regret, too, that he chose to imaginatively recreate Livy as this false ideal, when she was in fact so much different from the pallid and useless creature that the ideal tried to make her seem. Livy was a warm and vital person, and there is considerable pathos in Twain's failure to recognize that, and to use the real Livy, not the created one, as the model for the women of his novels. Generations of readers would have been spared the boredom of certain unbearable females, and generations of critics would have been spared the difficulty of trying to equate the Livy who really lived with the endless string of fictional women who are so much less than Livy was.

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