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**Mark Twain's Comments
On Books and Authors**

By

Franklin L. Jensen

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by
Franklin L. Jensen*

I

On Twain As Critic

A historian who would convey the truth has got to lie. Often he must enlarge the truth by diameters, otherwise his reader would not be able to see it.¹

Mark Twain is usually thought of as a critic of the customs of foreign countries, of most social institutions, and of man's follies; he is seldom considered a literary critic. His caustic, concise remarks about the weather, democracy, religion, Congress, royalty, swearing, modesty, smoking, exercise, and injustice are frequently quoted and praised. Some of his comments concerning various authors are just as apt and significant; still these comments are not well known. Two reasons for Twain's lack of esteem as a pungent critic could be, first, that literary criticism endeavors to be somewhat objective; and secondly, that much of Twain's criticism is in private matter, such as letters (mailed and unmailed), biography, unfinished manuscripts, marginal notes, and other material not published during his life. Twain was more subjective than objective in his literary opinions. This personal view was part of his distinction. His literary comments, made public before his death in 1910, are quite numerous but usually accepted as jokes. And, finally, another reason why Twain's literary criticism has not been either accepted or discarded is that the recent Twain scholars cannot agree on his importance in this field. These scholars have made statements that have varied from "Guiltless was he of logic as a child. All was emotion,"² to the belief that Twain was the forerunner of the twentieth century "tooth-and-claw" criticism of Shaw, Mencken, and Devoto.³ The critics, habitually, seem to use Twain's literary criticism in the way that it will best promote their particular theory, especially is this true of Van Wyck Brooks.⁴ Gladys C. Bellamy sprinkled her book with Twain's criticism to vitalize her theory of the author as a literary artist and to dampen Brooks's thesis.⁵ Many of the critics, however, have nothing to say about this phase of Twain.

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1. Albert Bigelow Paine, *Mark Twain: A Biography*, XXXIII, p. 1514. (Henceforth references to Mark Twain's works will be to the "Stormfield Edition" when the book title has a volume number after it.)

2. Fred Lewis Pattee, *Mark Twain*, p. XXXIX.

3. George W. Feinstein, "Twain as Forerunner to Tooth-and-Claw Criticism," *Modern Language Notes*, LXIII (January, 1948), pp. 49-50.

4. Van Wyck Brooks, *The Ordeal of Mark Twain*, *infra*.

5. Gladys C. Bellamy, *Mark Twain as a Literary Artist*, *et passim*.

Sometimes they mention the books he read, the influence of certain works upon his thought, or his theory of style, but say very little of his criticism of other authors.

One critic, Brooks—without whom no list of Twain critics would be complete—believed that Twain admired men of deed rather than word. He stated that Twain had “. . . an ingrained contempt for the creative life against the life of sagacious action.”⁶ Brooks concluded:

He was always for the Bacons as opposed to the Shakespeares; in his private memoranda he does not concern a certain disdain for Jesus Christ in comparison with Marcus Aurelius and the Stoics, and the indignant passion of his defense of Harriet Shelley, to mention an allied instance, is hardly qualified by any regard for her husband.⁷

Furthermore, Twain, with his undeveloped aesthetic sense, only read Browning for the fun he had in “puzzling it all out,” and “The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam” for its rhythm and doctrine. Brooks assumed that Twain read *A Tale of Two Cities* by Dickens only because its theme is that of the French Revolution. Nevertheless, the humorless Brooks did find one noteworthy contribution in Twain’s literary criticism—his remarks on the use of grammar:

An animal repugnance to Jane Austen, an irritated schoolboy’s dislike of Scott and Cooper—is not that the measure of the literary criticism he has left us? But here again there was a positive note—his lifelong preoccupation with grammar. How many essays and speeches, introductions and extravaganzas by Mark Twain turn upon some question whose interest is purely or mainly verbal!—“English as She Is Taught,” “A Simplified Alphabet,” “The Awful German Language,” “A Majestic Literary Fossil,” “Fenimore Cooper’s Literary Offenses,” “Italian with Grammar,” “William Dean Howells,” “General Grant and Matthew Arnold,” “The New Guide of the Conversation in Portuguese and English.” It is the letter-perfection of Mr. Howells that dazzles him; the want of it he considers a sufficient reason for saying “you’re another” to Matthew Arnold and tripping him up over some imaginary verbal gaucherie.⁸

And finally, Brooks pointed out why it was that Twain disliked Austen: “When he roars and rages against the novels of Jane Austen, we can see that buried self taking vengeance upon Mr. Howells, with whom Jane Austen was a prime passion.”⁹ Brooks, in his delving into Twain’s “buried self” and relating Twain’s animosities, failed to see Twain’s assumed position as an iconoclast. He, likewise, noticed only that literary criticism which added to his own theory of the influence of Olivia and Howells upon Twain’s thought. However, had Brooks considered all of Twain’s literary comments, his argument would have been weakened. An awareness of those that Twain admired—Shakespeare, Malory, Harte (in his earlier works), Howells, Voltaire, Pepys, and many others—might well have exploded some of Brooks’s most cherished notions.

Bernard DeVoto was not as concerned with Mark Twain’s literary criticism in *Mark Twain’s America* as he was in confuting Brooks’s

6. Brooks, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*, p. 160.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 183.

thesis.¹⁰ If DeVoto said anything of importance about Twain's literary criticism in this book, it is that the American humorists—Henry Wheeler Shaw, Charles F. Browne, George W. Cable, and Joel Chandler Harris—worked with materials similar to those which occupied Twain. And, moreover, Howells and Olivia did not stifle his genius, as Brooks implied, but directed it. Later, DeVoto did express some interest in the literary criticism of Twain in *Mark Twain in Eruption* and in "Fenimore Cooper's Further Literary Offenses."¹¹

After reviewing the scope of Twain's reading, Fred Lewis Pattee asserted a belief in the originality of Twain's style:

His reading was desultory, chosen by impulse, haphazard. It made small impress upon his style. For his European histories he read widely, but even here it is hard to find where any book has changed at all his Mark Twain manner and style.¹²

If Pattee's analysis is correct, one could assume the originality of Twain's critical taste. And, of course, Pattee would be a little impatient with such theories of literary obligation as those of Brashear, Moore, and Blair present.¹³ In a footnote he stated: "One finds what one is looking for."¹⁴ This sort of biographical criticism, obviously, was not what Pattee was looking for. He found, for example, Brooks's theory far-fetched and did not believe that Howells or Olivia had been a detrimental influence to Twain's works.

In her chapter "Sam Clemens's Reading," Minnie M. Brashear implied that Twain was continually a critic of what he read in that it was a stimulus for him:

In youthful argument, on the river, he made his reading from Shakespeare serve his purpose to support a theory. In five of his later writings Mark Twain used what he read as documents to help him establish a thesis: in his "Defense of Harriet Shelley," in "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses," in "What Paul Bourget Thinks of Us," in "Is Shakespeare Dead?" and in *The Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc*.¹⁵

She continued to say that *A Fireside Conversation in the Year 1601*, *Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven*, *A Double-Barreled Detective Story*, *Tom Sawyer*, *The Prince and the Pauper*, *Huckleberry Finn*, and *A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court* were provoked in the same way. More importantly, Brashear had the insight to note his rebellious idol-smashing nature which makes Twain difficult to evaluate as a consistent critic:

With his habit of iconoclastic humor he would have put Shakespeare among the same boresome classics, and yet there is good evidence that he knew his Shakespeare well at the time when it was worth most to his personal development to know him.¹⁶

10. Bernard DeVoto, *Mark Twain's America*.

11. Bernard DeVoto (ed.), *Mark Twain in Eruption*; DeVoto (ed.), "Fenimore Cooper's Further Literary Offenses," *New England Quarterly*, XIX (September, 1946), 291-301.

12. Pattee, *op. cit.*, p. 1 (p. 50 in Introduction).

13. Minnie M. Brashear, *Mark Twain: Son of Missouri*; Olin H. Moore, "Mark Twain and Don Quixote," *PMLA*, XXXVII (June, 1922), 324-346; Walter Blair, "The French Revolution and *Huckleberry Finn*," *Modern Philology*, LV (August, 1957) 21-35.

14. Pattee, *loc. cit.*

15. Brashear, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 214.

In writing of Twain's literary theory, Wagenknecht declared: "Mark Twain never developed anything so elaborate as a critical theory in judging literature."¹⁷ He quoted Twain's saying that he wrote to entertain the masses and concluded that Twain was more precise and detailed on the technical aspects of style. Twain judged more frequently on style, in Wagenknecht's opinion, than anything else. For this reason, Twain condemned Cooper, Scott, Harte, Dowden, and the Southern journalists; and for the same reason he praised Howells. Re-emphasizing Twain's regard for style, Wagenknecht stated:

Feeling the importance of style so strongly as he did, Mark Twain surely could not have held up his own head as a self-respecting writer if he had not considered his own work at least competent along this line. He did so consider it. No other compliment ever pleases him quite so much as praise of his style.¹⁸

Gladys Bellamy in her informative survey of Twain's attitude toward certain authors and their works concluded:

His aesthetic experience no doubt still leaves much to be desired; but his attainment shows that he recognized his deficiencies, tried to keep an open mind, and attempted a sort of self-culture with a result that is in no wise contemptible.¹⁹

Even though Bellamy believed that there was "much to be desired," she intelligently hinted that Mark Twain may not have been a critic who merely pretended. Again, she saw that some of his comments had misled critics. She pointed out that for a man ". . . who 'detested' novels, who was 'indifferent' to literary effects and 'insolent' toward his own literary work," Twain certainly appeared to feel quite different at times when his pretense slipped.²⁰

Eugene Hudson Long in a section called "Literary Sources" simply summarized the previous opinions of other critics.²¹ He did not add, nor attempt to add, anything new. He merely made broad generalizations and recorded brief, obvious examples of Twain's attitude toward other writers. As Wagenknecht had done before him, he mentioned Twain's comment and hurried to the next: "While on the river Sam read *Paradise Lost*, remarking upon 'the Arch-Fiend's terrible energy'; there too he read Shakespeare."²²

As can be seen in this summation of the Mark Twain critics, actually little has been done in the field of Twain's literary criticism. Some listed what he had read and its influence; some enjoyed developing a theory of composition for Twain; some pointed out that Twain had no theory of literature; and others psychoanalyzed him through his readings and his comments. Perhaps one of the most worthwhile contributions to the problem was a two-page article by Feinstein in which he credited Twain as being the forerunner of "tooth-and-claw" criticism:

17. Edward Wagenknecht, *Mark Twain: The Man and His Work*, p. 73.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 76.

19. Bellamy, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 38. Of Twain's criticism of novels, Bellamy said: "The kind of novels he detested included the namby-pamby products of sentimental 'lady authoresses' and books blighted by what he called 'niggling analysis' and 'jejune romanticism.'"

21. Eugene Hudson Long, *Mark Twain's Handbook*.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 294.

A withering appraiser of books and authors, Mark Twain has yet to be credited for the possible impetus his eruptive antipathies and enthusiasms have given to the American drift toward trenchant style in criticism. With only moderate exaggeration he could say of the criticizing of books: ". . . I don't do it except when I hate them."²³

In the closing statement of his article, Feinstein determined that this kind of criticism had reached a new high with Twain and that several later "tooth-and-claw" critics had inherited some of Twain's critical style:

Personal, vituperative, iconoclastic criticism reached its apotheosis in nineteenth-century America in Twain. And what critic during the past century, other than Twain, has blasted Sir Walter Scott, George Eliot, and Mary Baker Eddy with such contempt for prevailing opinion? Clearly Shaw, Mencken, DeVoto—Twain idolaters all of them from their early, formative years, by their own admission—and a horde of modern journalistic reviewers inherit, remotely or directly, something of Twain's flailing quality, his aggressive, epithetic line.²⁴

The idea, here, cannot be proved any more than a theory that the English eighteenth century writers—Dryden, Pope, and Johnson—or earlier satirists started the "tooth-and-claw" criticism, or that these men, from Dryden to DeVoto, were simply no more than products of their own times. There have always been pithy remarks, and today, when most people will not read long reviews, they do enjoy witty comments on literary works.

If he disliked the man, Twain was not likely to assume an attitude of tolerance toward the author's work. For example, after quarreling with Harte, his inclination was to be vindictive rather than just in evaluating Harte's works. And frequently a hatred of the work ostensibly came first. After reading *Pride and Prejudice*, he said that he wanted to dig up Jane Austen and ". . . beat her over the skull with her own shinbone." If he liked the man, he praised his works accordingly. Holmes, Howells, and perhaps Kipling receive dual affection in this manner. By contrast the works of White and Howe came into Twain's affection before the men. Thus, with the exception of several like Bryon and Shelley, the work and the author were one and the same to Twain. To hate one was to hate the other, or to like one was to like the other.

A serious critic is usually thought of as one who helps separate the good and bad literature for the purpose of saving and interpreting the good. Twain in his position of serious "humorist" does not appear as a serious critic. For a perpetual dyed-in-the-wool vituperative iconoclast, attacking the classics is the appropriate action. Samuel Johnson did it before Twain and Shaw and Mencken after Twain. Such men are usually interested in commenting on only "good" literature, for why attack something as unknown as the "bad" literature?

Inasmuch as Twain's inclination was to look for the ludicrous, he often overlooked the sublime. Yet much of his criticism was not negative; he found things to admire in Howells, Holmes, Kipling, Howe, White, Browning, Dickens, Goldsmith, and even Scott (*Quentin Durward*). He spoke more privately of those authors whom he liked for personal, contradictory, and often sound reasons. Most of his references to this group

23. Feinstein, "Twain as Forerunner," *op. cit.*, pp. 49-50.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

can be found in his letters or such hidden places as the margins of their various books that he owned.

Cooper, Scott, and Austen

Truth is stranger than fiction, but it is because fiction is obliged to stick to possibilities; Truth isn't.—Pudd'nhead Wilson's New Calendar.¹

Before listing all the authors that Twain commented upon, one should investigate three major novelists and their works in the light of Twain's criticism. His favorite targets were Cooper, Scott, and Austen. His treatment of these authors helps strengthen the belief that Twain was knowingly serious when he said to Kipling: "Personally I never cared for a fiction or storybook. What I like to read about are facts and statistics of any kind."²

Even though some critics believed Twain to be guiltless of logic, he was quite systematic in his treatment of Cooper in "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses." This article climaxes Twain's thoughts on Cooper throughout the years; however, his attacks on Scott and Austen could be reactions against the pet admiration of Warner for Scott and Howells for Austen.³ Twain blasted away at Cooper's verbosity, style, and treatment of Indians. Wagenknecht referred to a letter that Twain wrote to his mother from Carson City as early as 1862 in which he said he would give her ". . . a full and correct account of these lovely Indians—not gleaned from Cooper's novels, Madam, but the result of personal observation."⁴ Another attack on Cooper's Indians appears in *Roughing It*; Twain compared the Goshoots of the West to "Noble Red Men" of *The Last of the Mohicans*. He pretended to be surprised when he found that he had been betrayed by the "mellow moonshine" of such novels:

The disgust which the Goshoots gave me, a disciple of Cooper and a worshiper of the Red Man—even of the scholarly savages in the *Last of the Mohicans*, who are fittingly associated with backwoods-men who divide each sentence into two equal parts; one part critically grammatical, refined, and choice of language, and other part just such an attempt to talk like a hunter or a mountaineer as a Broadway clerk might make after eating an edition of Emerson Bennett's works and studying frontier life at the Bowery Theater a couple of weeks—I say that the nausea which the Goshoots gave me, an Indian-worshiper, set me to examining authorities, to see if perchance I had been overestimating the Red Man while viewing him through the mellow moonshine of romance.⁵

In the matter of choice of language or speech, Twain assailed Cooper, later, in a criticism of the *Deerslayer*. He stated that the rules of literary art required the author to describe a character so that ". . . the conduct and conversation of that personage shall justify said description."⁶ Twain

1. *Following the Equator*, XX, p. 137.

2. Rudyard Kipling, *From Sea to Sea*, II, p. 180.

3. Twain often attacked that which others worshipped. But at other times he was in full agreement with these men: Warner as a collaborator on *The Gilded Age* and Howells as a literary adviser.

4. Wagenknecht, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

5. *Roughing It*, III, p. 134.

6. *The Defense of Harriet Shelley*, "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses," XXII, pp. 60-77.

continued in his commentary on Indians, but it is centered on the Goshoots rather than on Cooper's idealized portrayals: "They deserve pity, poor creatures! and they can have mine—at this distance. Nearer by, they never get anybody's."

Twain devoted a complete chapter to the description of the "wretchedest type of mankind" whom he had ever seen. He remarked that these noble "Red Men" wore an accumulation of months of dirt, had a beggar instinct which was their main element of character, ate crickets and grasshoppers which they had bravely killed, embezzled carrion from buzzards and coyotes, thought the Great Spirit was whisky, and had the courage of rabbits in a fight. In *Innocents Abroad*, he again disparaged Indians in general, and specifically Cooper's lack of realistic characterization:

When near Lake Como in northern Italy: People say that Tahoe means "Silver Lake"—"Limpid Water"—"Falling Leaf." Bosh! It means grasshopper soup, the favorite dish of the Digger tribe—and of the Pi-utes as well. It isn't worth while, in these practical times, for people to talk about Indian Poetry—there never was any in them—except in the Fenimore Cooper Indians. But *they* are an extinct tribe that never existed.⁸

In another reference, he paralleled Cooper's Indian to Grime's Arab—or the sentimentalism of the "Noble Red Men" to the adoration of the inhabitants of the Holy Land:

That is the kind of gruel which has been served out from Palestine for ages. Commend me to Fenimore Cooper to find beauty in the Indians, and to Grimes to find it in the Arabs. Arab men are often fine-looking, but Arab women are not. We can all believe that the Virgin Mary was beautiful; it is not natural to think otherwise; but does it follow that it is our duty to find beauty in these present women of Nazareth?⁹

In 1867, General Connor had been fighting Indians, and Twain was waiting to hear that Connor had "polished off" them:

He [Connor] has shown that he knows how to fight the kind of Indians that God made, but I suppose the humanitarians want somebody to fight the Indians that J. Fenimore Cooper made. There is just where the mistake is. The Cooper Indians are dead—died with their creator. The kind that are left are of altogether a different breed, and cannot be successfully fought with poetry, and sentiment, and soft soap, and magnanimity.¹⁰

In this passage, Twain did not pity the Indian even from a distance, as he did in *Roughing It*. However, he again seemed to be speaking against Cooper for effect; certainly Twain was for the underdog Negro and Filipino.

In "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses" he developed a criticism of the dialogue of Cooper's Indians as well as many other characters. This article is Twain's most ambitious work of literary criticism. Twain

7. *Roughing It*, loc. cit.

8. *Innocents Abroad*, I, p. 205.

9. *Ibid.*, II, p. 267.

10. *Mark Twain's Travels with Mr. Brown*, eds. Franklin Walker and G. Ezra Dane, p. 266.

opened his essay with a discussion of three favorable critical evaluations of Cooper's works by established critics. He asserted:

It seems to me that it was far from right for the Professor of English Literature in Yale, the Professor of English Literature in Columbia, and Wilkie Collins to deliver opinions on Cooper's literature without having read some of it. It would have been much more decorous to keep silent and let persons talk who have read Cooper.¹¹

He continued with this bellicose manner, saying that in the *Deerslayer*, a literary "*delirium tremens*," Cooper broke a record when on two-thirds of a page he ". . . scored 114 offenses against art out of a possible 115." But exaggerating or not, Twain subsequently enumerated the eighteen, out of a possible nineteen, "rules" which Cooper had violated. These rules comprise a rather complete list, wittily presented. Twain demanded ". . . that the personages in a tale shall be alive, except in the case of corpses, and that "always the reader shall be able to tell the corpses from the others." He believed that this detail had been overlooked in the *Deerslayer*. Twain's rules concern the development of the story, the consistency of the characters in speech and action, the reason for certain characters, the possibilities of action, the interest of reader, the necessary words and details, the correct grammar, the right word, and the simple, straight-forward style. (Even though there are eighteen rules, some of them overlap.) The impossibilities or miracles, not the improbabilities, in Cooper's stories drew Twain's attention. Among these miracles were Natty Bumppo's ability to find a military post by following the track of a spent cannon-ball, Chicago's (Chingachgook's) diverting the stream to find a moccasin print at the bottom of the stream, Bumppo's remarkable ability to see better than most men can see with a telescope, and the floating of a scow (probably one-hundred-and-forty feet long) down a river twenty feet wide with bends every thirty to fifty feet. Twain mentioned the even more remarkable fact that not one of six agile Indians could jump on this "leviathan" from a limb overhanging the river, even though it took a full minute for it to pass under. Twain concluded with a statement about the literary art of the *Deerslayer*:

A work of Art? It has no invention; it has no order, system, sequence, or result; it has no lifelikeness, no thrill, no stir, no seeming of reality; its characters are confusedly drawn and by their acts and words they prove that they are not the sort of people the author claims that they are; its humor is pathetic; its pathos is funny; its conversations are—oh! indescribable; its love scenes odious; its English a crime against the language.

Counting these out, what is left is Art. I think we must all admit that.¹²

At first glance all of Twain's delightful remarks seem just, deserved, and logical; but with further study one senses, as Wagenknecht stated, "a deep-seated dislike" behind them.¹³

11. *The Defense of Harriet Shelley*, XXII, p. 60.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 77.

13. Wagenknecht, *loc. cit.*

In Mark Twain's papers DeVoto found a continuation of Twain's criticism of Cooper.¹⁴ After quoting a passage from Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*, Twain commented on its obscure verbosity, its "mincing and smirky" style, and its inexact words.¹⁵ He showed how Cooper spent twice as many words as were needed. Twain pointed out Cooper's inaccuracy as an observer: Cooper or his Indians had trouble telling darkness from daylight. From another passage of 320 words, Twain pruned 100:

In a minute he was once more fastened to the tree, *a helpless object of any insult or wrong that might be offered. So eagerly did every one now act, that nothing was said.* The fire was immediately lighted in the pile, and the end of all was anxiously expected.

It was not the intention of the Hurons *absolutely* to destroy the life of their victim by means of fire. They designed merely to put his *physical fortitude* to the severest proofs it could endure, short of that extremity.¹⁶

From this example, Twain proceeded to show what he meant when he said that Cooper had scored 114 literary transgressions out of a possible 115.¹⁷ Also, this passage supplied the literary errors for rules 12 through 18 of the formerly published "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses."¹⁸

One year before "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses" appeared in the *North American Review*, (1894), Twain wrote an incomplete story called "Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer Among the Indians." In this story, Tom, who has derived his knowledge from Cooper's novels, talks about Indians.¹⁹ After various adventures in the wilderness, the story breaks off. Thus, Twain seemed to have exhausted himself in attacking Cooper and the Indians. Of course, after "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses" what more could he say?

Twain's closing note on Cooper is to be found in a letter to the Rev. Joseph H. Twichell. Twichell sent Twain an article by Brander Matthews in which the letter discussed Twain's criticisms of Cooper. Obviously the article is "New Trials for Old Favorites."²⁰ In Matthews's opinion, Twain's criticism consists more or less of humorous comments. He wrote that Twain's ". . . sentence of annihilation . . ." upon the "Leather-Stocking Tales" seems ". . . to suggest rather the exaggeration of the wanton humorist than the severe restraint of the cautious critic."²¹ Matthews also justified—if it needed justifying—Twain's right and purpose of criticism: "To arouse us from our laziness and our lethargy there is

14. "Fenimore Cooper's Further Literary Offenses," ed. Bernard DeVoto, *New England Quarterly*, XIX (September, 1946), 291-301. This article is obviously an integral part of Twain's comments on Cooper: "The manuscript of the final version shows that not all of it was published, presumably because it was overlong for a magazine" (*Ibid.*, p. 291). DeVoto suggested that in a future definitive edition of Mark Twain's works the essays should be put together as they were written. [This article has recently been published in Mark Twain, *Letters from the Earth*, ed. Bernard DeVoto (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), pp. 135-145, Ed.]

15. *Ibid.*, p. 295.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 299. That which is italicized is what Twain considered unnecessary.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 300.

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Mark Twain—Howells Letters*, eds. Henry Nash Smith and William M. Gibson, p. 497.

20. Brander Matthews, "New Trials for Old Favorites," *Forum*, XXV (August, 1898), 749-760. No direct reference to this specific article can be found. But after a perusal of Matthews's articles in the years 1896-1898, one finds that this is the only one which mentions Twain as a critic of Cooper.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 749.

nothing like a vehement assault on the inherited opinion, even if the charge is too sweeping. . . ."²² Twain's comment of Matthew's remarks follows:

And so I thank you very much for sending me Brander's article. When you say "I like Brander Matthews; he impresses me as a man of parts and power," I back you, right up to the hub—I feel the same way—. And when you say he has earned your gratitude for cuffing me for my crimes against the Leather stockings and the Vicar, I ain't making any objections. *Dern* your gratitude!²³

Sir Walter Scott, another target of Twain, did not become the subject of a critical essay as did Cooper. However, Scott was flayed on two general counts—romanticism and style. These counts are similar to the faults Twain had found in Cooper. But unlike Cooper, Scott was not attacked early in Twain's career, and Twain eventually found a novel by Scott that he liked—*Quentin Durward*. In a speech, Twain once said:

Professor Trent also had a good deal to say about the disappearance of literature. He said that Scott would outlive all his critics. I guess that's true. The fact of the business is, you've got to be one of two ages to appreciate Scott. When you're eighteen you can read *Ivanhoe*, and you want to wait until you are ninety to read some of the rest. It takes a pretty well-regulated abstemious critic to live ninety years.²⁴

Nevertheless, Twain did appreciate Scott at two different ages.

In 1870 the first indication of his later abhorrence of Scott appeared in a letter to Olivia in which he wrote a satirical synopsis of *Ivanhoe*.²⁵ In *The Gilded Age* by Twain and Warner (1874), Scott was certainly one of the authors who helped influence Laura's thinking to the extent that she was susceptible to Colonel Selby's advances.²⁶ In the same year, Twain complimented Howells on his "admirable workmanship" of the *Foregone Conclusion* and added: "If your genuine stories can die, I wonder by what right old Walter Scott's artificialities shall continue to live."²⁷ Throughout *Tom Sawyer*, Scott is implied as the author from whom Tom acquires much of his boyish romantic nonsense. Again Tom in *Huckleberry Finn* is shown trying to use some of this nonsense in the cruel rescue of Jim. Also, in this novel a sinking steamboat, the *Walter Scott*, almost destroys Jim and Huck. And in *Life on the Mississippi*, Twain contended that the South derived her "jejune romanticism" and "medieval chivalry silliness" from Scott, and he finally charged that Scott was responsible for the Civil War. Two of Twain's friends, Charles Dudley Warner and Joe Twichell, were probably more responsible for these charges against Scott than for a re-reading and re-evaluation on Scott by Twain. Warner was trying to bring back romanticism to litera-

22. *Ibid.*, p. 754.

23. *Letters*, XXXV, pp. 666-667.

24. *Speeches*, "Disappearance of Literature," XXVIII, p. 210.

25. Dixon Weeter (ed.), *The Love Letters of Mark Twain*, p. 361. The letter itself, No. 172, is not in this selection; it has not yet been published.

26. *The Gilded Age*, V, pp. 181-182.

27. *Mark Twain-Howells Letters*, p. 21.

ture.²⁸ And Twichell simply admired Scott.²⁹ These two Scott admirers were sufficient enough to make the iconoclastic Twain point out Scott's weaknesses. In *Life on the Mississippi*, he warmed up rather slowly to his theory that Scott was the cause of the Civil War. First, when speaking of a library in a Southern household, he said that perhaps it would contain *Ivanhoe*.³⁰ Next, he stated that Scott was probably responsible for the sham castle of a capitol building in Baton Rouge.³¹ Twain believed that Scott had "run the people mad" and that the ". . . South has not yet recovered from the debilitating influence of his books."³² This "imitation castle" architecture, which the whole South had adopted, in Twain's opinion, would be harmless if it were not a ". . . symbol and breeder and sustainer of maudlin Middle-Age romanticism."³³ Through Twain's writings, Scott was to be blamed for all the South's weaknesses, such as its acceptance of gentlemen murdering one another, its burial habits, its cruel sports, its flowery journalism, its Mardi-Gras grotesqueries, and its shams.³⁴ Twain believed that Scott had checked the wave of progress that was earlier in the South and had replaced it with a world in love with

. . . dreams and phantoms; with decayed and swinish forms of religion; with decayed and degraded systems of government; with the sillinesses and emptiness, sham grandeurs, sham gauds, and sham chivalries of a brainless and worthless long-vanished society.³⁵

He added: "He [Scott] did measureless harm; more real and lasting harm, perhaps, than any other individual that ever wrote."³⁶ And he finally charged that Scott ". . . had so large a hand in making Southern character, as it existed before the war, that he is in great measure responsible for the war."³⁷ Recognizing that it seemed harsh to so accuse

28. Floyd Stovall (ed.), *The Development of American Literary Criticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1955), pp. 131-132. Stovall explained the literary battle evolving Warner and Twain in the following paragraphs:

"The battle of the periodicals over the novel, meanwhile, took on renewed interest in a three-way argument touched off by Charles Dudley Warner's article in *The Atlantic* ("Modern Fiction," LI, pp. 464-74) in April, 1883. Warner resurrected the cause of Sir Walter Scott and pleaded for a return to chivalry, romance, truth, virtue, justice, and happy endings. The purpose of the novel, he expostulated, was "to entertain." He argued that Scott and Cervantes represented not only romance and realism, but two universal attitudes toward life and concluded that Sir Walter had restored the balance between chivalry and realism which the followers of *Don Quixote* had destroyed. He attacked "modern fiction" for its morbidity, pessimism, psychological "analysis," and despondent tone.

"Mark Twain countered the traditionalism and romantic idealism of his friend Warner with a vitriolic blast in *Life on the Mississippi* at the "Sir Walter Disease" of the South in which he attributed the sentimentalism and unreality of that region to "the pernicious work" of Scott, his "jejune romanticism," fantastic heroes, and grotesque chivalry. He lamented the decline of Cervantes' prestige and the "debilitating" effect of Scott's books on the South."

29. *Mark Twain's Autobiography*, XXXVII, p. 224. In this volume, Twain remarked: "They [Twichell and his wife, Harmony] were devotees of Scott, and they devoted that day or two to ransacking Edinburgh for things and places made sacred by contact with the Magician of the North."

30. *Life on the Mississippi*, XII, p. 318.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 332.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 333.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 333-334.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 374. Stressing his point about the South, Twain asserted: "Take away the romantic mysteries, the kings, and knights, and big-sounding titles, and Mardi-Gras would die, down there in the South. The very feature that keeps it alive in the South—girly-girly romance—would kill it in the North or in London."

35. *Ibid.*, p. 375.

36. *Ibid.*

37. *Ibid.*

Scott, he confessed: ". . . yet something of a plausible argument might, perhaps, be made in support of that wild proposition."³⁸ Here Twain considered his onslaught against Scott as a "wild proposition"; however, Twain, as a writer, would expect a book to have a great influence on a civilization.³⁹

Yet, even though Scott was exceedingly popular in the South, one might imagine that the plantation system of the pre-Civil War culture was more responsible for its backwardness than the feudal system of Scott's novels. G. Harrison Orians from a modern Southern view of the problem challenged the logic of Mark Twain:

Scott, though he may have been a decorative influence in Southern life, was certainly not a dictating force either in the preservation of an old order or in the defense of Southern institutions. It is one thing to say, as Mark Twain says, that Scott enamored the South with chivalry and the past; it is another to make one of his pet piques into a sober declaration of historical fact.⁴⁰

After such an attack on the "Sir Walter Disease," it would seem that there was little yet to be said. But it was not so with Twain for when speaking of indecent language of earlier England, he said:

Suppose Sir Walter, instead of putting the conversations into the mouths of his characters, had allowed the characters to speak for themselves? We should have had talk from Rebecca and Ivanhoe and the soft lady Rowena which would embarrass a tramp in our day.⁴¹

The charge seems to be that Scott does not use the actual language of the day.

Scott is briefly mentioned in two other volumes. The first is in *The American Claimant* in which Lady Gwendolen (Sally) attends Rowen-Ivanhoe College, the "selectest and most aristocratic seat of learning for young ladies in our country."⁴² The college has ". . . Castellated college-buildings—towers and turrets and an imitation moat—and everything about the place named out of Sir Walter Scott's books and redolent of royalty and state and style."⁴³

The other brief reference tells of Scott's fondness for Marjorie Fleming, a child prodigy.⁴⁴ Dr. John Brown of Scotland wrote "he [Scott] would take her on his knees and make her repeat Cordelia's speeches in *King Lear* till he swayed to and fro, sobbing his fill."⁴⁵ Twain added: "'Sobbing his fill'—that great man—over that little thing's inspired interpretations."⁴⁶

Twain's most systematic attempt to judge Scott consists of twelve questions which he sent to Brander Matthews. Twain had been trying to

38. *Ibid.*

39. *Ibid.*, pp. 377-378. Twain believed that Cervantes' book could do the opposite: "A curious exemplification of the power of a single book for good or harm is shown in the effects wrought by *Don Quixote* and those wrought by *Ivanhoe*. The first swept the world's admiration for the medieval chivalry silliness out of existence; and the other restored it. As far as our South is concerned, the good work done by Cervantes is pretty nearly a dead letter, so effectually has Scott's pernicious work undermined it."

40. G. Harrison Orians, "Walter Scott, Mark Twain, and the Civil War," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, XL (October, 1941), p. 359.

41. *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, XIV, p. 30.

42. *The American Claimant*, XV, p. 37.

43. *Ibid.*

44. *Europe and Elsewhere*, XXIX, pp. 359-361.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 360.

46. *Ibid.*

read Scott during an illness, and he asked Matthews to answer the questions ". . . when you have 8 or 9 months to spare, and jot me down a certain few literary particulars for my help and elevation."⁴⁷ The questions ask whether Scott ever had any success with the English language, characterization, style, and realism:

Brander, I lie here dying, slowly dying, under the blight of Sir Walter. I have read the first volume of *Rob Roy*, and as far as Chapter XIX of *Guy Mannering*, and I can no longer hold my head up nor take my nourishment. Lord, it's all so juvenile! so artificial, so shoddy; and such wax figures and skeletons and spectres. Interest? Why, it is impossible to feel an interest in these bloodless shams, these milk-and-water humbugs. And oh, the poverty of the invention! Not poverty in inventing situations, but poverty in furnishing reasons for them. Sir Walter usually gives himself away when he arranges for a situation—elaborates, and elaborates, and elaborates, till if you live to get to it you don't believe in it when it happens.⁴⁸

Twain said that he knew that Scott was great in his time as was "God in Jewish times for that matter." He doubted if either of them rank very high now. A few days later, Twain seemed to have answered some of his questions himself:

I finished *Guy Mannering*—that curious, curious book, with its mob of squalid shadows jabbering around a single flesh-and-blood being—Dinnmont; a book crazily put together out of the very refuse of the romance-artist's stage properties—finished it and took up *Quentin Durward*, and finished that.

It was like leaving the dead to mingle with the living: it was like withdrawing from the infant class in the College of Journalism to sit under the lectures in English literature in Columbia University.

I wonder who wrote *Quentin Durward*?⁴⁹

Perhaps the recovery from his illness helped him leave the dead to mingle with the living Scott. Anyway he enjoyed *Ivanhoe* at age eighteen and *Quentin Durward* at age sixty-eight. So Twain proved his earlier judgment that one has to be young or old to appreciate Scott.

Twain, however, never lived long enough to develop an appreciation of anything by Jane Austen. His dislike for Austen was probably helped along by Howells. Austen was an author about whom they seemed to enjoy arguing. To Howells, she was the ideal writer; to Twain, she was an intolerable writer. Twain had a natural antipathy for Austen's fiction, whereas Howells upheld her works in such a way that Twain desired to smash Howells's idol. He did not begin by heaping the hot coals upon her as he earlier had done with Cooper and Scott. Yet, he seemed to concur with Warner who may have had some of her novels in mind when he wrote:

For Laura had her dreams. She detested the narrow limits in which her lot was cast, she hated poverty. Much of her reading had been of modern works of fiction, written by her own sex, which had revealed to her something of her own powers and given her, indeed, an exaggerated notion of the influence, the wealth, the position a woman may attain who has beauty and talent and ambition and a little culture. . . .⁵⁰

47. *Letters*, XXXV, p. 737.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 738.

49. *Ibid.*, pp. 738-739.

50. *The Gilded Age*, V, p. 192.

His first direct reference to her appeared in 1896: "This is the best library I have seen in a ship yet. I must read that devilish *Vicar of Wakefield* again. Also Jane Austen."⁵¹ From these notes, Twain made a more specific and invective blast during the next year when he again spoke of the ship's library: "Jane Austen's books, too, are absent from this library. Just that one omission alone would make a fairly good library that hadn't a book in it."⁵² In the same letter to Twichell that referred to Matthew's reply to the Cooper Article, Twain wrote:

I haven't any right to criticise books, and I don't do it except when I hate them. I often want to criticise Jane Austen, but her books madden me so that I can't conceal my frenzy from the reader; and therefore I have to stop every time I begin.⁵³

Twain's frenzy was possibly encouraged by Howells with such remarks as: "Now you're sick, I've a great mind to have it out with [you] about Jane Austen. If you say much more I'll come out and read "*Pride and Prejudice*" to you."⁵⁴ Twain may have begun his attacks on Austen to plague Howells and if this be so, Howells knew how to return the harassment. Paine recorded Twain's hinting in 1907 that some of Austen's novels may be great but not to his taste:

"When I take up one of Jane Austen's books," he said, "such as *Pride and Prejudice*, I feel like a barkeeper entering the kingdom of heaven. I know what his sensation would be and his private comments. He would not find the place to his taste, and he would probably say so."⁵⁵

Whether or not Twain actually felt inferior to Austen, as has been suggested by many critics of this passage, cannot be known. But whatever the reason, he continued his attacks in 1909:

To me [Poe's] prose is unreadable--like Jane Austen's. No, there is a difference. I could read his prose on salary, but not Jane's. Jane is entirely impossible. It seems a great pity that they allowed her to die a natural death.⁵⁶

Jane Austen was also the subject of one of the most fierce remarks that any author has ever said about another: "Every time I read *Pride and Prejudice* I want to dig her up and beat her over the skull with her own shinbone."⁵⁷ And another time he remarked: "She makes me detest all her people, without reserve."⁵⁸ Almost all of Twain's criticism of Austen is emotional and unreliable so far as its validity is concerned. He deprecated her shallow, passionless characters, and at the same time he did not want such well-developed characters as Becky Sharp and Tom Jones.

51. *Notebook*, p. 266.

52. *Following the Equator*, XXI, p. 289.

53. *Mark Twain's Letters*, XXXV, p. 667.

54. *Mark Twain-Howells Letters*, p. 769.

55. *Biography*, XXXII, p. 1500.

56. *Mark Twain-Howells Letters*, p. 841.

57. Brander Matthews, "Mark Twain and the Art of Writing," *Harper's Monthly*, CXL1 (October, 1920), 642.

58. *Mark Twain-Howells Letters*, p. 770.

Authors and Books to 1869

"Classic." A book which people praise and don't read.¹

The authors examined by Twain in this chapter are those who died before 1869. This date has been chosen to demarcate the literary men of the past and Twain's contemporaries for two reasons: first, Twain did not rise as a writer of much stature before his *Innocents Abroad*, and, secondly, the realistic movement in America was reaching importance at this time. This arbitrary line of separation has its complications as any other method would. For example, Elizabeth Barrett Browning is in this section with the writers of Twain's past, and her husband will be discussed in the next chapter with Twain's contemporaries. Nevertheless, this date separates quite successfully those people whom Twain did not know and those he could know.

Another point which may be confusing about Twain's literary criticism of earlier authors is that he usually spoke of them and their works as one. For example, his references to Bacon have little to do with literary criticism *per se*, but when considered comprehensively, they give Twain's general opinion of Bacon.

Twain was quite consistent in judging with his two-fold standard of realism and simplicity. He might praise a work for having just one of these qualities—the realism of Casanova's *Memoirs* and the simplicity of Malory's *Morte D'Arthur*. Or Twain might condemn a work for not having one of these qualities.

Since Twain was reading for information and entertainment, the philosophy or doctrine of certain works was judged. He applauded *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* on this count and denounced Jonathan Edward's *Freedom of the Will* for the same reason.

The authors selected here are not limited to the writers of *belles-lettres*. Twain appraised all writing by the same standard; therefore, a comment on any work of writing is a part of his literary criticism. Plays, novels, poems, short stories, histories, memoirs, diaries, and works of theology were all subject to Twain's criticism. For the sake of simplicity and order, the list that follows is arranged alphabetically by author.

Bacon, Sir Francis. Twain's comments about Bacon were not concerned primarily with literary criticism but with literary conjecture in the Shakespeare-Bacon authorship controversy. He joined the Baconians in that he stated that he did not see how one could be such a great literary figure and so unknown as a man.² Here again, Twain may have been simply opposing Paine, who was an anti-Baconian, as he did Howells with Austen, and Warner and Twichell with Scott. Bacon is also a character in Twain's Rabelaisian *1601*.³

Bible. Most of Twain's criticism of the Bible bears upon doctrine rather than style. Yet it is commonly thought that Twain's own style was a result of careful study of and familiarity with the Bible.⁴ He alluded to

1. *Following the Equator*, XX, p. 220.

2. "Is Shakespeare Dead," *What is Man? and Other Essays*, XXVI, pp. 297-376.

3. *1601 or Conversation as It Was at the Fireside in the Time of the Tudors and Sketches: Old and New*.

4. Long, *op. cit.*, p. 294.

this work more than any other, and he read it well aloud.⁵ He remarked upon the poor example and the cruelty of the Christian God,⁶ upon the "harmful" influence of the Bible,⁷ upon its setting being sentimentalized,⁸ and upon its doctrine and stories in many parodies, burlesques, sketches, and stories.⁹

Browning, Elizabeth Barrett. Twain found her *Aurora Leigh* a trifle obscure and asked Livy for explanations.¹⁰

Bunyan, John. *Pilgrim's Progress* was one of the books which Twain put in the typical Southern library in *Huckleberry Finn*.¹¹ Huck referred to it as being "about a man that left his family, it didn't say why."¹² Upon two occasions, Mark Twain mentioned the unsuitability of Bunyan's heaven: once judging one of Henry James's novels he said, "I would rather be damned to John Bunyan's heaven than read that";¹³ on another occasion, he joined the Victorian idea of progress saying, "Nobody would go to Bunyan's heaven now, since our improvements have made this life attractive, but it was a superior place in its day."¹⁴ Twain recognized the realism of *Pilgrim's Progress*; at one time he thought of making a "stereoptical panorama" of it.¹⁵ He believed that with actors he could photograph the Valley of the Shadow of Death in a gorge and Vanity Fair in many cities. However, he never attempted this. Another unstated but suggested reference to *Pilgrim's Progress* is the initial naming *Innocents Abroad* as *The New Pilgrim's Progress*. Perhaps he thought this title was too mocking; anyway Twain changed it to the sub-title. Also, in the introduction of *Report from Paradise*, Twain wrote that it would be a "wonderful experience" to hear Bunyan read from his "noble works."¹⁶

Burns, Robert. Twain compared the French can-can performers to Burns's witches in *Tam O'Shanter*: "Nothing like it has been seen on earth since trembling Tam O'Shanter saw the devil and the witches at their orgies that stormy night in 'Alloway's auld haunted kirk.'"¹⁷

Byron, George Gordon. Even though he censured Byron as a man, Twain respected his talents as a writer. Twain thought that Byron may have felt the same way about man as he did, but he believed that Byron's personal behavior should be condemned. He agreed with Harriet Beecher Stowe's controversial *Lady Byron Vindicated* in that Byron was guilty of mistreating his wife. In defense of Mrs. Stowe's defense of Byron's wife, Twain wrote:

He was a bad man; as bad, perhaps, as a man with a great intellect, a passionate animal nature, intense egotism and selfishness

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5. *Ibid.*
 6. *Notebook*, p. 301; *Biography*, XXXIII, pp. 1354-1357.
 7. *Ibid.*
 8. *Innocents Abroad*, II.
 9. Such as: *Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven*, "Adam's Diary," "Eve's Diary," *The Mysterious Stranger*, "As Concerns Interpreting the Diety," and passages throughout his works.
 10. Wecter, *The Love Letters of Mark Twain*, p. 34.
 11. *Huckleberry Finn*, XIII, p. 140.
 12. *Ibid.*
 13. *Mark Twain's Letters*, XXXV, p. 455.
 14. *Notebook*, p. 328.
 15. *Ibid.*, p. 192.
 16. Mark Twain, *Report from Paradise*, p. IX.
 17. *Innocents Abroad*, I, p. 131.

and little or no moral principle to restrain or govern either of these, could be.¹⁸

Of Byron's sinful characters Twain remarked:

If Byron—if any man—draws 50 characters, they are all himself—50 shades, 50 moods, of his own character. And when the man draws them well why 'do they stir my admiration? Because they are me—I recognize myself.¹⁹

Twain also paralleled himself with Byron through their feelings for themselves and man:

But, dear sir, you are forgetting that what a man sees in the human race is merely himself in the deep and honest privacy of his own heart. Byron despised the race because he despised himself. I feel as Byron did, and for the same reason. Do you admire the race (consequently yourself)?²⁰

In two lighter references to Byron's works, Twain praised himself for writing about the Coliseum without using the phrase "butchered to make a Roman holiday,"²¹ and he did not see why the prisoner of Chillon suffered so in such a "nice, cool, roomy place."²²

Caesar, Julius. Ranking Grant's work with *Caesar's Commentaries*, Twain stated that "they are noted for their simplicity, naturalness and purity of style."²³

Casanova de Seingalt, Giacomo. Twain believed that Casanova's frank remarks gave a good picture of the "high life of that [eighteenth century] epoch."²⁴ While telling Huck how ignorant he is, Tom Sawyer mentions Casanova as a hero.²⁵ But Twain's most literary comment on Casanova is in a letter to his brother Orion. He wrote of Casanova's candor:

The supremest charm in Casanova's *Memoires* (they are not printed in English) is, that he frankly, flowingly, & felicitously tells the dirtiest & vilest & most contemptible things on himself, without ever suspecting that they are other than things which the reader will admire & applaud.²⁶

Cellini, Benvenuto. In *Benvenuto's Autobiography*, Twain found an everlasting quality: "That most entertaining of books, Benvenuto's. It will last as long as his beautiful Perseus."²⁷ There are also several other references to Benvenuto but of no literary importance.²⁸

Cervantes Saavedra, Miguel de. As has been mentioned before in Chapter II in the discussion of Scott, Twain thought that Cervantes's *Don Quixote* had the power to "sweep the world's admiration for the

18. Paul Baender, "Mark Twain and the Byron Scandal," *American Literature*, XXX (January, 1959), 469.

19. *Biography*, XXXIII, p. 1540.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 1539. This is a marginal note which Paine quoted from Twain's copy of Charles Greville's *Journal of the Reigns of George IV and William IV*.

21. *Innocents Abroad*, I, p. 296.

22. *A Tramp Abroad*, X, pp. 161-162.

23. *Notebook*, p. 187.

24. *Biography*, XXXIII, p. 1536.

25. *Huckleberry Finn*, XIII, p. 331.

26. *Mark Twain, Business Man*, ed. Samuel Charles Webster, pp. 143-144.

27. *Notebook*, p. 144.

28. *Huckleberry Finn*, XIII, p. 331; *Autobiography*, XXXVI, p. 95; *Mark Twain-Howells Letters*, p. 180.

medieval chivalry silliness out of existence."²⁹ Scott, however, restored it.³⁰ Even though he had the highest praise for *Don Quixote*, Twain was not sure that it is suitable for Livy to read:

I am sorry enough that I didn't ask you to let me prepare *Don Quixote* for your perusal, in the same way [as he suggests doing to Swift]. It pains me to think of your reading that book just as it stands. I have thought of it with regret, time & again. . . . *Don Quixote* is one of the most exquisite books that was ever written, & to lose it from the world's literature would be as the wresting of a constellation from the symmetry & perfection of the firmament—but neither it nor Shakespeare are proper books for virgins to read until some hand has culled them of their grossness.³¹

This lubricious regret on Twain's part seems a little ironical when one considers Livy's continuous attempts to curb his "grossness" throughout their marriage. Whether or not Twain sincerely thought that *Don Quixote* was unfitted to the purity of women's minds is difficult to ascertain, because in another letter he spoke of leaving his "exquisite" *Don Quixote* with Susan Crane.³² In Twain's youth this book was one of his favorites; however, he said but little of it in his later years. Olin H. Moore believed that Twain admired it so much that he used it consciously or subconsciously as a pattern for the Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn relationship.³³

Chaucer, Geoffrey. When explaining the language barrier of heaven's occupants, Sandy tells Captain Stormfield that he has talked some with Chaucer but that they could not understand each other.³⁴ This simple commentary on the change of the English language is Twain's main reference to Chaucer.

Dante Alighieri. Twain said that he wrote *Pudd'nhead Wilson* in a place where Dante "... let on to be watching them built Giotto's campanile and yet always got tired looking as soon as Beatrice passed along on her way to get a chunk of chestnut cake."³⁵ Twain destroyed the unrealistic image of Dante's idealized love by mixing in the ordinary.

Edwards, Jonathan. Twain found Edwards's doctrine partially acceptable even though he considered Edwards insane. He wrote to Twichell, who had loaned him Edwards's *Freedom of the Will*, about his sensations from reading Edwards:

. . . I wallowed & reeked with Jonathan in his insane debauch; rose immensely refreshed & fine at ten this morning, but with a strange & haunting sense of having been on a three days' tear with a drunken lunatic. It is years since I have known the sensations. All through the book is the glare of a resplendent intellect gone mad—a marvelous spectacle. No, not *all* through the book—the drunk does not come on till the last third, where what I take to be Calvinism & its

29. *Life on the Mississippi*, XII, p. 378.

30. *Ibid.*

31. *The Love Letters of Mark Twain*, p. 76.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 361.

33. Moore, "Mark Twain and Don Quixote," *op. cit.* In *Huckleberry Finn*, XIII, p. 18, Tom, when scolding Huck, shows that he fails to understand the satire of *Don Quixote*. He takes Cervantes literally.

34. *Report from Paradise*, p. 78.

35. *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, XVI, pp. xix-xx.

God begins to show up & shine red & hideous in the glow from the fires of hell, their only right and proper adornment.³⁶

Thus he is so absorbed in the doctrine that he does not comment on Edwards's style—a vivid style which he would probably have admired if the subject had been different.

Fielding, Henry. When writing about "indecentcy," Twain thought of Fielding. He complained that Fielding had more license to write about "foul subjects" than the writers of Twain's day.³⁷ On the other hand, when speaking of the language of the first ladies and gentlemen, the Connecticut Yankee says that after reading *Tom Jones*, he knows that "the highest and first ladies and gentlemen in England had remained little or no cleaner in their talk."³⁸ Later explaining how America led the way in human liberty, Twain declared that England was in bad shape: "In England there was a sham liberty, . . . Tom Jones and Squire Western were gentlemen."³⁹ Twain did not seem to know whether he approved of Fielding's language or characters. One time such a freedom of expression was what he desired, and at another time he condemned the result of such a license.

Franklin, Benjamin. Twain in his sketch "The Late Benjamin Franklin" ridiculed the moral seriousness of Franklin's maxims and his "pernicious biography." He said that Franklin's "maxims were full of animosity toward boys."⁴¹

Nowadays a boy cannot follow out a single natural instinct without tumbling over some of those everlasting aphorisms and hearing from Franklin on the spot. If he buys two cents' worth of peanuts, his father says, "Remember what Franklin has said, my son—A groat a day's a penny a year"; and the comfort is all gone out of those peanuts.⁴²

Also Twain stated that one of Franklin's "inspired flights of malignity," the "early to bed and early to rise" proverb had hounded boys "to death and robbed" them of their "natural rest."⁴³

Gibbon, Edward. Twain probably read Gibbon's *History* for its chapters concerning the growth of Christianity. Of the *History* Twain said: "I have been reading Gibbon's celebrated Fifteenth Chapter, . . . and I don't see what Christians found against it. It is so mild—so gentle in its sarcasm."⁴⁴

Goethe, Johann Wolfgang Von. In a letter to Charles Webster, Twain simply said that he wanted to read *Faust*:

I wish you would buy & send to me an unbound copy of Bayard Taylor's translation of Göthe's "Faust." I mean to divide it up into

36. *Biography*, XXXII, p. 1157. Twain stated that it is ". . . an immense admission for a man not otherwise sane" to believe that man is moved to action by an impulse back of the action and that man always chooses the thing most pleasing to him. But the influence of the rest, Calvinism and its God, is "frank insanity" (*Ibid.*). At an earlier time asserted that the masses are helped more by the Salvation Army than Edwards: ". . . for all Jonathan Edwards's help they would die in their slums, but the Salvation Army will beguile some of them up to pure air and a cleaner life" (*Letters*, Vol. XXXV, p. 527.). Twain questioned Edwards's hell also in *Notebook*, pp. 168-169.

37. *A Tramp Abroad*, X, p. 243.

38. *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, XIV, pp. 29-30.

39. "On Foreign Critics," *Speeches*, XXVIII, p. 152.

40. *Sketches: New and Old*, VII, 188-192.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 189.

42. *Ibid.*

43. *Ibid.*

44. *Biography*, XXXIII, p. 1535.

100-page parts and bind each part in a flexible cover—to read in bed.⁴⁵

Goldsmith, Oliver. Twain praised Goldsmith's *Citizen of the World*, but he had much more to say about Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield* which he censured severely. *The Vicar of Wakefield* reminded Twain of Austen's works; he mentioned them together several times: "In the past year have read *Vicar of Wakefield* and some of Jane Austen—thoroughly artificial."⁴⁶ On another occasion he wrote: "This is the best library I have seen in a ship yet. I must read that devilish *Vicar of Wakefield* again. Also Jane Austen."⁴⁷ Twain discussed these two together also in *Following the Equator*. (His criticism of Austen has already been given in Chapter II.) Of Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield* he wrote:

Also, to be fair, there is another word of praise due to this ship's library: it contains no copy of the *Vicar of Wakefield*, that strange menagerie of complacent hypocrites and idiots, of theatrical cheap-john heroes and heroines, who are always showing off, of bad people who are not interesting, and good people who are fatiguing. A singular book. Not a sincere line in it, and not a character that invites respect; a book which is one long waste-pipe discharge of goody-goody puerilities and dreary moralities; a book which is full of pathos which revolts, and humor which grieves the heart. There are few things in literature that are more piteous, more pathetic, than the celebrated "humorous" incident of Moses and the spectacles."⁴⁸

Even in the first volume of *Following the Equator*, Twain compared the humor and pathos of the *Vicar of Wakefield* to a volume called *The Sentimental Song Book*:

The Sentimental Song Book has long been out of print, and has been forgotten by the world in general, but not by me. I carry it with me always—it and Goldsmith's deathless story. . . . Indeed, it has the same deep charm for me that the *Vicar of Wakefield* has, and I find in it the same subtle touch—the touch that makes an intentionally humorous episode pathetic and an intentionally pathetic one funny.⁴⁹

Brander Matthews answered Twain's criticism of Goldsmith at the time he answered Twain's "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses."⁵⁰ Twain planned to further his assault in a work but never did:

Now that our second-hand opinions, inherited from our fathers, are fading, perhaps it may be forgivable to write a really honest review of the *Vicar of Wakefield* and try to find out what our fathers found to admire and what not to scoff at.⁵¹

But the idol-smasher forfeited this bout and moved on to the next game.

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. Twain seemed to have difficulty deciding what he thought of Hawthorne. Praising Howells's *Indian Summer*, Twain told Howells that he could not stand "George Eliot and Hawthorne and those people; I see what they are at a hundred years before

45. *Mark Twain, Business Man*, p. 242.

46. *Biography*, XXXII, p. 1016; *Notebook*, p. 262.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 266.

48. *Following the Equator*, XXI, pp. 288-289.

49. *Ibid.*, XX, p. 310.

50. *Matthews*, "New Trials for Old Favorites."

51. *Notebook*, p. 240.

they get to it and they just tire me to death."⁵² But, in a chauvinistic mood, he defied the English, saying: "Nobody writes a finer and purer English than Motley, Howells, Hawthorne, and Holmes."⁵³

Homer. The iconoclastic Mark Twain ironically suggested that Homer has been overrated as far as the masses are concerned. He said that "the critic has actually imposed upon the world the superstition" that Homer is more valuable "than the little everybody's-poet whose rhymes are in all mouths to-day and will be in nobody's mouth next generation."⁵⁴ Homer is also in Captain Stormfield's heaven, but there he is a second-rate writer compared to an unknown Billings "from Tennessee."⁵⁵ In a letter to Howells, Twain suggested that Howells "draw out" his son to write an "article upon A Boy's Comments Upon Homer."⁵⁶

Johnson, Samuel. Thackeray wrote of Johnson in his biography of Swift that Johnson recognized Swift as an author: ". . . [He was] forced to admit him into the company of poets, receives the famous Irishman, and takes his hat off to him with a bow of recognition, scans him from head to foot, and passes over to the other side of the street."⁵⁷ "A neat portrait of Johnson" wrote Twain in the margin.

Lamb, Charles. He said that Harte was "as dull as Charles Lamb."⁵⁸

Lecky, William. Twain admired Lecky's *History of European Morals*. Paine wrote: "There were periods when they [Theodore Crane and Twain] read Lecky avidly and discussed it in original and unorthodox ways. Mark Twain found an echo of his own philosophies in Lecky."⁵⁹ Paine later stated that Twain's two volumes of Lecky were "much worn."⁶⁰ Twain agreed with Lecky's epicurean ideal: a desire to obtain happiness and to avoid pain is the only possible motive to action and "on the whole such a course will bring us the greatest amount of happiness."⁶¹ Twain's marginal note is—"Sound and true."⁶²

Lesage, Alain Rene. Twain wrote to Livy during their courtship that he would not mark *Gil Blas* for her to read because of its bad taste:

I am now reading *Gil Blas*, but am not marking it. If you have not read it you need not. It would sadly offend your delicacy, & I prefer not to have that dulled in you. It is a woman's chief ornament.⁶³

Later in a letter to Howells, Twain said that he had written a story (*Tom Sawyer*) "autobiographically, like *Gil Blas*."⁶⁴ All in all, Twain seemed to enjoy this picaresque novel.

Macaulay, Thomas Babington. The histories of Macaulay served Twain more with information of the past than with inspiration for literary criticism. His first reference to Macaulay was to use him in a

52. *Letters*, XXXV, p. 455.

53. *Notebook*, p. 157.

54. *Letters*, XXXV, p. 526.

55. *Report from Paradise*, p. 67.

56. *Mark Twain-Howells Letters*, p. 105.

57. Coley B. Taylor, *Mark Twain's Margins on Thackeray's "Swift,"* p. 32.

58. *Mark Twain-Howells Letters*, p. 396.

59. *Biography*, XXXI, p. 511.

60. *Ibid.*, XXXIII, p. 1539.

61. *Ibid.*, XXXI, p. 511.

62. *Ibid.*, XXXI, p. 1539.

63. *The Love Letters of Mark Twain*, p. 132.

64. *Biography*, XXXI, p. 132.

pretended review of his *Innocents Abroad*. The burlesque has this passage:

Lord Macaulay died too soon. We never felt this so deeply as when we finished the last chapter of the above-named extravagant work. Macaulay died too soon; for none but he could mete out complete and comprehensive justice to the insolence, the impudence, the presumption, the mendacity, and above all, the majestic ignorance of this author.⁶⁵

Other references to Macaulay speak of public executions,⁶⁶ of Canadian piracy,⁶⁷ of the hypocrisy and intrigue of the English court under James II,⁶⁸ and of King James's plot to assassinate William II.⁶⁹

Malory, Sir Thomas. From the time when George Washington Cable introduced Twain to Malory's *Morte D'Arthur*⁷⁰ until Twain's death, he read and reread the tales of Malory.⁷¹ One of Twain's more famous novels, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, took its elements of setting and characters from Malory. In an introduction to *The Connecticut Yankee*, Twain wrote: "From time to time I dipped into old Sir Thomas Malory's enchanting book, and fed at its rich feast of prodigies and adventures, breathed in the fragrance of its obsolete names, and dreamed again."⁷² Paine wrote:

He [Twain] would naturally favor simplicity in anything. I remember him reading, as an example of beautiful English, *The Death of King Arthur*, by Thomas Malory, and his verdict.

"That is one of the most beautiful things ever written in English, and written when we had no vocabulary."

"A vocabulary, then, is sometimes a handicap?"

"It is indeed."⁷³

Yet, Twain always respected the exact word. "Twain enjoyed," stated Paine, "the beauty of tales and the absurdities of that ancient day."⁷⁴ His use of Malory was not belittling in any way, just pragmatic. He wrote to Mrs. Fairbanks: "Of course in my story I shall leave unsmirshed & unbelittled the great & beautiful characters drawn by the master hand of Malory."⁷⁵

Milton, John. As a youth, Twain wrote to his brother Orion that the "grandest thing" in *Paradise Lost* is the Arch-Fiend's terrible energy.⁷⁶ He admired the characterization. Much later—over forty years—Twain said that very few ever read *Paradise Lost*:

Professor Winchester also said something about there being no modern epics like *Paradise Lost*. I guess he's right. He talked as if he was pretty familiar with that piece of literary work, and nobody would suppose that he never had read it. I don't believe any of you

65. *Ibid.*, p. 428.

66. *Notebook*, p. 288-289.

67. *Biography*, XXXI, p. 428.

68. *Ibid.*, XXXIII, p. 1565.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 1568.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 790.

71. *Ibid.*, XXXIII, pp. 1455; 1540.

72. *A Connecticut Yankee*, XIV, pp. 2-3.

73. *Biography*, XXXIII, p. 1320.

74. *Ibid.*, XXXI, pp. 790-791.

75. *Mark Twain to Mrs. Fairbanks*, ed. Dixon Wecter, p. 210.

76. *Biography*, XXX, p. 146.

have ever read *Paradise Lost*, and you don't want to. That's something that you just want to take on trust. It's a classic, just as Professor Winchester says, and it meets his definition of a classic—something that everyone wants to have read and nobody wants to read.⁷⁷

After blasting Professor Winchester, Twain wrote mildly that he would like to hear Milton read from his "noble" works in heaven but Milton probably would not care for him.⁷⁸

Omar Khayyam. The doctrine of Omar Khayyam and the poetry of Edward Fitzgerald appealed to Twain. Paine stated that Twain often quoted the "Come, fill the cup, . . ." stanza.⁷⁹ Another time Paine quoted Twain as saying:

How strange there was a time when I had never heard of Omar Khayyam! When that card arrived I had already read the dozen quatrains or so in the morning paper, and was still steeped in the ecstasy of delight which they occasioned. No poem had ever given me so much pleasure before, and none has given me so much pleasure since. It is the only poem I have ever carried about with me. It has not been from under my hand all these years.⁸⁰

Probably the doctrine of Fitzgerald's *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* is what gave Twain so much pleasure. Yet the versification certainly was not unpleasant to Twain's ear.

Paine, Thomas. Twain stated: "It took a brave man before the Civil War to confess he had read the *Age of Reason*."⁸¹ He read it as a cub pilot "marveling at its fearlessness and wonderful power."⁸² In 1908 Twain said: "I read it again a year or two ago, . . . and was amazed to see how tame it had become. It seemed that Paine was apologizing everywhere for hurting the feelings of the reader."⁸³

Pepys, Samuel. Albert Bigelow Paine repeatedly stressed that Pepys's *Diary* was one of Twain's favorite books.⁸⁴ Paine stated that Twain had Pepys's *Diary* in mind when he wrote *1601*.⁸⁵ Twain's own comments on Pepys are rather brief. In a letter to Twichell, he wrote: "P. S.—Am luxuriating in glorious old Pepys's *Diary*, and smoking."⁸⁶ Another time he wrote that Pepys's *Diary* gives an honest picture of the English high life.⁸⁷

Petrarch, Rancesco. Twain criticized Petrarch's philosophy rather than his style:

We saw a manuscript of Virgil, with annotations in the handwriting of Petrarch, the gentlemen who loved another man's Laura, and lavished upon her all through life a love which was clear waste of the raw material. It was sound sentiment, but bad judgment. It brought both parties fame, created a fountain of commiseration for them in sentimental breasts that is running yet. But who says a word in behalf of Mr. Laura? . . . Let the world go on fretting about

77. "Disappearance of Literature," *Speeches*, XXVIII, p. 210.

78. *Report from Paradise*, p. ix.

79. *Biography*, XXXI, p. 614.

80. *Ibid.*, XXXIII, p. 1295.

81. *Ibid.*, p. 1445.

82. *Ibid.*

83. *Ibid.* This was also a favorite book of Luigi, the lively twin in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, XVI, p. 221.

84. *Letters*, XXXV, p. 189; *Biography*, XXXI, pp. 511 and 589; *Ibid.*, XXXIII, p. 1538.

85. *Ibid.*, XXXI, p. 580; *1601*, p. 11.

86. *Letters*, XXXIV, p. 207.

87. *Biography*, XXXIII, p. 1536.

Laura and Petrarch if it will; but as for me, my tears and lamentations shall be lavished upon the unsung defendant.⁸⁸

Poe, Edgar Allan. After reading an article by Howells about Poe's excessive "mechanicality," Twain wrote to Howells:

I have to write a line, lazy as I am, to say how your Poe article delighted me; and to say that I am in agreement with substantially all you say about his literature. To me his prose is unreadable—like Jane Austen's. No, there is a difference. I could read his prose on salary, but not Jane's.⁸⁹

Rabelais, Francois. Twain, who thought that Lesage and Swift too indelicate for Livy, tries to "out-Pantagruel" Rabelais with *1601*, otherwise named "Fireside Conversation in the Time of Queen Elizabeth." Twain did not consider his *1601*, coarse, but "dreadfully funny."⁹⁰ The inference is that Rabelais is not coarse either. Other than in references to Twain's sketch *1601*, Rabelais is not mentioned.

Saint-Simon, Henri de Rouvroy. Twain told Paine that he had read Saint-Simon's *Memoirs* "no less than twenty times."⁹¹ In the first volume, Twain wrote: "This [Saint-Simon's *Memoirs*], & Casanova & Pepys, set in parallel columns, could afford a good coup d'oeil of French & English high life of that epoch."⁹² The "incomparable Saint-Simon" and Twain agreed on many subjects: the Divine right of kings, theology, and court hypocrites.⁹³ Twain credited Saint-Simon with being one of the influences of his life.⁹⁴ He read the *Memoirs* for its information and doctrine.

Sevigne, (Marie de Rabutin-Chantal). Paine wrote that Twain made some marginal notes in *Letters of Madame de Sevigne* not complimentary to Sevigne, ". . . whom he once designates as a 'nauseating' person, many of whose letters had been uselessly translated, as well as poorly arranged for reading."⁹⁵

Shakespeare, William. Being the source quoted most in the English language after the Bible, Shakespeare, of course, was not neglected by Twain. From his early sophomoric newspaper parodies and burlesques, Twain continually alluded to Shakespeare.⁹⁶ He wrote that the Germans appreciated a Shakespearian play,⁹⁷ that Barnum awoke the English to restore Shakespeare's home,⁹⁸ that Shakespeare was singularly unknown to be such a great literary figure,⁹⁹ that Shakespeare was a prophet in Stormfield's heaven,¹⁰⁰ and that the critic's law forces the "cultivated-class standard" upon all poets: "It requires Whitcomb Riley to sing no more till he can sing like Shakespeare."¹⁰¹ Twain did not question

88. *Innocents Abroad*, I, p. 181.

89. *Mark Twain-Howells Letters*, p. 841.

90. *Notebook*, p. 151.

91. *Biography*, XXXIII, p. 1536.

92. *Ibid.*

93. *Ibid.*, pp. 1536-1537.

94. *Letters*, XXXV, p. 490.

95. *Biography*, XXXIII, p. 1540.

96. Mark Twain, "The Killing of Julius Caesar 'Localized,'" *Editorial Wild Oats* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1905); Mark Twain, *Adventures of Thomas Jefferson Snodgrass*, ed. Charles Honce (New York: Covici Friede, 1928).

97. *A Tramp Abroad*, IX, p. 63.

98. *Following the Equator*, XXI, pp. 314-315.

99. *Is Shakespeare Dead? What is Man? and Other Essays*, XXVI, pp. 297-376.

100. *Report from Paradise*, p. 67.

101. *Letters*, XXXV, p. 526.

Shakespeare's greatness—only the reaction and the praise of the people for Shakespeare:

Now what was the accident that brought Shakespeare into notice after two centuries of neglect and oblivion—was it a chance remark of a monarch? An idea there; make kings read all the new (native) books; and once every year proclaim the names—just the names—of the few that particularly pleased them.¹⁰²

Even though Twain was quite familiar with Shakespeare's works, it is natural for him to discredit Shakespeare by joining the Baconians. His perversity about agreeing with the general evaluation of a venerated author and Paine's belief in Shakespeare's authenticity probably caused Twain to unite with the Baconians in the authorship controversy.¹⁰³ In his sketch "Is Shakespeare Dead?" he systematically attacked the Shakespeare "myth" pointing out that a famous writer would have a better epitaph, more fame in his own home town, more references to him by other contemporary authors, and a library to bequeath besides a second-best bed.¹⁰⁴ In conclusion, Twain seemed willing enough to accept the greatness of Shakespeare's work, but not Shakespeare.

Shelley, Percy Bysshe. While defending Harriet Shelley, Twain limited his remarks to Shelley's character and did not include his works: "Shelley's life has the one indelible blot upon it, but is otherwise worshipfully noble and beautiful."¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, throughout his defense Twain did seem to acknowledge Shelley's importance as a great poet. Shelley was also one of the authors that Laura of *The Gilded Age* studied so diligently.¹⁰⁶

Smollett, Tobias George. Twain saw Smollett as he did Fielding: an earlier writer with a literary license to write the indecent,¹⁰⁷ and a novelist who told in *Roderick Random* how the ". . . first ladies and gentlemen in England" talk.¹⁰⁸

Sterne, Laurence. In a courtship letter to Livy, Twain praised the "Recording Angel" passage in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*.¹⁰⁹ But for Livy he found the ". . . book is coarse, & I would not have you soil your pure mind with it."¹¹⁰

Suetonius (Gaius Suetonius-Tranquillus). Paine wrote that Twain often read Suetonius's *Lives of the Twelve Caesars*; however, Twain himself neither wrote nor spoke about Suetonius.¹¹¹

Swift, Jonathan. In another courtship letter to Livy, Twain recognized two reading levels of *Gulliver's Travels*. He praised the book but did not recommend it to Livy:

I have been reading—I am reading—*Gulliver's Travels*, & am much more charmed with it than I was when I read it last, in boyhood—for now I can see what a scathing satire it is upon the English government, whereas, before I only gloated over its prodigies

102. *Notebook*, p. 240. Also, Twain used Shakespeare as character in 1601.

103. *Biography*, XXXIII, pp. 1479-1483.

104. "Is Shakespeare Dead?" *Loc Cit.*

105. *The Defense of Harriet Shelley*, XXII, p. 58.

106. *The Gilded Age*, V, p. 182.

107. *A Tramp Abroad*, X, p. 243.

108. *A Connecticut Yankee*, XIV, pp. 29-30.

109. *The Love Letters of Mark Twain*, p. 34.

110. *Ibid.*

111. *Letters*, XXXV, pp. 489-490; *Biography*, XXXIII, pp. 1537-1538; 1576.

& its marvels. Poor Swift—under the placid surface of this simply-worded book flows the full tide of his renown—the turbid sea of his matchless hate. You would not like the volume, Livy—that is, a part of it. Some of it you would. If you would like to read it, though, I will mark it & tear it until it is fit for your eyes—for portions of it are very coarse & indelicate.¹¹²

Most of Twain's notes in the margins of his copy of Thackeray's *English Humorists* are of Swift's character not of his writings. Still when Thackeray referred to the passage in *Gulliver's Travels* where Gulliver obsequiously kisses the hoof of the Houyhnhnm, Twain wrote: "Only Swift could write this—because only he could enter fully into the spirit of it."¹¹³ At the end of the essay on Swift, Twain wrote: "Void of every tender grace, every kindly, humanizing element, what a bare, glittering iceberg is mere intellectual greatness,—& such was Swift's."¹¹⁴

Temple, Sir William. A passage from Temple's "Essay on Gardens" received Twain's approval: "There isn't an ill-balanced sentence or a jagged, uneven place in this smoothly-worded paragraph."¹¹⁵

Thackeray, William Makepeace. Twain dismissed some of Thackeray's essays in *English Humorists* as "tolerably dull."¹¹⁶ When Thackeray wrote about what it would be like to have been a friend of Swift and other great writers, Twain interjected with—"A strong figure at the expense of sincerity."¹¹⁷ Of Thackeray's passage: "Through the storms and tempests of his furious mind, the stars of religion and love break out in the blue shining serenity, though hidden by driving clouds and the maddened hurricane of his life. . . . Exquisite—pray put it in the Book of Extracts—it is a picture that is worthy."¹¹⁸ Twain asserted after Thackeray's praise of Swift for thinking fondly of Stella after her death:

Other cats, perchance—being sated—have grown sentimental, & grieved that they are the mouse. It seems to me that it would have been enough merely to have forgiven Swift in this paragraph—not sainted him.¹¹⁹

Twain obviously was not over-powered by Thackeray's prose; he was simply interested in a fellow hater—Swift. In an assault on Harte, Twain charged that Harte was "as slovenly as Thackeray."¹²⁰ In his old age Twain reminisced that his wife was humiliated ". . . to confess that her husband was not familiar with the writings of Thackeray and others."¹²¹

Thoreau, Henry David. Using Thoreau as a criterion, Twain said of a contemporary writer, Dean Sage: "This is the best & the happiest narrative-talent that has tackled pen since Thoreau."¹²²

Trollope, Frances. Twain quoted Frances Trollope's *Domestic Manners of the Americans* in his *Life on the Mississippi*. He wrote that she was "humbled" with "stupid and silly lies" by the people.¹²³

112. *The Love Letters of Mark Twain*, p. 76.

113. Taylor, *op. cit.*

114. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

115. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

116. *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

117. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

118. *Ibid.*, pp. 40-41.

119. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

120. *Mark Twain—Howells Letters*, p. 396.

121. *Biography*, XXXIII, p. 1500.

122. *Mark Twain—Howells Letters*, p. 138.

123. *Life on the Mississippi*, XII, p. 338.

Voltaire (Francois Marie Arouet). Twain, a disciple of Voltaire's views, humorously wrote about Voltaire's life in Hell. When Satan was offered a "Cavour" cigar, he said, "With permission I will save it for Voltaire."¹²⁴ Twain narrated: "I was greatly pleased and flattered to be connected in even this little way with that great man and be mentioned to him, as no doubt would be the case."¹²⁵

Webster, Daniel. Twain wrote to Twichell that he had been reading *Daniel Webster's Private Correspondence*: "Have read a hundred of his diffuse, conceited, 'eloquent', bathotic (or bathostic) letters."¹²⁶

Authors and Books Since 1869

There are three infallible ways of pleasing an author and the three form a rising scale of compliment: 1, to tell him you have read one of his books; 2, to tell him you have read all of his books; 3, to ask him to let you read the manuscript of his forthcoming book. No. 1 admits you to his respect; No. 2 admits you to his admiration; No. 3 carries you clear into his heart.—Pudd'nhead Wilson's Calendar.¹

If he was too condemnatory in his comments of the authors of an older day, Mark Twain was overly complimentary to his contemporaries. He continued to use superlatives but more in praise—perhaps, at times, unbased and unfounded praise. He condemned less than ten (of the nearly eighty whom he evaluated) of his contemporaries. He did not praise all the works of the remainder, but he did express favorable comments on either the men or their works.

The works that he referred to most frequently were prose fiction; however, he judged many biographies, scientific and theological studies, poems, informative articles, and several plays. Twain's standards of literary criticism for the works were the same ones he used in judging the classics except with his fellow authors he did not need to be idolbusting for sake of disagreement since most of their reputations had not been established at that time.

Ade, George. Twain thanked Howells for introducing him to the "incomparable" *Pink Marsh*.² He said that his "admiration of the book has overflowed all limits, all frontiers," and that the characters are "all true to the facts, & as exact as if they had been drawn to scale."³ After noting that the illustrator is even better than the writer, Twain concluded, "He [Pink Marsh] deserves to live forever."⁴

Aldrich, Thomas Bailey. Aldrich's "brilliant" wit was mentioned quite frequently by Twain.⁵ One example of Twain's way of recognizing Aldrich's wit is this typical Twainian conversation between the author and Stevenson:

124. "Sold to Satan," *Europe and Elsewhere*, XXIX, p. 330.

125. *Ibid.*

126. *Biography*, XXXI, p. 683.

1. *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, XVI, p. 83.

2. *Mark Twain-Howells Letters*, p. 832.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Biography*, XXXIII, p. 1456; *Ibid.*, XXXI, pp. 538; 642; *Autobiography*, XXXVI, pp. 247-248; *Mark Twain in Eruption*, p. 294.

"Aldrich has never had his peer for prompt and pithy and witty and humorous sayings. None has equaled him, certainly none has surpassed him, in the felicity of phrasing with which he clothed the children of his fancy. Aldrich was always brilliant, he couldn't help it; he is a fire opal set round with rose diamonds; when he is not speaking, you know that his dainty fancies are twinkling and glimmering around in him; when he speaks the diamonds flash. Yes, he was always brilliant; he will always be brilliant; he will be brilliant in hell—you will see."

Stevenson, smiling a chuckly smile, "I hope not."⁶

In a courtship letter to Livy, Twain wrote that he was reading *The Story of a Bad Boy*, but that he "could not admire the volume."⁷ However, he praised some of Aldrich's poems quite highly. Twain said that "Cloth of Gold" was "lightning poetry" and that ". . . the "Ballad of Babie Bell" always seemed perfection, before, but now that I have children it has got even beyond *that*."⁸ Later he wrote to Howells that one of Aldrich's books (*Ponkapog Papers*) did him the disservice of keeping him awake.⁹ Even though he did not find *The Story of the Bad Boy* very laudable in his early reading of it, Twain usually spoke kindly of Aldrich. At Aldrich's memorial dedication, Twain—following many sad, grave speeches—gave a humorous speech which was successful. Explaining his feelings later, he said:

He [Aldrich] had been a man who loved humor and brightness and wit, and had helped to make life merry and delightful. Certainly, if he could know, he would not wish this dedication of his own home to be a lugubrious smileless occasion.¹⁰

Arnold, Matthew. Twain did not write of Arnold's works specifically. Nevertheless, Twain criticized Arnold's grammar after Arnold had criticized General Grant's English. Twain said that Arnold was unfair:

That [Arnold's criticism] would be fair enough, maybe, if the examples of imperfect English averaged more instances to the page in General Grant's book than they do in Arnold's criticism on the book—but they do not. It would be fair enough, maybe, if such instances were commoner in General Grant's book than they are in the works of the average standard author—but they are not.¹¹

Barnum, Phineas Taylor. Little can be said of Twain's views of the *Life of P. T. Barnum, Written by Himself* except that Twain read it intently.¹²

Bellamy, Edward. Twain called *Looking Backward* "the latest and best of all the Bibles."¹³ He also referred to Bellamy as ". . . the man who has made the accepted heaven paltry by inventing a better one on earth."¹⁴

Bourget, Paul. Twain answered Bourget's reflections upon America, *Outre-Mer*, with "What Bourget Thinks of Us."¹⁵ After he asked if the

6. *Autobiography*, XXXVI, pp. 247-248.

7. *The Love Letters of Mark Twain*, p. 132.

8. *Letters*, XXXIV, p. 239.

9. *Mark Twain-Howells Letters*, p. 779.

10. *Biography*, XXXIII, p. 1456.

11. "General Grant's Grammar," *Speeches*, XXVIII, p. 135.

12. *Biography*, XXXIII, p. 1540; *Ibid.*, XXXI, p. 410; *Following the Equator*, XXI, pp. 314-315.

13. *Mark Twain-Howells Letters*, p. 622.

14. *Ibid.*

15. *The Defense of Harriet Shelley*, XXII, pp. 148-171.

Frenchman Bourget could teach Americans novel writing, Twain answered: "No. M. Bourget and the others know only one plan, and when that is expurgated there is nothing left of the book."¹⁶ Twain always seemed to have a general animosity toward the French, and when Bourget criticized America and her women, it was too much. Twain continued that the only ". . . expert who is qualified to examine the souls and the life of a people and make a valuable report—the native novelist."¹⁷ Also, a native novelist does not try to generalize a nation, ". . . he lays plainly before you the ways and speech and life of a few people grouped in a certain place—his own place—and that is one book."¹⁸

Browning, Robert. Twain had met Browning in 1873, long before he became interested in Browning's poems.¹⁹ It is unknown whether or not this acquaintance caused Twain to become such a scholar of Browning's obscure poems, but by the winter of 1886-1887 Twain was studying, marking, and reading Browning's works.²⁰ He did not fully understand them; however, at times he would get from them a kind of "vague dim flash of splendid humming-birds through a fog."²¹ Or as Twain stated another time of the flashes of splendor:

One's glimpses & confusions, as one reads Browning, remind me of looking through a telescope (the small sort which you must move with your hand, not clock-work). You toil across dark spaces which are (to *your* lens) empty; but every now & then a splendor of stars & suns bursts upon you and fills the whole field with flame.²²

He read and discussed Browning before a group called the Saturday Morning Club.²³ Of his performance before the group Twain wrote the following to Mrs. Foote:

They say that my reading [of Browning] imparts clear comprehension—and that is a good deal of a compliment, you know; but they say that the poetry never gets obscure till I begin to explain it—which is only frank, and that is the softest you can say about it. So I've stopped being expounder, and thrown my heft on the reading. Yes, and with vast results—nearly unbelievable results. I don't wish to flatter anybody, yet I will say this much: Put me in the right condition and give me room according to my strength, and I can read Browning so Browning himself can understand it.²⁴

He was still reading Browning before groups in September, 1888.²⁵ Even Twain (as have critics since) considered his taste for Browning's poems somewhat unusual.²⁶

Bryant, William Cullen. Twain only commented on one passage of Bryant's works. Of the passage, "Truth crushed to the earth will rise again," in Bryant's "The Battle Field," Twain said that Bryant "was playing to the gallery" when he told this "lie of virtuous ecstasy."²⁷

16. *Loc. cit.* Twain expressed this feeling when he wrote of Joan of Arc, of French duels, of French laws, and of French manners.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 152.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 153.

19. *Biography*, XXXI, p. 484.

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Ibid.*, XXXII, p. 847.

22. *Ibid.*

23. *Mark Twain—Howells Letters*, p. 597.

24. Benjamin DeCasseres, *When Huck Finn Went Highbrow*, pp. 6-7.

25. *Notebook*, pp. 200-201.

26. *DeCasseres*, p. 6.

27. "My First Lie," *The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg*, XXXIII, p. 167.

Cabell, James Branch. Paine wrote that Twain read with "great enjoyment" Cabell's *Chivalry* and that Twain could not say enough of the "subtle poetic art" with which Cabell had ". . . flung the light of romance about dark and sordid chapters of history."²⁸

Cable, George Washington. Twain called Cable "the South's finest literary genius" in *Life on the Mississippi*.²⁹ He continued to show that in the author of *The Granddissimes* ". . . the South has found a masterly delineator of its interior life and its history."³⁰ In 1882, he praised Cable as a "marvelous talker" who spoke smoothly and orderly in a clean, clear, crisp English.³¹ Twain's opinion of Cable's reading seemed to cool a little by 1883: "He's just a rattling reader now—the best amateur I ever heard."³² After being on a four-months platform campaign with Cable in 1885, he wrote that Cable's ". . . gifts of mind are greater and higher than I had suspected," but that Cable's pious nature had made the Christian religion seem "loathsome."³³ A few months later Twain stated that Cable's reading lacked sincerity and that he had "self-complacency, sham feeling & labored artificiality."³⁴ The better Twain knew the pious Cable the less he seemed to value him.

Carlyle, Thomas. Carlyle's *French Revolution* was one of Twain's favorite works. Twain mentioned Carlyle quite frequently but said little of his literary merits.³⁵ Nevertheless, one time after Paine had said that Carlyle reminded him of a ". . . fervid stump-speaker who pounded his fists and went at his audience fiercely, determined to convince them," Twain answered, "Yes, but he is the best one that ever lived."³⁶

Carroll, Lewis (Dodgson, Charles Lutwidge). Twain said that Alice of *Alice in Wonderland* was immortal and that the author was a still and shy man: "We met a great many other interesting people, among them Lewis Carroll, author of the immortal Alice—but he was the stillest and shyest full-grown man I have ever met except "Uncle Remus."³⁷

Cather, Willa Silbert. Cather, the novelist, came after Cather, the poet, and also after Twain's death. Twain praised her poem "The Palatine" which was printed in *McClure's*. Of this poem which applies the "Ozymandias" ideal to the past Caesars, Twain said: "Here is a fine poem, a great poem, I think. I can stand that."³⁸

Collin, Grace Lathrop. In a letter to Howells, Twain expressed his views on Collin's *Putman Place* and joked with Howells.

Putman Place did not much interest me; so I knew it was high literature. I have never been able to get up high enough to be at home with high literature. But I immensely like your literature, Howells.³⁹

28. *Biography*, XXXIII, p. 1535.

29. *Life on the Mississippi*, XII, p. 355.

30. *Ibid.*

31. *Biography*, XXXI, p. 743.

32. *Mark Twain-Howells Letters*, p. 527.

33. *Letters*, XXXV, p. 450.

34. *Mark Twain-Howells Letters*, p. 527.

35. *Biography*, XXXI, p. 763; *Ibid.*, XXXIII, p. 846; *Ibid.*, XXXIII, pp. 1535; 1576-1577; *Letters*, XXXV, p. 450; "My First Lie," *The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg*, XXIII, p. 167; *Mark Twain in Eruption*, p. 131. Twain had Carlyle's volumes by his bedside when he died.

36. *Biography*, XXXIII, p. 1535.

37. *Autobiography*, XXXVII, p. 232.

38. *Biography*, XXXIII, p. 1501; *McClure's*, XXXIII (June, 1909), 158-159.

39. *Mark Twain-Howells Letters*, p. 769.

Cooke, Rose Terry. In Twain's opinion Mrs. Cooke's story, "Freedom Wheeler's Controversy With Providence," was a "ten-strike."⁴⁰ He wished ". . . she would write 12 old-time New England tales a year."⁴¹

Dana, Richard Henry. Although Twain did not write about Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast*, Paine noted that it was one of Twain's favorites.⁴²

Darwin, Charles Robert. Being in agreement with Darwin's theories, Twain only praised Darwin and used his ideas.⁴³ He met the "great" Darwin in 1879.⁴⁴

Dickens, Charles. Even though Twain mentioned Dickens and his works many times, his literary criticism of him was little.⁴⁵ Twain said he had read *The Tale of Two Cities* and could do it again.⁴⁶ Of the humor in the *Pickwick Papers*, he wrote:

I have no sense of humor. In illustration of this fact I will say this—by way of confession—that if there is a humorous passage in the *Pickwick Papers* I have never been able to find it.⁴⁷

Dowden, Edward. Twain said that Dowden's *Life of Shelley* was "a literary cake-walk":⁴⁸

The biographer throws off that extraordinary remark [that Shelley was not in any way guilty of his wife's suicide] without any perceptible disturbance to his serenity for he follows it with a sentimental justification of Shelley's conduct which has not a pang of conscience in it, but is silky and smooth and undulating and pious—a cake-walk with all the colored brethren at their best. There may be people who can read that page and keep their temper, but it is doubtful.⁴⁹

Doyle, Sir Arthur Conan. The similarity of the Sherlock Holmes stories and Twain's *A Double-Barrelled Detective Story* suggests that Twain, perhaps, burlesqued Doyle's stories or, at least, used them.⁵⁰

Dumas, Alexandre. In *Innocents Abroad* Twain described the dungeons which are in *The Count of Monte Cristo*.⁵¹

Eliot, George (Mary Ann Evans Cross). Twain thought that Eliot analyzed the "guts out" of the motives and feelings of the characters.⁵²

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. Except for the many contrite references to the speech that Twain made at the Whittier Birthday Dinner, he did not comment much on Emerson.⁵³

40. *Ibid.*, p. 187.

41. *Ibid.*

42. *Biography*, XXXI, p. 511. In two other references to Dana, Twain showed a respect for Dana: *Notebook*, p. 130; *Mark Twain—Howells Letters*, pp. 490-491.

43. *Biography*, XXXI, p. 777; *Autobiography*, XXXVI, p. 146.

44. *Notebook*, pp. 155; 165.

45. Such references are *Roughing It*, IV, p. 116; *Life on the Mississippi*, XXII, pp. 316-317; *Letters*, XXXV, p. 490; *Biography*, XXXII, p. 848; *Autobiography*, XXXVI, pp. 140; 157; *Mark Twain in Eruption*, pp. 213-217; *Mark Twain, Business Man*.

46. *Biography*, XXXIII, pp. 1500-1501.

47. *Notebook*, p. 184.

48. *The Defense of Harriet Shelley*, XXII, p. 3.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 58.

50. *The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg*, XXIII, pp. 285-358.

51. *Innocents Abroad*, I, p. 96. In *Mark Twain's Travels with Mr. Brown*, p. 170, Twain wrote of Dumas's personal life with a "notorious" lady, Adah Isaacs Menken.

52. *Letters*, XXV, p. 455.

53. *Mark Twain—Howells Letters*, pp. 212-215. Twain apologized to Emerson for his burlesque of him, and Emerson who was quite aged then said that he had not heard Twain that night and that he saw no reason for an apology after he had heard what was said.

Glyn, Elinor. As the newly notorious author of the then erotic *Three Weeks*, Elinor Glyn visited Twain in 1907. He thought her beautiful and brave, and he said that her naturalistic writing was courageous and passionate.⁵⁴ In their conversation Twain gave his views of the use of the sexual relations in literature:

I said its [*Three Weeks*] literary workmanship was excellent, and that I quite agreed with her view that in the matter of the sexual relations man's statutory regulations of it were a distinct interference with a higher law, and law of Nature. . . . I said we were servants of convention; . . . that we must accept them and stand by them, even when we disapproved of them; . . . I said her book was an assault upon certain old and well-established and wise conventions, and that it would not find many friends, and indeed would not deserve many.⁵⁵

Gorky, Maxim (Alexei Maximovich Peshkov). When Gorky visited America, Twain as a supporter of the Russian Revolution, welcomed him. Later it was discovered that Gorky had transgressed customs by bringing a mistress; and Twain said as for Gorky's acceptance in this country, "He might as well have come over here in his shirt-tail."⁵⁶ (All of this is of little consequence as literary criticism, but it shows Twain's feelings concerning the behavior of literary figures.)

Grant, Ulysses S. Grant, of course, was not a literary man; still Twain defended his grammar against Arnold.⁵⁷ Twain praised the simplicity, naturalness, and purity of the style of Grant's *Memoirs*.⁵⁸

Hale, Edward Everett. Upon hearing of Hale's death, Twain said: "I had the greatest respect and esteem for Edward Everett Hale, the greatest admiration for his work."⁵⁹

Hardy, Thomas. Paine wrote that Twain spoke of Hardy's *Jude* with high approval.⁶⁰

Harris, George ("Sut Lovingood"). Twain found the broad humor of Sut Lovingood's Yarns well written but not altogether acceptable: "The book abounds in humor, and is said to represent the Tennessee dialect correctly. It will sell well in the West, but the Eastern people will call it coarse and possibly taboo it."⁶¹

Harris, Joel Chandler ("Uncle Remus"). That which Twain commented on most frequently concerning Uncle Remus was Harris's shyness and the fact that children were disappointed when they saw that he was white.⁶² Twain said that Harris was "the only master" of Negro dialect the country had produced.⁶³ Another time he said that the "immortal tales" of Uncle Remus charmed the world.⁶⁴

Harte, Francis Bret. The turbulent relationship between Harte and Twain causes a difficulty in evaluating Twain's criticism. His comments

54. *Mark Twain in Eruption*, pp. 312-319.

55. *Ibid.*, pp. 314-315.

56. *Biography*, XXXIII, p. 1285. [This incident is also mentioned in *Letters from the Earth*, pp. 153-156, Ed.]

57. "General Grant's Grammar," *Speeches*, XXVIII, p. 135.

58. *Notebook*, p. 187.

59. *Biography*, XXXIII, p. 1498.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 1567.

61. *Mark Twain's Travels with Mr. Brown*, p. 221.

62. *Life on the Mississippi*, XII, pp. 379-380; *The Love Letters of Mark Twain*, p. 212; *Mark Twain in Eruption*, p. 136.

63. *Life on the Mississippi*, XII, p. 380.

64. *Autobiography*, XXXVI, p. 112.

about Harte alone would make a large volume. In view of the voluminous amount of material that is available, it is necessary to limit Twain's comments to Harte's works specifically. Before their collaboration on *Ah Sin* in 1877, Twain spoke highly of Harte.⁶⁵ His marginal notes in *The Luck of Roaring Camp, and Other Sketches* (1870) reflect none of the later enmity which develops for Harte.⁶⁶ He marked nearly as many passages "good" as those for suggested improvement. As a final comment to "The Luck of Roaring Camp" Twain wrote: "This is Bret's very best sketch, & most finished—is nearly blemishless."⁶⁷ He also said of "The Outcasts of Poker Flat": "This ranks next to the 'The Luck' unquestionably."⁶⁸ Of "Boonder" he remarked: "This is in Bret's best vein—it is his 'strongest suit.'"⁶⁹ In 1876 in a letter to Howells, Twain showed concern for Harte's success: "Harte's play [*Two Men of Sandy Bar*] can be doctored till it will be entirely acceptable & then it will clear a great sum every year."⁷⁰

But after the collaboration on *Ah Sin* in the summer of 1877, Harte was not referred to very favorably. Twain wrote of their play:

But it [*Ah Sin*] is full of incurable defects; to-wit, Harte's deliberate thefts & plagiarisms, & my own unconscious ones. I don't believe Harte ever had an idea that he came by honestly. He is the most abandoned thief that defiles the earth.⁷¹

In 1879 *An Heiress of Red Dog and Other Tales* was judged by an emotionally biased Twain. Twain's primary criticisms of this book were word usage, dialogue, and artificialities.

Chatto sent me Harte's new book of Sketches, the other day, ("An Heiress of Red Dog," etc.). I have read it twice—the first time through tears of rage over the fellow's inborn hypocrisy & snobbishness, his apprentice-art, his artificialities, his mannerisms, his pet phrases, (such as the frequent "I regret to say,")—his laboriously acquired ignorance, & his jejune anxiety to display it. O, my God! He rings in *Strasse* when street would answer every purpose, and *Bahnhof* when it carries no sharper significance to the reader than "station" would; he peppers in his seven little French words (you can find them in all his sketches, for he learned them in California 14 years ago),—he begins his German substantives with "lower case" generally, & sometimes mis-spells them—all this with a dictionary at his very elbow—what an illustration of his slovenly laziness it is! And Jack Hamlin talks like a Bowery gutter-snipe on one page, & like a courtier of Louis XV's time on the very next one. And he has a "nigger" who talks a "dialect" which is utterly original. The struggle after the pathetic is more pathetic than the pathos itself;

65. In "License of the Press," *Speeches*, XXVII, p. 50, he defended the fallen Harte in this speech: "Bret Harte was suddenly snatched out of obscurity by our papers and throned in the clouds—all the editors in the land stood out in the inclement weather and adored him through their telescopes and swung their hats till they wore them out and then borrowed more; and the first time his family fell sick, and in his trouble and harassment he ground out a rather flat article in place of another heathen Chinee, that hurrating host said, "Why, this man's a fraud," and then they began to reach up there for him and they got him, too, and fetched him down, and walked over him, and rolled him in the mud, and tarred and feathered him, and then set him up for a target and have been heaving dirt at him ever since."

66. Bradford A. Booth, "Mark Twain's Comments on Bret Harte's Stories," *American Literature*, XXV (January, 1954), 492-495.

67. *Ibid.*, p. 493.

68. *Ibid.*

69. *Ibid.*, p. 495.

70. *Mark Twain—Howells Letters*, p. 152.

71. *Ibid.*, p. 192.

if he were to write about an Orphan Princess who lost a Peanut he would feel obliged to try to make somebody snuffle over it.⁷²

But on second reading Twain noticed other things besides Harte's weaknesses. He even considered putting his prejudices aside and becoming a temperate critic of Harte.

The second time I read the book I saw a most decided brightness on every page of it—& here & there evidences of genius. I saw enough to make me think, "Well, if this slovenly shoemaker-work is able to command the applause of three or four nations, what *mightn't* this ass accomplish if he would do his work honestly & with pains?" If I ever get my tedious book finished, I mean to weed out some of my prejudices & write an article on "Bret Harte as an Artist"—& print it if it will not be unfair to print it without signature.⁷³

In the 1880 issue of the *Atlantic* Twain wrote once more of Harte's use of dialect in an answer to a fictitious Boston girl who had supposedly criticized Twain's grammar:

What is known as 'dialect' writing looks simple and easy, but it is not A man not born to write dialect cannot learn how to write it correctly. It is a gift. Mr. Harte can write a delightful story; he can *reproduce* California scenery so that you see it before you, and hear the sounds and smell the fragrances and feel the influences that go with it and belong to it. He can describe the miner and the gambler perfectly,—as to gait and look and garb; but no human being, living or dead, ever had experience of the dialect which he puts into his people's mouths. Mr. Harte's originality is not questioned; but if it ever shall be, the caviler will have to keep his hands off that dialect, for that *is* original. Mind, I am not objecting to its use; I am not saying its inaccuracy is a fatal blemish. No, it is Mr. Harte's adverb; let him do as he pleases with it; he can no more mend it than I can mine; neither will any but Boston Girls ever be likely to find us out. . . .⁷⁴

Twain, again, referred to Harte as a shoe-cobbler type of writer in 1882:

I am at work upon Bret Harte, but am not enjoying it. He is the worst literary shoe-maker, I know. He is as blind as a bat. He never sees anything correctly, except Californian scenery. He is as slovenly as Thackeray, and as dull as Charles Lamb.⁷⁵

Twain did not care for Harte's efforts to be sentimental:

He [Harte] said to me once with a cynical chuckle that he thought he had mastered the art of pumping up the tear of sensibility. The

72. *Ibid.*, p. 261. Also in *A Tramp Abroad*, X, p. 12. Twain made an indirect reference to Harte or at least his form of ostentation. Twain's agent had visited a place for Twain and in his written report he used some foreign words simply for their own sake. Twain remarked: "The foreign words and phrases which they use have their exact equivalents in a nobler language—English; yet they think they 'adorn their page' when they say *Strasse* for street, and *Bahn'hof* for railway-station, and so on—flaunting these fluttering rags of poverty in the reader's face and imagining he will be ass enough to take them for the sign of untold riches held in reserve."

73. *Ibid.*, pp. 261-262.

74. Robert J. Lowenherz, "Mark Twain on Usage," *American Speech*, XXXII (February, 1958), 70-72.

75. *Mark Twain-Howells Letters*, p. 396. Even later Twain usually saw the realism of Harte's California stories—"What Gourget Thinks of Us," *The Defense of Harriet Shelley*, XXII, p. 153. "Bret Harte got his California and his Californians by unconscious absorption, and put both of them into his tales alive. But when he came from the Pacific to the Atlantic and tried to do Newport life from study-conscious observation—his failure was absolutely monumental."

idea conveyed was that the tear of sensibility was oil, and that by luck he had struck it.⁷⁶ Pointing out more of Harte's shallowness, Twain wrote of Harte's imitation of Dickens:

In the San Franciscan days Bret Harte was by no means ashamed when he was praised as being a successful imitator of Dickens; he was proud of it. I heard him say, myself, that he thought he was the best imitator of Dickens in America, a remark which indicated a fact, to wit: that there were a great many people in America at that time who were ambitiously and undisguisedly imitating Dickens. His long novel, *Gabriel Conroy*, is as much like Dickens as if Dickens had written it himself.⁷⁷

By 1903, the year of Harte's death, Twain reminisces with a mellow hatred that he saw the glorious birth ("The Luck of Roaring Camp") and the beggarly death of Harte.⁷⁸ Surely Twain had reasons enough for his dislike of Harte, and surely Twain let this emotion bother him so much that he could not be rational about Harte's works. Yet, overall, time has proved that Twain was correct in his judgment: Bret Harte's most important works are "The Luck of Roaring Camp" and "The Outcasts of Poker Flat."⁷⁹

Hay, John. In a letter to *Harper's Weekly* Twain verified Howell's supposition that Hay's ballads came before 1871 and, therefore, they were not imitations or parodies of Harte's ballads.⁸⁰

Holmes, Oliver Wendell. If he possessed too much animosity during some of the Harte criticism, Twain possessed too much affection when he wrote the marginal comments in Holmes's *The Autocrat at the Breakfast Table* to be an effective critic.⁸¹ He used *The Autocrat* as a courting book during his engagement to Livy. The margins are filled with love notes, witty remarks, "progress reports" on the proof-reading of *Innocents Abroad*, and little else.⁸² An incident, which later made Twain more incapable as a critic of Holmes's works, was Holmes's kind, understanding reply to Twain's apology for unintentionally plagiarizing him in the dedication of *Innocents Abroad*.⁸³ He mentioned Holmes's "The Last Leaf" in a letter to Livy,⁸⁴ and Paine asserted that it was one of Twain's favorites.⁸⁵ Twain thought Holmes a good writer.⁸⁶

Howe, Edgar Watson. Howe received a two-part (public and private) letter from Twain about his *A Story of a Country Town*. In the first part Twain praised Howe's style and description:

76. *Mark Twain in Eruption*, p. 265.

77. *Ibid.*, pp. 266-267.

78. *Mark Twain-Howells Letters*, p. 775.

79. In *Mark Twain in Eruption*, p. 272, Twain quite effectively summarized his feelings toward and his country's reaction to Harte. "In the early days I liked Bret Harte, and so did the others, but by and by I got over it; so also did the others. He couldn't keep a friend permanently. He was bad, distinctly bad; he had no feeling, and he had no conscience."

80. Twain, "John Hay and the Ballads," *Harper's Weekly*, XLIX (October 21, 1905), 1530.

81. Booth, "Mark Twain's Comments on Holmes's *Autocrat*," *American Literature*, XXI (January, 1950), 456-463.

82. *Ibid.*

83. This incident is told in *Biography*, XXI, pp. 659-660; *Autobiography*, XXXVI, pp. 240-241; *Speeches*, XXVIII, pp. 77-79.

84. *The Love Letters of Mark Twain*, p. 233.

85. *Biography*, XXXIII, p. 1556.

86. *Notebook*, p. 157. Other references to Holmes are in *The Gilded Age*, VI, p. 48; *Speeches*, XXVIII, pp. 63-76; *Autobiography*, XXXVIII, p. 150.

Your style is so simple, sincere, direct, & at the same time so clear & so strong, that I think it must have been born to you, not made. Your pictures of that arid village life, & the insides & outsides of its people, are vivid, & what is more true; I know, for I have seen it all, lived it all.⁸⁷

Twain stated that Howe's book was "history" and with a few obstructions removed it could be a tale. He praised Howe's characterization of Big Adam and wished that Howe had put him in the story more. Howe reached Twain's primary criterion of style: "You write as a man talks, & very few can reach that height of excellence."⁸⁸ Twain's criticism in the private portion of the letter points out too much sentimentality, some striking figures, Adam's possible use as a central figure in another novel, the unnecessary character Biggs, the misuse of *shall* and *will*, and an unnecessary preface. Twain concluded by saying that he believed that Howe had more "fish in his 'pond'" and that he only talked to help him.⁸⁹

Howells, William Dean. Twain called his close personal and literary adviser "the head of American literature."⁹⁰ They were acquaintances from 1869 to Twain's death in 1910, or more importantly, "fast friends" with a continuing correspondence from 1872 to 1910. Of the quiet Howells (as compared to the vituperative Twain) Twain always had praise. His literary criticism of Howells was one-sided.

One of Twain's first indirect compliments of Howells's novels was through Laura of *The Gilded Age* who thumbed through *Venetian Life* while a dapper bookstore clerk tried to interest her in some juvenile works.⁹¹ More specifically Twain cited Howell's skill of characterization and narration of *A Foregone Conclusion*.

I have just finished reading the 'Foregone Conclusion' to Mrs. Clemens and we think you have even outdone yourself. I should think that this must be the daintiest, truest, most admirable workmanship that was ever put on a story. The creatures of God do not act out their natures more unerringly than yours do.⁹²

Later in his criticism of *The Lady of the Aroostook*, Twain again applauded Howell's realism, characterization, and dialogue.

If your literature has not struck perfection now we are not able to see what is lacking.—It is all such truth—truth to the life; everywhere your pen falls it leaves a photograph. I *did* imagine that everything had been said about life at sea that could be said,—. . . only *you* have stated it as it absolutely *is*. And only you see people & their ways & their insides & outsides as they *are*, & make the talk as they *do* talk. I think you are the very greatest artist in these tremendous mysteries that ever lived.⁹³

Twain continued to praise Howell's novels along the lines of realism and characterization. He added one more virtue which seemed to have been understood before: that *Indian Summer* did not have ". . . a waste line

87. C. E. Schorer, "Mark Twain's Criticism of *The Story of a Country Town*," *American Literature*, XXVII (March, 1955), 110.

88. *Ibid.*

89. *Ibid.*, p. 111.

90. "Layman's Sermon," *Speeches*, XXVIII, p. 283.

91. *The Gilded Age*, VI, p. 49.

92. *Letters*, XXXIV, p. 222.

93. *Mark Twain-Howells Letters*, p. 245.

in it, or one that could be improved."⁹⁴ Twain often criticized works for their verbosity. After commenting on how touching *Indian Summer* was, he wrote: "Well, you have done it with marvelous facility and you make all the motives and feelings perfectly clear without analyzing the guts out of them, the way George Eliot does."⁹⁵

Howells's essays about other writers also received Twain's praise. Referring to Howells's article on Frank Norris, Twain summarized the reasons for Howells's effective criticism:

I found in it, . . . what I always find in your examinations of books: a microscope's vision, a chemist's mastery of analysis & proportion, & a precision all your own in setting down the details & the accumulated result of the inquisition in English which no man can misunderstand. Nor improve upon in the matter of purity, nor rival in grace of expression.⁹⁶

He wrote that Howells's obituary article about Harte was quite pertinent and kind:

You have written of Harte most felicitously—most generously, too, & yet at the same time truly; for he was all you have said, & although he was more & worse, there is no occasion to remember it & I am often ashamed of myself for doing it.⁹⁷

Mark Twain lauded Howells's poems "Sorrow, My Sorrow," "After the Wedding," and "The Mother." He said the first was a "moving and beautiful poem."⁹⁸ And in "After the Wedding" he found these two traits more accentuated:

It was very moving & very beautiful—would have been overcomingly moving, at times, but for the haltings & pauses compelled by the difficult MS.—these were a protection, in that they furnished me time to brace up my voice, & get a new start.⁹⁹

Twain summed up his comments on Howells as a writer in his tribute, called simply "William Dean Howells:"

In the sustained exhibition of certain great qualities—clearness, compression, verbal exactness, and unforced and seemingly unconscious felicity of phrasing—he is, in my belief, without his peer in the English-writing world.¹⁰⁰

He seems to be almost always able to find that elusive and shifty grain of gold, the *right word*. . . . And where does he get the easy and effortless flow of his speech? and its cadenced and undulating rhythm? and its architectural felicities of construction, its graces of expression, its pennmican quality of compression, and all that? Born to him, no doubt.¹⁰¹

After quoting from a paper by Howells on Machiavelli, Twain remarked:

You see how easy and flowing it is; how unvexed by ruggednesses, clumsinesses, broken meters; how simple and—so far as you or I can make out—unstudied; how clear, how limpid, how understandable, how unconfused by cross-currents, eddies, undertows; how seemingly

94. *Letters*, XXXV, p. 455.

95. *Ibid.*

96. *Mark Twain-Howells Letters*, p. 245.

97. *Ibid.*, pp. 774-775.

98. *Ibid.*

99. *Ibid.*, p. 814.

100. "William Dean Howells," *What Is Man? and Other Essays*, XXVI, p. 228.

101. *Ibid.*, pp. 229-230.

unadorned, yet is all adornment, like the lily-of-the-valley; and how compressed, how compact, without a complacency-signal hung out anywhere to call attention to it. . . . I think it is a model of compactness. . . . The sample is just in other ways: limpid, fluent, graceful, and rhythmical as it is, it holds no superiority in these respects over the rest of the essay.¹⁰²

Twain continued his unrestrained eulogy of Howells with the following:

I do not think any one else can play with humorous fancies so gracefully and delicately and deliciously as he does, nor has so many to play with, nor can come so near making them look as if they were doing the playing themselves and he was not aware that they were at it.¹⁰³

And there is more—Twain believed that Howells was nearly perfect in his introduction of dialogue and characters. “Mr. Howells does not repeat his forms [“stage directions”], and does not need to; he can invent fresh ones without limit.”¹⁰⁴

Hugo, Victor-Marie. Twain mentioned Hugo briefly in a letter to Mrs. Fairbanks: “I have read half of *Les Miserables*, two or three minor works of Victor Hugo, & also that marvelous being’s biography by his wife.”¹⁰⁵

James, Henry. With Holmes and Lowell, Twain considered James as one of “the big literary fish.”¹⁰⁶ But big or not Twain did not care for James’s “analyzing”: “And as for ‘The Bostonians,’ I would rather be damned to John Bunyan’s heaven than read that.”¹⁰⁷

Keller, Helen. Keller’s *The Story of My Life* received Twain’s approval:

I am charmed with your book—enchanted. You are a wonderful creature, the most wonderful in the world—you and your other half together—Miss Sullivan, I mean—for it took the pair of you to make a complete & perfect whole. How she stands out in her letters! her brilliancy, penetration, originality, wisdom, character, & the fine literary competencies of her pen—they are all there.¹⁰⁸

Kingsley, Charles. Twain wrote to Livy: “Twichell gave me one of Kingsley’s most tiresomest books—*Hypatia*—& I have tried to read it & can’t. I’ll try no more.”¹⁰⁹

Kipling, Rudyard. From their first meeting comes Twain’s familiar quotation in which he said: “. . . he [Kipling] is a most remarkable man—and I am the other one. Between us we cover all knowledge; he knows all that can be known, and I know the rest.”¹¹⁰ Twain praised two of Kipling’s poems “The Bell Buoy” and “The Old Men”:

I have been reading “The Bell Buoy” and “The Old Men” over and over again—my custom with Kipling’s work—and saving up the rest

102. *Ibid.*, p. 231.

103. *Ibid.*, p. 235.

104. *Ibid.*, p. 238.

105. *Mark Twain to Mrs. Fairbanks*, p. 207. Also, in *The Love Letters of Mark Twain*, p. 358, Weeter lists in a check list of unpublished letters that Twain wrote Livy that he was reading Victor Hugo (Letter #68).

106. *Mark Twain—Howells Letters*, p. 160.

107. *Letters*, XXV, p. 455.

108. *Biography*, XXXII, p. 1199.

109. *The Love Letters of Mark Twain*, p. 126.

110. *Biography*, XXXII, p. 881.

for other leisurely and luxurious meals. A bell-buoy is a deeply impressive fellow-being. In these many recent trips up and down the Sound in the Kanawha he has talked to me nightly, sometimes in his pathetic and melancholy way, sometimes with his strenuous and urgent note, and I got his meaning—now I have his words! No one but Kipling could do this strong and vivid thing. Some day I hope to hear the poem chanted or sung—with the bell-buoy breaking in, out of the distance.

"The Old Men," delicious, isn't it? And so comically true.¹¹¹

Paine recorded Twain's saying that he "could stand any amount" of a poem like Kipling's "The Naulahka."¹¹² Two statements in which Twain extolled Kipling's poems in general are: "I am not fond of all poetry, . . . but there's something in Kipling that appeals to me. I guess he's just about my level."¹¹³ And "Kipling's name, and Kipling's words always stir me now, stir me more than do any other living man's."¹¹⁴

Klein, Charles. Twain thought Klein's *Music Master* a rather permanent play with David Warfield playing it.¹¹⁵

Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth. Just Longfellow himself, not his works, was mentioned as great.¹¹⁶

Lowell, James Russell. Twain considered Lowell one of "the big literary fish."¹¹⁷ Also he read Lowell's *Letters*.¹¹⁸

Lytton, Edward George Earle Lytton Bulwer. Twain did not care for some of Bulwer-Lytton's works; he wrote of *Eugene Aram*: "Read *Eugene Aram* all day—found it tedious—skipped 4 pages out of 5. Skipped the corporal all the time. He don't amount to anything."¹¹⁹

McLaren, Elizabeth T. Twain wrote of the biographer McLaren's book, *Dr. John Brown and His Sister Isabella*:

It says in every line, "Don't look at me, look at *him*"—and one tries to be good and obey; but the charm of the painter is so strong that one can't keep his entire attention on the developing portrait, but must steal side-glimpses of the artist, and try to divine the trick of her felicitous brush. In this book the doctor lives and moves just as he was.¹²⁰

McLean, Sarah Pratt. Writing of McLean's "delightful unworldly people" in *Flood Tide*, Twain remarked that the novel should be read with G. B. Wasson's *Captain Sineon's Store* of "delightful worldly people."¹²¹

Meredith, George. Meredith's work which was popular during the last of the nineteenth century never appealed to Twain. He criticized Meredith's characterization in *Diana of the Crossways*:

111. *Letters*, XXXV, p. 746.

112. *Biography*, XXXIII, p. 1502.

113. *Ibid.*, p. 1440.

114. *Mark Twain in Eruption*, p. 309. Other references to Kipling are: *Letters*, XXXII, 977; *Ibid.*, XXXV, pp. 541; 610; *Biography*, XXXIII, p. 1540; *Speeches*, XXVIII, pp. 315; 377; and *Notebook*, pp. 230; 248.

115. *Biography*, XXXIII, p. 1305.

116. *Notebook*, p. 157. Longfellow was one of the venerable authors which Twain had feared that he had insulted at Whittier's birthday anniversary—"The Story of a Speech," *Speeches*, XXVIII, pp. 63-76.

117. *Mark Twain—Howells Letters*, p. 160.

118. *Biography*, XXXIII, p. 1488.

119. *The Love Letters of Mark Twain*, p. 162.

120. *Letters*, XXXV, p. 529.

121. *Mark Twain—Howells Letters*, p. 769.

It doesn't seem to me that Diana lives up to her reputation. The author keeps telling us how smart she is, how brilliant, but I never seem to hear her say anything smart or brilliant. Read me some of Diana's smart utterances.¹²²

Twain's last allusion to Meredith was: "I never could stand Meredith and most of the other celebrities."¹²³

Miller, Joaquin (Cincinnatus Heine). Miller was in England once when Twain was. Twain said that Miller charmed conventional London by affecting "the picturesque and untamed costume of the wild Sierras."¹²⁴

Moore, J. Howard. Twain found the philosophy of Moore's *The Universal Kinship* agreeable.¹²⁵

Nasby, Petroleum V. (David Ross Locke). Twain said that humor which does not teach, such as Nasby's, will not last, and when the fashion of an old trick of speech or of spelling passes, so does fame.¹²⁶

Parkman, Francis. Twain referred to Parkman as a man he worshipped.¹²⁷ He read Parkman's *Canadian Histories* periodically, and on the title-page of the *Old Regime* he wrote: "Very interesting. It tells how people religiously and otherwise insane came over from France and colonized Canada."¹²⁸

Patmore, Coventry Kersey Dighton. Twain admired Patmore's *The Angel in the House*.¹²⁹

Phelps, Elizabeth Stuart. *Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven* was first written as a parody of Phelps's *The Gates Ajar*—

a book which had imagined a mean little ten-cent heaven about the size of Rhode Island—a heaven large enough to accommodate about a tenth of one per cent of the Christian billions who had died in the past nineteen centuries.¹³⁰

Phelps, William Lyon. Of Phelps's *Literary Essays* in which Twain is mentioned, Twain wrote to Phelps: "I thank you ever so much for the book, which I find charming—so charming, indeed, that I read it through in a single night, & did not regret the lost night's sleep."¹³¹

Reade, Charles. Twain wrote to Livy of *The Cloister and the Hearth*: "I bought it & am enchanted. You shall have it if you have not read it. I read with a pencil by me, sweetheart, but the book is so uniformly good that I find nothing to mark."¹³²

Riley, James Whitcomb. Twain defended Riley's right "to sing" in spite of the critic who wants him to be still until he can "sing like Shakespeare."¹³³

Robbins, Elizabeth. After reading Robbins's *Open Question*, Twain wrote her:

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122. *Biography*, XXXII, p. 847.
 123. *Ibid.*, XXXIII, p. 1501.
 124. *Mark Twain in Eruption*, pp. 332-333.
 125. *Letters*, XXXV, p. 804.
 126. *Mark Twain in Eruption*, p. 202.
 127. *Mark Twain—Howells Letters*, p. 284.
 128. *Biography*, XXXIII, p. 1538.
 129. *The Love Letters of Mark Twain*, p. 34.
 130. *Mark Twain in Eruption*, p. 247. See also *Biography*, XXX, p. 362.
 131. *Biography*, XXXIII, p. 1562.
 132. *The Love Letters of Mark Twain*, p. 126. Reade is also mentioned in *Roughing It*, IV, p. 89; and *Specches*, XXVIII, p. 47.
 133. *Letters*, XXXV, p. 526.

I am not able to put in words my feeling about the book—my admiration of its depth and truth and wisdom and courage, and the fine and great literary art and grace of the setting. . . . I have not been so enriched by a book for many years, nor so enchanted by one. I seem to be using strong language; still, I have weighed it.¹³⁴

Sage, Dean. Twain sent Howells a sketch by Sage praising its artlessness and simplicity. Of Sage, Twain wrote: "This is the best & the happiest narrative-talent that has tackled pen since Thoreau."¹³⁵

Smith, Seba. Twain frequently recited parts of Smith's "Burial of Moses."¹³⁶

Soule, Frank. Twain wrote that he was going to try to find a publisher for Soule's poems. He remarked about the poems: "Frank Soule has written some mighty good poetry—I have heard Harte & honest men say so."¹³⁷

Spencer, Herbert. Praising Cable, Twain asserted: "I do not see how even Spencer could unwind a thought more smoothly or orderly, and do it in cleaner, clearer, crisper English."¹³⁸

Stevenson, Robert Louis. Twain commented on Stevenson's idea of conscience in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.¹³⁹

Stoddard, Charles W. Twain thought an article by Stoddard to be "good literature" so he sent it to Howells.¹⁴⁰ Howells damned it; nevertheless, Twain said he believed that "a lot of his [Stoddard's] similes were ever so vivid and good."¹⁴¹

Stowe, Harriet Elizabeth Beecher. Twain wrote of the popularity of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* on Broadway.¹⁴² Also he defended Mrs. Stowe when she was being attacked because of her *Lady Byron Vindicated*.¹⁴³

Swinburne, Algernon Charles. Twain made a rather vague allusion to Swinburne's political lyricism when he said that he was a Swinburnian "clear to the marrow" considering the problem of liberty in Russia.¹⁴⁴

Taine, Hippolyte. Twain believed that Taine's history and philosophy had influenced and changed him.¹⁴⁵ In *The Gilded Age* Laura looked for Taine's *Notes on England*—" . . . a volume that is making a deal of talk just now, and is very widely known."¹⁴⁶

Tarkington, Booth. Paine recorded Twain's saying of Tarkington's *Beasley's Christmas Party*: ". . . this is very beautiful . . . Tarkington has the true touch, . . . his work always satisfies me."¹⁴⁷

Ticknor, George. Twain saw Ticknor as a man who brought out the good in people.¹⁴⁸ Still he found some weaknesses in Ticknor's *Diary* which he read for the second time:

134. *Biography*, XXXII, p. 1089.

135. *Mark Twain-Howells Letters*, p. 138.

136. *Notebook*, pp. 69-70.

137. *Mark Twain-Howells Letters*, p. 327.

138. *Biography*, XXXI, p. 743.

139. *Notebook*, pp. 348-349. Another reference is conversation with Stevenson about Aldrich—*Autobiography*, XXXVI, pp. 246-250.

140. *Letters*, XXXIV, p. 249.

141. *Mark Twain-Howells Letters*, p. 65.

142. *Mark Twain's Travels with Mr. Brown*, p. 84.

143. Paul Baender, *op. cit.*, pp. 467-485.

144. *Letters*, XXXV, p. 538.

145. *Ibid.*, p. 490.

146. *The Gilded Age*, VI, p. 48.

147. *Biography*, XXXIII, p. 1535.

148. *Letters*, XXXIV, p. 304.

I am re-reading Ticknor's diary, and am charmed with it, though I still say he refers to too many good things when he could just as well have told them. Think of the man traveling 8 days in convoy and familiar intercourse with a band of outlaws through the mountain fastnesses of Spain—he the fourth stranger they had encountered in thirty years—and compressing this priceless experience into a single colorless paragraph of his diary! They spun yarns to this unworthy devil, too.¹⁴⁹

Tolstoy, Count Leo Nikolaevich. Twain wrote Howells who was greatly influenced by Tolstoy: "I haven't got him [Tolstoy] in focus yet."¹⁵⁰ Since this is his only allusion to Tolstoy, Twain probably never did get him in focus.

Townsend, Benton O'Neill. Twain's reaction to Townsend's *Plantation Lays and Other Poems* with its unauthorized dedication to Howells brought out an emotion but not much specific literary criticism. His letter to Howells is quoted in full:

Good land, have you seen the "poems" of that South Carolinian idiot, "Benton O'Neill Townsend, A B. & Attorney at Law?"—& above all, the dedication of them to you?

If you did write him what he says you did, you richly deserve hanging; & if you didn't, he deserves hanging. But he deserves hanging any way & in any & all cases—no, boiling, gutting, brazing in a mortar—no, no, there *is* no death that can meet his case. Now think of this literary louse dedicating his garbage to you, & quoting encouraging compliments from you & poor dead Longfellow. Let us hope there is a hell, for this poet's sake, who carries his bowels in his skull, & when they operate works the discharge into rhyme & prints it.

Ah, if he had only dedicated this diarrhea to Aldrich, I could just howl with delight; but the joke is lost on you—just about wasted.¹⁵¹

Trollope, Anthony. Twain mentioned Trollope's speech as the ". . . pouring forth a smooth and limpid and sparkling stream of faultless English."¹⁵²

Trowbridge, John Townsend. In 1908 Twain met this writer of juvenile works at the Aldrich memorial: "Trowbridge, are you still alive? You must be a thousand years old. Why, I listened to your stories while I was being rocked in the cradle."¹⁵³

Wallace, Alfred Russell. Twain extended Wallace's theory of natural selection of *Man's Place in the Universe* in an unpublished ironical essay, "Was the World Made for Man?"¹⁵⁴

Walpole, Horace. Twain believed that the "grace, wit, and humor" of the *Walpole Letters*, which he read as a boy, influenced his own style.¹⁵⁵

Ward, John. The reader should care, in Twain's opinion, about a novel's characters—their successes and failures. But of John Ward's characters, Twain said: "You feel no divided interest, no discriminating

149. *Ibid.*, p. 303.

150. *Biography*, XXXII, p. 848.

151. *Mark Twain-Howells Letters*, p. 488.

152. *Mark Twain in Eruption*, pp. 332-333.

153. *Biography*, XXXIII, p. 1456.

154. *Mark Twain-Howells Letters*, p. 777.

155. *Speeches*, XXVIII, p. 185.

interest—you want them all to land in hell together, and right away."¹⁵⁶

Ware, Eugene F. Paine recorded Twain's saying that he thought Ware's *The Rhymes of Ironquill* to be "most truly American in flavor."¹⁵⁷

Wasson, George Savary. Twain wrote that Wasson's *Captain Simeon's Store* had "delightful worldly people."¹⁵⁸

White, Andrew D. Enjoying White's history about the religious theory of the creation and age of the world, Twain said that White's *History of the Warfare of Sciences With Theology in Christendom* was a "most amusing book."¹⁵⁹

White, William Allen. In a letter to Howells, Twain wrote: "I like 'In Our Town,' particularly that Colonel, of the Lookout Mountain Oration, and very particularly pages 212-16. I wrote and told White so."¹⁶⁰ In the letter to White, Twain praised the readability of the selections he had mentioned to Howells:

Howells told me that "In Our Town" was a charming book, and indeed it is. All of it is delightful when read one's self, parts of it can score finely when subjected to the most exacting of tests—the reading aloud. Pages 197 and 216 are of that grade. I have tried them a couple of times on the family, and pages 212 and 216 are qualified to fetch any house of any country, caste or color, endowed with those riches which are denied to no nation on the planet—humor and feeling.

Talk again—the country is listening.¹⁶¹

Wilbrandt, Adolf von. Twain saw Wilbrandt's *The Master of Palmyra in Vienna*. He said that he wasn't sure whether it should be called a play or ". . . a great and stately metaphysical poem, and deeply fascinating."¹⁶² To Twain the theme seemed to "Note what a silly, poor thing human life is, . . ." ¹⁶³ This work, believed Twain, is ". . . just one long, soulful, sardonic laugh at human life."¹⁶⁴ After giving the plot and his impressions of the play and pointing out the "lightsome feast" of the New York theaters, he suggested that *The Master of Palmyra* be sent for. Since not many tragedies appeared in New York at that time, Twain gave his reason for the ordering of it:

Comedy keeps the heart sweet; but we all know that there is wholesome refreshment for both mind and heart in an occasional climb among the solemn pomps of the intellectual snow-summits built by Shakespeare and those others [Wilbrandt].¹⁶⁵

Wolston, S. Watson. In "A Cure for the Blues" Twain satirized Wolston's *The Enemy Conquered; or, Love Triumphant*.¹⁶⁶ He believed that one would read and reread it for its "total and miraculous absence" of all good qualities. Twain laughed at it for its lack of

156. *Notebook*, p. 206.

157. *Biography*, XXXIII, p. 1374.

158. *Mark Twain-Howells Letters*, pp. 768-769.

159. *Biography*, XXXIII, p. 1506.

160. *Letters*, XXXV, p. 797.

161. *Ibid.*, pp. 797-798.

162. Twain, "About Play-Acting," *The Forum*, XXVI (October, 1898), 143.

163. *Ibid.*, p. 147.

164. *Ibid.*, p. 176.

165. *Ibid.*, p. 151.

166. *The \$30,000 Bequest and Other Stories*, XXIV, pp. 99-122.

. . . wisdom, brilliancy, fertility of invention, ingenuity of construction, excellence of form, purity of style, perfection of imagery, truth to nature, clearness of statement, humanly possible situations, humanly possible people, fluent narrative, connected sequence of events—or philosophy, or logic, or sense.¹⁶⁷

Yonge, Charlotte Mary. Twain used Yonge's *The Prince and the Page* as inspiration for his own *The Prince and the Pauper*.¹⁶⁸

Zangwill, Israel. Twain praised the grammar, the characters, the plot and the realism of Zangwill's *The Master*.

Zangwill's "Master" is done in good English—what a rare thing good English is! and the grammar is good, too—and what a very, very rare thing that is! The characters are real, they are flesh and blood, they are definite; one knows what they will do in nearly any given set of circumstances. And when there is an incident, an episode, it comes about in a natural way, and happens just as it would happen in actual life.¹⁶⁹

Zola, Emile. Twain applauded Zola as a man when he said that ecclesiastical and military are courts made up of cowards which can be produced at the rate of a million a year, ". . . but it takes five centuries to breed a Joan of Arc and a Zola."¹⁷⁰ Owen Wister recorded Twain's referring to the incident in Zola's *La Terre* in which a young girl took a cow to a bull in the presence of a man. Twain said that even though such a rustic scene is universal, "American taste wouldn't stand its being so much as hinted at."¹⁷¹ In *Letters from the Earth* Mark Twain comments:

. . . Chapter after chapter seemed to be only frightful inventions, crazy inventions of an obscene mind; then came the conviction that the tale was true, photographically true; and finally came that hair-lifting thought which I have mentioned.¹⁷²

An Evaluation of Twain as Critic

Familiarity breeds contempt. How accurate that is. The reason we hold truth in such respect is because we have so little opportunity to get familiar with it.¹

Twain was quite serious in conveying to the reader what he thought was the truth. His main criterion of criticism was that of truth (true to life) not realism *per se* as Matthews suggested, or simply grammar and style as Brooks, Wagenknecht, and Patee believed, or the "tooth-and-claw" criticism as Feinstein thought. Twain believed that he knew the truth and he wanted to familiarize others with it. But as an iconoclastic humorist he was not taken seriously. Kenneth S. Lynn stated that Twain was "in dead earnest" about what he said, and that Twain would have

167. *Ibid.*, p. 100.

168. *Biography*, XXXI, p. 597.

169. *Notebook*, pp. 267-268.

170. *Ibid.*, p. 342.

171. Wister, "In Homage to Mark Twain," *Harper's Weekly*, CLXXI (October, 1935), 553.

172. *Letters from the Earth*, p. 218.

1. *Notebook*, p. 345.

purged society if he could.² As early as 1893 Frank R. Stockton must have believed Twain serious for he said that Twain's "most notable characteristic is courage."³ Yet there was a safety in his assumed position as a humorous idol-smasher. Critics have even said that he was guiltless of logic as a child; who, therefore, would take him seriously even though what he said did sound more feasible than the current beliefs? But what Twain said was the truth for Twain.

Of Twain's literary criticism Edith Wyatt as early as 1917 noted:

No more informing literary criticism is to be found than his reply to Matthew Arnold's strangely crass and ignorant remarks on General Grant's biography. His wit on the subject of the emptiness of Fenimore Cooper, his thorough-praise of William Dean Howells' sustained power as a writer—everything he has to say concerning the art and craft of writing has conscientiousness, truth and independence.⁴

Still, perhaps, Twain cannot be considered a serious *literary critic* but certainly a serious *humorist* or *moralist* speaking of literary works. Twain was referred to as a moralist in 1867 when his first book (*The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County, and Other Sketches*) came out.⁵ If, as Wagenknecht said, Twain did not have a critical theory, he undeniably had critical preferences and standards.⁶ To reiterate, the one thing that these preferences and standards seemed to be based on is truth.⁷ His demands for truth in literature places him partially in the school of realism. To Twain the doctrine, the conversation, the words, the characters, and so forth—all must seem true. Anything such as wordiness, sentimentality, over-analysis, poor grammar, or poor logic was in the way of truth, and, therefore, it should be censured. Thus Twain seemed much more like a moralist than a humorist. Twain himself said: "Humor must not professedly teach, and it must not professedly preach, but it must do both if it would live forever."⁸ On the other hand, there are many "preachers," but they have not been listened to; to be an effective "preacher," one must have an audience. One way to acquire an audience is to be a humorous "preacher"—a "preacher" who is enjoyable to hear.

Any critic would find important most of the principles of art which Twain used. A few are: (1) an author must write about his own experiences; (2) the story must be based on probabilities; (3) the

2. Lynn, "Huck and Jim," *Yale Review*, XLVII (March, 1958), 423-424. Lynn wrote: "The human race, says the stranger, [*The Mysterious Stranger*], for all its grotesqueries and absurdities and shams, has one really effective weapon—laughter. Power, money, persuasion, supplication, persecution—these can lift at a colossal humbug—push it a little, century by century; but only laughter can blow it to rags and atoms at a blast. Against the assault of laughter nothing can stand." For Twain, the humorist was above all else a moralist, in whose hands the ultimate weapon of laughter might conceivably become the means of liberating mankind from its enslavement to false ideals."

3. Stockton, "Mark Twain and His Recent Works," *Forum*, XV (August, 1893), 673. Stockton also said: "He [Twain] may be a queer fellow, but he means business."

4. Wyatt, "An Inspired Critic," *North American Review*, CCV (April, 1917), 614. Wyatt continued in her article about Twain as critic in a general manner: "No one ever told the truth about us more relentlessly. No one ever laughed more uproariously, at our mussy, imbecile romanticism and our tenth-rate, ignorant feudal tastes and our mawkish imitative 'refinement' or despised more completely our smug idealizing superstitions, or our sloppy subservient government, and our endless injustice."

5. Charles Henry Webb, "Advertisement," found in *Mark Twain: Selected Criticism*, ed. Arthur L. Scott (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1955), p. 12.

6. Wagenknecht, *loc. cit.*

7. H. R. Haweis, "Mark Twain," found in *Ibid.*, p. 30, saw that Twain's exaggeration contained truths: "He is supposed to lie like truth; but in my opinion he as often speaks truth like lies, and utters many verities in jest—ay, and in earnest too."

8. *Mark Twain in Eruption*, p. 202.

characters should seem real in speech and actions; (4) the best writing passes the test of reading well aloud; (5) the plot should consist of relevant incidents and should progress; and (6) for the sake of taste and convention one should avoid the emphasis of sex in literature. (Twain never did seem too certain of his feelings about the last principle given; however, he avoided sexual implications in his own works for the most part, sometimes to a point of prudishness).

Mark Twain, who believed that a novel (*Don Quixote*) could sweep the "chivalry silliness" out of existence in an earlier century, tried to sweep away hollow convictions and shams of the "genteel tradition" of his century.⁹ His literary criticism or "preaching" is mainly sound in light of his effort to praise the truth and to condemn that which seemed opposed to a true portrayal of the world.¹⁰ As Howells remarked:

It does not so much matter whether you agree with the critic [Twain] or not; what you have to own is that here is a man of strong convictions, clear ideas, and ardent sentiments, based mainly upon common sense of extraordinary depth and breadth.¹¹

In conclusion, the Lincoln of American literature was not the Jefferson Davis of American literary criticism, nor was he a "Lincoln" for that matter.¹² He had too many "axes to grind" to be a good objective literary critic. He even spoke disparagingly of critics: "The critic's symbol should be the tumble-bug: he deposits his egg in somebody else's dung, otherwise he could not hatch it."¹³ Many of his comments are merely statements of like or dislike. But as Coley B. Taylor explained, a "humorist is necessarily a critic," but "critics are seldom humorists."¹⁴ Twain must not be discounted as a literary critic because he was not outwardly a grave, severe, abstemious man, for he was a "humorous preacher" with a doctrine of man's depravity and the Victorian faith in continuing progress paradoxically mixed in his "sermon."

9. George Santayana, "The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy," *Winds of Doctrine*, pp. 201-202.

10. Lionel Trilling, "Huckleberry Finn," *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society*, p. 104, said that the greatest of *Huckleberry Finn* lies "Primarily in its power of telling the truth."

11. William Dean Howells, "Mark Twain: An Inquiry," from Scott, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

12. Howells called Twain the "Lincoln of our literature" in his *My Mark Twain*, p. 101.

13. *Notebook*, p. 392.

14. Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

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