The Autobiography of Mark Twain Study Guide

The Autobiography of Mark Twain by Mark Twain

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BOOKRAGS

Contents

Introduction

The Autobiography of Mark Twain is as famous for its fictional qualities as for its lively writing style. This is one of the reasons the work□which exists in three distinct and competing versions□has lived on for generations and inspired much debate. This entry studies the 1959 version, edited and arranged by Charles Neider and available in paperback from Perennial Classics

Twain's autobiography was originally published in 1924 (fourteen years after Twain's death) by Albert Bigelow Paine in New York. It was published in two volumes as *Mark Twain's Autobiography.* Samuel Langhorne Clemens, the real-life counterpart of the Mark Twain pseudonym, had been preparing notes for his autobiography for almost forty years, and they culminated in a series of dictated conversations to Paine from 1906 to Twain's death in 1910. Twain had lofty intentions when he started writing autobiographical notes in the 1870s. He expected that his autobiography would live on forever, and in this spirit he designated that certain parts of his memoirs would be time-released from his estate at specific times in the distant future.

The Autobiography of Mark Twain spans the years from 1835 to 1910, a rich period in United States history. Through Twain's characteristic wit and wisdom, readers gain a unique perspective on the Civil War, slavery and race relations, the colonization of the American West, world travel in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and notable literary and historical . With popular works like *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer and The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,* Twain was regarded as a master storyteller in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and readers eagerly anticipated his memoirs. Readers were therefore profoundly disappointed when the first version of the Twain's autobiography was published in 1924 as a mass of incomplete biographical notes and observations that lacked organization. Later versions have tried to correct this problem by removing awkward sections or adding or rearranging other sections as necessary. None of the editors have chosen to include Twain's complete typescript in the order in which Twain intended.

Author Biography

Mark Twain was born Samuel Langhorne Clemens on November 30, 1835, in the village of Florida, Missouri. When his father died in 1847, Clemens□who was only twelve years old at the time□was sent to be a printer's apprentice. While his early life was spent in Missouri, Clemens left home as a young man and was a traveler for the rest of his life, often taking on odd jobs, submitting various writings for publication, and assuming other odd jobs to fund his adventures.

After working as a riverboat pilot and spending some time in the South, where he was a Confederate soldier for two weeks, Clemens moved to the developing American West. He first gained popularity in small towns as a journalist using the pseudonym Mark Twain, a nautical term from his riverboat pilot days. He later became known as a travel writer, humorist, and lecturer.

Clemens married Olivia Langdon in 1870. They had four children together: Langdon, who died as an infant; Susy, who died from meningitis in her twenties; Jean, who died from heart failure in her twenties; and Clara, their only surviving daughter.

An optimistic and enterprising man, Clemens used the small fortune from his literary success to make several bad investments, including starting his own publishing company, which sent him into debt in his late fifties. Clemens worked off his debts through a new lecture tour and then spent his final years traveling with his family and dictating much of *The Autobiography of Mark Twain,* the first version of which was not published until after his death.

Clemens left specific instructions for the release of all of his autobiographical writings, the next major installment of which is due to be published in 2006 by the University of California Press. He considered some of his writings so controversial that they are not to be published until 2406.

Clemens wrote hundreds of works during his lifetime under the pseudonym Mark Twain. Some of his most famous writings include novels such as *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, The Prince and the Pauper, and A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court;* autobiographical and travel books such as *The Innocents Abroad, or the New Pilgrims' Progress, Roughing It, Old Times on the Mississippi, and Following the Equator;* and short stories such as "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County," "1601," and "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg." He also wrote numerous essays, speeches, and other short nonfiction works, many of which have been anthologized or reproduced in collections. In 2001, one of Clemens's unpublished manuscripts entitled *A Murder, a Mystery, and a Marriage was published by the Atlantic Monthly.*

Clemens died from heart disease in his home near Redding, Connecticut, on April 21, 1910. He left behind a legacy as one of America's most important writers, a distinction that has only increased with time.

Plot Summary

Preface

The author explains to his readers that since the publication of his autobiography will happen after he is dead, he is "speaking from the grave," and so will not have to censor himself.

Chapters 1-17

Clemens is born in the small village of Florida, Missouri. He remembers an uncle whom he admired, and describes this uncle's general store and the farm where Clemens stayed for a few months each year. Clemens says that he could never be totally equal with his Negro friends on the farm, due to their differences in skin color and social stature.

He recalls his mother and father, and explores his ancestral connection to Geoffrey Clement, who helped to sentence England's King Charles I to death. Clemens describes his father's purchase of 100,000 acres of then-worthless Tennessee land and the family's move to Hannibal, Missouri. He remembers his mother's death, and discusses her infinite compassion.

Clemens is a troublemaker and has problems at both school and home. As a teenager, he gets into more precarious situations. He fakes a trance for a hypnotist to get the approval of the audience, and has to act like it does not hurt when they stick him with pins. He reflects on various friends from his boyhood who have contacted him as an adult, then introduces his brother Orion.

Chapters 18-28

Clemens's father dies in 1847, sending the family into poverty. Clemens becomes a printer's apprentice, then works for his brother Orion's newspaper. Orion is so honest that he lowers prices too far to make a profit, a trend he continues with other businesses.

Clemens decides to travel to South America, then becomes a riverboat pilot instead. In a dream, he predicts his brother Henry's upcoming death. He then joins the Confederate army for two weeks while in Louisiana.

Through a personal connection, Orion becomes secretary of the new territory of Nevada. Clemens moves to Nevada with him, and starts writing for the Virginia City *Enterprise,* eventually adopting his pseudonym Mark Twain, a nautical term meaning two fathoms (twelve feet). When Twain's editor is out of town, Twain is challenged to a duel in the editor's place. The man who challenged Twain to a duel is scared away after

one of the other men from the newspaper office creates a lie about Twain's marksmanship.

When Twain moves to San Francisco, he becomes the only reporter on the *Morning Call*. He covers the courts and the theaters, and creates news when there is not any. The editor hires an assistant to help Twain, and the assistant ends up doing Twain's job to the point where Twain gets fired.

Twain meets Bret Harte, a writer who becomes famous for a style of literature that mimics Dickens. Twain explains how Harte's character changed from honest to dishonest when Harte moved from San Francisco to the East.

Twain is sent by the Sacramento *Union* to the Sandwich Islands, where he writes about the survivors of a boat accident. Back in the United States, he begins a lecture tour as a result of his growing fame.

Chapters 29-35

Twain takes a trip around the world, then writes *The Innocents Abroad* based on his experiences. The book is a rousing success, but Twain gets swindled out of some of his royalties because he is uneducated about the publishing business.

Twain remembers his first lecturing experience and how he got on the national lecturing circuit through James Redpath's bureau in Boston. Twain lectures for three seasons, then retires to his married life.

Chapters 36-42

Twain discusses his courtship of and marriage to Olivia L. Langdon, an invalid most of her life, who denies Twain's proposals several times before agreeing to marry him. Twain's first child, Langdon, dies from complications due to a cold. His second child, Susy, is an inquisitive and passionate child who troubles over the meaning of human existence and who exhibits a mature sense of fairness. She undertakes a frank biography of her father when she is thirteen years old.

Chapters 43-52

While in San Francisco, Twain gets two potential opportunities from an investor, both of which are foiled inadvertently by Twain's brother Orion. Twain does not make much money on his next several books or investments, and decides to become his own publisher. He puts his nephew-inlaw, Webster, in charge of the business, starting with the publication of Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

Twain receives the contract to publish the memoirs of his friend General Grant, and reflects on his past experiences with this former President and Civil War hero. Grant's book is a success, and it earns his heirs about half a million dollars.

Webster renegotiates his contract with Twain a couple of times, cheating Twain out of money and decision-making rights in the process. Twain buys out Webster, but Webster's mismanagement bankrupts the business. Twain reimburses his creditors by liquidating the company's assets and earning the rest himself through another lecture tour and the publication of his book *Following the Equator*.

Chapters 53-60

Twain discusses his half-completed books, his laziness, and his newfound dependence on dictation. He reflects on the other humorists from his early career, most of whom have become unknowns by this time. He expresses his views about the ignorance of copyright laws and the ignorance of inexperienced writers who try to get published. Twain relates how he unknowingly met his favorite author, Rudyard Kipling, before the writer became famous, then talks about authors who have fame with the lower classes.

Chapters 61-64

Twain talks about his increasing disdain for Bret Harte, who has angered creditors, critics, and friends with irresponsible behavior. Twain notes that Harte can only write when the pressure from creditors is strongest, then discusses how Harte has abandoned his family, including trying to figuratively stab his son in the back.

Twain pardons Harte's actions, saying he is like other creatures of nature, using God-given traits, whether good or bad. Twain talks about trickery in general, and gives examples of tricks that have been played on others.

Chapters 65-71

Twain relates the details of the death of his daughter Susy, who contracts meningitis while Twain is abroad in England. He then discusses the death of his wife, resulting from the failure of her immune system.

Twain writes that, during his wife's final months, their daughter Jean caught a chill and got double pneumonia. The family hides Jean's illness from Twain's wife through Twain's daughter Clara, who lies to her mother about Jean□the first time Clara has ever lied to her mother. Twain moves his wife back to their villa, where she dies.

Chapters 72-78

Twain shares his negative views on Europe, then jumps at the chance to travel there to receive an honorary degree from Oxford. During his trip, an acquaintance tricks him into lunching with her so that she can parade him around through carefully staged events designed to improve her reputation with the press.

Twain meets with an English author who has recently gained notoriety for her salacious novel, which Twain praises privately but says he can never defend publicly. Twain attends the overly elaborate memorial dedication for a writer friend, whose wife is preoccupied with her reputation. He talks about his reputation for not following common superstitions.

Chapter 79

Twain describes his daughter Jean's death from heart failure caused by an epileptic seizure, then remembers back on other loved ones he has lost Susy, his wife, friends and reflects on the fact that he is alone until he dies. He describes death as a gift.

Introduction

Introduction Summary

Introducing this volume in 1959, editor Charles Neider attempts to give the reader an account of Mark Twain's autobiography. Twain began making notes for it as early as the 1870's, but it wasn't a completed work when he died in 1910. By that time, he had switched to dictating his memories to a secretary. Twain found that when he used his pen, the narrative was more literary that he wanted it to be.

Twain wanted to create a new kind of autobiography. Its main difference from other such books was its focus on the everyday events of life. Since Twain himself was so famous, there are episodes in his life that feature other famous people. Twain was most interested, however, in sharing the ordinary events of his life that he found interesting. He thought his readers would relate most to those.

Twain experimented and struggled to find a method for writing this new kind of autobiography. In general, what he final chose was to talk about a memory or subject that interested him, and then drop it, when he found it no longer interesting. He even wanted to have it published in random order, rather than chronologically.

When Albert Bigelow Paine first published Twain's autobiography in 1924, he tried to follow Twain's wishes, with the result that the book was a confused jumble of great and trivial work. Paine left out whatever he felt was irrelevant or might be offensive to certain people. The book was not received well by critics or readers.

In 1940, Bernard DeVoto published a complementary volume that worked with the parts of the manuscript that Paine had left unpublished. This version had more clarity and organization, but it depended upon the earlier version to be complete. It was not an improvement on the earlier version.

In this current form, first published in 1959, Charles Neider explains that he has used mostly chronological order and focused on the truly autobiographical. There were several chapters that Twain's surviving daughter asked him not to publish. These had to do with her father's unconventional ideas about God and religion. In order to protect his family, Twain wrote that these chapters were not to be published until at least 2006.

Neider closes this introduction by reminding the reader that not everything Twain says is fact. As Twain writes, when telling a story in a later chapter, "I don't believe these details are right, but I don't care a rap. They will do just as well as the facts."

Introduction Analysis

Besides giving the chronology of the development of this book, the introduction serves three other purposes. First, it gives the reader insight into the reasons for choices that

both writers and editors make. Second, it leaves the reader curious enough to read the book. Third, it reminds the reader that there is a difference between fact and literary truth.

Preface

Preface Summary

In the brief preface, Mark Twain tells his readers that this autobiography is not being published until after his death. He wants to speak "from the grave," because he wants to speak freely. He wants to speak as freely, he says, as a person does when writing a love letter and assured of privacy.

Preface Analysis

In these three paragraphs, Twain reveals his sharp insight into his own nature and human nature in general. He also hints that this autobiography is to be his love letter to a life he lived deeply and completely.

Chapters 1-2

Chapters 1-2 Summary

Mark Twain was born Samuel Langhorne Clemens in the village of Florida, Missouri in 1835. Most of the houses there were made of logs as was the schoolhouse that doubled as church on Sundays. Twain's Uncle John owned one of the two stores in Florida. Everything was cheap, including the hire of slaves from nearby farmers.

Twain's Uncle John was also a farmer. When Twain was four years old, his family moved to Hannibal, Missouri. Twain spent part of every year, until he was 11, visiting his uncle's large family at their farm outside Hannibal.

Although he had never met a better man than John, Twain never used him in a book, although he used the farm a couple of times. He describes is as a heavenly place for a boy. He loved the double log house and all the good country food.

Twain remembers with affection the people that were slaves on that farm. One of the slaves named, "Uncle Daniel," served as the inspiration for the character Jim in *Huckleberry Finn* and other books. Twain refers to him as a spiritual companion that has been with him throughout his life.

Twain closes Chapter 2 with a discussion of slavery. As a boy, he says, he didn't realize there was anything wrong with it. No one spoke against it at home, in newspapers, or in church. The Bible was used in church, in fact, to rationalize the institution of slavery. However, Twain's mother once made him aware that a slave boy, who they had hired from another farmer, had been separated from his mother in Maryland and brought to Hannibal. Though she never spoke against slavery, she hated unkindness or injustice. Her son used her as the model for Aunt Polly in *Tom Sawyer.* The slave boy was also used in *Tom Sawyer,* where he did not fall for Tom's trick to have him whitewash the fence.

Chapters 1-2 Analysis

Chapter 1 establishes the setting of Twain's beginnings. The setting is shown not only in terms of place and time, but also in terms of prices of items in his uncle's store. The mention of slavery is a reminder that he was born pre-Civil War.

Chapter 2 is used to teach ways a writer uses the people and settings from real life. Twain used his writings to exorcise the horrors and honor the goodness he has seen in life.

Twain's discussion of slavery, particularly the church's sanction of it, makes an important historical point. Readers today may be familiar with churches that use the Bible to

support the oppression of women or gays. Twain shows that people with good intentions can rationalize injustice when they it is to their profit to do so.

Chapters 3-4

Chapters 3-4 Summary

Mark Twain reminisces about some of his mischievous boyhood adventures. He remembers the cozy farmhouse and the caves just three miles from Hannibal, where he got bats to bring home and scare his mother. *Tom Sawyer's* Injun Joe died of starvation in these caves, but in real life, Injun Joe survived on bats.

The health care that people received pre-Civil War was as varied as it is today. The elderly women, who knew all the herbal treatments, handled ordinary illness. The so-called Indian doctor knew a few more secrets. There was also a faith doctorwho lived five miles from Hannibal; Twain saw her cure his mother of toothache on two occasions. The medical doctors were called only in extraordinary cases. The family doctor worked on a retainer of $25 a year to treat the whole family - medications were included.

There was a schoolhouse three miles from Uncle John's farm. When Twain first visited that school at the age of seven, he was humiliated when his peers criticized him for not knowing how to chew tobacco. Even learning to smoke a pipe, he says, couldn't improve his reputation..

For the rest of the chapter, Twain shares highly detailed memories of his life on the farm. He details the landscape and the pleasures of eating a good watermelon, of listening to Uncle Daniel tell stories, of coon and possum hunts late at night. His life there, he says, was full of charm and mystery.

Chapters 3-4 Analysis

Chapter 3 continues to provide historical context for Twain's life and writings. It also illustrates, very humorously, a rich store of memories he used to draw on in his work. His use of "Injun Joe" tells the reader a bit about the writer's trade.

Chapter 4 illustrates two things. First, it reveals Twain's method of switching from one subject to another whenever he feels like it. It also illustrates why he eventually switched to dictating his autobiography rather than using a pen. When he wrote with his pen, Twain felt his work became too literary and that he became distracted by description. In this chapter, for instance, whatever else he'd intended to say about the school was waylaid by his fabulous description of life on the farm.

Chapters 5-6

Chapters 5-6 Summary

Twain now turns to the subject of his ancestry. He feels blessed, except that he is, unfortunately, vain about it. It has been reported that he had an ancestor that helped sentence Charles I to death.

When his parents married, neither of them had much property. They settled in eastern Tennessee where four of Twain's older siblings were born., They did not live long enough for Twain to know them. He was born later in Missouri, he says, because Missouri was a new state and needed some attractions.

When his father died, he left the family 75,000 acres of undeveloped land in Jamestown, Tennessee. One cousin, James Lampton, was sure there the land was worth millions of dollars.. He turned out to be right, but the family never saw those millions.

Twain used his cousin, James Lampton, as the basis for the character of Colonel Sellers in a fictional account of Jamestown called *The Gilded Age*. People have thought this character was too comical to be based on a real person, but Twain insists he never could have created Sellers on his own.

In Chapter 6, the acreage in Tennessee has increased to 100,000 acres. Twain's father bought it for $400 and saved that land for his children, thinking he had done them a favor. Twain, however, says that his father made a mistake when he gave his children "prospective wealth." None of the children settled down to work, he claims, because they all expected great money to come from the land. After his father's death, the land was gradually sold off piece by piece. Twain had not yet been born, but he made the most of anyone off of that land, by using it in his books.

Chapters 5-6 Analysis

Chapter 5 touches on two themes that show up throughout this autobiography. One subject involves the financial troubles that haunt the Clemens family. The other is the idea that truth is stranger than fiction.

These themes are revisited in Chapter 6. In this chapter, there seems to be some exaggeration of the amount of acreage. Even in writing his autobiography, which is a work of non-fiction, Twain changes facts, with tongue in cheek, whenever it makes a better story.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Twain spends this chapter talking (not writing, he says) about his mother. Mrs. Clemens had a small body, but a huge heart. She also had a lively mind that was interested in everything and everyone. Twain is certain that her ability to lose herself in these interests was what gave her such a long life. Twain remembers her moaning at the deathbed of his brother, who died at the age of 10, when Twain was just eight. His mother's anguish over that loss made a deep and lasting impression on him. Although she was declared to be in delicate health by the age of 40, as many ladies were in the nineteenth century, she lived to the age of 89.

She was a paradox. Like others in their small town, Twain's mother was both committed to democracy and proud of her aristocratic ancestry, and she saw no conflict between those two states of mind. She would defend women, children, and animals from the fiercest men. She took in every stray cat. Her children were not allowed to have caged animals, because she wouldn't deprive a rat of its liberty, but she did not speak against slavery.

Training and conditioning can accomplish strange results, says Twain. He says that the people in his town were no more hard-hearted than they are anywhere else. They were horrified by the hard life of Southern plantation slaves. Slavery, however, had numbed them to the humanity of the slave.

Chapter 7 Analysis

One can see Twain's deep affection for his mother, as well as his appreciation for her fallible humanity. He does not worship her but he admires almost everything about her. It would seem he learned from her to be interested in people and everything else around him. It is probable that her own sense of justice was passed down to Twain and gave him clarity about slavery that she herself did not possess.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Twain revisits the subject of the first day of school. This time he speaks of the school in his own town. He was four and one half years old when he started school; he received a whipping with a switch the first day.

He says he believes his mother really enjoyed all the trouble he gave her. Henry, his older brother, gave her no trouble at all. Twain is sure that she would have been bored her to death without his own antics to provide her with some variety. Twain went swimming when he wasn't supposed to, lied about going to church when he hadn't gone, and generally stayed in trouble. He was supposed to take a teaspoon of "pain-killer" every day to prevent cholera, but he fed it to the cat. All of these adventures showed up, in some form or other, in *Tom Sawyer*.

His mother sometimes punished him , when Henry was actually not guilty. She said it didn't matter - she was sure he deserved it for something else she didn't know about.

Chapter 8 Analysis

This chapter shows how Twain used fiction from his life.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

When Twain was 14 years old, he suffered a humorous and awful humiliation. His older sister gave a party, and he was to play the part of a bear in a fairy tale play. Not long before the play, he went to an empty house to practice his part and get into costume. While practicing, in the nude, he was unaware that two girls of the party were hiding behind a dressing screen, watching him make a fool of himself. When he finally heard one of them giggling, he was mortified.

Twain was surprised and relieved that the story did not spread all over Hannibal, but because he never could figure out which two girls had seen him, he suspected every girl he saw. For weeks, he fled as soon as he could from any contact with females. It was 46 years before he found out who one of the girls was. Now a grandmother, she still wouldn't tell who the other girl was.

His life as a boy was not all comedy, though, Twain says. He meant to help a drunken man in the village jail, when he gave the man some matches that he had asked for, but the man burned himself along with the jail. Twain felt responsible for this incident.

Twain also witnessed several other tragedies in Hannibal within the time frame of two or three years. Guilty and imaginative Presbyterian boy that he was, Twain believed that all these horrors happened in front of him to teach him a lesson and save his soul, before it was too late. It never occurred to him to question why he should be so valuable to God that God would kill half a dozen innocent people to teach Twain a lesson. These thoughts tortured him so much at night that he could barely sleep. He would make promises to be a well-behaved boy, but his repentance was gone with every sunrise.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Besides entertaining the reader with Twain's humiliations and conceits, this chapter reveals that there was as much horror as humor in Twain's childhood. The imagination that was fed by all the good was also fed by the frightening. Twain's imagination tortured him with nightmares and self-blame for every horror he witnessed.

Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

When Twain was 15 years old, he joined a temperance society that pledged abstinence from tobacco. He had been smoking since he was nine years old. He joined the society for its red sash, which members were allowed to wear in two parades a year. He lasted three months, from the May Day parade through the Fourth of July parade. As soon as he resigned, he enjoyed the stub of a cigar he found on the ground. Tobacco was cheap where he lived, and there was no law that prevented boys from buying it. Throughout his early and middle age, he says, Twain sometimes tortured himself by abstaining from smoking. He never regretted it, he says, because it felt so wonderful to pick it up again.

When Twain was 15, a boy named Jim Wolf came to stay with the Clemens. Wolf was 17 years old and so shy that he could barely speak - even with Twain's mother in the room. One night, during the winter, Twain's older sister had an outdoor party. Twain was too young for the party, and Wolf was too shy to attend. Two tomcats started fighting on a first floor roof outside of the boys' second floor window. Wolf was very annoyed. Twain knew that Wolf would never back down from a dare, and he dared Wolf to crawl out on the icy roof and grab the cats. The result was that Wolf, in his pajamas, went sliding down the icy roof into the party below. Twain writes that he enjoys that moment now as much as he did those 50 years ago.

Twenty years later, when Twain says he'd stumbled into literature after failing at everything else, he wrote up the story as "Jim Wolf and the Cats" for the *Sunday Mercury* newspaper in New York. It paid him $25 and gave him some notoriety. Later,, Twain was accused of plagiarism, but he didn't worry about it, he said, because silence is the best way to let a slander die down.

Twain remembers another incident with Jim Wolf. Once, he was trapped in a room where Twain's mother was visiting with two ladies. Somehow, a colony of wasps settled on his leg and began stinging him. Jim was so determined not to draw attention to himself that he sat stiff through the whole thing, except that he tried to pinch them off with his right hand. Even before that incident, Twain had brushed hundreds of wasps between Jim's bed sheets. Of course, Jim was covered in stings when he lay down to bed. He beat the wasps to death with one of his boots, and then waited until Twain fell asleep before beating him in the face.

Twain says that he used to think nothing of playing practical jokes on people. The last three quarters of his life, he says, he has despised practical jokers. The fact that he used to be one only increased his hatred rather than sympathy for the joker.

Chapter 10 Analysis

In this chapter, the reader gets some comical boyhood stories, as well as more insight into the development of Twain's writing and career. Twain passes along some wisdom. He shares experiences with dealing with untrue accusations, and hepoints out that human beings despise most those qualities in which they have indulged in.

Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

In May of 1850, when Twain was about 15 years old, a hypnotist came to town, although the term then was "mesmerizer." After a few nights of failing to be hypnotized, Twain became the star of the show by pretending to be. The hypnotist was there for two weeks, but after the fourth night, Twain was his only subject. Together, they fooled everyone in town, except a handful of skeptics. Twain says he was as hurt by these skeptics as if he had been honest. He felt very proud when he finally won over the leader of the town's intellectuals, Dr. Peake, from Virginia.

Dr. Peake didn't know it, but Twain had been in the room several years before, while the doctor reminisced about a horrible fire in his hometown. He also spoke of an old house with a hole made by a British cannonball during the Revolutionary War. When Dr. Peake came to scoff at the hypnotist, Twain saw him in the audience and was reminded of these stories. As he pretended to see visions of Dr. Peake's hometown in detail, Peake became convinced. Twain enjoyed all the attention this brought him for only a few weeks. Then, he began to feel ashamed and dreaded hearing of it. After that, Twain was the only person in Hannibal who did not believe in hypnotism. Thirty-five years later, he was unable to convince his own mother that it had all been a farce.

Chapter 11 Analysis

This story is a humorous snapshot of the entertainment available to a small town in the 1800s. It is also another example of the kind of mischief Twain got into as a boy.

Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

Twain now turns his attention to the so-called "Negro Musical Show." He bemoans the fact that the original stars, such as Billy Rice, Billy Birch, David Wambold, and Backus are long gone. Twain describes some of the routines and jokes from these shows, as well as his mother's insights..

Twain first saw a minstrel show as a boy, but church-going people in Hannibal did not go to these shows. When Twain's mother visited him in St. Louis ten years later, she had never seen one, although they had become common by that time. Twain actually tricked his mother and her friend Aunt Betsy into seeing a show, and they laughed so hard at all the old jokes that the rest of the audience found new humor in them.

Chapter 12 Analysis

In addition to providing a piece of cultural history, this chapter is further evidence of Twain's fondness for his mother.

Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

This essay concerns what Twain calls his prejudice against phrenology. During the 1800s, he explains, people were fascinated by what they could learn about their personalities by having phrenologists analyze the bumps on their heads. The most well known of these experts were Fowler and Wells.

Twain tested Fowler by going to him under an assumed name. One of the most striking things Fowler said was that Twain had a cavity in his head where the sense of humor should be. Much later, under his own name, Twain visited Fowler again to learn that his sense of humor was like a mountain on his head.

Twain ran a similar test once on a palmist. A friend sent photos of Twain's hands, first under another name, and then under the name Mark Twain. This test had similar results; the pseudonym was diagnosed with no sense of humor, but Mark Twain had plenty.

Chapter 13 Analysis

In addition to being humorous, these stories illustrate that Twain was as curious about everything in life as his mother was. Despite his cynicism, it appears that Twain would have enjoyed finding out he was wrong to be so cynical. In these cases, however, his skepticism was justified.

Chapters 14-16

Chapters 14-16 Summary

In March of 1906, Twain received a letter from another man who had grown up in Hannibal. Twain did not remember this particular man, but they had grown up among the same schoolmates. This letter causes Twain to reminisce about his various schoolmates and gossip heard about their lives. The gossip may or may not have been true, he says, but it was interesting and that was all that mattered. He also reveals that *Huckleberry Finn* was modeled after Tom Blankenship, son of the town drunk.

At the beginning of Chapter 15, Twain reminisces about the first girls he loved. When he was about nine or ten years old, he had crushes on a series of older girls at school,. Among the other classmates, he remembers Jimmie McDaniel, who was the first person to hear Twain tell a funny story. It was about Jim Wolf and the cats. The pleasure of McDaniel's laughter never faded.

Twain remembers the measles epidemic that occurred when he was ten years old. Children died almost every day. Like all the mothers of the town, Twain's mother was very frightened and did everything she could to prevent her son from catching the measles. Unfortunately, the suspense of whether he would catch them anyway became too much for Twain. He decided he would get it over with. Twain snuck twice into the bed of his friend Will Bowen, who was deathly ill. The first time, Will's mother sent Twain away with a good scolding. The second time, she took Twain home to his mother.

Twain did indeed catch the measles from Will Bowen, and he almost died. He lost all interest in everything, except he retained a very slight interest in being the center of attention, when his family gathered at his deathbed. When Dr. Cunningham thought there was nothing more to do, he put hot ashes on the boy, whom Twain says "dragged me back into this world and set me going again."

Twain is reminded of another sweetheart, Laura Wright, who was a steamboat passenger once during his years working on steamboats on the Mississippi River. He had spoken about her to friend just last Saturday, although he had not seen her for 48 years, when she was 14 years old. Then, on Wednesday, he received a letter from the 62-year-old Laura, who requested one thousand dollars. She was a teacher and a widow with a disabled son. Twain sent the money, and in this chapter he is furious that a good girl like her should be sentenced to poverty in her old age. He did hear from her again with the money reached her, and was so lost in memory that he was surprised to realize she thought of him as a busy, famous author.

Chapters 14-16 Analysis

Chapter 14 is another example of Twain's incredible memory with examples of his imaginative fiction..

Chapter 15 contains a story of Twain at 10 years old, although there have already been a few chapters going up to his fifteenth year. The reader is reminded that when Twain wrote his autobiography, he did not do it in chronological order. The editor of this edition has mostly followed chronological order, but that was not strictly possible in all cases. The mention of childhood friends in Chapter 14 was a logical precedent to this chapter, which opens with memories of his first loves and classmates.

Chapter 16 offers a glimpse into the sense of tragedy that coexisted with Twain's sense of humor. He loved people fiercely and could never reconcile himself to injustice of any kind.

Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

Twain says he received his education not only in the school at Hannibal, but also at the newspaper office of his eldest brother, Orion. Orion Clemens was born in Jamestown in east Tennessee. He was 10 when the family moved to Missouri and 15 when he took a printing apprenticeship in St. Louis.

From Twain's description, Orion sounds like a case of bipolar disorder. He woke up every day on fire with a new project or idea. These obsessions died down by nightfall, but the next day brought new eagerness about some other idea. During those same days, however, he would fall into despair and gloom, so that he was both the most hopeful and most miserable man that Twain ever knew.

Orion was known for being honest and sincere, but that was his only stable characteristic. He changed his religion and politics frequently, and went at them with all his energy. He was starved for approval, and so it was easy to change his religion or politics with a disapproving remark. Only the highest principles were not negotiable. For instance, Orion was always an abolitionist, even though he grew up among slaveholders.

Chapter 17 Analysis

Twain uses this chapter to memorialize his brother, and perhaps to seek an understanding of his changeable character. He also uses some humor to indicate that he considers religion and politics to be relatively unimportant, when compared to real principles.

Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

In 1847, Twain's father was elected clerk of the Surrogate Court. The family was happy, because this would raise them out of poverty. However, on his way home from being sworn in, Mr. Clemens was caught in a storm of rain and sleet. He contracted pleurisy and died.

Orion stayed in St. Louis for two more years, because he was earning wages as a journeyman and could send money home to support Mrs. Clemens and Twain's younger brother, Henry. As for Twain, he was removed from school as soon as his father died and became a printer's apprentice at Hannibal's newspaper, *The Courier*. In that capacity, he earned room, board, and one hand-me-down suit from the publisher of that paper..

Chapter 18 Analysis

This autobiography is not only valuable as background on the life of one writer, but as a vivid description of life in his time. Reading this chapter, one is reminded that there was no social security or other safety net when families fell upon hard times. At the age of 12, Twain's school days were over, but his education continued in the form of apprenticeships that were common in those days.

Twain shares hilarious stories of the antics of his fellow apprentice. This seems to be the method by which he wrote fiction and lived his life, balancing tragedy with comedy.

Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

A couple of years after the death of their father, Orion returned to Hannibal and bought a newspaper there. He took Twain out of the *Courier* office and made him his own apprentice for the generous wage of three and one half dollars per week. The only problem was that Orion could never afford to pay that wage, as he never made a profit on the paper. The Clemens family always seemed to struggle with money.

Still a few more years later, Orion sold that paper and moved to Muscatine. Right before that, Twain had run away to work in St. Louis, in New York where he saw the first World's Fair, and then Philadelphia for a few months. Eventually, he joined Orion in Muscatine. He left in 1856, after he found a fifty-dollar bill on the road. He advertised his find, but when no one claimed it after four days, he took it and went to Cincinnati, where he lived in a cheap boarding house and worked in a printing office. Twain closes this chapter with some of his memories of co-workers there.

Chapter 19 Analysis

Twain as an adolescence was as adventuresome as he was poverty-stricken. The story of the fifty-dollar bill illustrates his honesty. It also illustrates what a large amount of money that was in the mid 1800s.

Chapters 20-21

Chapters 20-21 Summary

Twain became entranced by the idea of exploring the Amazon River. He took a steamboat to New Orleans, thinking to go from there to Peru. However, since no ships went to Peru from New Orleans, and Twain had no money or friends in New Orleans, he asked the steamboat pilot to teach him that profession. Thus began Twain's career on the Mississippi River.

Twain helped his younger brother Henry to get work on steamboats, too. In 1858, Henry died as a result of a boiler explosion aboard the Pennsylvania. This incident happened just a few weeks after Twain had a particularly vivid dream, in which Henry was dead in his casket.

The Civil War cut short Twain's career as a steamboat captain. In June 1861, he joined the Confederates, but then he resigned two weeks later, "due to fatigue from retreating."

He then went to the Nevada Territory with his brother, Orion. Orion had a friend on President Lincoln's cabinet, and this friend obtained an assignment for Orion as Secretary in Nevada. The salary was small, but with the $800 Twain had saved from steamboating, the two brothers got along well for a while. They took a room at a boarding house, Orion filled the Secretary's post, and Twain traveled the countryside looking for silver.

In 1863, Twain began covering the legislature for a Virginia City newspaper. He wrote a weekly column and began signing these "Mark Twain." Twain used his influence to convince the legislature to pass laws that helped Orion make a decent living as a Secretary as long as that lasted.

Chapters 20-21 Analysis

Chapter 20 is a good example of Twain's humility. He is able to laugh at himself.

The loss of his brother was a harsh one for Twain, and he seems to blame himself for Henry's death. His account of this event also illustrates that, while he often voices skepticism about mysterious phenomena, there is enough of it in his own life to keep him curious on the subject.

Twain's life story offers snapshots of the history of this country, as well. Chapter 21 shows how his career in journalism began.

Chapters 22-23

Chapters 22-23 Summary

Twain opens Chapter 22 with a letter from an old friend from his silver mining days. One of the things Twain liked about this man, Higbie, was his poor spelling. Twain says good spelling is not an accomplishment; it is a talent one is born with or not.

Higbie was the first person to use Twain's creative scheme to help the unemployed get work. Twain sent him to volunteer his labor, and within weeks Higbie was a highly paid worker as a result of the bidding that broke out among various foremen. Twain says he never did apply this scheme himself. He didn't need a job as long as Higbie had one.

In Chapter 23, Twain discusses dueling. It was both fashionable and illegal in Nevada. Twain had no desire to fight a duel, but there were frequent duels between representatives of rival newspapers. By now, Twain was the city editor of the Virginia City newspaper called *Enterprise.* He had written an insulting editorial, as was customary, about a rival newsman, Laird.

Twain's staff expected Laird to send a challenge for a duel. When he didn't, they sent challenges on Twain's behalf. Laird refused, and the staff kept sending challenges. This was fine with Twain, for it made him look brave, until Laird finally accepted the challenge. Twain was saved when one of his friends lied and said that Twain had shot the head off of a bird in the air. Laird declined to duel, so Twain's reputation was saved. However, since dueling was against the law, he had to leave town.

Chapters 22-23 Analysis

Twain uses humor at his own expense. These stories are quite possibly some of his tall tales, but they offer a vivid picture of life in the West of the 19th century. They also create a vivid picture of Twain as a young man who was stronger with words than with actions.

Chapter 24

Chapter 24 Summary

After leaving Nevada, Twain was a reporter in San Francisco, where he covered police reports and the local theatres. He was bored with it until, one night, he saw some Irish boys stone a Chinese meanwhile an Irish policeman did nothing to stop it. Twain wrote up the story, but it was not published. The editor said it would be too unpopular with the newspaper's Irish readership. After that, Twain had no enthusiasm for the work at all. His boss eventually asked him to resign.

Twain says he waited for God to pay back the newspaper - forty years later; the building was burned in a fire. Twain ironically comments that the publisher's successor bore the brunt of the paper's punishment.

Chapter 24 Analysis

Twain mentioned before that his Presbyterian upbringing instilled a very self-centered concern with God's "punishment." Here, he makes a joke of it. He also makes fun of himself by saying he is not nearly as principled now as he was as a young man. He attributes that to the influence of money.

Chapter 25

Chapter 25 Summary

Twain spends this chapter discussing another newspaperman of those times, Bret Harte. Harte had great success in terms of popularity and financial support. However, his fame later became a burden to him- when he was in debt, borrowing from other men and living off of women.

Chapter 25 Analysis

The reader must remember that Twain is writing "from the grave." He is committed to sharing his true opinion of everybody and everything he has encountered in his life.

Chapter 26

Chapter 26 Summary

Twain shares a number of stories to illustrate how gullible he has been, and yet how often sheer beginner's luck has protected him. In bowling, 15-ball pool, and cards, he escaped traps that he didn't know had been laid for him.

Twain then turns his thoughts to his "study of the human race," by which he means his study of himself. He finds that there is no human quality that he doesn't share, to greater or lesser degree. He believes people are all alike, and that the difference in degree of various traits is the only thing that provides variety. He says his opinion of himself is not complimentary, and so neither is his opinion of there rest of humanity.

One peculiarity that he humorously considers is why we humans should prefer a good bowling alley, for instance, to a bad one. He points out that a bad alley, or a wobbly billiards table, provide more chances to practice skill and are therefore more fun.

Chapter 26 Analysis

Twain's remark that he doesn't think much of the human race is an exaggeration. He seems to admire the women of his family greatly. Perhaps it is the male of the species that he criticizes more.

Chapter 27

Chapter 27 Summary

Twain learns in 1907 that an old friend, Jim Gillis, has died. Gillis was a natural storyteller that Twain knew during his years in California. Twain believes that with just a few years' training in writing, Gillis' literary genius would have made him famous.

Twain thinks a lot about the fact that Gillis' close friends and family were too close to recognize him as a genius. He reflects that a genius is usually not recognized by his intimates, nor himself.

Chapter 27 Analysis

Although this chapter was written or dictated in 1907, the editor has chosen to place it in somewhat chronological order. The bulk of the chapter is about Jim Gillis, so the editor fits it as close as possible to the time frame in which Twain lived in California.

Twain's recognition of Gillis as a literary genius is an example of Twain's respect for ordinary people. In spite of his claims not to have much opinion of humanity, Twain in fact has a generous respect for people, famous or not.

Chapter 28

Chapter 28 Summary

Twain was on assignment to Honolulu for a Sacramento newspaper, when survivors of the clipper *Hornet* came ashore. These people had lived 43 days on 10 days' rations on an open boat. Twain's story about them was the only complete account, so when he returned to California, he found he was a local celebrity.

Twain heeded advice to capitalize on his fame by breaking into the lecture business. His first lecture began with two minutes of stage fright, but Twain soon found out he could use his wonderful sense of humor to endear him to audiences.

Chapter 28 Analysis

Twain's humble account illustrates how much of life happens by sheer luck, or grace, depending on one's worldview. Later in this book, Twain will explain the popularity of the lecture circuit, called "The American Lyceum." People in the 1800s attended lectures the way people today follow rock concerts.

Chapter 29

Chapter 29 Summary

Twain lectured in the main towns of California and Nevada, and then decided to sail around the world from San Francisco. He wrote a weekly letter to a California newspaper for the price of $20 per letter. When he returned, he hoped to make another successful round of lectures.

However, people around the country had not heard of Twain, because the California newspaper had copyrighted his letters, rather than allow others papers to print them. Twain fought that paper to be allowed to use his own letters as the raw material for *The Innocents Abroad.*

Three years after the book's publication, Twain learned he had accidentally copied a dedication from Oliver Wendell Holmes for his own book's dedication. He wrote Holmes to apologize, but Holmes wasn't angry. He assured Twain that unconscious plagiarism is no crime, and all who speak or write commit it every day. Twain had come to believe he was right.

Chapter 29 Analysis

Twain contrasts the pettiness of the California newspaper to the generosity of the truly great writer, Oliver Wendell Holmes. He offers encouragement to other writers who struggle to be original, when he says that nothing is truly "original."

Chapters 30-31

Chapters 30-31 Summary

This chapter describes how Twain began his career as an author of books. Writer and editor Charles Webb suggested to Twain that he publish a volume of sketches. Twain was excited and flattered by the idea.

Webb scheduled an appointment for Twain with a publisher named Carlton, who turned him down rudely. Twenty-one years later, Twain ran into Carlton, who apologized by introducing himself as "the prize ass of the nineteenth century." When Carlton refused the book, Webb published it himself.

When Twain sailed abroad, the American Publishing Company invited him to write a book about that trip. While writing that book, *The Innocents Abroad*, Twain roomed with a friend, and the two supported themselves on $24 per week earned from their own little syndication scheme.

While Elisha Bliss of the American Publishing Company was supposed to be publishing *The Innocents Abroad*, Twain was on a lecture tour. The contract date came and went, but Bliss had not released the book. His board of directors was nervous, because they had never published a book with humor in it before. Twain held the company to its contract, though. When his book was finally published, it took the company out of debt and made them over $70,000.

As for the first book, *The Jumping Frog*, its publisher, Mr. Webb, swindled Twain out of a couple thousand dollars. Yet when Twain became famous, Webb claimed to have discovered and created him. Later, Bliss and the American Publishing Company, as well as many other people in California and Nevada, made the same claim.

Chapters 30-31 Analysis

Twain's early publishing experiences should offer encouragement to struggling writers in the early phase of their careers. He also offers a humorous look at what happens when one becomes famous.

Chapters 32-34

Chapters 32-34 Summary

Twain has many memories from his lecture tour in the late 1860s. He explains the "lyceum system," which was at its height during that time. Most lecturers made $100 per night, though a few knew their value and made more.

The speakers of "The Lyceum" began each lecture season in Boston. For about a month before the season began, the lecturers tried out their new talks in the surrounding towns. This gave them a chance to try them out and make revisions before premiering in Boston. Once the commercial success of a new lecture could be determined by Boston's response to it, the management knew what to charge in the other cities of the lecture circuit.

Twain's career with "The Lyceum" began with characteristic humor. In 1867, he ran into a friend named Frank Fuller in New York. Fuller was like Twain's brother Orion, in that he had a new enthusiasm every day. He decided he wanted to set Twain up to do a lecture about his assignment in Honolulu, so he rented a hall that seated 2000 people.

Twain was flattered, but knew that no one would pay to see an unknown. Finally, he persuaded Fuller to pass out complimentary tickets, so that at least he wouldn't have to lecture to an empty house. The audience was made up of public school teachers, who loved him. Soon, either that year or the next, the lyceums around the country began calling for him.

Chapters 32-34 Analysis

"The American Lyceum" provided winter entertainment for cities and towns all across the U.S. during the late 1800s. Its managers did not expect to make money, but only to uplift and entertain. Today's small performing arts theatres would be somewhat parallel.

Again and again, the modest Twain gives credit to other people, and sometimes, pure luck, for helping him along his way. The story of his New York lecture may not be accurate in all its particulars, because he can't remember which year he actually started touring the circuit, but it is essentially true. Essential truth is all Twain cares about, and that is a theme of his throughout this book.

Chapters 35-37

Chapters 35-37 Summary

Twain contrasts lecturing with reading, which is usually boring for an audience. Charles Dickens made readings popular, but that was because he did it so well. In fact, Twain got to see him once, and says it made the happiness of his life. This was not because he was so happy to see Dickens, but because it was on this trip that he met a young woman, Olivia Langdon. They married in 1870.

Twain says his wife was both girl and woman, for all the years that he knew her. He speaks at length about her poor health and frailty, although he says her spirit was indestructible. Olivia had fallen on ice at the age of 16 and was an invalid for two years, until the prayers of a Dr. Newton cured her. Twain met Dr. Newton years later and asked for his secret. Newton wasn't sure, but he thought that perhaps a very subtle type of electricity flowed from his body.

Twain praises his wife as the best person he ever knew. She was also his "faithful, judicious, and painstaking editor" from the time of their engagement to three or four months before she died.

The couple's first child, a son named Langdon Clemens, was born in late 1870 and lived only 22 months. Twain blames himself for the child's death, because he let him get too cold on a carriage ride. He states that he doubts he had the courage to admit this to the child's mother, or to anyone, at the time.

Chapters 35-37 Analysis

Twain's praise for his wife and daughters, and for his mother previously, makes an interesting contrast to his claim that he doesn't think much of human nature. It is clear that he thinks very much of female human nature.

Olivia's physical frailty is an interesting bit of history, because it was quite fashionable in the 19th century for women to be frail, or even invalid. Although Twain has earlier voiced skepticism for unusual phenomena, it is clear that he takes Olivia's mind cure by Dr. Newton very seriously. This may be due to his mother's faith in the faith healer that cured her of toothache many years before.

Twain's guilt over his son's death, whether legitimate or not, is typical of him. As he has shared more humorously in other memories, he had believed as a boy that he was being punished when people close to him were hurt or killed. He never completely outgrew that emotionally, even if he did so intellectually.

Chapters 38-40

Chapters 38-40 Summary

The next several essays concern the girl who is clearly Twain's favorite child, his daughter Suzy. He recalls how Suzy's temper caused her much grief, before she learned to govern it. He recalls with pain how she once sentenced herself to missing a much-anticipated hayride, because she had hit her sister with a stick or shovel handle.

He also reminisces upon many clever insights and childhood sayings. Because literate people frequented their home, Suzy's vocabulary was quite impressive from a very young age. There were many words she misused as she learned them, and this delighted and entertained her family.

When Suzy was 13, she began secretly to write a biography of her father, and Twain shares some excerpts of it. No other compliment before or since has meant so much to him. Thinking of the biography brings joy, although it also brings sadness that he will never see Suzy again.

Chapters 38-40 Analysis

These chapters memorialize the daughter who was clearly Twain's favorite. Clearly, she was as intelligent as her father, and shared his interest in stories and writing. She died prematurely from meningitis, as the reader will learn later in this book. Though talented, successful and famous, the fact that his daughter wanted to write his biography pleased him like no other honor.

It is characteristic of Twain that he interlaces the tragedy of this lost daughter with the humor of her shrewd observations.

Chapters 41-42

Chapters 41-42 Summary

Suzy's biography mentioned that her father used strong language. This reminds Twain of the first time he accidentally swore in front of his wife. Olivia was so upset by it that she repeated what she'd said, so he'd see how awful it sounded. It made him laugh so hard that she couldn't help but laugh, too. Later, at breakfast Olivia made a guarded remark against the use of strong language, and both Suzy and her sister Clara said, "But mamma, papa uses it!" Until then, he'd thought he'd kept his swearing a secret from the whole family.

Twain remembers a trip he took with a minister friend of his. The minister traveled somewhat anonymously, so he could have a real vacation. An innkeeper had no idea he was speaking to a minister, and he made Twain "quietly die from joy" by lacing all conversation with a constant stream of profanity. Even when the minister let it be known he was a minister, the innkeeper didn't pause. He didn't realize he was causing any offense at all. This was just his natural way of speaking.

Chapters 41-42 Analysis

Twain's memories certainly reflect a different social climate than the one we live in today. It is common to hear women and children use profanity, in the media and in real life. Twain delights in the innkeeper's unconscious profanity, because he knows the man did not mean to blaspheme. Had the man been doing it for effect, Twain remarks, it would have been merely disgusting.

Chapters 43-45

Chapters 43-45 Summary

Twain returns to the subject of money. First, he remembers his brother Orion again, and all of his financial disasters. Orion died at the age of 72, in 1898. He died at his kitchen table, mid-word with pencil in hand.. It gives Twain some comfort to think that Orion's difficult life had a swift and painless ending.

Twain then addresses the subject of his own adventures with money. He says he has always had a talent for being swindled. He discusses how Elisha Bliss swindled him out of profits that were rightfully due on his books. Even after Bliss died, though, he failed to use the opportunity to insist that the American Publishing Company make it right. Instead of staying with the company and insisting on terms that would have compensated him, Twain went to another company for a time, which was not as successful at selling his books.

Meanwhile Twain also tried his hand at investing in patents. He had so many bad experiences, and lost so much money, that he gave it up and refused to invest in the development of the telephone. He felt sorry for the store clerk in town that spent his life's saving buying stock in it. Eighteen months later, the clerk was a wealthy man.

Chapters 43-45 Analysis

Twain again suggests that money troubles run in his family. He also strikes on another theme of this book, which is that writers had better watch out for publishers. By placing the essays in this order, the editor of this book is laying the groundwork for the reader to understand Twain's largest business failure, still to come.

Chapters 46-48

Chapters 46-48 Summary

When the new publishing company failed to sell many of his books, Twain decided to start his own publishing company. Previously, he had hired his nephew-in-law, a young man named Webster, to run one of his failed patent businesses. Now, Twain hired that nephew to run the publishing house and named it "Webster and Company."

Twain jokes about how little Webster and his lawyer knew about the business, and how sure Twain was that the boy was a treasure, because he seemed so confident. In fact, Webster did do well with *Huckleberry Finn*, and Twain received $54,500 in his first royalty check.

Originally, Twain had meant to publish only his books. However, he overheard someone say that General Grant, who had led the Union in the Civil War and later served as President, was going to write an autobiography. Twain was acquainted with Grant and convinced him to let "Webster and Company" publish his autobiography.

Chapters 46-48 Analysis

Twain shows the reader that, even though he has as much respect for "regular people," he is very comfortable with the most famous.

With sarcastic remarks about himself and his nephew throughout these pages, Twain foreshadows the eventual failure of his company and his falling out with his nephew.

Chapters 49-50

Chapters 49-50 Summary

This chapter details the contrast between the nephew Webster and General Grant.

When it became public that "Webster and Company" would publish General Grant's autobiography, Twain's nephew got a good bit of attention and notoriety. Twain says it went to the young man's head. Webster asked for a new contract, even more favorable to him than the last, and Twain agreed, he says, without really reading it. The result was that Twain owned 9/10ths of the company, but did not have any say in what the company did. Webster rented a bigger office and sported new suits.

On the other hand, in Chapter 50, Twain marvels at how modest Grant was. He remained completely unmoved anytime generous praises were heaped upon him, and he had no idea how sought-after his book would be.

Twain found out Grant was human, though, when he learned Grant was troubled that Twain had not offered an opinion on his manuscript. Soon after, Twain diplomatically let Grant know his truly high opinion of the work in progress, and he could see Grant was as pleased as any new author.

General Grant died soon after finishing his autobiography. As he lay dying, he voiced the hope that the book might make some money to take care of his family. Twain assured him that the book had already guaranteed the family at least $200,000. This was halfway through the publicity campaign, and Grant died at ease about the care of his family. By the time it was all over, the autobiography had made closer to half a million dollars for the family. This was fortunate, Twain says, because Webster lost money on almost everything else he published.

Chapters 49-50 Analysis

Whether Twain intended the contrast or not, the editor has placed these two chapters next to each other so that the reader can see the absurd contrast between the humility of General Grant and the pride of Twain's nephew, Webster.

Twain reminds the reader, when he speaks so bluntly about Webster, that he is speaking from the grave. He has left instructions that these chapters must be suppressed until everyone that might feel hurt by them has gone. In this, Twain shows himself a sensitive person who understandably wants to set the record straight. He also continues with the theme of his mistakes in business.

Chapters 51-52

Chapters 51-52 Summary

As if in a hurry to get this painful episode over with, Twain hurries on to finish the story of the failure of "Webster and Company."

Under the new contract, Webster had the power to decide what would be published. Yet most people knew it was Twain's company and would offer books through him. Webster was offended when this happened and would refuse these books, no matter how good they were. On the other hand, if anyone offered Webster a book directly, he would publish it, no matter how bad it was. Webster even stalled on publishing Twain's book, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, for as long as he could.

Webster suffered from what today would be called migraine headaches, and he became addicted to a new German painkiller. Twain say that in his condition, Webster was not responsible for his actions, and so he bought Webster's 1/10th share of the company for $12,000.

The company was struggling more than Twain knew, and Twain did not take over its management for himself, but hired someone else. When he finally realized what dire straits the business was in, he came back to New York from Italy, where he'd been with his family. He put $24,000 of his own money into the company and tried to borrow the remainder.

However, there was an economic panic going on in 1893, and he could not find any lenders. Many businesses were bankrupt and their creditors took the loss. Even though the company's creditors knew it was the firm that owed them, and not Twain individually, Twain set about to repay all 96 creditors at an average of $1,000 each. Twain began a lecture tour abroad in January of 1895. By the beginning of 1899, Twain had paid all the creditors of Webster and Company.

Henry H. Rogers passed away by the time Twain tells this story, but it still makes him emotional. Twain says Rogers rescued him, and did it without seeming he had done it. Twain says it is a rare person who can serve another without causing a deadly feeling of obligation.

Rogers understood that Twain wasn't just a businessman: He was a literary man, and so his reputation was his life. Therefore, Rogers agreed Twain should pay back his creditors, but he protected Twain's family by giving Twain's copyrights to Olivia as the prime creditor. That way, after all the debt was paid, Twain's family was able to live in security and comfort.

Chapters 51-52 Analysis

Through the telling of one of the most difficult times of his professional life, Twain reveals the best and worst of his character. He could be gullible and sarcastic where his nephew was concerned, but he was also compassionate, honest, and grateful when gratitude was due. He shares this story as an old man who wants to be free of it, yet who wants others to benefit from its lesson. It also shows something that has always been true of Twain's character; he is less interested in what's socially or legally right, and more interested in what's morally right.

Chapters 53-58

Chapters 53-58 Summary

In these short chapters the editor has placed many of Twain's remarks on writing and the issues writers face. He describes his process for writing a book and says that he will write on a book as long as the book will write itself. When it stalls, he lays it aside. The first time he found he could do that was when he wrote *Tom Sawyer*. He knew there was more to write, but it stalled in the middle. After a rest, he was able to finish it easily.

Twain says he never had to work at a book. His book *1601* was originally a joke he wrote to a friend. The friend found it so funny that he began to pass it around, and finally it was printed.

Two issues are pet peeves of his. One is copyright law. He feels a person should own their copyright forever and be able to bequeath it to his family for an infinite number of generations, just like any other piece of property. The other annoyance is that would-be writers are always sending him their writing and wanting his praises. Few people realize, he says, that writing is a trade like any other, and therefore requires skill, practice, and a period of apprenticeship.

Chapters 53-58 Analysis

Although Twain was such a prolific writer, he again and again insists he never worked. For him, it was play. Once he learned to trust the process when writing *Tom Sawyer*, Twain knew that he didn't have to force anything to a conclusion. In fact, it was better when he didn't. Ironically though, he had respect for writing as a craft and thought more people should work at it before inflicting their manuscripts on him.

Chapters 59-62

Chapters 59-62 Summary

In these chapters the editor has placed Twain's memories and opinions of a variety of well-known people of his day. He met Rudyard Kipling before the writer became famous, and was impressed and amazed by how much he knew. He also speaks of Robert Lewis Stevenson, but mainly just to say they'd met a number of times.

Twain speaks highly of an editor named Murat Halsted, who died after a career of 60 years. He obviously admires his dedication.

In contrast, Twain speaks harshly, again, of Bret Harte. His criticism of Harte is heightened by the fact that he admired Harte's wife and cared about his family. Harte apparently was a drinker and a womanizer, and Twain was unusually judgmental of him.

Chapters 59-62 Analysis

Twain has been true to his word that his biography would include regular people. However, Twain himself was a famous person, so it stands to reason that he would have a number of famous people in his life. Because he is so tolerant of human frailty, it is interesting that he is so hard on Bret Harte. Because Twain was very tenderhearted towards the women in his life, it may be that it was hard for him to see Mrs. Harte treated poorly by her husband.

Chapters 63-66

Chapters 63-66 Summary

Twain shares a variety of thoughts and family memories that culminate in the unexpected and tragic death of his daughter Suzy. In 1896, Twain, his wife, and daughter Clara were traveling to Europe, when they received a telegram that Suzy had fallen ill. This was during the time period that Twain was lecturing to pay off his creditors, so he had to keep traveling. Olivia and Clara turned around and went home to take care of Suzy, but Suzy died from meningitis before they got there.

Chapters 63-66 Analysis

Though life was good to Twain in so many ways, as with all of us, it was also harsh with him, . The loss seems even more tragic to us, today, who have the benefit of modern medicine, including antibiotics. The sense that this autobiography highlights Suzy as a favorite daughter may simply be because she is gone. Later, when another daughter dies, it will be clear that she is just as dear to him.

Chapters 67-71

Chapters 67-71 Summary

These chapters eulogize Twain's wife, Olivia Langdon Clemens, and describe the last days of her life. He says the dictation of this autobiography ceased for two years after she was gone, because he didn't know if he could bring himself to tell the story. He resumed this autobiography on the second anniversary of Olivia's death.

It is actually unclear why Twain's wife died. At the beginning of her last illness, she was diagnosed with a nervous breakdown. From then on, Olivia was confined to her bed, and her family protected her from any unpleasant news. For instance, Clara, who had always been the most honest person in the family, managed to keep it from her mother when the Clemens' third daughter, Jean, had double pneumonia. Clara made up an entire fictional life for Jean, and Olivia was thought never to have known the difference.

At the end of October 1903, the family returned to their villa in Italy, thinking Olivia might recover there. Instead, she died almost as soon as they got settled. Her last day was happy and peaceful. Twain wrote just two hours after she died, "She was my riches, and I am a pauper."

Chapters 67-71 Analysis

It is unclear exactly what went wrong in Olivia Clemens' health, especially since the term "nervous breakdown" is more descriptive than diagnostic. Moreover, it is not clear why the Clemens family thought that a diet of lies would help her. The reader must remember that it was still fashionable for upper-class ladies to be frail, but that certainly doesn't explain why she died. It is touching that Twain, who experienced both poverty and prosperity, used the metaphor of "riches" when speaking of his late wife.

Chapters 72-73

Chapters 72-73 Summary

In this section, Twain talks about human vanity, first in the collective and then in himself.

First, Twain relates the story of a banquet he attended, where a man bragged, "when an Anglo-Saxon man wants something, he just takes it." For this speech, he received thunderous applause. Twain was shocked that no one spoke against this arrogance, but he says he didn't have the courage to do that, either. He remarks that while our public philosophy is one thing, "In God We Trust," the young speaker apparently voiced America's private philosophy.

Twain has fun talking about his vanity, too. He was awarded an honorary degree in England. Although he has three honorary degrees already, and although he has said he'll not have reason to travel abroad again, he plans to make haste to receive the new degree.

Chapters 72-73 Analysis

One of the things that makes Twain such a humorous and reliable critic of human nature is that he does not exempt himself from his jokes and criticism. If he only spoke of the faults of others, he would be guilty of false pride. As it is, his humility shines through, even when he has strong opinions about others.

Chapters 74-78

Chapters 74-78 Summary

The next several chapters are another set of various memories and opinions. He speaks briefly of his dislike for a woman named Marie Corelli. He also speaks of meeting with an English author, Elinor Glyn, and trying to convince her that she must be sensitive to conventional wisdom. This, although he says he agrees with her that human law is actually in opposition to God's law, and that the laws of Nature are paramount.

Next, Twain considers a trip he took to assist at the opening of the Thomas Bailey Aldrich Memorial Museum. Although he believed Aldrich's widow took on this project to stroke her own vanity, he wouldn't have missed it for anything.

Finally, Twain pokes fun at the superstition, apparently common in his day, that water rots the hair. He points out that water does good for everything else, so why not hair? He also describes how watermelon always cured his wife of dysentery, but he has never been able to get a doctor to try it.

Chapters 74-78 Analysis

These chapters are just examples of how Twain is speaking his mind freely, "from the grave."

Chapter 79

Chapter 79 Summary

Twain knew that this essay, written Christmas Eve 1909, would be the last chapter of his autobiography. He gave it to his secretary and said to put it at the end, "if it was good enough."

Twain's daughter, Jean, had died suddenly the day before from epilepsy. They had spent a wonderful evening together and parted happily at bedtime, looking forward to Christmas Eve. However, Jean had a seizure sometime in the night, and the housekeeper found her dead in the early morning of Christmas Eve.

Twain lost Suzy 13 years ago, Olivia 5 ? years ago, and now Jean. He says he feels as if a bullet has crashed through his heart.

Chapter 79 Analysis

This was indeed the last chapter of Twain's autobiography. He died in his home just four months later. Although Twain was 75 years old when he died, it seems certain that this comic genius must have died from sorrow, more than from any affliction of his body. Twain left his daughter, Clara, who has overseen the editing of previous versions of his autobiography, as well as this one.

Characters

Elisha Bliss

Elisha Bliss, who works for the American Publishing Company, offers Twain the contract for *The Innocents Abroad,* then delays publication of the book, for fear its humorous quality would offend readers, until Twain threatens a lawsuit. Ironically, the book is a success. Twain publishes several more books with Bliss, and it is only after Bliss's death that Twain finds out from the publishing company how badly Bliss had swindled him in skimming money from the company.

Clara Clemens

Clara Clemens is Twain's second-born daughter. In her twenties, Clara is known as being extremely honest, and her mother Olivia believes that she cannot tell a lie. Clara is thus recruited to take care of her mother when her mother falls ill, so that she can lie to her mother about the severity of her illness.

Olivia is a very watchful person, and while she is in her sickbed, she analyzes every report that Clara gives her about the outside world. The lying is painful for Clara, who often has to create more lies to cover up inconsistencies in her stories. It is particularly difficult for Clara when Clara's sister Jean catches pneumonia, and Clara has to hide the illness from her mother. Clara is the only one of Twain's children who survives into adulthood.

Henry Clemens

Henry Clemens is Twain's younger brother. He often tells his parents about Twain's many mischievous acts when he and Twain are children, and Twain makes Henry the object of many pranks. Because Henry rarely does anything naughty, Twain usually gets blamed when Henry actually does something bad.

Henry is injured in a steam boiler explosion while working as a mud clerk (a volunteer position) on Twain's riverboat. Although Henry survives the accident and begins to heal, he dies when some inexperienced young doctors give him an overdose of morphine. Twain has a prophetic dream about his brother's funeral a few days before the explosion.

Jean Clemens

Jean Clemens is Twain's youngest child. She is energetic and enjoys being outdoors. She catches pneumonia at one point, although she eventually gets better. An epileptic,

Jean dies in her father's home after she has an epileptic seizure and her heart fails, one day before Twain's last Christmas in 1909.

John Marshall Clemens

John Marshall Clemens is Twain's father. He invests a small fortune in 100,000 acres of Tennessee land, which he thinks will be worth a lot of money to his family some day. Although this prospect gives him hope throughout hard financial times and even on his deathbed, the property becomes a burden to Twain and his brother Orion, who lose most of the property through mismanagement. When John loses several thousand dollars on a bad loan, he and his family are thrown into poverty. His luck changes when he is offered a new job, but he dies before he can start, forcing Twain to start work as a printer's apprentice.

Langdon Clemens

Langdon is the firstborn child of Olivia and Twain. He dies as a baby after complications stemming from a cold.

Mrs. Clemens

See Olivia Langdon Clemens

Olivia Langdon Clemens

Olivia Langdon Clemens is Twain's wife. Often referred to as "Livy," or "Mrs. Clemens," Olivia is an invalid most of her life due to a partial paralysis from a fall on the ice at age sixteen. Twain first learns of Olivia from her brother Charley, one of Twain's shipmates on the Quaker City excursion.

Twain meets Olivia for the first time following the Quaker City excursion. He begins to court Olivia, and proposes to her on several occasions, but she initially denies his proposals. Twain then fakes an injury following an accident at Olivia's house, and she ends up nursing him back to health. The next time he proposes, she accepts. As a wedding gift, Olivia's father buys the young couple a house in Buffalo, New York. Olivia's father tells Olivia about the house, but she and her father hide the fact from Twain for a time, using it as the basis to play a joke on him.

Olivia is much more affectionate than Twain, who was brought up to be reserved. She acts as Twain's inspiration through their many years of poverty and debt, and edits most of his written works. Olivia helps preserve her husband's literary reputation in other ways as well. When his publishing company fails, Olivia is the one who first suggests to her husband that he pay back everything that is owed to the company's creditors, so that Twain's character is not stained. She also supports Twain's decision to destroy

lower quality manuscripts before he is tempted to sell them and discourages him from lending his name as editor to a humorous periodical, which would pay a large salary but would be a step down for a writer of his stature.

Olivia and Twain have several children together. Their firstborn, Langdon, dies as a baby after complication stemming from a cold. They also bury their second child, Susy, after Susy contracts meningitis at age twenty-four.

Olivia herself becomes ill on several separate occasions during the last decade of her life, when she and Twain are doing a lot of traveling. However, she recovers from these maladies. During the last two years of her life, she falls seriously ill and ultimately dies of heart failure at Twain's villa.

Orion Clemens

Orion Clemens is Twain's oldest sibling. He is an enterprising individual with many optimistic ideas, but his bad business sense gets him into trouble when he puts money into a string of ill-fated investments. He is so honest that as soon as he buys a business, he reduces the price of the product so far that he cannot afford to pay his overhead.

Orion has other misadventures. He gets engaged to two Illinois girls, until one of them forces him to break off the other engagement and marry her. He and his new wife move to her hometown and buy a newspaper office. Twain often helps out Orion, such as when he works in Orion's newspaper office after leaving his printer's apprenticeship.

Through a friend, Orion secures the office of secretary of the new territory of Nevada, working under Governor Nye. His extreme honesty makes him popular with the legislature, who cannot trust one another. Nye is often absent from the territory, leaving Orion to act as governor. When Nye lobbies to turn the territory of Nevada into an official state, it is assumed that Orion will become secretary of state. However, on the day that he is to be nominated, Orion suddenly shifts his views from supporting alcohol to banning it, and the pro-alcohol community refuses to nominate him.

Jobless, Orion and his wife sell their Nevada house at a reduced price, squander the money on a vacation in New York, then eventually settle in Hartford, Connecticut, where Twain helps Orion trick his way into an editing job. Against Twain's advice, Orion takes a better-paying editorial job in Virginia, from which he is eventually fired. Orion tries his hand at several more careers, including law, chicken farming, and inventing, but he does not find success, and repeatedly has to borrow money from Twain to survive.

Samuel Langhorne Clemens

Samuel Langhorne Clemens is the author and main character in his autobiography, in which he is referred to by both his real name, Clemens, and by his pseudonym, Mark Twain. In his autobiography, Twain sometimes paints himself in a positive light and

sometimes not. He admits that he does not get all of his facts right, and states that he does not care, because the facts he presents will do just as well. He also jumps from topic to topic, talking about experiences when and how it pleases him. He notes that his intentions are to tell his story the way he wants to tell it, and not to censor himself.

A fiery, independent temperament is characteristic of Twain, who shares many of his experiences as a troublemaking child. After his father dies and the family is plunged into poverty, Twain is sent to work as a printer's apprentice, learning a trade that will serve him well in various other jobs throughout the United States.

Twain devotes his considerable energies towards many jobs as a young man, including working as a riverboat pilot, laborer, reporter, and lecturer. Eventually Twain's fiery spirit manifests itself in his sharp sense of humor□demonstrated throughout his autobiography□for which he becomes famous. Twain is also adventurous and travels extensively throughout his life, producing many lectures and books as a result of his travels. He mentions these works throughout his autobiography, and also notes the various people□celebrities and unknowns□that he meets in his lifetime.

While he is uncensored in his discussion of people he does not like, the people in his life who truly invoked his ire receive a special roasting in his autobiography. The people who most irritated him include: the writer, Bret Harte; a series of publishers who swindle him out of profits when he is a young, naïve author; and Charles Webster, Twain's nephew-in-law, whose deceptive and irresponsible behavior at his uncle's publishing company ruins Twain's fortune.

Twain is a family man and a significant portion of his autobiography is devoted to talking about his family life. During the last decade of his life, it greatly distresses him when he loses his oldest daughter Susy, his wife Olivia, and his youngest daughter Jean.

Susy Clemens

Susy Clemens is Twain's oldest daughter. A bright, inquisitive child, Susy contemplates the meaning of life at an early age. As a child, her passionate temper often gets her into trouble in fights with her younger sister, Clara. Still, she is very honest, and when she is caught doing something wrong, she always gives herself a just punishment.

At age thirteen, Susy begins writing a frank and honest biography of her father, which is flattering in spots and less so in others. Twain adores Susy's biography, which he reproduces in his own autobiography.

While Twain, his wife, and Clara are in England after Twain's final lecture tour, they receive word that Susy□who is supposed to travel to England to meet her family□is slightly ill. Olivia and Clara take a steamer back to Hartford to be with Susy, but she dies from meningitis (a disease that causes inflammation of the brain and spinal cord) while they are in transit.

General Ulysses S. Grant

General Grant is the Union general who eventually defeats Robert E. Lee and the Confederate army, thus winning the Civil War for the North. He also serves as President of the United States from 1869 to 1877.

Twain notes that during his two weeks in the Confederate army, he was almost captured by Grant, who was then a colonel. Twain meets Grant briefly on two separate occasions. Twain's literary status earns him an invitation to give a toast on Grant's behalf. During his toast, Twain tells a slightly irreverent joke about the general, who finds it very funny. From this point on, Twain and Grant become friends.

When Twain hears that Grant is going to publish his memoirs, he visits Grant to see what kind of deal Grant is getting from his publisher. When Twain realizes that the publisher is trying to swindle Grant, Twain offers to publish Grant's book himself, offering Grant a much better deal in the process.

Grant is hesitant at first, concerned that Twain will lose money on the deal. After one of Grant's friends examines Twain's publishing operation and finds it sound, the general relents and Twain publishes the book.

Grant's book is a huge success, and nets Grant's heirs about a half-million dollars, although Grant does not live to see it. On Grant's deathbed, his last request□to die as a general and not a president□is granted by Congress, even though Congress is offi-cially out of session.

Bret Harte

Bret Harte is one of Twain's writer friends, who becomes famous for his story "The Luck of the Roaring Camp." Twain meets Harte in San Francisco, when Harte is the private secretary of the superintendent of the United States Mint, a position with very few duties that leaves him much free time to write.

Twain says that once Harte went east, all of Harte's good qualities departed. Twain goes on at length about Harte's vanity and the injustices that Harte has visited upon others, including Twain. Harte generally lives beyond his means□especially when it comes to his fashionable clothes□at the expense of his family, whom he has abandoned. At one point, Harte deliberately encourages his son to seek out the help of one of Harte's friends, then tries to stab him in the back.

Harte secures assignments that he does not complete, such as when he receives ten thousand dollars from the *Atlantic Monthly* for a year's worth of writings, then produces almost nothing. He goes on a streak of borrowing money from friends and acquaintances, most of whom he never pays back.

Harte's literary fame turns sour when he deliberately antagonizes his critics, after which time they give his works bad reviews. As a rule, he generally does not line up writing work until he is desperate for money, and he seems to only be able to write under deadline pressure.

Jane Lampton

Jane Lampton is Twain's mother. She knows that Twain is a troublemaker in his youth and believes that he deserves whatever retaliation his brother Henry dishes out. Her compassion for others is so great that she defends Satan when some townspeople put her to the test to see if she will go that far. On other occasions, she intervenes on behalf of both people and animals in danger of being beaten.

Jervis Langdon

Jervis Langdon is Olivia Langdon's father. When Twain proposes to Olivia, Langdon checks out Twain's references, who do not speak well of the writer. In the end, Langdon overlooks this fact and allows the marriage. Out of concern for his daughter's welfare, however, he purchases a house in Buffalo, New York, for the new married couple.

Livy

See Olivia Langdon Clemens

Henry H. Rogers

Henry Rogers is a friend who saves Twain from many swindlers. He also negotiates with Twain's creditors to keep them from hounding Twain while he is on his lecture tour, earning back the debt incurred by the failure of Twain's publishing company, Webster and Company.

Mark Twain

See Samuel Langhorne Clemens

Charles L. Webster

Charles L. Webster is Twain's nephew-in-law, whom Twain initially hires to manage one of his investments. Twain loses forty-two thousand dollars on the investment, but does not hold Webster responsible for the loss.

Later, when Twain forms his own publishing company, he offers to put Webster in charge of it. Webster demands a large salary, which Twain thinks is very bold, since

Twain himself never got paid to learn a new trade. Twain believes that Webster's initiative will make him rich, and even names the company after him.

The first book from Webster and Company, Twain's *Huckleberry Finn,* is a success. Although he had intended to use the company only to publish his own books, Twain does end up publishing General Ulysses S. Grant's memoir.

However, by signing a series of bad contracts that Webster's lawyer creates, Twain inadvertently gives away his decision-making power and profits to Webster. Eventually, Webster's mismanagement weakens the business. In an ironic twist, Webster places his trust into another employee, who ends up swindling Webster out of his profits. When Webster experiences problems from his increasing drug habit, Twain steps in and buys Webster's share of the business for twelve thousand dollars, although the company fails shortly thereafter.

Themes

Truth and Lies

The Autobiography of Mark Twain begins with a preface from Twain that states the "frankest and freest and privatest product of the human mind is a love letter," and that with his autobiography, he intends to be this frank and honest with his readers. The book is saturated with references to truth. However, when one compares Twain's autobiographical accounts with real-life events, they do not always match, a fact noted by many reviewers. Indeed, Twain himself admits at the beginning of the work that he does not always get his memories right. He notes he used to remember his brother Henry being burned in a fire when he was a baby. Twain notes that it was "remarkable that I should cling to the delusion for thirty years that I did remember it□for of course it never happened."

Twain himself admits on several occasions he may not be telling the truth. For example, he relates how he sold a dog that was not his so that he could collect his reward. "Now then, that is the tale. Some of it is true," he writes.

Within the narrative of Twain's life, the concept of truth features prominently. As a child, Twain was a troublemaker and lied to his mother or hid information from her so often that she did not believe him even when he was telling the truth. Twain also discusses the concept of trickery, both his own and others.

Overall, Twain seems to support the telling of white lies, but not truly dishonest acts that hurt people. When Twain hires his nephew-in-law Webster to work for him in his new publishing company, he gives Webster a good salary and names the company after him. However, Webster wants more. He swindles his uncle into signing a contract that turns all control over to him. Says Twain, "Under the preceding contracts Webster had been my paid servant; under the new one I was his slave, his absolute slave, and without salary."

Vanity

Vanity is another key theme in the book. To extend the Webster example, after he swindles Twain out of his company, Webster takes a number of management actions based on his vanity that eventually sink the company. These actions include insisting on expensive offices that are larger than necessary and publishing all books that are offered directly to him, not Twain. After the huge success of the Grant book that Twain secured, Webster takes the credit for its success. "In his obscure days his hat was number six and a quarter," says Twain. "In these latter days he was not able to get his head into a barrel."

Other characters also exhibit vanity, most notably Twain himself. When one of his friends asks him if he can name the American author with the most widespread

popularity, Twain notes, "I thought I could but it didn't seem to me that it would be modest to speak out, in the circumstances." Twain's friend notices Twain's silence and puts him in his place with the comment, "Save your delicacy for another time□you are not the one."

On another occasion, near the end of his life Twain receives an honorary degree from Oxford. He notes that it is long overdue and that he should have received the degree long before now, because others who are less talented than him have been receiving degrees in the meantime. Says Twain, "I have stood at the head of my guild during all that time, with none to dispute the place with me."

When it comes to discussing the vanity of others, Twain is very quick to criticize, most notably in several chapters about Bret Harte, in which Twain provides examples of Harte's vanity. When a wealthy benefactor of Harte's sends Harte's stack of IOUs back to Harte, offering to wipe Harte's debt clean as an act of friendship, Harte apparently "fired the bale back at him, accompanying it with a letter which was all are with insulted dignity." On another occasion, Twain is with Harte in a New York hotel, getting ready to deliver a play they have written together. The theater is down the street, and Twain assumes they will walk. However, Harte, who is wearing some fancy clothes that are badly "out of repair," puts on airs for the hotel clerk and pays him a dollar (ten times the normal fee) to deliver the play for him.

Mortality

The fragile quality of human life plays an important role in Twain's autobiography. True to the times he lives in, people are susceptible to many fatal and crippling illnesses, including many of Twain's family and friends.

Twain's view of death changes throughout his life. When he is remembering his experiences as a boy, he acts like being saved from death was a bad thing. He talks about his family doctor, claiming that he "saved my life several times. Still, he was a good man and meant well." One might suspect that Twain is being humorous here, but there are other instances of the apparent fatalism he had as a child. At one point, Twain remembers a day when he was nine years old and almost drowned in a creek. slave woman saved him. He almost drowns several more times before he learns how to swim. Twain notes that he does not know "who the people were who interfered with the intentions of a Providence wiser than themselves," but says he still holds a grudge.

When Twain is recounting his experiences as a young man, it appears he is afraid of death. In San Francisco, after he is issued a challenge to fight in a duel, Twain is concerned that if his opponent shows up he might die as a result. "I didn't sleep any," says Twain. "I had plenty to think about." When one of Twain's friends shoots the head off a flying bird before the duel, then lies and says it was Twain's shot, the opponent refuses to duel. In this case, providence is on Twain's side: "I don't know what the bird thought about that interposition of Providence but I felt very, very comfortable with it."

As an adult, when he witnesses the deaths of many family members, he regards death as negative. "To-morrow will be the 5th of June, a day which marks the disaster of my life□the death of my wife," writes Twain. Later, in another passage about his wife's death, he laments some more, "She was my life, and she is gone; she was my riches, and I am a pauper."

Although Twain is flippant or scared about his own brushes with death, the death of his family hits him hard, and there is no mistaking his feelings about it at the end of the book. In the final chapter, which is devoted entirely to the topic of death, Twain remarks that even if he could, he would not bring back his deceased daughter: "If a word would do it, I would beg for the strength to withhold the word." Twain says that he is "content" because Jean "has been enriched with the most precious of all gifts . . . death."

Style

Organization

Although Charles Neider's version of the *The Autobiography of Mark Twain* is organized chronologically, the material within each chapter still reflects Twain's original intent to impose no structure on the material other than that which was created by his freeform dictations. This lack of formal organization forces the reader to pay greater attention to details, since the details are not neatly packaged. The lack of formal organization also creates links between subjects that might not be there in a truly chronological autobiography, and thus provides an insight into the author's thought patterns.

For example, in the chapter where Twain first talks about his mother, he describes her extreme compassion, writing, "my mother would not have allowed a rat to be restrained of its liberty." In the next paragraph he abruptly switches gears, and talks about how, when he was a boy in Missouri, "everybody was poor but didn't know it."

What is the purpose of this abrupt switch in narrative? One imagines Twain dictating this passage, with an image of the rat his mother would try to save. It could be at this point that he starts to think about rats in general, and how rats are usually associated with poor conditions. This would provide the link to the paragraph about poverty.

In any case, analyzing the text in this manner, especially at points where Twain abruptly switches topics, helps the reader to get inside Twain's head and understand his intentions better. If all of the recollections of Twain's mother were included in one chapter and all of the recollections of his poverty were kept in a separate chapter, the book would have an entirely different feel.

Humor

Twain was known as a humorist and demonstrated a playful quality in most of his writings. This is evident throughout the book, in which he uses humorous phrases to describe situations, such as when wasps are crawling up the leg of a boy so stricken with shyness by some girls in the room that he cannot move. Twain describes the wasps as "prospecting around," and says that "one group of excursionists after another climbed up Jim's legs and resented even the slightest wince or squirm that he indulged himself with in his misery." By employing interesting words like "excursionists" in obviously unconventional ways, Twain elicits a laugh from his readers.

But Twain's humor also has a sharp edge to it when it is aimed at somebody else. He does this when he wants to vilify someone whom he feels has wronged him. For example, when explaining that Webster's business manager at the publishing company came from the same town as Webster and his lawyer, Twain says, "We got all our talents from that stud farm at Dunkirk." A stud farm is a place where quality horses are bred. By referring to the three young men who sink the business as "talents" who came

from a "stud farm," Twain is suggesting just the opposite□that the men have no talent and they come from low stock.

Historical Context

One of the reasons *The Autobiography of Mark Twain* continues to engage readers is its detailed, first-person account of the historical events of the time. Twain lived during formative years in the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when America was experiencing growing pains and de-fining its national identity.

It is no surprise that Twain and his brother Orion were able to find work in the newspaper industry, which experienced rapid growth in the nineteenth century. This growth was due to a number of developments, including the increased use of advertising to subsidize printing costs, an increase in the number of news correspondents using the telegraph to wire in the latest national news, and the establishment of the Associated Press. The importance of newspapers and other forms of rapid communication increased with the advent of the Civil War, when existing newspapers on both sides of the conflict promoted their cause in print.

The Civil War was the single, bloodiest fight that America has ever experienced. From 1861 to 1865, more than six hundred thousand Americans died in this war which pitted brother against brother□sometimes literally, as some families were divided in their loyalties to North and South. Although the secession of the southern states from the Union started the war, divided views over slavery caused the South to secede. The South viewed the election of Abraham Lincoln to the presidency in 1860 as a threat to its way of life□most notably the institution of slavery, which provided the massive labor force that fueled the lucrative southern cotton trade.

The majority of casualties in the war came from disease, which thrived among the troops on both sides. Second to disease as a cause of death in the war were battlefield injuries and a lack of medical knowledge, experience, and preparation. Medicine in the nineteenth century was largely undeveloped, and medical education was not yet regulated. American physicians had, at this time, little knowledge of the cause and prevention of disease and infection.

Even in cities, away from the crude setting of the battlefront, medicine was largely guesswork and people easily succumbed to many fatal and crippling illnesses. In this autobiography, Twain gives some examples from his own experiences. His father gets caught out in a storm on a trip home and dies from pleurisy, an inflammation in the pleura due to a prolonged lung infection. Twain's wife falls on the ice when she is a teenager, and as a result is an invalid for the rest of her life. His brother, Henry, is given an overdose of morphine, which kills him.

In one of the most heart-wrenching passages of the book, Twain recalls his responsibility for the death of his first-born child, Langdon. Twain took his son out for a drive on a cold morning and forgot to check on him. "The furs fell away and exposed his bare legs," Twain recalls. He and the coachman wrap up the child again, but the effects of the cold proved fatal. As Resa Willis notes in her book, *Mark and Livy,* Langdon's

death was "caused by diphtheria, the disease that took so many children in the nineteenth century and for which no antitoxin would be developed until 1890."

Critical Overview

To understand the critical reception of *The Autobiography of Mark Twain,* one must examine the context in which all of the versions were created and released, the intentions of each editor, and the debate over the works that continues today. Twain's autobiography, in the form that he intended it to be released, exists in the form of a massive, 400,000-word typescript he created in the final years of his life. The manuscript is largely composed of nonchronological, freeform dictations that Twain made to Albert Bigelow Paine, his official biographer, from 1906 until his death in 1910. During these dictations, Twain would say whatever came into his mind, mixing present and past events as he saw fit. Says E. Hudson Long in his *Mark Twain Handbook,* "Mark's intentions were to make his autobiography a combination of daily diary and memories from the past, a contrast he believed would add interest."

Twain assembled his dictations, along with other autobiographical writings from the past, into the typescript, which he continued to work on until his death. It was not until 1924, fourteen years after Twain's death, that Paine published a portion of the typescript as *Mark Twain's Autobiography.* Paine deliberately removed items from the work that he thought might be too controversial, in some cases instructed by the Twain estate to do so, but left the rest in the unconventional order of composition that Twain had intended rather than the true chronological order that most autobiographies follow. This hybrid approach led to mixed reviews. As Charles Neider notes in the introduction to his version of Twain's autobiography, most reviewers commented negatively about the lack of order, although some critics found good things to say about the writing itself and criticized Paine for leaving out some sections.

In 1940 Bernard DeVoto published his version of the autobiography, *Mark Twain in Eruption,*which left out all of the material from Paine's version, and only included part of the remaining manuscript. He edited his version heavily, imposing a thematic order on it that was directly contrary to Twain's intentions. He did, however, include some of the controversial items that Paine left out, which whetted critics' appetites. *Atlantic Monthly* critic Robert M. Gay read the book eagerly, "half expecting to find a chamber of horrors. In it, I suspected, we should at last get to the bottom of Mark Twain's tragic mystery which we have heard so much about." Unfortunately, as Gay remarked in his review, the passages did "not prove to be soulshaking revelations."

In 1959 Neider tackled the typescript. Like DeVoto, Neider ignored Twain's original intentions and imposed his own views on how the autobiography should be organized. Neider's version included some published material from the previous versions and some new selections from the typescript. *Nation* critic Kenneth Rexroth reviewed Neider's version with the same mixed feelings that the other two versions had received:

What is there to say about this book? It is a more coherent collection of Mark Twain's random reminiscences than the Paine or DeVoto volumes, but it omits some of the political and social criticism that DeVoto printed and that is certainly important to an understanding of Mark Twain.

Twentieth-first century critics look forward to the publication of Twain's complete autobiographical typescript□disorganized structure, margin notes, and all□so that they can make their own estimations about whether or not Twain's idea to publish such an unconventional autobiography was a good one. In his 1996 article, "Mark Twain and Collaborative Autobiography," Michael Kiskis argues that the time has come to stop relying on editors' interpretations and let Twain's entire version be published. Says Kiskis, "We should turn away from the seductive prospect of retelling his story by adjusting his words and return to the original materials to understand the complex process in which Clemens was engaged." Kiskis notes that "such an edition is still in the planning stages by the Mark Twain Project at the University of California at Berkeley."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Poquette has a bachelor's degree in English and specializes in writing about literature. In the following essay, Poquette proposes a model for divining the truth in Twain's autobiography.

How does one go about reading *The Autobiography of Mark Twain*? Noted by generations of critics and readers alike for its sprawling collection of experiences that lack an obvious structure, the work has also been studied with a historical microscope to determine what facts hold up under inspection.

Indeed, even while the bulk of the material was being dictated to Albert Bigelow Paine, the biographer himself had doubts as to its authenticity. As Michael Kiskis notes in his article, "Mark Twain and Collaborative Autobiography," "Paine came to believe that the material was infected by dramatization, a belief that drove a wedge between his work as biographer and Clemens's as autobiographer."

To some extent, this should have been expected, given Twain's profession. Twain was known for his "tall tales" in both his fictional works and semi-autobiographical travel works, and the tendency to embellish his life for the amusement of others was□by the time of the autobiographical dictations□instinct.

Twain may not be alone in this instinct. Speaking about autobiographies in general, Alvin P. Sanoff notes in his article "Autobiography and the Craft of Embellishment" that "scholars are now asking whether autobiographers actually bare their souls or whether their works are every bit as much a product of the imagination as a well-crafted novel."

However, this does not necessarily mean that one should read Twain's autobiography with a history book or documented biography nearby, although some readers do. Instead, a reader who wishes to understand the truth within the work should consider focusing on the particular qualities of the words themselves. Perhaps one of Twain's own quotes sums it up best. In an excerpt from a conversation to his friend, William Dean Howells, reproduced in Kaplan's book, Twain says "The remorseless truth is there, between the lines."

If reading between the lines is the trick to understanding the truth of Twain's autobiography, then there must be some formula, some focusing point, with which to view the work to find its subtext, or hidden meaning. Indeed, when one examines the situations in the book in light of their relative quality of humor, a possible formula presents itself. Specifically, Twain uses three different levels of humor in his autobiography□mild humor, vicious humor, and the total lack of humor□all of which give an indication of how truthful the account is.

When Twain uses mild humor, there is good reason to believe that he is embellishing the truth, if not manufacturing the entire story, telling the equivalent of a harmless white lie to benefit the narrative. There are many examples of mild humor in the text. In the

narrative, when Twain almost takes part in a duel, he acts like he is worried and says of his opponent, "If the duel had come off he would have so filled my skin with bullet holes that it wouldn't have held my principles." This is a funny little anecdote, but the duel never happened. As Leland Krauth notes in his article "Mark Twain Fights Sam Clemens' Duel," "Clemens' challenges . . . were never accepted; there was no confrontation on the field of honor."

That does not mean, however, that other instances where Twain uses mild humor are totally false. For example, Kaplan notes that Twain's brother Orion does have a number of misadventures in real life, including the incident where he sneaks into the wrong house in the middle of the night and snuggles up against two old maids, whom he mistakes for his brothers. Whether the maids actually screamed or whether Orion "was out of the bed and clawing around in the dark for his clothes in a fraction of a second," readers may never know, although it is likely that Twain embellished this part somewhat for greater effect.

However, in other portrayals of Orion, Twain does not give the full story. In his narrative, Twain discusses how he gave Orion the task of writing down an autobiography in the style that he himself was planning. He instructs Orion to "tell the straight truth in it," saying that "this had never been done," and that if Orion succeeded, "his autobiography would be a most valuable piece of literature." Apparently, in real life, Orion succeeds, for Kaplan notes that "[t]he first installments struck Sam as so 'killingly entertaining,'" that he sent them on to try to get them published. But when Twain recalls Orion's autobiography, he says, "great was my disappointment. . . . In it he was constantly making a hero of himself, exactly as I should have done and am doing now." In an effort to justify his own autobiographical embellishments, Twain's dictation alters the past so that he is not the only one adding embellishments.

This trend intensifies when Twain's humor turns dark and he becomes especially vicious towards others in his autobiography. On these occasions, the facts would suggest that he is crafting a lie and attributing it to a scapegoat to hide a fault of his own. The most notable examples from the book come from the discussion of Twain's relationship with his nephew-in-law Webster. From the start of his recollections about Webster, Twain fabricates the actual details. In his account, he paints Webster as a vain, uneducated, and inexperienced man who eventually swindles Twain out of his business, picks up a drug habit, and mismanages the publishing business to its ruin.

In reality, these claims are unfounded. The truth of the matter, as Kaplan notes, is that Twain completely tied himself up with the daily details for the publication of the General Grant book, which is the type of job that he hired Webster to do. "He simply could not hand over authority, and Charley's days as a publisher were numbered," says Kaplan, who notes that for years Twain ran Webster ragged with small errands, at the same time warning him not to work too hard. Largely due to this stress and the resulting health effects, Webster sold his share in the business and died an early death at the age of forty.

This is a far cry from the story that Twain tells about Webster, but it makes sense why he makes up the tale. Twain cannot admit that it is his own mismanagement that makes his book business fail, and so he demonizes Webster to try to absolve his own guilt. In Twain's version, Twain is the embattled underdog who has to deal with his nephew-inlaw's traitorous act and soldier on to regain financial solvency. Even when he does not have an audience, Twain is in such need to deny his own guilt that he maintains Webster has wronged him. Kaplan notes that until his death, Twain "held Webster responsible for every terrible thing that happened, including bankruptcy and the deaths of Susy and Livy."

Twain himself admits in the autobiography that his memory is failing, and that when he was younger, he could "remember anything, whether it happened or not." But in the case of his strong feelings toward Webster, it goes beyond remembering something incorrectly. His hatred becomes an internal reality, which manifests itself in his excessive use of vicious humor at the expense of his nephew-in-law.

On a similar note, Twain is most honest when describing tragic events that are totally devoid of humor, such as the accounts of the deaths of his daughter Susy and wife Olivia. This fact is not lost on Twain's biographer. Says Kiskis, "As Paine came to realize the conflicting approaches, he drew a distinction between the materials related to Livy and Susy as being different from the other materials."

A significant portion of Twain's autobiography is devoted to the death of his wife Olivia and two of his daughters, Susy and Jean. In each of these tellings, Twain is notably moved. "It is one of the mysteries of our nature that a man, all unprepared, can receive a thunder-stroke like that and live," says Twain, when recalling his reaction to Susy's death. He goes on to say that "the intellect is stunned by the shock." For the great humorist with the noted quick wit, there are no humorous alleviations for his grief; death of a close personal loved one is the single topic that cannot be qualified with a joke.

Jean's death hits him so hard that he ends the book with it. There is no mistaking his tone when he recounts the death of this daughter. Humor is still absent, and the voice is one of a man in pain: "Possibly I know now what the soldier feels like when a bullet crashes through his heart."

Given the fact that Twain makes this statement in the last chapter in his book, which was also one of the last chapters that he dictated, it might be that this is Twain at his most honest. All of his playful humor is gone, and he is merely waiting for his own death, which he views as a "gift." Indeed, Twain dies a mere four months later, one presumes from a broken heart, which even his incredibly imaginative mind□with its characteristic and sometimes falsifying sense of humor□could not repair.

Source: Ryan D. Poquette, Critical Essay on *The Autobiographyof Mark Twain, in Nonfiction Classics for Students,* The Gale Group, 2002.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay excerpt, Krauth examines the problems and complexities present in Twain's autobiography, including its fragmented form, its merging of fact and fiction, and its telling by both Samuel Clemens and Mark Twain.

"All my books," Twain once confessed, "are autobiographies." To an unusual degree this is true, as he mined his past for his fictions and recorded versions of his present for his travel books. At the same time, from at least 1870 on, he began to write sketches of his life experiences and his family that are more directly autobiographical. The impulse found new impetus in Vienna from 1897-98 and acquired a new mode in Florence in 1904 when he began to dictate (he had tried dictation briefly in 1885). Finally in 1906 he started the series of almost daily dictations that would continue to within a few months of his death. Always self-conscious, always performing versions of himself, Twain took naturally to autobiography, especially during his later years when he was worrying over his present and future image. As Michael Kiskisf has observed, however, most of Twain's autobiography was "composed during periods of creative, personal, and emotional stress". The result of Twain's writing and dictating portions of his life story off and on for some forty years is, in the words of one critic, "one of the most perplexing compilations in American letters."

Part of the problem is the form of Twain's autobiography. It is a series of fragments, written or dictated at different times, that replaces chronology with free association prompted by present events as well as past memories. It incorporates, though it has never been published this way, a range of documents, some personal to Twain, others just the flotsam of everyday life. Twain intended to add some parts of his autobiography as notes to his already published works in order to extend their copyright. He also intended to have his self-told life story published in successive installments only after his death, the first installment of which would omit characterizations of his acquaintances, while the second, third, and fourth would leave out what he thought were his more heretical opinions. He designated certain chapters to be sealed and unpublished for one hundred years. Rather clearly visible in these designs is not only a desire to perpetuate Mark Twain but also a large sense of self-importance.

Given the complications, not to say, the peculiarities, of Twain's forays into autobiography, as well as his directions about them, there may never be a definitive text of this work, despite the ingenuity and energy of the editors at the Mark Twain Project. Fortunately, however, Twain himself may have given us a final version of his autobiographical self. Enticed as ever by money ($30,000 in this case), he agreed to publish in the *North American Review* twenty-five installments "Chapters from My Autobiography." They were selected and edited by George Harvey, editor of the *Review*and the senior editor at Harper who was handling Mark Twain, but, as Kiskis has pointed out, Twain was "involved in the choices for the installments, had final control over the revisions that were made to the texts, and gave his approval for their publication". The "chapters" appeared from September 1906 to December 1907. If they

are not the definitive version of the autobiography, they are certainly the final, extended public representation of Mark Twain.

In naming these selections *The Autobiography of Mark Twain,* Clemens confounds the customary triad of autobiographical composition: author, narrator, subject. Who is which? Reversing the usual relationship in which Clemens did the living, Twain the writing, here Clemens seems to become the writer, the biographer of Mark Twain, who seems to have a life of his own□at least until the term *autobiography* dissolves the difference between the two. It is tempting to say that the narrator and the subject are both Twain, making Clemens just the author, but what the *Autobiography of Mark Twain* actually presents are the facts (and fictions) of Clemens's life. To complicate things further, this autobiographical text presents itself throughout as unreliable. Its author repeatedly subverts his story by suggesting that it may not be the truth. The last line summarizes the deliberately uncertain status of the whole: "Now, then, that is the tale. Some of it is true". And yet these problematics are perfectly characteristic of Mark Twain. They point once more to the all but inextricable unity of Clemens and his persona. Here the pseudonym does not subvert the autobiographical act. The text does tell the life of Clemens, but it tells it through the eyes and style of Mark Twain. The two are, in the end, in this end, one. Further, the autobiography is not an especially humorous performance, thus reinforcing the view that the pseudonym Mark Twain signals the entire range of the creative self, the serious, sentimental, and conventional as well as the comic, caustic, and unorthodox. The autobiography, perhaps more than any other text of Mark Twain's, makes it clear that we need to enlarge our sense of the persona to at least the proportions of its actual practice.

Although Clemens's life was in reality a spectacular instance of success against heavy odds (followed by failure, capped yet again by success), the autobiography does not shape itself around the traditional pattern of rising in the world. Nor does it isolate any turning point or conversion experience. (Twain specifically denies that there are any.) And if, as Susanna Egan has argued, post-Civil War American autobiographies are typically cast as "history in the making, with the self, in varying degrees of objectivity, as participant," then Twain's autobiography is atypical for its time. It does not place the self in history; it is not concerned with the self as master or victim or even exemplar of historical process. Even Henry James, whose memoirs are so firmly lodged in the development of his own artistic consciousness, offers a fuller sense of historical force than Twain. Twain simply ignores history or shrinks it to the dimensions of the personal. Thus, to take only a few obvious examples, in his life story slavery becomes the childhood experience of black folkways and interracial companionship; the Civil War is refracted into Mark Twain's visits to and conversations with General Grant; westward expansion is reduced to anecdotes of Mark Twain's time in Nevada and California; reconstruction is skirted altogether except for allusions to personal friends, such as Cable, who were in the thick of its ideological struggles; and urbanization and industrialization are either overlooked or realized only as affording modern conveniences for Mark Twain. (In the *North American Review* version, Twain even omits his highly publicized opposition to imperialism.) Despite the fact that he was in so many ways a Representative Man of his era, Twain chooses to place his autobiographical self

largely outside of his times. He thus removes from his self-portrait the shaping influence of historical process, making himself appear independently self-created.

Ignoring chronology, Twain also presents himself as fully formed from the first of his narrative. Although he does begin the first chapter with scattered remarks about ancestors (including Satan), he jumps almost at once to his literary use of his mother's cousin and then moves in his second chapter to unconnected events separated by as much as fifty-seven years, with several other discrete episodes slipped in between. Thus by the second chapter his method of autobiography is fully under way: "It is a deliberate system, and the law of the system is that I shall talk about the matter which for the moment interests me, and cast it aside and talk about something else the moment its interest for me is exhausted. It is a system which follows no charted course and is not going to follow any such course. It is a system which is a complete and purposed jumble"

The randomness of his system defies the causality common to most autobiographies. Essentially a collection of nonchronological fragments that begin, unfold, and conclude willy-nilly, his form is designed to thwart the emergence of any coherent pattern and with it a meaning to his life. He is as unconcerned with presenting, or discovering, a unified self (despite his emphasis in *What Is Man?* on idiosyncratic temperament) as he is with displaying a multiple self (despite his complex representations in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* of individual identity). His guiding principle is "the matter which for the moment interests me." Such a conception of autobiography is massively egotistical as it privileges the present interest of the writer above all other considerations. It also presupposes that what is of interest to Mark Twain will inevitably be of interest to his readers.

Thus enacted in the very form of Twain's autobiography is the absolute autonomy of self. The self is the narrative fragments, and each is assumed to be equally revelatory, defining, and engaging. This heralding of the independent self is common to the Victorian mode of male autobiography, which tends to diminish community and silence the voices of others (see Danahay). On the other hand, Twain's peculiar version of self-creating actually employs groups and places others in dialogue with the self. His autobiography is in its way consummately social. His narrative voice is often that of the storyteller, and storytelling presumes and creates an audience. But the people he surrounds and involves himself with in his text□from family, to friends, to publishers, to presidents□are used on the whole only to highlight the many facets of Mark Twain. With so much functioning to illuminate him, what Mark Twain is finally revealed?

A remarkably conventional one. Whatever the range and quirkiness of his complete autobiographical writings and dictations, in the selections published in the *North American Review* Twain's life is defined as more mainstream than divergent, his self more conventional than radical. He appears as a winsome, slightly eccentric, but thoroughly respectable Victorian.

As with many Victorians, he achieves his upright, public self through a series of repressions. Suppressed in, or edited out of, this autobiography are, among other things, his antagonism toward his father, the actual facts of his aborted duel, his violent

aggression toward imagined enemies, his business dealings, notably those leading to his bankruptcy, and his sexuality. And muted, though as we shall see, not entirely suppressed, is his religious skepticism. More generally still, the autobiography conceals his domineering personality. What is presented, then, is the conventional person: the loving husband, the doting father, the successful writer, the tender sentimentalist, the staunch moralist, the urgent sage, the famous personage. While these roles may not, indeed do not, disclose the whole man, they do define fundamental aspects of him; they reveal the proper Mark Twain.

In the well-known preface he prepared for his autobiography (not one he used in the *North American Review* version) he imagined, to protect as well as to liberate himself, that he was "speaking from the grave". He also proposed a model of free expression

The frankest and freest and privatest product of the human mind and heart is a love letter; the writer gets his limitless freedom of statement and expression from his sense that no stranger is going to see what he is writing.It has seemed to me that I could be as frank and free and unembarrassed as a love letter if I knew that what I was writing would be exposed to no eye until I was dead, and unaware, and indifferent.

In his autobiography Twain does not attain anything like the intimacy and candor of a conventional love letter, for the fragments of his life are always *told,* sometimes, when he was writing, to an imagined audience, always, when he was dictating, to a real one□to some gathering of his stenographer, secretary, authorized biographer, and even upon occasion his business manager. (Throughout his later years, special audiences, whether made up of his domestic circle, his "aquarium" of young girls, or his male cronies, fed his sense of personage.) But in one sense the autobiography is a love letter□a love letter to Livy. He memorializes her with affection and tenderness, evoking many of the same terms of praise and devotion he had used in his courtship correspondence. Again, she is both "girl and woman," a loving innocent full of "limitless affection" and unfailing "charity," a saintly person of "perfect character"; and again, she is the object not only of his love but of his "worship". Twain's use of the love letter as analogue for his autobiographical narrative recalls the postures Clemens assumed in his courtship. Significantly, the one that seemed so real at that time because it was weighted with his visible imperfections, the role of prodigal returning to the fold, is gone now, replaced by a resolute skepticism, while the other major postures, ones that proclaimed his achieved, constant character, his roles as Man of the World, Man of Feeling, and Man of Letters, are all confirmed in the autobiography. Indeed, his life story as he tells it testifies that he has lived as the man he assured Livy he was. The first full expression of himself as a proper gentleman is reenacted in the autobiography.

The conventionality of the autobiography has not escaped notice. For all of his promises of personal and conceptual fireworks, Twain actually created a fairly staid set of narrative fragments. Certainly, as Cox has pointed out, there is "little of a revelatory or shocking nature in all the dictations". And there is nothing at all that shocks or surprises in the selections Twain actually published, unless one is taken aback by their very orthodoxy.

Predictably, those passages that seem to lie deepest in Twain's past, to define in some way his core, his recollections of the Quarles farm, are repossessed and re-created□repossessed through their re-creation□in a highly stylized manner. This, too, is indicative of the conventional in Mark Twain. Their vivid particularity, the sensuous specificity, the astounding details of his descriptions are all knit together in a self-conscious, complex syntax, governed by the rhetorical refrain, "I know," and its variants, "I can see" and "I can remember". The passage, probably the most admired in the entire autobiography, is a successful set piece of ostentatious prose of the sort practiced so long ago in the love letters (and repeated in one form or another in many of the major works). Bathed in nostalgia, Twain's litany of lost, "blessed" things depends on the romantic assumption that "the eye of the artist is the eye of the child". This is a very traditional notion, to say the least, one that infatuated Romantics and Victorians alike. To approximate that innocent vision, Twain incorporates Susy's biography of him into his own autobiography. Just as George Harvey selects and edits Twain's chapters, so Twain chooses and presents excerpts from Susy's text. (He does leave her style, with all its misspellings, for it conveys her untutored youth, certifies her innocence.) His appropriation of Susy's observations allows him to pay eulogistic tribute to her, to recover the wonder of a child's perspective, to celebrate himself (for Susy's remarks are full of admiration even when they chide him), and to display to the full his loving fatherhood. Through Susy he enshrines himself within the family nexus as a loving husband, father, neighbor, and friend. It is a very Victorian act.

It is also through Susy that Mark Twain frames his own skepticism. His report of her innocent, wondering question "What is it all for?" echoes throughout his story. And at times he uses her as access to his own deeper doubts. He reports her account, for instance, of familiar childhood play: "Sept. 10, '85.□The other evening Clara and I brought down our new soap bubble water and we all blew soap bubbles. Papa blew his soap bubbles and filled them with tobacco smoke and as the light shone on them they took very beautiful opaline colors," and then he adds to it his own sentimental moral reflection: "It is human life. We are blown upon the world; we float buoyantly upon the summer air a little while, complacently showing off our grace of form and our dainty iridescent colors; then we vanish with a little puff, leaving nothing behind but a memory□and sometimes not even that. I suppose that at those solemn times when we wake in the deeps of the night and reflect, there is not one of us who is not willing to confess that he is really only a soap-bubble, and as little worth the making". From the initial metaphor, through the trite language, to the final idea of human transience, this is a stock piece of Victorian melancholy.

Twain could hardly be more conventional□and hence safer□in his musings. Yet he is so uneasy about his cynical reflections that he seeks (or rather creates) multiple sanctions for them. First, his thoughts are prompted by□and softened by□Susy's play, and then he reaches for the exemption of universality□"there is not one of us who is not willing to confess"□to depersonalize his despair. Such a moment as this in the autobiography reveals (though the revelation is neither new nor shocking) just how conventional Mark Twain is: conventional enough to write effectively using familiar tropes, conventional enough to reflect moralistically on the vanity, the brevity, and insignificance of life, and

conventional enough to feel guilty about the religious challenge of his reflections (as far as one can tell, he was pleased with their expression).

Had Twain been less conventional, he might have reveled in the doubt he shared with so many other Victorians. In his *North American Review* autobiography, however, he only toys with orthodox religious belief, tweaking the noses, as it were, of true believers with his humorous—and therefore, he must have felt, safe—remarks about Providence. This version of his quarrel with God is staged as little more than a quibble conducted through quips.

The quips are both frequent and varied. Explaining the horrors that plagued his childhood—fears of death, nightmares of mutilation, remembrances of violence—he observes facetiously, "They were inventions of Providence to beguile me to a better life." Then he exploits his past innocence to mock the framework of such thought: "It would not have surprised me, nor even over-flattered me, if Providence had killed off that whole community in trying to save an asset like me. Educated as I had been, it would have seemed just the thing, and well worth the expense". The adult Twain often uses Providence for his humorous criticisms, disarmingly including himself in those he attacks: "It is the will of God that we must have critics, and missionaries, and Congressmen, and humorists, and we must bear the burden". Sometimes an anecdote is shaped around the mistaken notion of attributing to God what is done by man. In this vein he complains that his family, in the habit of giving credit "to Providence" for every good event out of "automatic religion," thanks God for providing ducks when it is he who buys them. As he relates this story, he creates an unusually ugly picture:

There was a stranded log or two in the river, and on those certain families of snapping-turtles used to congregate and drowse in the sun and give thanks, in their dumb way, to Providence for benevolence extended to them. It was but another instance of misplaced credit; it was the young ducks that those pious reptiles were so thankful for—whereas they were my ducks. I bought the ducks.When a crop of young ducks, not yet quite old enough for the table but approaching that age, began to join the procession, and paddle around in the sluggish water, and give thanks—not to—for that privilege, the snapping-turtles would suspend their songs of praise and slide off the logs and paddle along under the water and chew the feet of the young ducks.

Vying comically here with Providence for the respect due to one in control, Twain raises, however obliquely, the fundamental question of causality and opens the lens on a savage nature. At such moments what seems good-humored play has a dark nether side. Relating a variant of a familiar Twain joke, he says that in his boyhood people were always thwarting Providence by saving him from death: "I was drowned seven times after that before I learned to swim—once in Bear Creek and six times in the Mississippi. I do not now know who the people were who interfered with the intentions of a Providence wiser than themselves, but I hold a grudge against them yet". The final ironic inversion—resenting those who saved his life—implies a preference for death over life that is openly announced elsewhere in the autobiography, most poignantly perhaps when the grieving father says that even if he could he would not bring back the dead Susy to suffer "the cares, the sorrows, and the inevitable tragedy of life".

In a dazzling, provocative study of the autobiography, G. Thomas Couser explores Twain's conception of a narrative that would open itself to "the subtlest impulses of consciousness and memory". Echoing Twain's own metaphor of narrative as a river stream ("narrative should flow as flows the brook"), Couser observes this: "Alternating between rapids and leisurely eddies, the narrative would resist, if not negate, the chronology and teleology of life-writing that point toward the subject's death". While the act of narrating might as it transpires provide such a resistance, Twain's actual narrative engages rather than avoids his own mortality. Light as they are, his jokes about Providence, especially in their cumulative force, undercut the prevailing religious teleology.

His published autobiographical chapters are haunted by death. Most obviously, Livy and Susy cast the dark shadow of death over the entire autobiography, but Twain goes out of his way to chant the names of the dead: Olivia Clemens, Susy Clemens, Jane Clemens, Orion Clemens, Henry Clemens, Pamela Moffett, Samuel Moffett, General Grant, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Dean Sage, Thomas Bailey Aldrich, Bret Harte, Frank Stockton, James Redpath, Charles Dudley Warner, John Garth, Will Bowen, Sam Bowen, Ed Stevens, Irving Ayres, George Butler, Ruel Gridley. His litany expands as the narrative unfolds until the story of Twain's life begins to feel saturated with death. As counterpoint perhaps to naming the dead□and thus honoring them□Twain paradoxically offers from time to time a generalized reflection on the meaning of all life that emphasizes its futility, thus indirectly suggesting that everyone dies in vain:

A myriad of men are born; they labor and sweat and struggle for bread; they squabble and scold and fight; they scramble for little mean advantages over each other; age creeps upon them; infirmities follow; shames and humiliations bring down their prides and their vanities; those they love are taken from them, and the joy of life is turned to aching grief. The burden of pain, care, misery, grows heavier year by year; at length, ambition is dead, pride is dead; vanity is dead; longing for release is in their place. It comes at last□the only unpoisoned gift earth had for them□and they vanish from a world where they were of no consequence; where they achieved nothing; where they were a mistake and a failure and a foolishness; where they have left no sign that they have existed□a world which will lament them a day and forget them forever. Then another myriad takes their place, and copies all they did, and goes along the same profitless road, and vanishes as they vanished□to make room for another, and another, and a million other myriads, to follow the same arid path through the same desert, and accomplish what the first myriad, and all the myriads that came after it accomplished□nothing!

Whatever stays against death narrating his autobiography may have provided, Mark Twain's immortality lay, as he perceived, in his literary achievement. It was the rock upon which he was tenoned and mortised. In *The Turning Point of My Life,* a comic bit of autobiography published just two months before his death, he does what he refuses to do in the autobiography proper: he offers an explanation of his life's centering. "To me," he writes, "the most important feature of my life is its literary feature". Although its deliberately nonchronological, nonpatterned, nonpivotal form denies overall significance to the life, the chapters published in the *North American Review* do return time and

again in one way or another to his career as a writer—to his life's "literary feature." He does not, to be sure, explore the creative process itself. He no more enters into that subjective arena than into his own psychological makeup and emotional states. Despite his belief that the true life of a person resides in the flow of ideas and feeling in consciousness, his autobiography is notably lacking in inwardness. But he refers to the sources of his works, to their subjects, to their publications, to their receptions, and to their earnings so recurrently that not even the determined randomness of his form can conceal the importance of his identity as author. It flits through the times and places of his narrative like a ghost whose presence is always felt. The figure of Mark Twain, the writer, is arguably at the center of his wandering memoirs, informing all the other facets of his life. Both husbandhood and fatherhood are tied to his authorship: he discovers Livy because he is traveling abroad as a writer; Susy undertakes his biography because he is a famous author whose character, she believes, is misperceived by the world. Given the importance of authorship to his life story, as he tells it, there is an aptness about the first of the two events with which he concludes his *North American Review* narrative. That penultimate episode also marks an important metaphorical turn in the awareness of death that pervades the autobiography.

In the first half of his final chapter, Twain revisits what he felt was the greatest catastrophe in his literary career—the Whittier birthday speech. In returning to that episode he exercises a power inherent in his form, one fundamental to the autobiographical act: the ability to rewrite one's life. As we saw earlier, the original speech, given in December 1877 at the dinner held by the *Atlantic Monthly* to honor Whittier at seventy, was perceived by Twain—with a lot of guidance from Howells—as a disaster of incalculable magnitude. Twain felt its consequences keenly, believing that he had offended Emerson, Longfellow, and Holmes, the objects of his burlesque, as well as Whittier, the guest of honor. He believed for a time that the speech itself was of inferior quality. And he believed that he had disgraced himself as a member of polite society. Believing all this, he feared that his *literary* career was in jeopardy, and, as noted in chapter 2, he may even have gone abroad in the spring of 1878 to escape what he imagined to be a continuing storm of public protest. His anxiety is worth recalling. "My misfortune," he wrote to Howells, "has injured me all over the country; therefore it will be best that I retire from before the public at present". Given his delusions and, as he says as he retells the episode and reprints the speech, his actual pain, there is at least symbolic truth as well as humor to his saying, "I shall never be as dead again as I was then". Insofar as his autobiography records the life of Mark Twain the writer, this is his moment of death.

The Whittier fiasco epitomized the cultural conflict between elite gentility and democratic commonality. Twain is customarily taken to be at one with the latter. Yet his distress over his performance was so great precisely because he cared about being genteel. He had, or so it seemed to him (and Howells), failed himself, failed as a gentleman, betrayed his innate sense of propriety, however accidentally and momentarily, and so lapsed in social grace. Precisely because all this mattered to him, he exaggerated the proportions of his blunder. Howells deepened his sense of monumental error. "Every one with whom I have talked about your speech," he wrote Twain, "regards it as a fatality". But this report of the death of Mark Twain was premature. He recovered at the time, of course, and

went on to greatness as a writer. And in the autobiography, having suffered his death in the retelling, he resurrects himself□for himself□by reclaiming the very proprieties of character he once feared he had lost. Rereading his speech, he testifies that there is no "coarseness" in it, no "vulgarity." It is, he says, "smart" and "saturated with humor". Twain thus restores himself to the living, rewrites the past, and removes a supposed blemish from his person. At the near end of his autobiography, he reestablishes his character as a proper gentleman.

Ironically, the final story he tells plays directly against that character. The tale, in brief, is that he once sold another man's dog (for three dollars), reclaimed it for its true owner (returning the three dollars), and then accepted a reward (three dollars again) for his service. Told with stylish innocence, often displaying Twain as inspired idiot, the story ends the autobiography with a tale that may be tall ("some of it is true," Twain says. It shows Twain at the last as an accomplished literary humorist, but that very act raises a question about the humor of the autobiography. To put the issues in terms appropriate to the form: what kind of a humorist is Twain in his life story?

The final comic tale, made important by its very position, discloses the essential nature of the humorous Mark Twain of the autobiography. There is an orality about its narrative (but then the autobiography itself often feels spoken, as indeed much of it was), and it does show off Twain as master of illogic, non sequitur, and deadpan stupidities. The tale also takes yet another comic swipe at religious ideology, since Twain undertakes his dog dealing to provide what the Lord hasn't. But the humor overall really turns upon Twain's protestations of morality. "I was always honest," he says. "I know I can never be otherwise". The joke at the heart of the anecdote turns on the question of how honest Twain has been in his dog dealing. In somewhat broader terms, however, what entertains here is the spectacle of Mark Twain, celebrated writer, famous person, moralist to the nation, playing a con game. The humor derives from Twain's stature.

Throughout his autobiography, Twain's humor makes light of his character; it turns upon□by turning against□his personage. He presents himself through remarks and through anecdotes as other than what his readers expect him to be, other than what most segments of the autobiography show him to be. Thus he comically contests his prestige, his morality, his social standing, his power, and his eminence□the very conditions of achievement and character that authorize the autobiography in the first place. Such humor at the expense of the very proprieties and attainments he cares so much about does not subvert them, however. We continue to believe in the proper Twain even as he proclaims and reveals his improprieties. His revelations of questionable self are just jokes, made funny to the degree that they are improbable. Ironically, then, the more he uses humor to display an improper self, the more he actually evokes the presence of the proper one. To put it another way, Mark Twain actually flaunts his propriety by comically declaring his impropriety.

Source: Leland Krauth, "Personage," in *Proper Mark Twain,* University of Georgia Press, 1999, pp. 219-50.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, Kiskis examines Twain's reliance on "collaborating" trying his work out on family and friends in his creative process, especially in the creation of his autobiography.

Our understanding of Mark Twain's creative process continues to be obscured by the complex myth that he, his heirs (literary and legal), and his critics have suggested and reinforced. It is a myth that has been fostered by Twain's own descriptions of his work habits, descriptions that have been too quickly accepted by critics as well as Twain enthusiasts. The myth suggests that Twain avoided work, that he was not interested in the mechanics of composing beyond the accumulation of words and pages, and, perhaps most importantly, that his use of various editors (Mary Fairbanks, Olivia Langdon Clemens, William Dean Howells, Albert Bigelow Paine) was based on a basic and one-way relationship. Twain composed, and then editors excised. Despite the work that Bernard DeVoto, Henry Nash Smith, Walter Blair, James Cox, Alan Gribben, and Everett Emerson have given us, the myth persists. We are notoriously accepting of the Mark Twain persona that Samuel Clemens projected the lazy and uninterested writer, the "jack-leg" writer who felt chained to the pen when he would much rather lounge and speculate on new business dealings. Samuel Clemens, however, the man behind the persona, promoted the image of the lazy and disinterested writer as part of his performance as Mark Twain. Clemens's often stated reliance on his imaginative "well" has become legendary. He is dismissed as incapable of disciplined thought, and his seemingly passive acceptance of editorial advice is presented as a conscious attempt to use others to support his composing process.

Recent critical work (especially that of Victor Doyno in *Writing Huck Finn* and Laura Skandera- *Trombley in Mark Twain in the Company of Women,* an examination of Clemens's reliance on the women in his circle) introduces us not to a passive and submissive Clemens but to a writer who courted intense personal and primary relationships in order to give tone and substance to his storytelling, both fiction and non-fiction. While Clemens's sensitivity to his audience has long been accepted, this new work demonstrates how Clemens remained tuned to the needs of real readers throughout his creative process and how he adjusted his prose so that it would more effectively approach reader expectations. Most importantly, it demonstrates how he understood and made constant use of collaborative relationships and how he invited a range of opinion and a chorus of voices into his creative process as he struggled to give shape to his creations. A primary critical focus on his relationships with various editors, censors, and advisors has been directed toward his fiction; however, collaboration also played a vital role in Clemens's approach to autobiography. An examination of Clemens's collaborative efforts at autobiography offers us a new and valuable insight into the creative approaches Clemens adopted early on and then reclaimed during the final years of his life. It also offers us an important insight into his reliance on a variety of "editors" and the specific roles that succeeding editors would play in extending the life of the tales and manuscripts that Clemens bundled together as his autobiography.

Clemens began to compose autobiography as early as 1870, but he did not fully engage in the process of recollecting his past until late in 1905 when he was approached by Albert Bigelow Paine who proposed a formal and authorized biography. During those thirty-five years, Clemens made brief and long-separated attempts at writing and dictating portions of autobiography which he would then set aside, feeling only an occasional impulse to return to the project but with no firm plan for an extended effort. Some of these fragments, it would appear, helped him to rehearse settings and tales for his fiction. The early manuscripts written between 1870 and 1876 conform to the conventional approach to ' reflective writing in which the writer attempts to build a bridge to his past by examining episodes out of his prior experience. In Clemens's case, this meant creating sketches only several paragraphs long, a form with links to his talent for short, precise vignettes like those strung together in the chapters of *The Innocents Abroad, Roughing It, A Tramp Abroad, and even The Adventures of Tom Sawyer.* In these sketches, he attempts to reclaim a sense of the contrast between his present and his past. Longer autobiographical fragments□the Grant Dictations of 1885 and the dictations begun in Florence during 1904□were composed in the presence of a "shorthander" or stenographer. These later selfcontained descriptions of Clemens's experiences are precursors of a form of collaboration Clemens would pursue more energetically in his autobiographical dictations of 1906-1909.

Clemens used the dictating sessions of 1885 and 1904 to record immediate ideas and impressions. James Pond, Clemens's lecture agent, worked with him on the Grant material; Isabel Lyon, recently hired to help carry some of the weight of the household, took down Clemens's 1904 Florence observations. Neither of these attempts at working with an amanuensis was Clemens's first such attempt. The very notion of working with a stenographer appears quite early. During his 1872 trip through England, Clemens wrote to Olivia: "If I could take notes of all I hear said, I should make a most interesting book□but of course these things are interminable□only a shorthand reporter could seize them." In 1873, he hired S. C. Thompson, a theological student, to accompany him to England and to keep notes and records of the trip; in 1883 he hired Roswell H. Phelps, a stenographer for the Continental Life Insurance Company of Hartford, to accompany him during his tour of the Mississippi River, although Phelps would not complete the trip. Clemens also dictated portions of *The American Claimant* and even toyed with the idea of dictating onto wax cylinders as a way to increase his output.

While these events demonstrate Clemens's interest in dictating as one method of composing, they hardly suggest collaboration. The early experiences with Thompson, Phelps, and Pond do not suggest any attempt to share the work of composition. They were there to take down notes and ideas and reactions, not to take an active role in composing text. In Phelps's case, Clemens used dictated material much later when he wrote *Life on the Mississippi*. Even Clemens's earlier□and rather quickly aborted□attempt at collaboration, a scheme to engage John Henry Riley to dispatch notes from South Africa so that Clemens could build a book on diamond mining by surrounding those notes with his own reactions and ideas, was more collaborative in spirit. Besides, Clemens certainly had neither wish nor intention to share either the composition or the credit with any other person. He shared bylines only with Charles

Dudley Warner, Bret Harte, and William Dean Howells, but even then there was usually some tension between the collaborators.

During the 1870s and 1880s, Clemens was riding the crest of his own creativity. He was thus not interested in sharing the fruits of that success. He was, however, interested in using those around him to help him sharpen his storytelling. That interest led him to collaborate with family members by reading the day's work to them in order to gauge their reaction. Historically, critical confusion over Olivia's role as reader and censor has resulted in misinterpretations of Clemens's own descriptions of those evening readings. Clemens's desire to use an audience of auditors was also behind his repeated pleas to Howells for editorial support. On one level, these are simply attempts to try his material out "on the dog," attempts to get some notion of how the work was progressing and whether he should "edit" material out. But what seemed either a game or a serious attempt at censorship, in various critical interpretations, was more likely Clemens's shrewd attempt to use a representative audience to see whether his work might have broader appeal. More specifically, Clemens used his wife and their daughters Susy, Clara, and Jean as a focus group to determine how his work would play to a wider audience. Later, he would look back at this period as among the more peaceful and creatively satisfying of his life. As the century came to a close, however, Clemens faced the loss of the support network that had sustained his work. He was geographically separated from Howells, Livy's illness took her further out of the circle of creative partners, and his daughters were maturing and looking to wean themselves from the family. Susy's death in 1896, Jean's increasingly serious epilepsy, and Clara's attempt to create her own life and singing career contributed to Clemens's physical and psychological isolation. With Livy's death in 1904, Clemens lost the creative compass that held him on course, and he began a methodical search for a new network that would sustain his creativity. He would spend the final decade of his life in a sometimes desperate attempt to recapture the muse that escaped him when the family circle was broken.

With these circumstances as background, we can better understand not only why Clemens began to show more interest in autobiography but also why he returned to dictation of his material. One of its primary attractions was the prospect of telling tales to a captive and appreciative audience. That notion began to take shape with Isabel Lyon in Florence as Clemens turned to the practice of dictating in the face of Olivia's deteriorating health. While the balance of the Florence materials is rather bland, with the exception of several nasty entries focusing on the Clemenses' landlady, it is clear that Clemens saw the work as important to his own peace of mind. Years earlier, he had retreated into work after Susy's death and produced his longest and most effective piece of autobiographical writing to date□"Ancestors." With Livy's decline, he found a similar solace in the production of dictated text. In keeping with a practice that was particularly useful as he constructed *Following the Equator,* he attempted to infuse the later sections of the Florence dictations with an additional power and poignancy by returning to his notebooks to offer pieces of his earlier descriptions of Florence in 1892 so as to contrast with the 1904 experience. The mixture of dictation and notebook materials shows Clemens's interest not only in his work with an amanuensis but also with the idea of placing his own past on display and of running that past head on into

the present like, as he said later, "the contact of faint with steel." For a very brief period, that mixture fostered a collaboration with his own younger and happier self.

Livy's death on June 4, 1904, threw Clemens into personal and creative chaos. His family, in effect, became fractured. Clara entered a New York rest-cure where Clemens was not allowed to visit, Jean and Isabel Lyon spent a long stretch in the Berkshires, and Clemens himself arranged for new living quarters in New York. He continued to work, with "Eve's Diary" being published in 1905, "Adam's Diary" being revised, "3,000 Years Among the Microbes" and a section of the Mysterious Stranger saga being begun. The prospect of gathering a circle of admiring listeners seems to have helped convince Clemens not only of the entertainment value of being interviewed by Paine for the biography but also of the creative potential offered by dictating material to a waiting and eager stenographer as grist for an autobiography that would both extend copyright on many of his earlier works by using portions as preface material and also keep Mark Twain before the reading public. Clemens adapted his notion of collaboration to fit the moment. For the biography, Paine would be able to use the autobiography that Clemens produced; Clemens himself would be able to sit and tell his stories to his audience and recapture some of the creative energy that emanated from the family gatherings at which he formerly read the day's work. Clemens would be free to weave a complicated quilt that would map his mind's wandering. He would survey his memories, introduce contemporary issues, even drop whole newspaper articles, letters, essays, and fiction into the massive collection. As early as March, 1906, he concocted an idea of an autobiography that would require an entire state to contain its volumes. The captive audience of Paine, Lyon, and Josephine Hobby, the first of several stenographers employed by Clemens, seemed perfectly to aid Clemens as he worked to recapture the creative momentum that was his while his family circle had been intact.

Paine describes the dictating sessions as taking on the aspect of performance: "We were watching one of the great literary creators of his time in the very process of his architecture. We constituted about the most select audience in the world enjoying what was, likely enough, its most remarkable entertainment." He records Clemens's description of his return to dictating: "'With shorthand dictation one can talk as if he were at his own dinner-table□always a most inspiring place. I expect to dictate all the rest of my life, if you good people are willing to come and listen to it.'" Of course, they kept coming. The constellation of agendas guaranteed that each member of the little band preserved his or her own vested interest in continuing the sessions. Paine and Lyon, the two minor players in the intimate audience, were each marrying their futures to a connection with Clemens. Paine's interests lay in a projected biography, which made it imperative that he forge both professional and personal relationships with Clemens in order to assure continued access to source materials. As the biographical process continued, Paine's interest focussed on maintaining the public persona, the public icon that Clemens had established for Mark Twain. On the other hand, Lyon's mixture of literary ambition□she was to be an editor of Clemens's correspondence□and personal interest□her personal affection for Clemens grew deeper as time passed□seem directed toward creating a safe environment for the aging writer. At the center of all the creative and emotional attention, Clemens immediately sensed the value of recording the re-creation of his past.

As the dictations moved ahead, they became the locus for the self-mythologizing at which Clemens was now so expert. Paine found out the hard way that Clemens was using the dictations both to review and to re-create his past. At times, Paine discovered, Clemens became caught in the web of creative memory:

It was not for several weeks that I began to realize that those marvelous reminiscences bore only an atmospheric relation to history; that they were aspects of biography rather than its veritable narrative, and built largely□sometimes wholly□from an imagination that, with age, had dominated memory, creating details, even reversing them, yet with a perfect sincerity of purpose on the part of the narrator to set down the literal and unvarnished truth . . . His gift of dramatization had been exercised too long to be discarded now.

Paine came to believe that the material was infected by dramatization, a belief that drove a wedge between his work as a biographer and Clemens's as autobiographer, between the work of historian and storyteller. Clemens, it seemed, was using the contrasting approaches to break free from the traditional demands of verisimilitude placed on biography in order to move back to the by-nowfamiliar, perhaps inevitable, blending of life and fiction that had been the foundation for his halfcentury of storytelling. As Paine came to realize the conflicting approaches, he drew a distinction between the materials related to Livy and Susy as being different from the other materials.

The things he told of Mrs. Clemens and of Susy were true□marvelously and beautifully true, in spirit and in aspect□and the actual detail of these mattered little in such a record. The rest was history only as *Roughing* It is history, or the *Tramp Abroad;* that is to say, it was fictional history, with fact as a starting-point.

This is, most likely, a distinction driven by Paine's own agenda to assure his readers of the quality and consistency of Clemens's approach to the autobiography. It certainly points to a symbiotic relationship between his and Clemens's work which makes them individual halves that need to be brought together to appreciate the life whole and entire. Paine's focus on truth "in spirit and in aspect," in other words truth based on the consistency of the teller's voice and tone, is closely allied to Clemens's concept of a truth created both by words and the impression left for the reader to find "between the lines," one which leaves at issue the possibility of verifiable truth outside the reader/writer relationship. On a more practical level, it not only sets up the biography as a necessary historical check to Clemens's creative wanderings but also lays the early groundwork for the two-volume autobiography that Paine would publish in 1924.

What is important here is the emphasis on performance and the way that Clemens intentionally and expertly places himself at the center of a creative process that ultimately recasts the collaborative relationship as one that□unlike his earlier episodes that begged for clear advice or at least clear vocal reaction from his family□uses a silent presence to stoke his talk. He is not looking for editorial advice but, rather, for appreciative listeners who will hang on his every word. In fact, what appear to be unrehearsed comments and reactions are often best related to Clemens's rehearsed stage appearances. Contrary to the evidence of Clemens's and even Paine's

descriptions of the dictating sessions, the formal sessions were not the only venue for Clemens's use of audience to ignite his own creativity. Clemens, in fact, augmented the emotive power of the dictating sessions by frequent rehearsals with Isabel Lyon during the morning prior to the arrival of the stenographer and the beginning of the formal dictating session. Increasingly, Clemens needed an audience□even an audience of one□to prompt, but not interrupt, his talk. The audience□the listeners to his talk rather than the readers of his writing or the commentators on his writing□aided in the production of text. It was an effective, if somewhat unusual, use of his relatively new immediate social circle.

This immediate audience, however, was not only a boon to Clemens's work, enabling him to excavate stories and to amass text. It was also one of the primary influences on Clemens's approach to storytelling itself. That small audience, closed and comfortable and congenial, for the most part adoring, lent an element of informality to the enterprise, even though that informality did not extend to the possibility of their interrupting his monologue or diverting his dictation toward conversational give and take. Clemens's analogy to the dinner table is key to our understanding of how he played off his loyal listeners not only because it places him at center stage but also because of the subtle suggestion that they are guests who may or may not be invited again. Still later, Clemens's habit of dictating from his bed, in effect a revision of his practice of welcoming visiting reporters to conduct their interviews while he lounged comfortably in bed, suggested an atmosphere steeped in confidence, safety, and confidentiality. In fact, that atmosphere seems another revision of yet another of Clemens's storytelling experiences, a revised version of Clemens's own memories of the storytelling that echoed in the cabin at Angel's Camp□or around the real and metaphorical camp fires of the west□or within frontier kitchens and slave quarters. Each locus of storytelling enhances the potential for a variety of tales and emphasizes the creation of a community defined and restricted, and yet somehow inviting and welcoming, by shared stories. The mixed atmosphere allowed Clemens to offer a full range of tales and observations□some of which he would eventually hold back from publication because he felt that his comfort had allowed him to range far from the content and tone that would make for proper reading. Some of these, he would announce, were being held back in order to whet public appetite, as for example when, during his first six months of work, Clemens gave his agents instructions to withhold the material generated during twenty-six of the seventy-eight dictating sessions. This entire series of tales and recollections e-connected him to the base-line value of talk itself.

As he warmed to the return to oral storytelling, Clemens used his tales to introduce a variety of voices, not only those of actual people he had known but those he himself invented, as he orchestrated the autobiography. His voices are many, and they are complex. Unlike the rather simple juxtaposition of present and past that Clemens used in "Early Years in Florida, Missouri" or in the Florence dictations, the dictations of 1906-1909 present a broader and more complex picture of Clemens as he approaches the tales of his own past from the perspective of seventy years and a full experience with life and death, success and disappointment at his disposal. He adjusts his own voice as he moves among the tales: he is calm and reflective when he speaks of Susy and Livy; angry and defiant when he blasts his various editors; uncompromising when he issues

judgments on politicians and contemporary political scandals; shrill when he addresses the practices of an unjust deity; remorseful as he considers his own role in the financial problems that haunted his family.

Of the voices that Clemens adopted, and perhaps the most useful in establishing a relation between him and his audience (both immediate and future), was his guise as a dead man. He announced that he would play this role as early as 1904:

In this Autobiography I shall keep in mind the fact that I am speaking from the grave. I am literally speaking from the grave, because I shall be dead when the book is issued from the press.

This idea of grave speech (perhaps a genre unto itself) regulated Clemens's approach to the dictations. It is one of the primary motifs that run through the typescripts. The pose□itself a mixture of indifferent, disconnected voices□gave Clemens the opportunity to integrate his present and future audiences and to use this composite to gauge his success at creating a serious and effective story. As he wove what he hoped would eventually become a tale renowned for its truthfulness (whether that truth came out directly in his words or indirectly in the impressions that would be left to be discovered between the lines), he was aided by both his actual and imagined audience as he drew a shade of intimacy around these confidantes who were sharing the wanderings and workings of his mind. It is, of course, one more instance of Clemens collaborating with silent listeners to tease out what he felt were his most private thoughts.

Each day found Clemens ready. He would often slide into new topics in order to explore a particularly nagging question or issue. This mixture does not easily allow for easy characterization. In fact, the broad expanse of the dictations in raw form is intimidating for any reader, although their length is not as daunting as the shifts among topics. For example, from the initial burst on January 6, 1906, that begins in his thirtieth year and focuses on his Nevada experiences, Clemens detours into contemporary events. The look at his present interests keeps him solidly interested until January 19, when he returns to the topic of his experiences in Nevada. The loudest voice in this series may be that of the tour guide who is pleased to meander along wherever the paths he opens might lead. At one point, Clemens claims, "In this autobiography it my purpose to wander whenever I please and come back when I am ready."

That self-assured and relaxed voice is at the heart of the dictations. It leads us through a series of day-long and month-long episodes that have their own particular focus. Still, only when reading the full collection of materials does a reader come away with a sense of the intellectual territory that Clemens was attempting to map. The final scheme is best described as a collection of linked tales. Clemens's survey extends from a host of dictations in February, 1906, that deal broadly with family concerns through a series of commentaries devoted to his career, accounts that speed through April and May and June of 1906 and on into a brief series devoted to the relationship between man and God. The collection of topics and themes continues through 1907 and 1908 as Clemens offers his readers a tour not only through the events of his life but of the very process of storytelling itself. As the dictations move ahead, in fact, it is quite reasonable to see the

broad sweep as an extended experiment in practical storytelling rather than as a deep analysis of a life. Throughout the dictations, we never lose sight of the ever-present audience. Neither does Clemens.

But Clemens could not sustain the full weight of the dictations himself: not even his powerful and compelling voice would support the structure he was attempting to build. And he knew it. One way to turn away from a dependence on his solitary voice was to import tales from other sources. Clemens's sensitivity to the voice in his fiction□a voice like that which resonates through Huckleberry Finn, Hank Morgan, Roxana, and Mark Twain□sent him off to scour the autobiographical materials he had accumulated as well as his own journals and notebooks. More than that, however, it pushed him to search other (and external) sources: from newspaper accounts to letters, from the morning's post to the biography of him that Susy wrote when she was thirteen years old, to the journals that Ralph Ashcroft kept during the 1907 visit to England. Clemens used all of these materials: he would carefully and scrupulously juxtapose their stories with a flurry of his own commentaries and observations. Newspaper clippings appear throughout the dictations and provide Clemens with grist for his disillusionment with American politics and policy (he being particularly fond of blasting Theodore Roosevelt). In later dictations, he turns his attention to tales he finds in letters that he receives. Susy's biography appears in twenty-six of the dictations that Clemens completed during 1906; his responses to her writing formed the most effective and most emotional recurring thread within the first year's dictalions. Ralph Ashcroft's notes begin to appear in August, 1907, and play an important supporting role in the series of dictations during July, August, September, and October, 1907, that describe Clemens's trip to Oxford. During 1908, Clemens incorporates letters and writing samples from Dorothy Quick, the model for his aquarium of Angel Fish, and follows his established pattern of excerpt followed by his own commentary.

My main point, however, is not merely the specific trajectories of Clemens's interest but rather certain patterns of dependence that Clemens establishes early in the dictating process. At its most basic, the need for external aids was a part of his career as a writer: a host of his books from *The Innocents Abroad to Roughing It to Life on the mississippi to Following the Equator* relied heavily on gathered materials. With the turn to autobiography, however, his reliance on notebooks, journals, and correspondence, as well as on the physical presence of a select audience, became even more profound. His need to identify, include, and expand on external sources and influences increased as he dove into the final series of dictations. In fact, the use of bits and pieces of external materials□from clippings to full literary works□acted as a stimulant. The chorus, perhaps the chaos, of voices helped Clemens adjust the tone and vibration of his commentary. He could act as a foil for the honest and innocent and cutting observations of his children; he could adopt the swagger of celebrity to intimidate any number of literary or business adversaries. The external voices could move him to deep sentiment or mild amusement or spitting anger. At its most mundane, his collection of manuscripts simply gave him something to talk about when his creative well was low. At its most inspired, it energized his attempt to escape the constraints of time.

All of this collecting and excerpting and commenting is supplementary to Clemens's well-established dependence upon his small and captive audience. He uses both to enhance the creative process, a process that he seems genuinely incapable of engaging without the support of these collaborators. Of course, the primary voice and perspective throughout is Clemens's; however, he clearly understands and makes allowances for the difficulty of the task he has set for himself. By the time Clemens began away from writing books, except for the rare exceptions of (1904), *What is Man?* (*published* in 1906 but written in 1898), *Christian Science* (1907) and "Extract from Captain Storm field's Visit to Heaven" (1908), which were not particularly successful either financially or artistically. The dictations□a project that he originally envisioned to require some 600,000 words□was far beyond any project he had ever attempted during his prime. His ability to begin and complete the project was assured by his ability to depend so completely on collaboration.

The collaborative work on Clemens's autobiography, however, did not end with his final scratch of pen on paper for his description of Jean Clemens's death on December 24, 1909, or with his own death on April 10, 1910. Clemens did plan and oversee the publication of a portion of his autobiographical manuscripts in the *North American Review* of 1906-1907. Subsequently, his materials have been presented to the public in several competing versions. The competition to define Clemens's autobiography began in 1924 when Albert Bigelow Paine published his two-volume *Mark Twain's Autobiography.* Paine offered both written and dictated material and arranged the pieces in the order of composition, a plan that Clemens would have approved. Unfortunately, Paine not only presented a mere handful of dictations, material that extends from January through April, 1906, but also edited sections of the pre-1906 manuscripts that would seem to taint Clemens's status as an American icon. A radically different version was published by Bernard DeVoto as *Mark Twain in Eruption* in 1940. While including material that was not part of Paine's edition, DeVoto arranges the material in thematic cluster□a useful compilation but one that altered Clemens's own scheme. Charles Neider's revised version *The Autobiography of Mark Twain* (1959) takes the autobiographical manuscripts and fashions them into a conventional cradle-to-grave chronology, also violating Clemens's instructions. Clemens's own version of his autobiography that he published as "Chapters from My Autobiography" in the *North American Review* were issued as a single text in 1990 as *Mark Twain's Own Autobiography: The Chapters from the "North American Review."* Each edition is, in fact, a collaborative work between Clemens's text□if not Clemens himself□and an individual editor. No version presents the whole of the autobiographical manuscripts; such an edition is still in the planning stages by the Mark Twain Project at the University of California at Berkeley.

All of this has about it a bit of the child's game "telephone." It is a simple game, but it presents us with an analogy that helps to explain the difficulty that is part of any exploration of Clemens's autobiographical work. To play this game, children establish a sequence, e.g., a line or a circle. The first child begins by whispering a sentence to the next in line. That child whispers what he or she has heard to the next. And so on. And so on. The last child in line announces the sentence to the group after it has made the rounds. Invariably, by the time the last child speaks, the simple sentence has been

transformed: "The fox ran to the tree ahead of the dogs" becomes "The dog rested his head on the box." In Clemens's version of the game, he plays the role of several children. His first version of a tale is rehearsed before the arrival of stenographer and biographer, the dictation is recorded, Clemens edits the typescript, the tale is redone. Then editors come along and choose, edit, and rearrange the material. While individual episodes may remain intact, the whole of the autobiography may be distorted as editors place their own stamp upon and infuse their own voice into the text; voice, after all, is affected by the order and arrangement of material which often helps to set the tone for a work. Paine, DeVoto, and Neider imposed their ideas upon the materials that Clemens composed and arranged. Each offered his version of what he thought was the appropriate form for the autobiography; each started with Clemens's text but then moved quite far a field. The line that runs from Clemens through Neider is very much a game of "telephone."

Ultimately, it is important to place Clemens back at the center of his creative process and reinforce his voice as the authoritative voice. The collaborative work that remains should now focus on expanding our understanding of Clemens's creative and autobiographical process. Examining the public text of Clemens's life is one way to illuminate his thinking about autobiography; examining the public text against the original materials sheds even more light on Clemens's creative choices as well as on his abilities, both strong and weak, to consider audience. We should turn away from the seductive prospect of retelling his story by adjusting his words and return to the original materials to understand the complex process in which Clemens was engaged. That approach to collaboration holds considerable scholarly and intellectual promise.

For Clemens, collaboration became a way to meet a personal and creative need. Companionship and human connection were central to the entire process of his autobiographical dictations. Dictating became a social activity, a way to keep people with him, a way to recall the intimacy of evenings surrounded by family. The very act of talking out his story brought him back to the most basic of his experiences□oral storytelling and the sharing of tales in comfortably domestic surroundings. It also brought the potential for connecting to a readership in posterity that would assure his reputation and standing as an author. It was a way to bring order and constancy to his long and often troubled life.

In the end, the complexity of the dictations suggests that Clemens actively sought order as he moved ahead with the project; the presence of a physical audience made it more likely that he would contain his wanderlust and control bundles of tales by staying within admittedly loose chronological and thematic sequences. The collaboration introduced a structure, at times a discipline. One result is that Clemens is at once navigator and guide, architect and engineer. He steers the story along the current, and he ties up at a network of interconnecting lattices. Yet neither drift nor design offers a single strand that runs from end to end. Stories connect at well-timed junctures and lead both writer and audience to an insight into the writer's process and personality with each new turn and dip. Clemens aims at painting the full portrait using an effective blend of language and silence. The silence of quiet listeners as well as the silence that inhabits the space between the lines of story becomes an effective collaborator as Clemens creates his

life. Returning to this basic tale□and to the context in which that tale was composed□will allow us to look behind the myth of Mark Twain, and it will free the original tale from the editorial round-robin that has so confused our image of Clemens.

Source: Michael J. Kiskis, "Mark Twain and Collaborative Autobiography," in *Studies in the Literary Imagination,* Vol. XXIX, No. 2, Fall 1996, pp. 27-40.

Topics for Further Study

In his autobiography, Twain admits that he does not always give the correct facts about his life. Write a short biography about your own life, in which you deliberately embellish some of the details.

Clemens created the pseudonym Mark Twain from a term he learned while working as a riverboat pilot. Create a pseudonym for yourself that is derived from your own life experiences, then write a short essay explaining from where the name comes and how it symbolizes your personality.

Twain does not follow a true chronological format when describing the events of his life. Organize the major journeys of his life in chronological order, then plot them on a world map.

Twain bought a number of patents for inventions, and in one case even invented his own scrapbook. Research the process one takes when securing a patent, then create a sample patent for a new invention, either based on an existing product or one of your own ideas.

Research the reasons why the Civil War began and the main effects the North's victory had on life in the United States. Write a short essay explaining what life might be like today if the Confederate South had won the war

Compare and Contrast

1860s: The United States engages in the Civil War, a ground battle that divides the country and claims the lives of more than six hundred thousand Americans.

Today: Americans unite in their support of the war on international terrorism, instigated by a terrorist act on September 11, 2001, that claimed the lives of several thousand Americans. This new kind of war relies heavily on behind-the-scenes intelligence efforts, and the use of military ground forces and air strikes.

1860s: America experiences an increase in leisure travel, due in large part to the expanding railroad network which triggers a decline in domestic travel by slower, steam-powered river boats.

Today: Many Americans travel to all parts of the world for both work and pleasure. The fastest form of commercial air travel, the supersonic Concorde, can travel at more than two thousand miles per hour.

1860s: James Redpath establishes the first official lecture management agency in America, capitalizing on the increase in popularity of lectures by major and minor celebrities.

Today: Many celebrities find a wide audience for their ideas on television talk shows, and most have an agent or manager who books engagements for them.

What Do I Read Next?

Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895) is a classic Civil War novel that claims to gives a first-hand, realistic account of the war experience, which is often traumatic and without glory.

The Luck of Roaring Camp and Other Writings (1869) is a collection of some of Bret Harte's best-known works. Harte was at the forefront of American literature in his day, and paved the way for many great authors, including Mark Twain.

Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* (1901) is the story of an orphaned Irish boy in India, who is recruited by the British Government as a spy to help keep reign over Indian soil. In his autobiography, Mark Twain says this is his favorite book.

Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,* originally published in 1884, is considered by many to be a seminal work of American fiction. *The Annotated Huckleberry Finn* (2001), edited by Michael Patrick Hearn, includes the original tale, a lengthy introduction that details the book's history, the author's intentions, the critical reception, and an exhaustive collection of explanatory notes and Twain quotes that run alongside the text.

Mark Twain's *The Complete Humorous Sketches and Tales of Mark Twain* (1996), edited by Charles Neider, demonstrates why people often appreciate Twain's humor.

Mark Twain's *Innocents Abroad; or the New Pilgrims' Progress* (1869) is a humorous narrative about Twain's steamship voyage to Europe.

When Mark Twain's *Joan of Arc* was published in 1895, readers noted the striking difference in tone from the author's other works. Twain spent more than a decade researching Joan's story and developed his narrative from the point of view of Louis de Conte□using a translation of Conte's memoirs□who was with Joan from her beginning as a peasant until he served as defense counsel at her trial.

Mark Twain's *Life on the Mississippi* (1876) details his childhood experiences as a worker on a steamboat that traveled up and down the Mississippi River.

Mark Twain's *Roughing* It (1872) is an account of his many adventures journeying to and living in the developing American West.

Further Study

Budd, Louis J., Critical Essays on Mark Twain, 1867-1910, G. K. Hall & Co., 1982.

This collection features a number of the key criticisms of Twain's works during his lifetime.

Davis, David Brion, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture,* Oxford University Press, 1988.

This classic, Pulitzer Prize-winning study examines slavery from historical and sociological perspectives.

DeVoto, Bernard, The Riverside Press, 1951.

This informative book, by the editor of the second version of Twain's autobiography, discusses Twain within the context of the times in which he lived, and answers some of the critical attacks on Twain.

Gandy, Joan W., and Thomas H. Gandy, *The Mississippi Steamboat* Era in Historic Photographs: Natchez to New Orleans 1870-1920, Dover Publications, 1989.

This book chronicles the culture of steamboats through photos and essays from the Civil War until the beginning of the twentieth century.

Meinig, D. W., *The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History, Vol. 3, Transcontinental America,* 1850-1915, Yale University Press, 2000.

This book contains a detailed account about the country's geographical development from the mid-nineteenth century until the beginning of World War I.

Powers, Ron, *Dangerous Water: A Biography of the Boy Who Became Mark Twain,* Basic Books, 1999. This biography by a fellow Missouri native discusses the real-life Clemens in context with the Twain pseudonym and icon, which the author says helped launch Twain as the first American media superstar.

Turner, Frederick Jackson, *The Frontier in American History* Dover Publications, 1996.

Originally published in 1920, this classic book on the American frontier explains how and why the United States became the country that it is.

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Rexroth, Kenneth, "Humor in a Tough Age," in *Nation,* Vol. 188, March 7, 1959, pp. 211-13.

Sanoff, Alvin P., "Autobiography and the Craft of Embellishment,"in *U.S. News and World Report,* Vol. 107, No. 16,October 23, 1989, p. 64.

Willis, Resa, *Mark and Livy: The Love Story of Mark Twain and the Woman Who (Almost) Tamed Him,* TV Books Inc.,2000, p. 73.

BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Nonfiction Classics for Students (NCfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, NCfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on

□classic□ novels frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NCfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NCfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NCfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NCfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NCfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Nonfiction Classics for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NCfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NCfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Nonfiction Classics for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Nonfiction Classics for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NCfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Nonfiction Classics for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NCfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Nonfiction Classics for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NCfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Nonfiction Classics for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NCfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Nonfiction Classics for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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