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Literary criticism contained in the works of Mark Twain

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LITERARY CRITICISM
CONTAINED
in the
WORKS OF MARK TWAIN

by

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ter of Arts.

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INTRODUCTION

Brander Matthews knows his literature, and loves it; he can talk about it and keep his temper; he can state his case so lucidly and so fairly and so forcibly that you have to agree with him, even when you don't agree with him; and he can discover and praise such merits as a book has even when they are half a dozen diamonds scattered through an acre of mud, and so he has a right to be a critic. To detail just the opposite of the above invoice is to describe me. I haven't any right to criticize books, and I don't do it except when I hate them.1

The above statement contained in a letter written by Twain in his later years seems to disclaim any possibility that he might in the future be even remotely considered in the field of literary criticism. Nevertheless, many critical comments, literary as well as social, can be found dispersed throughout Twain's many works. Since Twain's contributions to social criticism have already been well established, it is the primary purpose of this thesis to deal with his literary judgments. Even so, social criticism cannot be entirely disregarded for, although there is no evidence of Twain's having written book reviews or critical books as such, there is much evidence of social criticism which may also be taken as literary criticism. Twain's criticism, we must remember, was the broad criticism of the sentimentalism characteristic of the

majority of the writing done during the 1840's through the 1860's. True, Twain does criticize Cooper and Scott severely, but only because he considers them "true exemplars" of an age and type of writing he abhors. With the exception of Cooper, Scott and Harte, Twain rarely reflectively castigates individual writers, and then only when they, too, contribute to the literary trend of the times.

Thus, it follows that a full understanding of Twain's literary criticism necessitates a familiarity with the background of the age and type of literature he so vehemently objects to, the excessively sentimental literature of the early and mid-nineteenth century. Since Twain restricts the major part of his criticism to this excessively sentimentalized type of writing truly characteristic of the period, a broad definition of the term sentimentalism with all its attributes becomes necessary. A simple definition proving inadequate, it becomes necessary to define the term by means of concrete illustrations, taken from the literature of the period, of the more salient features which Twain particularly objects to.

This period, extending from 1830 to 1860, referred to by E. Douglas Branch as the "Sentimental Years," was characterized by writing based on sentiment purely for sentiment's

sake, a writing trend characteristic of the period. Feeling was considered more important than facts, and reverie rather than cerebration became the basis for formulating truths. This all-importance of feeling led to a spontaneous, moral literature characterized by mock melancholy, pathetic amour and a romantic nostalgia for the past, a past which Twain claims ought to be buried.

Spontaneity in writing was, no doubt, enhanced by the great influx of women writers on the sentimental scene. Mrs. Stowe's successful publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had induced many otherwise unlettered women to venture into the literary field. As a result the reading public was beset with much frivolous, mediocre writing, "a sentimentalized writing performed in a nervous dash with little or no regard for facts." Contrary to Twain's view, it was the general impression among most writers of the period that spontaneity in feeling and expression was actually necessary to attainment of true naturalness in writing. They further believed that facts had a tendency to destroy rather than elevate the feelings. This disregard for facts, or even a semblance of facts, depicted by Twain as one of Cooper's chief faults, is thoroughly discussed in "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses," one of Twain's few essays actually based on literary criticism.

Not only did Twain object to these spontaneous, exaggerated expressions of sentimentalized feelings, generally void of fact, but he also objected to the flowery, windy language necessarily used to express them. The following quote by Orpheus C. Kerr, office seeker during Lincoln's time, amply illustrates the grandiose oratory in vogue at the time: "The sun rushed up the eastern sky in a state of patriotic combustion, and as the dew fell upon the grassy hillside, the mountains lifted their heads and were rather green."4

Passages contained in Tom Sawyer and Life on the Mississippi also serve to illustrate Twain's dislike for flowery language. Twain, primarily a lecturer and humorist, had to depend upon concise, condensed, yet suggestive words; flowery elegance had no place in his vocabulary. Walter Blair, author of Native American Humor, in discussing Twain's characterization of Huckleberry Finn, had this to say:
"There is no sign of laborious phrasing in Huckleberry Finn. Huck's talk is precision, the imagination of poetic art; almost every critical word was exactly the right one."5 This use of the right word at the right time is another quality in which Twain finds Cooper especially lacking. Many humorous

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illustrations of the effects of Cooper's misuse of words are given in the essay, "Penimore Cooper's Literary Offenses."

Mock melancholy, another attribute of the moral, sentimental literature of the period, found its chief expression in the many obituary poems prevalent among the works of many of the women writers. Most women considered it their moral duty to give literary consolation for bereavements. Elegies were written at the slightest provocation. Death served as an inexhaustible theme, a theme that would live forever.

Mrs. Sigourney wrote one of her better elegiac verses consoling the owner of a canary which had been accidentally starved to death.6 Another was written for the father of a child "drowned in a barrel of swine's food." The elegy, although rich in consolatory sentiment, left the manner of the child's death to be explained in a prosaic subtitle, for it wasn't considered "in good taste" to write the word hog even in one's own diary, and most certainly not in a poem. Much similarity is noted between this poem and Emmeline Grangerford's "Ode to Stephen Dowling Bots, Dec'd," as presented in Twain's Huckleberry Finn.

A more gentle kind of melancholia might sometimes be

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6 Mrs. Sigourney is identified by Branch as a professional lady poet upon whom a popular balloting undoubtedly would have bestowed the national laureateship. For three years (1840-42) Godey paid her $500 annually for the use of her name as associate editor on the title page of the Lady's Book. Branch, op. cit., p. 135.
induced by simple recollection of the past. A simple childhood experience when recollected and reflected upon in the proper surroundings was sufficient to produce, not mourning or sorrow, but a vicarious titillation—some writers called it "melting." The following quotation expresses this wonderful "melting" experience most admiringly:

What better place to 'melt' in than an attic? The deep nooks housing ancient, worn-out furnishings; the unused spinning-wheel white with dust; the old faded bonnet hanging on the wall; and with luck, the raindrops chanting upon the roof and the swallow twittering under the eave. It gives one a dreamy sort of melancholy to sit in such a room.  

Even so, the romantic melancholy evoked by the attic proved no match for that aroused by the graveyard.

This nostalgia for the past contributed to furthering the already exaggeratedly sentimental, romanticized versions of the past. Most writers of the period, when dealing with the past, were prone to glorify it, a fact Twain found particularly true of Sir Walter Scott and James Fenimore Cooper. Scott's romantic portrayal of the Middle Ages where virtue prompted by chivalrous deeds always triumphed was especially ridiculed in Twain's Life on the Mississippi (1883), a book in which Twain particularly stresses Scott's negative influence on the South in general and the Southern writer in particular. Whether good or bad, Scott's influence on the writers and fictional techniques of his time is not to be

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7 Ibid., p. 153.
denied. This great influence, generally acknowledged by most prominent writers of today, is best expressed by Blair who says:

And other writers, in various ways, were influenced by Scott or the changing forces in fiction for which he stood. Scott was active in the creation of a fictional technique which stressed the relationship between characters and their background, which attempted to individualize, to localize, to particularize more than had previous fictional techniques.  

Blair in several other instances reemphasizes Scott's influence; the following quote is noteworthy:

General nature was best arrived at by localizing the characters, by giving them the special sort of imaginative solidity which derives from the sense of their being actual persons in an actual environment. The most real scenes, for the fiction reader of the day, were those which corresponded most readily with what he recognized as common in actual life.

Although Blair believes Scott to have achieved this end, the portraying of actual persons in an actual environment, most successfully, Twain presents quite a different view.

This nation-wide influence of Scott Twain localizes particularly in the South, since the North was able to break away from the yoke of Scott, while the South remained enchained to Twain's day, and would probably remain so, thought Twain, for all time.

Cooper's romantic treatment of the Indian was described by Twain as a subjectively fantastic, windy Indian

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8 Blair, op. cit., p. 33.
9 Ibid., p. 34.
worship. Cooper's Indians were too subjective; too much white was visible beneath the war paint. Twain saw this romanticism of the pioneer in relation to the Indian as a part of that instinct by which new peoples attempt to enrich themselves from old. Rourke says:

About the Indian figure the American seemed to wrap a desire to return to the primitive life of the wilderness. In the Indian novels and plays, he could drench himself in melancholy remembrance of the time when the whole continent was untouched.¹⁰

This tendency to cling to the past, the worshiping of traditions and the faulty idealization of the Indian, discouraged, Twain thought, all attempts at originality. This lack of originality Twain believed to be especially noticeable in Cooper's Leather Stocking Tales. To further illustrate this tendency Twain in Innocents Abroad makes use of a fictitious author, Grimes, of a fictitious book, Nomadic Life in Palestine, to illustrate the excessively romantic literature being produced about the Holy Land.

In addition to its extreme sentimentality, most contemporary literature was wont to have a moral attached to it. The general consensus was that "the real superiority of American literature should be its grasp of and subordination to morality."¹¹ To most writers the volume of life ever opened

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¹⁰ Rourke, op. cit., p. 115.

¹¹ Branch, op. cit., p. 128.
at the moral. Every object of the creation when examined closely was found to contain a moral by which the individual might learn and profit. The very leaf one trod beneath his foot was considered emblematical of his mortality. Moral significance was particularly profuse in nature, a fact of which Elizabeth Cokes Smith continually reminded her readers. "There is not a spray which yields its tribute to the wind," she says, "that hath not a lesson in its shiver and a moral in its sound."\textsuperscript{12} Twain's criticism of this continual groping for a moral, more aptly expressed by him as "sermonizing," is presented in the ever-popular novel, \textit{Tom Sawyer}.

To better stress the morals in their writings, most authors contributing to writing during this sentimental period considered it advantageous and even necessary to resort to the use of excessively exaggerated sentimentality. Letting their feelings run away with them was, they felt, the one way in which they could reach their objectives; the most trifling matter was capable of inducing a deluge of tears, feeling was out of all proportion with the act inducing it. A profusion of tears was considered necessary for the real success of any story. Branch, in discussing these sentimental women writers, says:

\begin{quote}
The greatest achievement of any of the lady novelists by the twin test of copies sold and tears coaxed was The
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{12} Branch, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 148. Quoting Elizabeth Cokes Smith, 1806-1893, well-known author, lecturer, and reformer.
Wide, Wide World, a tale of rural life, rich in pathos, by Mrs. Susan Warner (Elizabeth Wetherell). A critic has reckoned that the heroine of The Wide, Wide World burst into tears, silent or paroxysmal, at the numerical average of every other page through the two volumes.\textsuperscript{13}

Although Twain makes several references to this excessively sentimentalized type of writing, his most noteworthy criticism is contained in his very first full-length work, Innocents Abroad, in which he makes fun of the fictitious author, Grimes.

Having amply illustrated by means of the literature of the period the broad definition of sentimentalism with all its attributes and salient features as criticized by Twain, we find it desirable to consider by way of summation a more compact, brief definition. Since sentimentalism and romanticism go "hand-in-hand" and are usually spoken of in the same breath, Branch's definition which takes both terms into consideration is probably most inclusive. Branch says:

Romanticism I take to be three-pronged: the recognition of the reality; the passing of judgment upon it; and the clinging to the myth. Sentimentalism, on the other hand, is the refusal to recognize the reality; or the inability to pass judgment upon it; and the clinging to the myth. It is the immature phase of the Romantic Movement.\textsuperscript{14}

However, Thrall and Hibbard, though they define the terms separately, see sentimentalism in two different senses. Sentimentalism used in the first sense is "characterized by

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{13} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 131.
\item \textsuperscript{14} \textit{Ibid.}, p. viii.
\end{itemize}
an overindulgence in emotion, especially the conscious effort to induce emotion in order to analyze or enjoy it; also the failure to restrain or evaluate emotion through the exercise of judgment."15 According to Thrall and Hibbard, sentimentalism in this sense is usually found in the melancholic verse of the Graveyard School, in humanitarian literature and in sentimental fiction characterized by the ever-fainting heroine. Sentimentalism as used in the second sense, however, is "an optimistic overemphasis of the goodness of humanity, representing in part a rationalistic reaction against orthodox Calvinistic theology, which regarded human nature as totally depraved."16 Sentimental comedy, fiction and primitive poetry based on "the noble savage," serve as the chief exemplars of the term as used in this second sense.

As evidenced in the foregoing illustrations, Twain's criticism, although extending to both of these phases of sentimentality, deals particularly with the first sense.

Terms having been defined, the general organization of the materials needs to be considered prior to a consideration of the thesis proper. The materials fall naturally into five main divisions: (1) social criticism which may be considered as indirect literary criticism; (2) direct, seriously intended

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16 Loc. Cit.
literary criticism of the work of Scott, Cooper, and Harte, authors who contributed greatly to the sentimental trend in writing; (3) spontaneous criticism found in sporadic, brief, passing remarks, either negative, positive, or both, which, when taken collectively, constitute some basis for evaluating Twain's innate capacity for criticism; (4) favorable criticism of the works of William Dean Howells, which serves to demonstrate the basic principles of writing which Twain considered essential to good literature; and (5) a general evaluation of Twain's contributions to the literary criticism of the period.

The discussion of Twain's direct, thoughtful, adverse literary criticism will dwell primarily on his criticism of Cooper, Scott and Harte contained in *Life on the Mississippi* and *How to Tell a Story and Other Essays*. Much social criticism which may also be taken as indirect literary criticism is to be found in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, novels concerned with such sentimental trends as spontaneity and naturalness in writing, mock melancholy, a nostalgic, romantic portrayal of the past, use of excessively fine ornamental language, excessive sentimentality characterized by a great profusion of tears and a tendency to overemphasize the moral.

All passing remarks, favorable and unfavorable, wherever contained, which might add to the accuracy of the general evaluation of Twain's criticism will be considered collectively.
The final chapter of the thesis, an evaluation of Twain's contribution to the literary criticism of the time, will be based on evidence presented throughout the thesis. No attempt will be made to establish Twain as a bona fide critic; an attempt will be made to establish only the point that Twain, voluntarily or involuntarily, was inclined to be critical of his fellow writers and that he did have definite standards, a strong sense of what good writing should be, standards which he followed and which he expected his fellow writers to follow.
CHAPTER I

INDIRECT LITERARY CRITICISM
FOUND IN TWAIN'S SOCIAL CRITICISM

In attempting to evaluate Twain as a literary critic, one finds that rarely is there any evidence of Twain's writing serious, thoughtful criticism. Most of Twain's more seriously intended criticism is contained in his essays; however, there is much casual, less-serious criticism dispersed throughout his novels, and particularly his correspondence. Since Twain did not write any book reviews or critical books as such, it becomes necessary to carefully search through these essays, novels and personal correspondence to gain an insight into his contribution to the literary criticism of his day.

In addition to the many direct comments upon literature dispersed throughout Twain's works, there is much social criticism that may also be taken as literary criticism. In his social criticism of the period 1840-60 Twain indirectly reveals the influence of exaggerated sentiment on the mores of society, mores which can actually be judged by an evaluation of the popular literature of the society. Reading interest somewhat reflects philosophy of life—the basis of social customs; thus, when criticizing social customs, one may at the same time be criticizing the literature that helped promote those customs. There are many instances where
Twain's social criticism has a direct bearing on some literary trend or type of writing. There is evidence of this type of criticism in Twain's Tom Sawyer, Huckleberry Finn, Innocents Abroad and other novels discussed in this chapter.

Innocents Abroad, Twain's first full-length novel, shows his insistence upon objectivity in reporting facts and scenes, a reflection, no doubt, of his newspaper background and a rebellion against the then generally accepted romanticized treatment of scenes and facts. He uses a fictitious author, W. C. Grimes, of a fictitious book, Nomadic Life in Palestine, to illustrate his criticism of society's nostalgically romantic attitude toward the Holy Land as reflected in the literature of the time. He vehemently criticizes Grimes' romanticized description of the beauty of Gennesaret in this book. "No ingenuity," says Twain, "could make the true picture beautiful to one's actual vision." 1 "It is an ingeniously written description well calculated to deceive. But if the paint and the ribbons and the flowers be stripped from it, a skeleton will be found beneath." 2 Twain further objects to Grimes' version of the Madonna-like beauty of the women of Nazareth. "A Madonna, whose face was the portrait of a beautiful Nazareth girl," says Grimes, "would be a 'thing of

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2 Ibid., p. 267.
beauty and a joy forever.'"3 However, Twain gives us an entirely different picture. "Arab men are often fine looking," he says, "but Arab women are not. We can all believe that the Virgin Mary was beautiful; it is not natural to think otherwise; but does it follow that it is our duty to find beauty in these present women of Nazareth?"4 Thus, here is evidenced a social criticism of the advocates of the Christian religion, a religion which always cloaked the Holy Land with beauty; a beauty Twain claimed was nonexistent.

Further criticism contained in The Innocents Abroad deals with Grimes' extremely exaggerated sentimentalism. The following quotation from "Nomadic Life in Palestine" is roundly ridiculed:

'It is no shame to have wept in Palestine. I wept when I saw Jerusalem, I wept when I lay in the starlight at Bethlehem, I wept on the blessed shores of Galilee. My hand was no less firm on the rein, my finger did not tremble on the trigger of my pistol when I rode with it in my right hand along the shore of the blue sea.' (weeping) 'My eye was not dimmed by those tears nor my heart in aught weakened. Let him who would sneer at my emotion, close this volume here, for he will find little to his taste in my journeyings through the Holy Land.'5

In referring to the above passage, Twain sarcastically remarks that Grimes never bored but he struck water. Here Twain is criticizing a society that considered it fashionable to weep.

3 Ibid., p. 296.
4 Ibid., pp. 296-97.
5 Ibid., p. 300.
at the least provocation; it is an indirect social criticism of the American trend toward Victorian "genteelness."

Twain's social criticism of the exaggerated chivalry of the South where knighthood was still influential as evidenced in the prevailing practice of dueling, and where the chivalrous attitude toward women was still in vogue, is expressed in Life on the Mississippi in an account showing the Southern reporter's tendency to eulogize womanhood. "The trouble with the Southern reporter," says Twain, "is--Woman... He is plain, and sensible, and satisfactory until woman heaves in sight. Then he goes all to pieces; his mind totters, becomes flowery and idiotic." To prove his point Twain uses a newspaper account describing the spectators at a mule race:

'It will be probably a long time before the ladies' stand presents such a foamlike loveliness as it did yesterday. The New Orleans women are always charming, but never so much so as at this time of year, when in their dainty spring costumes they bring with them a breath of balmy freshness and an odor of sanctity unspeakable. The stand was so crowded with them that walking at their feet and seeing no possibility of approach, many a man appreciated as he never did before the Peri's feeling at the Gates of Paradise and wondered what was the priceless boon that would admit him to their sacred presence.'

This eulogistic, romantic description of Southern womanhood Twain attributes to Scott's influence, for, according to Twain, it was Scott who was responsible for the South's ad-

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7 Loc. cit.
To the Middle Ages, an age characterized by exaggerated chivalry and knighthood long passed elsewhere but still prevalent in the South. This indirect social criticism serves also as literary criticism of the Southern reporters' use of a flowery type of writing.

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn contains a criticism of the society's general sentimental preoccupation with death, enhanced by the myriads of obituary poems in circulation at this time. Huckleberry, having been taken in by the Grangerfords, is saddened by the excessively sentimentalized obituary poetry which had been written by the deceased Emmeline, fifteen-year-old daughter of Colonel Grangerford. Huck feels sorry for the girl whose only theme in life seemed to have been death and the grave. He says:

This young girl kept a scrapbook when she was alive and used to paste obituaries, and accidents and cases of patient suffering in it, out of the Presbyterian Observer, and write poetry under them out of her own head. It was very good poetry. 8

Huck then proceeds to quote "Ode to Stephen Dowling Bots, Dec'd." to prove his point:

And did young Stephen sicken,
And did young Stephen die?
And did the sad hearts thicken,
And did the mourners cry?

No; such was not the fate of
Young Stephen Dowling Bots;

Though sad hearts round him thickened,  
   Twas not from sickness shots.  
   . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .  

O no. Then list with tearful eye,  
   Whilst I his fate do tell.  
   His soul did from this cold world fly  
   By falling down a well. 9

More indirect literary criticism is intermixed with the social criticism when Huck says:

If Emmeline Grangerford could make poetry like that before she was fourteen there ain't no telling what she could 'a' done by and by. Buck [Emmeline's brother] said she could rattle off poetry like nothing. She didn't ever have to stop to think. He said she could slap down a line, and if she couldn't find anything to rhyme with it would just scratch it out and slap down another one, and go ahead. She warn't particular; she could write about anything you choose to give her to write about just so it was sadful. 10

Thus, through Huck, Twain is able to give indirectly a clear sense of his negative attitude toward the loose, free style of those Romanticists who wrote spontaneously wherever and whenever the spirit moved them, about anything and everything, paying no particular attention to rhyme, form or method of procedure, and indulging in spontaneity and naturalness at the least provocation.

Twain also has further criticism for a society that permits romantic sentimentality to encroach upon art. He introduces Huck to some of Emmeline's crayon drawings.

These drawings prove sufficient reason for Twain's bitter

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9 Loc. cit.
10 Ibid., p. 143.
feelings toward the then popular sentimentality. As illustrations, one need only consider some of the more representative pictures. The first drawing to catch Huck's eye he describes most humorously. Huck says:

The picture was a young lady with her hair all combed up straight to the top of her head, and knotted there in front of a comb like a chair back, and she was crying into a handkerchief and had a dead bird laying on its back in her other hand with its heels up and underneath the picture it said, 'I Shall Never Hear Thy Sweet Chirrup More Alas' 11

This descriptive ridicule of the mock melancholy depicted in art might very well have been a specific criticism of the previously mentioned elegy Mrs. Sigourney had written consoling the owner of a canary which had been accidentally starved to death.

Another drawing, entitled "And Art Thou Gone Yes Thou Art Gone Alas" depicts a young lady at a window, looking up at the moon with tears streaming down her cheeks. She has an open letter with black sealing wax showing on one edge of it in one hand and is mashing a locket against her mouth with the other. Here Twain's criticism is two-fold, a criticism of both the excessively exaggerated melancholy and the pathetically amorous theme accompanying it. It was generally assumed that this mid-nineteenth century heroine, having lost her loved one, would die of a broken heart, the only honorable thing to do under the circumstances. This same theme is

11 Ibid., p. 141.
humorously reemphasized in Huck's description of Emmeline's final finished drawing:

This one was a woman in a slim black dress, belted small under the armpits, with bulges like a cabbage in the middle of the sleeves; and a large black scoop-shovel bonnet with a black veil, and white slim ankles crossed about with black tape, and very wee black slippers, like a chisel, and she was leaning pensive on a tombstone on her right elbow, under a weeping willow, and her other hand hanging down her side holding a white handkerchief and a reticule and underneath the picture it said 'Shall I Never See Thee More Alas.'

This drawing proved "too much" even for Huck. He could enjoy Emmeline's obituary poetry, seeing and hearing words on a page was all right, but an actual drawing, that was different; the blackness of the scene depressed him. "These was all nice pictures, I reckon," he says, "but I didn't somehow seem to take to them, because if ever I was down a little, they always give me the fan-tods." Huck was sorry Emmeline had died, but he supposed that with her disposition, she was having a better time in the graveyard, anyway.

Emmeline had been in the act of completing her greatest picture when death called. Only Huck could do justice to the actual description of this unfinished drawing:

It was a picture of a young woman in a long white gown, standing on the rail of a bridge all ready to jump off, with her hair all down her back, and looking up to the moon, with the tears running down her face, and she had two arms folded across her breast, and two arms stretched out in front, and two more reaching up toward the moon—and the idea was to see which pair would look best, and

12 Loc. cit.
13 Loc. cit.
then scratch out all the other arms; but she died before
she got her mind made up. . . . The young woman in the
picture had a kind of a nice sweet face, but there was
so many arms it made her look too spidery, seemed to me.14

Although Twain bases his criticism on Emmeline's art, he
nevertheless has as his main aim indirect literary criticism
of the sentimental writing of the period, as is evidenced by
the sentimental titles of the drawings and the fact that the
theme of one of the drawings appears to be based on an elegy
written by Mrs. Sigourney, mourning the death of a canary.

Another novel containing social criticism which may be
taken as literary criticism is Twain's *The Adventures of Tom
Sawyer*. Here Twain criticizes our educational institutions'
encouragement of a clinging to a dead past, over-sentimental-
izing and using excessively ornamental, flowery language.
However, an additional criticism of the schools' encourage-
ment of the general tendency to play "find the moral" is also
given special significance.

Twain criticizes the backwardness of the educational
methods of the time by depicting a secondary school examina-
tion in which themes are read to an audience for judgment and
approval. Representative themes bore such sentimentally
melancholy titles as: "A Missouri Maiden's Farewell to
Alabama," "Friendship," "Heart Longings," "Dream Land,
"Filial Love," and "A Vision." "The themes," says Twain,

14 Ibid., p. 142.
"were the same that had been illuminated upon similar occasions by their mothers before them, their grandmothers and doubtless all their ancestors in the female line clear back to the Crusades."

Twain also spares no words in criticizing the inveterate, intolerable sermon which wagged its crippled tail at the end of each and every one of the themes. "No matter what the subject might be," he says, "a brain-racking effort was made to squirm it into some aspect or other that the moral and religious mind could contemplate with edification."

Twain continues his onslaught on the educational methods and requirements by pointing out the glaring insincerity of the sermons:

There is no school where the young ladies do not feel obliged to close their compositions with a sermon; and you will find that the sermon of the most frivolous and the least religious girl in the school is always the longest and most relentlessly pious.

This quotation is consistent with Twain's lack of faith in human nature and is in line with the Calvinistic doctrine of the total depravity of man which rejects the excessively sentimental humanitarianism based on an exaggerated conception of brotherly love. Branch amply illustrates this exaggerated sense of brotherly love (humanitarianism at its peak), by quoting Lowell, "I go out sometimes with my heart

16 Ibid., p. 180.
17 Loc. cit.
so full of yearning toward my fellows that the indifferent look with which entire strangers pass me brings tears into my eyes."18 Twain's pessimistic outlook toward mankind, nevertheless, remained unaltered.

Twain names as the remaining prevalent features in the compositions a tendency to lug in by the ears particularly prized words and phrases until they were worn entirely out, and a tendency toward a wasteful and opulent gush of fine language. As an illustration of this excessive use of fine language, Twain quotes a paragraph from the day's prize-winning composition, "A Vision":

"Dark and tempestuous was night. Around the throne on high not a single star quivered; but the deep intonations of the heavy thunder constantly vibrated upon the ear; whilst the terrific lightning reveled in angry mood through the cloudy chambers of heaven, seeming to scorn the power exerted over its terror by the illustrious Franklin! Even the boisterous winds unanimously came forth from their mystic homes and blustered about as if to enhance by their aid the wildness of the scene."19

"This nightmare," says Twain, "occupied some ten pages of manuscript and wound up with a sermon so destructive of all hope to non-Presbyterians that it took first prize."20 Although Twain quotes from many other compositions, they need not be considered since the above illustration is representative of the majority of them. Twain concludes by explaining

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19 Twain, Tom Sawyer, p. 183.
20 Loc. cit.
through a footnote that the original source of these unaltered
pretended compositions was a volume entitled, Prose and Poetry
by a Western Lady.

Thus Twain relates his social criticism of the educa­tional methods being used in the schools directly to the
influence the sentimental writers were having in encouraging
the schools to follow the sentimental trend.

A resume of the foregoing chapter will show that much of
Twain's literary criticism is indirectly presented in his
social criticism. Twain describes the South as literarily
and socially retarded by their clinging to the Middle Ages in
their manner of expression and in their manner of living.
Social criticism of a religion which not only permitted but
insisted on a romanticized misrepresentation of the Holy Land
is also a literary criticism of the misrepresentative,
exaggerated writing in general. Likewise, the social critici­
ism of a system of education which builds a curriculum on
sentimental writing is also literary criticism. Since Twain's
direct serious criticism is so limited, the foregoing consid­
eration of social criticism taken also as indirect literary
criticism is imperative to a full understanding of Twain's
contribution to the literature of the time.
CHAPTER II

TWAIN'S DIRECT, ADVERSE LITERARY CRITICISM OF SCOTT, COOPER, AND HARTE, CONTRIBUTORS TO THE SENTIMENTAL TREND

As we have seen, part of Twain's literary criticism lies implicit in his criticism of society. An even larger part of his literary judgments may of course be found in his direct evaluation of authors and their work. However, only in a few instances does Twain voice unfavorable, direct literary criticism of specific writers, and then only when they contribute to the general trend of writing in vogue at the time. Thus, this chapter deals solely with direct, carefully considered adverse criticism of the chief exemplars of the writing characteristic of the sentimental age, namely Sir Walter Scott and James Fenimore Cooper. This limitation is justifiable due to the fact that nearly all of Twain's serious, reflective negative criticism is centered about the writings of these men. Any additional unfavorable criticism consists of sporadic, brief, spontaneous remarks which only prove valuable when taken collectively. Thus, it becomes necessary to take special cognizance of the following chapter in attempting to evaluate Twain's contributions to the adverse aspects of the literary criticism of his time.

Although Twain is equally vehement in his denunciation of Scott and Cooper, and although he points out similar
weaknesses in both writers, it seems, nevertheless, that he considers Scott more dangerous, the reason being Scott's supposedly bad influence on the South. Twain considers Scott's romantic portrayal of what Twain calls "the sham civilization of the Middle Ages" as being directly responsible for the degradation and decline of the South.

"Then comes Sir Walter Scott with his enchantments," says Twain, "and by his single might checks the wave of (Southern) progress, and even turns it back; sets the world in love with dreams and phantoms; with decayed and swinish forms of religion, with decayed and degraded systems of government; with the silliness and emptiness, sham grandeurs, sham gauds, and sham chivalries of a brainless and worthless long-vanished society. He did measureless harm; more real and lasting harm, perhaps, than any other individual that ever wrote." Twain even goes so far as to say that Scott was partly responsible for the Civil War. "Sir Walter had so large a hand," says Twain, "in making Southern character, as it existed before the war, that he is in great measure responsible for the war." Scott's glorification of an age where chivalry knew no bounds, where knights killed for the

2 Loc. cit.
3 Ibid., p. 376.
-ro pleasures of a kiss, where jousts were looked upon as "mere play," had led to a South where the duel was the only honorable way to settle an argument and where human life was considered cheap and expendable.

Even the Mardi Gras Twain considers a direct reflection of the influence of Scott's romanticism. In the North, where Scott's influence was short-lived, the Mardi Gras would have little chance of adoption and survival. "The Mardi Gras pageant," remarks Twain, "could hardly exist in the practical north; would certainly last but a brief time; as brief a time as it would last in London. For the soul of it is romantic, not the funny and the grotesque. Take away the romantic mysteries, the kings and the knights and big sounding titles and Mardi Gras would die, down there in the South. The very feature that keeps it alive in the South—girly-girly romance—would kill it in the North or London."⁴ Twain in a later work, The American Claimant (1892), reiterates the above reference to romantic big-sounding titles. Colonel Mulberry Sellers' wife, having learned that her husband is rightful heir to an English earldom and that her daughter, Sally Sellers, is now to be entitled "Lady Gwendolyn," exclaims, "But Gwendolyn! I don't know how I am ever going to stand that name. Why, a body wouldn't know Sally Sellers in it. It's too large for

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⁴ Ibid., p. 374.
kind of like a cherub in an ulster." Nevertheless, she

a roes with Mulberry (Lord Rossmore) that Sally is not likely
to find fault with it. "She takes to any kind of romantic
rubbish like she was born to it," Mrs. Sellers sadly admits.

In conjunction with the criticism of Scott's influence
on the political and social aspects of living in the South,
Twain particularly rebukes the Southern writers' tendency to
imitate his style and methods. Twain writes:

If one takes up a Northern or Southern literary periodi-
cal of forty or fifty years ago, he will find it filled
with wordy, windy, flowery 'eloquence' . . . all imitated
from Sir Walter and sufficiently badly done, too. . . .

Further criticism of Scott's misuse of language is contained
in Twain's letter to Brander Matthews. Twain puts the follow-
ing four questions to Matthews:

Are there in Scott's novels passages done in good
English--English which is neither slovenly or involved?
Did he know how to write English, and didn't do it be-
cause he didn't want to? Did he use the right word only
when he couldn't think of another one, or did he run so
much to wrong because he didn't know the right one when
he saw it?

This criticism of Scott's misuse of English is similar to
remarks made about Cooper. Misuse of the English language is
a "pet peeve" with Twain; he continually harps upon the use of the "right word," the use of words not merely for ornamentation but rather for conveying information. This principle is essential, Twain believes, to all good writing; however, it was ignored, he points out, not only by Scott, but also by Southern writers in general, the majority of whom Scott influenced. This influence Twain illustrates by quoting an article depicting the Southern reporter's tendency to be over-ornamental, "wordy," or "windy":

"On Saturday, early in the morning, the beauty of the place graced our cabin, and proud of her fair freight, the gallant little boat glided up the bayou." Twain remarks that using twenty-two words to say the ladies came aboard and the boat shoved up the creek is a clean waste of ten good words and is destructive of compactness of statement.

Another criticism dealing directly with the Southern reporter's weakness of expression is contained in Twain's description of a mule race—he apologizes for using the descriptive phrase, "The grandstand was well filled with the beauty and chivalry of New Orleans," stating that the phrase wasn't original with him but was the Southern reporter's. Twain says:

He has used it for two generations. He uses it twenty times a day, or twenty thousand times a day, or a million

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9 Twain, Life on the Mississippi, p. 369.
10 Ibid., p. 368.
times a day—according to the exigencies... He never tires of it; it always has a fine sound to him. There is a kind of swell, medieval bulliness and tinsel about it that pleases his gaudy, barbaric soul... It is likely that the men and women of the South are sick enough of that phrase by this time, and would like a change, but there is no immediate prospect of their getting it.

This insistence of the Southern writers on sticking to an out-dated language, to write for the past rather than the present, to use obsolete forms, all contributed to the making of a literature far inferior to that of the North. It was only by breaking away from the yoke of Sir Walter that the South could regain its former competitive literary standing with the North. "But when a Southerner of genius writes modern English," says Twain, "his book goes upon crutches no longer—but upon wings; and they carry it swiftly all about England and America—as witness the experience of Mr. Cable and 'Uncle Remus,' two of the very few writers who do not write in Southern style." (Further favorable comments regarding Joel Chandler Harris, author of the "Uncle Remus" stories, and Cable, are to be presented in the following chapter.) Another pertinent remark worth mention at this point concerns Cervantes' Don Quixote, a book which Twain praises for having "swept the world's admiration for the medieval chivalry silliness out of existence." However,

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11 Loc. cit.
12 Ibid., p. 377.
13 Loc. cit.
Scott's *Ivanhoe* restored it. "All the good work done by Cervantes," says Twain, "is pretty nearly a dead letter, so effectively has Scott's pernicious work undermined it." 14

Another fault, characteristic also of Cooper, is Scott's use of language inconsistent with character. As a result, Twain sees Scott's characterizations as counterfeits. Twain in questioning Matthews regarding Scott's weakness asks:

Has Scott heroes and heroines who are not cads and cadesses? Has he heroes and heroines whom the reader admires, admires, and knows why? Has he funny characters that are funny, . . . ? Has he personages whose acts and talk correspond with their characters as described by him? 15

Although there is no record of Matthews' answers to these queries, we do get a clear statement of Twain's views in a quotation taken from the same letter. Twain in commenting upon Scott's portrayal of Scottish character as exemplified by Guy Manners, exclaims:

Brander, I lie here dying, slowly dying, under the blight of Sir Walter. I have read the first volume of *Rob Roy* and as far as Chapter 19 of *Guy Mannering*, and I can no longer hold my head up nor take my nourishment. Lord, it's so juvenile . . . ; and such wax figures and skeletons and spectres. Interest? Why, it is impossible to feel an interest in these bloodless shams, these milk and water humbugs. 16

Nevertheless, Twain did manage to "struggle through" *Guy Mannering*, for four days later a second letter to Matthews

14 Loc. cit.
15 Twain, *Letters*, II, 737.
16 Ibid., p. 733.
states:

. . . I finished *Guy Mannering*—that curious, curious book, with its mob of squalid shadows jabbering around a single flesh and blood being—Dinmont; a book crazily put together out of the very refuse of the romance artist's stage properties—finished it and took up *Quentin Durward*, and finished that.17

The above quotation shows that in addition to faulty characterization, Twain was also concerned with Scott's lack of originality and form in writing, two faults he also finds in Cooper's writings.

The remainder of the letter, although complimentary to *Quentin Durward*, questions its authorship. Twain writes:

It was like leaving the dead to mingle with the living; it was like withdrawing from the infant class in the College of Journalism to sit under the lectures in English literature in Columbia University. I wonder who wrote *Quentin Durward*?18

This praise of *Quentin Durward* is, according to Paine, "about the only approval Twain ever accorded to the works of the great romanticist."19 Even so, Twain approves the book with a "tongue-in-cheek" attitude.

The foregoing information is further evidence of the broad scope of Twain's criticism, actually less critical of Scott than it is of the Southern literary writers, most of whom Twain thought had been duped by Scott into following his

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17 Ibid., pp. 738-39.
18 Ibid., p. 739.
19 Ibid., pp. 736-37. Editor's Note.
style and methods. Thus, Twain's is primarily a criticism of Scott's influence, an evil which affected the literature of the entire country, particularly the South, which was affected rather permanently.

Next to Scott, Twain rated James Fenimore Cooper as the most evil influence on the literature of the time. Most of Cooper's faults Twain attributes to his inaccuracy of observation, a fault which Twain amply illustrates in his essay, "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses." Twain felt that while Scott's descriptions were deliberately calculated to deceive, Cooper's were unintentionally so. Cooper, according to Twain, just couldn't see things in their true perspective. "Cooper's eye was splendidly inaccurate," says Twain; "he seldom saw anything correctly. He saw nearly all things as through a glass eye, darkly." Much criticism regarding this weakness is directed at the romantic characters, particularly Indians, depicted in Cooper's Deerslayer. In contrast to Cooper's stately, brave, big, strong, healthy, proudly intelligent Deerslayer Indians, Twain gives a description of what he considers typical Indians, the Goshoot Indians, a tribe he encountered on his travels, two hundred fifty miles from Salt Lake.

20 Twain, "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses," How to Tell a Story and Other Essays (Hartford, Conn.: The American Publishing Company, 1900), p. 35.
Twain describes these Indians as "small, lean, 'scrawny' creatures . . . a silent, sneaking, treacherous race" without honor or shame who go about begging like all other Indians, "for if the beggar instinct were left out of an Indian he would not 'go,' any more than a clock without a pendulum." Twain acknowledges their hunting prowess, but stresses the fact that they have "no higher ambition than to kill and eat jackass rabbits, crickets and grasshoppers and embezzle carrion from the buzzards and coyotes." As for their bravery Twain has this to say, "One would as soon expect the rabbits to fight as the Goshoots . . . they would] come some dark night when no mischief was expected, and burn down the buildings and kill the men from ambush as they rushed out." This naked, black race of savages, dirty, unwashed " . . . bearing dirt which they had been hoarding and accumulating for months, years and even generations," Twain sees as true, typical Indians stripped of the "paint and tinsel" with which Cooper was wont to disguise them. "Wherever one finds an Indian tribe," remarks Twain, "he has only found Goshoots more or less modified by circumstances and surroundings--but Goshoots, after all."21

Twain also contrasts what he calls Cooper's sham romantic portrayal of the Indian, "that windy Indian worship"

with the Australian writers' generally authentic portrayal of the aborigines. "Australia is fertile in writers," says Twain, "whose books are faithful mirrors of the life of the country and of its history." He singles out as representative Mrs. Campbell Praed's *Sketches of Australian Life*, a book in which Mrs. Praed places "a thing before you so that you can see." A report by officer and author Philip Chauncy, contributed to the archives of the Victorian government, in which he gives his personal observations of the aborigine's skill in stalking game, Twain also considers noteworthy. The uncanny skill of the aborigine is demonstrated when, by "a little examination of the trunk of a tree which may be nearly covered with the scratches of the opossums ascending and descending," he is able to tell "whether one went up the night before without coming down again or not." In commenting upon this passage Twain jokingly states that "Cooper lost his chance. He would have known how to value these people. He wouldn't have traded the dullest of them for the brightest Mohawk he ever invented." Twain accepts as authentic the majority of responsible Australian writers' portrayals of the aborigines. Included

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22 Twain, *Following the Equator*, I, 217.

23 *Loc. cit.*


25 *Loc. cit.*
in this group are Marcus Clark, Rolf Boldrewood, Gordon Kendall, Brough Smyth and the aforementioned Mrs. Campbell Praed, Australian novelists who, Twain claims, did not need to invent their picturesqueness; theirs was a brilliant vigorous literature, a literature based on reality, not fancy.

Cooper's inaccurate observations, on the other hand, lead, in Twain's opinion, toward a portrayal of not merely improbabilities but rather impossibilities, impossibilities such as the episode in which Chingachgook, an Indian character in the Deerslayer legend, loses the trail of a person he is tracking through the forest. Chingachgook is puzzled, but only momentarily, for, after a moment's reflection, he solves the problem by turning a running stream out of its course, and there, in the slush in its old bed, he finds the person's moccasin tracks still intact, apparently unaffected by the current. Twain thought this was carrying things too far, for "even the eternal laws of Nature have to vacate when Cooper wants to put up a delicate job of woodcraft on the reader." 

Another notable instance in which Cooper ventures into the realm of the fantastic depicts a settler's scow "... prowling down bends which were one third as long as itself

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26 Twain, "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses," How to Tell a Story, pp. 83-84.
27 Ibid., p. 84.
and scraping between banks where it had only two feet of space to spare on each side." Such a discrepancy could not be stomached by Twain, who had spent a portion of his life as a pilot on the Mississippi. Twain justifiably advises Cooper to follow the Australian writers' practice of confining situations to possibilities and letting miracles alone, and to make at least a pretense at reality.

However, Twain points out, Cooper does not confine his miracles to situations alone, for his characters are in keeping with the miracles they perform; characters with superhuman traits perform feats which know no bounds, either in heaven or earth. On one occasion Natty Bumppo, central character in most of Cooper's tales, encounters in the woods one foggy day some "mislaid people" who are searching for a fort, a fort which Bumppo finds by following the track of a cannon ball which, following a blast, "comes rolling into the wood and stops at their feet." This incredible feat is merely representative of many of Bumppo's good deeds for the day; many more feats just as miraculous follow.

Performance of miraculous deeds is not confined to Bumppo alone, however, for Deerslayer, mighty trapper and hunter, also comes into the picture, exhibiting a miraculous

28 Ibid., p. 86.
29 Ibid., p. 83.
Cooper's portrayal of Deerslayer as one who, at a hundred yards, could hunt flies with a rifle, Twain questions, for he considered it impossible to see a common housefly at a hundred yards, much less hit it with a rifle shot. Thus, Twain attempts to confirm his point that Cooper's Indians are a myth, a tribe that never existed.

Other factors directly attributable to Cooper's inadequacy of observation which further weaken the development of his Indians and characterizations in general are his failings in dialogue. The characters in *The Deerslayer* prove by the way they talk and act that they aren't the kind of people Cooper claims they are, an inconsistency being evident even in their day-to-day conversation. Twain says Cooper "... even failed to notice that the man who talks corrupt English six days in the week must and will talk it in the seventh and can't help himself."30 "Deerslayer," Twain continues, "[talks] the showiest kind of booktalk sometimes and at other times the basest of base dialects."31 Deerslayer, being asked if he has a loved one, and if so, where she dwells, gives the following flowery, majestic answer:

"She's in the forest--hanging from the boughs of the trees, in a soft rain--in the dew on the open grass--the

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30 Ibid., p. 93.
31 Loc. cit.
Imagine this language, intimates Twain, coming from the mouth of a man who only a short while ago stuttered through the following remark: "'It consarns me as all things that touches a fri'nd consarns a fri'nd.'" Twain reiterates the contrast by quoting another of Deerslayer's remarks, "'If I was Injin born, now, I might tell of this, or carry in the scalp and boast of the expl'ite afore the whole tribe; or if my inimy had only been a bear.'" This inconsistency in dialogue is shown by Twain to be evident in all of Cooper's tales about Indians. A similar criticism is also made of Indian dialogue as expressed in the Last of the Mohicans; however, here the inconsistency is even more pronounced since it occurs within single sentence structures, each sentence being divided into two equal parts; "one part critically grammatical, refined, and choice of language, and the other part just such an attempt to talk like a hunter or a mountaineer as a Broadway clerk might make after eating an edition of Emerson Bennett's works.\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{32} Loc. cit.
\textsuperscript{33} Loc. cit.
\textsuperscript{34} Loc. cit.
\textsuperscript{35} Emerson Bennett (1822-1905) wrote novels of frontier life, the most popular of which were The Prairie Flower and Leni Leoti. Dictionary of American Biography, II, 191-92.
It is not at all surprising to find Twain, a lecturer-humorist of the old Southwest school, being super-critical of faulty, misrepresented dialogue since as a platform lecturer he had to depend so strongly on representative dialogue to achieve truly humorous effects.

Twain further elaborates on the weakness in Cooper's presentation of dialogue by pointing out his weak choice of words. Cooper was willing to settle for the approximate word; the right word had no place in his vocabulary. To illustrate this point Twain quotes a list of words taken from Deerslayer, words which he considers "second cousins" to the right word. He condemns Cooper's use of "'verbal' for 'oral;' . . . 'unsophisticated' for 'primitive,' . . . 'rebuked' for 'subdued,' . . . 'fact' for 'condition,' . . . 'explain' for 'determine,' 'mortified' for 'disappointed,' . . . 'decreasing' for 'deepening,' . . . 'embedded' for 'enclosed,' "37 Twain states that "although one perceives what he is intending to say . . . one also perceives that he doesn't say it."38 Twain's final advice to Cooper is to "say what he is proposing to say, not merely come near it."39

36 Twain, Roughing It, I, 157.
37 Twain, "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses," How to Tell a Story, p. 95.
38 Ibid, p. 94.
39 Ibid., p. 81.
Additional comments on word usage center around Cooper's tendency toward wordiness. As an illustration of this weakness, Twain quotes the aforementioned flowery speech made by Deerslayer in answer to the question concerning the whereabouts of his loved one. Twain criticizes "this custom to spread a two-minute remark out to ten," this tendency to "beat around the bush," aimlessly wandering in conversation all around and arriving nowhere. Although this practice had its use in the platform lecturer's story-telling where digression often served as a useful tool for the attainment of special humorous effects, yet it had no place, Twain thought, in the over-romanticized writings of Cooper. Twain sums up all these defects in Cooper's word usage by refuting Lounsbury's praise of Cooper's English with the statement that "... Cooper wrote about the poorest English that exists in our language." Weakness in the use of language contributed naturally, Twain points out, to a weakness in the presentation of dialogue, the end-result being manifest in Cooper's many weak characterizations. Cooper's characters speak a language foreign to their own general make-up; they are so ill-defined, so dimly drawn that they appear as corpses rather than live men. "Rules governing literary art require," says Twain,

40 Ibid., pp. 92-93.
41 Ibid., p. 96.
"that the personages in a tale shall be alive, except in the case of corpses, and that always the reader shall be able to tell the corpses from the others." Twain, however, did not believe Cooper capable of making this distinction.

Twain's final major criticism concerns Cooper's lack of originality or invention. Twain refutes Brander Matthews' praise of Cooper's "extraordinary fullness of invention" by stating that "Cooper hasn't any more invention than a horse, and I don't mean a high class horse either. I mean a clothes horse." Twain bases this particular criticism mainly on Cooper's insistence on overworking tired, worn-out tricks, stratagems and devices for his Indians and backwoodsmen to mislead and entrap each other with. One of his favorites was to make a moccasined person tread in the tracks of a moccasined enemy, and by so doing hide his own trail. Twain claims, "Cooper wore out barrels and barrels of moccasins in working that trick." Another trick or stage property upon which Cooper continually relied was the broken twig, so much so that Twain suggests Cooper's Leather Stocking Series ought to have been called the Broken Twig Series. Cooper insists his character step on a broken, dry twig; whether the weather be

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42 Ibid., p. 79.
43 Ibid., p. 84.
44 Ibid., p. 82.
fair or foul, wet or dry, "Cooper requires him to turn out and find a dry twig, and if he can't do it, go and borrow one." Twain concludes by stating that "it's a restful chapter in any book of his [Cooper's] when somebody didn't step on a dry twig and alarm all the reds and whites for two hundred yards around." Thus, intimates Twain, even if there were (which there isn't) a remote possibility of Cooper's arriving at a clever situation, he would still make it absurd by his handling of it.

Clearly, then, Twain's criticism of Cooper parallels his criticism of Scott. Both men are primarily condemned for their influence on other writers of the period—Scott for his influence on the Southern writers and Cooper for his influence on writers in general. Scott's romantic portrayal of the chivalrous knights of the Middle Ages and Cooper's romanticized version of the "noble savage" both added to the sentimental, sham fantasies of the majority of the writings of the 1850's and 1860's, decades in which most writers refused to "come down to earth." The facing of some semblance of reality Twain considered essential to all writing; men could not solve their problems by continually escaping into fantasy; occasionally facts had to be faced and taken for what they were worth. Yet Twain's definition of reality was not confined to the relation of strict facts; his was a

45 Loc. cit.
broad definition based on verisimilitude rather than on realism. Thus, Twain felt that Cooper and Scott failed, not because they portrayed mere "dreams," but because they failed to keep their dreams within bounds, within the realm of probability.

The one remaining criticism worth mentioning in our summary is Scott's and particularly Cooper's ineptness in the use of language. This ineptness was primarily due, Twain believed, to weak choice of words and secondarily to use of excessively flowery redundancies, faults which contributed more than any other to the many weak characterizations.

A discussion of serious adverse criticism must include Twain's judgment of Bret Harte, for Harte was one of the significant authors in Twain's mind. However, Harte cannot be discussed in the same breath with Scott and Cooper, authors whom Twain condemns as true exemplars of the sentimental age, but must be considered separately. Twain had a personal involvement with Harte which must be taken into account. Since Harte is both highly praised and severely castigated and since the major adverse criticism follows a quarrel between Harte and Twain, presumably over a sarcastic remark Harte made concerning Livy, Twain's wife, care must be taken to distinguish genuine literary criticism from mere personal prejudice. The question of whether the critical remarks following the estrangement are valid criticism or mere personal prejudice must be resolved. It must be kept in mind that thirteen years of
friendly close relationship had passed before Twain began his tirade against Harte and even then he did not consider Harte a "true exemplar" of the sentimental age but rather a contributor to its cause. It was only after Twain and Harte had quarreled that Twain began his castigation of Harte's works. Prior to this time Twain praised and respected Harte's ability as a writer, even rating him, on several occasions, superior to himself. In a letter dated January 28, 1866, Twain speaks of Harte as one "who trimmed and trained and schooled me patiently until he changed me from an awkward utterer of coarse grotesquenesses to a writer of paragraphs and chapters that have found a certain favor in the eyes of even some of the very decentest people in the land--"46 Six months later, June, 1866, although a bit more falteringly, he still acknowledges Harte's superiority. "Though I am generally placed at the head of my breed of scribblers in this part of the country," he writes, "the place properly belongs to Bret Harte, I think, . . ."47 Twain's ego would not let him go all the way; the words "I think" creep in, marring his sincerity.

Twain again praises Harte in a letter dated October, 1876, in which he discusses their collaboration in a play in which he, Twain, is "to put in Scotty Briggs . . . and he

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46 Twain, Letters, I, 182. Letter to Thomas Bailey Aldrich.

47 Ibid., p. 122. Letter to Jane Clemens and Mrs. Moffett, June 20, 1866.
... and how often I do use three words where one would answer—a thing I am always trying to guard against. I shall become as slovenly a writer as Charles Francis Adams, if I don't look out. (That is said in jest; because I never shall drop so far toward his and Bret Harte's level as to catch myself saying "It must have been wiser to have believed that he might have accomplished it if he could have felt that he would have been supported by those who should have &c. &c. &c.) The reference to Bret Harte reminds me that I often accuse him of being a deliberate imitator of Dickens; ...
leads to the belief that there might have been something more than mere personal prejudice in the remarks made following the estrangement, remarks which no doubt reflected earlier suppressed opinions, opinions deliberately suppressed because of Twain's reluctance to hurt his friend's feelings. "If he [Twain] couldn't write without hurting peoples' feelings," says Van Wyck Brooks, "he wouldn't write at all ... ."51 Although the above statement is too inclusive, for Twain certainly did not hesitate to criticize Cooper, Scott, Austen and many others whom he disliked, there is some evidence in many of Twain's remarks that he dared not openly criticize, during his lifetime, many of the things he had a strong desire to criticize. "Frankness," he says, "is a jewel; only the young can afford it."52 However, his most straightforward remark on this matter is to be found in his Autobiography. "I am writing," he says, "... from the grave. On these terms only can a man be approximately frank. He cannot be strictly and unqualifiedly frank either in the grave or out of it."53 Thus it seems that the later criticisms of Harte, though appearing to be strictly personal prejudice at first glance, prove upon closer examination to be based on fact.

52 Loc. cit.
That Twain's criticism following the quarrel is not to be taken as mere personal prejudice is also suggested by the fact that Twain criticizes many of the same qualities in Harte which he found so distasteful in the writers he considered representative of the sentimental age. As in the case of the criticism of Scott and Cooper, Twain's objection is based primarily on Harte's weak characterizations. Twain felt that Harte, as a rule, was not familiar enough with his characters to portray them accurately; the only way to really get to know people, Twain maintained, is through unconscious absorption over a long period of time. Thus Harte was somewhat successful in portraying California and Californians, a culture and people with which he was fairly familiar, but failed in all his other attempts at characterization. "Bret Harte," says Twain, "got his California and his Californians by unconscious absorption, and put both of them into his tales alive! But when he came from the Pacific to the Atlantic and tried to do Newport life from study--conscious observation--his failure was absolutely monumental."54 This failure Twain compares to the failure of the French novelist Paul Bourget in his attempt to portray the nature of the people of the United States.55 No foreigner, maintains Twain, can

54 Twain, "What Paul Bourget Thinks of Us," *How to Tell a Story*, p. 146.

55 Paul Bourget, French novelist, wrote *Outer Mer* (1895), a work of travel in the United States.
possibly portray a nation's interior, "... its soul, speech, thought. A knowledge of these things is acquirable by absorption alone; ... years and years of intercourse with the life concerned; of living it ... One learns peoples through the heart, not the eyes or the intellect." But Harte, in Twain's estimation, was incapable of genuine emotion, for "he had nothing to feel with. ... his heart was merely a pump and had no other function." Thus in his portrayal of the higher passions, Harte was a mere imitator; "what he knew about them [passions] he got from books;" his were artificial reproductions of passions, passions akin to those portrayed by stage players "following certain faithfully studied rules." It was this tendency by Harte to imitate that began the "drifting apart" of the two men. Twain, working with Harte on the play, Ah Sin, was annoyed by his "trickiness, shabby sponging, and flair for plagiarism;" however, it was not until Harte became sarcastic toward Livy that the final rupture in their friendship occurred.

The other main criticism voiced by Twain while he and Harte were still friends and which serves indirectly as the basic criticism of the chief exemplars of the sentimental

56 Ibid., p. 145.


age, condemns Harte's imitation of Dickens, "the sympathetic [revealer] of the sadder elements in humble life." 59 Dickens's portrayal of the downtrodden, exploited middle-class Twain thought was a "tear-jerking" portrayal, sentimental to the core and much exaggerated. That Harte was actually proud of his imitation of Dickens to the point of boasting "that he [Harte] thought he was the best imitator of Dickens in America . . ." 60 is revealed in an excerpt contained in DeVoto's *Mark Twain in Eruption*. Twain refers to Harte's "The Luck of Roaring Camp" and "Tennessee's Partner" as "felicitous imitations of Dickens," 61 imitations no doubt of Dickens's sentimentality and perhaps his character portrayal. Harte's "The Luck of Roaring Camp" is marked not only by its sentimental theme but also by its much too virtuous blackguard heroes. Blair no doubt had "The Luck of Roaring Camp" in mind when he stated that "Harte's characters are too virtuous; for he, of course, had no villains; that was part of his formula. Hence, one reading through many of Harte's pages begins to yearn before long for the introduction of someone totally depraved--some prostitute, thief, gambler, or drunkard within whose breast is a heart not of gold." 62

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60 Twain, *Mark Twain in Eruption*, p. 266.

61 *Loc. cit.*

62 Blair, *op. cit.*, p. 139.
sentimental theme based on the saving of an infant from drowning by the blackguard is a theme which, no doubt, would have been roundly acclaimed by the sentimental writers of the time. Thus Twain isn't the only one to consider Harte as a writer of sentimental tales. Twain's ire, though, is more than usually aroused because he knows that Harte is capable of good writing and that he is insincere in his sentimental writings, the sentimentality being "put-on" or forced. "This is the very Bret Harte," declares Twain, "whose pathetics imitated from Dickens used to be a godsend to the farmers of the two hemispheres on account of the freshets of tears they compelled. He said to me once with a cynical chuckle that he thought he had mastered the art of pumping up the tears of sensibility. The idea conveyed was that the tear of sensibility was oil and that by luck he had struck it." Such insincerity was not to be taken lightly by one with as high moral standards as Twain.

The few praises given Harte following the estrangement are usually qualified. Thus Twain acknowledges Harte's bright wit, but at the same time claims "the character of it spoiled it; it possessed no breadth and no variety; it consisted solely of sneers and sarcasms; when there was nothing to sneer at Harte did not flash and sparkle : . . ."64 On another occasion

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64 Ibid., pp. 274-75.
he compares Harte's wit with that of Thomas Bailey Aldrich.
"Harte was good company," Twain avers, "... he was always
bright, but never brilliant; that in this matter he must not
be classed with Thomas Bailey Aldrich ... Aldrich was always
witty, always brilliant. ...

Again a former major criticism of the true exemplars of romanticism, lack of breadth and
variety, is reiterated and applied also to Harte, an indication that perhaps this criticism is more than mere personal
prejudice.

A review of the foregoing information brings to mind
four major criticisms applied to Harte which were previously regarded as characterizing the true exemplars of romanticism, Cooper and Scott. Even though the major criticisms are
similar, namely verboseness, faulty characterizations, ex-
aggregated sentimentality and lack of breadth and variety, the
possibility of personal prejudice following the estrangement
makes it necessary to consider Harte separately as a contrib-
utor to the sentimental age rather than a true exemplar of the age. However, evidence does show that Twain's criticism of Harte was not based entirely on mere personal prejudice
since there is evidence of adverse critical judgments made
prior to the estrangement. The remarks that follow the es-
trangement are criticisms of the same principles of writing
practiced by the true exemplars of sentimentalism.

65 Twain, Autobiography, p. 247.
CHAPTER III

SPONTANEOUS CRITICISM IN TWAIN’S WORKS

We have discussed Twain’s serious, unfavorable criticism of his fellow writers. It is further necessary to give some consideration to the many isolated incidental judgments throughout his works, judgments both positive and negative that may constitute some basis for further evaluation of Twain’s contribution to the criticism of his time. The following discussion will necessarily appear somewhat sketchy and perhaps superficial, but nevertheless, in its total, it will contribute to the final evaluation of Twain as a literary critic.

Up to this point the discussion has dealt primarily with the adverse aspects of Twain’s criticism, but here it is necessary to deal with both uncomplimentary and complimentary elements. It is true that Twain’s thoughtful criticism is disproportionally unfavorable; however, the sporadic remarks are intermixed with both aspects of criticism, positive and negative.

Twain’s most vehement yet unfounded criticism concerns Jane Austen. That Twain should find fault with Jane, a true realist and humorist herself, is somewhat puzzling, when we realize that Jane’s works had none of the weaknesses that Twain castigates so severely in the writings of other authors.
Twain in his previous criticisms, was always stressing the importance of accurate observation, the necessity of at least some semblance of reality in portraying characters and events, the all importance (somewhat overemphasized) of felicity in phrasing and the use of the right word on all occasions, all qualities in which Jane was most proficient. What then was the reason for the cutting remarks Twain was wont to make about Jane Austen's writing? The question is difficult to answer, for Twain never really commits himself to any valid, sound criticism; he speaks of the terrible writings of Jane Austen, yet never actually states why he considers them so terrible. He excuses himself from actually considering Jane's works seriously by stating that "[I] often want to criticize Jane Austen, but her books madden me so that I can't conceal my frenzy from the reader, and therefore, I have to stop every time I begin."¹

In another instance, Twain goes out of his way to make a nasty remark about Jane in Following the Equator; while on board ship during the journey, Twain speaks about some of the better features of the ship's library: "Jane Austen's books too are absent from this library. Just that one omission," claims Twain, "would make a fairly good library out of a lib-

rary that hadn't a book in it."  

The above statements concern Jane's works in general; Twain actually mentions a specific work only once, but the remark, although one of his most vehement, is not to be considered seriously since it was written to "an intimate, familiar with his imaginative exaggeration."  

"Every time I read Pride and Prejudice," says Twain, "I want to dig her [Austen] up and beat her over the skull with her own shin bone."  

No doubt Twain would never have written the above statement if he had had any notion whatsoever that anyone but his best friend would ever read it. It is a statement that may be taken as a mere illustration of the bad taste which occasionally characterizes him. Another remark, illustrative of Twain's bad taste, compares Poe's writing with Jane's:  

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

Once more Twain fails to commit himself as to just what makes Jane's prose impossible. His readers can only surmise what he means. However, even though there is no definite answer,  

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4 Ibid., p. 642.  
5 Twain, Letters, II, 830.
Brander Matthews does have some suggestions worth considering. One of the main reasons he gives for this unnatural hate is that "Austen is a miniaturist of exquisite discretion, not a mural painter, ... because her little miracles of delicate observation seemed to him [Twain] only the carving of cherry-stones. Her field is limited and her vision, keen as it is, is restricted, whereas Mark's was wont to survey the full spectroscope of American life. ..." Thus Twain's criticism, if viewed with the above explanation in mind, does take on some meaning, restricted perhaps, but still worth considering.

Twain's criticism of Poe, however, does seem based on more substantial grounds; the surprise is not that he criticizes Poe but rather that he speaks of Poe and Jane Austen in the same breath, the two having little if anything in common. That he actually prefers Poe's writing as the lesser of two evils also comes as a surprise. As in commenting upon Jane, Twain again fails to give any specific reason for branding Poe's works unreadable. However, in his discussion of Poe the reason is much more obvious, since Poe's tales did add to the romantic aspects of the age. It is not surprising that Twain castigates a man of Poe's temperament, a temperament which found solace in contemplation of death and the supernatural, a highly imaginative temperament which knew no

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6 Matthews, op. cit., p. 642.
bounds, a temperament beset with strange dreams and fancies induced by artificial means—the twin evils of liquor and drugs. George Feinstein, professor at the University of North Dakota, gives us yet another view, pointing out Twain's indifference to arbitrary canons governing story structure, an indifference marked by his natural, flowing, informal development of narrative. "The world," states Twain, "grows tired of solid form in all the arts, . . . execution transcends design."7 Thus, Twain ignores Poe's theory of unity of effect, wherein every atom of plot was to be streamlined and irreplaceable. Instead he, like Cervantes, "shuns symmetrical pattern as a violation of its [humor's] nature."8 To Twain "ideal narration . . . is natural and informal, like life or talk."9 The fact that Twain's criticism of Poe is limited to a single remark perhaps does not justify such an elaborate assumption; nevertheless, facts tend to reinforce our contentions.

Other remarks, brief and scattered, yet worth reference, concern the writings of Malory, Langland, and Chaucer. How sincere Twain was in his criticism of Malory is questionable, at least at first glance, especially so if we consider

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7 George Feinstein, "Mark Twain's Idea of Story Structure," American Literature, XVIII (May, 1946), 160.
8 loc. cit.
9 Ibid., p. 160.
the statement Olin Harris Moore makes in "Mark Twain and Don Quixote," an article in which Moore attempts to show the great influence of Cervantes' *Don Quixote* on Twain's early works. Moore says:

In pursuance of this theme [the satire upon chivalry and chivalrous romances in *Connecticut Yankee*] Mark Twain is willing even to satirize a beloved volume for which his true feeling is expressed in the affectionate phrase 'old Sir Thomas Malory's enchanting book.'

Nevertheless, the fact remains that Twain in *A Connecticut Yankee* does openly and unmistakably ridicule Malory's romantic characterization of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. An illustration of his intent to ridicule, taken from a letter to Mrs. Fairbanks, follows:

Of course in my story [*A Connecticut Yankee*] I shall leave unsmirched and unbelittled the great and beautiful characters drawn by the master hand of old Malory ... I shall hope that under my hand Sir Galahad will still remain the divinest spectre that one glimpses among the mists and twilights of Dreamland ... and ... Lancelot abide and continue 'the kindest man that ever strake the sword, yet 'the sternest knight to his mortal foe that ever put spear in the rest;' and I should grieve indeed if the final disruption of the Round Table, and the extinction of its old and tender and gracious friendships, and that last battle—the Battle of the Broken Hearts, it might be called—should lose their pathos and their tears through my handling.

10 Olin Harris Moore, Professor of Romance Languages, Ohio State University and author (*The Legend of Romeo and Juliet*, 1949).


Twain in *A Connecticut Yankee* carries through this proposed ridicule to the fullest extent. Although several pages in this novel are word for word quotations from Malory, the majority of the quotations are mere parodies. The following 'narrative, a comic parody, illustrates this method of ridicule:

'So they two departed and rode into a great forest. And—'

'Which two?'

'Sir Gawaine and Sir Uwaine. And so they came to an abbey of monks, and there were well lodged. So on the morn they heard their masses in the abbey, and so they rode forth till they came to a great forest; then was Sir Gawaine ware, in a valley by a turret, of twelve fair damsels, and two knights armed on great horses, and the damsels went to and fro by a tree. And then was Sir Gawaine ware how there hung a white shield on that tree, and ever as the damsels came by it they spit upon it, and some threw mire upon the shield—'

'Now, if I hadn't seen the like myself in this country, Sandy, I wouldn't believe it. But I've seen it, and I can just see those creatures now, parading before that shield and acting like that...'

Although additional passages of ridicule could be cited, the above illustration should prove adequate to justify Houston Peckham, Purdue University professor, in his contention that *A Connecticut Yankee* is solely "a romantic travesty on Malory." Evidence leads to the conclusion, contrary to Olin Harris Moore's opinion, that Twain's criticism is sincere; there is no evidence of a "tongue-in-cheek" attitude nor


14 Houston Peckham, "The Literary Status of Mark Twain, 1877-1890," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, XIX (October, 1920), 338.
any attempt to make the ridicule less than severe; the ridicule is there for all to see, plain and outspoken.

Twain's criticism of Chaucer and Langland is incidental to what he considered the over-rated, glorified past. The "contemporary-minded" Twain had "no use" for anyone who lived in the distant past; the mere fact that Chaucer and Langland lived so far in the past made them unintelligible. This view is ably expressed in "Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven," a farce in which Twain's criticism is expressed in the person of Stormfield's heavenly guide. "Yes, but it English district of heaven," remarks the guide, "is not so very much better than this end European of the heavenly domain. As long as you run across Englishmen born this side of three hundred years ago, you are all right; but one minute you get back of Elizabeth's time, the language begins to fog up, and the further back you go, the foggier it gets. I had some talk with one Langland," the guide continues, "and a man by the name of Chaucer--old time poets--but it was no use, I couldn't quite understand them and they couldn't quite understand me. I have had letters from them since, but it is such broken English I can't make it out."15 Twain on one other occasion, in one of his late works, What Is Man and Other Essays, writes another essay denouncing the Simplified Alpha-

bet movement, saying "It has taken five hundred years to simplify some of Chaucer's rotten spelling . . . and it will take five-hundred more to get our exasperating new Simplified Corruptions accepted and running smoothly." Here we find one of Twain's main limitations as a critic, his tendency to apply standards of today to fiction of yesterday. This limitation of Twain is also recognized by Brander Matthews, who defends Cooper and Scott on the grounds that men of the past were not armed and equipped with the weapons of precision now available for men of only ordinary stature. Thus when judging an author one must take into consideration the age for which he wrote and must make one's final judgment with this factor in mind, a factor which Twain completely fails to recognize.

Having considered the adverse criticism accorded the major writers, we now turn to Twain's criticism of the lesser authors, authors known for a short time and since then all but forgotten. This group includes William Bowen and Yonges, novelists, and Mrs. Julia A. Moore, poetess, authors with whom most modern readers are unfamiliar but who, nevertheless, were very popular in their day.

Julia A. Moore, "The Sweet Singer of Michigan," wrote


17 Matthews, op. cit.
several volumes of poems and songs, including *The Sentimental Song Book*, which were widely read and acclaimed, but to Twain she was nothing more than a sentimental child whose narrow grasp and lack of sustained power was, Twain saw, reflected in the ridiculously humorous poem, "William Upson." One need only consider the first and last stanzas to see Twain's point:

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Come all good people far and near
Oh, come and see what you can hear
It's of a young man true and grave.

Although she knows not that it was her son,
For his coffin could not be opened—
It might be someone in his place
For she could not see his noble face.  
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This poem Twain jokingly claims has more merit than any of the remaining lyrics in *The Sentimental Song Book*. "I am persuaded," says Twain, "that for wide grasp and sustained power 'William Upson' may claim first place." Further satire is expressed in Twain's comparison of *The Sentimental Song Book* with Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield*. Twain says that he finds "in it [*The Sentimental Song Book*] the same subtle touch [that he finds in *Vicar of Wakefield*]--the touch that makes an intentionally humorous episode pathetic and an intentionally pathetic one funny." Twain's criticism

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19 *Loc. cit.*
20 *Loc. cit.*
of Yonge's *Life of Marie Antoinette* is in much the same vein. Twain states that "... Yonge's recent *Life of Marie Antoinette* ... is without exception the ... blindest and slovenliest piece of literary construction I ever saw and is astounding in another way; it starts out to make you a pitying and lamenting friend of Marie, but only succeeds in making you loathe her all the way through and swing you hat with unappeasable joy when they finally behead her."21 Repeatedly Twain returns to this basic criticism, faulty characterization of both fictional and real characters, the living and the dead.

That Twain refrained from dealing too harshly with his friends, always afraid of hurting their feelings, is manifest in an excerpt taken from a letter to Mr. Burroughs of St. Louis discussing their mutual friend, Will Bowen. Twain tells Burroughs of a letter he once wrote bitterly castigating Will Bowen for his sham sentimentality and tendency to drool over the past. However, Twain ends the letter by confessing that he "went to the unheard of trouble of rewriting the letter and saying the harsh things softly."22 The "harsh things" which Twain found necessary to "tone down" were mild in comparison with later criticisms accorded to writers he did not

21 Twain, *Mark Twain to Mrs. Fairbanks*, p. 206.

22 Twain, *Letters*, I, 290. Letter to Mr. Burroughs of St. Louis, November 1, 1876.
consider friends. An illustration of these "harsh things"
prior to their modification follows. Twain writes:

I told him [Will Bowen] to stop being sixteen at forty; 
told him to stop drooling about the sweet yet melancholy 
past, to take a pill. I said there was but one solitary 
thing about the past worth remembering, and that was that 
it is the past—can't be restored--... my idea was to 
kill his sham sentimentality once and forever..."23

Twain further describes this sham sentimentality as "the kind 
a school girl puts into her graduating composition; the rot 
that deals in the 'happy days of yore,' the 'sweet yet melanc­ 
choly past,' with its 'blighted hopes' and its 'vanished 
dreams'--and all that sort of drivel."24 Again we have that 
same recurring criticism, criticism of the past, a past which 
retards rather than enhances originality in letters and art.

The next phase of our discussion deals with authors 
whom Twain both praised and ridiculed at the same time, com­ 
plimentary criticism intermixed with uncomplimentary criticism, 
a feature heretofore not considered since Twain's complimen­ 
tary criticism is so very limited. Brander Matthews states 
that "once and once only was he [Twain] moved to criticism, 
not by hate, but by love, by a sincere appreciation of the 
superb craftsmanship of a fellow practitioner [Howells]..."25

Without doubt, Twain's criticism of Howells is the most re­

23 Loc. cit.
24 Loc. cit.
flective of his favorable criticisms; however, Twain did make other favorable criticisms, mostly brief and casual, which will be discussed in this chapter, the entire fourth chapter being confined to Twain's reflective positive criticism of Howells.

In discussing this dual criticism, both favorable and unfavorable, we begin with Goldsmith, an author whose merits Twain could not entirely discount. Although the greater portion of the criticism is negative, Twain does praise the "quiet style" of Goldsmith's Citizen of the World, referring to the work as one of his (Twain's) "beau ideals of fine writing," the other being Cervante's Don Quixote. This remark, however, constitutes the sole praise Twain ever accords Goldsmith; all other remarks emphasize Goldsmith's failure in characterization, a failure Twain sees particularly evident in The Vicar of Wakefield, a book described as "one long waste-pipe discharge of goody-goody puerilities and dreary moralities... full of pathos which revolts and humor which grieves the heart." To Twain The Vicar of Wakefield characters were "a strange menageries of complacent hypocrites and idiots, of theatrical cheap-john heroes and heroines, who are always showing off, of bad people who are not interesting

26 Twain, Letters, I, 45.
27 Loc. cit.
28 Twain, Following the Equator, II, 312.
and good people who are . . . fatiguing."\textsuperscript{29} The main element Twain saw lacking in all these characterizations was sincerity; Goldsmith, lacking sincerity himself, could not impart it to his characters. As a result, the reader loses respect for the characters, seeing them as shams rather than real commonplace people.

Other authors to be considered in the light of both favorable and unfavorable criticism are Cervantes, Swift, Cable and Carlyle. Although Twain does find minor faults in the writings of these men, the favorable criticism of their works far outweighs the unfavorable. For instance, Twain has much respect and praise for the writings of both Cervantes and Swift, yet he cannot overlook the "coarse and indelicate portions" in \textit{Gulliver's Travels} and the "too gross speech" in \textit{Don Quixote}. Twain's naturally strict moral sense, exaggerated by courtship, is clearly expressed in one of his love letters in which he praises \textit{Gulliver's Travels} for its scathing satire upon the English government, yet admonishes his fiancée Olivia not to read it until he has deleted the coarse and indelicate portions. "If you would like to read it \textit{Gulliver's Travels}, though," writes Twain, "I will mark it and and tear it until it is fit for your eyes."\textsuperscript{30} A similar

\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Loc. cit.}

caution is expressed regarding Cervantes' *Don Quixote*.

Twain continues:

*Read nothing that is not perfectly pure* . . . *Don Quixote* is one of the most exquisite books that was ever written, and to lose it from the world's literature would be as the wresting of a constellation from the symmetry and perfection of the firmament—but neither it nor Shakespeare are proper books for virgins to read until some hand has culled them of their grossness.*31

There is little doubt that this exaggerated moralistic sense is colored somewhat by circumstances. Twain during his courtship is to be looked upon as a lover trying to make a good impression. The mention of Shakespeare is surprising since Twain never acknowledged Shakespeare's works to have been written by Shakespeare but rather credited the writings to Francis Bacon.

That Twain should find Cervantes' works, especially *Don Quixote*, so praiseworthy is to be expected since both writers are working on common ground, the criticism of medieval chivalry, chivalrous romances and the romantic frauds in general. The close relationship between the ideas and purposes of the two authors prompted Kipling to state that Cervantes was a relative of Twain's. Another author also links the two names together in his statement that "like Cervantes, Rabelais, Swift and Meredith, he [Twain] saw through shams and sentimentalities."32  

31 *Loc. cit.*

however, carries the relationship much further. He attempts to show that the best of Twain's novels, *Huckleberry Finn*, *Tom Sawyer*, *Life on the Mississippi* and *A Connecticut Yankee* were based directly on Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. Although Moore's argument fails in many respects, it does show that Twain was very familiar with and fond of *Don Quixote*, even to the extent that he acknowledges imitating one or two episodes from *Don Quixote* in *Huckleberry Finn*. Huck loses faith in Tom Sawyer when their carefully planned ambush of Arabs and Spaniards with camels and elephants turns out to be a raid on a Sunday School picnic. Huck says:

> I didn't see no diamonds, and I told Tom Sawyer so. He said there was loads of them there, anyway; and he said there was A-rabs there, too, and elephants and things. I said, why couldn't we see them, then? He said if I warn't so ignorant, but had read a book called *Don Quixote*, I would know without asking.

Cable is another writer whom Twain both praises and condemns; however, the condemnation is quite negligible. In one of his love letters he refers to "that infernal Night Ride of Mary's" An editorial note at the end of the letter explains that Twain is here castigating "Mary's Night Ride," . . . a sentimental episode near the end of Cable's novel, *Dr. Sevier*, [which] described Mary Richling's crossing of the

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Confederate lines to reach her dying husband." At this time Twain and Cable were on a reading tour, and perhaps the remark was a reflection of the strain of close association rather than a valid, carefully thought-out criticism. Twain found Cable's mannerisms irritating, especially his "idiotic Sunday superstition." At this point Twain is referring, no doubt, to Cable's habit of attending four early morning services every Sunday.

All other remarks concerning Cable, story writer of old Creole days, are favorable. Twain is particularly fond of Cable's monologues revealing character, especially his French dialects. "Mr. Cable," says Twain, "is the only master in the writing of French dialects that the country has produced. . . ." Considering the great amount of importance Twain places on use of correct native dialect, we can justly assume that Cable ranked quite high on his list of the better authors. Twain also has much praise for Cable's ability to correctly use the English language; he sees Cable as a writer equally at home in expressing both simple and complex ideas. "He [Cable] is a marvelous talker on a deep subject," says Twain, "I do not see how even Spenser could unwind a thought more

36 Ibid., editor's note.
37 Ibid., p. 234.
smoothly, and do it in a cleaner, clearer, crisper English."\(^{39}\) A previously quoted passage from *Life on the Mississippi*, wherein Twain praises Harris and Cable for breaking away from the affected, medieval language used by the majority of Southern writers, also contains Twain's approval of Cable's unaffected language.

Although Twain's remarks, both favorable and unfavorable, concerning Carlyle are limited and not informative, critically speaking, they are included rather to show an attitude than as an example of learned literary criticism. Twain never tells just why he likes Carlyle, but he does claim "a reverent affection for Carlyle's books"\(^{40}\) and does confess having enjoyed reading Carlyle's *History of the French Revolution* eight times. This work he refers to as "one of the greatest creations that ever flowed from a pen."\(^{41}\) The fact that it was *The French Revolution* and not the Bible which was found beside his death-bed is also significant.\(^{42}\) An explanation for Twain's regard for Carlyle, as expressed by William Lyon Phelps, is plausible: "Mark Twain apparently

\(^{39}\) Twain, *Letters*, I, 426.


\(^{41}\) Twain, *Mark Twain to Mrs. Fairbanks*, p. 207.

\(^{42}\) "Mark Twain as a Serious Force in Literature," *Current Literature*, XLVIII (June, 1910), p. 664.
believed in neither God nor man," says Phelps, "but his faith in democracy was so great that he almost made a religion of it." 43

Additional evidence that Twain read and was interested in Carlyle is Twain's "The Death Disk," a short story the text of which is based on "a touching incident mentioned in Carlyle's Letters and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell." 44

The unfavorable remarks concerning Carlyle are so few and insignificant that they hardly need be mentioned. "I do not like," he says, "the lie of bravado, nor the lie of virtuous chastity: the latter was affected by Bryant, the former by Carlyle..." 45 Again, this time more jokingly, he states, "I refer to his [Washington's] remark that he 'could not lie.' I should have fed that to the Marines: or left it to Carlyle: it is just in his style." 46 That such remarks as the above have little critical value is acknowledged; however, their value in the final analysis of critical attitudes must be recognized.

The one remaining author deserving emphasis in our discussion of authors for whom Twain expressed both adverse and complimentary criticism is Thomas Bailey Aldrich. The

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44 Twain, "My First Lie," The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg, p. 268, Footnote #1.
46 Ibid., p. 168.
negative criticism which was contained in "The Memorial to Thomas Bailey Aldrich" dated July 3, 1908, however, was "not to be used for seventy-five years from 1908." Thus Twain's reluctance to criticize his friends during their lifetime is again illustrated. "Aldrich was never widely known," says Twain in this, his one and only unfavorable criticism of Aldrich; "his books never attained to a wide circulation, his prose was diffuse, self-conscious, and barren of distinction in the matter of style; his fame as a writer of prose is not considerable; his fame as a writer of verse is also very limited, but such as it is it is a matter to be proud of." This remark upon Aldrich's style is the nearest Twain ever comes to adversely criticizing Aldrich. And then even this bit of negative criticism is "glossed over" in the remaining portion of the criticism. "It [Aldrich's fame] is based not upon his output of poetry as a whole," continues Twain, "but upon half a dozen small poems which are not surpassed in our language for exquisite grace and beauty and finish." Thus all faults are overlooked and Twain ends with the statement that "these gems are known and admired and loved by the one


48 Loc. cit.

49 Loc. cit.
person in ten thousand who is capable of appreciating them at their just value."\textsuperscript{50} Thus Aldrich's audience, infers Twain, was limited due to a lack of understanding and knowledge on their part rather than through any fault of Aldrich's. The genius was there for all to see; all readers needed to do was to recognize it.

Twain's praise for this "most brilliant of living men"\textsuperscript{51} never lags nor falters during Aldrich's lifetime. Twain has nothing but high praise for the author of "Cloth of Gold" and "Baby Bell." Twain comments that he "read the 'Cloth of Gold' through, . . . and it is just lightning poetry . . . 'Baby Bell' always seemed perfection before,"he says, "but now that I have children it has gone even beyond that."\textsuperscript{52}

Aldrich "shines" even more when contrasted with Harte; Harte (according to Twain) was "always bright, but never brilliant,"\textsuperscript{53} while Aldrich "was always witty, always brilliant."\textsuperscript{54} Felicity of phrasing, pithy, witty and humorous sayings all add, Twain believes, to Aldrich's stature as a writer. Furthermore, Aldrich, like Twain, could not condone windy pretense and extravagances. "When it came to making fun

\textsuperscript{50} Loc. Cit.

\textsuperscript{51} Twain, Letters, I, 184. Editor's note.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., pp. 239-40.


\textsuperscript{54} Loc. Cit.
of a folly, a silliness, a windy pretense, a wild absurdity, Aldrich the brilliant, Aldrich the sarcastic, Aldrich the ironical, Aldrich the merciless, was a master . . .," concludes Twain.55

Twain's high praise of Aldrich is not surprising when we consider the many things they had in common: both writers paid much attention to felicity of phrasing, both depended on humor for added effectiveness in writing, both hated "windy pretense" and "wild absurdities" and both wrote prose which was self-conscious. "For he [Aldrich]," says Twain, "had very nearly as extensive an appreciation of himself and his gifts as had the late Edmund Clarence Stedman, who believed that the sun merely rose to admire his poetry . . . Stedman was a good fellow; Aldrich was a good fellow; but vain? bunched together they were as vain as I am myself."56

We have examined two areas in Twain's casual criticism, the completely adverse judgments and the adverse judgments tempered with some praise. A third category of his casual evaluations includes those positive judgments which are fully favorable—judgments about writers whom Twain respected. That Twain should find little or no fault in the writings of his fellow-humorist Joel Chandler Harris, creator of the Uncle

55 Twain, "The Memorial to Thomas Bailey Aldrich," Mark Twain in Eruption, p. 294.

56 Loc. cit.
Remus stories, is quite natural since Harris and Twain both belonged to the same school, the Southwest humorist school, and so were working on common ground, both having in mind similar principles of what constituted good writing. Both writers considered mastery of the natural dialect of a people primarily essential to a true realistic portrayal of them. It is this quality, Harris' natural ability to use correctly the negro dialect, which Twain finds most praiseworthy. Twain in Life on the Mississippi says, "Mr. Harris ought to be able to read the negro dialect better than anybody else for in the matter of writing it he is the only master the country has produced."57 This emphasis on realistic dialect is noted throughout Twain's writings as a major factor in his many criticisms. It is one of the main qualities for which he praises Cable; it is one of the main qualities he finds most lacking in Harte. In a letter to Harris, "illustrious sage and oracle of the nation's nurseries,"58 Twain praises the Uncle Remus characterization as "most deftly drawn and . . . a lovable and delightful creation; he, and the little boy and their relations with each other, are high and fine literature and worthy to live, for their own sake."59 Twain,

57 Twain, Life on the Mississippi, p. 390.

58 Loc. cit.

It is to be noted, not only appreciated the monologue revealing character but also the humorous anecdote framework in which it was written, a framework most characteristic of the Southwest humorist, and one which Twain himself followed closely.

The best way (and perhaps the only way) to really learn "dialect," Twain believed, is to live among the people speaking it. One cannot learn dialect from books or from mere observation as Harte attempted to do in portraying his Atlantic seaboard characters; the only way to learn a dialect is through slow absorption, through a long process of "living experiences." This all-importance of actual experience is clearly pointed out in Twain's praise of Richard H. Dana's realistic sailor talk in his novel, Two Years Before the Mast. "His sailor-talk flows from his pen," Twain says, "with the sure touch and the ease and confidence of a person who has lived what he is talking about, not gathered it from books and random listenings." "Richard H. Dana," Twain continues, "served two years before the mast and had every experience that falls to the lot of the sailor." And so Twain gives high praise to an author who has long since been forgotten but who in Twain's day "proved his mettle" so far as Twain was concerned.

60 Twain, "Is Shakespeare Dead?" What Is Man? and Other Essays, p. 335.
Another author, less known than Dana yet worth mention, William Allen White, Emporia, Kansas, newspaperman, also scores as a worthy character portrayer. Twain praises "In Our Town, particularly that Colonel of the Lookout Mt. Oration..." Twain also notes that "parts of it [In Our Town, a collection of short stories] can score finely when subjected to the most exacting of tests—the reading aloud." This statement reveals yet another quality which Twain looked for in what he considered good literature, a quality a platform lecturer would be expected to rate high on his scale of values. Humor was another "must" in the platform lecturer's equipment for the day, humor and feeling being qualities everyone could understand and experience. These qualities Twain also finds evident in pages 212 and 216 of White's book, pages "qualified to fetch any house of any country, caste or color, endowed with those riches which are denied to no nation on the planet—humor and feeling." 

Another writer for whom Twain had nothing but praise and respect was Kipling. This exaggerated feeling of admiration is aptly expressed in the following quotation in which he speaks of Kipling as a stranger but "a most remarkable man.

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61 Twain, Letters, II, 797.
62 Loc. cit.
63 Loc. cit.
. . . Between us we cover all knowledge," says Twain, "he knows all that can be known, and I know the rest." That this feeling of respect was mutual is clearly shown by Kipling's statement that he loves "to think of the great and god-like Clemens. He is the biggest man you have on your side of the water by a damn sight and don't you forget it." This mutual feeling of friendship and respect continued throughout the writers' lives.

Twain praised Kipling because Kipling was truthful; his characterizations were life-like; his experiences led to a first-hand, intimate knowledge of the Orient; his writings were based on real experiences, not merely on imaginative fancies. He was particularly successful, Twain felt, in *Kim*, a novel revealing the many subtle charms of India. Twain claims that "it was worth the journey to India to qualify myself to read *Kim* understandingly and to realize how great a book it is." Twain further claims that "The deep and subtle and fascinating charm of India pervades no other book as it pervades *Kim*. . . . *Kim* is pervaded by it as by an atmosphere." Twain also has much praise for those "incomparable Jungle Books," books that "must remain unfellowed permanently."  

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64 Twain, *Lark Twain in Eruption*, p. 312.
66 Twain, *Lark Twain in Eruption*, p. 312.
67 Loc. cit.
Not only, however, did Kipling capture the atmosphere of India, but he also captured the "aspect and sentiment of the bewitching sea," the long road which leads to the Orient. To illustrate this point, Twain quotes a stanza from one of Kipling's ballads:

The Injian Ocean sets an' smiles.
So sof', so bright, so bloomin' blue;
There aren't a wave for miles an' miles
Excep' the jiggle from the screw.

Both men had an uncommon love and longing for life on shipboard. Twain's early years as pilot on the Mississippi are recorded in Life on the Mississippi as his happiest years. Kipling expresses a strong attachment to the sea. "If I had my way," he says, "I would sail on forever and never go to live on the solid ground again," a sentiment which Twain also expressed in his piloting days.

However, Kipling was, Twain felt, just as successful in his characterizations as he was in portraying the enchantments of the sea and the Orient. In a letter thanking Frank Doubleday for a volume of Kipling's poems, Twain loudly praises "The Bell Buoy" and "The Old Man," poems which he read "over and over again." "A bell-buoy," says Twain, "is a

68 Twain, Following the Equator, II, 314.
69 Loc. cit.
70 Loc. cit.
71 Twain, Letters, II, 746.
deeply impressive fellow-being. In those many recent trips up and down the Sound in the Kanawha he has talked to me nightly . . . and I got his meaning--now I have his words. No one but Kipling could do this strong and vivid thing. Some day I hope to hear the poem chanted or sung—with the bell-buoy breaking in, out of the distance."\textsuperscript{72} Twain also is quite enthusiastic about "The Old Men," referring to the poem as "delicious" and "so comically true."\textsuperscript{73} Here, then, is expressed Twain's view that the truly humorous and comic are to be found in portraying the commonplace—in regard to both men and events, in portraying the realistic aspects of life.

Another author also praised for telling "the straight truth" is De Blowitz. Twain always gives due credit and recognition to any author, no matter how insignificant he may be, who makes an honest effort to portray events and people realistically. De Blowitz is further complimented as being "quaintly and curiously interesting,"\textsuperscript{75} a compliment Twain accorded to few writers of his day.

Stoddard, another contemporary, who was a "facile and pleasing writer of poems and descriptive articles,"\textsuperscript{76} is also

\textsuperscript{72} Loc. cit.
\textsuperscript{73} Loc. cit.
\textsuperscript{74} Loc. cit.
\textsuperscript{75} Loc. cit.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., I, 246. Editor's note.
complimented. In a letter to Stoddard, Twain writes, "I have cut your article about San Marco out of a Y. paper ... and sent it to Howells. It is too bad to fool away such good literature in a perishable daily journal."77 Again Twain emphasizes the importance of simplicity in writing, of using plain, common, "every-day" language that everyone can understand and appreciate.

This emphasis on the merits of the concrete, simple language as opposed to the abstract, ornate, flowery language being used by the sentimentalist writers of the time is continued in Twain's praise of Grant's Memoirs. It was largely through Twain's persuasion and encouragement that Grant finally consented to write his Memoirs. "He [Grant]," Twain remarks, "had no confidence in his ability to write well, whereas everybody else in the world, excepting himself, is aware that he possesses an admirable literary gift and style."78 This admirable literary gift and style as manifested in Grant's Memoirs Twain then compares to Caesar's Commentaries. Both books are found to be on the same high level. Twain states that "the same high merits distinguished both books—clarity of statement, directness, simplicity, unpretentiousness, manifest truthfulness, fairness and justice toward friend and


78 Twain, Autobiography, I, 26.
foe alike, soldierly candor and frankness, and soldierly avoidance of flowery speech." Twain continues his discussion on Memoirs with mention of Largraine Wilhelmina, "she of the imperishable Memoirs." Twain is particularly "grateful . . . for her (unconscious) satire upon monarchy and nobility . . ." Since no mention is made of Wilhelmina's aesthetic qualities as a writer, Twain's comment must be taken as a mere appreciation of principles rather than as an appreciation of the good writing.

Twain in but one instance makes critical comments about sermons. In comparing the sermons of Rev. George Collyer with those of Henry Ward Beecher, Twain finds that Collyer's sermons "lack the profundity, the microscopic insight into the secret springs and impulses of the human heart, and the searching analysis of text and subject which distinguish Henry Ward Beecher's wonderful sermons, but they are more polished, more poetical, more elegant, more rhetorical and more dainty and felicitous in wording . . ." Twain's emphasis on craftsmanship, the aesthetic qualities of literary art is repeated, but due consideration is also given to

79 Twain, Lark Twain in Eruption, p. 133.
81 Loc. cit.
82 Twain, Love Letters, p. 53.
the importance of proper subject matter, subject matter near one's heart, subject matter based on an analysis of a personal experience.

All other writers and works Twain merely mentions, no attempt being made to give the basis for his evaluations. Such remarks as: "I am just finishing Charles Reade's Woman Hater, which has a handful of diamonds scattered over every page,"83 "In Exotic Israel, a very able novel by Baring Gould . . . ,"84 and "I read Dumas and was serene and content,"85 serve little purpose other than to show some of the books he read and apparently liked and do give us some picture of the extent of his reading.

A summation of the many foregoing scattered remarks proves surprisingly simple since most of them are mere repetitions of a few basic criticisms introduced in previous chapters. The close correlation between the sporadic remarks quoted in this chapter shows that Twain's criticisms were as a whole fairly consistent. The qualifying remark, fairly consistent, is introduced not as a means of evading the issue but rather as statement of fact. Most remarks made about Twain must necessarily be qualified; his unsteady temperament necessitates the qualification of practically any statement

83 Twain, Mark Twain to Mrs. Fairbanks, p. 208.
84 Ibid., p. 207.
85 Twain, Love Letters, p. 184.
made about him.

The fact that he could both praise and condemn the same work within the same breath is evidence of his sometimes puzzling judgments. While praising Don Quixote as "one of the most exquisite books that was ever written" Twain was at the same time warning his fiancée not to read it until he had deleted the gross speech it contained; it was not, he maintained, "a proper book for virgins to read." Twain's extreme prudishness at this point can only be forgiven on the grounds that he, like most men in love, was trying to make a good impression.

At times bias also mars the true validity of Twain's criticism; personal friends like Aldrich were likely to be over-praised and enemies over-castigated. Evidence of Twain's bias is also contained in the aforementioned letter to Burroughs wherein Twain admits rewriting a letter castigating William Bowen for his sham sentimentality. Evidence like this makes necessary the qualifying phrase "fairly consistent" in making an evaluation of Twain's many casual critical remarks, some of the remarks being inconsistent and some being biased. It must be admitted that Twain was reluctant to criticize his friends and over-enthusiastic in criticizing

86 Ibid., p. 76.
87 Loc. cit.
his enemies. Furthermore, in many instances Twain's criticisms are mere flat opinionated statements, abrupt short statements which make no attempt to answer "why" the work being criticized is or is not good. Many of the statements reflect poor taste, particularly those concerning Jane Austen in which Twain actually desecrates the grave.

Yet Twain often is consistent in his criticisms. Even though his judgment does at times appear to be based on prejudice and does at times appear inconsistent, there are certain principles of writing which he consistently denounces in his criticisms, and other principles which he consistently upholds. Twain in his tirade against sentimentalism is certainly sincere; sentimentalism and all its attributes are consistently denounced. Twain proves just as surely critical of "sham sentimentality" in his sporadic remarks as he does in his more serious, thoughtful criticism. All the attributes of sentimentality dwelt upon in his serious, reflective criticism of Cooper and Scott are reiterated in his more brief, sporadic remarks about Malory's King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table. The "contemporary-minded" Twain ridicules not only Malory but Langland and Chaucer as well, men of the distant past who, if for no other reason than their remoteness, are to be ignored. Twain cannot see modern writers endangering their own originality in an effort to copy men who cannot even be understood.
Characterizations based on "experienced living" are to Twain the only valid characterizations, another principle he maintains consistently. A valid, realistic dialogue can only be expressed by a writer who has lived and worked with the characters whose dialogue he is attempting to reproduce. Again, there is a tie up between Twain's reflective, serious criticism of Harte's weak Atlantic seaboard characterizations and the remarks concerning Goldsmith's failure of characterization in The Vicar of Wakefield. Both Harte's and Goldsmith's characterizations failed because they were not convincingly real, a failure Twain attributes to their lack of "living experience" with the people they were trying to portray.

On the other hand, the characterizations of Cable and Harris were successful because the dramatic monologue revealing character was based on living experiences. Uncle Remus' negro dialect Harris knew first hand, not through mere observation. Kipling and Dana were also successful in their characterizations by virtue of this same principle, knowledge of dialect and character through living experience.

Another writing principle which Twain consistently criticizes in both his considered serious criticism and incidental remarks is the use of ornate, high-sounding language to express simple ideas. Simplicity and concreteness are two principles which Twain always upholds as essential to good writing; those very two principles, simplicity and concre-
ness, made Grant's Memoirs so successful. Flowery, "windy" language can never take the place of the precise, concrete statement in which felicity of phrasing is best attained in natural, informal narration. Thus, the rigid canons governing story structure set up by Poe Twain ignores as contributing to a formal, stiff, unnatural style. All the foregoing information, it is to be noted, merely proves to be a reaffirmation of basic principles already introduced in the chapters on Twain's more serious reflective criticism.
CHAPTER IV

CRITICISM OF HOWELLS--A REFLECTION
OF TWAIN'S OWN LITERARY STANDARDS

That a whole chapter is to be devoted to a single individual, William D. Howells, is justified by the fact that Twain's reflective, complimentary criticism of Howells entails all the basic principles of good writing which Twain felt essential and which he himself practiced. Thus Twain's favorable criticism of Howells gives us an accurate picture of Twain himself as a literary artist; critical quotations concerning Howells "reveal Mark's own standard of style as sharply as they illuminate Howells' practice." 1 Another important fact concerning Twain's criticism of Howells is that Howells is the only author whom Twain considered both complimentarily and thoughtfully. True, Twain does make favorable criticisms of other authors, but only by means of casual, sporadic, unreflective remarks, remarks lacking the depth and quality of serious reflective criticism. Twain's criticism of Howells is, however, perhaps his most sound, reflective criticism, even though it is somewhat marred by the favoritism Twain was in the habit of showing his friends. Even when Twain did find fault with Howells' writing, he was reluctant to

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admit it, as is shown in the following excuse Twain makes for one of Howells' earlier sentimental works, Their Wedding Journey. "It was very moving and very beautiful," says Twain, "would have been overwhelmingly moving, at times, but for the haltings and pauses compelled by the difficulties of MS. . ." 2

Twain's hedging is here quite apparent; however, such occasions are rare since on the whole Twain and Howells were in agreement as to what constitutes literary art.

Since Howells, according to Twain, embodies all the principles essential to good writing, we shall devote the remainder of the chapter to a discussion of each of these, principles which Twain continually finds lacking in most of the writings of his day. These principles when followed closely Twain felt constitute a true literary craftsmanship, a literary craftsmanship attained, Twain believed, by Howells to its fullest extent.

Although this tendency toward a studied literary craftsmanship is usually accredited to Howells, many critics and writers still have the false impression that Twain's art was a strictly native, spontaneous art, one which was a finished product at the first writing with no attempt being made at revision. This faulty impression is given us by Carl Van Doren in his The American Novel. Van Doren sums Twain up as

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"a natural force which . . . moved through the world laughing, an American Adam with the eye of innocence giving new names to what he saw." However, at the present time many of our modern critics are acknowledging Twain as a conscious literary artist who paid much attention to the rhetorical principles of writing. De Voto in speaking of Twain's style says "... such a style is not developed inattentively, nor are infants born with one by God's providence." Gladys C. Bellamy also discounts the belief that Twain was careless in revision or shunned it altogether by relating Twain's conscientious writing of "The Recent Carnival of Crime in Connecticut." "This short study of the human conscience," says Bellamy, "he had written in two days, but, as he wrote to Howells, he later spent three more days 'trimming, altering and working at it.' Thus," continues Bellamy, "the widespread opinion that Mark Twain was a funnyman who merely wrote down whatever happened to come into his head needs revision." Although many other writers could be quoted on the view of Twain's unstudied, spontaneous writings, for the purpose of this thesis, no more of them need be considered.

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4 Ibid., p. 265.
5 Ibid., pp. 135-36
Pursuing the general theme of the chapter, Twain's reflective, positive criticism of Howells as a reflection of Twain's own literary style or standards, we discover that Twain finds one of Howells' chief merits to be his ability to portray common events and commonplace people realistically, true to life. This accuracy of presentation of people and events Twain attributes to Howells' wonderful power of observation, a quality he found so very lacking in Cooper, Scott, and later Harte. Twain remarks that Howells' literature "is all such truth--truth to the life; everywhere [his] pen falls it leaves a photograph."\(^6\) This accuracy of observation, Twain claims, led Howells to portray life at sea, a phase of life with which Twain was certainly familiar, more realistically than anyone else had ever portrayed it. "I did imagine," says Mark, "that everything had been said about life at sea that could be said--but no matter, it was all a failure and lies, nothing but lies with a thin varnish of fact, only you have stated it as it absolutely is."\(^7\) However, Howells' quality of realistic portrayal was not confined to the sea; characters were also shown "inside and out." Twain says that only Howells sees "people and their ways, and their insides

\(^{6}\) Twain, *Letters*, I, 346.

\(^{7}\) *Loc. cit.*
and outsides, as they are and makes them talk as they do talk."8 Twain is particularly impressed with Howells' realistic portrayal of the drunken business magnate, Silas Lapham, the "paint king" in one of his most successful novels, *The Rise of Silas Lapham*. The portrayal of the dinner scene itself and all the events leading to Lapham's downfall Twain describes as realism at its best. "That's the best drunk scene--because the truest--that I ever read," says Twain. "There are touches in it that I never saw any writer take note of before and they are set before the reader with amazing accuracy."9 The minute accuracy in observation Twain jokingly infers could only be attained by someone who himself had quite recently experienced the elevating affects of liquor. "How very drunk and how recently drunk, and how altogether admirably drunk you [Howells] must have been," says Twain, "to enable you to contrive that masterpiece."10 Thus the ever-occurring principle that observation to be truly accurate need be based on experience is once more repeated.

Together with Howells' fine realistic characterizations, Twain lauds the perfect, simple, unstudied English used to portray these characterizations. To Twain simplicity

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8 *Loc. cit.*


10 *Loc. cit.*
of language was one of the chief virtues of any writer living in a democracy. A writer to be truly effective must be understood by the masses, and not merely by the learned few. Thus Twain has much praise for Howells' "...easy...flowing...simple...unstudied...clear...limpid...understandable...unconfused...seemingly unadorned...language." A simple language is necessarily unadorned; simplicity in language means "putting your idea across" in the simplest terms and as briefly as possible. Compactness of statement Twain finds exemplified in most of Howells' works; however, he finds the following phrase particularly noteworthy: "...an idealist immersed in realities who involuntarily transmutes the events under his eye into something like the visionary issues of reverie." This ability of Howells to express abstract ideas in brief concrete terms Twain sums up by stating that "with a hundred words to do it with, the literary artisan could catch that airy thought, and tie it down and reduce it to a concrete condition, visible, substantial, understandable and all right, like a cabbage; but the artist does it with twenty and the result is a flower."13

Twain has further praise for Howells' compactness of

12 Ibid., p. 232.
13 Loc. cit.
statement when writing stage directions. Howells in his stage directions never uses more words than are absolutely necessary; however, the brevity never detracts from his wit or information, but rather enhances it. On the other hand, "some authors overdo the stage directions, ... they spend so much time and take up so much room in telling us how a person said a thing and how he looked and acted when he said it that we get tired and vexed and wish he hadn't said it at all. Other author's directions are brief enough, but it is seldom that the brevity contains either wit or information."\textsuperscript{14} To prove his point that Howells' brevity doesn't detract from needed information, Twain quotes stage directions, eliminating the intervening conversation, and shows that even if we do not hear the dialogue, we still have a fairly good idea of what goes on in the conversation by merely noting the stage directions.

Not only, however, were Howells' stage directions brief. They were also, according to Twain, characterized by variety, each stage direction contributing to a further identification of the character's personality. "Mr. Howells," says Twain, "does not repeat his forms, and does not need to; he can invent fresh ones without limit."\textsuperscript{15} However, some writers "have

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., p. 237.
\textsuperscript{15} Loc. cit.
nothing in stock but a cigar, a laugh, a blush, and a bursting into tears. In their poverty they work these sorry things to the bone." This overuse of stock phrases Twain claims weakens characterization as is shown in the overly-used stage direction "... murmured Gladys, blushing."... This poor old shop-worn blush is a tiresome thing. We get so we would rather Gladys would fall out of the book and break her neck than do it again."16 Such a stage direction adds little if anything to the character's personality and makes no distinction between this particular character and any other character.

Twain asserts that another principle by which Howells attains compactness, brevity and simplicity of style is the use of the right word. The approximate word is as foreign to the right word, Twain thought, as the "lightning bug is to the lightning."17 Twain thought also that "... in the matter of verbal exactness, Mr. Howells has no superior. ..." Howells, like Twain, was "always able to find that elusive and shifty grain of gold, the right word." This similarity of views regarding the importance of the right word goes hand in hand with another similarity of views—the importance of "... unforced and seemingly unconscious felicity of phrasing."18 In remarking on a paper on Machiavelli which

16 Loc. Cit.
Howells had published in *Harpers*, Twain points out "... how easy and flowing it is; how unvexed by ruggedness, clumsiness, broken meters; ... how understandable, how unconfused by cross currents, eddies, undertows...."19 Thus again Howells conforms to Twain's basic premise of the simplicity and straightforwardness necessary in presentation of facts to the masses. Both men "... disclosed no individual aberrations either in vocabulary or in usage."20

The one remaining principle that need be touched upon is Twain's high regard for Howells' subtle humor. Twain was particularly impressed by the subtle, elusive humor in *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, a humor described as "so very subtle and elusive... just a vanishing breath of perfume which a body isn't certain he smelt till he stops and takes another smell... ."21 In addition to this elusive subtleness, Twain commends the variety of Howells' humor. "I do not think anyone else can play with humorous fancies so gracefully and delicately and deliciously as he does," says Twain, "nor has so many to play with... ."22 Twain continues by stating that Howells' "... is a humor which flows softly all around about and over and through the mesh of the page, pervasive,

19 Ibid., pp. 228-30.
20 Matthews, *op. cit.*, p. 635.
refreshing, health giving, and makes no more show and no more noise than does the circulation of the blood."\(^{23}\) That Twain should dwell particularly on the subtle aspects of Howells' humor is to be expected since Twain hated "show" and "pretentiousness" in any form. Humor of the time as defined by Blair "was a foe to prolixity of any kind; it admitted no fine writing or affectation of style. . ."\(^{24}\) If we are to take this statement at face value, then Twain's remark concerning the easy, flowing characteristics of Howells' writing, "unvexed by ruggedness, clumsiness, broken meters. . . simple. . . understandable. . . unconfused by cross-currents, eddies, undertows. . . seemingly unadorned. . ."\(^{25}\) takes on added significance for it places Howells more securely in a role in which he was not seriously considered—the role of humorist. In his later years Twain's own view of the role of humor in society became much more inclusive; he disclaimed the purpose of his early type of humor for mere entertainment, a humor based on exaggeration and sometimes even reverting to caco¬graphy for humorous effect, in favor of a humor whose aim is to preach and teach; Twain says that, "humor must not pro-

\(^{23}\) Loc. cit.


\(^{25}\) Twain, "William Dean Howells," *What Isfan?*, pp. 229-
fessedly teach, and it must not professedly preach, but it
must do both if it would live forever. . . . I have always
preached . . . If the humor came of its own accord and unin­
vited, I have allowed it a place in my sermon, but I was
not writing the sermon for the sake of the humor."26 This
latter view without doubt conforms much more closely to the
type of humor Howells exemplified and for which Twain praised
him. However, it must be kept in mind that Twain makes this
statement assuming that the passage would not be printed until
seventy-five years after his death. "I am saying these vain
things in this frank way," writes Twain, "because I am a dead
person speaking from the grave. Even I would be too modest
to say them in life."27

Whether or not Twain's criticism of Howells is pre­
judiced, slanted in only a favorable direction, the fact re­
mains, nevertheless, that Twain's criticism is valuable in
that it sets up certain principles of true craftsmanship.
That Howells was a literary craftsman is not denied even by
his most severe critics. C. Hartley Grattan, although he
disclaims Howells' position as a realist, claiming he's both
too genteel and too superficial, nevertheless admits that

26 Twain, Mark Twain in Eruption. Edited by Bernard
De Voto. (New York and London: Harper and Brothers Publishers,

27 Loc. cit.
Howells' "style represents a very considerable achievement
... a competent craftsman Howells certainly was."28 Henry
K. Alden, in an article in the Book News Monthly, comments
on Twain's essay in appreciation of Howells, claiming that
"we have had no better criticism of the novelist's art of
expression than that."29 So it appears that by looking at
Twain's criticism in the light of the principles of literary
craftsmanship it sets up, we can evaluate the literary stan­
dards at the same time—standards which are often similar and,
when different, are rarely irreconcilable.

As realists, both Howells and Twain would naturally
possess "the realist's abiding abhorrence for romanticism,
willful, arbitrary and high flown, for its striving for vivid
external effects and for the departure from veracity which
this seeking entails."30 However, neither of the men were
ture realists, another similarity worth noting. Howells self-
avowedly calls his a "reticent realism,"31 a realism which
Firkins terms an "elusive concept of realism" which insists

28 C. Hartley Grattan, "Howells: Ten Years After,"
American Mercury, XX (August, 1930), 42-50.

29 "Mark Twain as a Serious Force in Literature,"
Current Literature, XLVIII (June, 1910), 666.

30 Matthews, op. cit., pp. 641-42.

31 Clara Larbury Kirk and Rudolph Kirk, William D.
Howells, p. cxvii.
upon the "amiable, agreeable, undisturbing," omitting all the crime and more sordid things in life. Twain's realism, although including a much larger portion of life, is also somewhat restricted. Both men, although they consider themselves realists, shy away from the subject of sex, so much so that the very word is shunned. Firkins speaks of Howells' "fear of sexual frankness [as almost amounting] to morbidity," while Carl Van Doren gives us the following views of Twain's treatment of sex. "In his few references to sex, a topic on which he was, publically at least, as reticent as a schoolboy is in public, he clung to the medieval code of chivalry and to the mid-century code of respectability." This attitude is in strong contrast to the usual concept of realism.

Both men regard women with such decorum that one gets the impression that the entire race of women are virgins; a woman's character is never to be questioned; all women, both in fiction and in real life, are eulogized as being chaste and pure. Both men believed that decent literature should never "cause the blush of shame to rise upon the maiden's cheek." Thus they have no place in their novels for sex or the portrayal of women whose character might be the least bit "shady."

33 Loc. cit.
35 Loc. cit.
However, even though both men deviate somewhat from the more general inclusive definition of realism, "the representation of facts and life exactly as they are," they do tend to a great extent to follow the basic fundamental principles of realism. It is in the following of these principles that both men are equally consistent, so perhaps a summation of them is in order. The basis of realism is an opposition to the school of romanticism, particularly exaggerated sham sentimentality, pretentiousness or the gaudy show of mere external effects without any attempt to probe into the deeper sensibilities, ostentatious use of learned words and outdated, archaic words, use of a generally loose, careless style of writing characterized by spontaneity, and use of mere superficial observations instead of real experiences in portraying characters and life. Upon all these basic principles both Twain and Howells agree—Twain praises Howells' use of brief, simple concrete terms to express commonplace real life situations, experiences lived and not merely superficially observed, because he himself was always trying to present abstract terms and generalizations about life in brief, concrete form, something the reader "could get his hands on." This concreteness is shown by Twain's large reliance on metaphor and simile to illustrate his generalizations. Twain's con-

Pactness and concreteness of statement are also amply illustrated by the Puddinhead maxims, which are still recited and repeated in the Twentieth Century.

Even though exaggerated, sham sentimentality was never overlooked in their criticism of the writings of other authors, both Howells and Twain at one time or another committed this very crime. Howells in his early writings followed his model, the romantic Heine, so closely that he, too, was prone to write sentimentally, this sentimentality being particularly noticeable in his very first novel, Their Wedding Journey, a novel which Twain actually praised! Twain, on the other hand, reverts to sentimentality in one of his later works, Joan of Arc, a work which he, contrary to the opinion of most critics, considered as one of his best. Although other instances of sentimentality in the works of Twain might be cited, Joan of Arc seems to be the novel in which it is most noticeable and clear-cut, most nearly reaching the classification of "sham."

Although critics have found many faults in the writing of both Howells and Twain, there is common agreement that their style of writing shows superior craftsmanship. Both writers were meticulous in their choice of words, in sentence structure, and attained a prose rhythm seldom surpassed. It is no wonder then that they were so vociferous in denouncing the careless, spontaneous writing so prevalent in their day.
To be understood by the masses, the "common man," was the chief aim of both Howells and Twain. To attain this "universal understanding" both men found it necessary to speak in simple, many times colloquial, terms; thus they made it possible for everyone to become acquainted with some of the "inner secrets" of man and his world.

If all the above information is taken into consideration, Twain is less likely to be censured too severely for his apparent prejudiced treatment of Howells, for Howells embodied all the principles of craftsmanship which Twain considered essential to good literature. It is natural that there should be much agreement between writers whose philosophy of writing and even of life was so identical. To the very end Howells and Twain were in perfect agreement on most political issues, both authors strong advocates of anti-imperialism, both condemning the United States and Britain's expansionist policies in South Africa, China and the Philippines. Thus to discard Twain's criticism of Howells on the grounds that it is too biased would be unwise, since consideration of Twain's criticism of Howells gives a clear picture of Twain's own theories and standards of writing, theories and standards by which he judged the writing of all other authors.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

We have come upon Twain's standards for literary criticism in various areas of his writing: in novels, letters, and essays. To summarize core values in his criticism proves somewhat difficult, because Twain's criticism does not conform to any particular school of criticism, but is rather a hodgepodge of remarks, with a few intervening essays, sometimes appearing to be based on mere prejudice and sometimes appearing to have some basis of fact. The very fact that Twain himself disclaims any attempt at bona fide literary criticism in the true sense of the word adds to the difficulty. Thus, any attempt to portray Twain as a bona fide literary critic proves futile; nevertheless, an evaluation can be made of his contribution to the criticism of the time, even if only his strong personal opinions are considered, opinions which he frequently and ably expressed. So the thesis has actually been dealing with Twain's attitudes rather than with any strong, deeply reflective criticisms.

One of Twain's major weaknesses in criticism, no doubt, is his tendency to make wild, exaggerated generalizations, usually based on scant evidence, and sometimes seemingly based on mere prejudice. For instance, Twain does not even attempt to justify the scattered, shallow, derogatory remarks he makes about Jane Austen; the only thing these shallow remarks are
evidence of is Twain's own poor taste since in these remarks he actually desecrates Austen's grave. Other sporadic remarks made concerning Poe, Carlyle and some of the lesser writers also prove to be mere shallow statements made on the spur-of-the-moment with no basis of fact. Even in his longer criticisms, the essays, there is evidence of much catering to personal friends, and further evidence of unjustified, exaggerated castigation of those he dislikes, much prejudice being shown toward anyone even remotely connected with romanticism. In fact, his friends are overly praised, eulogized, while anyone else is apt to be overly condemned.

Another fault that deters from Twain's effectiveness as a critic was his failure to "practice what he preached." There is a marked inconsistency between what Twain does and what he says he does; he himself frequently does not follow the very rules he sets up; he does the very things he so vehemently criticizes others for doing. Thus, though his main critical thesis is centered about the evils of romanticism, Twain himself contributed to the romantic movement. One of Twain's best works, *Life on the Mississippi*, is based on a romantic portrayal of the "river-god." Both in *Life on the Mississippi* (1883) and *The Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc*, a later work (1896), Twain shows a tendency toward romanticism. His romantic portraiture of the Mississippi, his "river-god," cannot be overlooked; neither can his portrayal
of the Maid of Orleans. Although his portrayal of the Mississippi is deeply colored by romantic nostalgia, it does contain many realistic elements. The Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc, on the other hand, is romanticism at its peak, sentimentality and all! That Twain, supposedly the life-long bitter opponent of sentimentalism should in late-life succumb to its use is evidence enough that the germ of romanticism, first evidenced in his writing of Life on the Mississippi, remained "in his system" throughout his life. Even Howells, Twain's best friend, calls him "a romancer." "Even now [February, 1901]" says Howells, "I think he should rather be called a romancer [than novelist]..."¹ Carl Van Doren in an article comparing Mark Twain and Bernard Shaw also comments on the romantic qualities of The Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc, claiming the novel "... raises the white banner of romantic goodness against the evil and malicious world."²

The novel also repudiates the following remark made by Twain in one of his later letters. Twain writes, "I confine myself to life with which I am familiar when pretending to portray life."³ However, there is little evidence of

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Twain's familiarity with life in the Middle Ages. Neither A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court (1883) nor The Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc (1896) shows any grasp of the actual life in the Middle Ages.

Basil Davenport defends a statement made in his review of "The Sword and the Stone," that Twain was "a man who hated the Middle Ages, knowing nothing whatever about them," by quoting from a review by Howells, Twain's best friend, in which Howells states, "My suffering begins when he [Twain] does the supposedly medieval thing. Then I suspect that his armor is of tin, that the castles and rocks are pasteboard, that the mob of citizens and soldiers who fill the air with the clash of their two-up-and-two-down combats and the well-known muffled roar of their voices, have been hired in at so much a night . . . ." Since the above quotation comes from an otherwise laudatory review, and was made by one who admired and was admired by Twain, it should prove significant in strengthening the contention made in this thesis that Twain, although he preaches against writing about unfamiliar things, does so himself.

Again, although Twain hated the Middle Ages, particularly the sentimental writers' eulogistic, exaggerated portrayal of

5 Loc. cit., citing William Dean Howells.
chivalry, refinement and gentility, he does himself "in his few references to sex ... [clinging] to the medieval code of chivalry and to the mid-century code of respectability." 6 This attitude certainly proves inconsistent for one who laughed uproariously at "our tenth-rate ignorant feudal tastes and our mawkish imitative 'refinement'" 7 and one who considered himself a man of his own time who had nothing to do with the past.

Although Twain pokes fun at the sentimental writers' practice of nostalgically looking at the past, he himself has some of his most pleasant and successful moments while contemplating his boyhood and his early years on the Mississippi. It is not surprising, then, that *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, a book based on a nostalgic reminiscence of Twain's boyhood, is his most successful book. Another novel showing Twain's absorption with his youth, his hankering to recapture some of its pleasanter moments, is *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. This tendency to return to his boyhood pranks and dreams carries through even in the very late years of Twain's life as evidenced by the story *Tom Sawyer Abroad* (1894).

Other weaknesses stem from Twain's listless attitude toward literary criticism; Twain made no attempt to take lit-

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crazy criticism seriously. His criticism is many times merely another way of "letting off steam." He dares not criticize personal friends; he dares not "stick his neck out" and lose patrons. Literary criticism was not a means of making money quickly; fiction proved more profitable. Writing to Twain was first and foremost a means of making money and sometimes, particularly in later years, this commercialized view led to a hurried kind of writing, a writing in which Twain could not reach his peak of attainment.

Twain's own limited background also curbed his critical powers. Although Twain no doubt did much reading, his reading was not broad enough, not chosen well enough, to justify the role of critic of literature. Twain was self-educated and even though "well educated" did not have the advantage of a guiding hand to point out the direction to follow in the broad and never-ending avenues of literature. Twain once declared that, aside from The Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc, his writings "'needed no preparation and got none . . .';" an exaggeration probably, but nevertheless significant.

Also, many of Twain's unjust criticisms stem from the fact that he did not consider the period in which the writer is writing; he tried to relate modern standards to old writers, not taking into consideration that the writers of the past

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"were not armed and equipped with the weapons of precision now available for men of only ordinary stature, " and that they, the older writers, could not be expected to foresee that their methods would be outmoded in coming years. This fault Brander Matthews lists as "Huck's most obvious limitation as a critic of literature."  

Twain's criticism, in addition to being many times prejudiced, shallow and inconsistent, is also somewhat limited and is confined to the lesser writers of the period to the extent that Twain made no attempt to consider writers like Whitman, Emerson, James and Lowell, the better major writers of the time. It is not surprising, then, that Twain's criticism is disproportionately negative. A criticism devoted largely to the commercial, "two-bit" writers and ignoring such important writers as Whitman, Emerson, James and Lowell would naturally tend in this direction. Twain himself explains his tendency toward the negative aspects of criticism by proclaiming that the only time he writes criticism is when he hates someone. 

In his essays containing the longer, more serious, thoughtful criticisms, Twain deals in extremes; he either has "all praise" for an author or "all condemnation." There is no middle ground; either an author is "all good" or "all bad".

10 Loc. cit.
11 See page 1 above.
It is only in the brief, incidental remarks that Twain occasionally treats an author as having both merits and faults. This broader outlook is not evidenced in any of Twain's longer essays based on more reflective criticism.

Twain was actually too preoccupied with social criticism to give literary criticism much serious thought. When he did attempt literary criticism, he placed too much emphasis on rhetoric, the external, mechanical qualities of writing, and not enough on the value of the idea being portrayed. Thus, Twain, the literary craftsman, was evaluating mainly the mechanics of literature: the use of the "right word," "felicity of phrasing," "prose rhythm"—the style being the most important thing, not the idea. This extreme preoccupation with style is clearly recognized by Bellamy. "Style is the aspect of writing," she says, "which he [Twain] considered most closely in the writings of others and with which he concerned himself most frequently in his own work." It was this meticulous concern over the mechanics of writing which led Twain to overlook many of the merits which the writings of Cooper and Scott contained. "Mark was led to overlook major merits in Cooper's and Scott's works," says Brander Matthews, "in his disgust at their minor lapses from rhetoric—

cal propriety."

Thus, he overlooks the "broad bold pictures of life in the green forest and on the blue water painted in [Cooper's] *The Last of the Mohicans* and in *The Pilot*," and further overlooks Scott's adequate portrayal of Quentin Durward and concentrates wholly on Scott's and Cooper's haphazard use of words and their careless and reckless style. According to Matthews, it is only in condemning these rhetorical principles that Twain's criticism is justified, for admittedly "Cooper is not a word musician; he sometimes flats and sharps and he is often content when he has happened on the approximate terms." and Scott also "did not take his fiction over-seriously. He was ... improvising novels to buy farms with. His style, like his construction is sometimes careless, not to call it reckless." However, "despite their occasional slovenliness of diction ... Scott and Cooper," says Matthews, "could create individual characters standing upon their own feet and dominating the situation in which they are immersed." Twain, on the other hand, points out that it is the very weakness which Matthews admits, Cooper's misuse of the English language, that contributes to

14 *Loc. cit.*
15 *Loc. cit.*
16 *Loc. cit.*
a weakness in his characterizations; Cooper's arbitrary use of language, his guess-work in the choice of words and dialect, his handling of conversation keep his characters from coming to life.

Matthews was not the only person but merely one of many who felt that Twain's criticism of Cooper was carried too far. Even one of Twain's best and most agreeable friends, the Reverend Twichell, evidently did not agree with Twain's criticism of Cooper for in one of Twain's letters the following excerpt appears: "... and when you [Twichell] say he [Brander Matthews] has earned your gratitude for cuffing me for my crimes against the Leatherstockings ... I ain't making any objection. Dern your gratitude." The general tone of the above remark seems to imply that even Twain, in his later years, began to acknowledge that perhaps he carried his criticism of Cooper just a bit too far.

William Lyon Phelps, professor of English Literature at Yale University, would disregard Twain's criticism of Cooper altogether. He sees the attack on Fenimore Cooper as of no consequence whatsoever except as a humorous document. Most writers, however, share the view professed in the Dial


review of Twain's *How to Tell a Story and Other Essays* which states that Twain's "... invasion of literary territory... an indictment of James Fenimore Cooper, ... will not generally be regarded as [a contribution] to critical literature, although the [criticism] says some very sensible things."20 The very fact that the criticism "says some very sensible things," a fact heretofore also acknowledged by Matthews, repudiates Phelps' contention that Twain's criticism of Cooper is "of no consequence."

That Twain's criticism of Cooper, Scott and other writers is significant is acknowledged by some authorities. "Mark's ventures into criticism," says Matthews, "are not many, but they are significant; and they shed light upon his own artistic standards."21 It is precisely this principle which makes the pursuit of Twain's criticism worth-while. In his criticism, Twain sets up definite stylistic standards which he expects the writer to follow; these standards serve as a guide to the attainment of a true literary craftsmanship; they prove valuable as a guide to both novice and professional writer. These standards of good writing are reiterated throughout Twain's many works; a brief summary of some of them follows. Twain had no "trunk" with loose prose; his prose was concise, to the point, as illustrated by the Puddinhead

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20 "How to Tell a Story and Other Essays Review," The *Dial*, XXIII (August 1, 1897), 75.

21 Matthews, op. cit., p. 639.
maxims, "pungent maxims produced as a result of his conscious practice in pruning and condensing."22 "As to the adjective," says Twain in one of these Puddinhead maxims, "when in doubt, strike it out."23 Thus Twain insists that there is no substitute for the right word. One should either use the right word or none at all; Twain is "... seeking always the exact noun and the inexorable adjective;"24 there is no need for wordiness.

This conciseness in expression attained through careful selectivity of words added, Twain believed, to a clearer understanding of the language by the masses. Mark Twain wanted to be understood by the common people, the masses, so he used simple Anglo-Saxon terms; "the Lincolnian word" was given preference to the "Charles Sumnerian";25 Twain's was not the scholarly English of Milton, Thackeray or James but rather the simple English of Grant. Twain writes English "as if it were a primitive and not a derivative language;"26 Twain, like General Grant, employs his words "... to express the plain, straight meaning their common acceptance has given them, with no regard to their structural significance or their philological implications."27 Milton, Thackeray, and James,

22 Bellamy, op. cit., p. 137.
23 Matthews, loc. cit.
24 Ibid., p. 335.
25 Ibid., p. 336.
27 Loc. cit.
on the other hand, employ an English which is "... scholarly
and conscious; it knows who its grandfather was; it has the
refinement and subtlety of an old patriciate."28 However
fine and exquisitely artistic the language of Milton, Thackeray
and James is "... you will not have with it the wildest
suggestion, the largest human feeling, or ... the loftiest
reach of imagination."29 qualities which can only be fully
attained in the simple language used by Twain.

The following passage describing a circus trick riding
performance is marked by a balanced construction suggesting
the preliminary easy riding: "... two and two, and gentle-
man and lady, side by side ... drawers and undershirts ... no shoes nor stirrups ... their hands on their thighs easy
and comfortable."30 As "the performers stand up on their
horses, the phrases expand to a rolling tripartite gait '... so gentle and wavy and graceful ... so tall and airy and
straight ... their heads bobbing and skimming along, away
up there under the tent roof ...'"31 In addition to the
carefully controlled balance and grammatical parallelism,
there is in the above passage an unmistakable underlying prose

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28 Loc. cit.
29 Loc. cit.
30 Twain, Huckleberry Finn, quoted in "Reading and
Writing," New Republic, C2 (May 1, 1944), p. 60S.
31 Loc. cit.
rhythm, a prose rhythm characteristic of much of Twain's writing. Twain's sentences never seem labored, no matter how deeply they have been meditated. There is a deliberate colloquial ease about them, an unforced and unconscious felicity of phrasing which almost defies duplication. This easy, effortless flow of Twain's sentences made him readable on all levels, by the masses as well as by the learned. "My books are water," Twain writes in 1885, "those of the great geniuses are wine. Everybody drinks water."  

Indeed a shrewd piece of literary criticism!

Gladys Bellamy gives a very adequate summation of Twain's standards of writing, standards which he meticulously followed and which he expected his fellow writers to follow, by comparing the similarities between the artistic style of Lincoln and Twain. Bellamy quotes the following excerpt from an article by Roy P. Basler, listing Lincolnian characteristics in writing, and notes that "... most of this [the Lincolnian characteristics] applies with equal force to the prose of Mark Twain."  

Twain, like Lincoln, used: "... concrete rather than abstract words, current idiom rather than 'authoritarian nicety'... in imagery 'an instinct for analogy and metaphor'... in sentence structure, balance and gram-


33 Bellamy, op. cit.
Thus, Twain's style, like Lincoln's, is marked by a deliberate striving for simplicity, a simplicity attained by use of a vivid vocabulary and imagery; idiosyncratic phrasing and colloquial ease of expression.

Another factor to be considered in the evaluation of Twain's criticism is the effect it had on belittling the exaggerated, sham sentimentality characteristic of the majority of writing of the 1840's to 1860's and the further effect it had on promoting the approaching realism. Twain's criticism was a direct influence in the final clearing of the tearful atmosphere created by the sham sentimentalists and in setting up arbitrary rules which the realist might follow. A major point which Twain's criticism emphasizes is that to write realistically one must confine his writings to life and characters with which he is familiar. To realistically portray characters a writer has to have had living experiences with them; only then can he give the true portrayal of dialect and mannerisms so necessary for a realistic characterization.

Twain further maintained that only by sticking close to reality can the writer make a truthful presentation of material. A truthful presentation can best be achieved by depicting current events, by depicting life of the writer's day and section, life and events with which he is most familiar.

34 Loc. cit.
Thus, Twain, like other local colorists and realists, saw the need for a native literature divorced from Europe and the far-off realms of the imagination.

However, Twain himself was not a true realist, his criticism of non-realists, romanticists in particular, dwelt upon the fact that their depiction of characters and events did not even approach reality; in fact, their characters and events were so far removed from reality, Twain thought, that they became mere fantasies. Thus, Twain did not demand writing based strictly on realism but rather writing which at least seemed plausible, writing based on verisimilitude. No doubt Twain's willingness to settle for verisimilitude is due to the realization that he himself was not a true realist. Twain's realism is best termed "selective realism" for he, like Howells, was reluctant to talk about sex. Twain fails to see life as a whole; he overemphasizes the sordid, ugly aspects of life at the expense of the sublime and the noble. It is this "... absorption with ugliness which reveals his [Twain's] failure to see life as a whole," according to Bellamy.35

Nevertheless, even though Twain himself digressed from realism somewhat, he did through his criticisms set up certain standards which he considered essential to a realistic portrayal of characters and events, and he did contribute to the realists'

35 Bellamy, op. cit., p. 260
cause in this manner. Twain, in *Huckleberry Finn* and *Life on the Mississippi*, does succeed in giving us a true realistic picture of his boyhood haunts in Hannibal, Missouri, and his later experiences on the Mississippi; he does in these, his two masterpieces, give us a realistic picture of the fanatically superstitious negro, and a less realistic, somewhat idealized characterization of the typical American boy. This vivid, realistic depiction of his life and day and the somewhat realistic portrayal of the people involved is evident throughout most of his other novels.

The final evaluation of Twain's criticism based upon a summation of both the weak and the strong points in his criticism, shows a predominance of weak points. Twain's criticism frequently consists of mere generalizations and is often based on mere personal prejudice. Also, his criticism is oftimes too temperamental, being contained many times in heated "on-the-spur-of-the-moment" remarks, remarks with little or no real critical value. Furthermore, Twain confines most of his criticism to a mere consideration of the external, mechanical aspects of writing with little or no concern for ideas. There is also an inconsistency between what Twain does and what he says he does; he himself is guilty oftimes of the very faults he so severely condemns in others. Thus, on the basis of the foregoing research, it appears that Twain's criticism is to be taken rather lightly. Twain's role as a literary critic is
overshadowed by his role as a social critic, his literary criticism being incidental to his social criticism.

However, not all of Twain's criticism should be discarded as weak; there is some strong, valid criticism among the weaker, superficial criticism. Particularly noteworthy is Twain's criticism of the mechanical aspects of writing. Twain, the literary craftsman, as a rule made little attempt at formal criticism; however, he does become somewhat formal in his criticism of rhetoric. Most of the judgments concerning rhetoric Twain renders in all seriousness, and they prove most valuable in aiding the student to formulate the Twainian aesthetic. It is in the rendering of judgments on rhetoric that Twain proves most proficient; and it is in his role as literary craftsman that he contributes most to the criticism of his day for he sets up rules by which both the novice and professional writer may profit.

Twain's criticism also tends to make the writer "realism conscious" and laughs to scorn all those writers engaged in pretentious, exaggeratedly sentimental, romantic writing. Twain's critical contributions to realism emphasize the importance of truth in writing, truth which could only be attained through living experiences recorded with careful, minute observation.

Twain, in the last analysis, represents the nineteenth century "drift toward the trenchant style in criticism;" he is
the "forerunner of tooth-and-claw criticism . . .," "a criticism [which] reached its apotheosis in nineteenth century America . . ."36 Twain's swift sorties into literary criticism, his withering appraisal of books and authors constitutes ". . . a personal, vituperative, iconclastic criticism [with a] flailing quality characteristic of the then critical trend."37 Thus, Twain is in many ways an important contributor to the criticism of his day.


37 Loc. cit.
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