MARK TWAIN AND HENRY JAMES: DIFFERENT AMERICANS, SIMILAR JOURNEYS

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CHAPTER I

FINDING THE BRIDGES BETWEEN TWAIN AND JAMES.

Writers considering the scholarship about Mark Twain and Henry James often despair that no new lodes of insight may be found – that their work has been “overmined,” as Anne T. Margolis put it in the mid-1980s (xi). When reviewing two new additions to the analysis of Mark Twain in 2005, Colin Irvine started with the concern that they “appear to have arrived on the Mark Twain scholarly scene after the getting was good” and faced the “absence of easy pickings among Twain’s remains” (140). Indeed, Twain and James have been asked to bear enormous cultural burdens over the years – vetted for their views on race, women, sexual identity, and the nature of America. While a vigorous debate over what their views were, and how those views should be received, continues, it is genuinely possible to survey a shelf of books about them, or a JSTOR rundown of academic articles, and wonder if any new ground exists. Yet Margolis went ahead with her consideration of James and “the problem of audience” and Irvine concluded that the two writers “contribute significantly to the crowded conversations surrounding Twain’s life and literature” (141). The presence of epic biographies of James and Twain has not deterred others from weighing in; indeed, Alfred Habegger in 1987 concluded that even with Leon Edel’s James biographies in hand “it is time for other biographers to have a go” (208) – and writers like Fred Kaplan and Sheldon M. Novick
have so obliged. In addition, the publication of the first volume of Twain’s complete, unexpurgated autobiography in November 2010 inspired a new round of discussion of Twain’s observations about life. The massive output of work and correspondence by James, meanwhile, has yielded relatively new discoveries like the letters between James and Hendrik Andersen published at the turn of this century. Those letters added to the discussion of James’s romantic passion, even if it remains unclear exactly what was the result.

Where additional documents provide new ways of considering Twain and James separately, considerations of them together seem underdeveloped, and too often focused on negative contrasts. After all, they ranked as the most important American writers of the second half of the nineteenth century, and their reputations are secure today – although James’s had to go through a period of neglect and rediscovery. A closer exploration of where they were a matched set seems in order. Indeed, they could and should be considered not as literary opposites, as is so often the case, or as parallel writers, but as literary companions making many of the same points about American society and culture.

While this thesis does not pretend to be a complete view of the works of Twain and James, which are not only numerous and immense but are accompanied by an even greater immensity of critical analysis, it does explore two significant areas of their work. The first is the similarities between Twain and James, including literary ones, as a counterweight to the larger public impression of their differences. The second is their place as distinctly American writers, both in their subject matter and in the perception of
their work. These areas will be covered through a combination of close reading of parallel texts and a consideration of the historical and biographical contexts of their works, beginning with a consideration of their respective biographies. That will be followed by two chapters devoted to close comparisons of Twain and James works which are thematic companions, all of which offer perspectives on America. One pairing involves their breakthrough works, Twain’s *Innocents Abroad* and James’s *Daisy Miller*, both of them showcasing Americans in Europe. The other pair, Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and James’s *The Bostonians*, found the writers almost simultaneously confronting the nature of America following the Civil War and Reconstruction; the commercial result, and the literary heritage, of those works have been different but thematically they are closer than Twain’s famous dismissal of James’s novel implied. Finally, the thesis will look at the place of Twain and James in American culture in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, whether they will continue to be seen as vital writers whose works continue to deserve attention and how they are still scrutinized in some very similar ways. But to set the stage for discussion of their similarities, it should be made clear how literary history has deemed them so different.

To argue Twain and James are similar is, from many critical perspectives, counterintuitive. In assessing the relationship between Twain and James as social acquaintances as much as literary peers, Leon Edel observes they “were by nature never destined to be intimate. . . . No two American geniuses were more dissimilar” (Master 37-8). Edwin H. Cady argues that “no man but Howells could have been simultaneously the intimate and mentor of both” (46). Some of their respective advocates have treated them as literary opposites, and often seem compelled to downgrade one in order to
elevate the other. Each, for that matter, offered hints of a rivalry with the other; in the words of Fred Kaplan, a biographer of both, “neither thought much of the other’s work” (613). James, a voracious reader and literary critic, did not review Twain’s writings. (Sarah Daugherty concludes that Twain was one of James’s “blind spots” [196]). Twain, in turn, brutally dismissed James’s The Bostonians as a book he could not bear to finish reading. That Twain remark about James in particular has dominated the discussion of the writers far more than assertions such as Edel’s that “the two writers had great respect for each other” (Master 38). Edel, as voluminous as his work on James has been, has been accused of favoring James too much; Cady laments Edel’s “obstinate monolatry” (51) and on at least one issue Edel tied himself up in knots trying to explain James’s behavior.¹

In personal terms, the gaps are noticeable: Twain and James were almost a decade apart in age, with Twain the elder. They had different economic and geographical backgrounds: Twain in erratic economic circumstances (including more than one financial humiliation of his family as a child) with roots in the South and Midwest; James cosmopolitan and brought up in America’s relatively ancient East and the even older world of Europe. Twain was public, James private – though that does not mean that James did not want commercial success, or that Twain was always happy in the spotlight. But the distinction between the writers goes far beyond personal touches. Another seeming divide is literary: Twain conversational and informal, loving American vernacular, with novels that come across as anecdotal to the point of veering away from linear storytelling and thematic consistency; James more visibly rigorous, less dependent

¹ See the discussion of James’s possible homosexuality in Chapter IV.
on conversation than the monologue of an often unidentified narrator – or, in Howells’ phrase, “an analytic study rather than a story” (Cady 71). And James was epic in some of those monologues. Twain was more memorably epigrammatic; the sixteenth edition of Bartlett’s Familiar Quotations includes more than twice as many lines from Twain than from James (525-8, 548-9); for that matter, James’s brother William is included more than Henry (545-7)-- though still far less than Twain. Twain was by inclination a concise writer, schooled in newspaper journalism; the heft of some of his books, says Margolis, stems from his having to satisfy a subscription-book audience which “expected very bulky books” for the price (21). Though James was artful in the short story, his novels could swell. Even James’s letters daunted. Howells began one reply to James – then in his late twenties and not yet the imposing “Master” – by declaring “if I attempted a letter of the generous length of yours, I should feel bound to give it up at the start”; Howells apologized for his own missive consisting of “four modest pages” (Howells Letters I, 171).

Where James was a serious figure, the maker of grand and twisting sentences, Twain’s work, however formidable it now appears, was not always taken seriously in its time. Its rough-hewn manner was erroneously equated with a lack of serious craftsmanship. Arnold Bennett praises portions of Huckleberry Finn while calling it “of quite inferior quality” as a complete work of art; he considered Twain overall “a divine amateur” (F. Anderson 285). A contemporary review of Huckleberry Finn in Athenaeum declares the book was “meant for boys” and observed: “For some time past Mr. Clemens has been carried away by the ambition of seriousness and fine writing. In Huckleberry Finn he returns to his right mind, and is again the Mark Twain of old time” (F. Anderson
James believed in refinement and an intellectual approach to art; he said Walt Whitman’s attitude in his poetry was “monstrous because it pretends to persuade the soul while it slights the intellect; because it pretends to gratify the feelings while it outrages the taste” (Criticism 632).

The issue of taste also arises in “The Art of Fiction,” where James warns “the young aspirant in the line of fiction . . . will do nothing without taste, for in that case his freedom will be of little use to him” (178). He also asserts that “the deepest quality of a work of art will always be the quality of the mind of the producer” (182). In the Whitman review, he declares the American populace “is a great civilizer. It is devoted to refinement” (634). But De Voto sees Twain in frequent conflict with the nineteenth century’s “fetish of good taste,” and often yielding, though not entirely, and likely not without some resentment (206). Twain ran up against the refined tastes of his editors (including Howells and Twain’s wife Olivia) and of taste-makers. Huckleberry Finn was famously banned by the Concord, Massachusetts, Public Library, with one library committee member declaring it “absolutely immoral in its tone” and another complaining about “a very low grade of morality,” “a systematic use of bad grammar” and “an employment of rough, coarse, inelegant expression” before summing it up as “trash” (Powers 490).

But even more fundamental to the Twain-James debate is the relation of their writing to America itself. Within America, if not overseas, Twain and James were seen as representing separate constituencies: James “rooted in the urbane subsocieties of Eastern America and of American expatriates in Europe,” as Twain biographer Ron
Powers puts it (365), while Twain embodied the westerner skeptical of eastern nuance, and especially the new American who had turned his back on the nation’s European roots. It was no accident that Henry Seidel Canby called his dual biography of Twain and James Turn West, Turn East (although he could just as easily have made the directions North and South). Canby argued that:

They come from two very different Americas that are contemporary. Mark’s frontier culture of the Mississippi is a young civilization. The East of Poe, Emerson, Hawthorne, Melville, Thoreau, later James, is no longer a young country. (295)

Similarly, shortly after Twain’s death in 1910, Frank Jewett Mather observed that “if Mark Twain has stretched his muscles and spent his sympathy from the Mississippi to the Sierras, Henry James has no less lived strenuously through the more somber spiritual adventure of the American in Europe” (F. Anderson 279). And in that contrast lay flaws, at least to Maxwell Geismar, a vigorous hater of James who says:

James’ central thesis was, of course, that Europe must educate America, which was gross, vulgar, materialistic, and uncultivated; and that America, as his novels always assume, would gladly accept this submissive role. . . .
The truth was quite the opposite, as Twain saw. (497)

The contrast is most pointed in terms of residency, as James became associated with novels set in Europe, having spent decades overseas and becoming an English subject not long before his death; Twain’s most popular tales reflected the American experience on American soil, or with works like A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court, the American who could show Europe a thing or two.

Even one of the rare places where they are generally bound proves implausible. In the field of American literary realism, they are two tall trees, and Howells a hammock swinging between them. Donald Pizer, for one, begins his analysis in Realism and
Naturalism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature on a foundation of three works: James’s *What Maisie Knew*, Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and Howells’s *The Rise of Silas Lapham*. Yet the nature of realism, at least as defined by Howells, is itself open to question. Michael Davitt Bell, in *The Problem of American Realism*, offers up the Twain-Howells-James triad as the “generally agreed . . . principal American realists of the first generation.” Then he slices:

If this is a group at all (and for the most part one is compelled to conclude it is not), it is a famously and even scandalously odd one. While Twain and James were both friends of Howells, they would seem to have had little else in common; not only is it hard to imagine them as part of the same movement, it is sometimes a bit difficult to imagine them inhabiting the same planet. (13)

Indeed, Northrop Frye argues that the “realistic” and its supposed fictional antecedent, the “romantic,” have labels which “as ordinarily used, are relative or comparative terms. . . . [they] cannot be used as simply descriptive adjectives with any sort of exactness” (49). And Bell contends that:

> It is hard to see Howells, Twain, and James – not to mention such successors as Sarah Orne Jewett, Frank Norris, Stephen Crane, and Theodore Dreiser – as constituting any single literary tradition or ‘school’ of literature; the differences among their characteristic modes are far more striking than the similarities. (1)

Eric J. Sundquist, while presenting the collection *American Realism: New Essays*, grapples with the question of how realism is defined. “No genre – if it can be called a genre – is more difficult to define than realism,” he says, “and this is particularly true of American realism” (vii). Not only did it embrace “the sensational, the sentimental, the vulgar, the scientific, the outrageously comic [and] the desperately philosophical,” it tried
to include “the exquisitely fine craft of James” and “the resonant colloquial idioms of Twain” (vii). Sundquist further looks askance at Howells:

. . . [who] often seems to ride along in a strange vacuum, nearly unheeded in his continual insistence on the proprieties of the everyday, stable characterization, and moral certainty, while almost every other important author of the period simply refused, in these terms, to become a realist. (4)

Nor is Sundquist alone in questioning whether Howells really wanted a realism that was grittily, vividly, uncompromisingly real. Sinclair Lewis, receiving the 1930 Nobel Prize for literature, fires even more harshly at Howells:

. . . one of the gentlest, sweetest, and most honest of men, but he had the code of a pious old maid whose greatest delight was to have tea at the vicarage. . . . He was actually able to tame Mark Twain, perhaps the greatest of our writers. . . . [W]hile men like Howells were so effusively seeking to guide America into becoming a pale edition of an English cathedral town, there were surly and authentic fellows – Whitman and Melville, then Dreiser and James Huneker and Mencken – who insisted that our land had something more than tea-table gentility. 2

In short, realism is a swamp in which critics can easily be bogged down – so the most common ground used for setting Twain and James side by side is not at all firm. And at this point, it would appear that the only things they have in common are a profession, a century and a nation of birth. But as will be shown, there are many areas in which they do overlap. And one is their treatment by the highest literary prize in the world: the Nobel. In the eyes of the members of the Swedish academy, Twain and James were in essence just two more Americans.

2 http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1930/lewis-lecture.html
As I have said, neither Twain nor James won a Nobel Prize for literature -- nor will they, since the Nobel Foundation eliminated posthumous awards in 1974. Hamlin Hill says “newspaper rumors” had Twain in contention for the 1907 prize (173), which instead went to Rudyard Kipling; but according to the Nobel Prize database he was not formally nominated then or in any other year up to 1950, the latest for which Nobel provides nomination details. As of 1950, James had received four nominations -- one each in 1911 and 1916 and two in 1912. Edith Wharton backed what Edel calls “a vigorous campaign” in 1911; “the Swedish academy was thoroughly briefed; appropriate letters were written emphasizing the Master’s supreme position in Anglo-American letters” (476). But in spite of what looks like formidable support from an American perspective – Howells joined, and according to his biographers led, the 1911 James effort3 – Nobel chronicler Gunnar Ahlstrom says that the supporters for James “were neither numerous nor powerful” (“1911” 216).4 The 1911 award instead went to the Belgian author Maurice Maeterlinck. It was long after James and Twain had died that the prize first went to an American, Lewis.

The issue of the Nobel appears to have mattered little to Twain. Hill says Twain “seems to have taken no notice” of the prize rumors (173) and both Hill and Powers indicate that an honorary degree from Oxford at that time had more significance to him. When Wharton lobbied for James, she did so because she thought James needed the money; when he did not win, she secretly had some of her royalties transferred to James’s

3 Wharton was nominated for the Nobel in 1930, when Lewis achieved the American breakthrough, 1927 and 1928. Howells was nominated in 1910.
4 According to Kjell Espmark, a member of the Swedish Academy and author of The Nobel Prize in Literature: A Study of the Criteria Behind the Choices, Ahlstrom’s notes in the Nobel Prize Library series are “based on inside information whose extent is at times surprising” (3).
account. But while it is not clear how James would have felt about winning, it is certain that he did not want to lose; Susan Goodman and Carl Dawson say that the 1911 campaign “required absolute secrecy. If they failed and James found out, he would be humiliated” (405).

There may have been factors which worked against Twain and James independently of each other. Ahlstrom says that Twain, as well as James Fenimore Cooper before him, “were classified as writers of ‘juvenile books’ ” (“1930” 369). But that comment is curious since Ahlstrom not only misidentifies a signature Cooper work (as “The Last Mohican”) but, by including Cooper, refers to a writer who had died half a century before the first Nobel was awarded. In addition, by 1907, Twain’s works included not only Tom Sawyer, The Prince and the Pauper and Huckleberry Finn but essays; autobiographical writing like Roughing It, Life on the Mississippi and his travelogues, and the satire of A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court. He had an admiring adult readership, including in Europe, where he counted among his admirers Germany’s Kaiser Wilhelm II. (Powers 542). If the Nobel committee could reduce Twain to a writer of children’s stories, it could have done just the same with Kipling – famous, after all, for The Jungle Book.

Espmark specifically mentions James, along with Tolstoy and Ibsen, as writers who “should have been rewarded instead of, for instance, Sully Prudhomme, Eucken and Heyse”5. But James, like Twain, ran into literary roadblocks. Edel theorizes that James was too far removed from the Swedes, that:

. . . the northern judges of the world’s literature had not read Henry James.

They had not read about him in the newspapers; he was an intensely private figure. Moreover they tended to be influenced by the degree to which foreign writers were popular in other countries than their own and the extent to which they were translated. James had been very little translated. He did not permit it. He considered himself – and most translators agreed – untranslatable. (Master 476)

But Espmark says that the Nobel committee had read James, though not entirely happily.

While noting praise of James’s style and technique, Espmark also cites several devastatingly critical comments from the Nobel committee. The Wings of the Dove had “an at once improbable and odious subject,” and The Portrait of a Lady was “tiring” in its “meticulous analyses of thought and feeling, drawn out in the minutest detail” (26).

(Walter Scott could pull it off, the committee said, but not James.) In addition:

\[\ldots\text{one never understands how it can be possible for the heroine, Isabel Archer, endowed with all perfections, to be so imperceptive as to reject the excellent Lord Warburton and give her hand to such an egoistic dilettante as Mr. Osmond.} (26)\]

While one could find plenty of readers over the years who have been worn down by James, the Nobel committee’s comments nonetheless suggest a considerable misreading of Portrait. Isabel is far from “endowed with all perfections.” But it does appear that James – and Twain before him – had run into obstacles based on Alfred Nobel’s wish to honor work “of an idealistic tendency” (Espmark 9). Espmark argues that, under the leadership of Carl David af Wirsen, the Nobel judges took Nobel’s phrase to mean “a lofty and sound idealism,” and equated that with conservatism (9-12). As Espmark says, the committee rejected Herbert Spencer for his agnosticism, Zola for using “the spiritless, and often grossly cynical in his naturalism” and Tolstoy in part for his criticism of the Bible; Strindberg was not even formally nominated (17-18). Into this maelstrom marched Twain, with a legacy of criticism of various social orders, with a book like Connecticut
Yankee ending in profound darkness, and with a published skepticism about religious dogma. Even as his wife was gravely ill, he told her “I more believe in the immortality of the soul than misbelieve in it” – and even that, says Powers, “was almost certainly a white lie” (615). James also saw the flaws in social systems, and no consolation from religion, in the nightmares of his novels and short stories. Human frailty and deviousness are everywhere and ineradicable.

Besides, both James and Twain were Americans, regardless of James’s long residence outside of his native land. The American omission was not a question of English language; besides Kipling, Yeats and Shaw won before an American. Rather, Carl L. sees “the indifference of the Swedes to American culture” before World War I, a sentiment that changed only with a postwar disenchantment with Germany and a vogue for American movies in Sweden (64-5). While for some 55 years, as Richard Jewell has pointed out, “almost no one outside Europe and the U.S. won” the literature Nobel (102), more than half that period had passed before Lewis received his prize; Anderson contends the Nobel tradition before Lewis was “principally Western European” (84). Americans, even its writers, came from an untamed cultural frontier. Anderson notes the disdain many prominent Swedish writers felt for:

. . . the threatening spread of a tyranny of mediocrity engendered in an irresponsible, traditionless democracy and nurtured in the forcing-bed of American materialism and pragmatism. No wonder, then, that a common epithet for America was jungle – an untended, carelessly abundant land full of tricks and pitfalls for the unwary but smugly said by its natives to be the “garden spot of the world.” (86)

Indeed, as will be seen in Chapter II, many Americans went abroad with arrogance about their homeland’s superiority over the Old World. Its writers as much as its travelers were
accordingly suspect. Kaplan says of James – and could just as well have said of Twain – that he “represented a national literature that still seemed to the Swedish Academy on the distant, blurred edge of civilization” (541). Ahlstrom says that, at least until World War I, America “was thought to be a civilization untouched by true culture. From the literary point of view, there was little to detain the traveler” (“1930” 369). Clarence Gohdes, studying the place of American literature in nineteenth-century England, points to the tremendous popularity of some writers (Twain was one of the notables in humor) but says that by late in the century, “it became the fashion [among critics] to consider America as possessing a very large number of minor writers, many of them able and artistic but lacking perhaps what Quintilian called the summa manus (131).” Moreover, Twain and James were Americans at literary odds with Europe, or at least establishment Europe. Gohdes says that:

. . . . as far as any generalization can be made . . . . the chief devotees of American literature among the critical classes of Great Britain were likely to be extreme liberals or radicals in politics or Scotchmen by birth, sometimes both. (132)

Twain’s fame rested in part on the mocking currents of his travel stories and a sense of the “ugly American” that could not help make his case in Sweden. Sydney J. Krause observed that A Tramp Abroad was popular with Europeans in part because it had “a crassly American hero” who, in spite of occasional insight, was still a fool (22). Fiction like Connecticut Yankee contains criticism of British culture, and of organized religion, with the Church putting a stop to the Yankee’s bringing of modernization and democracy. While Louis Auchincloss thought that James’s “comparison of American with European values brought out the most superficial side of James,” Auchincloss still saw in those
international tales that “his American characters are high-minded and naïve and are taken advantage of by their more worldly European acquaintances” (56-7). At the same time, the Nobel committee’s seizing on Warburton vs. Osmond has it pointing specifically at a contrast between a good European and a bad American. The absence of both Twain and James from the Nobel rolls suggests they were swimming against an anti-American tide that would not break for years to come.

Yet when the Academy belatedly began to recognize American artists, it did so in a way that underscored its oversight with James and Twain. Besides Lewis, American winners have included Saul Bellow, John Steinbeck, William Faulkner, Pearl Buck, Toni Morrison, and Eugene O’Neill, as well as the émigrés Isaac Bashevis Singer and Joseph Brodsky, and the American-born T.S. Eliot, who like James became an English subject. Lewis, as noted, considered Twain perhaps the best of American writers. Conrad Aiken, writing about Faulkner, keeps circling back to James for comparison (141-2). In Green Hills of Africa in 1935, Hemingway famously says that “all modern American literature comes from … Huckleberry Finn”; but he precedes that line by saying that America had no great writers – although “the good writers are Henry James, Stephen Crane, and Mark Twain” (22). In a 1958 interview, he mentions Twain first when asked by George Plimpton which artists he had learned the most from – but does not include James in the thirty names he mentioned before halting with the declaration “it would take a day to remember everyone” (227). As a teacher, Bellow assigned James’s essays; as a writer, James Atlas said, Bellow drew on “the folksy idiom of Mark Twain” (192). Morrison wrote an introduction for an edition of Huckleberry Finn, read it repeatedly going back to her childhood and calls it “classic literature” (419). Eliot calls James “the most intelligent
man of his generation” (Dupee 111) but also considers _Huckleberry Finn_ “a masterpiece” (Anthology 234). Nor is it only Americans who have spoken up for James or Twain; Kenzaburo Oe, the 1994 literature recipient, has recalled – including in his Nobel lecture -- reading _Huckleberry Finn_ as a child in Japan. In sum, many of those upon whom Nobel’s light shone had themselves been lifted into the light by Twain and James. And, as much as they were seen similarly in the chambers of the Nobel Prize, they came to that consideration through biographical arcs which also bore more than a passing resemblance.

Cady sees similarities in Twain and James in relation to Howells: “both members of the same literary generation, his own; both great artists, despite all the differences, of the newness; both deserving of the highest recognition and requiring . . . a critic’s help fighting to secure it” (50). But even there, Cady notes a divide, that each needed the critic’s help “for opposite reasons . . . Howells struggled to get the world to take Clemens seriously and to take James despite high seriousness” (50). While he also concedes their differences, Edel briefly acknowledges similarities, notably that “both were lovers of the truth, both critical of their fellow-Americans” (Master 50). In their late middle age, he adds, “both had passed through long periods of despair. Both had battled with private demons. The [eighteen] ‘nineties had been as hard on the world-seeking prosperous Mark Twain as on the privacy-seeking Henry James” (36).

Edel might well have observed that the two had walked similar paths for much of their lives. Within the lives that provided fodder for such biographies, one can also find parallels between Twain and James, starting with their childhood love of literature – and erratic formal education. “Learning to read was by no means an inevitable skill for
“Twain],” says Powers. “He was a restless child, hated school, spent a lot of his class time daydreaming, and finished his ‘formal’ education by the age of twelve” (26) But learning to read was indeed “life changing” for Twain; later, working in a bookstore, he complained that “the customers bothered me so much I could not read with any comfort” (Powers 45). The biographer adds that “words became objects of almost physical beauty to him” and Twain “became a stickler for grammar” (27). (Although that sounds as if it put him on the same ground as the formal James, Powers further notes that Twain’s “work was seminal in purging American literary English of its heavy Victorian ornamentation” [27] – while there isn’t a tree big enough to hold all of James’s ornaments.)

James, meanwhile, though often schooled, did so with a dizzying array of tutors and institutions, according to Edel, and was entirely incapable of mastering basic mathematics. But like Twain, he found comfort and inspiration in reading, to the point that his father said, “Henry is not so fond of study, properly so-called, as of reading. He is a devourer of libraries” (Untried 132). Edel adds:

> We have no record of Henry’s readings, but his constant allusions to novels and novelists, letter writers and biographers, in his early criticism, could be made only by one saturated with literature . . . from early boyhood. (133)

Twain, for that matter, had “the capacity to remember great swaths” of his reading, Powers says. “Even as a small child he could disgorge entire sections of adventure novels” (28).

Considering that both men would write in their respective ways about the consequences of the Civil War, the most important American event of their lives, neither
had any significant contact with its battlefields and campaigns. Twain, twenty-five as the war began, briefly enlisted for the Confederate side, in a unit which quickly became “mostly concerned about which direction to retreat,” according to Kaplan, and when the unit soon disbanded, Twain “had hardly been a soldier at all” (85-6). Powers says Twain then “did not stop running from the war until he reached Nevada several weeks later” (100). Since James turned eighteen mere days after Southern forces fired on Fort Sumter, Fisher observes that he and his older brother William “were natural candidates for recruitment” but his father, Henry Sr., refused to let them enlist (176). James, in Edel’s view, was “temperamentally unsuited for soldiering” (Untried 170). Moreover, early in the war, James suffered “an obscure hurt” while helping to put out a fire (173). It appears, in retrospect, to have been a back injury and, according to Edel, James “seems to have felt by vagueness and circumlocution he might becloud the whole question of his non-participation in the Civil War” (175) Yet because of that very vagueness, it raised questions about James’s sexuality; James’s bleak allusions to the hurt suggested something as extreme as castration. And Fisher notes that during an 1869 James trip:

Harry’s “obscure hurt” from the early Civil War period may not have caused him a genital injury, but his bad back – and now his other debilitating health problems – led him to envy and fetishize masculine potency. (262)

Both writers experienced breakthroughs at comparable points in their lives.

Twain, eight years James’s senior but with a more youthful quality in his writing, made his great commercial breakthrough in his mid-thirties when The Innocents Abroad, as Bernard De Voto put it in 1932, “began a circulation which, of American books, only ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin’ has exceeded” (180). James was also in his mid-thirties when he
broke through with *Daisy Miller*, a book which, Howells told James Russell Lowell, made James “thoroughly known” and “went so far that society almost divided itself in Daisy Millerites and anti-Daisy Millerites” – although, Howells archly noted, in that discussion “nobody felt very deeply, and everyone talked very loudly.” *(Howells Letters I, 271)*. Moreover, as will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two, the two works found James and Twain dealing with some similar themes. And in their personal feelings about America and Europe, it can be argued that Twain and James were far from opposite. Paul Fisher says that the wanderings of James’s youth took him from a New York which

> . . . must have seemed safe and predictable . . . a home for a family who would afterward spend their lives perpetually in search of an equivalent emotional anchorage. In Manhattan, over the past decade, the younger Jameses had enjoyed what they would remember as idyllic childhoods. (17)

In *The American Scene*, James, returning to America in 1904 after an absence of more than twenty years, is nonetheless taken in by the sight of New York, “the beauty of light and air, the great scale of space” *(Hamlin Garland notes that James late in his life said, “If I were to live my life over again, I would be an American. I would steep myself in America. I would know no other land” (Page 92). Ford Madox Ford recalls the aged James’s burst of anger at criticism of America, even when that criticism echoed a remark he himself made not long before.*
These were hardly the sentiments of a happy expatriate. Indeed, James’s writing in Europe would return repeatedly to his American experiences; The Bostonians, his attempt at a genuinely American story, was written in England but after an extended stay in America (albeit his last until 1904). His final masterwork, The Golden Bowl, found him once again dealing with “the international theme.” T. S. Eliot, about four years into his own long exile from his native America, claimed that “I do not suppose that anyone who is not an American can properly appreciate James” (Dupee 108, original underlining).

As for Twain, his published mockery of European customs hardly kept him from savoring delights overseas. It was as if he endorsed James’s declaration in 1881 that any American “must deal, more or less, even if only by implication, with Europe” (Notebooks 218). In a January 1904 letter to Howells from Florence, Twain noted the harsh weather back in America and said he “was grateful to be in Italy & look out upon Paradise. If I have any more years left, they will be split in two, & the winter-half will be spent here” (Smith & Gibson 779). When he received his honorary degree from Oxford, he did so as an Anglophile for whom “an honorary degree from Oxford outranked degrees from Yale and Missouri” (Kaplan 633). Charles Neider notes that Twain’s decades of cobbling together of his autobiography included sections written in Vienna and Florence, with the former location where “he wrote the brilliant chapters on the early days spent on his uncle’s farm” (x) – not unlike James looking back from his European vistas. One did not need to be in America to write about it, whether one was James or Twain. And that was just one example of how Twain and James overlapped as writers, even took guidance from each other; Twain told Howells that James took up dictating his work “because he
had heard that I always dictated‖ (Smith & Gibson 681). And “Daisy Miller” may have owed a significant debt to *Innocents Abroad*.6

On James’s side, although portions of “The Art of Fiction” can be read as critical of Twain’s writing style, it is also possible to read it as endorsing Twain’s approach to writing insofar as James would have supported anyone bringing new vigor and a different approach to the novel. In the essay, James tried to free authors from the restrictive rules and demands for “conscious moral purpose” supported by the likes of Walter Besant (180). James assaulted the vagueness of Besant’s position on moral art, arguing that “questions of art are questions (in the widest sense) of execution; questions of morality are quite another affair’ (181). To James, “the only obligation to which in advance we may hold a novel . . . is that it be interesting” (170). Addressing the hypothetical aspiring novelist, he said, “All life belongs to you, and don’t listen either to those who would shut you up into corners of it and tell you that it is only here and there that art inhabits. . . . There is no impression of life, no manner of seeing it and feeling it, to which the plan of the novelist may not offer a place” (182).

In addition, each writer effectively employed humor. Twain, of course, has long been treated as a humorist, sometimes to his diminution. William M. Gibson has theorized that James thought of Twain as “a raconteur, a humorist, a public figure” (4), though that analysis is without attribution or annotation; it may be based solely on James’s once observing that “in the day of Mark Twain there is no harm in being reminded that the absence of drollery may, at a stretch, be compensated for by the presence of sublimity” (Essays 1171). James, in contrast, is presented as the grim Master:

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6 See Chapter II.
Garland speaks of the elderly James as “earnest all the time” and that “he had not even the comfort of a comic spirit such as Clemens had” (Page 93). But James provided enough material for Richard Poirier to write about his “comic sense” while focusing just on six works, and Denis Flannery calls *The Bostonians* “insidiously funny” (1). Indeed, when looking at the portrayal of Miss Birdseye in *The Bostonians*, Mrs. Penniman in *Washington Square* or Henrietta Stackpole in *Portrait*, one finds a humor which can at once amuse the reader and lacerate the subject. Though Poirier observes that James “tends to expend most of his comedy” on minor characters (184), it is impossible to read the descriptions *Portrait’s* Isabel Archer without at least a chuckle. As a young girl during the Civil War, “she felt herself at times (to her extreme confusion) stirred almost indiscriminately by the valour of either army” (41); she was “reported to have read the classic authors – in translation,” the narrator archly adds, and her “errors and delusions were frequently such as a biography interested in preserving the dignity of his subject must shrink from specifying” (53). Then there’s Alice Hall Petry’s bold, and rather impressive, declaration that “Turn of the Screw” was “a parody of *Jane Eyre*” in which the governess engages in a “pathetic attempt to emulate Charlotte Bronte’s famous heroine” (61). But Petry also points to a potential problem with James’s humor: “Perhaps it is too clever, since [the *Eyre* joke] has not been noticed for nearly ninety years” (76). With Twain, the joke was usually evident. That said, when striving for amusement, James often had a serious underlying purpose – and, for those of us who didn’t get the joke, “The Turn of the Screw” is timeless Gothic. Twain likewise employed humor in somber purpose. Novels like *Huckleberry Finn* and *Connecticut Yankee* ride on currents of social commentary and grim imagery; *Connecticut Yankee* haunts with its image of the Boss
and his loyalists trapped behind walls of dead men, themselves dying from “the poisonous air bred by those dead thousands” (450).

Both James and Twain were apparently suspicious of autobiography, even though each worked in the latter form – and turned biographer when it came to others. Their suspicion arose as a function of who would control the telling of their own life stories. James destroyed thousands of manuscripts and received letters late in life to foil future biographers. (He could not destroy his letters to others and Edel says it apparently did not occur to James that everyone he wrote to would save them.) The memoirs he did write “subtly altered content,” Edel says. “Part of the family history had to be written as art: life in its raw state was inartistic.” That “art” included rewriting the letters of his father and brother William to make them “more tasted and liked.” (Master 457). Twain also turned life into art and himself into a creation – adopting, for example, “the posture of art-ignoramus,” in Leland Krauth’s term (258). Though seemingly more open, Twain’s memoirs could still stagger the reader; Krauth calls his autobiography “the sign either of eccentricity run amuck or of genius manifesting itself one last time. . . . not a coherent narrative but a series of disjointed fragments” (259). And that biography has been a challenge not only to readers but to would-be editors for a century. Indeed, both Albert Bigelow Paine and Bernard De Voto tried to edit the sprawling manuscript into something more readable, though Charles Neider – presenting a Twain autobiography he thought closer to the writer’s original intent – says neither Paine nor De Voto “either did not envision the possibility of a true autobiography or did not care to undertake to make one” (x). And even Neider “weeded out a variety of material” as he tried to present “the creative slant of Mark Twain’s mind” (xxi). The release of the first volume of an
unexpurgated Twain autobiography late in 2010 may have brought readers closer to what Twain intended, but its patchwork text obscures Twain as much as it reveals him.

Yet as careful as Twain and James might have been about letting the audience get too close, they still both craved that audience’s approval – and money. This does not surprise where Twain was concerned. Among other things, he went on successful lecture tours and turned out multiple Tom Sawyer sequels designed to capitalize on the first book’s success. Kaplan notes that, in the wake of the Paige compositor disaster, Twain turned to writing efforts like Tom Sawyer Detective “for solace, for pleasure, for profit” (496). But James, however esoteric his work may have seemed, also longed for popular success, as Marcia Jacobson and Anne T. Margolis have both observed. Indeed, James’s friend Edith Wharton has recalled James’s “lifelong disappointment at his lack of popular recognition.

I am not sure that Henry James had not secretly dreamed of being a “best seller” in the days when that odd literary form was at its height; at any rate he certainly suffered all his life – and more and more as time went on – from the lack of recognition among the very readers who had most warmly welcomed his early novels. He could not understand why the success achieved by “Daisy Miller” and “The Portrait of a Lady” should be denied to the great novels of his maturity. (191-2)

The longing for success certainly contributed to the relationship between Howells and, individually, Twain and James. But it was a relationship which had a high price, that of at least listening to Howells at his most censorious. Oscar Cargill refers to Howells’s “neurotic prudery” (375), though he has his defenders as not only an editor but as a bold and supportive one; Powers begins his Twain biography with the first meeting of Howells and Twain, though he later notes that Howells “could get starchy on one issue: profanity” (368). Cargill notes that “James conceded to Howells that his editor knew more about
public taste than he did” (378). But James did not always like what Howells asked since he, like Twain, was moving toward a literature which did not settle for what was acceptable from other artists. And that, after all, was what Twain and James’s respective lives and broad literary attitudes were leading to: the production of works which would change Americans’ reading habits, and perhaps Americans themselves. Indeed, when each writer first achieved great literary success, it was with a work about America.
CHAPTER II

THE AMERICAN “INNOCENTS,” THE “INNOCENT” DAISY

It was “Europe” that had, in very ancient days, held out to the yearning young American some likelihood of impressions more numerous and various and of a higher intensity than those he might gather on the native scene.

Henry James, 19077

“It is a complex fate to be an American,” Henry James observed, and the principal discovery an American writer makes in Europe is just how complex that fate is.

James Baldwin, 19598

Mark Twain and Henry James achieved literary breakthroughs with two seemingly dissimilar but nonetheless overlapping works. Twain’s was The Innocents Abroad in 1869, a long account of his participation in “a pleasure trip” to “many a land renowned in history” in Europe and the Holy Land (3, 5). James’s was the far briefer, and nominally more fictional “Daisy Miller” in 1878; it details how the titular character, a young American woman, ran afoul of social standards among Americans in Europe – and her effect on a young American, Winterbourne, who is at once fascinated and baffled by her. In each case, the writers hold up Europe as a mirror for American experience and

7 “Richmond,” The American Scene (351)
8 “The Discovery of What It Means to Be an American,” Nobody Knows My Name: More Notes of a Native Son (3)
perceptions in the post-Civil War years. Europe is, after all, a place of reflection for many Americans, albeit one to be both embraced and pushed away; America’s ancestral home and cultural foundation on one hand, a representative of political philosophies and structures rejected by the new nation on the other. Because of this combination of closeness and apartness, the mirror of Europe has also provided Americans – and especially American writers – a means of reflecting on their own culture. As James Baldwin has written, an American writer meeting Europeans meets people “whose sense of reality is entirely different from his own . . . and this forces the writer to reconsider many things he had always taken for granted. This reassessment, which can be very painful, is also very valuable” (9). Yet James also considered such an assessment – the idea of judging the American culture against other nations’ – to be uniquely American. As he said in his essay “Americans Abroad”:

> It is hard to imagine two or three Englishmen, two or three Frenchmen, two or three Germans comparing notes and strongly differing as to the impression made upon the civilized world by the collective body of their countrymen. . . . If [a European man] were to be made aware that foreigners were criticizing him, he would be extremely indifferent to their verdict. He would comfortably assume that the standards of manners – the shaping influences – in his own country are the highest. (786)

This bringing of Americans to European places and people was especially evident in the late nineteenth century. As Christof Wegelin observes, “the American in Europe had become a phenomenon,” with the number of travelers from major East Coast ports to the Old World almost doubling between 1860 and 1880 (307), the period during which Innocents and “Daisy Miller” were written and published. The perspective Americans like Twain and James took on these overseas journeys was not a simple one: they had been born less than a century after the American Revolution widened the metaphorical
gap between the continents, and had seen at close hand the redefining of their own nation by its Civil War. William Dean Howells, friend to both men, says that James “belongs pre-eminently to that period following the Civil War when our authorship felt the rising tide of national life in an impulse to work of the highest refinement, the most essential truth” (Heroines II 164) – however skeptical James may have been about the consequences of that tide. (His American abroad often “finds Europeans very ignorant of a country . . . he may be pardoned for thinking a magnificent one” [791].) Twain belonged, as skeptic and author, to the same period Howells assigns James, and was equally committed to getting to the “essential truth” of his time; as important and elegant as James’s work is, Twain is the one who laid claim not only to the great American novel, with Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, but with Charles Dudley Warner to giving a name to an American era, the Gilded Age. Granted Twain’s “refinement” was of a somewhat different sort than James – evident in his private life, but less obvious in his work, where his impulse was sharply satirical and employed seemingly unrefined people (including the on-paper “Mark Twain”) to make points about society generally. But there is no doubt that he could be a meticulous stylist, refining his work even if it took years, and painstakingly revising -- and re-revising -- Innocents.⁹

More importantly, both Twain and James went after essential truths about Americans – their directness, their social ambitions and, yes, their remarkable innocence – and followed similar paths to their revelations. And both used the European mirror.

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⁹ Twain extensively revised the newspaper articles for Innocents as a book, with Bret Hart and his future wife Olivia Langdon among those helping with the editing. He then rewrote it more for the British edition of the book. While some of the changes for British publication were significant, the first American edition is the one most commonly reprinted. See Scott, “Mark Twain’s Revisions of The Innocents Abroad for the British Edition of 1872.”
James, indeed, is one of the great practitioners of the so-called international novel, and one could fill a shelf with his works on that theme, Portrait of a Lady, The American, The Ambassadors and the story “Daisy Miller” among them. Twain, meanwhile, employed what at first seemed to be comedy for a meditation on the cultural clash between new America and old Europe in A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court, and more than once ventured into nonfiction to write about his travels overseas, the most famous of those chronicles being Innocents Abroad.

In terms of each writer’s biography, Innocents and “Daisy” provide a tidy match. Each was written when their respective authors were in their thirties and had achieved a measure of fame and success. Twain was known as a humorist and lecturer. In January 1867 a newspaper report refers to him as “of literary and lecture renown on the Pacific” (Kaplan 179); after the publication of his book The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County, and Other Sketches in April 1867, and a successful speech in New York City that May, Kaplan adds, Twain “had risen to the stature of a minor national figure” (186). The Alta California paid for the trip which would provide it with Twain’s letters from his trip to Europe and the Holy Land beginning that June, the letters which would be the basis for Innocents Abroad. James, meanwhile, had also accomplished much when, in 1878, “Daisy Miller” appeared; two novels, Roderick Hudson and The American, had preceded it, along with numerous shorter fiction and nonfiction pieces, and in early 1878 he was hoping that in six months he could “give myself up seriously to ‘creative’ writing” (Edel Conquest 302). With the appearance of their respective works, the world changed dramatically for each writer. “Public interest in Mark Twain rose to a new pinnacle,” says Hoffman (159) and Twain fed that interest through a lecture tour,
turning the book into a bestseller and Twain into even more of a marquee name. Twain himself made clear how important the success of *Innocents* had been in his 1910 contribution to a series of articles on “The Turning Point of My Life.” He disdained the idea of a single turning point in his writing life – tracing his literary development through a sequence of links beginning with his getting measles when twelve years old – but the last link in the chain was *Innocents*, with which “at last I became a member of the literary guild” (457-62).

In addition, Emerson says that Twain “had begun to set higher standards for himself – or rather more genteel ones” (44), trying to make inroads into the Eastern audience with better work – and to please his future wife, Olivia Langdon, who began editing him with the proofs of *Innocents* and continued to do so for the rest of her life (Smith *Autobiography* 359). Philip Beidler says *Innocents* and its sequel, *Roughing It*, are works which “served decisively to launch their author on the great central phase of his career” revealing “Twain’s intense preoccupation with realistic style as a kind of imperative truth-telling” (33); Bruce Michelson notes that *Innocents* showed Twain meeting the “multiple challenge” of pleasing the existing audience for his humorous work while demonstrating he had more than “the buffoon implicatons of his own joking and his public name” (389). James, meanwhile, did not fare so well financially with “Daisy,” a victim of the literary pirates of the time, but did increase and improve his reputation – and made of “Daisy Miller” a catchphrase and even a fashion statement, with Edel noting that “Daisy Miller” hats were sold (309).
While it goes too far to say that James saw a way to achieve a Twain-like success by plowing the same furrow of Americans – innocent or not -- abroad, Twain’s title and themes may have resonated with James. “Daisy Miller,” in fact, looks not only like an acknowledgment of Twain’s book but like an almost explicit validation of many of Twain’s ideas. The word innocents was obviously much on James’s mind when considering his countrymen and their journey and, like Twain, he saw it as a way to reflect a variety of American attitudes. Twain’s innocents conform to the online Oxford English Dictionary definitions as “one not disposed to do harm, or unacquainted with evil,” particularly in the context of the religious pilgrims on his voyage; “a guileless, simple, or unsuspecting person,” easily subject to the cons and trickery inflicted on foreign travelers, including Twain himself, and “one wanting ordinary knowledge or intelligence; a simpleton,” which can be applied to the many characters targeted by Twain’s mockery. OED definitions of the adjective form of innocent elaborate on qualities applicable to his characters: “artless, naïve, ingenuous”; “free from guilt or moral evil.”

It is of Americans in an artless, even naïve context that James wrote “Americans Abroad,” published between the June-July 1878 serialization of “Daisy Miller” in England and its authorized November 1878 publication in the United States, when he said that “the great innocence of the usual American tourist is perhaps his most general quality” (789). But James, too, played with different definitions of the word as it recurs in

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10 By the time Harper published the authorized American version, the story – not yet copyrighted in the U.S. -- had been “pirated on a large scale,” to James’s financial dismay (Lodge xiii). “My fame indeed seems to do very well everywhere,” he wrote to Howells in 1879; “it is only my fortune that leaves to be desired” (Horne 111).
“Daisy Miller.” It is most firmly used when, near the end of the story, her Italian suitor Giovanelli refers to Daisy as the “most innocent” young lady he ever saw. The main male character, Winterbourne, echoes with surprise, “the most innocent?” to which Giovanelli firmly declares, “The most innocent!” (63) It is clear they are talking about Daisy as “doing no evil; free from moral wrong, sin, or guilt” – indeed, “pure, unpolluted,” in opposition to the scandal which dogged her in society because of her relationship with Giovanelli. The discussion between Winterbourne and Giovanelli takes the reader back to the beginning of the story when, after their first meeting, Winterbourne thinks Daisy “looked extremely innocent. Some people had told him that, after all, American girls were exceedingly innocent” (12) – same word, different meaning. Here James appears to be using the word to refer to a lack of social guile: “showing the simplicity, ignorance, artlessness, or unsuspecting nature of a child or one innocent of the world.” (Winterbourne also considers her “completely uncultivated” [18].) And that is the use Mrs. Costello makes of the word when she warns Winterbourne of his attraction to Daisy: “You will be sure to make some great mistake. You are too innocent” (18). Yet he appears to misunderstand, since his reply is: “‘My dear aunt, I am not so innocent,’ . . . smiling and curling his mustache” (18) – a suggestion he is not “free from guilt or moral evil”; this had already been implied in the narrator’s reference to Winterbourne’s devotion to “a foreign lady” (4) 11 But in his famous letter to Eliza Lynn Linton two

11 The undercurrent of lust in Winterbourne’s attraction to Daisy is made even clearer when Winterbourne muses on the flirtatiousness of Mrs. Costello’s New York granddaughters: “If, therefore, Miss Daisy exceeded the liberal license allowed to these young ladies, it was probable that anything might be expected of her. Winterbourne was impatient to see her again” (19). Twain also acknowledges a lack of sexual morality in at least one of his innocents, for example when the doctor, having received a kiss from a young girl for a franc “because she had a million left . . . offered to take the whole cargo” (80). Twain himself was eager to see the grisettes of Paris, beautiful working girls known as “so charmingly, so delightfully
years after the success of “Daisy Miller,” James is still talking about innocence as a lack of guile: “Poor little D.M. was (as I understand her) above all things innocent . . . . The keynote of her character is her innocence . . . . I didn’t mean to suggest she was playing off Giovanelli against Winterbourne – for she was too innocent even for that” (122, original underlining).

David Levin’s essay “Innocents Abroad: From Mark Twain and Henry James to Bellow, Malamud and Baldwin” draws a through-line between James and Twain’s considerations of Europe in terms of their innocents:

Henry James’s American innocents are even more complex than those of Mark Twain, but in some of his best works on the European theme James plays variations on a theme that Mark Twain and many predecessors had sounded. (292)

As has been noted in Chapter I, James was reticent about Twain’s work, though it is unlikely he was unaware of it, and it would have been hard to miss Twain’s best-selling chronicle. In 1869, as Innocents took book form, James was embarked on his own European “pilgrimage” (as Leon Edel describes it), his fourth trip to the continent; and Twain had focused on something James would repeatedly address in his own work: Americans making journeys to Europe, with their distinctly American point of view up front. Edel looks at remarks James made to his brother William in 1869 as:

the strong reaction of a cultivated young American, to whom Europe was a deep and important experience, against those Americans who devote themselves, Mark Twain fashion, to a denigration of all that is foreign and strange and different from their own parochial horizons” (Untried 304).

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immoral” (61) – only to find they were “ill-shaped” and “not winning” (62). And when presented with a performance of the can-can, Twain “placed my hands before my face for very shame. But I looked through my fingers” (55).
When Edel speaks of “Mark Twain fashion” he may be acknowledging the imitators while misreading the original; as shall be seen, Twain was as intent on satirizing Americans, abroad and at home, as he was making broad fun of overseas locations and people. That being said, James and Twain both had an understanding of American innocents while clearly standing outside that mob.

However, the comparing of “Daisy Miller” and *Innocents* has its complications. One might ask if “Daisy” can be stretched to be considered as “travel writing” like *Innocents*. But for the purposes of this thesis, the central issue is not as much one of stretching “Daisy” as it is of redefining *Innocents* – not as a travel chronicle but as a commentary on America and on other cultures, with the journey as an excuse for making the comments. “Daisy,” after all, provides a platform almost immediately for considering Americans. Young Randolph Miller set that particular tone upon arrival when he blames “old Europe” for making his teeth fall out -- “In America they didn’t come out” (5) – or when he declares “American candy is the best candy” (6). Randolph is not far removed from the “young and green” traveler on Twain’s voyage who “corners these educated British officers and badgers them with braggadocio about America and the wonders she can perform!” (28) – or Twain himself when he observes, for example, “by far the handsomest women we have seen in France were born and reared in America” (62). And, in the end, both works are not so much about where their characters are geographically as where they are spiritually: what they carry with them from America in terms of social perceptions and rules, and when rules could be broken.
A larger question may explain why Levin merely glances at Twain’s traveling innocents and focuses more on his Connecticut Yankee and Huckleberry Finn\(^\text{12}\) -- or why Tony Tanner chose to reflect on Daisy’s innocence in comparison to Huckleberry Finn’s instead of Twain’s travelers (210). Those essays work within the comfortable boundaries of fiction, avoiding the seemingly large stumbling block that James’s work is fiction while Twain’s is treated as nonfiction. Only such a genre division is not only surmountable, but actually questionable. The idea of Twain’s work being purely nonfiction is, for starters, a slippery one. His book contains extended forays into satire such as Chapter XXVI’s presentation of “the only playbill of [the Roman Coliseum] now extant,” which mocks the ballyhoo of American handbills, and a review of the Coliseum’s events in “a stained and mutilated copy of the Roman Daily Battle-Ax” (116-17). He seemingly warns the reader of the likelihood of tall America-favoring tales when he used them to one-up a Russian baron: “I was not going to let any man eclipse me on surprising adventures, merely for the want of a little invention” (170). The newspaper letters from which the book sprang included a fictional character named Brown whom Twain had previously employed\(^\text{13}\) to offer sundry observations; when the articles took book form, Twain excised Brown, but some of Brown’s comments went to other characters including “to a ‘thoughtful old Pilgrim,’ to Jack, and, most often, to Blucher” (Dickinson 152) – as well as “to Twain himself” (McKeithan xiii). Twain also subjected \textit{Innocents} to the sort of revisions which indicate he believed literary license was allowed,\(^\text{12}\) He also ignores “Daisy Miller” in favor of James’s novels.\(^\text{13}\) Twain began making use of Brown, “a companion for the traveling writer,” when writing about Hawaii in 1866. “To Brown he assigned anything crude or earthy he wished to say,” Everett Emerson said; Brown also allowed for byplay with Twain (33). But some of Twain’s revisions of his letters were “for the sake of decorum” meant to appeal to an Eastern audience and “besides being ignorant, Brown is vulgar” (Dickinson 145, 152).
not least the use of composite characters (Powers 201); as Arthur L. Scott observes, even
Twain’s letter published in the New York Herald underwent revision for book publication
“just as he revised the rest of the book” (56). Beyond that, one can make the larger
argument that Mark Twain is in fact a fictional character created by Clemens – “one
whose celebrated persona existed separate from his basic identity,” as Andrew Hoffman
has said (124). Hoffman sees the voyage described in *Innocents* as pivotal because it
found the writer not sure when he could be Clemens and when he could be Twain. Even
some contemporary critics failed to see the pose Clemens adopted as the traveling Twain;
his joking reference to not knowing that Michelangelo was dead – part of his satire of the
American in Europe, as well as a tweaking of European guides – was taken as a sign of
“shameful ignorance” (Emerson 59).

Where “Daisy Miller” was more clearly identified as fiction than Twain’s work,
James offered for it a real-life underpinning. In his preface to the New York Edition
James said the story began with an anecdote heard from a friend in 1877 about “a child of
nature and of freedom” who took up with “a good-looking Roman,” with unfortunate
social results (1269). His appending the subtitle “a study” to “Daisy Miller” was further
validation of the reality of the character which he judged as having “a certain flatness,”
with the “study” offering “a depreciation, addressed to the reader, of any great critical
hope of stirring scenes” (1270). And he observes, “at a certain hour long afterwards,” two
young women in Venice who to his eye were “a couple of attesting Daisy Millers” (1270-
71). William Dean Howells, writing about Daisy as one of the “heroines of fiction,” also
testified to her realness, saying: “In 1860-70, you saw her and heard her everywhere on
the European continent” (II 66) – although if she were anywhere in Twain’s path, he
apparently missed her. And she proved, to Howells at least, a transitory figure, all but
gone from the scene in the decade following her heyday.

But for all this seemingly real foundation for “Daisy,” James appeared
ambivalent about how much she was real and how much she was a work of art, especially
once she was being held up as a representative of American young womanhood. James
observed in his preface to “Daisy” that after recording the 1877 anecdote he put next to it
a pencil mark “inveterately signifying, in such connexions, ‘Dramatis!’” (1269). And he
defensively concluded that “my supposedly typical little figure [Daisy] was of course
pure poetry, and had never been anything else” (1271). James’s 1872 travel piece,
“Swiss Notes,” further hints that the inspiration for his tale may not have been solely
from conversation; James refers to a novel by Victor Cherbuliez — apparently Paule Mere
-- which indicated “frank nature is woefully out of favor” in Switzerland in its telling of a
“heroine who dies of a broken heart because her spontaneity passes for impropriety”
(626). It is therefore significant that James begins “Daisy Miller” in Switzerland since
Daisy was both frank and, eventually, out of favor; furthermore, Winterbourne’s aunt
asks him to bring her a copy of Paule Mere, which David Lodge deems James’s “sly way
of acknowledging his debt to it” (77). Daniel Mark Fogel points out “several essays that
deal with James’s sources in Continental fiction” (19), among them works by Viola
Dunbar and Edward Stone on Cherbuliez’s novel; Fogel also cites Motley F. Deakin’s
arguing for heroines in Cherbuliez, Sand, De Stael and Turgenev as “no less important as
models for Daisy Miller than the real American girls James observed” (19). While Fogel
also includes Hawthorne as one of the American foundations for “Daisy,” he then adds:
... though James is an extraordinarily different writer from Mark Twain, his Daisy Miller and his other innocent Americans in Europe are cousins, as it were, to the travelers portrayed in Twain’s *Innocents Abroad* (19).  

In sum, both Twain and James were writing along the line between fiction and nonfiction, drawing on the material available to them to make larger points; the issue of nonfiction vs. fiction becomes moot when considering the ideas within each work.

As for those works, Twain’s is the earlier, and the larger, and a piece which offers an array of interpretive alleyways, from Twain’s observations on religion to his stylistic shifts. Bruce Michelson offers a variety of contradictory reactions to Twain’s thoughts, particularly in whether Twain fits any definition of a true American. Michelson sums up the assessments of Twain:

> Flag-waving Yankee-Philistine, hater of Americans and American ways, exacting and sober critic of civilization, boor and yahoo, ferocious democrat, sycophant before royal fools, pilgrim of real or hypocritical or parodistic piety – the long list gives little hope of ever settling the question (385).

Michelson goes on to argue that *Innocents Abroad* is essentially a form of play, reflecting the voyage’s being a pleasure trip (385-6), and that Twain’s role was that of a playful tourist, which allows for his “improvisation and make-believe” (391). But if so, it was played on the hard concrete of Twain’s feelings about Europe, the Holy Land, dogma and his traveling companions, which were not all admiring or amused. “Daisy Miller” also

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14 Fogel does not elaborate. In fact, that is his only reference to Twain in more than 100 pages of discussion of “Daisy Miller” – particularly surprising since he deems James’s work “a dark comedy of manners” and Twain is one America’s great practitioners of comedy, including the dark kind.

15 Michelson admits that the playful-tourist idea breaks on the wheel of the Holy Land, where Twain “leaves the world of the tourist for the world of the pilgrim. . . . In Europe, the narrator may have what fun he likes with the sacred objects he sees and the miracles he is told about, for most of these are of the Roman church and fair game therefore for a nineteenth-century American Protestant and his predominantly Protestant audience. But in the Holy Land almost everything . . . is so sacred as to be imaginatively
begins playfully, in conversations among Winterbourne, Daisy Miller and her brother Randolph, who is the most blatantly comical character in the story. But here, too, is a grim atmosphere – a literal and figurative miasma that was at once in the air of Rome and in the hearts of most of the characters, and which carried its infection into three overlapping thematic conflicts.

The most obvious of the three concerns the reintroduction of Americans to Europe, a place where, in spite of their ancestry, Americans are creatures apart.

“Americans in Europe are outsiders,” James wrote in his “Americans Abroad” essay; “that is the great point, and the one thrown into relief by all the zealous efforts to controvert it” (787). The second conflict is more internal, set in Europe but with Americans pitted against each other on social and other grounds. Straddling both the conflict of American against American and of American against European is the issue of at what point an American loses his or her special American-ness, becoming not a European but someone caught between two worlds. The key parallel for considering all these issues is between Twain-the-character and Daisy Miller, the two true outsiders on their respective journeys, as well as the two most designed to represent the specific kind of American individual whom Michelson observes in Twain. But other characters come into play as well, including Winterbourne as a straddler of the European/American line, Mrs. Walker as the protector of the social order against which Daisy (and Twain) rebel, and James’s narrator as a source of commentary akin to that of Twain’s own narration.¹⁶

¹⁶Unlike Twain, who acted as both a narrator and a participant in his account’s action, James’s “Daisy Miller” narrator was not directly involved in the story’s action. At the same time, he was not impersonal.
What makes Twain the character a close companion to Daisy is their shared outsider status in their respective worlds. Daisy was never fully part of the social world to which she blithely assumed she had been admitted; Twain, though, “basked in the happiness of being for once in my life drifting with the tide of a great popular movement” (12), meaning only people who were going to Europe; he was not remotely one of the religious “pilgrims” dominating the traveling party. In addition, Daisy and Twain have comparable attitudes toward their travels in their longing for fun and adventure. Michelson has argued that Twain the tourist conveys “a sense of a young man out to squeeze pleasure out of an uncooperative world . . . to change the faceless and formal world of the pilgrim into a vital, unpredictable, imaginative, human encounter” (393). For example, when told the traveling party would not be allowed into Piraeus, Twain and three companions (of about seventy-five who had gone on their voyage) choose to sneak in anyway, “when most of the ship’s company were abed” (144). To ease boredom, guides are tortured with silly questions about Michelangelo (121) and Columbus (122). Also implying a disrespect for the Old World is Twain’s disdain for the paintings of the Old Masters, a disdain rooted in weariness of their sameness:

As early as the second paragraph of the tale, the narrator used the first person, as in “I hardly know whether it was the analogies or differences that were uppermost in the mind of a young American” (4), a statement which also personalized the narrator by denying him or her omniscience. It does appear that the narrator was part of the American social circle in which Winterbourne traveled, being privy to gossip such as the “contradictory accounts” of the motives for Winterbourne’s return to Geneva (64) and being aware of shared opinion that Winterbourne was “universally liked” (4). The narrator’s awareness of Winterbourne’s thoughts also suggested he/she was a Winterbourne confidant. Overall, though, one infers from James that a narrator was also an outsider – much the way Twain was when considering the mass of his fellow travelers.
We have seen famous pictures until our eyes are weary with looking at them and refuse to find interest in them any longer. And what wonder, when there are twelve hundred pictures by Palma the Younger in Venice and fifteen hundred by Tintoretto? . . . We have seen pictures of martyrs enough, and saints enough, to regenerate the world. . . . [T]o me it seemed when I had seen one of these martyrs I had seen them all (97-98).

This longing for fresh entertainment is also part of Daisy’s makeup: “I’m very fond of society, and I’ve always had a great deal of it,” she says. “Last winter I had seventeen dinners given for me; and three of them were by gentlemen” (11). When Winterbourne warns Daisy that her conduct is not like “a young lady of this country,” Daisy replies: “The young ladies of this country have a dreadfully poky time of it, so far as I can learn; I don’t see why I should change my habits for them” (49). Her fatal trip to the Colosseum is driven by a need for the experience: “I have seen the Colosseum by moonlight! . . . That’s one good thing.” (61, original underlining) So determined is she that Winterbourne wonders if she is “of the reckless class” (56) – as might be said of some of Twain’s exploits – while Giovanelli thought her unbendingly imprudent (60). Just as Twain breaks rules to enjoy himself, so does Daisy when she refuses Mrs. Walker’s demand that she get in her carriage; indeed, her rule-breaking tendency is already clear when she meets Winterbourne, since “a young man was not at liberty to speak to a young unmarried lady except under certain rarely-occurring conditions” (7) – and she tacitly encourages Winterbourne to do so.

As I have said, such revelry and risk takes place in the middle of meditations on Europe and America. Twain at times admires the look of the places he is visiting, such as “the noble panorama of Spain and Gibraltar and the blue Mediterranean” (26), and the “bewitching land” of France (42) and its contrast with an American landscape in “the
absence of hog-wallows, broken fences, cow lots, unpainted houses, and mud” (45). He speaks glowingly of Italian railways (105) and of French Emperor Napoleon III (51-2), perhaps too glowingly in the latter case. As Scott has pointed out, Twain cut the praise of Napoleon from the British edition of *Innocents* in 1872 because the emperor – “the model of Twain’s progressive modern man” (58) – had between American and British editions lost a war declared on Prussia and been deposed in favor of the Third French Republic (58-9). Elsewhere in Twain’s text are more timely disappointments: Italian tobacco (66), guides who “deceive and defraud every American who goes to Paris for the first time” (50); jewels on the remains of an Italian saint, “poor, and cheap, and trivial . . . in presence of . . . the awful majesty of death!” (72), the “battered and scarred” condition of the painting of the Last Supper (77). And there are the repeated broadsides against Catholicism – “a happy, cheerful, contented ignorance, superstition, degradation, poverty, indolence, and everlasting unaspiring worthlessness” (85)17. Even when Twain finds things to admire, he retains a longing for his native land. After one difficult portion of the Italian journey, he observes, “We never entirely appreciated, before . . . how jolly it is to . . . hold familiar conversation with friends in one’s own language” (104). Chapter XXVI is perhaps the most pro-American relative to Europeans, as Twain imagines being a Roman gone to America, and returning to his land to report:

I saw there a country which has no overshadowing Mother Church, and yet the people survive. I saw a government which never was protected by foreign soldiers at a cost greater than that required to carry the government itself. I saw common men and common women who could read. . . . I saw common men, there – men who were neither priests nor princes – who yet absolutely owned the land they tilled. . . . Jews, there, are treated just like human beings, instead of dogs. . . . The common people

17 See Note 15.
there know a great deal; they even have the effrontery to complain if they are not properly governed. (110-111)

In the speech’s final blow, Twain’s speaker realizes that his Italian listeners “do not believe the things I am telling you” (112). The American ideal, it appears, is too much at odds with what Twain has seen – although that ideal is, Twain knew, not quite the same as the real.

James’s narrator, like Twain, praises some of the beauty of Europe’s lands, starting with a Swiss “remarkably blue lake . . . that it behooves every tourist to visit” (3). The Roman Colosseum at night greatly impresses Winterbourne – although, “if nocturnal meditations in the Colosseum are recommended by the poets, they are deprecated by the doctors” (59); the miasma looms. That sense of an illness in the land – at least for Americans – is foreshadowed by Mrs. Miller’s complaining about a “climate . . . less bracing than Schenectady” (34). As with Twain, James sees there can be a difference between the land and the people who live on it. This distinction is especially visible in some of James’s travel writing; in “Swiss Notes,” six years before “Daisy Miller,” James notes “the want of humor” in the Swiss (627) and the country’s “terrible German element” (629). In the same essay, James mocks John Calvin as, along with Rousseau, great figures with “no great affinity” for the beauties of the Rhone, which “must have seemed to the grim Doctor one of the streams of the paradise he was making it so hard to enter” (628); Winterbourne, socially bound to the point of a repressive grimness, “had an old attachment for the little metropolis of Calvinism” – so James may also have been a kinsman of Twain in his skepticism about some religious practices. Winterbourne and Daisy more explicitly run against the social tide in their fondness for some Europeans,
demonstrated by Winterbourne’s liaison with “a foreign lady” (4), and Daisy’s wandering about with Giovanelli and what Mrs. Costello calls “half-a-dozen of the regular Roman fortune hunters” (32). Mrs. Costello’s comment seems more in keeping with the broader attitude of the established Americans, who keep most foreigners at arm’s length – perhaps fearing they carry the miasma with them – and who will not let the “Roman fortune hunters” into their homes; the narrator also says “very few Americans – indeed I think none – had ever seen” Winterbourne’s foreign lady (4). Not even death could bridge some divides; in Catholic Rome, Daisy is buried “in the little Protestant cemetery” (63). To be sure, for some Americans, Europeans were an object of curiosity; just as “Daisy Miller” is a study of Daisy, so Mrs. Walker makes a point of “studying European society,” although her interest was more academic than social as she “collected several specimens of her diversely-born fellow-mortals to serve, as it were, as text-books” (47). Twain is curious about Europeans, too, but keeps wanting them to live up to an image concocted by other writers of travel books, such as that of the grisettes, or of Naples, where he carried the cliché of “See Naples and die” and found instead “people . . . filthy in their habits, and this makes filthy streets and breeds disagreeable sights and smells” (133). (Twain, too, seems to fear an Italian miasma.) James echoes Twain in Mrs. Miller’s observation about Rome that “I must say I am disappointed. . . . We had heard so much about it; I suppose we had heard too much. . . . We had been led to expect something different” (35).

Europeans were welcomed into American circles only under certain circumstances – for Twain, as guides and royalty (the latter being mainly as the sort of objects of curiosity Mrs. Walker collects); for James’s people, if they were social arbiters
like the “observant Europeans” who were told that Daisy’s conduct was “abnormal” (56) or if they possessed enough wealth or titled nobility to marry American. Even before she brings up fortune hunters, Mrs. Costello complains about Daisy’s “third-rate Italians” (32). Giovanelli, upon Winterbourne’s investigation, is “perfectly respectable” but still “doesn’t move in what are called the first circles” (53); Giovanelli might have a better chance with Daisy were he “a count or a marchese” (54).

Even if Daisy had married well in social terms, she would have had to take care not to become Europeanized. In both Twain and James, it is a terrible offense by an American in Europe to lose his or her unique American-ness. Winterbourne “felt that he had lived in Geneva so long that he had lost a good deal; he had become dishabituated to the American tone” (12). Daisy at first does not take Winterbourne for a real American; “he seemed more like a German” (9). Indeed, Winterbourne is warned by his aunt that he has been too long in Europe to understand American society, and Winterbourne comes to concede that point; had he had more of Daisy’s independently American vigor, he might have more powerfully defended her, or ignored the strictures placed upon him by his social world. Once he has failed, he appears to put aside his American self and at the end of the tale has fallen again into the arms of Europe and his foreign lady. Twain, in turn, makes sport of those Americans adopting what they thought of as European style “to excite the envy of our untraveled friends” – including their seeming to forget English and to respond only to French (96). Much the way Winterbourne is caught between his American roots and his European manner, so Twain sees Americans with European flourishes as half-measured:

We laugh at Englishmen, when we are at home, for sticking so sturdily to
their national ways and customs, but we look back upon it from abroad very forgivingly. It is not pleasant to see an American forward obtrusively in a foreign land, but Oh, it is pitiable to see him making of himself a thing that is neither male nor female, neither fish, nor flesh, nor fowl – a poor, miserable hermaphrodite Frenchman (97).

And here we strike an issue of otherness in Twain and James which is more narrow than that of Americans vs. Europeans: the one of Americans against each other. Indeed, Auchincloss has said that the drama of “Daisy Miller” “lies in the opposition of Americans to Americans, not Americans to Europeans” (61). Americans abroad, innocent or not, take their social baggage along with their steamer trunks. Daisy and her mother, for example, “have not yet risen to the stage of . . . culture” at which they might catch a titled man (54) – or so thinks Winterbourne, and in doing so he illustrates the way that class divides the Americans against each other. James was clearly ambivalent about Americans, especially the new, rich breed represented by the Millers. In “Americans Abroad,” he speaks of tourists to Europe “by no means flattering to the national vanity . . . ill-made, ill-mannered, ill-dressed” (790) and, as has been mentioned, finding “Europeans very ignorant” about the United States (791). Twain, in his Herald letter, also speaks of Americans pitying Europeans who “had hardly ever heard of America” (281) and earlier pokes fun at his friend Dan’s insistence on speaking English to people who did not understand it (76). Even in the middle of his pro-American talk in Chapter XXVI, Twain turns on Americans; a rich man “is very greatly honored . . . no matter how ignorant an ass he is” (110), and the slavishness to fashion has women “put on a different dress almost every day” although it is “absurd in shape,” while the men’s clothes include “boots which . . . can stand no wear” (111). James gives the wealthy Millers a comparable measure of crassness, whether in Randolph’s and Mrs. Miller’s bragging or
Daisy’s chattiness and “laxity of deportment” (12); the shunning of Daisy may be read as either an act of cruelty (as Winterbourne sees it) or a defense of the established order. Either way, James portrays a gap in the American ensemble. And Twain pokes fun at Americans from the start of *Innocents*.

The ballyhoo promoting Twain’s voyage was so extreme that Twain reproduced in its entirety what he claimed was the exhaustingly long promotional bill for the voyage aboard the Quaker City. Granted the voyage was a major event, not only for its religious underpinning (sponsored by a church) but for its being “the first organized luxury cruise in American history” (Powers 183) and “the vanguard of the largest and richest invasion of wandering pleasure-seekers in history” (Michelson 392). Still, Twain brackets his reproduction of the voyage’s promotional material with drolly ironic enthusiasm about the luxury ("a picnic on a gigantic scale . . . [on] a great steamship with flags flying and cannon pealing" [5]) and the religiosity (the hymnal was specified, passengers were urged to bring a Bible and items on a list “which consisted chiefly of books relating to the Holy Land, since the Holy Land . . . seemed to be [the tour’s] main feature” [9]). And he notes after the ballyhoo that the event does not live up to expectations, since celebrities including Henry Ward Beecher, General Sherman and “a popular actress” were all expected – but dropped out of the trip. Instead, he is often stuck listening to the green young man or the bombastic Oracle. By the fourth chapter, Twain, obviously bored at sea, declares “life in the ship became nearly as systematically monotonous as the routine of a barrack” (14). Part of that routine involves the passengers’ writing in their journals; Twain, who knew the burden of regular writing, views the literary ambitions skeptically, claiming that however diligently the journal-keepers start, they will lose their zeal in
twenty-one days (15). Only someone of “pluck, endurance, devotion to duty for duty’s sake, and invincible determination” (15) can sustain a journal, he says – pretty high self-praise, as well as a way for Twain to set himself apart from the other travelers, much the way he had already mocked spectacle meant to dazzle those on the journey. The pilgrims are oppressive to him, and in his New York Herald letter following the voyage he complains that the pleasure excursion “did not look like one” and was “a funeral excursion without a corpse” (279-80). The divide between pilgrims and Twain’s small band of “sinners” appears most clearly after the group misses a planned boat trip “upon the waters that had borne the vessels of Apostles” (211); the pilgrims’ hypocrisy is exposed and the sinners are quietly triumphant:

> How the pilgrims abused each other! Each said it was the other’s fault, and each in turn denied it. No word was spoken by the sinners. . . . Sinners that have been kept down and had examples held up to them, and suffered frequent lectures, and been so put upon in a moral way and in the matter of going slow and being serious and bottling up slang, and so crowded in the matter of being proper and always and forever behaving, that their lives become a burden to them . . . took an unworthy satisfaction in seeing [the pilgrims] fall out, now and then, because it showed that they were only poor human people like us, after all (212).

And, it can be argued, like Daisy. She is repeatedly held up by gossips as an example of an “abnormal” woman (56), who to Americans living in Rome is “going really ‘too far’” (54). But, like Twain, she is unapologetic. Winterbourne’s warning about “a young lady of this country” refers not only to Italian women but implicitly to American women in Italy, and Daisy’s reply about not changing her ways “for them” (49, original underlining) is a cry of defiance to the Americans who are about to shun her. “When you

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18 Twain also made ironic reference to his lecturing success when he said, “An attempt was made to organize a debating club, but it was a failure. There was no oratorical talent on the ship” (17).
deal with natives you must go by the custom of the place,” warns Winterbourne (50) – although, again, the “natives” and “custom” refer to the Americans; Daisy found a place among the Europeans. The one good thing about her death was that she went to it with her lack of social guile, her innocence, intact and so unchangeable. Twain, of course, fared better – or we would not have his account to read; nevertheless, he wrote of a bold, confident American who might have found Daisy an excellent traveling companion.

In sum, both James and Twain used Americans in Europe to consider travelers and by extension their comrades at home by examining how they traveled, and how they treated others when they did. Resulting are two sets of portraits which fit as nicely next to each other as two Old Masters on one of the walls that so overwhelmed Twain. Of course, the two works do not have the sameness Twain lamented in the paintings; they are radically different in form and style. But when we look closely at the content of the works, the similarities abound. Americans in Europe, whether seen among Twain’s travelers or James’s little social group, were not so different.

Still, in “Daisy Miller” and Innocents Abroad, both authors look at Americans outside their home borders. James and Twain also walk across similar ground while considering Americans in America, and nowhere more so than in their largely simultaneous works, The Bostonians and Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.

As the next chapter will discuss, Twain’s great American novel and James’s “attempt to show I can write an American story” wrestle with some of the great issues of post-Civil War America. Twain’s reservations about The Bostonians aside, each writer also came to similar conclusions about the state of the nation.
CHAPTER III
THE AMERICANS SEEN

The whole thing [is] . . . an attempt to show I can write an American story.

Henry James, 1883\textsuperscript{19}

I do not think [Twain] much liked reading fiction.

William Dean Howells, 1900\textsuperscript{20}

The February 1885 issue of The Century Magazine contains some noteworthy pieces: Ulysses S. Grant’s memoir of the Battle of Shiloh, one of seven articles devoted to “Battles and Leaders of the Civil War”; “A Florentine Mosaic” by William Dean Howells; an editorial on election reform which notes Ohio has become “the battle-ground of the politicians”; two song-poems by Joel Chandler Harris under the name “Plantation Memories,” and the even more stunning “Aphorisms from the Quarters” by humorist J.A. Macon. Sample: “De cleans’ paft is de wus one to lay down in.” But none of those pieces prompted Bernard De Voto to proclaim, some 50 years later, that “as an accessory of literature, American journalism attained its highest reach [in that issue]. . . . No comparable enterprise has even been undertaken by a magazine” (308). Instead, De Voto believed the Century contained excerpts from three novels representing “the climax of the

\textsuperscript{19} The Complete Notebooks of Henry James (19)
\textsuperscript{20} “My Mark Twain,” \textit{Literary Friends and Acquaintance} (320)
national literature which followed the Civil War” (308). Those were James’s The Bostonians, Howells’s The Rise of Silas Lapham, and Twain’s Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.

The simultaneous publication of excerpts from Huckleberry Finn and The Bostonians which so excited De Voto has not, apparently, seemed significant to some observers. Yet their placement so close to each other in the magazine is a sign indicating they should be read together, perhaps back to back, because they collectively explain the urges coursing through America at the time of their publication. But that sign has to be detected amid the two novels’ superficial differences. Huckleberry Finn has a boy emerging from small towns and rural settings of the pre-Civil War Southwest; not overly literate, prone to vernacular speech, on a journey which occurs in the towns dotting the Mississippi River. The Bostonians also has a Southerner, Basil Ransom, who also journeys far, from Mississippi to New York and Boston; but he is literate and literary, and infiltrates a group of urban crusaders for women’s rights in the decade after the end of the war. Where death and injury mark Huck’s adventures, The Bostonians duel verbally. Where Huck travels the mighty Mississippi and wanders untamed lands, Basil Ransom takes walks in city parks and views boating as a mild pleasure; Doctor Prance has to teach him how to cast a fishing line (384).

It may not be surprising, then, that Peter Shaw, for one, does not suggest the works are overlapping in his consideration of them. He presents separate, consecutive essays on Twain’s novel and James’s in his Recovering American Literature, but cites neither in the chapter on the other. In her provocative Advertising Fictions: Literature,
Advertisement and Social Reading. Jennifer Wicke looks closely at the role of advertising – and, by extension, commerce – in The Bostonians but does not even mention Twain, let alone Huckleberry Finn, even though advertising plays a part in that book, notably where the King and the Duke more than once employed elaborate handbills (116, 126), with the latter setting up one of their most successful schemes; Twain also pointedly presents the excesses of advertising in Innocents Abroad (116). On the other hand, some critics, such as Sara deSaussure Davis, see great parallels in the two novels; she argued that The Bostonians was “very much like Huckleberry Finn,” that “the similarities are strong between Selah Tarrant [in James] and the Duke and the King” and that “James, like Twain, is consistently suspicious of the group in whatever form” (585) – so that James’s satirizing of characters in his novel is an attack not on feminism per se but on “group behavior” which is also anathema to the individualistic Twain (585).

Howard Kerr, in his considering of spiritualism in American literature, not only puts Huckleberry Finn and The Bostonians in adjacent chapters as Shaw did; he proposes that “Mark Twain could have and William Dean Howells must have taken close personal interest in Henry James’s handling of spiritualistic and related matters in The Bostonians” (190). Indeed, James’s work had similarities to a novel by Howells, the friend and colleague of both James and Twain. But Kerr goes on to argue that James approaches spiritualism “with different intentions than had Twain or Howells” (191), a point that as shall be seen is open to debate.

The books have also received different commercial and cultural reactions, as well as forming the basis for what appears to be a lack of regard by each author for the other’s work. Huckleberry Finn fueled the American imagination and became one of the works
in the American literary pantheon and beyond. So enduring is its appeal that in the twenty-first century a well-intentioned if wrong-headed publisher planned a new edition which would replace the word most offensive to modern sensibilities.\textsuperscript{21} The Internet Movie Database lists more than forty screen versions of Finn, counting appearances with Tom Sawyer; spanning more than ninety years, they include renditions of this specifically American tale in Russian and German. In contrast, IMDB lists but one adaptation of \textit{The Bostonians}, and that from 1984, although a 2005 film borrows the plot of James’s novel but relocates and reworks it for the present day, as \textit{The Californians}\textsuperscript{22}.

Indeed, where \textit{Huckleberry Finn} became a generally acknowledged classic – albeit a controversial one -- \textit{The Bostonians} has suffered periodic neglect, including by its author, and had at times to search for defenders against charges like Carl Van Doren’s that it is “too largely skeleton” and, compared to James’s own \textit{Princess Casamassima} seems “flat and empty” (VIII). In an essay written more than ninety years after the novel was published, Davis contends that even James’s “knowledge of his subject matter in \textit{The Bostonians} has been impugned or ignored” (570) – an insult she proceeds to dispute. The dismissal of \textit{The Bostonians} is even more lamentable because James’s goal in \textit{The Bostonians} is to be “as local, as American, as possible.” to write “a tale very characteristic of our social conditions” (\textit{Notebooks} 19-20) – goals Twain had in his work. Also like Twain, James layers into the novel a reflection on the Civil War, particularly by his use of a Southern character, Basil Ransom of Mississippi, as a catalyst; and an examination of sundry movements and notions circulating in society, from the do-gooder,

\textsuperscript{21} This NewSouth edition is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four.
\textsuperscript{22} For more about this adaptation, see Chapter Four.
abolitionist impulses of Miss Birdseye to the “mediums, communists, vegetarians” (541) Basil believes have gathered at Miss Birdseye’s; Twain features similar types in his book. And, where James views “the situation of women” (Notebooks 20) as a central issue for the novel and “the most salient and peculiar point in our social life” (Notebooks 20), his examination of it constantly echoes the question of racial equality in Huckleberry Finn, as each book asks its reader to consider the nature and importance of individual freedom. Indeed, where Van Doren takes issue with James’s portrait of his corner of America, Jean Gooder argues in The Cambridge Quarterly that James produced “one of the most intelligent novels written about America. . . . It enacts the foundering of direction, confusion of identity and values, that marked a turning-point for the nation. . . . Tragic in reach, the text is comic, racy, witty and violent by turns. Its demons are those of the demos” (99-100). Much the same could be said of Huckleberry Finn.

But how did the three authors – Howells, Twain and James -- view each other’s work at this major literary moment? As has been discussed in Chapter One, Twain, James and Howells were all well acquainted and involved in each other’s work. In the case of The Bostonians and Huckleberry Finn, Howells made a contribution to both of his colleagues’ novels. Howells had helped edit Huckleberry Finn (and censor some passages) and told Twain it was “a mighty good book” (513 ). Howells’s The Undiscovered Country has been cited as “a pivotal link in the literary genealogy of The Bostonians” (Anesko 173), and Anesko goes on to wonder if the “language of piracy” dotting James’s novel is a sub-textual acknowledgement that James had borrowed heavily.

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23 Quotations from the first five chapters of The Bostonians come from the magazine version, as Twain would have read them. The Modern Library edition notes James made “many revisions” in the novel for book publication (xxv).
from Howells (173). Twain expresses his fondness for Silas Lapham, as well as his wife’s, telling Howells that the June 1885 excerpt was “as great & fine & strong & beautiful as Mrs. Clemens had already proclaimed it to be” (531). And James confides to Grace Norton that he admired “the truth and power” of Silas Lapham – although he adds somewhat bitterly that “They don’t revile Howells when he does America . . . and why do they revile me? The ‘Bostonians’ is sugar-cake, compared with [Lapham]” (Anesko 182).

But when one goes past the Howells connection to have James and Twain face-to-face, James is silent about Huckleberry Finn – presumably a literary favor, though one the other author did not return. In a July 21, 1885, letter to Howells, Mark Twain concludes by saying, “And as for the Bostonians, I would rather be damned to John Bunyan’s heaven than read that” (Smith and Gibson 534). Nor is that the first time that Twain complains about James’s novel. In February 1885, after the first selection from The Bostonians appeared, Twain tells his wife that “I tried to read the Bostonians, but couldn’t. I dragged along halfway through it & gave it up in despair” (Gribben 349).

From the terse shot fired in the letter to Howells has a long Twain-James battle been erected. While such a fight overlooks their being cordial, if somewhat distant, social acquaintances, theirs was an acquaintanceship accompanied by some literary animosity. At the time of his death, Howells was working on a paper about James which says in part, “America was never kind to James. It was rude and harsh, unworthily and stupidly so” (Anesko 470). And so was Twain, who has been called “crassly immune” (Krause 227) to the greatness in James. If Twain indeed gave up on The Bostonians at the time he wrote to his wife, it was after a single installment had appeared in The Century; that would mean that he made up his mind based on the first five chapters of a forty-two-chapter
novel, five chapters during which one major character barely appears. And Twain may have given up even sooner, since he said he quit “halfway through.”

While it is possible that he returned to the serialized selections later (since he brought up the issue with Howells while the novel was still running in *The Century*), Twain’s comment to Howells indicates that he likely decided not to finish reading James’s novel long before it had completed its appearances in the magazine’s pages. Indeed, while Twain frequently made notes in the books he owned, his copy of the single-volume American edition of *The Bostonians* is pristine, according to its current owner. “It does not have a single annotation in it,” he said – although he also wondered if Twain had instead made notes in his copies of *The Century*, which do not survive.\(^\text{24}\)

James, on his side, appears neglectful if not hostile to Twain and to *Huckleberry Finn*, leaving critics like Sarah Daugherty to sigh, “If he had appreciated Twain. If he had remained in the United State throughout the 1880s, reading such novels as *Huckleberry Finn*” (112, my underlining added). But the public did not take to James the way it had to Twain. James’ novel was greeted by “negative reviews and poor sales,” says Anne T. Margolis (2), and the poor reputation continued for many years. James himself appears to cast the novel aside when assembling his New York Edition, although there is no absolute explanation for his dissatisfaction.\(^\text{25}\) Still, any possible rejection of the novel by James does not explain why Twain was so hostile to it – particularly when the two novels are so closely tied. Before looking at great length at those connections, it is first

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\(^{24}\) E-mail from Kevin MacDonnell, MacDonnell Rare Books, Austin, TX. Sept. 23, 2009, and telephone interview, Sept. 24, 2009.

\(^{25}\) See a 1915 James letter on the issue (Horne 559) and Edel’s discussion (*Master* 325) for two possible explanations.
necessary to look mainly at *The Bostonians* to understand how Twain’s thinking went – and therefore how much he missed if he dismissed the novel as abruptly as the written record indicates. It could be something very simple, that the very fact of this novel’s existence may be the starting point for Twain’s disdain. Van Doren argues that Twain detested novels, and “for the more sophisticated in that department he had no use.

He could not stand Henry James or George Eliot or [Nathaniel] Hawthorne; he found [Sir Walter] Scott an unendurable snob and [James Fenimore] Cooper a literary bungler; he developed his loathing for Jane Austen until he came to take a positive delight in uttering it in the most violent language. (VII)

Van Doren is leaning rather heavily on Howells here (while the critic also notes that Twain’s admiration of Howells’s work “must be assigned to his affection for the man” [VII]). In “My Mark Twain,” Howells says that Twain “did not care much for fiction, and in that sort he had certain distinct loathings,” among them Austen’s work (319). However, it is also possible that such criticism overstates Twain’s animosity toward what he had read of James’s novel. Van Doren enhances the jab at James by giving James top billing over Eliot and Hawthorne, a change in the order of authors Twain himself used in the July 1885 letter. The letter as reproduced in Smith and Gibson (533-4) begins with Twain’s praise of Howells’s *Indian Summer*, which was being serialized in *Harper’s New Monthly* at the time. Twain had read the second installment in the magazine’s August issue and was casting about for the previous month’s installment of the “beautiful story.” “You are really my only author,” Twain wrote. “I am restricted to you. I wouldn’t give a damn for the rest.” “The rest” then boils down to Eliot, with Twain complaining about both *Middlemarch* (“with its labored & tedious analyses of feelings & motives, its paltry & tiresome people, its unexciting & uninteresting story . ..”) and *Daniel Deronda*. 57
(“dragged through three chapters . . . & then was honest enough to quit”). “I haven’t any romance-literature appetite, as far as I can see,” he adds, “except for your books.” Then he resumes his praise of Howells before coming back to his earlier plaint:

You make all the motives & feelings perfectly clear without analyzing the guts out of them, the way George Eliot does. I can’t stand George Eliot, & Hawthorne & those people; I see what they are at, a hundred years before they get to it, & they just tire me to death. And as for the Bostonians . . .” (534)

In Twain’s letter, unlike Van Doren’s reconfiguring, James and The Bostonians appear almost as an afterthought. It may be that, having eviscerated Eliot and Hawthorne, two of Howells’s favorites, Twain simply decided to dig the needle in deeper. (Van Doren’s motives may have derived from his own lack of enthusiasm for The Bostonians.) Such banter between Twain and Howells would not have been surprising; the editors of the Twain-Howells letters note that Twain “often expressed an aversion to Jane Austen, perhaps in part to tease Howells, for whom she was a great favorite” (770). Howells said Twain considered his friend’s admiration of Austen and “more pitied me than hated me for my bad taste” (Literary Friends 320). And the 1885 letter again finds Twain commenting on writers admired by Howells but not by Twain.

Twain’s assault on The Bostonians could also have arisen because he was reminded of the excerpts from the novel when he described all the problems he had with work like Austen’s. If one reads only the first few chapters, The Bostonians could be seen as setting up an obvious romance. Twain might have looked at Basil and Olive and seen a gender-bent variation on Austen’s Elizabeth Bennet and the dour Mr. Darcy – a seemingly mismatched couple heading toward eventual love – although with ample pride and prejudice along the way. Twain indicated he had no stomach for romance literature
when dismantling Eliot; Twain’s description of dragging through Eliot is nearly identical to his description, in the letter to his wife, of how he first reacted to The Bostonians. The details of his attack on Eliot also sound eerily like some readers’ complaints about James. One can casually look at James and despair over “unexciting & uninteresting” stories lacking in the verve and action of Twain’s work; James’s examination of the interior life of his characters might well be reduced to “labored & tedious analyses of feelings & motives” by someone not disposed toward that sort of writing. Indeed, very little seems to happen in those five chapters of The Bostonians in the magazine excerpt: Olive and Basil meet, we are let in on some of their background and thoughts, they dine, they go to a meeting at Miss Birdseye’s home, we get more of their thoughts, residences are described, and there is a discussion about who should speak at the meeting. An epic journey by raft down a mighty river it is not.

Besides Twain’s general sense of irritation about fiction and his professed boredom with The Bostonians, there are other elements in the novel, even in those first five chapters, which provide ample reason for Twain to dislike the novel long before his sense of boredom overtook him. For starters, the novel presents a hermetic world, and one in which the details of places and personalities outside the urban East appear to have been put aside. Consider Basil Ransom. The man from Mississippi is repeatedly offered as an example of the South, but without many evocative specifics about his life or his particular region, as if James does not wish to overtax himself by searching for the proper details. (Here, at least, some of the complaints about James’s not understanding America could appear justified.) The vagueness reaches ludicrous extremes when the narrator concludes that Ransom’s stature, head of hair and “eyes especially, with their
smouldering fire, might have indicated that he was to be a great American statesman; or .
. . they simply might have proved that he came from Carolina or Alabama” (530).
Whatever geographic marker James observed in people’s eyes, it still makes a difference
to be from Carolina instead of Alabama, and even the two Carolinas are distinct from
each other; the well-traveled American Twain knew the variety of American places. But
it is as the passage continues that James’s narrator veers into country certain to irk Twain:

He came, in fact, from Mississippi, and he spoke very perceptively with
the accent of that country. It is not in my power to reproduce any
combination of characters this charming dialect . . . Yet the reader who
likes a complete image . . . is entreated not to forget that he prolonged his
consonants and swallowed his vowels, that he was guilty of elisions and
interpolations which were equally unexpected, and that his discourse was
pervaded by something sultry and vast, something almost African in its
rich, basking tone, something that suggested the teeming expanse of the
cotton-field. (4-5)

With that note the novel abandons any attempt to approximate the way Ransom sounded.
As Rob Davidson has observed, James did make “a belated call for attention to colloquial
American language” (259), although that came more than a decade after The Bostonians,
in an essay called “The Question of the Opportunities” in 1898. Nor was James entirely
convinced that writing in dialect was wise; a later 1898 essay cited by Davidson refers to
dialect as “invasive . . . in the subject-matter of the American fiction of the day,” a
reference which Davidson interprets as uneasiness on James’s part (259). He goes on to
cite James’s still later preface to the New York edition of Daisy Miller, where James’s
mentions of “the riot of the vulgar tongue” (1279) and “the bastard vernacular” (1280)
can be read as James believing – in Davidson’s words – “the chance to render American
dialect was an opportunity gladly given up” (260). Indeed, James launched what has to be
seen as a broadside against writers who love everyday language the way Twain did; that “bastard vernacular” belonged to communities

... disinherited of the felt difference between the speech of the soil and the speech of the newspaper, and capable thereby, accordingly, of taking slang for simplicity, the composite for the quaint and the vulgar for the natural. These were unutterable depths, and, as they yawned about one, what appreciable coherent sound did they most give out? Well, to my ear surely; at the worst, none that determined even a tardy compunction.

Twain, and Howells for that matter, seized the opportunity to use the language of the soil, and the newspaper. *Huckleberry Finn* bears an “explanatory” from Twain which notes:

In this book a number of dialects are used, to wit: the Missouri negro dialect; the extremest form of the backwoods South-Western dialect; the ordinary “Pike-County” dialect; and four modified varieties of this last. The shadings have not been done in a hap-hazard fashion, or by guess-work; but pains-takingly, and with the trustworthy guidance and support of personal familiarity with these several forms of speech. (2)

Not shrinking from the challenge, not claiming that “it is not in my power” to replicate speech, Twain was happy to present the varieties of the American voice. In his introduction to *The Portable Mark Twain*, De Voto notes that others had written in dialect before Twain but “merely humorous use . . . was the only one they had” while Twain “gave [dialects] a function in the writing of fiction” (27). Again, as we probe the antagonizing difference Twain saw in James: while Twain was relishing the voices of riverbanks and muddy pioneer streets, James stood on the sidewalk, or stepped into tidy drawing-rooms, with his boots put aside for cleaning. Indeed, where Twain puts *Huckleberry Finn* in the first-person voice of Huck himself, *The Bostonians* is at some remove from its characters; its narrator speaks occasionally in the first person but neither is named nor takes a specific role in the action. Gooder sees in James’s review of Walt
Whitman’s *Drum-Taps* the author’s belief that “it mattered to speak for America” (98) and that James did so in *The Bostonians*. But, as I have said, the Whitman review warns that only a certain kind of voice is appropriate. And James’s voice alone was not the sort Twain wanted to have heard. “Twain threw open the door on an America previously unrepresented in our literature,” says George Saunders, “its lower classes, its hustlers and religious con men, possessed of equal parts Spirit and lust” (xiii).

However politely they might speak, some of those people are also in James. Olive, for one, is driven by a reckless passion; Selah Tarrant is a hustler of the worst sort and Mrs. Farrinder only a slightly more elevated one; the Spirit is deep in Miss Birdseye. But, as lusty as Twain might have seen his men, such passions were not necessarily for the women he created. While Twain’s feelings about women generally would change during his adult life, especially after his marriage, those changes may not have found their way into his writing. “Most of Mark Twain’s women characters float through his pages on pink-tinted clouds of sentimentality, with all the verve and zest and passion of bisque dolls,” says Gladys Carmen Bellamy in *Mark Twain as a Literary Artist* (31). She notes De Voto’s reference to Twain’s statement that no woman in Hannibal was insulted, seduced, or gossiped about, and De Voto’s concluding that it was a “libel [of] a full-blooded folk” (31). Bellamy goes on to say: “The circumspect taste of his period cannot complete account for this tendency. . . . [H]is contemporary Henry James acknowledged in his novels the existence of sex and even his friend Howells . . . was not so prudish in print as Mark Twain” (31). Indeed, she considers the contentious debate between Twain critics De Voto and Van Wyck Brooks over Twain as a writer and a person, and
concludes that on the question of sex in his work, they found common ground like that which she describes.

To be sure, at least one other critic has had a different view; Geismar states that Laura in *The Gilded Age* possesses “a frank sexuality which she uses to gain power over the men who will further her own self-interest” (32). She is, says Geismar, “an American heroine who is far different from the whole line of ‘innocent maidens’ and ‘nice girls’ . . . who generally dominated the literary scene of the Victorian epoch in the United States” (32) – and a contrast to “the charming and innocent maidens of Henry James, virgins all” (33). Yet it is worth remembering that *The Gilded Age* was not written by Twain alone. And in a note Geismar concedes that throughout Twain’s writings there is “as regards his sexual experiences or lack of them, a complete silence, and blank” (27). And Powers also says that Twain, while courting his wife Olivia, discouraged her from reading *Don Quixote*, parts of Shakespeare and *Gil Blas* because “it would sadly offend your delicacy . . . [which] is a woman’s chief ornament” (301). In *Huckleberry Finn*, women may be noble, nurturing, gullible, or combinations of the same – but they are decidedly not sexual.

But instead of one of Geismar’s virginal nice girls, the first woman to be seen in *The Bostonians* is the aggressive and physical Mrs. Luna, her sights on Basil. She “glanced at him from head to foot, and gave a little smiling sigh” (530). In turn, Basil’s “eyes wandered over Mrs. Luna” (531); her drawing on of long gloves has a component of provocation and lust because “they reminded him of stockings, and he wondered how she managed without garters above the elbow”(531); as a widow and a mother, her sexual
experience is assumed. She provokes Basil again when her sister, Olive Chancellor, enters, by declaring, “I have told him you are a radical, and you may tell him, if you like, that I am a painted Jezebel” (532). Basil surely knows about painted Jezebels; he “knew no ladies, and was familiar with a ‘variety’ actress” (536). And Twain would not have been alone in being stunned by her; Denis Flannery has noted that one edition of The Bostonians referred on the back cover to “the appalling Mrs. Luna” and one early review of the book declared, “We hope never to meet . . . the widow who flirts in the flesh” (2). Flannery further imagines an even more complicated current which would have appalled Twain even more if he sensed it: Olive’s and Mrs. Luna holding a place in the American literary tradition of “sibling love and queer, specifically homoerotic, attachment” (5); indeed, Flannery claims “there is no good reason to exclude the possibility that in loving Verena Olive is choosing to love a version of her sister” (6) – although Twain would have had to read farther along than he indicated to pick up on that, since Verena is barely seen in the first five chapters.

Olive, meanwhile, though painfully shy at her first meeting with Basil, nonetheless harbors her own passions, even if they are at first reserved for causes. She envies Basil, who “had fought and offered his own life” in the Southern cause during the Civil War, and “the most secret, the most sacred hope of her nature was that she might some day have such a chance, that she might be a martyr and die for something” (533). She dreams of leading a movement to liberate women, for “the voice of their silent suffering was always in her ears” (543). (Miss Birdseye is equally passionate about causes, “consumed by the passion of sympathy” [543].) Yet Basil assesses Olive in sexual terms; after briefly entertaining the idea of a relationship with her because of her
wealth, he concludes that “nothing would induce him to make love to such a type as that” (535). Indeed, he sees her as “essentially a celibate” (535). Olive acknowledges to herself that “it had already been a comfort to her, on occasions of acute feeling, that she hated men, as a class anyway” (537) – a statement suggesting that her physical passion lay in a different direction, which makes me question De Voto’s assertion in *Mark Twain’s America* that James “could not have created Olive Chancellor if he had recognized her motives” (310). James in fact seems to hint at Olive’s lesbianism more than once: with “her immense desire to know intimately some very poor girl” (542); the way the shop-maidens she hoped to liberate were far more interested in a man whom Olive considered an “obtrusive swain planted in her path” whom she came to dislike extremely (542), and with the contrast between the unmarried Olive and Mrs. Farrinder, who is married and therefore an example at Miss Birdseye’s meeting that such a forum “is not necessarily hostile to the fireside” (540). Olive, meanwhile, though chilly about men, has a moment of intimacy with Miss Birdseye when she “tenderly fastened a small battered brooch which confined her collar and which had half detached itself” (543) – the final image of the first *Bostonians* excerpt in *The Century*. So Olive and the novel early on contain “the mixture of underlying sexual emotions with social ideas” which Canby theorizes is “something Americans were not yet ready to accept” (178). Nor might have Twain.

In addition to the dialogue provided him by James, Basil could have irritated Twain as well, since he is presented as a handsome and compelling figure, as “the most important personage in my narrative” (530), and as representative of what James with some sympathy calls a “blighted” region (533) James presents Basil, and by extension
his South, in terms of failure; Basil is poor, lean, shabby -- all adjectives offered in contrast to a voice that is rich and invokes “the teeming expanse of the cotton-field.” (530-1). Adds James: “His family was ruined; they had lost their slaves, their property, their friends and relations, their homes; had tasted of all the cruelty of defeat” (533). And if Basil is the embodiment of the South, Olive is the same for the North, wealthy and with “something very modern and highly developed in her aspect” (536). As A Concise History of the American Republic sums up the Civil War, “A loose agrarian confederacy . . . challenged a federal union . . . with overwhelming financial and industrial advantages” (276). Basil and Olive, like the two regions, are cousins but “not very close” (534). Basil has come to Olive, and the North, seeking an accommodation such as in his aborted idea of courtship, though without abandoning entirely the South’s old ways. James describes Basil’s journey as “making advances, as it were,” a phrase which suggests social climbing, a bold suitor and an invading army, a series of roles Basil would come to play. Indeed, he has come North to “enter the game and here he would win it” (534). And, much the way the powers of the Old South had by the time of The Bostonians regained control from the forces of Reconstruction, so Basil’s view of reform is that “the first principle of it was to reform the reformers” (536). Twain, meanwhile, had a complicated personal history regarding the South; he fought on its side in the Civil War, but in his family – as Edward Wagenknecht has written -- “sympathies between North and South were clearly divided” (232). In Mark Twain & The South, Arthur G. Pettit says Twain “was caught up in virtually the same mixture of fascinations, myths, and half-truths that bemused and tormented the South” (5). Pettit continues:
Southerners were supposed to be intrigued by Ancestry and by Cavalier origins. So too was Mark Twain. Southerners were supposed to be plagued by the Past, to be haunted by memories of slavery, the War, and Reconstruction. So was Mark Twain. Above all, Southerners were supposed to be consumed with shame and guilt over their treatment of the black race. And so was Mark Twain. (5)

Still, Howells, ever the loyal friend, says of Twain that “I never saw a man more regardful of negroes” (338) and that “he was the most desouthernized Southerner that I ever knew” (339). While that may have been true late in life, it was not always the case; Pettit notes that Twain’s early notebooks and journals “are liberally sprinkled with jokes about black body odor, fried n----- steaks, black sexual promiscuity, and the evils of miscegenation” (9).

But by the time Twain was reading The Bostonians, as Saunders puts it, “his natural clearheadedness asserted itself on the issue of racial equality” (xxii). Pettit says that by 1882 -- before the publication of Huckleberry Finn and The Bostonians – that “a large number of Mark Twain’s [created] Southerners were shabby, sick, lazy, ignorant, and profane” (68), a description that is also applicable to Huck’s Pap. Adds Pettit: “In Mark Twain’s eyes the South was rapidly becoming one vast pigsty – a region of dirt, grime, and mud that he soon transferred from the postbellum South to the antebellum villages in Huckleberry Finn.” (68-69). Yet here was James, in the pages of the same magazine carrying excerpts from Huckleberry Finn, presenting a Southerner in what has too often been seen as positive, even heroic terms.

In addition, Twain had by this point in life become a supporter of rights for women. James appeared both to mock the very women who were attempting to achieve those rights and to suggest that freedom for African-Americans was no longer a cause in
need of pursuing, since James’s advocates of abolition having taken up other banners.

This is most evident in The Bostonians’ early look into the mind of Miss Birdseye:

Since the Civil War much of her occupation was gone; for before that her best hours had been spent in fancying that she was helping some Southern slave to escape. It would have been a nice question whether, in her heart of hearts, for the sake of this excitement, she did not sometimes wish the blacks back in bondage. (26)

While Miss Birdseye is later a much more sympathetic character, Twain had left the novel by then. Instead, he was confronted by the above passage while well aware that the struggle for African-American rights had not ended with a war concluded decades before Huckleberry Finn. Although Twain’s novel itself has become, as Powers put it, “battleground in the American culture wars” (496) -- because of its use of the word nigger and perceived racism associated with the term – it also contains what Powers considers a moment of “moral majesty” (475) when Huck chooses hell over allowing Jim to remain a slave, a telling point in the years after the demise of Reconstruction’s reforms. Christine MacLeod has noted that Huckleberry Finn was written between 1876 and 1883, as race relations worsened; Twain began writing in the year that federal troops ended their Southern occupation and left behind “a vulnerable black citizenry” (7). In the year Twain completed the novel, MacLeod says, “the Supreme Court . . . interpreted ‘democracy’ to mean the inalienable right of white southerners to intimidate, segregate and discriminate against black Americans without fear of government intervention” (8). She sees Huckleberry Finn as “a cogent critique of America’s failure to live out the true meaning of the emancipation it had proclaimed” (14). Yet having made that argument, Twain faced James’s novel, with Miss Birdseye longing nostalgically for “the happiest days” of pursuing emancipation for African-Americans (539) as if the fight was over. In
addition, Olive has lost two brothers in the war, and she envisions Basil as “an offshoot of the old slave-holding oligarchy which, within her own vivid remembrance, had plunged the country into blood and tears” (533). She nonetheless extended him an invitation to her cousin, in essence offering peace in a land where Twain still saw conflict.

Acting on a flawed assumption about racial liberty, the women have moved on to gain rights for themselves. But to James they too often appear shabby and pathetic, in Miss Birdseye’s case; morbid, colorless and agitated, in Olive’s; calculating, “large, cold, and quiet” (540) in Mrs. Farrinder’s. They are, in sum, a stark counterpoint to the female community which Laura E. Skandera-Trombley has described as surrounding Twain. A central figure in that community was his wife, and Skandera-Trombley believes that Olivia Langdon Clemens – who married Twain in 1870 – brought with her a form of thinking new to her husband:

In Olivia’s immediate family and in the general ambiance of abolitionist and pro-women’s-rights thinking that infused her upbringing and her Elmira surroundings, Clemens encountered an atmosphere in which his highly traditional attitude toward women gradually but definitively changed. Clemens came to embrace many of the Langdons’ beliefs and periodically returned to Olivia’s birthplace, Elmira over the course of more than thirty years. After his marriage, Clemens’s views on such issues as women’s rights underwent distinct revision. (4)

Skandera-Trombley adds that “it was during the period in which his female family was intact, between 1876 and 1895, that Clemens produced much of what are considered to be his best writings” (24). And it is during that period, I imagine, that Twain most deliberately cast aside his February 1885 edition of The Century, because what he read
constituted an offense against not only his strongly held beliefs but those of his wife. This may explain why he so rapidly reported to her his dislike for the work.

In sum, Twain’s cursory reading of this early part of *The Bostonians* provided him ample reason not to keep reading. But by not finishing *The Bostonians*, he missed reading a book with which he might have found considerable philosophical agreement, and issues which would seem at home in his own work. Even some of the points already mentioned look very different as one goes farther into James’s work. Just as Twain had complicated feelings about the South, so does Olive, because Southern families have suffered in the war just as hers has, Flannery argues. She invites Ransom to Boston because “like Olive, Ransom has suffered bereavements. Like her brothers, he has ‘fought and offered his own life’” (8). Adds Flannery:

> Ransom would represent an opportunity for Olive to remain melancholically attached to her loved and lost brothers, to deny her loss of them, to enact her emotional ambivalence towards them, especially towards the manner in which they died and, fantasmically, to replace them. (9)

Basil and Olive can even be seen as mirrors in their passions: Olive in her belief in reform, Basil in his hatred of it. Where he is right to see the falseness in Selah Tarrant, he equates it with “the detested carpet-bagger” from what Basil considers “the horrible period of reconstruction” (56). And such comments are part of a vast issue running through both Twain’s and James’s novels: Both *The Bostonians* and *Huckleberry Finn* are laced with discussions of freedom. There is in *Finn*, for example: Huck’s longing to escape his father (23); Pap’s ranting about a freed slave (24-25); “Jim said it made him all over trembly and feverish to be so close to freedom” (74); Huck noting the irony in Tom working to free Jim when Jim was already free (242). In *The Bostonians*, Olive
imagines her sister marrying "a man who, no doubt, desired to treat women with the lash and manacles, as he and his people had formerly treated the wretched colored race" (157); she speculates that she and Verena "would be isolated, but they would be free" (159); Verena has "no traditions of independence" (68) and sees herself in marriage to Ransom as "a servant" (377). Moreover, in each work, the person for whom freedom is most personal (Jim in Huckleberry Finn, Verena in The Bostonians) is also the one who is, for the bulk of the story, the least free. Jim is a fugitive slave, and even Huck tends to see him as someone else's property; Tom degrades Jim even further, by turning him into a sort of passive minstrel on a stage built by Tom. Verena is also a source of entertainment; a celebrity whose photographs are sold before her aborted performance at the Music Hall (417). She also amuses Basil, not with her ideas but with her charisma; "her strange, sweet, crude, absurd, enchanting improvisation" (58). And she is for the most part not free because she is respectively the property of her parents, Olive and then finally Basil. While she has at the end of the novel a choice, which implies freedom, it is in fact a choice of to whom she will give up what little liberty she has.

On the question of freedom alone, then, Huckleberry Finn and The Bostonians are wrestling with the same idea, and doing so in books which are far more complicated than they might appear on first reading. The Bostonians poses numerous perplexing problems for its audience, both when it first appeared and today. Its unavoidable suggestion of a lesbian attraction by Olive for Verena would have been awkward for generations of tender sensibilities and nervous censors. But for reasons going far beyond sexuality,
what is an audience to make of the characters and James’s propelling them not through action but by dialogue and interior monologues? Is there an identifiable hero? Does that mean there is a villain? Can one read the text closely and agree with Carl Van Doren’s contention that the repellent Basil Ransom may be “reactionary” but is also “engaging” (VIII)? If the driving narrative of the novel is the battle for Verena’s heart between Olive and Basil, then why does James take Basil off the field for some eighty pages, almost twenty percent of the novel? What does one make of the ending, which to James at least is hardly a conclusion to the story, since he suggests more to come, particularly because Verena’s tears “were not the last she was destined to shed” (436)? Huckleberry Finn, which also ends with Huck heading into an uncertain future, is far from a simple challenge, either, however engaging its main character may seem. Huckleberry Finn appears, on the surface, to be more of a series of anecdotal adventures (such as the Grangerford-Shepherdson feud, or the King and the Duke), veering between realism and satire, social commentary and boyhood adventure, than a sustained, single-minded tale. The main character is a habitual liar, if not a very good one, and a thief; for much of the book, he seems moral only because there are far worse people wandering about – Pap, for one, and the King and the Duke. In addition, the ending of the story is painfully drawn out by the arrival of Tom Sawyer, with fully one-fourth of the text taking place after Tom appears and sets in motion various Jim-rescuing schemes drawn from Tom’s adventure books instead of allowing Jim a prompt, efficient escape.26

26 Jane Smiley, for that matter, has argued that the problem with the ending “really lies at the beginning . . . [where] neither Huck nor Twain take Jim’s desire for freedom at all seriously. . . . [N]ot only do the two never cross the Mississippi to Illinois, a free state, but they hardly even consider it” (459).
A telling illustration of the complexity of what Twain made is Leslie Fiedler’s 1948 essay “Come Back to the Raft Ag’in, Huck Honey!” which saw currents of race intermixed with homosexuality (the latter seeming quite discomfiting to Fiedler), a tale overall with “the texture of a dream” (147) about male love and particularly “the love of a colored man” (150) because “the white boy and the black we can discover wrestling affectionately on any American sidewalk, along which they will walk in adulthood, unwilling to touch even by accident” (151) – another form of the forbidden love Olive has for Verena. Fiedler specifically omits James from his consideration of Twain, Cooper, Hawthorne and other American writers by saying only James “completely escapes classification as a writer of juvenile classics” (144). But Fiedler is thinking mainly of books for boys, and may be on shaky ground there. Marcia Jacobson’s consideration of “boy books” argued that *Huckleberry Finn* is “something more,” beginning as a sequel to the more boyish *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, but which over time – Twain spent years off and on at the book – “came to incorporate Twain’s adult frustrations with his numerous social obligations and business dealings, his reflections on his widely varied reading and on contemporary politics, and his response to what he saw when he returned to the Mississippi River in 1882” (60). In comparison, one could look at *The Bostonians* as adopting the manner of a romance aiming at girls and women, only twisting to deal with other topics. Just as *Huckleberry Finn* shifts as it goes along, so *The Bostonians* turns from what looks like a Basil/Olive story in the early going into another kind of romance, one where Verena is the central character, beautiful and admirable, and forced to choose between love with a handsome stranger or a driven spinsterhood like Olive’s. But then it shifts again, as James turns romantic formula inside out since the
spinster is also, by implication, a suitor, and the handsome stranger is intent not on
wooing but enslaving the main character. James’s dismantling of romantic cliche
resembles the way Twain has made Tom’s adventure books seem ludicrous by showing
what might happen if such a story was applied to the real world. Indeed, much as Twain
drew on his childhood memories for elements of his novel, James was aware of a real-
world conflict similar to that he presented in The Bostonians, and may even have met
Anna Dickinson, one of the possible models for Verena Tarrant (David 573).

Looking beyond style, the books contain many comparable reflections on the
American experience. Besides the question of individual freedom already noted (filtered
through slavery in Twain’s novel, and gender issues doubling as racial metaphor in
James’s), each considers American greed in late-nineteenth-century America, which Jean
Gooder has observed is a parallel preoccupation in both novels; James’s novel, she says,
“analyses the metamorphosis of American idealism in what Mark Twain called the
Gilded Age. It is a hard look at what America had become, and was becoming” (102).”
Indeed, each novel repeatedly turns to characters’ feelings about and use of money. Jim is
an unsuccessful speculator, starting with “stock” – “live stock. Cattle, you know” (40) –
but falling to prey to repeated schemes; he even assesses himself in terms of his financial
worth: eight hundred dollars since “I owns myself” (41). Tom pays Jim forty dollars for
being patient during Tom’s silly schemes (243). Jim’s revealing the death of Pap is
important because it means Huck can safely collect his money (244). Indeed, money is
central to the way people’s worth – and not just Jim’s – is determined, like the preacher
who “never charged nothing for his preaching, and it was worth it, too” (189) or the kind
of loafer who “never has a cent” (117). Even Jim’s family has to be considered in
financial terms; after getting freedom:

... he would go to saving up money and never spend a single cent, and
when he got enough he would buy his wife ... and then they both would
work to buy their two children, and if their master wouldn’t sell them,
they’d get an Ab’litionist to go and steal them. (75)

As Dennis Patrick Slattery has said, Huckleberry Finn “is a narrative about money, or
better, about the myth of money – divinity in dollars, a story of sacred cents” (29).
Huck’s talismans, says Slattery, are “money and Jim” (33) – and Jim is repeatedly
equated with the money he can generate as a slave. In The Bostonians, Gooder has seen
a world in which money matters, where “the language of the present has to do with rights,
status, access and above all profit” (107). Basil, for one, is almost immediately
associated with money and calculation, looking “like a column of figures” (4) and with a
voice “suggesting the teeming expanse of the cotton-field” (5) – ironic comments, since
he has no money and the cotton fields neither teemed nor profited by the time the novel
begins. He has come north “seeking his fortune” (11). Olive has “a certain capital” which
Mrs. Farrinder sees making possible “liberal donations to a fund” (34). Verena’s ability
to raise money is part of her appeal, not only to her father but to Olive. After receiving
“the largest cheque” ever for one of Verena’s speeches, Olive observes that “money was
a tremendous force, and when one wanted to assault the wrong with every engine one
was happy not to lack the sinews of war” (296). Olive veers closely to agreeing to
Verena’s marriage to Henry Burrage because “it meant a large command of money –
much larger than her own” (301). As uneasy as he is about Verena’s stage work, Basil
recognizes its financial appeal – that “who wouldn’t pay half a dollar” for an hour with
her (311) – and that in the face of it “he felt ashamed of his own poverty” (312). Indeed, he resents that her growing wealth would widen the gap between them, that the power he believes a man should have over a woman is reduced by the woman’s making the money:

He had been born to the prospect of a fortune, and in spite of the years of misery that followed the war had never rid himself of the belief that a gentleman who desired to unite himself to a charming girl couldn’t yet ask her to come and live with him in sordid conditions. On the other hand it was no possible basis of matrimony that Verena could continue for his advantage the exercise of her remunerative profession; if he should become her husband he should know a way to strike her dumb. (312)

Key characters in each book – Verena and Huck – are shadowed by fathers intent on financial gain from their offspring, Huck’s Pap by getting Huck’s fortune, Selah Tarrant by peddling Verena to small crowds, then finally selling her outright to Olive. But wealth is not of itself a salvation for all the characters. Basil, the least well-off in his crowd, nonetheless triumphs over the fortunes of the Burrages and of Olive; Olive “confessed” to Mrs. Farrinder her having money (543), indicating some reluctance to do so, and the narrator observes Olive is so pleased that Mrs. Farrinder sees value in Olive’s money that she fails to notice Mrs. Farrinder has not remarked upon Olive’s character (543). Huck’s first line of defense against Pap is to give away his money (15) and he dreams of being able to “tramp right across the country, and hunt and fish to keep alive” (23); at the end of the book, Jim tells Huck that he can get his money again because Pap is dead – but Huck gives no indication that he wants it and he speaks instead of running off before Aunt Sally can “sivilize me. . . I can’t stand it” (244). Instead, it is the least principled
characters in each work -- Selah Tarrant in James, the King and the Duke in Twain – who are most enamored of money.27

Those characters have tried numerous ways to get it, none of it honest work. To be sure, Huck is no stranger to chicanery, either, but it is mainly in service of his own survival28 where the others aim to advance themselves without regard of the cost to others.29 And what is quite apparent is that neither Selah nor the King nor the Duke is especially good at his various practices. Mrs. Tarrant, for one, is “worn out with her husband’s inability to earn a living” (72). After Huck foils the King and the Duke’s best chance at a fortune:

. . . they done a lecture on temperance; but they didn’t make enough for them both to get drunk on. Then in another village they started a dancing school; but they didn’t know no more how to dance than a kangaroo does. . . They tackled missionarying, and mesmerizing, and doctoring, and telling fortunes, and a little bit of everything; but they couldn’t seem to have no luck. (175)

Soon after meeting them, in fact, Huck concludes they are “low-down humbugs and frauds” (106), just as Mrs. Tarrant acknowledges that Selah is “an awful humbug” (72).

27 It could be argued that Pap is the worst character in Huckleberry Finn, but he at least has some principles, however twisted they might be. He is especially bitter about “govment” and about African-Americans getting to vote (24-5). In his rage, Pap can be seen as a Reconstruction Southerner resenting what has happened to his world.

28 On the run with Jim, “I used to slip ashore . . . and buy ten or fifteen cents’ worth of meal or bacon or other stuff to eat; and sometimes I lifted a chicken . . . [or] borrowed a watermelon, or a mushmelon, or a punkin, or some new corn” (55-6). Huck does feel momentary guilt about the stealing, although he and Jim rationalize it by deciding they will not take crabapples or persimmons, since the former are never good and the persimmons weren’t ripe (56). But he at least admits to an awareness of right and wrong which eludes the King, the Duke and Selah Tarrant.

29 The King, or “the baldhead,” has sold an article removing tooth tartar (“and genrly the enamel along with it”), “laying on o’hands . . . for cancer, and paralysis, and sich things,” as well as fortune-telling (“when I’ve got somebody along to find out the facts for me”) and preaching (102-3). The Duke, “the young one,” has run temperance meetings (“puttin’ in my time with a private jug, on the sly”), sold patent medicines, taught singing, “sling a lecture” and practiced phrenology and mesmerism (102-3). Selah Tarrant, when first introduced, is also a “mesmeric healer” (541). When Mrs. Tarrant met him, he was “an itinerant vendor of lead-pencils” (69); joining him led to “strange adventures . . . in the great irregular army of nostrum-mongers” (70) where one could readily expect to find the King and the Duke, as well as “a dozen social experiments,” “a hundred religions,” “innumerable dietary reforms” and séances (70).
What little success these con artists have depends far less on their own skills than others’ choosing to go along with the humbug. Miss Birdseye, for one, believes Selah “had effected wonderful cures” (541) but her telling of them is “with all the facts wanting” (52). The King and the Duke rake in more money with their “ladies and children not admitted” scheme (126-129) after tricking the first crowd, when one man says “we don’t want to be the laughing-stock of this whole town . . . [but to] sell the rest of the town! Then we’ll all be in the same boat” (128, original underlining). As Slattery said, “The Duke, King, and Pap reveal . . . the modern attitude towards money in which no unity between men, or between men and the gods, is apparent; civilization and honorable goals are absent in its pursuit” (40). In James, “receipts were what Selah Tarrant was, in his own parlance, after. He wished to bring about the day in which they would flow in freely” (100). His agreeing to Verena living with Olive “would have the stamp of business” (160), an arrangement “conducted by means of cheques” (163).

As economic historian Edward Chancellor has observed, the financial panic of 1873 and the years of economic depression completed the 1870s stemmed from “the consequences of over a decade of speculative excess and overinvestment,” both rooted in the sort of criminality Twain and James present: “Periods of speculation had always fostered dishonesty, but in the nineteenth-century American stock market this tendency was even more pronounced” (186-7). The idea of making money was seen by some as singularly American; Chancellor notes the London Spectator’s editorializing “after a stock market panic in the late nineteenth century”:

The English, however speculative, fear poverty. The Frenchman shoots himself to avoid it. The American with a million speculates to win ten, and
if he loses takes a clerkship with equanimity. . . . It makes a nation of the most degenerate gamesters in the world. (154)

Jennifer Wicke takes Tarrant another step into modernity – and commerce – by analyzing his use of advertising; she considers The Bostonians a record of “the cultural Barnumization of America” (90), where the story of the Tarrant family “telescopes the rudimentary processes of early American advertising, its eventual link to the newspaper, and its ultimate ties to spectacle, deracinated history, and the sexualization of the advertising age” (91). She further considers Selah “the avatar of the advertising age” (92). As much as Selah wants money, he also craves publicity, “advertisements inserted gratis. The wish of his soul was that he might be interviewed” (102). Of course, it appears that he is more than willing to take money instead, as in his deal with Olive; nor is there any reason, given his history, to believe that those advertisements would be truthful – no more than the advertising handbills distributed by the King and the Duke, which promise “Shaksperean spectacle” (116) and, in the “ladies and children not admitted” notice (126), the possibility of sex. At least those advertisements were actually printed; one of the Duke’s swindles is collecting money for ads in a nonexistent newspaper (112).

While it should be clear at this point that Twain and James expressed alarm at many of the same qualities coursing through America, there is one more worth discussion: the role of spiritualism in the two novels. Howard Kerr’s Mediums, Spirit-Rappers, and Roaring Radicals: Spiritualism in American Literature, 1850-1900 devotes adjacent chapters to Huckleberry Finn and The Bostonians30 and each author’s distinct awareness of occult phenomena. For instance, Twain had in 1866 attended séances

30 He also precedes those chapters with a discussion of Howells’s The Undiscovered Country.
conducted by Ada Foye (157) and James speaks of a fictional spiritual lecturer named Ada T.P. Foat (190). Both writers, and others including James Russell Lowell and Nathaniel Hawthorne, were critical of aspects of spiritualism and “shaped their criticism through well-defined, humorous, occult and satiric patterns” (219). Kerr saw especially in James a synthesis of American writers’ responses to spiritualism – with the exception of “the comic séance and humorous poltergeist . . . recently revived by Mark Twain in Life on the Mississippi31 and Huckleberry Finn” (219). But the bottom line is that, in each book, spiritualism is treated as nonsense. As Huck says when Jim hears voices and fears they are spirits, “Spirits wouldn’t say, ‘dern the dern fog’” (100).

That is just one case where the idea of human contact with the spirit world is held up as fraudulent. Both the King and the Duke include spurious mesmerism among their efforts; Tom and Huck, when trying to free Jim, “acted as unwitting poltergeists in a burlesque of spiritual manifestations” (Kerr 171). Selah is not only a mesmerist but has worked as a medium, with his wife an accomplice

. . . when the table, sometimes, wouldn’t rise from the ground, the sofa wouldn’t float through the air, and the soft hand of a lost loved one was not so alert as it might have been to visit the circle. Mrs. Tarrant’s hand was soft enough for the most supernatural effect. (71)

Although Verena is introduced as a spiritual vessel manipulated by Selah, her strength is seen not as spiritual, or even rhetorical, but entertaining. “Well, they may call it what they please, it’s a pleasure to listen to it,” says one spectator at Miss Birdseye’s (62); Verena has given a “performance” (60) where “the audience was not disappointed” (61).

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31 Huck also makes an appearance in Life on the Mississippi “by way of illustrating keelboat talk and manners” (24), with a chapter Twain excised from Huckleberry Finn, “a book I have been working at, by fits and starts, during the past five or six years, and may possibly finish in five or six more” (24). It proved closer to two.
Verena was “naturally theatrical,” a blend of “a lesson rehearsed in advance” and “an air of artless enthusiasm” (50). Selah, in fact, fears people who may feel too earnestly about his practices; when a medium, “The people he had ever seen who were most in earnest were a committee of gentlemen who . . . had bent the fierce light of the scientific method upon him” (151).

But if one is not to believe too much in spiritualism, and be suspicious of money talk, and worry about the direction America has taken, and the unapologetic Southerner again enslaving, then what is left for someone to believe in? Both Huckleberry Finn and The Bostonians offer little in the way of answers. James’s novel ends with the pessimistic prospect of more tears from Verena. Twain’s book includes a racial epiphany for Huck, but not for society at large; Jim is free only because one woman has felt guilty – in her will – and that guilt is based on her planning to sell him down the river, not the simple act of ownership (241). Jim’s basic goodness simply earns him a higher potential purchase price, “a thousand dollars – and kind treatment” (238). He is still seen solely as a commodity to many, much the way Verena is a commodity who, at novel’s end, has just changed owners once more. In sum, each novel offers a similarly gloomy perspective on America and Americans, and a sense that not only is the basic issue of personal freedom unresolved in the wake of the Civil War, but things have gotten worse – that everyone is judged in terms of monetary value. While each novel is rich in comedy, each is also essentially an American tragedy.

Having seen some of the shared legacy of Twain and James in their lives and work, another question has to be asked: Can they still be twinned in the twenty-first century? Granted that Twain’s popularity still outstrips James’s, to the point that the
latest version of Twain’s autobiography topped best-seller lists, and the man himself was on the cover of a 2010 issue of *Newsweek*. There are nonetheless issues on which each author is asked to be representative of his culture, and in similar ways. Each, for example, has been held to the fire for racial attitudes which no longer appear appropriate. Each has also been held up as an example of a gay man in American arts. Each has seen his work revised so that it might appeal to a more current audience, whether on the page or on the screen. And Peter Shaw has used them – in fact, has used *Huckleberry Finn* and *The Bostonians* – as writers and works which need recovering from “academic radicalism from the 1960s to the present” (13). Chapter IV will look at how different critics and social observers tried both to claim and reject James and Twain, the merits of such arguments, and whether, indeed, in the present day Twain and James appear as closely tied as they did in their own.
CHAPTER IV

DO TWAIN AND JAMES STILL STAND TOGETHER IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY?

“Classic.” A book which people praise but don’t read.

Mark Twain, 1899

When Andrew Delbanco argued for the continuing significance of Herman Melville in his biography of the writer, he did so in part through a series of quotations containing references to Melville and extending into the early twenty-first century; the comments ranged from dialogue in an episode of *The Sopranos* to sundry comparisons of political figures to Captain Ahab. Melville, Delbanco implicitly argued, still mattered, still had something to say to modern America; his work fit Toni Morrison’s definition of classic literature as that which “heaves, manifests and lasts” (419). It would be foolish to say that Twain and James are on equal footing with modern audiences, where Twain is widely recognized and quoted, and where it is unlikely audiences would flock to a stage show called *Henry James Tonight*, let alone attend faithfully for more than half a century. Nevertheless, both Twain and James had works fit for Morrison’s classic definition (indeed, Morrison applied it to *Huckleberry Finn*): Each said things which are still worth hearing and reading. The preceding chapters have noted their addressing such issues as Americans’ place in the world beyond their borders, a topic which becomes ever more

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32“Pudd’nhead Wilson’s New Calendar,” *Following the Equator* 245.
important as technology and interconnecting economics shrink the globe, and the never-ending issue of the importance of individual liberty; *The Aspern Papers* is a sharp meditation on celebrity and privacy, a subject of almost nonstop discussion in the TMZ era. But when considering the comments which Delbanco offered about Melville, a careful reader may wonder if the commentators knew Melville’s work or if they were simply dropping the name of a literary character recognizable in some vague way to the audience at large. Even if James and Twain live vigorously in academe and Twain’s face is recognizable to the public at large, the nagging question again attaches: Are they known or merely recognized; understood or merely seized upon as representatives of this or that cultural moment? In short, are they totems of the culture or icons in the worst sense – mere symbols, squeezed into a Twitter post?

While discussion up to this point has argued vigorously for the authors’ overlapping thematic and literary visions, the argument now shifts to how each is considered in the present day – held up, in some cases, to the same standards and judged wanting in similar ways. Those considerations in turn ask if Twain and James can still have an impact on the public imagination, or if their ideas have become so tainted by other considerations – such as old literary standards, and challenging literary texts – that they cannot be considered at all. Have the criticisms become so extreme that the writers are in need of recovery, as Peter Shaw has put it – in essence an academic act of rescue which may be as positive as Huck’s freeing Jim from captivity or as ominous as Basil’s freeing Verena from Olive. In short, can two men writing so long ago – and writing about a culture which no longer exists – still be relevant to two overlapping but not entirely compatible audiences, the consumers and the cognoscenti? Discussion of those questions
here falls into two broad areas. The first concerns whether there is a legitimate risk of Twain and James not being read by the public at large, and why that might happen. From that issue arises the second area: the posthumous consideration of Twain and James in the context of political and social movements of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and how that has affected their reputations. While some of those matters have been addressed in previous chapters, the focus here will be as much on the critics as the criticized, to make clear the weight which James and Twain have been asked to carry. As will be seen, both writers have been subjected to an array of commentary, pro and con; as has been said about the four texts discussed in this thesis, Twain and James are also similar in some of the ways they have been perceived in recent times. And the way that debate has unfolded – particularly the lengths to which some have gone to make sure Twain is still taught in schools – underscores the argument that both writers are significant to any extended discussion of America. They do indeed heave and manifest not only in vague memory but in their still lively words.

But do they heave and manifest for the great body of readers? Again, one could ask the same question about Melville after encountering more than one person who knows of the whale but never wants to read *Moby Dick*. Similarly, as Malcolm Jones has observed, “Tom Sawyer’s fence-painting scam is known to people who have never read a line of Twain” (39); Peter Burnette has said that, while an initial disappointment commercially, *The Prince and the Pauper* “managed to worm its way into the American collective unconscious, so thoroughly in fact that many seem to have absorbed the tale without ever having read the book” – and that more readers know the story from the comic-book version than any other source (106). James and Twain may in fact be
familiar to people who know them only through the most pervasive popular arts of the last century, film and television; however, the screen adaptations of the writers have not consistently understood their work or embraced them in their full complexity. There have been occasional successes; Burnette has argued that the 1937 movie version The Prince and the Pauper “is that rare thing in American cinema, a movie that betters the ‘classic’ book on which it is based”\(^\text{33}\) (105). But adapting fiction to film is full of creative peril for the viewer and the viewed, especially if one expects fidelity to the original work; as George Bluestone has observed, criticism of infidelity assumes “a separable content which may be detached and reproduced, as the snapshot reproduces the kitten” but “changes are inevitable the moment one abandons the linguistic for the visual medium” (5). Still, the damage done to James and Twain goes beyond the challenge of narrative transposition to a fundamental, and possibly deliberate, departure from their narrative and thematic desires – a smoothing of the edges, a softening of harsh ideas. There is a tendency, for example, to reduce Twain’s work to comedy without acknowledging the dark side. Screen versions of A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court in 1931 (with Will Rogers) and 1949 (with Bing Crosby, and songs!) omit Twain’s horrifying denouement in favor of happy, romance-touched endings. The misunderstanding of Twain as a writer for juveniles has led to such efforts as the 1989 TV version of Connecticut Yankee starring Keshia Knight-Pulliam, then one of the young stars on The Cosby Show. The shifting of narrative tides in Huckleberry Finn so perplexed

\(^{33}\) That said, Burnette did not much like the book, calling it a “somewhat regrettable departure” from Twain’s work before it, and “spotty at best” (105).
screenwriters that Shelley Fisher Fishkin laments that, as the twentieth century ended, “there had never been a good Huckleberry Finn film”\textsuperscript{34}. She adds:

While the earliest film versions of the book (reflecting Hollywood’s insensitivity to racial stereotypes) reduced Twain’s complex characters to minstrel-show stereotypes, the most recent version (Disney’s)\textsuperscript{35} eviscerated Twain’s story by making it hopelessly “nice” – eliminating racist epithets, not showing white racists as they are, cleaning up Jim’s dialect, adding stuff Twain never put in, mangling Twain’s plot.\textsuperscript{36}

James, in turn, has also suffered at the hands of film producers who apparently do not see his work as sufficient on its original merits. A 2010 version of The Aspern Papers moved the story to the present day and to Venezuela, an alphabetic match to James’s Venice, but one where none of the underlying decay of James’s Venice would be evident. The Bostonians received similarly rough treatment in a 2004 version, retitled The Californians, where Basil (renamed Gavin) is a developer, Olive an environmental activist and Basil’s sister, and Verena (renamed Zoe) a protest singer; the feminist currents of James’s novel are gone, the satirical aspects of The Bostonians moved closer to farce. The climactic scene finds Gavin and Zoe leaving a concert hall as Olive performs a newly invented piece of musical doggerel to a great ovation. The 1996 adaptation of The Portrait of a Lady, while faithful to James in some ways, tries a bit desperately to reach beyond its period setting with an opening visual of modern women and an eroticized current which includes Isabel Archer dreaming of simultaneous caresses by three male suitors, and her appearing nude in a laughably overwrought sequence marking her transition to married life; such scenes are presumably meant to

\textsuperscript{34} She was ready to make an exception of Ralph Wiley’s screenplay, but it remains unproduced. 
\textsuperscript{35} Fishkin refers to the 1993 movie The Adventures of Huck Finn. 
\textsuperscript{36} From the online essay “In Praise of ‘Spike Lee’s Huckleberry Finn’ by Ralph Wiley.
draw the modern women filmgoers closer to the character and Isabel’s persistently awful coif. But that kind of reinterpretation also makes the argument that what James wrote is no longer valid for the current audience – implicitly giving the moviegoer no reason to then try out James’s words. And both James and Twain remain at risk of being known but not being read.

When Newsweek marked the centennial of Twain’s death by putting him on its cover, the accompanying essay by Jones at once claims Twain is America’s best-known writer and adds a chilling caveat akin to Jones’s comment about Tom’s fence-painting.

It is tempting to say he is also the country’s favorite writer, but that can’t be true. Too many grandparents have given too many copies of The Adventures of Tom Sawyer or The Prince and the Pauper to too many grandchildren, who then went about for the rest of childhood . . . while those books sat on numberless shelves, unread. If that didn’t finish off any appetite for Twain, there was always the high-school ritual of force-feeding The [sic] Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. (37)

The first volume of the University of California Press’s three-volume “complete and authoritative edition” of Twain’s autobiography was a best-seller in 2010; the New York Times reported in November 2010 that the originally planned printing of 7,500 copies swiftly turned into seven printings of a total of 275,000. Reasons given to the Times for the swift sales included an ongoing American love of Twain, its combination of history and biography making it “totally the Dad book of the year . . . a certain kind of guy book” and the “perfect holiday-gift quality: a widely adored author, a weighty feel, and a unique story behind its publication” because of Twain’s insistence that some passages not be published until after his death. But the Times also called it a “500,000-word doorstopper”; in fact, it would make other doorstoppers envious. It runs 712 pages not counting the index. It has five appendices, almost two hundred pages of endnotes and
close to one hundred fifty pages of “preliminary manuscripts and dictations” preceding what the edition officially calls “the autobiography.” One can see it taking up space on those “numberless shelves” Jones alluded to, its pages as crisply unread as those other books. And even those shelves would be in a fraction of American homes.

Another sign of concern for the mass-market longevity of Twain and James is the Library of America series. James and Twain are well represented. Sixteen volumes feature James, two devoted just to travel writing, two more to literary criticism, five to short stories, and six more to novels. Seven volumes feature Twain’s own work and an eighth collects “great writers on his life and work.” But the purpose of the Library is not, according to its own mission statement, to showcase well-known writers; rather, it arose from “scholars and literary critics who were concerned that many works by America’s finest writers were either out of print or nearly impossible to find.”37 The Library compares itself to “the historic preservation movement” to keep literature from being “lost to future generations.” Twain and James must therefore be considered at risk, if not now, then in the future, since the Library’s aims also include keeping works “permanently in print and widely available to readers” – as if the vogue for a given work or author could pass. Nor is this an unrealistic thought. The Bostonians, for example, so faded from view after its original publication that the 1945 republication was the first edition of it in the twentieth century.

But what would make it so difficult to keep James and Twain read? One could certainly make the argument that James, particularly the later James, is an enormous

challenge to everyday readers, and even shorter works like “The Aspern Papers” or “The Turn of the Screw” contain unsettling ambiguity which challenges the reader looking for something more clear-cut. A Modern Library list of the best novels of the twentieth century (a period which would exclude Twain’s most revered work) includes three by James: *The Wings of the Dove*, *The Ambassadors* and *The Golden Bowl*, respectively twenty-sixth, twenty-seventh and thirty-second. To encourage more discussion, Modern Library asked the Radcliffe Publishing Course to compile its own list; James figures prominently though not as highly, with *The Portrait of a Lady* (thirty-fifth), *The Wings of the Dove* (sixty-ninth) and *The Bostonians* (eighty-seventh). Such lists are, as noted, basically argument-starters and there is little to be gained from arguing whether a James novel should rank as twenty-sixth or sixty-ninth. Nevertheless, James was represented among the greats – according to Modern Library’s and Radcliffe’s experts. And that is significant because an accompanying list of Modern Library reader choices suggests James was far from *au courant*, since those readers exclude James entirely. This appears not to be a question of James’s occasionally extensive book length – the top two spots on the reader list were held by massive works by Ayn Rand – but of James’s accessibility and of reader passion.

Nor is Twain immune to a passion gap. He also presents considerable challenges to readers, not only in his writing for adults but in what has been passed off as juvenile fiction in the adventures of Tom and Huck. Those books describe a time and place alien

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38 It may be significant that those lists include two works, *Portrait* and *Wings*, that had prestigious screen adaptations not long before the lists’ compilation, and a screen version of *The Bostonians* had appeared in the previous decade.

39 After Rand’s novels, the next two favorites were books by L. Ron Hubbard and J.R.R. Tolkien. The top book with the Modern Library board, James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, ranked eleventh with readers, and I suspect even that high a ranking was a function of reader recognition of the title rather than actual reading.
to the modern young sensibility, and Twain’s narrative inconsistencies have been thoroughly noted – including by twentieth-century admirers examining the books with the benefit of historical distance. The Library of America collection of writing about Twain is dotted with cavils. Norman Mailer, writing on the centennial of the publication of *Huckleberry Finn*, called it a great novel but one that is also “flawed, quirky, uneven, not above taking cheap shots and cashing far too many checks (it is rarely above milking its humor)” (319). E.L. Doctorow, introducing *Tom Sawyer* in 1996, believed that children would find “the feelings of childhood truly rendered” -- but that Twain’s vision for the book “never quite came into focus . . . a creative dissatisfaction that would only be resolved with the writing of *Huckleberry Finn*” (365) – a book which, to many others besides Mailer, has its own considerable flaws. Kurt Vonnegut Jr. looked again at Twain’s grand, dark, comical, mad *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* and declared it a “technically flawed world treasure” (432). But these are, in a way, criticisms of style and technique. James and Twain have also run afoul of critics, and perhaps disenchanted readers, with their ideas – especially when those ideas do not conform to the dominant attitudes of an age.

One illustration of the critical conflict over the writers and their reputations in the late twentieth century is evident in Alfred Habegger’s provocatively titled essay “Who Made James the Modern American Master, and Why?” from his 1982 study *Gender, Fantasy, and Realism in American Literature*. Habegger is not a fan of James, arguing elsewhere in the book that Howells “was our great nineteenth-century novelist” while James, “with his great gifts, did not produce an oeuvre of first-rate realistic fiction between 1875 and 1890” since “he could not confront the full social reality of the United
States” (xi). He refers, of course, to the period during which James published “Daisy Miller,” The Portrait of a Lady and The Bostonians, remarkable and realistic works with Americans dealing with numerous American social realities, even when some of the conflicts took place on foreign shores. Habegger prefers to see the critical revival of James, and especially of The Bostonians, as stemming from a political-literary agenda promulgated, in his narrow view, by “the New Critics and the Partisan Reviewers” (xii). In the essay he elaborates:

New Criticism, in some respects a new form of the Southern conservative tradition, exerted a decisive influence in persuading students and English professors to take James more seriously. But the most influential group of all in getting James accepted as a major figure was, paradoxically, a circle of once-radical New York critics who maintained close contact with Marxist thought. . . . The Partisan Reviews loved James because his fiction supplied the ideal material prop – highbrow fantasy masquerading as realism – for mandarins on the margin of American political life. (294-5)

Habegger is especially focused on the critics’ treatment of The Bostonians, which he deems “brilliant if distorted social fiction” for its first third, and for the rest “a letdown, as many readers have complained” – a seeming endorsement of literary democracy, the kind of act which makes an Ayn Rand novel proclaimed the best of the twentieth century. Habegger is even setting that democracy in opposition to critics, particularly Philip Rahv and Lionel Trilling, who spurred James revivals beginning in the 1940s. They, he contended:

. . . performed a service in drawing a very interesting and virtually unread novel to the attention of modern readers. Yet these critics not only exaggerated James’s achievement in the novel but praised it for the wrong reasons. . . . They were far too eager to identify with the aristocratic male lead, and they failed to notice how little real information James
supplied about this character. They were far too hasty and uninformed in praising the novel’s accuracy of representation of a large social scene. (300-01)

As was pointed out in Chapter Three, the critical admiration of Basil Ransom is wrongheaded. But Sara Davis wrote in detail of the real-life elements of the feminist movement from which James drew – and did so three years before Habegger’s book appeared. It does not seem that Habegger is as interested in what was actually in James’s work as he is committed to taking down Rahv and Trilling, and James and The Bostonians provide him a means of doing so. However, such an action is bound to have a reaction, and one is provided by Peter Shaw. In his 1994 book Recovering American Literature, he seeks to save literary works which he believes are floating, unprotected, down a Mississippi of leftist thought; among those works are both Huckleberry Finn and The Bostonians. Shaw excoriates critics from the 1960s onward who were convinced that “political certainty” had driven nineteenth-century American writers. For those critics, Shaw argues:

American literature was an outright assault on the failings of American society: racism, sexism, homophobia, economic exploitation, class oppression, and imperialism. The literature’s preoccupations, that is to say, exactly matched those of academic radicalism from the 1960s to the present. (13)

Shaw numbers Habegger among those practicing that craft – and a rather meek practitioner at that, since Shaw thinks Habegger recanted “an unflattering description of feminism” in a 1976 introduction to The Bostonians in later writing, after “the cultural winds shifted” (135). Then Shaw piles hypocrisy onto his charges, in Habegger’s “seeing

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40 Three other chapters concentrated on The Scarlet Letter, Moby-Dick and Billy Budd, while an appendix was devoted to Typee.
fit not to mention his earlier apostasy” (135). Political thought had overwhelmed criticism, Shaw says. He continues:

Habegger’s conversion was chiefly one of political attitude. Without substantially altering his assessment of either Olive or Ransom, he was able to put himself in good odor by stating that ‘the trouble’ with James’s characterizations lay in their antifeminist intentions. Habegger was exceptionally frank about putting politics before literature in this way.

(136)

Of course, Shaw’s political attitudes come into play in his interpretations of literature and critics, such as in his treating critics as part of “academic radicalism” or his demeaning Olive Chancellor by using her first name in conjunction with Basil Ransom’s last. But he is far from alone in trying to bend a text to his political will. Indeed, the most recent history of *Huckleberry Finn* has involved an attempt to make it politically and culturally acceptable.

In early 2011, Alabama-based NewSouth Press released edited editions of *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn* as a single, connected work called, with a possessive that can only be considered ironic, *Mark Twain’s Adventures of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn*. This was not, of course, the first time Twain’s work had been edited. Not only were there the various attempts to shape his autobiography into something readers might find manageable, during his lifetime his work had been shaped by editors like Howells and Twain’s wife Olivia. Indeed, Twain once told Howells that, while reading to Olivia the manuscript of *Tom Sawyer*, he had left out the profanity he planned to include (Goodman 155). But the NewSouth edition’s changes, overseen by Twain scholar Alan Gribben, have quickly become among the most notorious. Again, as with the autobiography, a modest press run of 7,500 copies was planned but interest and
commentary far exceeded the volume’s book-shelf reach. Gribben has not merely removed the word nigger from Twain’s books, nor reduced it to dashes; he has replaced it with the word slave. Moreover, Injun Joe has become Indian Joe, and half-breed is now half-blood. A chapter deleted from Huckleberry Finn because Twain had already used it in Life on the Mississippi is reinstated in the NewSouth edition. Granted, discussion continues about its exclusion; it has been included as an appendix in the 2001 Modern Library edition of Huckleberry Finn, while the Bedford/St. Martin’s 2004 “Case Study in Critical Controversy” edition omits the passage because it was not in the 1885 text the edition includes and “is not directly relevant to any of our . . . . controversies” (v). Still, its reinsertion into the text is one more sign that what Gribben has made is a book at some remove from what Twain had authorized in his lifetime.

Gribben himself offers an extensive introductory explanation to the edition. The texts were combined, for example, “in order to restore the cohesiveness [Twain] originally envisioned.” And the changes in language are meant to provide a version of the books which the mass audience could embrace without discomfort; Gribben says the edition is “emphatically not intended for academic scholars” who have other, uncensored versions to consult but for “school teachers, college instructors and general readers [who] will welcome the option of an edition of Twain’s fused novels that spares the reader from a racial slur that never seems to lose its vitriol.” And, of course, from Injun and half-breed.

Quotations from the NewSouth edition are from the e-book version and so do not include page citations. Where appropriate, chapter numbers or other reference points will be provided instead.
The aim here is not to fall too deeply into the debate over the NewSouth publication, since that debate proceeds quite heartily on its own; on March 20, 2011, 60 Minutes included a segment on the controversy (albeit one that implied Gribben’s only change was the slave substitution). But the debate provides an example of the way in which one scholar firmly believes that the public – and young people especially – should be reading Twain, even if that must be is in a bowdlerized form And it should send readers back to the original text, to see how remarkable Twain’s use of language is. Gribben’s revision diminishes the forceful demeaning of Jim. Twain writes that Jim has become so proud of the attention generated by his bewitching, that “he wouldn’t hardly notice the other niggers. Niggers would come miles to hear Jim tell about it” (7); the juxtaposition of Jim’s social rise and of what he still is to Huck, makes Jim more sad than comical. The same force simply is not evident in Gribben’s milder, “he got so he wouldn’t hardly notice the other slaves.” The revisions also add redundancy. When Twain has Huck speak of Jim as “the only nigger I had in the world, and the only property” (180), he is making the distinction between Jim as person and as object; Gribben’s “the only slave I had in the world, and the only property” says the same thing twice, losing Twain’s distinction.

Gribben further demonstrates the danger of his approach in his proceeding past nigger to other words whose inflammatory quality is significantly less than that of the major word in question; one can easily imagine Shaw shaking his head with disapproval. Why stop there? And why stop with these works? Shouldn’t a more widespread purge of Twain’s writing be committed, one that also looks askance at some of his ideas? (Twain and James have also been accused of anti-Semitism.) Or is it better to side with Ralph
Wiley, the African-American social commentator who insisted, “There is not one usage of ‘nigger’ in Huckleberry Finn that I consider inauthentic, and I am hard to please that way” (42-43)? For that matter, Shelley Fisher Fishkin has argued that “Twain himself and the critics have ignored or obscured the African-American roots of his art” (Was Huck Black? 3). Wiley, who made his declaration in the 1990s, was well aware of the controversies around Huckleberry Finn and still was not alone among African-Americans in embracing the novel. Toni Morrison wrote an introduction to an edition. Ralph Ellison said the book had a “compelling image of black and white fraternity” (261).

But one might argue that those voices, too, come from the literary elite. Huckleberry Finn most offended regular people, Jonathan Arac has said: “African American parents and students” whose offense at the use of nigger was at first shrugged off, ironic in that African-Americans were fighting their way into store and schools only to find another reason to fight in the products they found. As Arac explains:

It was only after the Second World War that Huckleberry Finn achieved massive canonicity in the schools, as the great spiritual representative of the America that had become the dominant power in the world, and that aimed to embrace alien peoples with the loving innocence that Huck offered Jim; yet . . . the importance of this cultural work overrode the offense the book generated among many of its newly authorized, and newly obligated, African American readers. (20-21)

So, again, there is the suggestion that Huckleberry Finn should be read, as culture and as literature, but that many people simply do not want to read it. And just as Twain has been held up to racial scrutiny, so has James, with something of the same dismay. In The American Scene, his chronicle of his first return visit to America in a quarter-century, James portrays African-Americans years after their liberation in alien terms. Richmond, its old order collapsed, has as music only “the weird chants of the emancipated blacks”
(372); the African-Americans of Charleston “though superficially and doubtless not at all intendingly sinister, were the lustier race” (383), and when James’s journey southward leads more and more into “a dark and friendless void” (383), one cannot but think of James’s envisioning the unintentionally sinister race he had just described. Indeed, James may be “a perverse choice for consideration of the interrelation of race and literature during this [19th-century] period,” Kenneth Warren has observed (19). James appeared to squander the opportunity to write “a powerful brief against American racism” since, as Warren points out, James had read W.E.B. Du Bois’s The Souls of Black Folk before his American Scene journey and evidence of that racism surrounded him (112). James indeed praised Souls in American Scene and called Du Bois “that most accomplished of members of the negro race” (402). Yet the impact of Du Bois appears not to have been felt deeply by James, and may have only prompted a mocking humor; James speaks of one Southerner who, “though he wouldn’t hurt a Northern fly, there were things . . . he would have done to a Southern negro” (373). Such a low-key comment hardly serves to indicate the gravity of the “things” that Southerners had done at that time; about ten days before James had returned to the United States in August 1904, the New York Times reported:

A telegram from Statesborough, Georgia, says that a meeting of the planters was held today [Aug. 19], at which those present approved the recent burning of negroes, and resolved, in view of the attitude of the blacks, to “discipline” them whenever necessary. It was decided to lash three at once.

Months before that, Booker T. Washington had written of “barbarous scenes” of African-Americans burned at the stake; he begged “for pulpit and press to speak out against these burnings.” “Things,” indeed.
But James in total, because he deals so much with the bondage of society so plainly presented in both “Daisy Miller” and *The Bostonians*, may be seen as providing a commentary that transcends his occasional expressions of prejudice; Warren notes that even James’s assault on Walter Besant in “The Art of Fiction” contains “a disdain for class barriers” in “a context in which the social distribution of consciousness and feeling was racially and politically inflected” (25). On the great issues, Twain and James can be seen as enlightened. But the bedeviling details of their behavior still haunt them, especially as we move farther and farther away from their time and its prevailing attitudes.

On another point, the modern impulse to make writers our own leads not only to consideration of authors’ racial attitudes but their sexual ones. Such speculation has focused on both the bachelor James and the long-married (and clearly sexually experienced) Twain. The argument has been made more directly and unapologetically about James; in *The Young Master*, the first volume of his two-part James biography, Sheldon M. Novick says that James’s homosexuality “has been an open secret for a hundred years” (xiii). Edel, close to ninety years old when Novick’s book appeared, nonetheless took on Novick in the online journal Slate, contending that Novick’s theory “upsets half a century of scholarship that seems to have clearly shown James was firm bachelor with a ‘low amatory coefficient,’ as one of his doctors put it in 1905 in New York.” Implicit is that the scholarship includes Edel’s own; Novick had claimed Edel was both aware of James’s supposed homosexuality “but evidently did not care to be explicit in [Edel’s] vast five-volume biography” (xiii). Edel in turn disputed Novick’s evidence
and concluded “he attempts to turn certain of his fancies into fact—but his date is simply
too vague for him to get away with it.”

But Edel himself had struggled with earlier indications that James’ passion for
men was not merely theoretical. Habegger, while reviewing Edel’s one-volume version
of his James biography in 1987, noted changes from earlier editions “especially in the
approach to the old problem of James’s sexuality, presumably the topic Edel feels the
new generation of readers wants to hear about” (200). (Again, readers may be more
interested in hearing about James than actually reading his work.) Where the emphasis
had changed, Habegger concluded Edel did not fully dig into newly available material,
indicating an ongoing uneasiness in Edel; Habegger says Edel “wavers” was to whether
James’s issue was homoeroticism or androgyny (201). And this debate, too, has gone on.
When The Mature Master, Novick’s second volume, arrived a decade after the first, Edel
was dead; but Nicholas Delbanco voiced his skepticism in the Los Angeles Times,
declaring “conclusive evidence is scant” and that Novick at times shakily based
arguments on “the inaccurate assertion that a writer must have lived the scenes invoked in
his or her art.”42 Whichever sexual passions stirred James, they may have been as Novick
believes, or more complicated, or simply a function of that low coefficient. Even then, the
argument for at least homoerotic leanings in James appears to be far more plausible than
the one made for Twain having, at the very least, “youthful homosexual experiences,” as
Andrew Hoffman argued in Inventing Mark Twain (xii). Powers considers Hoffman’s
book “graced with praiseworthy research and interpretation” save on that point, which
Powers calls “speculative and circumstantial” (122). Noting that part of Hoffman’s

42From the online Los Angeles Times, Dec. 2, 2007.
evidence rested on such issues as Twain sharing a room, and perhaps even a bed, with other men, Powers points out that in the nineteenth century “unmarried men, especially when away from home, often shared beds.” Twain, Powers concludes, “was simply a creature of his century” (122).

Indeed, Powers adds an aside that Abraham Lincoln was doubtless a similar creature, even though the rail-splitter has also been the target of was-he-gay speculation, notably by writer-activist Larry Kramer in 1999 and by C.A. Tripp’s book The Intimate World of Abraham Lincoln in 2004. Central to the contention is Lincoln’s friend Joshua Speed, who was in Lincoln biographer David Herbert Donald’s view “perhaps the only intimate friend that Lincoln ever had” (69). But Donald looks at Lincoln and Speed’s sharing a bed (as well as “their most private thoughts”) as customary for the time; “no one,” Donald adds, “thought there was anything irregular or unusual about the arrangement” (70). In the final analysis, Powers says, Twain “kept mum about his actual sex life, a custom he shared with nearly every other writer of his century [including, by the way, James], and one that has since sadly slipped into desuetude.” (123). And it is possible to set aside the argument as a feverish attempt to bring more major writers into a gay pantheon. As Richard Brookhiser said of the Lincoln debate, “Since the other president sometimes thought to have been gay is the wretched James Buchanan, what gay activist wouldn’t want to trade up?”

On the other hand, Delbanco goes too far when considering Novick; he sees “heavy-breathing prurience” and asks “Does it matter? Why should we care whether James’ passionate attachments were of the body or mind?” An author’s character and motivations may provide paths into the consideration of their

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work, particularly work as laden with autobiographical elements as Twain’s and James’. Nevertheless, the gay assertion cannot be taken without question, leaving the reader to decide whether the writers’ work contains homoerotic elements.

But where do such debates take us on questions about the place of James and Twain in the twenty-first century? They put both writers squarely in the middle of the national discourse. This thesis is laced with names of American writers who have had commercial and critical success, and who believe in the greatness of Twain, James or both. Moreover, this thesis has pointed out in detail how much James and Twain were alike. That begins with their respective biographies – their early love of reading, their shared approaches to the writing craft, their humor (and its grim undercurrents), their need for financial success, their attachment to America although they spent large blocks of time elsewhere. They were especially American in their longing for a broad, commercial – and therefore largely democratic – acceptance even if James never had it on the level Twain achieved.

Then there is the fiction, the way that “Daisy Miller” is not so much a response to *Innocents Abroad* as a companion to it, equally aware of the difficulties Americans face not only among Europeans but among Americans themselves. The literary companionship is even more evident in their respective great American novels, *Huckleberry Finn* and *The Bostonians*: meditations on the inequities of post-Reconstruction culture; contemplations of liberty (with both Verena and Jim seen as forms of property by other characters); considerations of the late-nineteenth-century fascination with money and property, and the chicanery that could come with the practice of each. To read, for example, of Selah Tarrant and then of the King and the Duke may
involve moving from one book to another, but in terms of character and ideas, it is not unlike turning the pages of single book. And in that reading, one sees what America wrought more recently, in the recklessness and deception that led to the American financial crisis in the twenty-first century.

In sum, Twain and James have each, together, repeatedly asked us to consider what it means to be an American, and have shown that being American is essentially a journey – whether from America to Europe, or Mississippi to Boston, or from town to town along a mighty American river. That journey has not ended for any of their creations, who still travel through the imaginations of the readers who admit them; nor has it ended for America itself, which must still navigate the bold ideas and literary joys provided by James and Twain. And, on that journey, it is not enough merely to read Twain or James without considering the other. Part of their continuing vitality for the modern reader should arise not only from their respective richness in character, theme, humor and pathos; it should also come from reading them together, to listen in on the vigorous conversation, and occasional arguments, which can be found in their overlapping work. For all their stylistic differences, they often took the same literary path, and it is still a powerful pleasure to follow them along it.
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