



Elmira College Center for Mark Twain Studies

The Trouble Begins at Eight Spring Lecture Series



Thursday, May 3rd, 2007, in the Barn at Quarry Farm, 8 p.m. (PLEASE NOTE THURSDAY)

The “War-Prayer” Revisited: A Text for Our Time

Shelley Fisher Fishkin, Professor of English and Director of American Studies, Stanford University

“The War-Prayer,” a satire by Mark Twain on a nation’s invoking religion as it goes off to war, was written 102 years ago ~ but, sadly, it as fresh as the morning paper today. First published in 1923, “The War-Prayer” remains among the least-well-known works by Twain as far as the general public is concerned. Indeed, educated individuals are often startled and shocked when they are introduced to this piece, dumbfounded as to why they never encountered it before.

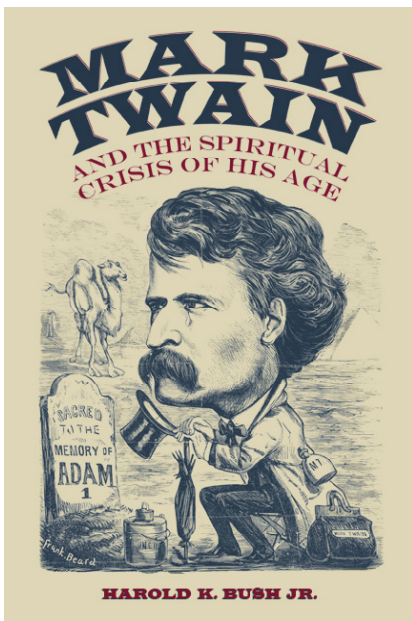
This talk will revisit the historical moment in which “The War-Prayer” was written, and will probe the significance of the ways in which Twain refined his text in his revisions and corrections of the manuscript. It will explore the ways “The War-Prayer” lays down the tracks for so much anti-war writing produced by American authors in the century after Twain wrote it. And it will encourage the audience to ponder this question: how might American history in the 20th and 21st centuries have been different if “The War-Prayer” had been as familiar to every high school student as Tom Sawyer?



(Underwood & Underwood photo, 1899. From the Jim Zwick collection.)

American soldiers and dead Filipinos after the battle of Malabon.

Doors open at 7:30. *The Trouble Begins at Eight.*



Wednesday, May 16th, 2007, in the Barn at Quarry Farm, 8 p.m.

Mark Twain and Spiritual Crisis

Hal Bush, Associate Professor of English, Saint Louis University

Dr. Bush will offer a brief summary of some of the material from his new book, *Mark Twain and the Spiritual Crisis of His Age*. Twain’s cultural achievement was deeply indebted to the forms of Christianity of that specific time and place in American history. Much of this debt was positive for Twain, so much so that he could occasionally wax eloquent about Christianity as “the most precious and elevating and ennobling boon ever vouchsafed to the world.” Twain’s work is also fairly shot through with evidence of the numerous religious controversies then confronting the American church, and Twain often commented on religion’s negative dimensions. But it is the positive dimensions that have been most ignored, and which deserve the majority of our attention. The quasi-religious ethos of Twain’s adult life ~ particularly in Hartford, Connecticut, and Elmira, New York ~ was marked by an intellectual, orthodox Christianity, much of it configured as responses to the spiritual crises at work against it.

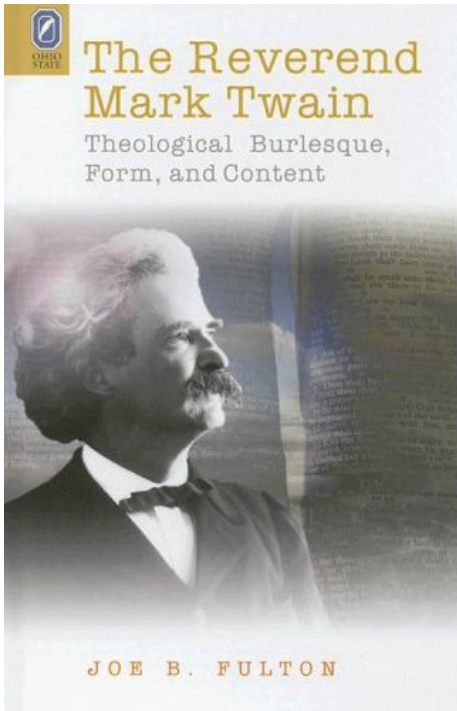
In addition, the talk will consider what constitutes “spiritual crisis,” and will sketch the period during and after the Civil War as one marked by considerable crisis for the Christian church. Much of Twain’s best work can be situated within the theological issues and disputes that characterized this era of spiritual upheaval and dissent. Copies of Dr. Bush’s book will be available for purchase and signing.

Doors open at 7:30. *The Trouble Begins at Eight.*



The Trouble Begins at Eight

Spring Lecture Series



Wednesday, May 30th, 2007, in the Barn at Quarry Farm, 8 p.m.
The Reverend Mark Twain: “This Career of Sparkling Holiness, Usefulness, and Health-Giving Theological Travel”
Joe Fulton, Associate Professor of English, Baylor University

Mark Twain made a career out of what he called “health-giving theological travel.” From his 1867 masquerade as the “Reverend Mark Twain” to gain a berth on the Quaker City excursion to the Old World and the Holy Land to his many later trips abroad, Twain used travel to create the occasion for parody, burlesque, and theological dialogue. Twain embarked on the Quaker City, for example, to situate himself as an observer and parodist in that environment of devout attention to the geography of religion. Throughout the writer’s career, travel served to bring him into contact with faraway places ~ and deities ~ with strange sounding names. During his career, Twain’s theological travel took him to the Joss houses of San Francisco, to the Vatican, to the Holy Land, and to the Hindu temple in Benares where Twain visited with the Sri 108 Matparamahansaparivrajakcharyaswamibhaskaranandasaraswati, the “living god.” Twain gave him a copy of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, feeling that “if it didn’t do him any good it wouldn’t do him any harm.” These collisions of culture and theology are riotously funny even while fostering profound theological dialogue. While theological travel may, like most travel, broaden one’s views, Twain’s comments typically derive from an orthodox perspective. The privileged position Twain granted orthodoxy, particularly when burlesquing other forms of belief, remained a

point of reference even while “lightly excursing along the primrose path of theology.” Copies of Dr. Fulton’s books will be available for purchase and signing.

Light refreshments will precede this closing lecture. Doors open at 7:30. The Trouble Begins at Eight.

Unable to attend our lecture series? Why not listen online?

Within a week of each lecture, go to <http://www.elmira.edu/twain>. Click on The Center for Mark Twain Studies and then on *The Trouble Begins at Eight*. Scroll down and click on the link for the appropriate audio file where live audio recordings of lectures will be available (with individual speakers’ permission).

Directions to Quarry Farm for local attendees:

From Elmira College, head east on Washington across the Clemens Center Parkway to Sullivan Street. Turn right on Sullivan. Turn left on East Avenue. Turn left on Crane Road. Quarry Farm will be on your left. Please park on the grassy area behind the Barn.



The Trouble Begins at Eight is made possible by the support of the Mark Twain Foundation and the Friends of the Center.

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