

Wednesday, May 13

“Guilty Pleasure Editing: Mark Twain’s Marginalia of ‘Bad’ Poetry”

Lisa McGunigal, *Hope College*

“The exquisitely bad is as satisfying to the soul as the exquisitely good—only the mediocre is unendurable”

Mark Twain, Notebook 39, 1896

Considered a satirist, travel writer, and lecturer, Twain was rarely presented as a poet or appreciator of poetry to the public during his life—and still today many people assume an antagonistic relationship between Twain and verse. In fact, Twain penned 120 poems (the bulk being of a humorous nature) and was an avid reader and performer of Robert Browning’s works. Additionally, Twain was clearly familiar with the popular poets of his era as he frequently parodied them within his novels. This lecture will discuss how Twain enjoyed not only reading bad poetry but also writing marginalia within his personal poetry collection—often consisting of snarky remarks criticizing the sentimental tone or rhyming structure— illustrating his active investment in altering and questioning the text as an enjoyable activity. In fact, Twain solicited editions of bad poetry from his friends and admirers with the expressed purpose to criticize them, and several of these copies are held today by the Elmira College Mark Twain Archive.



Sketch drawn by Mark Twain in 1890 that accompanied one of the author’s poems

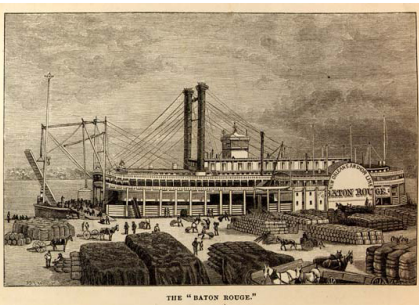
Lisa McGunigal is a Visiting Assistant Professor in the Department of English at Hope College. Her research examines the intersection of performance studies and nineteenth-century American literary realism, focusing on how authors adopted and adapted strategies from performance sites in their novels to interrogate societal attitudes about race, class, and gender. She was a 2019 Quarry Farm Fellow, and her work has appeared in several journals including the *Mark Twain Annual* and *American Literary Realism*. Lisa received her B.A. from the University of Rhode Island, M.A. from the University of Virginia, and Ph.D. from the Pennsylvania State University.

Wednesday, May 20

“Witnessing the Civil War: In Elmira with Mark Twain”

Shirley Samuels, *Cornell University*

Mark Twain did not go to Elmira during the Civil War, so the title has some deliberate ambiguity. What Elmira held during the last year of the war was a prisoner of war camp, and I am intrigued with the idea that Twain might have visited the site with the small dread that he could have been confined there or in a place like it if he had been captured during his brief foray into serving with a renegade group of would-be confederate soldiers. Most of the presentation focuses on his uncomfortable writing about the war in *Life on the Mississippi*. The revisions that appear between the early drafts of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* that appear in *Life* and its later, more familiar, appearance also fascinate me. Since Twain wrote most of *Huckleberry Finn* while sitting in his lair above Elmira, the title of the talk comes full circle.



Frontispiece for Life on the Mississippi

Shirley Samuels is working on a monograph, currently titled “Haunted by the Civil War,” on witnessing, testimony, and culture in the United States. She teaches at Cornell University in several departments, including American Studies, English, History of Art and Visual Studies, and Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. Her books include *Race and*

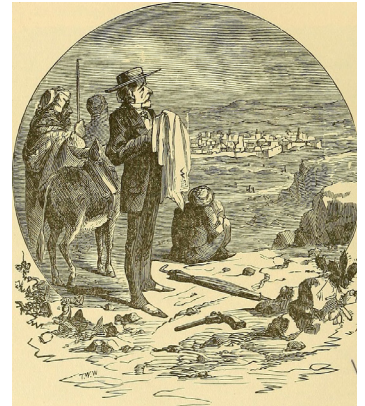
Vision in the Nineteenth-Century U.S. (2019); *The Cambridge Companion to Abraham Lincoln* (2012); *Reading the American Novel: 1780-1865* (2012); *Facing America: Iconography and the Civil War* (2004); *Companion to American Fiction, 1780-1865* (2004); *Romances of the Republic: Women, the Family, and Violence in the Literature of the Early American Nation* (1996); and *The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender, and Sentimentality in the 19th Century America* (1992.) In addition to Cornell University, she has taught at Princeton University, Brandeis University, and the University of Delaware. She has held fellowships from The American Council of Learned Societies, the Library Company of Philadelphia, the American Antiquarian Society, and the Huntington Library. She is a member of the 2020 class of Quarry Farm Fellows.

Wednesday, May 27

“Riding with Mark Twain”

Laura Skandera Trombley, *Southwestern University*

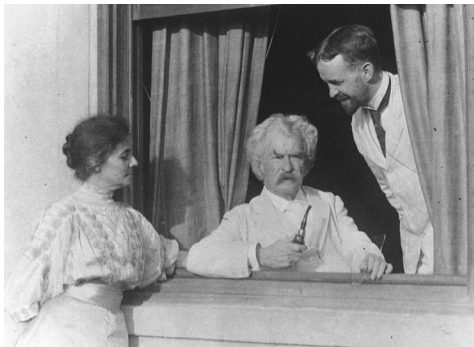
I was about to trek into the desert to try to find what Samuel Langhorne Clemens, also known as Mark Twain, had experienced over one hundred and fifty years ago on his foray through the Holy Land. Clemens had signed up because he was desperate for a future he couldn't imagine. He had arrived at this juncture exhausted from fighting for a sense of self-worth and fearing that whatever he had managed to accomplish would vanish unnoticed. As contrarian as it might appear, he was convinced that travelling to Europe and then galloping through Palestine was his best opportunity to secure a lucrative future. As for me, I was longing for a feeling of intensity, a strengthened connection, a heightening of awareness, a clearer pathway. I figured I wasn't the first person to seek enlightenment in the Judean Desert and neither was Clemens. We would be, together, Innocents Abroad.



“I Wept”

Illustration from *The Innocents Abroad*, Chpt.50

Laura Skandera Trombley is the forthcoming president of Southwestern University. She is president emerita of Pitzer College, where she served for 13 years, and The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens. Previously, she served as vice president for academic affairs and dean of the faculty at Coe College in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Dr. Trombley is the author of five books and a number of articles. She is the recipient of many awards for her scholarship, including being recognized by the *Mark Twain Journal* as a Legacy Scholar in spring 2019 for her efforts in rehabilitating the intellectual reputations of the women who surrounded Mark Twain. In 2017, she won the Louis J. Budd Award for her contributions to Mark Twain Studies. Dr. Trombley graduated summa cum laude with a Master of Arts in English from Pepperdine University. She received her doctorate in English from the University of Southern California.



Sam Clemens with Isabel Lyon and Ralph Ashcroft (circa 1908)

Wednesday, June 3

“Scandal at Stormfield: Mark Twain’s ‘Ashcroft-Lyon Manuscript’”

Lawrence Howe, *Roosevelt University*

In 1908, when Sam Clemens moved into his Italianate mansion, Stormfield, in Redding, Connecticut, he seemed to have turned the page on his sadness of recent years and begun a happy chapter. About a year later, this happiness was disrupted by a scandal: his personal secretary Isabel Lyon and his business manager Ralph Ashcroft betrayed his trust. Mark Twain addressed their deceptions in his final text, the “Ashcroft-Lyon Manuscript,” a tortured piece of writing in which he struggles to come to terms with their treachery. In this presentation, Howe will offer an account of the events and Twain’s text that disputes criticism of the manuscript as evidence of his irascibility and exhausted talent. Instead, Howe will show how the text’s compositional problems provide insight into Clemens’s vulnerability in the last stage of his life. In light of evidence proving that

the trusted couple exploited him, the text documents a crime that we now recognize as elder abuse. Twain’s emotional tone in this text signals how unsettling this nearly disastrous episode was for him. Indeed, the Ashcroft-Lyon manuscript is his attempt to regain control of his life by the means he knew best—through narrative.

Lawrence Howe is Professor of English and Film Studies at Roosevelt University, past-president of the Mark Twain Circle of America, and editor of Studies in American Humor. His publications include *Mark Twain and Money: Language, Capital, and Culture*, edited with Henry Wonham, and *Mark Twain and the Novel: The Double-Cross of Novelistic Discourse*. And he is currently at work on a book on Mark Twain and property. He has lectured throughout the United States and Europe on Mark Twain and other topics in American culture.

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