



The Trouble Begins

Spring 2022 Lecture Series

Wednesday, May 4 at Quarry Farm (7:00 p.m.)

“Found in Translation: Mark Twain’s Italian Humor”

Fred L. Gardaphe, *Queens College/CUNY and the John D. Calandra Italian/American Institute*



U.S. Americans were laughing at Italians long before they were laughing with them. Like all new immigrants, Italians served as targets of American humor, first through fear of their differences, then out of familiarity with their peculiarities. Scholars suggest that this is simply part of the process by which that minority is incorporated into the identity mosaic of the United States.

In a society governed by representation, a way of controlling people, beyond the law system, is through humiliation through humor, where laughter and ridicule serve as effective weapons of mass reduction, distorting identities through the creation of stereotypes that serve a variety of purposes. Humor, especially when ironic, can also reveal the prejudices and biases of those making fun of the new arrivals to the country.

Gardaphe examines the Italian references in Twain’s works, including *The Innocents Abroad*, “Italian with Grammar,” “Italian Without a Master,” *A Tramp Abroad*, *Pudd’nhead Wilson*, and his autobiography, to show how his ironic approach to Italy and the Italian people differs from most U.S. American writers of his time.

Fred L. Gardaphe is a Distinguished Professor of English and Italian/American Studies at Queens College/CUNY and the John D. Calandra Italian American Institute. He is a Fulbright Fellow (University of Salerno, Italy (2011) and past president of the Italian American Studies Association (formerly AIHA), MELUS, and the Working Class Studies Association. His books include *Italian Signs, American Streets: The Evolution of Italian American Narrative*, *Dagoes Read: Tradition and the Italian/American Writer*, *Moustache Pete is Dead!*, *Leaving Little Italy*, and *From Wiseguys to Wise Men: Masculinities and the Italian American Gangster*. He is currently working on a study of humor and irony in Italian American culture, which is the basis for this talk.

(Image comes from Mark Twain’s “Italian Without A Master,” first appearing in Harper’s Weekly for January 2, 1904)

Wednesday, May 11 at Quarry Farm (7:00 p.m.)

“Mark Twain’s Dreaded ‘Books that Laugh’: Laughter as Traumatic Utterance in the Mysterious Stranger Manuscripts”

Jennifer Hughes, *Averett University*

While in New Zealand in 1895, Mark Twain jotted dark musings into his notebook. In one note, he suggests that the world deserves more ridicule than he or any other author has heretofore been able to heap upon it. Humanity needs “books that laugh at the whole paltry scheme.” However, as he was responsible to his family, he could not publish such a controversial, derisive book himself. This presentation will examine Mark Twain’s explicitly-expressed fear of finishing the materials now known as the Mysterious Stranger manuscripts (“The Chronicle of Young Satan,” “Schoolhouse Hill,” and “No. 44, the Mysterious Stranger”), composed between 1897-1908. His fear, I argue, emerged from his view of laughter as a terrifyingly revealing and authentic expression, an utterance that could expose repressed wounds and hidden brokenness.

Additionally, an examination of contemporaneous newspaper and literary accounts of laws and trials will allow for a clearer understanding of the real legal and social risks Mark Twain confronted while drafting diatribes from a radical, blasphemous stranger.



Jennifer A. Hughes is Associate Professor of English and Chair of the Department of Language, Literature, and Culture at Averett University where she teaches courses in American literature, including an honors course on American humor and satire. She served as the Secretary/Treasurer of the American Humor Studies Association from 2013-2018 and has held fellowships from the American Antiquarian Society and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Jennifer received her B.A. from Cornell University, M.A. from the University of Virginia, and Ph.D. from Emory University.

(Image courtesy of the Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library)

Wednesday, May 18 at Quarry Farm (7:00 p.m.)

“A Copyright Ignored? Mark Twain, Mary Ann Cord, and the Meaning of Authorship”

Timothy J. McFarlin, *Samford University - Cumberland School of Law*

Did Mark Twain and the Atlantic infringe a copyright belonging to Mary Ann Cord? And does that copyright still exist today? In 1874 Cord told Twain and his family the heartrending and astounding story of how her family had been torn from her when she was enslaved, and how she was then liberated, years later, by her youngest son, Henry, now a Union soldier. Twain proceeded to write Cord’s story down from memory, organizing it chronologically, editing it, and describing how she told it. Twain published this manuscript in *The Atlantic Monthly* as “A True Story, Repeated Word for Word as I Heard It,” for money, under his name alone.



Mary Ann Cord

My talk will explore whether Cord had a common-law copyright in how she expressed her story and whether Twain and the Atlantic infringed on it. If so, Cord’s descendants may still hold that copyright today. In this way, these questions connect to our society’s current debates over reparations, as well as our longstanding examination of what it means to be an author.

Tim McFarlin is an Associate Professor at Samford University – Cumberland School of Law where he teaches courses relating to property and contract law; he specializes in intellectual property such as copyrights. His scholarship explores how the law intersects and interacts with the creative arts. He has previously written about the life, work, and disputes of artists like Chuck Berry and Orson Welles, mining them for insights into copyright law and the concept of authorship. He was raised in Missouri, like Twain, and practiced law in St. Louis. Trips to Hannibal as a boy and adult are cherished memories.

Wednesday, May 25 at Quarry Farm (7:00 p.m.)

“Our One Really Effective Weapon: Mark Twain and Humor as a Social Tool”

Elizabeth Cantalamessa, *University of Miami*



“Power, Money, Persuasion, Supplication, Persecution--these can lift at a colossal humbug,-- push it a little...but only Laughter can blow it to rags and atoms at a blast.” - from “The Mysterious Stranger”

Mark Twain understood that humor was not merely a psychological response, but a tool that allows us to do things that we could not do as effectively with other, more literal forms of speech. While it might seem like indirect methods of communication are generally less successful than straightforward deliberation, Twain’s work demonstrates that humor can be a useful tool for challenging social conventions in contexts where explicit justification would be too risky, controversial, or sabotage one’s goals. For example, Twain often employed parody to reveal latent absurdities in traditional Christian values and beliefs. Contrast Twain’s use of parody with

someone stating that, “Traditional Christian values are full of contradictions.” This declaration obligates the speaker to explain why their criticism is true, which would undermine the successfulness of the critique altogether. I’ll argue that Twain’s authorship provides a model of humor as a tool for inquiry and helps us locate the communicative contexts in which humor might be the most effective weapon.

Elizabeth Cantalamessa is a PhD candidate and instructor in philosophy at the University of Miami whose research lies at the intersection of social philosophy, philosophy of language, and philosophical methodology. Her dissertation proposes an alternative model of humor as a tool with unique expressive powers that allows speakers to publicly demonstrate socially-significant values without explicit justification, which captures how humor serves as a tool for revealing, reinforcing, and challenging social norms. She is a 2022 Quarry Farm Fellow and has published in *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy*, as well as the online public philosophy outlets *Aeon*, *Psyche*, and *Aesthetics for Birds*.

(Image is an illustration of Mark Twain and King Edward VII from Washington Times, June 28, 1907)

Center for Mark Twain Studies

(607) 735-1941

twaincenter@elmira.edu

MarkTwainStudies.org

Visit the “Trouble Begins Archives” at MarkTwainStudies.org for a downloadable recording of all these talks and other past lectures.

You can also see past “Trouble Begins” programs and CMTS quadrennial conference and symposia programs.