



Wednesday, October 6 Online Presentation

“Becoming Mark Twain”

Jeffrey Weissman, *Educator, Actor, Writer, Director, Producer*



45-year acting veteran Jeffrey Weissman, takes us through his history as a performer on stage, television and in major motion pictures. First he will focus on his work portraying classic comedians; Stanley Laurel, Charlie Chaplin, Groucho Marx, Larry Fine and others though study of their performance, private lives, postures, gestures and vocalizations. Then he will delve into what led him to portray Mark Twain in the PBS movie, *Dreamland; Mark Twain in Jerusalem* in 2008, (released in 2017). He will share his incredible stories and photos of how he helped a low-budget production obtain several ‘million dollar’ impossible-to-get shots. Finally, Jeffrey will bring us to the present, where he finds himself in demand as a Twain performer. He is currently in

development of the *Mark Twain’s American History; As I Know It* television series. We’ll get a sneak peek of the ‘proof of concept’ video and preview the different subjects he is tackling in the series scripts, which reveal the arc of Twain’s struggles and enlightenment, going from one side of an important social/political question to the other.

Jeffrey Weissman is an educator, actor, writer, director and producer. He co-stars in Hollywood blockbusters, *Back to the Future II & III*, *Pale Rider*, *Twilight Zone Movie* and over 70 other film and television shows. On stage he has performed in hundreds of shows, and he has played characters at theme parks, conventions and events around the world. Jeffrey trained at the American Conservatory Theatre, San Francisco State University and elsewhere. He teaches at Bay Area Professional Actors Studio, San Francisco Acting Academy and has taught at Sonoma State University, Dominican College, Ruth Azawa High School of the Arts, California Education at Berkeley and many other institutions. Jeffrey has performed, written, and directed dozens of shows for living history events, Universal Studios Hollywood, and Universal International in Osaka, Japan.

Wednesday, October 13 at Quarry Farm (7 p.m.)

“Sick of War or just the War Stories? Reading the *Harper’s Weekly* Civil War Stories with Mark Twain”

Joe B. Fulton, *Baylor University*

In December 1864, with the Civil War rushing toward its denouement at Appomattox Court House, Mark Twain published what was to become one of his most popular Civil War stories: “Lucretia Smith’s Soldier.” The narrator declares this a response to those “sickly war stories in *Harper’s Weekly*,” stories steeped in sentimentality, usually depicting hospital scenes rather than battle scenes. Having grown up in the border state of Missouri, Twain rebelled against the easy resolution of dilemmas seen in these “sickly war stories. Just as he would later blame Sir Walter Scott’s romantic fiction for causing the Civil War, in “Lucretia Smith’s Soldier,” Twain suggested that our tolerance for war was related to a romantic and sentimental writing. Reading those original *Harper’s Weekly* stories alongside Twain reveals his early rejection of romantic fiction as an aesthetic but also the antiwar sentiments visible throughout his career. Stories like “Lucretia Smith’s Soldier” show that Mark Twain was indeed sick of war stories, for he viewed them as contributing to our tolerance for war in the first place.



“Our Women and the War” Illustration by Winslow Homer. From *Harper’s Weekly*, September 6, 1862

Joe B. Fulton is Professor of English at Baylor University in Waco, Texas, where he has been honored as a “Baylor University Class of 1945 Centennial Professor.” Dr. Fulton has published five books on Mark Twain, including *The Reconstruction of Mark Twain: How a Confederate Bushwhacker Became the Lincoln of Our Literature* (Louisiana State University Press 2010) and *Mark Twain Under Fire: Reception and Reputation, Criticism and Controversy, 1851-2015* (Camden House 2018). He currently serves as Editor of the *Mark Twain Journal*.

Wednesday, October 20 Online Presentation

“Complementary Genius: The Sardonic Humor of Kurt Vonnegut and Mark Twain”

Richard Coronado, *South Texas College*



Many readers have found similarities in the works of Mark Twain and Kurt Vonnegut. The day after Vonnegut’s death in 2007, *The New York Times* compared Vonnegut’s corpus to Twain’s: “Like Twain, Mr. Vonnegut used humor to tackle the basic questions of human existence...He also shared with Twain a profound pessimism.” A philosophical consistency undergirds their ostensible conclusions about a mechanical universe, a determinist grip on mankind’s agency, and our inability to ameliorate the suffering that pervades human existence. The similarities in style, tone, subject matter, tropes, and motifs are so striking, in fact, that one must wonder if Vonnegut was guilty of what Twain himself confessed committing, “unconscious plagiarism.” Twain’s influence on Vonnegut is so pronounced, one must conclude a conscious borrowing. When one reads Vonnegut, they may as well be reading Twain, and, conversely, reading Twain feels like reading Vonnegut. A host of examples illustrating the parallels demonstrate how Vonnegut’s indebtedness transcends mere coincidence and how his work is in many ways a tribute to his predecessor.

Kurt Vonnegut at the Mark Twain House and Museum. Photo courtesy of Mara Lavitt/New Haven Register

Richard Coronado teaches English classes at South Texas College. He has presented several papers on the work of Kurt Vonnegut, Katherine Mansfield, and others. His literary interests include the philosophical novel, literature of the absurd, and modern and postmodern poetry. As an educator, he organizes annual lecture series that focus on the humanities, on social issues, and on literature that influences social thought. He lives in Weslaco, Texas.

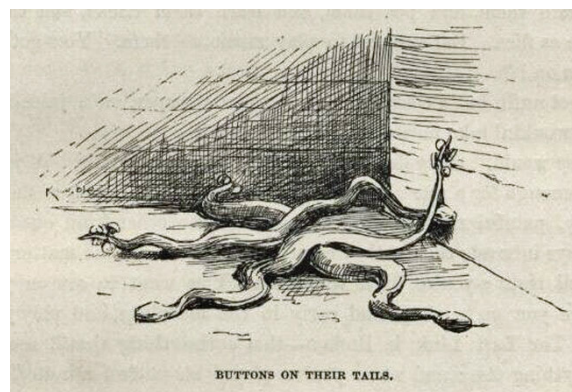
Wednesday, October 27 at Quarry Farm (7 p.m.)

“[T]ie some buttons on their tails, and let on they’re rattlesnakes”: Twain’s Anti-sentimentality and Contemporary African American Satire”

Sheri Marie-Harrison, *University of Missouri*

Of all the shenanigans in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, what returns to me most is Jim, imprisoned in a shed and tormented by Tom’s increasingly baroque efforts to free him. Here, the pairing of absurdity and violence indicts Tom’s and Huck’s inability to see the person they are attempting to free as a human being who, like them, feels pain and anguish — it is an indictment that extends to the reader who finds the harrowing violence of this situation funny. Jim’s time in the shed is among the ways the novel makes clear how dangerous white sentimentality can be. This is a danger that remains today and is taken up with implicit and explicit allusions to Twain’s work by African American writers like Paul Beatty and Kiese Laymon, particularly in their satirical novels. The pairing of absurdity and violence found in Jim’s confinement in the shed provides the occasion for this lecture’s discussion of Twain’s significance to Black satire and the continued role of sentimentality in antiracist struggles.

Sheri-Marie Harrison is an Associate Professor of English at the University of Missouri, where she researches and teaches Contemporary literature, and mass culture of the African Diaspora. She is the author of the book *Negotiating Sovereignty in Postcolonial Jamaican Literature* (Ohio State University Press, 2014) as well as essays in *Modern Fiction Studies*, *Small Axe*, *The Journal of West Indian Literature*, *The Oxford Research Encyclopedia*, *Contemporaries*, and *The Los Angeles Review of Books*. Among her ongoing projects is an author study of Marlon James, a monograph on genre in contemporary Black fiction, and she is also one of the co-editors for the *Routledge Companion to the Novel* (forthcoming 2023).



“Buttons on Their Tails.”

Illustration from *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain, Chpt.38, p.326 (1885)

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