

# The Trouble Begins

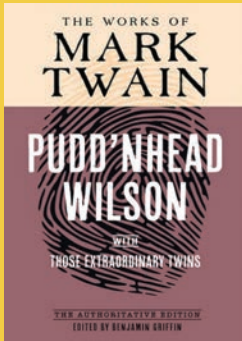
Spring 2025 Lecture Series



40th Anniversary (1985-2025)

Friday, April 25 at 1pm PDT/4pm EDT VIRTUAL EVENT

Benjamin Griffin, Mark Twain Papers, *University of California Berkeley*



In partnership with the Mark Twain Circle of America, the Center for Mark Twain Studies announces a special virtual Trouble Begins program: Editor Benjamin Griffin of the Mark Twain Papers will discuss his new edition of *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (University of California Press, 2024).

CMTS and MTC are sure that this particular edition is an important milestone for Mark Twain scholarship, and we welcome a chance to highlight it for our community. We believe that there will be plenty of interest in how Griffin decided to perform his own kind of surgery on the manuscript to render the most usable and authoritative version of both *Pudd'nhead Wilson* and *Those Extraordinary Twins*.

Wednesday, May 14 at 7pm in the Quarry Farm Barn

Two Talks on the Restoration of the Mark Twain Study

“Restoration of the Mark Twain Study Windows”  
by Steve Jordan

This talk about the restoration of the Mark Twain Study windows outlines the process used to restore historic windows and the special issues related to this project. The goal was to return the windows back to original condition, to the best degree possible, while respecting and saving the original materials—wood, glass, and hardware.



Steve Jordan (left) with assistant, and Alicia Campbell (right) working in the Mark Twain Study

Steve Jordan graduated from Memphis State University (BA History) and Cornell University's graduate program in Historic Preservation. He was the rehab advisor for the Landmark Society of Western New York for six years, an architectural conservator for Bero Architecture for four years, a contributing editor for *Old-House Journal* from 1998 through 2015, and operated a window restoration business for twenty years. He is the author of several books, including *The Window Sash Bible*; *Storm Windows: A Comprehensive Guide to Wood, Wood Combination, Aluminum, and Interior Storm Windows*; *Window Glazing: Puttying and Replacing Glass in Traditional Wood Windows*. Steve travels extensively to teach restoration skills.

“Mark Twain Study: Analysis of Original Interior and Exterior Finishes” by Alicia Campbell

This talk will present the findings and methods utilized to determine the original materials and colors used on the Mark Twain Study when it was constructed in 1874.

Alicia Campbell, of Campbell Restoration and Consulting, has been passionately working on historic preservation projects since 1993. She studied paint analysis at the Frank S. Welsh Co. in the late 1990s and has since performed independent paint analysis work in the Rochester, NY area. During her 30 year corporate career, she continued her training in the building preservation crafts, and with her husband worked on restoring their five historic properties - receiving the “Historic Home Award” and the “Blood, Sweat, and Tears Award” from the Landmark Society of Western NY. She is now dedicated to building restoration work full-time.

Wednesday, May 21 at 7pm in the Quarry Farm Barn

“Mark Twain and the ‘Commerce of Disease’”

Jess Libow, *Haverford College*

In Mark Twain’s unfinished 1905 novel, *Three Thousand Years Among the Microbes*, a scientist “studying micrology under co-founder of the American Society of Microbiology Prof. H[erbert] W[illiam] Conn,” is transformed by a magician into a cholera germ living on the body of an immigrant “tramp” from Hungary. As Americans were becoming increasingly aware that something undetectable to the human eye could pose a deadly threat, Twain asks what the human body looks like through the eyes of the microbe. *Among the Microbes* asks us to imagine a human body as “the only world there is” for its microscopic inhabitants. My talk situates Twain’s novel alongside other texts of what Lorenzo Servitje and Kari Nixon have termed “the Bacteriological Age” that emerged at the turn of the twentieth century. I illuminate the class critique embedded in *Among the Microbes* by reading it alongside texts such as Jacob Riis’s *How the Other Half Lives* (1890) and Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* (1906), both of which depict unhygienic impoverished environments to convey the simultaneously microscopic and immense threat of disease. Throughout *Among the Microbes* Twain examines microbial labor in relation to that of American workers. For example, the narrator presents the treatment of the lowest class of microbes – called “soiled bread eaters” – in terms reminiscent of the status of American workers. He reports that the stomach in particular is “the richest” and “most fertile” terrain for microbial trade and transportation, and this commercially active stomach echoes the digestive system’s emergence as a key site of disease in Sinclair’s depictions of the diseased meat processed and packaged by immigrant laborers. Ultimately, I argue that the unseen germ of disease in Twain’s manuscript is both a metaphor for and materially tied to another equally ubiquitous public health threat posed by industrial capitalism.

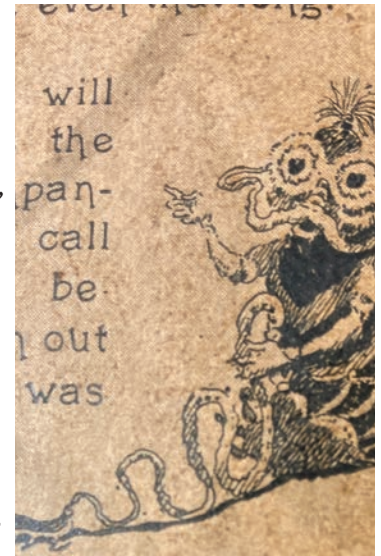


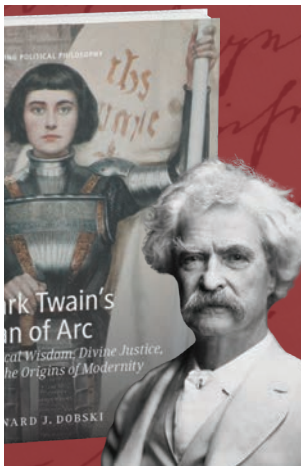
Image from *Leaves from a Microbe's Notebook* (advertising pamphlet) ca. 1900

Jess Libow is Interim Director of the Writing Program and Visiting Assistant Professor at Haverford College, where she teaches courses on health and activism in U.S. literature and culture. Her first book, *Vigorous Reforms: Women Writers and the Politics of Health in the Nineteenth-Century United States* is forthcoming from UNC Press in fall 2025. Her writing has appeared in journals including *American Literature*, *J19*, *ESQ*, and *Legacy*, as well as the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, *Public Books*, and *The Lancet*.

Wednesday, May 28 at 7pm in the Quarry Farm Barn

“Mark Twain’s Political Critique of Divine Providence: Joan of Arc and *Personal Recollections*”

Bernard J. Dobski, *Assumption University*



Twain’s life-long engagement with institutional religion is well-documented. In two of his last complete novels, Twain sharpens and deepens that engagement; *Connecticut Yankee* and *King Arthur’s Court* and *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc* explore the question of whether a providential god exists who secures justice in human life. Twain declares that he doesn’t settle that issue in the former book. Does he settle it in the latter, the book he also calls his “best”? I claim that he does: *Personal Recollections* effectively rules out the possibility of a providential God. The book’s argument against a providential God is grounded in its argument for man’s moral and political nature. And that nature, embodied chiefly in the novel’s narrator, the Sieur Louis de Conte, expressly hopes for a providential divinity that accords with and fulfills our longings for an earthly justice and nobility that would be impossible to fulfill on terms that those categories set for themselves.

Bernard J. Dobski teaches politics and literature, political philosophy, and international relations at Assumption University in Worcester, MA. He has published widely on ancient Greek political thought, especially Thucydides, the plays and poetry of William Shakespeare, and the political wisdom of Mark Twain. Most recently, he is the author of *Mark Twain’s Joan of Arc: Political Wisdom, Divine Justice, and the Origins of Modernity* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2024). He was a Quarry Farm Fellow in 2023 and is currently at work on a new book on Mark Twain’s engagement with the promise and perils of modernity, with a special focus on the character of its doctrine of individual rights.