Twain’s Omissions

Twain's Omissions:
Exploring the Gaps as Textual Context

Edited by

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INTRODUCTION

MINE THE GAP

GRETCHEN MARTIN

A common adage for authors in the nineteenth century, "Make them laugh, make them cry, but most of all, make them wait," has been attributed to British writers Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, and Charles Reade. However, American author Mark Twain perfected this formula, yet the latter of the three elements has received much less scholarly attention than the engaging first or the compelling second components of this aesthetic maxim. His one hundred year moratorium on the publication of his autobiography is just one example. Throughout his fiction, Twain routinely suspends information regarding character portraits, particularly details of a character's personal history that are often withheld in terms of the narrative's chronology or not addressed at all and thus produce gaps in the narrative. For example, Twain does not provide any significant information about the mothers of two of his most well-known characters, Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer, nor does he provide detailed information regarding Jim's personal history.

Indeed, most of the African American characters in Twain's work lack fully developed personal histories, which may be the result of the influence of the slave narrative tradition in his writing. Shelley Fisher Fishkin points out that the slave narratives

> inspired Twain throughout his career. During much of his adult life he was surrounded by family and friends (such as Jervis Langdon and Harriet Beecher Stowe) who shared this interest. The presence of slave narratives in Twain's library, references to them in his letters and conversations, and echoes in his fiction, of some of their characteristic incidents or strategies suggest a rich familiarity and strong interest on Twain's part; slave narratives may even be the source of some of Jim's lines in Huckleberry Finn. (107)

Many characteristics representative of the genre are indeed evident in Twain's work. For example, numerous slave narratives begin by former slaves describing a lack of knowledge regarding personal biographical details, such as date of birth or who their parents were, especially regarding fathers. Several former slaves were unclear regarding exactly how many times they had been sold or what year family members were sold, particularly for very young slaves. Similarly, Twain's most well-known African American character Jim is also depicted with few personal elements, and the details Twain does include are scattered throughout *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. This technique requires readers to piece together information distributed between significant gaps of time, various adventures, and other details fragmenting Jim's personal narrative. For example, in chapter eight, before we learn that he has a wife and children, Jim briefly refers to his father and grandmother when he is explaining various signs to Huck. He tells Huck that "'his father laid mighty sick once, and some of them catched a bird, and his old granny said his father would die, and he did'" (56). Several chapters later, (chapter sixteen) we learn that Jim has a wife and two children, but we do not learn the names of his children, Elizabeth and Johnny, until chapter twenty-three. We are never provided with the name of his wife nor details of their relationship other than that his wife and their children are owned by a farmer who lived "on a farm close to where Miss Watson lived" (110). Jim is owned by Miss Watson, but we do not know how or when he became her property or whether he was always owned by her. The only feature provided about his personal history in terms of location is suggested when Huck notes that Jim was homesick "because he hadn't ever been away from home before in his life" (170). While these elements of Jim's personal life are scattered and brief, they are crucially important to better understand the complexity of this character.

Other narrative omissions regarding characters' stories simply end abruptly, perhaps none more so than the account of Percy Driscoll's biological son, Thomas a Becket Driscoll, at the conclusion of *Pudd'nhead Wilson*. Twain writes,

> The real heir suddenly found himself rich and free, but in a most embarrassing situation. He could neither read nor write, and his speech was the basest dialect of the negro quarter. His gait, his attitudes, his gestures, his bearing, his laugh – all were vulgar and uncouth; his manners were the manners of a slave. Money and fine clothes could not mend these defects or cover them up, they only made them the more glaring and the more pathetic. The poor fellow could not endure the terrors of the white man's parlor, and felt at home and at peace nowhere but in the kitchen. The family pew was a misery to him, yet he could nevermore

> enter into the solacing refuge of the 'nigger gallery' – that was closed to him for good and all. But we cannot follow his curious fate further – that would be a long story. (114)

The personal accounts of the most important characters in the novel end ambiguously but pose highly provocative questions, such as what would life be like for a man who believed himself to be a privilege white man for twenty three years and then finds himself sold "down the river" as a slave? Or, what would life be like for a slave to discover that after twenty three years, he is actually a privileged white man?

There are also often substantial chronological gaps in the pace Twain utilizes. For example, there are several years at a time omitted in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* and *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger*, and indeed, Twain also notes that there were significant gaps of time in his creative productivity, most notably regarding the composition of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. He began writing the novel in 1876, took a three year break from the manuscript, and eight years after he began to work on the novel, it was first published in England in 1884. While many (if not most) authors regard "writer's block" as a distressing experience, James Daley explains that Twain viewed it merely as "a roadblock" in which "the story stops 'writing itself'" (85). Twain notes that he then simply set "aside the story, sometimes for years, until the time comes for it to write itself once again" (85). In "My Literary Shipyard," published posthumously in 1922, Twain explains,

> As long as a book would write itself, I was a faithful and interested amanuensis, and my industry did not flag; but the minute that the book tried to shift to my head the labor of contriving its situations, inventing its adventures and conducting its conversations, I put it away and dropped it out of my mind. Then I examined my unfinished properties to see if among them there might not be one whose interest in itself had revived, through a couple of years' restful idleness, and was ready to take me on again. (85-86)

On other occasions, the story simply refused, as Twain put it, to "tell itself" and he then destroyed the manuscript, as he explains, "lest I be tempted to sell them, for I was fairly well persuaded that they were not up to the standard" (87).

Identifying and exploring various gaps in the context of Twain's fiction yields, as these essays demonstrate, overlooked or under-explored information, ironically generated out of these narrative omissions. The essays collected in this project developed from a call seeking papers that

mine the gaps in Twain's work by The Mark Twain Circle for a panel at the South Atlantic Modern Language Association convention in 2012.

In Chapter One, "Mind the Gap: A Reader Reading Adventures of Huckleberry Finn," John Bird utilizes reader response theory to examine the ways in which the reader participates in constructing the text. Bird draws on Wolfgang Iser in establishing his methodology. Iser claims in *The Implied Reader* that "in considering a literary work, one must take into account not only the actual text but also, in equal measure, the actions involved in responding to that text" (274). For Iser, "the literary work cannot be completely identical with the text, or with the realization of the text, but in fact must lie halfway between the two" (274). He continues:

> The work is more than the text, for the text only takes on life when it is realized, and furthermore the realization is by no means independent of the individual disposition of the reader—though this in turn is acted upon by the different patterns of the text. The convergence of text and reader brings the literary work into existence, and this convergence can never be precisely pinpointed, but must always remain virtual, as it is not to be identified either with the reality of the text or with the individual disposition of the reader. (274-275)

Guided by Iser's theoretical principles, Bird reads the opening chapter of Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, minding the gaps, filling the gaps, creating once again the virtual text that Iser argues we create each time we read. This reading demonstration can help us better understand the text but also better understand how to teach and interpret it. As Bird demonstrates, such an approach facilitates a new critical perspective on the opening chapter through Iser's provocative and fruitful conclusion in *The Implied Reader*:

> Herein lies the dialectical structure of reading. The need to decipher gives us the chance to formulate our own deciphering capacity—i.e., we bring to the fore an element of our being of which we are not directly conscious. The production of the meaning of literary texts—which we discussed in connection with forming the "gestalt" of the text—does not merely entail the discovery of the unformulated, which can then be taken over by the active imagination of the reader; it also entails the possibility that we formulate ourselves and so discover what had previously seemed to elude our consciousness. These are the ways in which reading literature gives us the chance to formulate the unformulated. (294)

Thus, Bird demonstrates that by minding the gaps, he not only rediscovers something about a very familiar text, but also discovers what that text

reveals—to "formulate the unformulated" not only in Mark Twain's novel, but also in Bird's personal reading as well.

In Chapter Two, "'It lit up his whole head with an evil joy': The Unnamed Offense, Mysterious Stranger, and Revenge in Mark Twain's 'The Man that Corrupted Hadleyburg,'" Autumn R. Lauzon examines Mark Twain's short story, "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg." First published in *Harper's Monthly* in December 1899 and later included in the collection *The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg and Other Stories and Sketches* (1900), the story demonstrates the growing pessimism about humanity that was becoming increasingly evident in Twain's writing. The story is a tale filled with ambiguity to make a vital point about temptation; indeed, Twain encouraged the story to be read as a version of the Garden of Eden. Providing only a brief, yet virtuous introduction to the incorruptible town, Lauzon contends that Twain throws us into a partnership with a man determined to tarnish the reputation and habits of Hadleyburg. We do not know who he is, where he came from, or where he is going. All we know about this man is that at one point in time, (another detail of information that Twain omits) he was offended by someone in the town. The gaps of information then start to pile up – we never learn what this unpardonable offense is, we never find out who in the town committed the offense, and we never know how long this stranger has waited to seek revenge. For most of the story, readers must rely on and trust the narrator because there is so much vague information. In fact, as Lauzon points out, we are never even told how Hadleyburg came to be such a virtuous town and gain such a positive reputation. It is unclear if Hadleyburg has passed tests of temptation, or, as the stranger points out, if Hadleyburg has just been completely void of an opportunity to show the flaws of human nature in this community. The numerous omissions provide a plethora of opportunities for interpretation, a method that helps Twain disguise some of his own strong opinions. The stranger, who basically appears from apparently nowhere, can be interpreted as Satan, whose sole task is to ruin an entire town through temptation. Although the story is filled with omissions and ambiguities that could add to the story if included, Twain leaves out these facts to focus on the town and the actions of Hadleyburg's citizens.

In Chapter Three, Christopher D. Morris's "Glimpsing Universal Illusion through the Narrative Gaps of *A Connecticut Yankee* and *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger*" examines how narrative gaps in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* and *The Mysterious Stranger* extend but also challenge each work's depiction of western rationality as the illusion of the independent existence of self and other. Critics have associated that

illusion with varieties of "egotism" or "solipsism," but because the texts expose the constructed nature of their narrators too, a deeper skepticism may be advanced. Narrative gaps invite readers to imagine challenges to this wholesale doubt, but any such alternatives remain textual constructions as well. Furthermore, the dilemma can be regarded as an allegory of the name "Mark Twain," of an invented self who invents others. This is the plot of *The Mysterious Stranger*, which anticipates Derrida's argument in the essay "Psyche."

Morris observes a rather egregious gap in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* by Hank Morgan's failure to narrate his reunion with and marriage to Sandy, climactic events barely mentioned in passing. Sandy is the character most "other" to Morgan. She alone offers a vision that challenges his role as the accelerated grimace of Tom Sawyer, the ironic realization of Renaissance ideals in suicidal apocalypse. Hank never understands that his desertion of Sandy and elision of their marriage can be read as the bad faith of reason that refuses to acknowledge reality outside itself. His virtual erasure of her from his writing (except as an object of custom or as an addressee of his letters) ostensibly stages Twain's satire of western rationality as solipsism. In the novel's frame, a dying but momentarily "awakened" Morgan mistakes Twain (the tourist) for Sandy, demonstrating his continuing incapacity to recognize the other. But at the same time, a similar blindness also afflicts Twain at his bedside, and he fails to see Morgan as *his* construction.

Critics of *The Mysterious Stranger* have similarly overlooked August's remark that the events he narrates took place "long ago," so there is a presumably substantial gap between the novel's chilling, solipsistic conclusion and the time when August writes about it. There is no way of knowing what transpired during this lapse, and only one thing is certain about the time of narration: August interrupts his memoir-in-progress when he recalls the moment he jealously observes Fischer with Marget, the older girl he adored. This memory causes him to break into the flow of his narrative for the only time. Of Marget and Fischer, August says, "Such things do not interest me now," but readers must obviously assess the extent of his sincerity. All that can be said for sure is that August is unable to imitate the delivery of his double, 44, who reveals the emptiness of the universe "all tranquilly and soberly." The fact that August interrupts himself with debatable sincerity opens the tiniest of flaws in his otherwise conclusive narrative of solipsism. At the same time, that interruption must return us to the character of August himself, which is only created in a manuscript.

In Chapter Four, "Coming up Empty: Exploring Narrative Omissions in Huckleberry Finn," Patricia F. D'Ascoli notes that sometimes understanding what is omitted from a narrative can be a fruitful avenue for literary interpretation. D'Ascoli contends that such is the case with Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, which, she explains, contains three specific types of important narrative omissions: Informative Omissions, Emotive Omissions, and Evaluative Omissions. Informative omissions are those that fail to provide the reader with information which would enhance our understanding of the narrator beyond his status as orphan and victim. Emotive omissions indicate the narrator's unwillingness to articulate his emotions or thought processes. Evaluative Omissions are those that reflect the narrator's inability to fully comprehend and/or evaluate the significance of what he is relating. Each type of omission serves a specific purpose in the narrative. For example, Informative omissions, such as details about Huck Finn's family of origin in general and about his father in particular, are motivating factors in assessing Huck's character as it relates to his decision to escape from Pap. Emotive omissions, such as those that might reveal Huck's mental state, frequently mask his feelings about his situation and about his affection for Jim. Evaluative omissions, such as commentary Huck might relate to the reader in response to disturbing scenarios, reinforce Huck's status as a naïve narrator. Identifying and interpreting omissions in the novel helps the reader understand how they work to support Twain's narrative agenda.

In Chapter Five, Emahunn Campbell in his essay, "*Pudd'nhead Wilson* and the Discourse of Black Criminality," explores the imagination and construction of the black criminal in Mark Twain's novella, *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894). Twain's construction of this figure is shaped by surrounding scientific, historical, legal, and cultural discourses that inform both the historical period his text covers—the 1830s—as well as period of its publication. Campbell claims that the novella, in conjunction with other textual productions in literature and the sciences, reflects how black blood was not only a signifier of crime, but it was a signifier for criminality itself—that is, black characters are always already criminal. Campbell contends that with respect to the period of publication, Twain's novella is part of a larger discourse of what Michel Foucault calls *biopolitics*, the regulation, surveying, and taxonomization of bodies and populations. US census data from the 1870 to the 1890s, with the latter decade including prison statistics, "black criminality," writes Khalil Muhammad in *The Condemnation of Blackness* (2010), "would become one of the most commonly cited and longest-lasting justifications for black inequality and mortality in the modern urban world" (21). The

fingerprinting and bookkeeping practiced by David Wilson (later Pudd'nhead Wilson) to keep account of Dawson's Landing's population function as an obvious form of subjectivity. However, Campbell shows that what subjectivity signifies during the course of the novella is criminality hidden beneath the surface of the novel's black characters, only to be revealed in the novella's closing chapters.

In Chapter Six, Kelly Richardson's essay, "Stars and Drift-logs and Rafts: Huckleberry Finn's Readings of the River," explores, as she notes, one of the most significant narrative gaps in Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, which is how the title character has acquired his surprisingly extensive knowledge of the river. While Huck is certainly a character more at home in the woods, his knowledge of different types of water craft as well as methods to measure distance and mark time—even in night conditions—is remarkable. Moreover, the "Raftsman Passage," (which was omitted in the original publication and was not reintroduced to the novel until the 1961 Norton edition) demonstrates his ability to join the community of "tall-telling" river men. Given Huck's proficiency with navigating not only the natural river but also the multiple communities along the way, the novel's famous closing lines of "lighting out for the Territory" appear somewhat surprising. While Twain may have chosen the location as part of the plan for a new tale, the image has become largely separated from this intention, and Huck seeking freedom from being "civilized" remains one of the novel's most iconic scenes. Richardson contends that once attuned to Huck's accurate interpretations of the water, we observe how his technical control consistently does not ensure his ability to find safety or peace in this environment. He "lights out," in part, because instead of being a place of freedom, the river reveals itself to be inextricably linked with civilization.

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CHAPTER ONE

MIND THE GAP: A READER READING *ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN*

JOHN BIRD

I

As Wolfgang Iser argues in *The Implied Reader*, the gaps are crucial to the reading of any text. Indeed, he says, filling those gaps not only creates the text for the reader, but also allows the reader to formulate himself or herself. Iser's phenomenological approach demonstrates the dynamic process we engage in anytime we read, shifting the existence of the text from an artifact the author creates to a new virtual text that is created from that artifact during the act of reading. In the concluding chapter of *The Implied Reader*, "The Reading Process," Iser writes: "[T]he literary work has two poles, which we might call the artistic and the esthetic: the artistic refers to the text created by the author, and the esthetic to the realization accomplished by the reader" (274). That difference makes all the difference; he continues to argue: "From this polarity it follows that the literary work cannot be completely identical with the text, or with the realization of the text, but in fact must lie halfway between the two" (274). He concludes:

> The work is more than the text, for the text only takes on life when it is realized, and furthermore the realization is by no means independent of the individual disposition of the reader–though this in turn is acted upon by the different patterns of the text. The convergence of text and reader brings the literary work into existence, and this convergence can never be precisely pinpointed, but must always remain virtual, as it is not to be identified either with the reality of the text or with the individual disposition of the reader. (274-275)

To test Iser's phenomenological theory of reading, I want to conduct a short experiment, to read the opening chapter of Mark Twain's *Adventures of*

Huckleberry Finn, minding the gaps, filling the gaps, creating once again the virtual text that Iser argues we create each time we read. I tried to make my reading of the first chapter as authentic as possible, writing down quickly the first thoughts that came into my mind as I read the opening chapter. So, to the text, to the gaps, and after that, further discussion of my experiment and Iser's ideas, as well the relation to scholarly study of the novel and to our teaching of it in the classroom. I include the text of the opening chapter, interspersed in brackets with my responses:

II

You [I always feel like Huck is talking just to me, addressing me here, directly, rather than talking to a large audience] don't know about me [we certainly do, Huck, even if we have never read your book, since you have become such an icon] without ["without," not unless–the first glimpse of Huck's vernacular] you have read a book [astonishing: Huck admits that he only exists as a fictional character, an amazing "out of the inkwell" moment] by the name of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer;* [I read *Tom Sawyer* first, or rather had it read to me, by Mrs. Hathcock in the fifth grade, the beginning of a lifetime spent with Mark Twain] but that ain't no matter. [The first appearance of "ain't"–Huck's speech seems ungrammatical, but such usages are only sprinkled in–and with this statement, Huck also dismisses his creation.] That book was made [rather than "written"] by Mr. Mark Twain, [a nod to the creator!–and Mr. Mark Twain paints himself into the canvas–but Huck has dismissed his creator even before he names him] and he told the truth, mainly. [That "mainly" contains volumes, and many gaps.] There was things which he stretched, but mainly he told the truth. [Telling the truth and "stretching"–important themes of the book, introduced from the very beginning.] That is nothing. I never seen anybody but lied ["but lied"–another quirky Huck construction] one time or another, without it was Aunt Polly, or the widow, or maybe Mary. [All women, we note.] Aunt Polly -- Tom's Aunt Polly, she is -- and Mary, and the Widow Douglas is all told about in that book, which is mostly a true book, with some stretchers, as I said before. [Mostly true, but partly lies–and all fiction.] [In the second paragraph it is *Huck* who is filling in the gaps for the reader, by summarizing the ending of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*.] Now the way that the book winds up is this: Tom and me found the money that the robbers hid in the cave, and it made us rich. We got six thousand dollars apiece -- all gold. It was an awful sight of money when it was piled up. [I can imagine them piling it up and looking at the gold in awe.] Well, Judge Thatcher he took it and put it out at interest, and it

fetched us a dollar a day apiece all the year round -- more than a body could tell what to do with. [Huck moves from a treasure of $6,000 dollars to a pittance of one dollar a day, but that is still riches to him, a window into his value system.] The Widow Douglas she took me for her son, [the nearly-orphaned Huck finds a home and "mother"] and allowed she would sivilize me; [the first appearance of that important word, and one of the few words Huck misspells] but it was rough living in the house all the time, [the first glimpse of Huck's constriction in both space and time] considering how dismal regular and decent the widow was in all her ways; [being "regular and decent" is "dismal" to Huck–funny, but also revealing] and so when I couldn't stand it no longer I lit out. [Already in the second paragraph, talk of lighting out, not the last we will see of that reaction.] I got into my old rags and my sugar-hogshead again, and was free and satisfied. [Living in tatters, in a barrel, is a sign of freedom and happiness for Huck.] But Tom Sawyer he hunted me up and said he was going to start a band of robbers, and I might join if I would go back to the widow and be respectable. [A good joke, even if Huck does not see the humor in it–you have to be respectable to be a robber.] So I went back.

The widow she [Another Huck construction: those appositives after he says a person's name, part of Mark Twain's craft in suggesting vernacular speech rather loading up on it in the text] cried over me, and called me a poor lost lamb, and she called me a lot of other names, too, but she never meant no harm by it. [Another good joke, but like most of his jokes, one that he is not conscious of.] She put me in them new clothes again, and I couldn't do nothing but sweat and sweat, and feel all cramped up. [Feeling uncomfortable in proper clothes, in proper houses, another important theme.] Well, then, the old thing commenced again. The widow rung a bell for supper, and you had to come to time. [Coming to time, another constriction Huck rebels against.] When you got to the table you couldn't go right to eating, but you had to wait for the widow to tuck down her head and grumble a little over the victuals, [prayer as grumbling–a perfect ironic comment on religion] though there warn't really anything the matter with them, -- that is, nothing only everything was cooked by itself. [Nothing wrong with them, but Huck tells us what is wrong with them.] In a barrel of odds and ends it is different; things get mixed up, and the juice kind of swaps around, and the things go better. [The unseen earlier life: Huck has been living in a barrel, eating whatever discarded food he could find, the homeless boy, the outcast. But touched on only tangentially, another gap Twain leaves us to fill.]

After supper she got out her book [that book makes its first appearance--more comment on religion] and learned me [not "taught me"]

about Moses and the Bulrushers, [We get a glimpse into Huck's imagination: he envisions bull rushers, people who rush at bulls, which certainly sounds exciting] and I was in a sweat to find out all about him; but by and by she let it out that Moses had been dead a considerable long time; so then I didn't care no more about him, because I don't take no stock in dead people. [The first of many things Huck will "take no stock in"--yet Twain is able to sneak in a parallel between the abandoned Huck and the abandoned Moses.]

Pretty soon I wanted to smoke, and asked the widow to let me. [More symbols of freedom, freedom constricted.] But she wouldn't. She said it was a mean practice and wasn't clean, and I must try to not do it any more. [More rules, the rules of civilization.] That is just the way with some people. [Despite his apparent ignorance, Huck is a kind of philosopher, and sees through many people.] They get down on a thing when they don't know nothing about it. Here she was a-bothering about Moses, which was no kin to her, and no use to anybody, being gone, you see [If someone is not related to you or is dead, they are useless], yet finding a power of fault with me for doing a thing that had some good in it. [Smoking is good: the Concord Public Library and a host of other critics hear the alarm bells.] And she took snuff, too; of course that was all right, because she done it herself. [Hypocrisy, which Huck can always sniff out.]

Her sister, Miss Watson, a tolerable slim old maid, [such a packed description: "tolerable" means "very," and "old maid" is fraught with connotations] with goggles on, [we can see those thick, stern glasses in the word "goggles"] had just come to live with her, and took a set at me now with a spelling-book. [Huck is assaulted by yet another book. This character who admits he is merely a creation in a book is bedeviled by books.] She worked me middling hard [another packed phrase] for about an hour, and then the widow made her ease up. [Huck leaves a narrative gap: the scene of the kindly sister confronting her harsher sibling.] I couldn't stood it much longer. [More constriction.] Then for an hour it was deadly dull, and I was fidgety. [Like "coming to time": time weighs heavily on Huck, and he squirms under its constrictions.] Miss Watson would say, "Don't put your feet up there, Huckleberry;'" and "'Don't scrunch up like that, Huckleberry -- set up straight;' and pretty soon she would say, 'Don't gap and stretch like that, Huckleberry -- why don't you try to behave?'" [The first direct quotations from another character, the intrusion of other voices into Huck's voice.] Then she told me all about the bad place, [Huck cannot say "hell," or perhaps Mark Twain could not–he had his own constrictions] and I said I wished I was there. [Again, the choice of narration over direct quotation leaves a gap, a gap the reader fills.]

She got mad then, [Another gap: we imagine the demonstration of her anger] but I didn't mean no harm. [Huck does not know what he says, but he also truly does not mean any harm. He always wants to do whatever he can to get along, no matter how disagreeable his company.] All I wanted was to go somewheres; all I wanted was a change, I warn't particular. [Going somewhere, wanting a change: almost like a spoken wish, a wish that will soon be granted.] She said it was wicked to say what I said; said she wouldn't say it for the whole world; *she* was going to live so as to go to the good place. [The indirect discourse contains nearly all her spoken words, but again, the choice to embed them in narration incorporates them into Huck's voice, while still containing hers, the dialogism of the novel that Bahktin talks about.] Well, I couldn't see no advantage in going where she was going, so I made up my mind I wouldn't try for it. [Another unconscious joke, but also a bit of philosophy.] But I never said so, because it would only make trouble, and wouldn't do no good. [Another insight into Huck's psychology, his desire to get along and avoid conflict, a mark of the psychology of the abused child, the son of an alcoholic.]

Now she had got a start, and she went on and told me all about the good place. [Huck cannot say "hell," but he also cannot say "heaven."] She said all a body would have to do there was to go around all day long with a harp and sing, forever and ever. So I didn't think much of it. [Another concept dismissed, the literal-minded Huck recognizing that heaven would just be another "coming to time," another place where time would drag and constrict.] But I never said so. [Again, avoiding all conflict.] I asked her if she reckoned Tom Sawyer would go there, [always thinking of Tom Sawyer, always deferring to Tom] and she said not by a considerable sight. [The irony again: Miss Watson's words contain a much different meaning from what Huck perceives.] I was glad about that, because I wanted him and me to be together. [Another unconscious joke, but a philosophy that Twain subscribed to: "Heaven for climate, Hell for society."]

Miss Watson she kept pecking at me, ["pecking" is such a perfect word choice] and it got tiresome and lonesome. [Constriction compounded with loneliness: Huck seems a bit depressive in nature.] By and by they fetched the niggers in [the first appearance of the word that will appear over 200 times in the text, the word, like the "niggers" themselves, brought in without much comment or thought, totally accepted in that society as mere possessions] and had prayers, [What a loaded moment, full of gaps! The unspoken irony of owning human beings, and then praying with them] and then everybody was off to bed. I went up to my room with a piece of candle, and put it on the table. Then I set down [not "sat down": there have been less than a dozen such ungrammatical constructions, but they are

sprinkled so judiciously in Huck's narrative that they give the impression that there are many more] in a chair by the window and tried to think of something cheerful, but it warn't no use. [Huck's attempts at combating his depression.] I felt so lonesome I most wished I was dead. [The death wish is powerful, and should not be ignored. Death haunts Huck, ever present in his mind, and so many of us, especially at night. "Never quite sane in the night," as Twain wrote in his Autobiography.] The stars were shining, and the leaves rustled in the woods ever so mournful; [the first of several evocative descriptive scenes in the book: just as he is an unconscious humorist, Huck is an unconscious poet] and I heard an owl, away off, who-whooing about somebody that was dead, [death, always death] and a whippowill and a dog crying about somebody that was going to die; [more death: this is a very funny book, but underneath that humor, and not far underneath, lies great seriousness, always lurking] and the wind was trying to whisper something to me, and I couldn't make out what it was, [the message was about death, Huck, I would have to say] and so it made the cold shivers run over me. [Of course it did.] Then away out in the woods [Huck cannot let this death wish go; like any depressive, he allows his disposition to carry him to the very depths of despair] I heard that kind of a sound that a ghost makes [the untranslatable message of the wind has been transformed, literally, into a ghost] when it wants to tell about something that's on its mind and can't make itself understood, [the ghost, just like the wind, tries to communicate, but cannot, just like Huck, just like me] and so can't rest easy in its grave, [Huck's imagination is haunted; he has already seen death several times in his life, and his upcoming adventures are about to bring it even closer] and has to go about that way every night grieving. [Huck goes about this night, and probably many other nights, grieving like his imagined ghost.] I got so down-hearted and scared I did wish I had some company. [The lonesome, depressed, abandoned boy, wishing for friendship, for human connection.] Pretty soon a spider went crawling up my shoulder, [he wishes for company, but all he gets is a spider, just the kind of company his depressed nature would find] and I flipped it off and it lit in the candle; [another gap: this is a scene of horror, told matter-of-factly] and before I could budge [a gap: Huck lurches quickly to right the wrong] it was all shriveled up. [I can feel his terror as he watches that spider burn up in the flame–but Twain leaves us that gap to fill.] I didn't need anybody to tell me that that was an awful bad sign [the first of many bad signs, looming prophecies] and would fetch me some bad luck, [as he will learn later from Jim, most of the signs are bad: who needs to be warned about good luck? But to a depressed mind, almost all signs point to the negative] so I was scared and most shook the clothes off of me. [Another scene that we must

imagine.] I got up and turned around in my tracks three times and crossed my breast every time; and then I tied up a little lock of my hair with a thread to keep witches away. [I can see him doing that, funny but also scary, the mixed feelings we get when we watch the compulsive in action.] But I hadn't no confidence. [Of course you don't, Huck.] You do that when you've lost a horseshoe that you've found, instead of nailing it up over the door, [a preview of his superstitious mind] but I hadn't ever heard anybody say it was any way to keep off bad luck when you'd killed a spider. [An interesting gap: someone has undoubtedly told him that it is bad luck to kill a spider, but why no antidote?]

I set down ["set down" instead of "sat down"–another small grammatical error that deftly establishes the vernacular] again, a-shaking all over, and got out my pipe for a smoke; [at least in the depressing night, some of the constrictions on freedom are lifted] for the house was all as still as death now, [the first time Huck uses metaphorical language, and of course the simile is a comparison to death] and so the widow wouldn't know. [Already his conscience is tormented by the widow and her rules.] Well, after a long time I heard the clock away off in the town go boom -- boom -- boom -- twelve licks; [midnight, a portent] and all still again -- stiller than ever. [The quiet and stillness are so oppressive, like the constraints put on him by the Widow Douglas and Miss Watson.] Pretty soon I heard a twig snap down in the dark amongst the trees [a Cooper effect?]-- something was a stirring. I set still and listened. Directly I could just barely hear a *"me-yow! me-yow!"* down there. That was good! [Quite unexpected: after all this doom and gloom, something positive, and we can clearly feel Huck's dark mood lighten. What is it that comes out of this dark night that brings happiness?] Says I,*"me-yow! me-yow!"* as soft as I could, and then I put out the light and scrambled out of the window on to the shed. [A mini-preview of "lighting out for the territory," of escaping the constrictions of civilization and rules and religion and time.] Then I slipped down to the ground and crawled in among the trees, and, sure enough, there was Tom Sawyer waiting for me. [Tom Sawyer! Just where the chapter began, and indeed where Huck began. But if Tom is his escape, if Tom is the fulfillment of his wish for company, Huck is in for a raft of trouble . . .] (Twain 1-5).

III

Even though I have read this text many times, more times than I have read any other novel, the results of my experiment startled me a bit. My emphasis on Huck's depression this time through the chapter surprised

me--I don't recall that being my main emphasis during earlier readings, or I don't remember that emphasis being this pronounced. Iser discusses the phenomenon I experienced: "The manner in which the reader experiences the text will reflect his own disposition, and in this respect the literary text acts as a kind of mirror" (281). He goes on to make this important distinction: "[A]t the same time, the reality which this process helps to create is one that will be *different* from his own (since normally, we tend to be bored by texts that present us with things we already know perfectly well ourselves). Thus we have the apparently paradoxical situation in which the reader is forced to reveal aspects of himself in order to experience a reality which is different from his own" (281-282). One might assume that I was feeling a bit depressed when I made this particular reading, but that is not the case: I am not generally a depressive person, and indeed, I was quite elated to be reading the opening again, as I always am, and I was especially excited to be reading it for the purposes of this reading experiment. I conclude, as Iser says, that I was focusing on the *difference* between me and Huck, on the difference between our emotions, the gap between Huck and me allowing me to experience his depression more acutely. As to a mirror, perhaps the text reveals my general empathy with people in trouble, especially young people, as is natural (I hope) for a teacher.

Iser makes a number of observations that apply to and illuminate a reading of *Huckleberry Finn*. One observation is especially applicable to the character of Huck, even though it comes from a point Virginia Woolf made about a writer Mark Twain detested, Jane Austen. Iser quotes Woolf: "'Jane Austen is thus a mistress of much deeper emotion than appears upon the surface. She stimulates us to supply what is not there. What she offers is, apparently, a trifle, yet is composed of something that expands in the reader's mind and endows with the most enduring form of life scenes which are outwardly trivial'" (275-276). The same can certainly be said of Huck Finn as a narrator, with so much lying beneath the deceptively simple surface his narration presents us. Part of the power of reading this novel comes from all the gaps the reader must fill, a nearly constant filling of gaps, as we discover and uncover depths of meaning beyond Huck's words.

In his rich chapter, Iser focuses on "three important aspects that form the basis of the relations between reader and text: the process of anticipation and retrospection, the consequent unfolding of the text as a living event, and the resultant impression of life-likeness" (290). Clearly, all three are evident in my reading of the novel's opening chapter. My responses show clearly "the process of anticipation and retrospection," as I thought about what might come and reflected on what had just happened. Iser discusses

the way the gaps in reading affect the process of anticipation and retrospection, a key to his central point. The gaps, he says, "may be filled in different ways," which has important implications for the process of reading:

> For this reason, one text is potentially capable of several different realizations, and no reading can ever exhaust the full potential, for each individual reader will fill in the gaps in his own way, thereby excluding the various other possibilities; as he reads, he will make his own decision as to how the gap is to be filled. In this very act the dynamics of reading are revealed. (280)

I was not merely reading, then: I was experiencing the *dynamic* of reading, which helps explain why reading is such a powerful act. Second, I was obviously responding to the "unfolding of the text as a living event": as I read, I saw the action in my mind, saw Huck speaking and acting, and the text, once again, did become that living event. And I certainly experienced Huck's words as if they were true, as if they were life-like–indeed, as if Huck were a real person, which is certainly how I think of him. In a text that opens with an announcement by a fictional character that he is indeed a fictional character, and that we do not know about him unless we have not previously encountered him in a fictional text, that fictional character becomes quite real to the reader, even after only a few pages. This demonstrates the heart of the phenomenological process of reading that Iser describes.

I also engaged in another activity that Iser says goes beyond anticipation and retrospection: "[A]nd to this we must add the process of grouping together all the different aspects of a text to form the consistency that the reader will always be in search of. While expectations may continually be modified, and images continually expanded, the reader will strive, even if unconsciously, to fit everything together in a consistent pattern" (283). This act is an integral part of the co-creation of the text between Mark Twain as the writer and me as the reader. Twain used particular words, but it is up to me as the reader to perceive those words and group them according to the patterns I see.

Some might argue that my experiment is flawed, since this particular reading of the text was not my first–and in fact, I am quite sure that I have read *Huckleberry Finn* more times than I have read any other novel. Iser acknowledges this effect: "[W]hen we have finished the text, and read it again, clearly our extra knowledge will result in a different time sequence; we shall tend to establish connections by referring to our awareness of what is to come, and so certain aspects of the text will assume a significance we

did not attach to them on a first reading, while others will recede into the background" (281). I am sure this most recent reading of the text is colored by my many previous readings, my recent reading containing traces of previous readings, now augmented and perhaps partially supplanted by this new but repeated experience. Iser recognizes and explains the phenomenon we have all experienced with second and subsequent readings: "It is a common enough experience for a person to say that on a second reading he noticed things he had missed when he read the book for the first time, but this is scarcely surprising in view of the fact that the second time he is looking at the text from a different perspective" (281). Readings, he argues, are "unrepeatable," with subsequent readings always necessarily being different. That difference leads to richness: "Thus even on repeated viewings a text allows and, indeed, induces innovative reading" (281). In Iser's terms, my experiment of reading a text I have read many times is not flawed, since each reading is different from all the others, and thus, in its own way, authentic.

Other objections could be raised about my experiment. One might doubt the authenticity of what I wrote in the brackets: I could have just been making all those comments up, and in a sense, showing off. I was aware of those possibilities, and I can only repeat that I tried hard to write down immediately what came into my mind as I read. I resisted the urge to edit my comments, to change what I immediately thought, or to add to them later. Some might say that, as a Mark Twain scholar, I am a prejudiced reader, having spent many hours reading about Twain and, even more damning, many hours reading interpretations of this particular text. Iser has nothing to say about the effect of such a "professional" reader, but I suspect he would say that all that background merely provides more material for me to place in the gaps I encounter as I read. He does note that "when we have been particularly impressed by a book, we feel the need to talk about it; we do not want to get away from it by talking about it–we simply want to understand more clearly what it is in which we have been entangled. We have undergone an experience, and now we want to understand more clearly what it is in which we have been entangled" (290). That "talk" is what I am doing here, an attempt to communicate to others but also to understand something for myself. Iser reaches this conclusion about our urge to talk about reading: "Perhaps this is the prime usefulness of literary criticism–it helps to make conscious those aspects of the text which would otherwise remain concealed in the subconscious; it satisfies (or helps to satisfy) our desire to talk about what we have read" (290).

These objections aside, I come back to what startled me about this particular reading of the text, my surprise at my emphasis on Huck's

depression in a text that I always think of as being very funny. Despite the seeming artificiality of my reading experiment, its effect was quite real. As Iser notes, "But during this [reading] process, something happens to us" (291). Something did indeed happen to me as I read, as I paused to recognize the ways I had become entangled in the text, as I spoke aloud the gaps I was encountering and filling. Iser's conclusion to *The Implied Reader* tells me something about what happened to me in my interaction with the text:

> Herein lies the dialectical structure of reading. The need to decipher gives us the chance to formulate our own deciphering capacity—i.e., we bring to the fore an element of our being of which we are not directly conscious. The production of the meaning of literary texts—which we discussed in connection with forming the "gestalt" of the text—does not merely entail the discovery of the unformulated, which can then be taken over by the active imagination of the reader; it also entails the possibility that we formulate ourselves and so discover what had previously seemed to elude our consciousness. These are the ways in which reading literature gives us the chance to formulate the unformulated. (294)

I think we are onto something mysterious and exciting here. When we read a text, we are not merely formulating the words of the author into meaning, but we are also formulating ourselves, often discovering "what had previously seemed to elude our consciousness." As Iser argues, "Text and reader no longer confront each other as object and subject, but instead the 'division' takes place within the reader himself" (293). I am not reading *Huckleberry Finn*; I am reading myself. No wonder, then, that I return to this text time and again: I keep reading not so much to solve the puzzle of Twain's text, but to solve the most puzzling text I have ever encountered: myself.

There are a number of implications that can be drawn from these insights into the reading process. I will not read this text exactly the same way the next time I encounter it, since my knowledge base and my circumstances and my psychological state will have changed. When you read this text, you will fill the gaps according to your own personality, although there may be overlaps between the ways we both read it. But when you and I analyze this text, when we talk about it or write about it or read about it, we must recognize that we are never talking about exactly the same text. You have your virtual text, and I have mine. The next time I read a piece of literary criticism that I do not agree with, I will try to remember that.

Even more intriguing, I think, is what happens when we bring this text, or any text, into the classroom, with all those different readers reading,

minding the gaps, filling in the gaps, all creating a virtual text of their own. What a wondrous and rich set of texts for us to talk about! Iser comments on this exciting possibility: "The fact that completely different readers can be differently affected by the 'reality' of a particular text is ample evidence of the degree to which literary texts transform reading into a creative process that is far above mere perception of what is written. The literary text activates our own faculties, enabling us to recreate the world it presents" (279).

That would be true, if all our students were as skilled at recognizing and filling the gaps as we are and as our best students are. When we complain that our students can't read, what we are really saying is that they have not fully achieved the experience of minding the gaps and filling them. When students "read" a text but do not see anything in it, what may well be happening is that they have not really read it, or not read it in the way Iser talks about the experience of reading. Because they cannot read in this way, the literary text does not activate their faculties in the way that it does for us. As scary and revealing of ourselves as it might be, perhaps we should consider sharing with our students the inner, private experience of the rich reading that we do well, but that may be a mystery to them. That could be followed by our reading another part of the text aloud, pausing frequently, and asking students to write down their thoughts as they listen, then sharing their responses with others. Conducting such a reading experiment in the classroom, in which we speak aloud the gaps that we are filling as we read a text, might illuminate for students the richness that they as readers can bring to the text, and thus, as Iser says, formulate themselves. It is trouble to make a book, as Huck says at the end of his text, but it is also trouble to read it. Rewarding trouble, enlightening trouble, self-enhancing trouble–and trouble that is well worth the effort. Mind the gaps!

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CHAPTER TWO

"IT LIT UP HIS WHOLE HEAD WITH AN EVIL JOY": THE UNNAMED OFFENSE, MYSTERIOUS STRANGER, AND REVENGE IN MARK TWAIN'S "THE MAN THAT CORRUPTED HADLEYBURG"

AUTUMN LAUZON

Mark Twain's short story, "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg," was first published in *Harper's Monthly* in December 1899 and later in the collection *The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg and Other Stories and Sketches*, which appeared in 1900. Written later in Twain's career when pessimism about humanity became increasingly evident in his writing, "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg" is a story filled with ambiguity and negative messages about morality and human nature; this obscurity is, however, Twain's way of making a vital point about temptation and interpretation, and reflects his later belief in the evilness of human nature and man's immoral tendencies. Stanley Brodwin notes that the final stage of Twain's writing career was "saturated with a bitter or 'black' satiric mood," and many other critics who deal with Twain's later years also note his bitter disappointment with humanity (206). This bitterness can be seen not only in "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg," but also in *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger* (published posthumously in 1916), "That Day in Eden (A Passage from Satan's Diary)" (1905), and "Eve's Diary" (1906), to name only a few of the many. Brodwin, and others, point out that Twain's final writing stage lacked clear defining themes; rather, what we see is Twain's fascination with "fallen man with all his attendant personal, social, and political evils; an 'absurd' universe grotesquely deterministic and dream-like at the same time; the problem of personal (psychic) identity; and a Satan-figure, who, ironically, very likely developed out of a persistent Mark Twain character-type, the sometimes 'innocent,'

sometimes devious stranger striving either to 'con' or to 'reform' the people and society around him" (206). "Hadleyburg" is an ideal example of Brodwin's description as Twain uses the citizens of the town to show his readers the numerous faults of mankind.

Many critics encourage readers to read and interpret the Hadleyburg story as Twain's personal version of the Garden of Eden; Gary Scharnhorst and Mary E. Rucker, in particular, approach Hadleyburg with a focus on the fall of man, deterministic forces, or as an updated revision of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Other scholars, such as Jack Scherting, have focused more on the authors and texts, mainly Milton and Edgar Allan Poe, who may have inspired and influenced the story that became "Hadleyburg." Whereas, Peter West approaches the tale by pointing out many of the political issues Twain addresses. However, despite the extensive scholarly inquiries and various interpretations regarding the story, regardless of theoretical approach, it is clear that with so much missing information within the plot and about the town and people of Hadleyburg, Twain requires readers to actively fill in several gaps in the story in order to maintain any sense of coherent structure. Twain's lack of information in "Hadleyburg" also leads us to question authorial intent, often a rather controversial issue when reading any piece of literature. It is easier to fill in the gaps in the story if one is familiar with Twain's beliefs at this point in his life, and, as Scharnhorst points out, a familiarity with *Paradise Lost* makes much of "Hadleyburg" mirror Milton's rendition of the fall of man by filling in the missing gaps with details from that story as well, (i.e., Satan = the stranger, Edward and Mary Richards = Adam and Eve). Earl F. Briden claims that "Hadleyburg" is not about the fall of the town and what Hadleyburg has learned about itself, but is Twain's way of pointing out humanity's continual errors; Briden additionally points out that "three years before he [Twain] began tackling the story . . . Twain began mischievously jeering at the idea that a person could develop a temptation-proof moral constitution as a consequence of sin and suffering" (126). Ultimately, it was an absurd idea for Hadleyburgians to teach their children honesty without supplying them with tests and temptations.

The man who corrupts the town of Hadleyburg serves as a Satan figure whose sole mission is to destroy the reputation and honor of "Hadleyburg the Incorruptible" (53). Many of the missing pieces in "Hadleyburg" can be filled in with the understanding that Twain was strongly influenced by *Paradise Lost*. With so many missing pieces and gaps in the text, it is obvious that Twain compels readers to, in the words of Wolfgang Iser, interact with the text; in fact, "Hadleyburg" is an ideal piece for putting reader-response criticism into practice. Twain's words are all we have,

and because he has chosen to keep us in the dark about key information (who is the man and what great offense has he been dealt by the town? what is the secret shared between Mr. and Mrs. Richards? what is the crime that the town has accused Burgess of committing?, and the list goes on), the words guide each reader to fill in the numerous gaps within the text. What makes "Hadleyburg" unique, interesting, and sometimes frustrating is that the way a reader fills in the gaps determines the final "moral" or message at the end of the story, which is evident by the numerous scholarly interpretations that can be found about "Hadleyburg." According to Iser, "[w]hat is missing from the apparently trivial scenes, the gaps arising out of the dialogue – this is what stimulates the reader into filling the blanks with projections. He is drawn into the events and made to supply what is meant from what is not said" (34). Iser additionally points out that "as the unsaid comes to life in the reader's imagination, so the said 'expands' to take on greater significance than might have been supposed: even trivial scenes can seem surprisingly profound" (34). When applied to "Hadleyburg," what people do not know about others in the town, and about the stranger, prove to be the most important information for the plot's progression.

But is filling in the gaps vital to understanding "Hadleyburg"? The story is loaded with omissions that the reader is free to fill in, but whatever one imagines to be the great offense of the town or Burgess's crime, it makes no difference to what Twain suggests readers ultimately take away from the story – towns like Hadleyburg exist all over the world and humans are not, and can never be, free from errors. However, the gaps in the text pull the reader in to participate. As Iser asserts, "[w]hat is concealed spurs the reader into action, but this action is also controlled by what is revealed; the explicit in its turn is transformed when the implicit has been brought to light. Whenever the reader bridges the gaps, communication begins" (34). Textual gaps are found throughout "The Man that Corrupted Hadleyburg," which requires piecing together missing parts of a puzzle. Filling in the gaps, thus, compels reader engagement with the story, and in the case of "Hadleyburg," places us within the town to share the Hadleyburgians' experiences.

Information and interpretation are key points to the story, not only for the reader, but also for the characters; the gaps that the characters have to fill cause most of the problems in the plot and lead to many of the mistakes the citizens make. Although only a few of these omissions are filled in at the end of Twain's short story, they offer blank spaces for the reader to create assumptions about the characters and the town of Hadleyburg, which is precisely how Iser explains the connection between

text and reader. Many of these gaps are Twain's way of pointing out how similar humans are and that no town like Hadleyburg, which is supposedly devoid of temptation and human error, can exist in today's world; in fact, as we see at the end of the story, no town like Hadleyburg can exist, period. West points out that "Twain's story . . . does more than merely depict a community in which nobody knows exactly what has occurred; by keeping us in the dark with the Hadleyburgians themselves, the narrative invites the reader into a fictional town's interpretive mess" (62). And a mess it truly is. While readers remain in the dark about much of Hadleyburg's history, particularly how Hadleyburg has managed to gain such a reputation and what initially began their journey into spotless honesty, Twain makes his readers work to fill in his textual gaps as he leads us into Hadleyburg's ultimate temptation. From a humanist critical perspective, the text reveals constants, universal truths about human nature because human nature itself is constant and unchanging. People are pretty much the same everywhere, in all ages and in all cultures. We can, therefore, better interpret "Hadleyburg" and possibly picture ourselves as citizens of the town. This theoretical approach to "Hadleyburg" works because of Twain's unmentioned beliefs regarding human nature and morality. But unlike Roland Barthes' approach to separating the text from the author, we need to fill in the gaps from the perspective (a rather cynical one) Twain implies throughout the story.

The reader experiences Twain's omissions as soon as the story begins. Providing only a brief yet lively introduction to the incorruptible town of Hadleyburg, Twain throws us immediately into what feels like a secret partnership with a man determined to tarnish the reputation and morality of the town and its citizens. We do not know who he is, other than the name he signs at the end of his message attached to the sack of money, "Howard L. Stephenson." We do not know where he came from, where he is going, nor so much as why he passed through Hadleyburg to begin with. The stranger, who is frequently compared to Satan in "Hadleyburg" scholarship, seeks a revenge that will destroy *all* of Hadleyburg, not something that will only affect a specific individual or that would cause difficulties in the community for a short time. Twain tells us that "[a]ll through his wanderings during a whole year he kept his injury in mind, and gave all his leisure moments to trying to invent a compensating satisfaction for it. He contrived many plans, and all of them were good, but none of them was quite sweeping enough: the poorest of them would hurt a great many individuals, but what he wanted was a plan which would comprehend the entire town, and not let so much as one person escape unhurt" (2). All we know about this stranger, other than his obsession