Mark Twain Biography Essay, Research Paper

Mark Twain

Mark Twain was the pen name of Samuel Langhorne Clemens, he was born in Florida, MO, on Nov. 30, 1835, and he died on Apr. 21, 1910.Through this pen name he achieved worldwide fame during his lifetime as an author, lecturer, satirist, and humorist. Since his death his literary stature has further increased, with such writers as Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner declaring his works particularly Huckleberry Finn major influence on 20th-century American fiction.

Twain was raised in Hannibal, Mo., on the Mississippi River. His writing career began shortly after the death of his father in 1847. Apprenticed first to a printer, he soon joined his brother Orion’s Hannibal Journal, supplying copy and becoming familiar with much of the frontier humor of the time, such as George W. Harris’s Sut Lovingood yarns and other works of the so-called Southwestern Humorists.

From 1853 to 1857, Twain visited and periodically worked as a printer in New York, Philadelphia, St. Louis, and Cincinnati, corresponding with his brother’s newspapers under various pseudonyms. After a visit to New Orleans in 1857, he learned the difficult art of steamboat piloting, an occupation that he followed until the Civil War closed the river, and that furnished the background for “Old Times on the Mississippi” (1875), later included in the expanded Life on the Mississippi (1883).

In 1861, Twain traveled by stagecoach to Carson City, Nev., with his brother Orion, who had been appointed territorial secretary. After unsuccessful attempts at silver and gold mining, he returned to writing as a correspondent for the Virginia City Territorial Enterprise. At first he signed his humorous and imaginative sketches “Josh,” but early in 1863 he adopted the now-famous name Mark Twain, borrowed from the Mississippi leadsman’s call meaning “two fathoms” deep safe water for a steamboat.

Twain went to San Francisco in 1864. Dubbed the “Wild Humorist of the Pacific Slope,” he achieved a measure of national fame with his story “The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County” (1865). A trip to Hawaii in 1866 furnished articles for the Sacramento Union and materials for the first lecture, on his return, in a long and successful career as a public speaker. The following year he traveled to the Mediterranean and the Holy Land, providing letters to the San Francisco Alta California that, in their revised form as The Innocents Abroad (1869), won immediate international attention.

In 1870, Twain married Olivia Langdon of Elmira, N.Y. After serving briefly as editor and part owner of the Buffalo Express, he moved to Hartford, Conn., in 1871, abandoning journalism in order to devote his full attention to serious literature. There, and during summers in Elmira, he produced Roughing It (1872) an account of his Western years, The Gilded Age (1873, with Charles Dudley Warner) a satire of get-rich-quick schemes and political chicanery, the New Pieces for Sketches, New and Old (1875), and Tom Sawyer (1875) his classic tale of boyhood.

A European sojourn in 1878-79 inspired A Tramp Abroad (1880), soon followed by The Prince and the Pauper (1882), Twain’s first historical novel. He later turned to history again in the allegorical satire A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court (1889), a powerful fictional indictment of political and social injustice. Meanwhile, he completed Life on the Mississippi (1883) and, after establishing his own firm, Charles L. Webster and Co., published his masterpiece, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, in 1884.

Increasingly involved financial problems prompted Twain to move to Europe in 1891, just after finishing The American Claimant (1892). In 1894, following the failure of his publishing company and of the Paige typesetting machine in which he had invested heavily, Twain was forced to declare bankruptcy. During this period he turned out a number of works, generally inferior to his best: The Tragedy of Pudd’nhead Wilson (1894), Tom Sawyer Abroad (1894), Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc (1896), and Tom Sawyer, Detective (1896). In 1895, to help recoup his losses, he embarked on a world lecture tour, later described in Following the Equator (1897).

Although his financial situation rapidly improved, additional stress and sorrow came with the deaths of Twain’s daughter Susy in 1896 and of his wife in 1904. His writings of the late 1890s and 1900s became more pessimistic than ever: “The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg” (1898) and What Is Man? (1906) are particularly scathing examinations of human nature. Yet, these works also imply that proper understanding of human motivations can result in progress. Moreover, volumes in the Mark Twain Papers series Which Was the Dream?, and Other Symbolic Writings of the Later Years (1967), Mark Twain’s Mysterious Stranger Manuscripts (1969), and Mark Twain’s Fables of Man (1972) suggest that the period was not the wasteland described by some critics.