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Mark Twain's Dual Visions of Hawai'i: Censoring the Creative Self

ON MARCH 7, 1866, Samuel Langhorne Clemens, who came to be known to the world as Mark Twain, shipped aboard the steamer *Ajax* for Honolulu, the capital of the Sandwich Islands. Already known as a humorist on the West Coast, Twain had accepted an assignment to write a series of travel letters for the Sacramento *Daily Union*. This was Twain's first trip off the North American continent, and the four-month sojourn to the island kingdom influenced the writer throughout his career.¹ As a traveling correspondent for a major newspaper, Twain had an agenda to follow. Richard Pressman describes Twain as a "capitalist hero," a role that would require attention to details other than the humor for which he was becoming famous.² Of course, Twain entertained his readers with the Hawaiian letters, but he often juxtaposed such anecdotes with detailed reports concerning the Islands and their importance for America.

The humorist was on a serious mission, and he realized that unsubstantiated remarks could damage his career. Although he had earned a reputation for being controversial in San Francisco, Twain tempered his reports and avoided certain contentious topics while in Hawai'i. The *Union* was Twain's only public platform where he published opin-

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ions on the state of Island affairs, that is, until he returned to San Francisco and took the Hawaiian adventures on the lecture circuit. Twain's first public performance, which was held on October 2, 1866, was a resounding success; so much so, that Twain toured California and Nevada all through the autumn of that year talking up Hawai'i in town after town. Since each venue was different, Twain soon learned that the demands of individual audiences had to be considered if he wanted to continue to draw crowds. Not only were his lectures regularly adapted, but his own views as well were undergoing a transformation. The differences between his private opinions (basically those found in the journals of the trip) and the ones he made public verify that Mark Twain was holding back. His role as a "capitalist hero" required Twain to yield to the greater causes of regional and national interest, and this often prevented him from speaking his mind. In this paper, I will examine Twain's public and private writings on Hawai'i in an attempt to analyze how the reporter's opinions on economic cooperation, the monarchy, and the American Protestant missionaries in the Islands, differed depending on whom he was writing for or speaking to.

I

In the 25 letters published in the *Union*, Twain used humor as a buffer between more serious topics. Edgar Marquess Branch writes of the three objectives of the mission to Hawai'i. Twain reported on

Hawaiian industry and trade, with particular reference to American commercial enterprise. He wanted to explain the islands and their populations: the natives' surroundings and traditions, and their social and political life. Finally, he wanted to amuse his readers with the personal, sensational, and fictitious.³

On this assignment, Twain found respectability, and it was a new outfit for him to don in public. The hoaxster who had befuddled readers with tales of massacres and petrified men, as well as the "criminal" who skipped out of Virginia City rather than face death in a duel suddenly commanded a reputable voice.⁴ Henry Nash Smith interprets the change and what it meant for Twain. Smith explains, "This

assignment tended to detach him from his irresponsible Bohemianism and make him into a spokesman for respectable opinion."⁵ In other words, Twain's assignment for the *Union* changed not only the substance of the message, but also the messenger himself. By accepting the post, the humorist had expanded his audience, yet because of the nature of the appointment, he had also voluntarily consented to being reined in.

Twain wastes no time making the transition to respectability. His earliest letters written en route tell of the need for more American residents, capital, and a dependable means of commercial transport between the Islands and the mainland. In his "Second Letter to the *Union*," Twain is decidedly in favor of establishing the California-Hawai'i steamer line:

But the main argument in favor of a line of fast steamers is this: They would soon populate these islands with Americans, and loosen that French and English grip which is gradually closing around them, and which will result in a contest before many years as to which of the two shall seize and hold them. I leave America out of this contest, for her influence and her share in it have fallen gradually away until she is out in the cold now, and does not even play third fiddle to this European element.

But if California can send capitalists down here in seven or eight days time and take them back in nine or ten, she can fill these islands full of Americans and regain her lost foothold.⁶

Twain regards the *Ajax* and ships like her essential if America hoped to increase its clout in Hawai'i. Dependable steamship connections would lead to more economic interdependence. However, to help precipitate this eventuality other measures were needed. In the "Third Letter to the *Union*," Twain discusses the advantages of trade between the United States and Hawai'i before proffering an opinion on how to secure those mutual benefits. Twain writes, "Let Congress moderate the high duties somewhat; secondly—let the Islands be populated with Americans."⁷ Twain surmised that investment in the islands would boom once the U.S. government took a committed stance. Political decisiveness would encourage capitalists who required some guarantee that their investments would be backed by tangible support.

In 1866, Twain believed in America and the extension of its influence; the anti-imperialist character of his later years had not yet formed. The ideas quoted above are the public expressions of a man following an agenda; however, there was a private side to the writer which often clashed with the public one.

At the time of Twain's trip there was renewed interest in a trade reciprocity treaty between the United States and Hawai'i. With a great deal of support from the sugar planters, most of whom were American residents in Hawai'i, the proposed legislation aimed to stabilize the economy by eliminating tariffs on island sugar exported to the United States. Numerous other items would also pass duty free between the two nations once this treaty became law, but sugar stood out as the most important item for Hawai'i.⁸ It was supposed that such a treaty would revitalize the ailing industry and also encourage more investment from the mainland. In light of the decline in whaling, Twain thought that a flourishing sugar industry represented the best way of rescuing the island economy. The entire "Twenty-Third Letter to the *Union*" is an exposé on the sugar industry. Twain calls Hawai'i "the king of the sugar world, as far as astonishing productiveness is concerned."⁹ This letter contains detailed statistics showing the dollar value of the sugar industry to the United States, and discusses the means to obtain cheap labor from China to replace the declining Native Hawaiian population. Twain also argues for the importation of Chinese laborers to California, then ends the letter with a jingoistic prediction of how rich California will become once the Pacific trade is secured.

In these letters, Twain fulfills the first purpose of his mission as documented by Branch. Yet, what did Twain really think about American economic intervention at this time? Although his personal papers contain a few brief mentions of the sugar industry and the discussion between annexation and reciprocity, Twain himself seems unconvinced of the best course. Despite his assertion that the elimination of the tariffs might save the sugar plantations, in his *Notebooks & Journals* Twain considers a more sobering reason for the difficulties: "All planters on the islands have begun too late . . . most of the plantations are in debt—to see their extravagance, it is a wonder they survive at all."¹⁰

Twain was not above pandering to audiences when there were

advantages to be had; however, his equivocation sometimes makes it hard for scholars to understand just where Twain stood. Privately, he juxtaposes a local opinion on annexation with his own on reciprocity. Concerning the former, Twain explains that "Americans want annexation, of course, to get rid of duties," before advancing his own cautious view on the latter, "It would be fair to have reciprocity anyway—then—no duties at either end, Cal would have entire S. I [*sic*] trade."¹¹

Twain visited sugar plantations on O'ahu, Hawai'i, and Maui, and occasionally stayed as an overnight guest. He collected statistics and compiled an extensive report on the industry in the "Twenty-Third Letter to the *Union*." As a paid reporter, Twain had to accommodate his employer, but when he stepped onto the lecture platform Twain became his own boss. Since the responsibility for success rested solely on Twain's own shoulders, the lecturer had to be cognizant of the prejudices and opinions of his audience. California-Hawai'i trade was a topic of much discussion on the West Coast, and although Twain's lectures were billed as humor, he still managed to spotlight serious issues, some of which he had already introduced in the *Union* letters. In the copies and fragments of the lectures that survive, Twain waxes patriotic. He heralds the richness of the sugar industry and its potential contributions to America's coffers. In an incomplete manuscript of the lecture, Twain declares that the duties are crushing the planters and destroying the industry. He writes, "the planters always will be burdened with that exasperating duty until the Islands belong to America. . . ." He then continues, "I have dwelt upon this subject to show you that these islands have a genuine importance to America—an importance which is not generally appreciated by our citizens."¹²

Twain did express ideas intended to influence the public at a time when reciprocity and annexation were newsworthy subjects. Yet, what was best for the Islands does not seem to have been the main concern for him at this time; he suggested that America should pass mutually beneficial trade legislation to put some distance between Hawai'i and the Europeans jockeying for control. Twain did shift his public stance about American intervention six years later following the death of King Kamehameha V in December of 1872. Twain wrote two letters for the New York *Daily Tribune*, and in the second of those letters, dated January 9, 1873, Twain ends with a section entitled "Why We

Should Annex.” In this sarcastic diatribe, Twain trumpets the benefits that the mighty American civilization would bring to its new citizens. He closes:

We must annex those people. . . . We can make that little bunch of sleepy islands the hottest corner on earth, and array it in the moral splendor of our high and holy civilization. Annexation is what the poor islanders need. ‘Shall we to men benighted, the lamp of life deny?’¹³

By 1873, Twain had two successful books under his belt and another popular lecture based on his 1867 trip to the Holy Land, but in 1866 he had been a novice lecturer and regional reporter with no committed following. The younger man had yielded to caution.

In the same lecture quoted above (P & S Draft No. 5), Twain deleted two passages that more strongly advocated the annexationist alternative. In both of these sections, he suggests that independence is not a viable option for Hawai‘i. Twain first wrote, then crossed out, “The property has got to fall to some heir— + why not to the U. States?”¹⁴ Since the second of these excised quotes is very hard to decipher, Twain obviously felt strongly about withdrawing this opinion from the script. In that passage, Twain explains: “The Kanakas will all die out some day + then the Sand. Is. are going to be gobbled up by France or England or America. I don’t know which, by America may be if such be the will of Providence.”¹⁵

In 1866, Twain made a case that a Hawai‘i-U.S. trade treaty would rescue the Islands’ plantations and benefit America. He claimed that the high duties were hurting the planters and would ultimately destroy the sugar industry unless Congress removed the tariffs. He did not openly tout annexation, yet as the omitted passages show, he had originally intended to. The annexationist idea was gaining support in political circles, and soon even the possibility of a military takeover was to become a real concern.¹⁶ However, there may be another reason Twain deleted those passages. Although both passages can be interpreted as supporting annexation, in them Twain speculates about the demise of the Hawaiian people. With American residents and capital in place and few if any Native Hawaiians to interfere, inheritance of the Islands rather than annexation was possible. A

smooth transition in power, yes, but rather a tactless position to publish.

II

At the time of Twain's visit, Hawai'i was a constitutional monarchy. King Kamehameha V ruled the nation, and the legislature composed of local representatives was watched over by ministers, some of whom were emigrants from the U.S. and Europe. Differences of opinions concerning the welfare of the nation led to argumentative legislative sessions which the 30-year-old, patriotically inclined Twain wrote about. He championed America, but what he saw in Hawai'i caused him to question the spread of democracy. Twain actually favored the 1864 decision to revoke universal male suffrage. Amy Kaplan verifies this when she writes that Twain "supported the decision of the Hawaiian government to rescind universal suffrage and reestablish property holding as a requirement for voting. . . ." ¹⁷ So where did Twain stand on monarchical rule and democratic reforms taking place in Hawai'i? Well, it really depended on whom he was addressing. As a reporter, Twain could not afford to alienate the monarchy, since according to him, Americans were already operating at a disadvantage. Twain describes the prejudice against Americans in both his published and private writings. In the *Union*, he has this to say:

One of our lady passengers from San Francisco, who brings high recommendations, has purchased a half interest in the hotel, and she shows such a determination to earn success that I heartily wish she may achieve it—and the more so because she is an American, and if common remark can be depended upon the foreign element here will not allow an American to succeed if a good strong struggle can prevent it. ¹⁸

Here, Twain erects the framework of a conflict. Curiously, he refers to a "foreign element." But what were he and the Americans? As the previous discussion confirms, Twain argued that America should increase its demographic presence as well as its business in Hawai'i. In effect, an influx of people and investment would lead to American domination. But to take control from whom? The Hawaiians? No,

Twain perceives the threat to be the British and the French. Somehow, they had inveigled themselves into the king's good graces, and because of this, Americans were suffering. The main foreign influences on the king were: the Anglican Bishop of Honolulu, Thomas Nettleship Staley; the minister of foreign affairs, a Frenchman Charles De Varigny; and an American expatriate who served as the minister of finance, Charles Coffin Harris. Given this international representation, one would think the interests of all countries were being considered equally, but to Twain this was not the reality.

Twain regarded Americans as bearers of civilization, religion, and prosperity, and in private he railed against the king's prejudice toward Americans. Blaming the king's disdain of Americans on a racial incident that occurred long ago, Twain expostulates that the king:

remembers to this day, & grieves over a trifling unintentional offense offered in the US. years ago to his *private* individuality—*not* to his official <great> rank—& who hates America and Americans for it yet—but who is so guiltless of genuine, <true,> manly & kingly pride as to forget that his fathers, his whole people & his whole country have on noted occasions <not far in the past,> to wh I have referred, been humiliated, insulted, wronged, abused—<yea, at least figuratively speaking,> spit upon & trampled under foot—by <the> two great *nations* (not insignificant, unofficial & irresponsible) nobodies in a steamboat), by two nations, England and France—<but,><yet> and who to-day, purchased by the gimcrack & tinsel adulation those peoples have conferred upon his house, <he> with a spirit proper to a soul that is capable of remembering a trivial <woul> wound inflicted upon its poor personal vanity & forgetting a great national affront, licks the hands of the foreign princes who kicked & cuffed Hawaii-nei through her representatives his fathers.

The King gets his <cherished compliments> <cheap but> loved and cherished compliments from the English <Court> & his revenues from the Americans—his gew-gaws & cheap adulation from the one & whatever of real worth & greatness his country <is possessed of> possesses from the other—and with characteristic consistency he worships the men who have degraded his country & hates the strong & steadfast <American> hands that have lifted <it> her up.

Dam! [*sic*]

Royalty!—I don't think much of Hawaiian Royalty!¹⁹

In private, Twain accused the king of prejudicial treatment of Americans and of damaging the interests of the nation; in public, though, he had to be careful about disparaging the monarch. Twain was not a representative of the government and therefore possessed no official voice. Inflammatory remarks could have proved an embarrassment for the United States, and might even have derailed him from the career track along which he was hurrying. Perhaps it was fortunate that he stumbled on Harris and Staley, for they proved suitable targets for his anger over what he deemed an official policy of prejudice against Americans.²⁰

The king was a genuine source of news, and one he had to write up, but as just seen some of his opinions were not suitable for publication. Twain had to devise a way of bringing the king and other nobility into his reports. He did this initially through humor. In the "Fourth Letter to the *Union*," Twain describes the landing at Honolulu and his first glimpse of Hawaiian "royalty." On having the king pointed out to him, Twain explains how I "took out my notebook and put him down: 'Tall, slender, dark; full-bearded; green frock coat, with lappels [*sic*] and collar bordered with gold band an inch wide; plug hat-broad gold band around it; royal costume looks too much like a livery; . . .'"²¹ Disappointment soon follows. The man he has depicted is not really the king, but a carriage driver for some dignitary. The hapless Twain had missed the monarch by a day, for "the comfortable, easy going King Kamehameha . . . had been sitting on a barrel on the wharf, the day before, fishing; . . ."²²

Here, Twain introduces a "king" to his readers. This seemingly innocent humor masks his sarcastic intent. Royalty should exude a recognizable regalia. Twain takes the nobility of Hawai'i down a notch by confusing the king with a carriage driver. The sarcasm finds expression in the image of the monarch perched on a barrel, fishing, which is an all-too-democratic pose for a king. To evade censure, Twain was not openly derogatory about the king, his appearance, or his policies in public, but in his artful manner he depicted Kamehameha V as being indistinguishable from the rest of humanity.

So was the king such a vindictive, unforgiving man as Twain wrote privately? Or a source of levity as shown above? Twain's private comments go so far as to cast racial slurs on the king. In one virulent notebook entry, he refers to the monarch as a "heathen blackamoor."²³

Yet, even in private Twain is not always so deprecatory; some personal comments are laudable. Notebook entries on both Kamehameha IV and V verify this. He writes:

IV was remarkable man—ambitious—proud, accomplished, profound in thought & wisdom—a deep thinker—ashamed of his family & did not like old KI & Cooks murder recalled—did not like to be reminded that he came of race of savages.—thought he was worthy of nobler origin.²⁴

On Kamehameha V, Twain has this to say: “Present King is penetrating—sound judgment—dignity—accomplished—has good sense & courage & decision—& became acquainted with business by long apprenticeship as Minister of Interior.”²⁵

Even though the above comments praise the present and former kings, Twain cannot refrain from bringing up the past. His opinion that Kamehameha IV was chagrined by his heritage has some credence, for it was he who requested an English Bishop be dispatched to Honolulu and who named his son after Queen Victoria’s husband. The *Union* letters are filled with pages of historical references documenting the savagery of the nobles and commoners. This non-Christian history seems to have obsessed Twain. He warns that the pull of the past could be overpowering even to the enlightened. Privately, he concedes that the

King is a heathen—an old sorceress has him under her thumb—picks out the fish he may eat—tells him <where> in what house he may sleep, &c. Accompanies him in all his excursions. He was educated in a Christian school but has never submitted himself to Christianity—discovered his predilections for heathenism in his youth.²⁶

If the monarch himself could fall prey to the cultural pitfalls of the past and reject the “enlightenment” that Americans had bestowed on the country, would not others have difficulties assimilating to the new cultural norms? Perhaps, yet once again Twain’s public persona espouses opinions different than the private man.

Twain maintains that a complete transformation from a heathen to an educated Christian was possible. Here too, though, Twain makes

much of the wild past. In the first of two letters dealing with the legislature, Twain describes the president of the assembly, M. Kekuanaoa, the king's father. Twain paints a portrait of a handsome man with a noble bearing. As usual, though, he cannot avoid placing this man in the cultural framework of heathenism popularized by 19th-century chroniclers of Hawai'i. Twain takes the reader on a speculative journey into the world that Kekuanaoa may have once inhabited. He soliloquizes:

I could not help saying to myself, 'This man, as naked as the day he was born, and war-club and spear in hand, has charged at the head of a horde of savages against other hordes of savages far back in the past, and reveled in slaughter and carnage; has worshipped wooden images on his bended knees; has seen hundreds of his race offered up in heathen temples as sacrifices to hideous idols. . .'²⁷

After more examples of such sensationalist press, Twain continues:

Look at him, sitting there presiding over the deliberations of a legislative body, among whom are white men—a grave, dignified, statesman-like personage, and as seemingly natural and fitted to the place as if he had been born in it and had never been out of it in his lifetime.²⁸

Even though the man overseeing the workings of the government is educated and refined, Twain still reminds the readers of the distant past of the Hawaiian people. And, one must consider, why?

Twain implies that regression was a real possibility; therefore, reporting on the progress made after the arrival of the Americans was integral to his mission. If Hawai'i hoped to enter the modern world, the past must be discarded once and for all. There was another source of lingering danger which Twain did not approve of, yet here, too, his pen was stilled—immodesty was not a suitable topic for newspapers. He wrote at length on the demise of Princess Victoria Ka'ahumanu Kamamalu which took place while he was in Hawai'i. Three of his letters provide minute details of the month-long mourning ceremony and royal funeral. However, nowhere in those reports does Twain publish the cause of Princess Victoria's death. He notes the reason only in his journals. Why would he withhold this information

from his reading public? Surely, Americans would be curious as to why a young, healthy, benevolent, Christian woman of the nobility passed away so suddenly. He obviously was aware that the truth would have raised embarrassing questions about the moral integrity of Hawaiian nobility, and perhaps about the nation as a whole. Twain uses historical references to supplement his interpretations of the funeral rituals, which he describes as “heathen orgies.”²⁹ He blames Bishop Staley for this recidivistic behavior that negated four decades of progress under the auspices of the American missionaries. The reason for the princess’s death might not have jeopardized relations between the two nations, yet Twain prudently chooses not to headline events that might impede the formation of a stronger alliance. This is how Twain describes the cause of death in his private writings, “Pr. V. died in forcing abortion—kept half a dozen bucks to do her washing, & has suffered 7 abortions.”³⁰

Twain was obliged to write reports that reinforced the need for American investment and encouraged closer economic ties between the two nations, so it is probable that he understood any attacks on Hawaiian royalty could have led to a straining of relations. Mind you, the monarchy might not have concerned itself with the reports of an insignificant writer like Twain, but if American public opinion shifted after reading his reports, the results would have been counterproductive.

Of course, royalty would have been a topic of interest to Americans, and Twain realized that his American audience wanted news of the monarchy. Yet, as many of the contradictory comments thus far have shown, Twain’s ideas varied greatly. Still, kings were something of an enigma to the American experience, and the existence of monarchy could be detrimental to American democratic interests.

Twain must have believed that a favorable representation of the king was vital if his countrymen were to be persuaded of the benefits of better trade relations. The legislature was divided into representatives of the people and nobles, the latter of which Twain explains served as the “mouthpieces” of the king.³¹ Democracy at this time was primarily an American offshoot, although, waves of change had incorporated the concepts in various forms around the world. According to Twain, Hawai‘i had adopted a democratic form of government which

placed limits on the power of the people, but none on the monarch. Twain explains that "even if the Representatives were to assert their strength and override the Nobles and pass a law which did not suit the King, his Majesty would veto the measure and that would be the end of it, for there is no passing a bill over *his* veto."³² This uncontested veto power is a fundamental difference between the Hawaiian constitutional monarchy and American democracy. America has a system of checks and balances which prevent any president from usurping too much power. If Hawai'i was, in fact, ruled by a tyrannical monarch, this disclosure might negatively impact America's future there. Twain dismisses this fear by adapting his private assessment of the king's acumen for the *Union*. He writes that the monarch is not capricious or dangerous in the least:

The King is invested with very great power. But he is a man of good sense and excellent education, and has an extended knowledge of business, which he acquired through long and arduous training as Minister of the Interior under the late King, and therefore he uses his vast authority wisely and well.³³

Just in case his message was missed, Twain published "A Correction" in his "Thirteenth Letter to the *Union*." Again, he makes it clear to Californians that the king is trustworthy. If indeed, Kamehameha had lapsed in his youth, he had repented and earned forgiveness. Twain writes:

Some people in California have an idea that the King of the Sandwich Islands is a man who spends his time idling about the town of Honolulu with individuals of questionable respectability, and drinking habitually and to excess. This impression is wrong. Before he ascended the throne he was 'faster' than was well for him or for his good name, but, like the hero of Agincourt, he renounced his bad habits and discarded his Falstaffs when he became King, and since that time has conducted himself as becomes his high position.³⁴

Twain was irate that the monarch favored the British, yet a well-educated, business-savvy king would make a good ally. Since the cause of the king's prejudice against Americans was long past, would

not a wise leader, who hoped to do the best for his country, forget such a trifling insult? Twain used his discourse to promote better relations between the two countries, and his diplomatic treatment of the monarch reveals that he knew certain subjects were sacrosanct. A “heathen,” superstitious king could prove unreliable, or at least, unpredictable, and thereby an embarrassment, if not a real danger, to America. No matter what Twain’s real opinions on the monarchy were, he only published those that promoted his mission without detracting from, or causing harm to, his own growing reputation.

III

Twain is very clear in his opinion that the people of Hawai‘i were better off after the arrival of the American missionaries than they had been before. He credits the missionaries for transforming Hawai‘i into one of the most educated nations in the world. But if they were so educated, why does he constantly refer to what he seems to regard as an atrocious past? The main reason may have been to show that no matter how far Hawaiians had come, there was much further to go. In an unpublished draft of his Sandwich Island Lecture, Twain details the impact the missionaries had on the people of Hawai‘i. He writes:

They were a rusty set all round—those Kanakas—in those days. But the missionaries came and knocked off the shackles from the whole race—broke the power of the King + the chiefs + set the common man free + elevated his wife to an equality with him— + got a patch of land set apart + secured to each to hold forever. And the missionaries set up schools + churches + printing presses and taught the people the Christian religion after a fashion + taught the whole nation to read + write with facility in the native tongue— + now I suppose there is not an uneducated Kanaka in the Kingdom. <The K’s are as nearly civilized too, as they can ever be—+ that is not saying a very great deal.>³⁵

Surely, from the viewpoint of Twain and the missionary-historians, Hawaiians had made great progress, but the attitudes of these 19th-century observers were not, as we now know, accurate interpretations of Hawaiian society. By pointing out the foibles of the local people,

such writers may have actually encouraged mainlanders to step up efforts in acculturating the natives. For Twain, though, the missionaries were more malleable as a source of humor than the monarchy. Although their mission to convert and civilize was considered a worthy one, humor at their expense was not forbidden. And since the missionaries could be perceived as being both, accommodating and overbearing, Twain could write from either perspective without compromising his objectives. Even with all of Twain's waffling in his treatment of the missionaries one thing remains true, his sympathies lay with the Americans rather than the British ecclesiastics. In his "Fourteenth Letter to the *Union*," Twain satirizes the American missionaries, but he rails more bitterly against Bishop Staley for his meddling. Twain writes:

Mr. Staley, my Lord Bishop of Honolulu—who was built into a Lord by the English Bishop of Oxford and shipped over here with a fully equipped 'Established Church' in his pocket—has frequently said that the natives of these islands are morally and religiously in a worse condition to-day than they were before the American missionaries ever came here. Now that is not true . . . Our missionaries are our missionaries—and even if they were our devils I would not want any English prelate to slander them.³⁶

Twain had to take sides. His assignment required him to support the American intervention from the past to the present, and also to show how improved relations would be better for the future of both countries. The American missionaries may have had their faults, which Twain sometimes exploited for humor, but the good they had done the nation was a fact he truly defended.

What had the American missionaries given the people of Hawai'i? In his "Sixth Letter to the *Union*," Twain juxtaposes their accomplishments with comments about what conditions had been like for the common people in the pre-missionary days. He explains, "The missionaries have clothed them [the Hawaiians], educated them, broken up the tyrannous authority of their chiefs, and given them freedom and the right to enjoy whatever the labor of their hand and brains produces, with equal laws for all and punishment for all alike who transgress them."³⁷ Here, Twain promulgates definite democratic

progress with which Americans would certainly approve. The humorist, however, could not help analyzing the cost at which such achievements were obtained. Earlier in the same letter, Twain writes of the courageous missionaries who

braved a thousand privations to come and make them [the Hawaiians] permanently miserable by telling them how beautiful and how blissful a place heaven is, and how nearly impossible it is to get there; and showed the poor native how dreary a place perdition is and what unnecessarily liberal facilities there are for going to it; showed him how, in his ignorance, he had gone and fooled away all his kinfolks to no purpose [he is referring to human sacrifices]; showed him what rapture it is to work all day long for fifty cents to buy food for next day with, as compared with fishing for pastime and lolling in the shade through eternal Summer, and eating of the bounty that nobody labored to provide but Nature. How sad it is to think of the multitudes who have gone to their graves in this beautiful island and never knew there was a hell!³⁸

Twain could poke fun at the missionaries, yet at the same time, he could admire their contributions. The missionaries did not approve of his humor, as an entry in his notebooks confirms. He confesses that “The mish’s are outraged by the levity of my letters, & have so expressed themselves—but in sorrow, not in anger.”³⁹

There was, however, a more cynical side to his interpretation of missionary influence. Twain perceived the missionaries as being interested in securing private gain here on earth, while opening heaven to the benighted Hawaiians. Historical documents, such as this June 21, 1852, letter by Reverend W. P. Alexander, confirm this trend. Alexander confessed that not only did he survey land on Saturdays for profit (in direct violation with the decrees of the church), but he also possessed 32 cattle. Alexander defended his right to work for the benefit of his family’s comfort, as well as that of his flock; “I did desire to retain as close and intimate a relation with the mission as possible and was glad to be reckoned a corresponding member; yet if this involves a subjection to the arbitrary rule of the Prud. Com I do not desire to continue in the relation.”⁴⁰ What did Twain think about missionaries who profited from the privileged positions they held in the community? An answer might be seen in his “Nineteenth

Letter to the *Union*," where he relates a story about one clergyman who turned a substantial profit by speculating in land. Twain explains that the unnamed missionary acted to prevent the native-owned land bordering his own from falling into the hands of some foreigners of whom he knew nothing. The missionary paid \$1,500 and with no further investment soon sold the land to another foreigner for \$10,000 in gold. Twain's none-too-subtle irony becomes clear when he writes, "We naturally swell with admiration when we contemplate a sacrifice like this."⁴¹

There were opportunities to make money in Hawai'i and, it is true, that some missionaries were involved in land transactions, sugar plantations, and politics. Twain's private writings document how some families expanded their interests from the ecclesiastical to the secular. One entry explains how votes in the nation's legislature could be controlled: "House of Nobles appointed by King, & Lower House elective. Under Universal suffrage, Missionaries used vote their flocks for certain man, & then sit at home & control him. One member (missionary's son) said out loud in open <ne> house, he controlled eleven votes (a majority) in the House."⁴² As always with Twain, there are contradictions. On the same page in his notebooks, he applauds the honesty of a very influential missionary of an earlier era, Gerrit P. Judd. Twain writes: "Judd always kept country out of debt & cleaned up his tracks—since been out country gone badly in debt. He went out poor as a rat. To prove his honesty, he *was the government* & might have cabbaged the whole country."⁴³

Twain often commented on the missionaries in his letters and private writings. Interestingly, it is his private writings that are more often tolerant than the public writings. This is because the missionaries were a rich resource for innocent, good fun. Twain could ridicule them without damaging the Church, because his reading audience would not have taken seriously his attacks on those who forsook the comforts of home to convert a nation to Christ. The following list of missionary accomplishments reveals what Twain truly thought of the 46-year-old American mission in Hawai'i:

Missionaries have made honest men out of nation of thieves.
 Instituted marriage.
 Created homes.

Lifted woman to same rights & privileges enjoyed elsewhere.
 Abolished infanticide.
 " intemperance.
 Diminished licentiousness (the hula, where copulation in public).
 Given equal laws.
 " common Native homesteads.
 " whereby chief's power of life & death over his subject is taken away.
 In a great measure abolished idolatry and (until this King & his Bishop Church) destroyed power of Kahunas (now however, King licenses them).
 Have *well* educated the people.⁴⁴

A modern-day scholar could not only prove that Twain's comments are inaccurate, but may also argue that the missionaries aimed to destroy the culture of the Hawaiian people. However, Twain saw these as positive goals that not only showed the humanitarian, democratic spirit of the American mission, but which also paved the way for more investment. His own ideas on the achievements of the missionaries he recorded in his notebooks, but the public persona portrayed the missionaries differently. Twain begins his assessment of the missionaries with a disclaimer:

I judge the missionary, but, with a modesty which is entitled to some credit, I freely confess that my judgment may err. Now, therefore, when I say that the Sandwich Islands missionaries are pious; hard-working; hard-praying; self-sacrificing; hospitable; devoted to the well-being of this people and the interests of Protestantism; bigoted; puritanical; slow; ignorant of all white human nature and natural ways of men, except the remnant of these things that are left in their own class or profession; old foggy—fifty years behind the age; uncharitable toward the weaknesses of the flesh; considering all shortcomings, faults and failures in the light of crimes, and having no mercy and no forgiveness for such—when I say this about the missionaries, I do it with the explicit understanding that it is only *my* estimate of them—not that of a Higher Intelligence—not that of even other sinners like myself. It is only *my* estimate, and it may fall far short of being a just one.⁴⁵

Twain makes fun of the missionaries without slandering them. Perhaps, he just wanted them to lighten up. Even though the object of

the following notebook entry is not specifically mentioned, it very possibly refers to the missionaries because of the context. Twain writes, "I'll tell you what's the matter with you—you have no conception of a joke—of anything but awful Puritan long-facedness & petrified facts."⁴⁶ Twain may have felt that the missionaries were too dogmatic and therefore incapable of appreciating his humor, yet this did not prevent him from teasing them. Although he made fun of their ideas and their inflexible attitudes, he also believed in their cause and sided with them against the Anglican Church. Except for the Natives—their exotic customs and culture—the missionaries were the major source of humor for Twain in his writings and lectures on Hawai'i.

CONCLUSION

Hawai'i was a landmark in Mark Twain's life. It provided him with unique subject matter that contributed to the advancement of his writing career. Equipped with these Hawaiian experiences, Twain embarked on the lecture circuit, and thereby reached new audiences and augmented his earning capacity. No matter how liberating the posting to Hawai'i proved, it also restrained Twain and taught him to moderate his reports when either employer or audience demanded discretion. And, it seems that Twain learned this lesson well. The reporter who wrote up the Islands in his letters for the *Union* came to understand that his personal opinions on economic cooperation, the monarchy, and the missionaries had to be censored if they did not comply with the objectives of the assignment. He could neither afford to hinder the purpose of his mission, nor get sidetracked from the career path on which he was travelling. Twain's "Letters to the *Union*" provide insight into how a budding writer could conform and still retain his creative expression.

NOTES

- ¹ For a detailed study of the Hawaiian influence on the fiction of Mark Twain, see David Zmijewski, *Huck Finn and Hawaii: A Study of Hawaiian Influence on the "Adventures of Huckleberry Finn"* (Ph.D. diss., U of Hawai'i at Mānoa, 1998).
- ² Richard Pressman, "A Connecticut Yankee in Merlin's Cave: The Role of Contradiction in Mark Twain's Novel," *American Literary Realism: 1870-1910* XVI (Autumn 1983) 58-72, rpt. in *Mark Twain Critical Assessments*, Vol. III. Ed.

- Stuart Hutchinson. (The Banks Mountfield, East Sussex: Helms Information Ltd., 1993) 476.
- ³ Edgar Marquess Branch, *The Literary Apprenticeship of Mark Twain* (Urbana; U of Illinois P, 1950) 161.
- ⁴ Some of Twain's hoaxes can be found in *Early Tales & Sketches Volume I 1851-1864*, Edgar Marquess Branch and Robert H. Hirst, eds. (Berkeley: U of California P, 1979). "Petrified Man" 155-9, and "A Bloody Massacre near Carson" 320-6. For an account of the duel, see *Mark Twain's Letters, Vol. 1*, Edgar Marquess Branch, Michael B. Frank, and Kenneth M. Sanderson, eds. (Berkeley: U of California P, 1988) 287-301.
- ⁵ Henry Nash Smith, *Mark Twain: The Development of a Writer* (Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press of Harvard U P, 1962) 13.
- ⁶ Mark Twain, "Second Letter to the Sacramento Daily *Union*," Mar. 19, 1866, rpt. in Walter Francis Frear. *Mark Twain and Hawaii* (Chicago: Lakeside P, 1947) 266. All of Twain's "Letters to the *Union*" quoted hereafter are reprinted in Frear.
- ⁷ Twain, "Third Letter to the *Union*," Mar. 1866, 271.
- ⁸ "The Sandwich Islands Treaty," *PCA*, Oct. 17, 1867:4. Some of the other products on which the tariffs would be eliminated were, coffee, raw cotton, fruits, vegetables, furs, and hides.
- ⁹ Twain, "Twenty-Third Letter to the *Union*," Sept. 10, 1866, 398.
- ¹⁰ Mark Twain, *Notebooks & Journals*, Vol. I (1855-1873), Frederick Anderson, Michael B. Frank, and Kenneth M. Sanderson, eds. (Berkeley: U of California P, 1975) 126.
- ¹¹ Twain, *Notebooks & Journals* 124.
- ¹² Twain, "Sandwich-Island Lecture," No. 5 P & S Draft, 10. Mark Twain Project, Bancroft Library, U of California, Berkeley.
- ¹³ Twain, "The Sandwich Islands," Jan. 9, 1873, rpt. in Frear 500.
- ¹⁴ Twain, "Sandwich-Island Lecture," No. 5 P & S Draft, 2.
- ¹⁵ Twain, "Sandwich-Island Lecture," No. 5 P & S Draft, 12.
- ¹⁶ For an investigation of the threat of a takeover, see David Zmijewski, "The Conspiracy That Never Existed: How Hawai'i Evaded Annexation in 1868," *HJH*, vol. 37 (2003) 119-138.
- ¹⁷ Amy Kaplan, "Imperial Triangles: Mark Twain's Foreign Affairs," *Modern Fiction Studies* vol. 43, no. 1 (Spring 1997) 245.
- ¹⁸ Twain, "Fifth Letter to the *Union*," Mar. 1866: 279.
- ¹⁹ Twain, *Notebooks & Journals Vol. I (1855-1873)*, 150. < > indicates deletions in the text made by Twain.
- ²⁰ For details on how Twain used Harris and Staley as targets in his letters and lectures, see, David Zmijewski, "Mark Twain and Hawaiian Politics: The Attack on Harris and Staley," *Mark Twain Journal* vol. 31, no. 2 (Fall 1993) 11-27.
- ²¹ Twain, "Fourth Letter to the *Union*," Mar. 1866: 275.
- ²² Twain, "Fourth Letter to the *Union*," 275.
- ²³ Twain, *Notebooks & Journals Vol. I (1855-1873)* 149.

- 24 Twain, *Notebooks & Journals* 206.
- 25 Twain, *Notebooks & Journals* 206–207.
- 26 Twain, *Notebooks & Journals* 141.
- 27 Twain, “Twelfth Letter to the *Union*,” May 23, 1866: 319.
- 28 Twain, “Twelfth Letter to the *Union*,” 320.
- 29 Twain, “Sixteenth Letter to the *Union*,” June 30, 1866: 352.
- 30 Twain, *Notebooks & Journals* Vol. I (1855–1873) 129.
- 31 Twain, “Twelfth Letter to the *Union*,” May 23, 1866: 318.
- 32 Twain, “Twelfth Letter to the *Union*,” 318.
- 33 Twain, “Twelfth Letter to the *Union*,” 318.
- 34 Twain, “Thirteenth Letter to the *Union*,” May 23, 1866: 326–327.
- 35 Mark Twain, “Sandwich Islands Lecture,” No. 6 Bancroft, Crosshatch, Paris Paper: 38. Mark Twain Project, Bancroft Library, U of California, Berkeley. Bracketed passages have been deleted from the manuscript by Twain.
- 36 Twain, “Fourteenth Letter to the *Union*,” June 22, 1866: 331.
- 37 Twain, “Sixth Letter to the *Union*,” Mar. 1866: 289.
- 38 Twain, “Sixth Letter to the *Union*,” 288.
- 39 Twain, *Notebooks & Journals* Vol. I (1855–1873) 153.
- 40 W. P. Alexander, Lahainaluna, to [Rev. Rufus Anderson, Honolulu], June 21, 1852, Alexander & Baldwin Papers, 1824–1911, HMCS, Honolulu, Hawai‘i.
- 41 Twain, “Nineteenth Letter to the *Union*,” Jul. 1866: 373.
- 42 Twain, *Notebooks & Journals* Vol. I (1855–1873) 115.
- 43 Twain, *Notebooks & Journals* 115.
- 44 Twain, *Notebooks & Journals* 154.
- 45 Twain, “Fourteenth Letter to the *Union*,” June 22, 1866: 331.
- 46 Twain, *Notebooks & Journals* Vol. I (1855–1873) 154.

