

*Mark Twain, Charles Ives,
and the Uses of Vernacular Intelligence*

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“ALL MODERN AMERICAN literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*” was a famous 1935 observation by Ernest Hemingway. Less famous is Charles Ives’s Symphony no. 2, begun (perhaps) in 1899 and finished (we think) in 1909. (*Huck* was published in 1885.) Like Mark Twain, Ives transplanted and transformed an Old World genre through recourse to New World vernacular speech.

Huck’s idiom is a southern dialect inspired by both white and black voices: “You don’t know about me, without you have read a book by the name of ‘The Adventures of Tom Sawyer,’ but that ain’t no matter.” Ives’s idiom is an amalgam of parlor songs, patriotic airs, and church hymns. His symphony contains not a single wholly original tune. No less than Huck, it speaks a saturated American language. In fact, Ives’s Second and *Huckleberry Finn* are twin American cultural landmarks, comparable in method and achievement.

The context of Ives’s landmark symphony is a corpus of previous symphonies by Americans barely remembered: John Knowles Paine, George Chadwick, and George Templeton Strong, among others remembered even less. These works are by no means as negligible as their obscurity implies. Paine’s First (1875) was acclaimed by Chadwick as proof “that we could have a great musician, and that he could get a hearing.” Chadwick’s Third (1894) was admired by Dvořák. Strong’s hour-long *Sintram* Symphony (1888) is (to my knowledge) the single notable American symphony in an epic programmatic mode. But none of these impressive works sounds fundamentally “American.” They candidly echo and re-echo with Beethoven, Schumann, Brahms, and Wagner.

Ives’s Second is equally Germanic in structure and scope. Its sonata forms are shrewdly made. Its passages of turmoil and anguish

yield plateaus of uplift and serenity. But no listener, on either side of the Atlantic, could possibly mistake it for a European product.

In American classical music, the tensions afflicting a cultural colony naturally produced ambivalence toward the parent culture. The symphonies preceding Ives are to varying degrees imitative, deferent, or tentative. Ives alone levels the playing field. His paradoxical method is to burrow deep within the “genteel tradition”—its Germanic templates, suffused with striving; its marches and songs, remembered from his Danbury childhood. No less than Mark Twain’s pivotal American novel, Ives’s pivotal American symphony is the handwork of a cocky subversive, a master practitioner of the inside job.



Charles Edward Ives was born in Danbury, Connecticut, in 1874. His first important teacher was his father, the charismatic local bandmaster. A Yankee renegade, George Ives made Charlie sing “Old Folks at Home” in E-flat while accompanying himself in C. George thrilled to bumptious wrong notes and late entrances in the theater pit, to bands crowding and contradicting one another on Main Street. At Yale, Ives had a second teacher as staid as his first was rambunctious: Horatio Parker, who had himself studied with Josef Rheinberger in Munich. Ives was both absorbent and rebellious—and sought no further formal training. In New York in 1898, he was placed by relatives in a job with the Mutual Insurance Company. He cofounded a life-insurance office, Ives & Myrick, in 1909. It thrived. Meanwhile, more or less in secret, he prolifically composed music so heretical it could not possibly find an audience in its own time. Ill health curtailed both professions. By 1930 Ives had quit composing and selling insurance. He lived in Connecticut with his wife, mainly known to a handful of musical free spirits including Henry Cowell, Lou Harrison, Bernard Herrmann, and Nicolas Slonimsky.

Ives’s physical decline coincided with an ascendant reputation. For decades, Americans had labored to fashion an indigenous “American school” of musical composition for the concert hall. Nothing as formidably self-made as a musical Whitman or Melville had appeared. Yet

now it seemed that an autonomous American genius had long composed in necessary seclusion, undistracted by precedent or fashion. The landmark discovery took place in 1939, when John Kirkpatrick performed Ives's *Concord* Piano Sonata for a tiny audience at New York's Town Hall. Lawrence Gilman wrote in the *Herald-Tribune*:

[Ives's] sonata is exceptionally great music—it is, indeed, the greatest music composed by an American, and the most deeply and essentially American in impulse and implication. . . . It has imagination and spiritual vastness. It has wisdom and beauty and profundity, and a sense of the encompassing terror and splendor of human life and human destiny.

In 1947 Ives was awarded a Pulitzer Prize. His escalating reputation, however, was predicated on the apparent newness of his music—its “advanced” rhythms, harmonies, and textures. Critics inferred the modernist influence of Schoenberg. Ives responded with savage ridicule. He had always kept his distance from the music of his contemporaries. With the waning of modernism, we can only now appreciate that, rather than a nascent modernist, Ives is more accurately viewed as an anomaly within the eventful, late Gilded-Age moment he shares with Mark Twain.

Ives died of a stroke in 1954. Leonard Bernstein had premiered Ives's Second Symphony with the New York Philharmonic only three years previous. Ives declined Bernstein's invitation to travel to New York. As he did not own a radio, he listened to a broadcast in a neighbor's kitchen. When it was over, he spit in the fireplace and walked home. His wife Harmony wrote Bernstein an appreciative note. She added that Charles had found the fast movements “too slow.”



Charles Ives and Mark Twain knew each other through the Reverend Joseph Twichell (1838–1918). Twichell presided for five decades at Hartford's Asylum Hill Congregational Church. He was a gregarious, robust man with an exuberant sense of humor. He preached a nondogmatic “muscular Christianity” predisposed to social service.

His congregants included Charles Dudley Warner and Harriett Beecher Stowe. His literary circle included John Greenleaf Whittier.

Twichell was for forty years Samuel Clemens's closest friend. Clemens consulted him in matters personal and artistic. In 1870, with Thomas Beecher, Twichell married Clemens to Olivia Langdon. In 1878, he accompanied Clemens on an abortive walking excursion from Hartford to Boston (they hitched a ride to the nearest railroad station twenty-eight miles later). In 1878 he accompanied Clemens to Europe and became "Harris" in *A Tramp Abroad* (1880). In 1909 he married Clemens's daughter Clara to the pianist Ossip Gabrilowitsch. In 1910 he gave the benediction at Clemens's funeral.

Of the nine Twichell children, the third daughter, born in 1876, was named Harmony. Soft-featured, with luminous eyes, she was a model of soothing self-possession. Her husband, as of 1908, was a young man as mercurial as Harmony was calm. Charlie Ives, age thirty-four, doubtless found the Twichell household anchoring and consoling. And he was there introduced to "Uncle Mark."

There is no direct evidence that Mark Twain influenced Charles Ives. But it bears mentioning that in later life Harmony Ives was president of the Mark Twain Society. And if, as was likely, Ives had occasion to observe the interdependence of Samuel and Olivia Clemens, he would have absorbed an obvious model for his own lifelong marital happiness. Like Livy's, Harmony's fortitude would balance her husband's instability and buoy his artistic calling. In any event, both Twain and Ives, as Connecticut neighbors, inhabit a recognizable local type: they are "Connecticut Yankees," cranky, dissident, homemade.

If in Hartford Samuel Clemens transformed himself into a Victorian paterfamilias, as Mark Twain he remained a rude and unpredictable interloper in salons. Mark Twain the novelist was notably reticent about sex; his need to blaspheme was nonetheless lifelong and chronic. In hell-raising Nevada, he reported that proceeds from a Carson City charity ball would secretly "aid a Miscegenation Society somewhere in the East"—a drunken hoax for which he refused to apologize. Engaged to address a banquet for the Ancient and Honorable Artillery

Corps of Massachusetts, he celebrated his own brief military history as a Civil War deserter. A connoisseur of dirty jokes, he once gave a lecture in praise of the high antiquity of masturbation.

In Ives, the need to blaspheme was even more unbridled. Today the best-known, best-loved image of Ives is that of the subversive hell-raiser. In fin-de-siècle Vienna, fistfights would break out between supporters and opponents of the new music of Mahler and Schoenberg. In fin-de-siècle America, Ives was said to shout “Sissy!” and “Listen like a man!” at timid concertgoers. His writings bristle with disdain for parlor “pansies,” “lily-pads,” “old ladies,” “soft ears,” and “pussy-boys,” a homophobic vocabulary that grates today but—as the music historian Judith Tick has persuasively argued—in the context of genteel musical tastes discloses a metaphoric discourse of dissidence. A typical 1930s tirade thundered:

When I think of some music that I liked to hear and play 35 or 40 years ago—if I hear some of it now, I feel like saying, “Rollo, how did you fall for that sop, those ‘ta tas’ and greasy ringlets?” In this I would include the *Preislied* [by Wagner], *The Rosary*, a certain amount of Mozart, Mendelssohn, a small amount of early Beethoven, the easy-made Haydn, a large amount of Massenet, Sibelius, Tchaikovsky, etc. (to say nothing of Gounod), most Italian operas (not exactly most of the operas, but most of each opera), some of Chopin (pretty soft, but you don’t mind it in him so much, because one just naturally thinks of him with a skirt on, but one which he made himself).

For Ives, European effeminacy contrasts with American manliness. His Second String Quartet (1911–13) incorporates a scenario in which the players “converse, discuss, argue. . . fight, shake hands, shout—then walk up the mountainside to view the firmament.” In the second movement (“Arguments”), snatches of Tchaikovsky’s Sixth and Beethoven’s Ninth are shouted down by “Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean” and “Marching through Georgia.” In Ives’s manuscript a Romantic violin cadenza reads “Andante emasculato”; a raucous choral

response reads “Cut it out! Rollo!” Ives is here an irritably fettered composer—stranded by an uncomprehending concert environment, beleaguered by demons of nervous frustration.

Connecticut Yankees are self-made businessmen, not artists. Mark Twain and Charles Ives were both. Twain’s two lives generated two names. Samuel Clemens, the border ruffian turned Connecticut Yankee, owned the first telephone in a Hartford home. He bought a typewriter and claimed to be the first author to submit a typewritten manuscript. He invested in a steam generator and a steam pulley. He patented three inventions. Aiming to clinch a permanent fortune, he embarked on two disastrous entrepreneurial adventures: a publishing house that sold books door-to-door, and an automatic typesetting machine that he misjudged a mechanical marvel. He wound up bankrupt and humiliated. He was rescued by Henry Huttleston Rogers of Standard Oil, who reorganized his finances.

Ives’s business—his Ives & Myrick identity—was selling life insurance. In this endeavor, he was as great a success as Clemens the businessman was a failure. A true believer in the common man, Ives believed equally in life insurance; his strategies were sincere, inventive, and original. He promoted (and perhaps invented) the idea of training insurance salesmen. He also advocated estate planning. His pamphlet “The Amount to Carry—Measuring the Prospect” was a hortatory salesman’s bible, preaching the virtues of an honest pitch. With his profits and savings, Ives enjoyed lifelong financial security.

Clemens’s financial misfortunes were compounded by personal loss. He blamed himself when his younger brother Henry died in a steamboat explosion (Clemens had found him employment on the fatal vessel). He blamed himself for the death of his first child, Langdon, who fell ill following a cold-weather excursion. His favorite child, Susy, died of meningitis at the age of twenty-four. Livy expired of heart disease in 1904. The subsequent death of his daughter Jean, an epileptic, left him with a single offspring: Clara, consumed by a fledgling musical career of which her father disapproved. Long preoccupied with issues of good and evil, long a double observer of Mississippi vastness and of moral confinements bred by slavery, Twain in old age became a nihilist.

He was prone to excoriate democracy, universal suffrage, and the jury system. He frequently lampooned the vulgarity of great wealth and the venality of great power. The passing of the frontier observed by Frederick Jackson Turner in 1893 was the more keenly and wistfully felt by one who had known young Nevada and California. He observed the St. Louis levee nearly bereft of steamboats. He denounced the “triple curse” of the railroad, the telegraph, and the newspaper. “The twentieth century is a stranger to me,” he wrote. “I wish it well but my heart is for my own century. I took 65 years of it, just on a risk, but if I had known as much about it as I know now I would have taken the whole of it.”

Ives pursued a chimerical and eccentric faith in democratic ideals. He shared Woodrow Wilson’s dream of reforming the world. In 1918 he conceived a People’s World Nation embracing universal disarmament, free trade, and an international police force. In 1920 he drafted a Twentieth Amendment implementing direct democracy: bypassing politicians, the public would initiate legislation. The collapse of the Progressive movement produced in Ives a cranky resilience conditioned by estrangement and denial. He remained stoic in the face of illness and obscurity, immune to self-pity and depression. But he raged against what the world had become. He hated the telephone, would not use a phonograph, shook his fist at airplanes. He disapproved of FDR and the welfare state. He shielded himself against news of a terrible conflict overseas. He revisited Danbury and moaned aloud, head in hands, that it had so changed. He remained devoted to a lost childhood world of innocence.



In post-Civil War America, the idea that art was inherently moral was an article of faith. Art embodied sweetness and light. It enhanced humanity. It made people better.

At the turn of the twentieth century, when European artists and intellectuals deviated toward decadence, succumbed to anxiety, and otherwise veered toward the convolutions of modernism, Americans remained more sanguine. They nonetheless experienced their own

version of intense fin-de-siècle ferment. *Huckleberry Finn* and Ives's Second Symphony are products of America's fin de siècle.

In the harrowing course of the twentieth century, the music lovers Hitler, Stalin, and Mussolini destroyed the moral criterion of artistic worth. They showed decisively that even Mozart and Beethoven do not necessarily upraise the soul. But the notion that art can be ennobling is not some archaic parlor nostrum. In *Moral Fire: Musical Portraits from America's Fin de Siècle* (2012), I extrapolate five attributes of high personal and cultural achievement, as exemplified by four turn-of-the-century Americans. The first attribute is aesthetic: an unshakable belief in the inspiring properties of great music and literature, painting and drama. The second is political: endorsement of a democratic ethos. The third is temperamental: a spirit of combative advocacy. The fourth is existential: estrangement from the new century. The fifth is circumstantial: hybridity—a condition of flux, of being in-between.

Ives is the fourth of my chronological *Moral Fire* portraits. The others are of Henry Lee Higginson (1834–1919), the New England cultural colossus who invented, owned, and operated the Boston Symphony Orchestra; Henry Edward Krehbiel (1854–1923), who as “dean” of New York City's music critics was an essential proponent of Wagnerism and a singularly ecumenical New World authority on culture and race; and Laura Langford (1843–1930), who as creator of Brooklyn's Seidl Society was a prodigious entrepreneurial force in marrying music and philanthropy.

It had been my intention to include Mark Twain in this gallery of buoyant achievers, but he proved an impossible fit. A cloud of paradox and contradiction befogged his capacity to embrace uplift (which he sometimes craved) or democracy (which he instinctively admired). A quintessential American, he spent nearly one-sixth of his life in Europe. He endorsed Germany industry, thrift, and order. A lifelong Anglophile, he considered settling in England. He equally sought “the free air of Europe” and succumbed to bouts of homesickness. *The Innocents Abroad* (1869) is a study in ambivalence abroad: a barbarian/aesthete, he ridicules Old World backwardness and decay—or is seduced. *The Gilded Age*, his first novel, cowritten with Charles Dudley

Warner in 1873, is a tangled tale of Washington politics; hypocrisy and bribery, poverty and violence are major themes. His subsequent books and stories document both genteel pressure to conform and rancorous resistance to conformity. *The Prince and the Pauper* (1882) is a fable for children in which even Twain's staple motif of ambiguous or mistaken identity does not disturb a considered politesse of content and language. *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889) mingles genteel notions of progress and propriety with gusts of invasive bitterness. Hank Morgan awakes in sixth-century England. He decries the profanity of language and manners, the injustice of rank and caste, the technological impoverishment of primitive lives. A paragon of Yankee ingenuity, he implements a program of reform including the abolition of slavery, the democratization of the law, and the invention of the telegraph, telephone, typewriter, sewing machine, and steamboat. The showman and entrepreneur in Hank are pure Mark Twain, characteristically at war with himself. The fledgling stock exchange proves corrupt. The ingenious inventions include devastating weaponry. Resistance to Hank's agenda ignites a war. Twenty-five thousand men are killed by landmines, Gatling guns, and electrified fences. Rotting corpses spread disease and death. Hank returns to nineteenth-century Connecticut only to expire nostalgically remembering Arthurian times.

In his late writings, Twain's longtime preoccupation with the divided self takes increasingly corrosive forms. His unfinished dream stories inhabit an unfunny spectral realm. In *The Mysterious Stranger* (1906)—posthumously completed by Twain's literary executor Albert Bigelow Paine—Satan befriends a group of boys in sixteenth-century Austria. Like Faust's Mephistopheles, he transports them to other times and places. He also casually crushes miniature men with his finger and offhandedly promotes circumstances leading to misery and death. Satan preaches that man is diseased with a sadistic "moral sense" and that only animals are benign. In a final chapter discovered by his first biographer Albert Paine, he denies the existence of heaven and declares life "only a vision," a "grotesque and foolish dream."

In this company, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is supremely high and low, light and dark. It was denounced as vulgar and profane

—aggravating and perplexing its author. It even discomfited Livy and daughter Susy Clemens. Read today, its vignettes of squalor, meanness, and bigotry retain pertinence and power—albeit less so than its ethical core. At the heart of Huck Finn’s story—its enduring message and the signature of its artistic significance—is a moral epiphany.

Huck has run away and so has the slave Jim. They wind up together on a raft, sailing north on the Mississippi River toward Cairo, where Jim will be free. The linchpin is chapter fifteen. Huck, in a canoe, is separated from Jim and the raft in dense nocturnal fog. Their mutual disappearance, aggravated by swift currents, strikes fear in both boy and man. Only sporadically do they hear one another’s “whoops.” When they fortunately reunite, Huck pays a trick: he tells Jim he has been “dreaming,”

“ . . . I’ve been here all the time.”

Jim didn’t say nothing for about five minutes, but set there studying over it. Then he says:

“Well, den, I reck’n I did dream it, Huck; but dog my cats ef it ain’t de powerfulest dream I ever see. En I hain’t ever had no ream b’fo’ dat’s tired me like dis one.”

“Oh, well, that all right, because a dream does tire a body like everything, sometimes. But this one was a staving dream—tell me all about it, Jim.”

So Jim went to work and told me the whole thing right through, just as it happened, only he painted it up considerable. Then he said he must start in and ’terpret it, because it was sent for a warning. He said the first tow-head stood for a man that would try to do us some good, but the current was another man that would get us away from him. The whoops was warnings that would come to us every now and then, and if we didn’t try hard to make out to understand them they’d just take us into bad luck, ’stead of keeping us out of it. The lot of tow-heads was troubles we was going to get into with quarrelsome people and all kinds of mean folks, but if we minded our business and didn’t talk back and aggravate them, we would pull through and get out of the fog and into the big clear river, which was the free States, and wouldn’t have no more trouble.

Jim's dream interpretation is a sanguine life metaphor, ending in redemption. Huck now cites evidence that Jim's dream was no fantasy: leaves and rubbish on the raft, and a smashed oar. When Jim understands he has been deceived, he eyes Huck "without ever smiling" and says of the debris:

"What do dey stan' for? I's gwyne to tell you. When I go tall wore out wid work, en wid de callin' for you, en went to sleep, my heart wuz mos' broke bekase you wuz los', and I didn't k'yer no mo' what become er me en de raf.' En when I wake up en fine you back agin', all safe en soun', de tears come en I could a got down on my knees en kiss' yo'foot I's so thankful. En all you wuz thinkin' 'bout wuz how you could make a fool uv old Jim wid a lie. Dat truck dah is *trash*; en trash is what people is dat puts dirt on he head er dey fren's en makes 'em ashamed."

Huck reflects:

It was fifteen minutes before I could work myself up to go and humble myself to a nigger—but I done it, and I warn't ever sorry for it afterwards, neither. I didn't do him no more mean tricks, and I wouldn't done that one if I'd a knowed it would make him feel that way.

And so Huck's precocious early manhood is confirmed by a dawning realization that laws of the heart trump human laws such as those dictating that black men may be enslaved, and that slaves who escape be returned to their "masters." Also, Jim is revealed as a moral beacon—a source of wisdom; his existential metaphor, negating the fog, uplifts Huck and the reader both.

When *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* was banned as "trash" by the Concord (Massachusetts) Public Library, Twain commended the library for its "generous action," certain to impel people to buy the book and read it. The greater irony is that Huck's "trashy" vernacular and the novel's ethical core are bound as one. His faulty speech, his crude vocabulary, his deformed "conscience" at the mercy of prejudice and habit are what measure the moral distance traveled

when Huck decides to abet Jim's escape. In this boldest of his fictions, applying Mississippi flotsam and jetsam to the vagaries of universal human experience, Mark Twain is like Huck and Jim on the river: afloat, unmoored—and therefore creative. “Other places do seem so cramped up and smothery, but a raft don't,” Huck says. He also says, “We was always naked, day and night.” But the shore, with its thieves and slaves, was “enough to make a body ashamed of the human race.”



Extramusical content in a symphonic composition—events, personalities, ideas—is most typically purveyed by a “program”: a tacit scenario. The most popular practitioner of symphonic program music is Richard Strauss (*Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks*, *Don Juan*, *Don Quixote*, *A Hero's Life*, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, the *Alpine Symphony*, etc.—all of them stories in music). Less commonly, a composer will add words to a symphony in order to specify meaning. The best-known example is Beethoven's Ninth; setting Schiller's “Ode to Joy,” it is the very prototype of symphonic uplift. And then there are composers—not so many—who resort to encoded “messages in a bottle,” the best-known case being Dmitry Shostakovich. When Shostakovich quotes Wagner's *Götterdämmerung* in his Fifteenth Symphony, we realize he is referencing doom. When he quotes his initials DSCH—in German, Shostakovich is Schostakovich, and the notes D, G-flat, C, and B natural translate in German as D-S-C-H—we know he is musically describing some aspect of himself. There are also instances in which Shostakovich quotes well-known Russian songs—say, “Exhausted by the Hardships of Prison,” in the Eighth String Quartet—in order to impart meanings beyond the notes.

The reason we know Ives's Second Symphony anticipates this Shostakovich procedure is a 1943 letter to the conductor Artur Rodzinsky. Ives here links his symphony with the “fret and storm and stress for liberty” of the Civil War. Where the marches and dances of the symphony's finale abate for a plaintive horn theme citing Stephen Foster's “Old Black Joe,” Ives (according to his letter) finds inspiration in Foster's “sadness for the slaves.” (Foster's minstrel songs were sung

by whites in blackface—an abhorrent practice. But his compassion for the slave remains undeniable.

The passage in question—a lyric high point—is the second subject of the fifth movement (Meno allegro, cantabile, measure 58). When the tune returns in the recapitulation (measure 189), it is assigned to a solo cello (go to 4:28 of the Bernstein/Bavarian Radio performance of the finale on YouTube for a gorgeously distended rendition)—the horn and cello being instruments that strikingly evoke the male human singing voice. Foster’s tune, wordlessly sung by Ives, sets these words (which Ives assumes we know):

Gone are the days when my heart was young and gay
 Gone are the toils of the cotton fields away
 Gone to the fields of a better land I know
 I hear those gentle voices calling, “Old black Joe.”

I’m comin’, I’m comin’
 Though my head is bendin’ low
 I hear those gentle voices calling, “Old black Joe.”

Ultimately, this culminating movement of Ives’s Second takes a patriotic “victory” turn, climaxing with “Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean.” The closing measures add a bugle call: Reveille. And so Ives’s recourse to the vernacular not only secures an American flavor; it enables him to cite specific elements of the American experience.

These pregnant references are by no means unique to the Second Symphony. The “Black March” (1911) beginning Ives’s *Three Places in New England* memorializes Colonel Robert Gould Shaw’s legendary black Civil War regiment as depicted by Augustus Saint-Gaudens’s Boston Common bas-relief, with its proud black faces and striding black bodies. Shaw’s regiment perished heroically at Fort Wagner. Ives’s ghost-dirge is suffused with weary echoes of Civil War songs, plantation songs, minstrel songs: a dream distillation whose hypnotic tread celebrates an act of stoic fortitude.

Like Mark Twain’s Missouri childhood, Ives’s Connecticut childhood brought him into close contact with African American people.

During the Civil War Ives's father befriended a black boy, Anderson Brooks, whom he taught to read and write. Afterward, Ives's abolitionist grandmother took in Anderson Brooks and raised him. Ives liked to play "Give Me Jesus" at the piano; it reminded him of the gospel hymns he knew as a child. No less than Mark Twain's America, Charles Ives's America—and likewise his music—embraced the tragedy and turmoil of slavery and race.



Mark Twain, whose aural acuity enabled him to absorb and retain the drawling dialect—the musical speech—of a slave or frontier raconteur, played the piano, banjo, and guitar. At the keyboard, he would sing "Go Down, Moses," or "Old Folks at Home," or "Die Lorelei." Late in life, he purchased an Aeolian Orchestrelle—a kind of player organ—that rendered Beethoven, Schubert, and Wagner. The picture of Twain as music lover defies the usual portraiture. "I hate the very name of opera—partly because of the nights of suffering I have endured in its presence, and partly because I want to love it and can't," Twain recorded in his travel notebook in 1878. He also complained that *Lohengrin* "gave me a headache." And yet Twain had a favorite opera—*Tannhäuser*—whose hero is a blasphemous but repentant pariah.

Neither the Wagner festival at Bayreuth, nor Twain's Bayreuth visit of 1891 (the summer of the first Bayreuth *Tannhäuser*), was merely fashionable, as suggested in various biographical accounts. Twain at Bayreuth is, as ever, an upstart Yankee, at once proud and insecure. His innocence is half-feigned, half-authentic. He admires the Festspielhaus as a model of functional simplicity. He "browses" its "front yard." He approvingly observes that its patrons dress "as they please." He disapproves of the deference paid a German prince arriving casually at the last minute. Twain had last encountered *Tannhäuser* at the Metropolitan Opera under Anton Seidl. Of the third act at Bayreuth, beginning with the pilgrims' chorus, he records, "From that moment until the closing of the curtain it was music, just music—music to make one drunk with pleasure, music to make one take

scrip and staff and beg his way round the globe to hear it." Leaving Bayreuth for Bohemia, Twain declared his "musical regeneration" to be "accomplished and perfected"; on reflection, he had even enjoyed *Parsifal*. But then certain experts advised him that the singing he had heard was "third-rate." "Whenever I enjoy anything in art," he concludes, "it means that it is mighty poor."

Twain's dalliance with Wagner recapitulates his oscillation between New World and Old, his ironist's delight in incongruity. It also documents his vernacular humor, which appoints the New World the measure of all things. In *Huckleberry Finn*, Huck's drawl tweaks great moral and existential themes. In his Second Symphony, Ives's vernacular humor tweaks Bach, Brahms, and Wagner, all of whom he quotes. These borrowings—unlike those of tunes native to the United States—are always tangential. When, for instance, Bach pokes his nose into movement five (measure 147), the E minor Fugue from the *Well-Tempered Clavier*, book 1, becomes a straight man for slapstick, submerged by "Camptown Races." Vernacular musical humor takes a different twist in movement two, whose second subject appropriates a purposely inane college song (itself a parody of David Walker's hymn "The Hebrew Children"), now forgotten: "Where, O Where Are the Verdant Freshmen?"

Where, O where are the verdant Freshmen?
 Where, O where are the verdant Freshmen?
 Where, O where are the verdant Freshmen?
 Safe now in the Soph'more class.

Ives's version (measure 72, 9:36 in Bernstein's Munich performance), for paired flutes and oboes, is as mellifluous as its unlikely source is boisterously brisk. Elsewhere in the Second Symphony, Ives *is* boisterous—as playfully naughty as Tom Sawyer in the latter chapters of *Huckleberry Finn*. The pertinent imagery is of bands, picnics, childhood delights. The pertinent tunes (besides "Old Black Joe," "Camptown Races," "Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean," Reveille, "Where, O Where Are the Verdant Freshmen?") include "Turkey in the Straw," the fiddle tune "Pig Town Fling," Thomas Haynes Bayly's

“Long, Long Ago,” and Henry Clay Work’s Civil War song “Wake Nicodemus.” The symphony closes with a raucous guffaw. (J. Peter Burkholder’s indispensable *All Made of Tunes: Charles Ives and the Uses of Musical Borrowing* [1995] copiously documents the Second Symphony’s tunes and their deployment.)

A further vernacular ingredient of Ives’s Second has no equivalent in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*: hymns, sans irony. The reverential main theme of the symphony’s big slow movement is based upon “Beulah Land,” which Ives knew from the Methodist camp meetings of his childhood. He remembered “how the great waves of sound used to come through the trees, . . . sung by thousands of ‘let out’ souls. . . . There was power and exaltation in those great conclaves of sound from humanity.” Unlike Harmony Ives, Charles was not a conventional believer. “Many of the sincerest followers of Christ never heard of him,” he grumbled. But—unlike Mark Twain—he was religious by temperament. He aspired to exaltation. The dark side was not part of his art.



In Hartford, Mark Twain lived in a bifurcated mansion. The downstairs rooms were a genteel domain for Livy, whose duties included safeguarding her husband’s prose against violations of good taste. The top floor was reserved for billiards, whiskey, and cigars. Twain’s fictions likewise inhabit two worlds. They look fondly backward toward childhood and early adulthood, toward the river and the West; they equally limn an unknown future, a gathering storm. *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is two books, the second of which, commencing with Tom Sawyer’s cheerful arrival, is as harmless as the first is disturbed. (I am aware that this interpretation contradicts present-day revisionist readings.)

Though he would fantasize about a second lifetime piloting the Mississippi, the mature Mark Twain craved respectability in the cultural citadels of the northeast. Livy was the daughter of a New York State coal and iron mogul. Hartford was per capita America’s most affluent city. Their three-story home of nineteen rooms featured

indoor plumbing, furnishings and mantelpieces opulently inlaid and carved, and a semicircular glass conservatory fronting the library.

No part of Charles Ives craved respectability. His marriage to Harmony Twichell had nothing to do with social mobility. Their Connecticut home was comfortable but private. Ives feared complicity in the genteel parlor world of Livy Clemens's downstairs rooms. A warm-hearted, compassionate man, he cloaked his softness with a bristling demeanor. His music, over time, acquired new depth of feeling and an ever-sharper edge.

Huckleberry Finn was Mark Twain's peak achievement. He ventured no further in refashioning the novel as a New World genre. His later, estranged writings were increasingly fragmentary. Charles Ives looked back upon his Second Symphony as a mild early effort. He ventured quickly toward more radical appropriations of the European genres. His *Concord Piano Sonata* (1916–1919) and *Fourth Symphony* (1912–1925) retain in spirit the symphony and sonata as developed by Beethoven and his successors. But they dispense with sonata form and other structural templates the German composers deployed. Rather, they key on what Ives once termed the “ever-flowing stream partly biological, partly cosmic, ever going on in ourselves, in nature, in all life.”

William James had coined “stream of consciousness” in his *Principles of Psychology* (1890). James's fascination with the evolutionary flow of mental attention owes something to the Transcendentalist epistemology of Emerson and Thoreau—itsself rooted in German Romanticism and Eastern mysticism. Ives was at all times a devotee of the Transcendentalists. The four movements of his “Sonata—Concord, Mass., 1845” extol the Concord bards. Movement one, “Emerson,” is dense, dissonant, striving. In his *Essays Before a Sonata* (1920), Ives writes, “We see him standing on a summit, at the door of the infinite. . . peering into the mysteries of life, contemplating the eternities, hurling back whatever he discovers there.” “Hawthorne,” coming next, is presented as a poet of the supernatural. Ives conceives a cinematic phantasmagoria ranging from haunted churchyard strains to a demonic circus parade. “The Alcotts,” a hymn to ordinary things,

records Beth Alcott at the parlor piano, transmuting Beethoven's Fifth into a hymn. "Thoreau" is a contemplative nature poem culminating with the shudder of tolling bells heard at a distance over Walden Pond—a vibratory ecstasy. Here the four-note Beethoven motto, pervasive throughout, sublimates as a "human faith melody."

Ives's kinship to Beethoven in the *Concord* Sonata takes other forms. The spirit of heroic adventure is Beethoven's. Emerson, as understood by Ives, is himself a Beethoven cognate. The sonata's ethereal close evokes Beethoven's late piano sonatas op. 109 and 111. For Beethoven, the Fifth Symphony's pounding motto is "fate knocking at the door." For Ives, the motto conveys a sanguine moral imperative: "the soul of humanity knocking at the door of the Divine mysteries, radiant in the faith it *will* be opened—and the human become the Divine!" Ives's four-movement plan may somewhat resemble a traditional sonata format, with "The Alcotts" in the slow-movement slot. But the whole German machinery of key relations and developmental argument, retained in Ives's Second Symphony, is here overturned. There are no key signatures or metered rhythms. There is no regularity of bar lines. Stream of consciousness is the intended impression.

Ives's Symphony no. 4 is his final grand exercise in charting an "ever-flowing stream" both personal and cosmic. As in Beethoven's Ninth, a sung text—"Watchman, tell us of the night"—interpolates the sacred. The finale's gathering current is oceanic: an upward wave.



Emerson's poem "Music" reads:

'Tis not in the high stars alone,
Nor in the cups of budding flowers,
Nor in the redbreast's mellow tone,
Nor in the bow that smiles in showers,
But in the mud and scum of things
There always, always something sings.

Emerson also wrote, in praise of the vernacular: "The language of the street is always strong. . . . I confess to some pleasure from the

stinging rhetoric of a rattling oath in the mouth of truckmen and teamsters. How laconic and brisk it is by the side of a page of the *North American Review*.”

Charles Ives surely knew these Emerson writings. They inspired such passages in Ives’s *Essays Before a Sonata* as,

Like all courageous souls, the higher Emerson soars, the more lowly he becomes. . . . To think hard and deeply and to say what is thought, regardless of consequences, may produce a first impression, either of great translucence, or of great muddiness, but in the latter there may be hidden possibilities. Some accuse Brahms’s orchestration of being muddy. This may be a good name for a first impression of it. But if it should seem less so, he might not be saying what he thought. The mud may be a form of sincerity. . . . A clearer scoring might have lowered the thought. Carlyle told Emerson that some of his paragraphs didn’t cohere. Emerson wrote by sentence or phrases, rather than by logical sequence.

Emerson “wings the neck of any law,” writes Ives. His “messages are all vital, as much by reason of his indefiniteness, as in spite of it.” This is because “orderly reason does not always have to be a visible part of all great things.” “Initial coherence to-day may be dullness to-morrow probably because formal or outward unity depends so much on repetitions, sequences, antitheses, paragraphs with inductions and summaries.” “Read where you will, each [Emerson] sentence seems not to point to the next but to the undercurrent of all.”

There is no “mud” in Ives’s *Symphony no. 2*, not to mention such earlier Ives compositions as his German lied “*Feldeinsamkeit*”—a student exercise, at Yale, so finished that it actually bears comparison with Brahms’s famous setting of the same Hermann Allmers poem. But the *Concord Sonata* and *Fourth Symphony* waded in mud and “the scum of things.” Striving mightily for “sincerity,” both these great works forego “translucence” and “orderly reason” in favor of a protean “indefiniteness.” They eschew “formal unity” imposed by repetition and sequence. In fact, its composer arguably regarded the much-revised *Concord* as a permanent work in progress.

Notwithstanding the evidence of his earlier, more finished compositions, Ives's mature "vagueness" of style was judged a prevailing weakness by many a schooled modernist who otherwise admired Ives's quest. A 1944 encomium by Elliott Carter acknowledged, "Ives is always in quest of the transcendental. On the surface of his work, the infinite complexity of nature, the rapidly changing moods of forest and plain, the web of counterbalancing forces appear confused and dissociated. But Ives's involved texture, while mirroring this superficial confusion, at the same time attempts to show the larger harmony of rhythm behind the natural process." But in the same breath Carter—whose own music seeks precisely to notate and regulate its "infinite complexity"—questioned Ives's technical capacity. Leonard Bernstein, in the same breath that he championed Ives's Second Symphony, called its composer an "authentic primitive." Bernstein never conducted the Symphony no. 4.

The "unfinished" in Ives adduces a final point of affinity with Mark Twain. While there is no "mud" in *Huckleberry Finn*, this deepest of Twain's fictions is assuredly "unfinished." Tom Sawyer's elaborate plot to free Jim, which he pursues despite knowing that Miss Watson's will has already made Jim a free man, is a crippling non sequitur. Undermining the gravitas of Jim's enslavement and the probability of Huck's epiphany, it discloses an authorial loss of control. With his chronic contradictions, Twain is, altogether, an unfinished artist, one who never produced a wholly consummated magnum opus.

A larger American trope here in play is the self-made imperfect genius. Emerson, Whitman, and Melville are ancestors of Ives, who disdained formal tutelage beyond his studies with Parker at Yale; who considered his bandmaster father his truest teacher; who cautioned against the dangers of a "superimposed idiomatic [musical] education" that may not fit a composer's "constitution."

Consider the antithesis between Mark Twain and Henry James. Of James's novels, Twain quipped: "Once you put [one] down, you simply can't pick it up." Ives, in *Essays Before a Sonata*, rebuked James for calling Thoreau "provincial" and "parochial." While Twain and Ives were proud American pioneers, James brilliantly heeded Old-World

courtly muses from a fresh vantage point—not as an innocent abroad, but as a worldly expatriate fascinated by the juxtaposition of parent and offspring cultures. Or consider the most gifted American painter of the day, his longtime friend John Singer Sargent, born in Tuscany and schooled in Paris. A prodigious technician, Sargent was a victim or beneficiary of his uncanny facility and irremediable elegance.

In American music, there is no finished fin-de-siècle composer remotely of James's or Sargent's stature. The closest candidate is Boston's George Whitefield Chadwick, schooled in Leipzig and Munich. Chadwick's Yankee saltiness was not wholly refined by German training and methodology; his "Symphonic Sketch" *Jubilee* (1895) vividly connects to Tom Sawyer and to Winslow Homer's "Cracking the Whip." But it is ultimately too tame—or too tamed—to attain an emblematic panache. The most successful American composer of Chadwick's generation, forgotten today, was Charles Martin Loeffler, court musician to Isabella Stewart Gardner and hence part of Sargent's high-toned Boston milieu. Born in Prussia, raised in Alsace, Russia, Hungary, and Switzerland, Loeffler was a Francophile aesthete (he even falsified his birthplace as Alsatian) whose tendencies to decadence were (like Sargent's) too mild to matter. Unlike Sargent's, his deracinated personal and creative identity undermines his art.

James, Sargent, and Loeffler lack the mythic American traits described by Frederick Jackson Turner's "frontier thesis" of 1893: "Coarseness and strength combined," "restless nervous energy," "dominant individualism." They fit Emerson, Whitman, Melville. Also the vernacular expression of Mark Twain and Charles Ives.