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MARK TWAIN AND THE UNITED KINGDOM: A PECULIAR RELATIONSHIP?

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Only scattered pieces remain of the project of a travelogue on England that Mark Twain planned in the wake of *The Innocents Abroad* (1869), the bestseller that had established him as a renowned traveler-writer. The baffling renouncement may be found in the author's self-confessed unwillingness to water down his usual caustic humor in the context of the hearty welcome he received as soon as his first trip to the United Kingdom. Attentive readers, though, may find such explanation frustrating, given Twain's sometimes ruthless treatment of other countries he also held in great esteem, as was the case with India in *Following the Equator* (1897).

In order to analyze the question of Twain's puzzling treatment of the United Kingdom in the context of his travel writing, this paper starts by providing a mostly factual presentation of his stays in the United Kingdom before concentrating on the textual aspect, highlighting the particular importance of London in the author's assertion of himself among the greatest literary masters.

Keywords: Mark Twain, United Kingdom, England, London, travel writing, monuments, pun, death, literary recognition

Mark Twain intended to write a travel book on England as early as 1870, in the vein of *The Innocents Abroad* (1869), which had already made him an international celebrity. Though his New York publisher encouraged him in this direction, he quickly abandoned the idea; his usually extensive correspondence contains large ellipses on this subject. The very chronology of some journeys may prove puzzling, insofar as some biographers, critics and exegetes have left conflicting information difficult to untangle. As for the few notes that have been found and the few texts that have been published, they nevertheless demonstrate that Twain had enough material to write an irreverent book, as he did about most of the countries and regions he traveled around the world.

On the whole, his production reveals ambivalence in his perception of the United Kingdom. In spite of his critical stance, however, his writing appears largely self-

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censored due to his avowed gratitude for the natives' warm hospitality. Several versions of the rare fragments that remain of his project may be found in books or on the Internet, but whole paragraphs may be missing from one publication to another and titles may differ. That is why this paper will begin with a mostly factual presentation of Twain's stays in the United Kingdom before focusing on the specific role of London and more particularly its monuments in Twain's definition of himself as a writer among his peers.

1 Twain's stays in the United Kingdom

Twain made his first trip to England in 1872, which coincided with the publication of *Roughing It*: "I took a sudden notion to go to England and get materials for a book about that not-sufficiently-known country. It was my purpose to spy out the land in a very private way, and complete my visit without making any acquaintances." (Twain 2013: 434) The attentive reader will note two essential characteristics of Twain's style: irony first, insofar as only particularly ignorant implied implicit readers could really think that England could be so misunderstood. We also note the author's tendency to present himself as an innocent with disarming pretensions: his fame and the luxury of his travels at the time hardly predisposed him to total discretion. Here, for example, is a photo of the Langham Hotel in London, where he stayed on several occasions:



Picture 1¹

Between 1872 and 1874 Twain made three trips to England, intended to serve several functions: holding conferences, collecting notes for his writing project and providing him with the opportunity to correspond for the *New York Herald*. Given the absence of true protection for published works, his greatest concern, however, was to find a solution to the thorny issue of his copyright in England. Twain was always

¹ <http://www.clubhouseonwheels.com/search?q=langham>, circa 1899, accessed May 3, 2022.

extremely attentive to financial matters, and went through several very difficult periods in this regard. His investment in the failed Paige Compositor project (the manufacture of a printing machine) led him into debt between 1880 and the mid-1890s. Notwithstanding his entrepreneurial temperament, bad decisions accumulated and at the same time he and his nephew had set up their own publishing house in New York. Neither of them had any real experience in the field and Twain was the sole financial manager. Despite the notable success of the publication of President Grant's memoir, debts piled up and bankruptcy ensued in 1894. Twain was left with no other choice than to go on a lecture tour around the world in July 1895, which led him to write *Following the Equator* (1897) in England.

Twain took three trips to England between 1872 and 1874. His first stay, from August till November 1872 (alone, this time) led him to realize that he was considered a leading author. Very little is known about his travels there and hardly any information may be gathered from the epistolary exchanges with his family. His visits to Brighton, Crystal Palace or the Tower of London, for instance, are barely mentioned. Later on, the account of his stay in Salisbury at Christmas time was restricted to culinary or aesthetic comments about the delicacy of the dishes. From May to October 1873, Twain traveled with his wife and Suzy, their baby daughter. They went to Scotland and stayed in Edinburgh for a month. The only letter that mentions the journey reveals the great impression York made on him as they stopped in the North of England. It is also known that they went to Ireland. A few days before his return to the United States, Twain gave a week-long lecture on the Sandwich Islands (the former name of Hawaii) at the Queen's Concert Rooms, Hanover Square (next to the Langham Hotel):



Picture 2²

² "Broadside announcement of Clemens's lectures – London, October 1873"
<https://bancroft.berkeley.edu/Exhibits/MTP/england.html>, accessed December 2021.

At the time, the Queen's Concert Rooms was the largest hall in the capital and Twain's audience was very large. The organizer of these conferences had previously worked for Dickens. As with every visit, Twain met prominent intellectuals, artists and politicians: "If Mark Twain had been a lion on his first visit, he was little less than royalty now. His rooms at the Langham were like a court. [...] Robert Browning, Turgenieff, Sir John Millais, Lord Houghton, and Sir Charles Dilke [...] were among those that called to pay their respects."³ (Paine 2004: XC)

When the family returned to Hartford, CT, from the second British journey, he stayed at home for barely three days and was back at the Langham Hotel on his own from November 1873 to January 1874. He gave a long series of lectures, which began again with his travels in Hawaii, then gave way to the adventures recounted in *Roughing It*. Five years later, the travel diaries indicate that the Twain family's European trip took them to Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Austria, France, Belgium, Holland and England.

Twain stayed in London from July to September 1879, where he had a brief meeting with Lewis Carroll. He traveled here and there and met several leading artistic and intellectual figures such as Sir John Everett Millais, near Shrewsbury, and Darwin, who was staying at Windermere.

Between 1879 and 1900, he went to the UK several times, sometimes for long stays. In this context, at the end of his world tour in 1896, Twain spent eleven months in England writing *Following the Equator*, his last travel book.⁴ That process turned out to be a descent into hell, since as soon as he returned from his trip, his wife and daughter (Clara) had to leave immediately, having learned about Suzy's rapidly declining health. She died of meningitis a few days before her mother and sister returned, and Twain was left to live alone in Chelsea. Very few people even knew his address, which was a radical change from the hectic social life the family had previously experienced in London. He then traveled to Switzerland and Vienna and returned to London for a month and a half before leaving for Sweden, staying in London again between late September 1899 and October 1900.

Besieged by health problems in the years that followed, Twain vowed to be done with his extensive travels but could not resist crossing the Atlantic again in 1907,

³ Twain also met Herbert Spencer in the course of that stay (Paine 2004: XC), as well as Bram Stoker in 1907 (Paine 2004: CCLVII).

⁴ In England, *Following the Equator* was published under the title *More Tramps Abroad*, with a slightly different text.

having been awarded an honorary doctorate from Oxford University. Though he had received the same distinction in 1901 at Yale and the following year at the University of Missouri, the impact of Oxford's recognition of his writing career was beyond measure. He was flattered in the highest degree. The ceremony took place on June 26 and he stayed in England from June 18 to July 13.



Picture 3⁵

It was probably his most emotional trip and he would often proudly don his Oxford robe for official and personal occasions, as appears in the following picture of Clara's wedding:



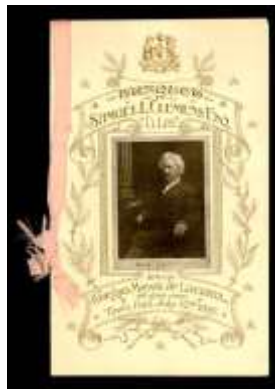
Picture 4⁶

Among the Oxford recipients were his friend Kipling, Camille Saint Saëns and Rodin. Twain stayed in England for a total of four weeks and this last trip was another opportunity for him to be at the center of prestigious festive events such as the Garden

⁵ https://photos.state.gov/libraries/amgov/4110/week_1/050610_oxford-500.jpg, accessed January 10, 2021.

⁶ "Clara and OssipGabrilowitsch wedding portrait with Mark Twain, Jervis Langdon, Jean Clemens and Joseph Twichell," Mark Twain Archive, Gannett-Tripp Library, Elmira College, https://marktwainstudies.com/archival_collection/clara-and-ossip-gabrilowitsch-wedding-portrait-with-mark-twain-jervis-langdon-jean-clemens-and-joseph-twichell/, accessed December 3, 2021.

Party at Windsor Castle where he met, among other prestigious figures, King Edward VII and the Queen, the Prince of Wales (who would become George V) and the King and Prince of Siam. He was also received at the House of Lords and the House of Commons and photographed there by Sir Benjamin Stone, a Conservative politician who was to be appointed official photographer for the coronation of King George V and Queen Mary in 1911. His autobiography attests that he was particularly fond of such official occasions (“I like these large attentions.” [Twain 2015: 399]). Hence, for instance, his quoting in full the prolix and dithyrambic speech of the Mayor of Liverpool who received him with great pomp a few weeks later, as well as the conclusion of his own equally long and emphatic reply. Here is the poster of the event, where he appears as the star of the evening:



Picture 6⁷

During this stay in England, Twain met George Bernard Shaw, the first time very briefly at St. Pancras station, a burlesque interview reported by the press. Later, Bernard Shaw recalled their lunch in London with emotion.⁸ Twain’s popularity was then at its peak; his schedule was overloaded with all sorts of invitations, for formal dinners, visits, or speeches, which led him to recruit two secretaries to handle visitors and mail.

Despite his enthusiasm, Twain never wrote the book on England he had originally planned. In September 1872, a letter to his wife shows him complaining about a hectic social life, not at all conducive to writing: “Confound this town, time slips relentlessly away, & I accomplish next to nothing. Too much company—too much dining—too much sociability.” (Twain 1997: 155-6) Two years later, a letter to a New York newspaper

⁷<https://bancroft.berkeley.edu/Exhibits/MTP/Images/mt34.jpg>, accessed December 3, 2021.

⁸ The meeting led to the creation of a play in 2011.

confirmed that the English hospitality that filled him with pleasure was hardly conducive to writing a travel book comparable to *The Innocents Abroad* or *Roughing It*: "There may be no serious indelicacy about eating a gentleman's bread & then printing an appreciative & complimentary account of the ways of his family, but still it is a thing which one naturally dislikes to do." (Twain 2002: 167)

2 London and its illusory monuments

Among Twain's notes is a very short text which, in the vein of a folk tale, says much about the symbolic significance of the character:

There was once an American thief who fled his country & took refuge in England, & he dressed himself after the fashion of the Londoners & taught his tongue the peculiarities of the London pronunciation and did his best in all ways to pass himself for a native—but he did two fatal things: he stopped at the Langham hotel, & the first trip he took was to visit Stratford-on-Avon & the grave of Shakspeare—& these things betrayed his nationality. (Twain 1872-1873: Introduction)

This barely veiled reference to Twain himself as a character of proven travels reveals his inescapable condition of stranger in his favorite country. Far from finding his place in the land of his ancestors, Twain is doomed to define himself by his Americanness: outside the United States, he is inevitably distinguished by the lavishness of his lifestyle and the predictable nature of his admiration for Shakespeare, presented as a typical American tourist cliché. The heart of Twain's identity problem in the United Kingdom lies in the acceptance of his literary status, which involves both the recognition of England's universal genius, of which Shakespeare is the quintessential expression, and the impossible overcoming of an Americanness that is both liberating and constraining.

When Twain was joined in London by his wife and daughter Jean in 1900, the family moved to Dollis House, a magnificent estate north of the city next to Gladstone Park. He held it as a corner of paradise, both close to the center and isolated in nature:



Picture 7 (Twain 2013: plates 5)

The house had been home to Gladstone, the famous prime minister, which amazed Twain but also puzzled him, since Dollis House did not have a telephone. He took the opportunity to point out what he saw as the city's problematic relationship with the technological advances of his time, and to deduce a characteristically humorous political salient: "In London, telephones are scarcer than churches. Perhaps it is because the service is substantially a monopoly in the hands of the Postal Department—a Department which is supernaturally and even superstitiously conservative." (Twain 2013: 449) There followed a ruthless condemnation of the postal system, culminating in that of London's address pattern: "I suppose it was a madman who invented the London system of indicating addresses. Obscuring them, is the exacter phrase." (452) A few lines down, a sentence hammers in the message: "The town is a vast planless cobweb of criss-cross and helter-skelter streets which begin nowhere, end nowhere, and travel in no particular direction, but wander around aimless and indifferent." (452) That passage may strike the attentive reader as a telltale poetic moment, as the same sentence, highlighted, establishes:

The town is a **vast** planless cobweb of **criss-cross** and helter-skelter **streets** which begin nowhere, end nowhere, and travel in no particular direction, but wander around aimless and indifferent.

When combined, the accents and sounds of the sentence flawlessly resonate with the message of the previous one. The beginning sounds like a succession of disordered strikes, through which one may perceive a sketch of poetic structuring. At the rhythmic level, we note that after an effect of calm initially produced by the original unstressed syllables ["the **town** is a **vast**"], the reader-listener is immediately lost in a short chaotic moment where the accents combine with aggressive alliterations that sometimes accelerate the rhythm and sometimes slow it down ["planless cobweb of

criss-cross and helter-**skelter streets**”], until a strange and welcome calm is reached [“**wander around aimless and indifferent**”]. Twain thus manages to transcribe the tranquil and paradisiacal world of Dollis House, which one gets to reach despite the spidery maze of the London streets, which at times can zigzag “s”-like in this simple sentence, leading to a calm “indifference.”

Both lost and happy in this relative chaos, Twain found little to celebrate in London’s architecture. He did, however, claim to have found a few monuments that could bring to this “battered and blackened old city” (Twain 1962: 171) a beauty that it otherwise sorely lacked. Such is the case with St. Paul’s Cathedral, the Albert Memorial and Westminster Abbey. To account for these three major landmarks of the British capital, bearers of emblematic values, Twain adopts the point of view of the ignorant tourist that structures all his travel books. In the case of St. Paul’s Cathedral and the Albert Memorial, no trace of aesthetic emotion softens the sarcasm. The description of the cathedral is more or less limited to the implacable evocation, duly quantified, of obscure details in a few areas devoid of interest—and to that of the architects concerned, with complete addresses. Here is a brief overview of this encyclopedic parody:

Upon arriving at Saint Paul’s, the first thing that bursts upon the beholder is the back yard. This fine work of art is forty-three feet long by thirty-four and a half feet wide – and all enclosed with real iron railings. The pavement is of fine oolite, or skylight, or some other stone of that geologic period, and is laid almost flat on the ground, in places. The stones are exactly square, and it is thought that they were made so by design [...]. (Twain 1962: 174)

By unveiling the dark side of the cathedral as the main part of the monument while pointing out its total lack of interest, Twain debunks its pretentiousness and implies the arrogance of its nationalist and imperialist foundations. He gives the same treatment to the last monarch of the Stuart dynasty—Anne, Queen of England and Scotland (united as Great Britain during her reign in 1707), and Queen of Ireland (1702-1714). The statue of the Queen, placed prominently at the front of the cathedral, is described as that of a “black woman which is said to have resembled Queen Anne, in some respects” and boasts its shoddy workmanship: “[t]he rigidity of the drapery has been much admired.” (178) It is notable that the woman—not the statue itself—is black in color, which creates an analogical relationship between the

queen and her city, and therefore between her and the country, as well as between her and the empire, the whole united in a dreary gray, cadaverous "rigidity."

When Twain described the Albert Memorial in 1872, the monument was not yet complete, since the statue of Prince Albert was added in 1875. The following photograph shows the monument without the statue, close to its condition when Twain discovered it:



Picture 8⁹

"One group represented Asia [...] Another group represents Europe [...] A third group represents America [...] The fourth group represents Africa [...] every little detail is perfect." (Twain 1962: 171-2) Surprisingly, no irony is detectable here in the imperialist display of the monument, which, unlike St. Paul's Cathedral, eventually elicits a quasi-lyrical flight: "The fringes that depend from the camels' covering fall as limp and pliant as if they were woven instead of chiseled; no 'prentice work is visible anywhere." (172) In the eyes of the narrator-traveler-aesthete, the suppleness of the covers of these camels constitutes an undeniable relief after "the rigidity of the cloths" of Queen Anne. The relative sensuality of this detail is combined with the evocation of the marble statues of "all the mighty poets, painters, architects the ages have given to the world—Homer, Virgil, Dante, Michael Angelo, Raphael—all the world's supremely gifted men." (172) Twain's enthusiasm is at its peak when he is asked to guess to whom the monument was dedicated. For him, it can only be to the greatest genius of the nation, who still stands tall in the eyes of the world by the scope of his vibrant marble tribute: "it is Shakespeare! Glory to old England!" (172) Upon hearing his companion tell him the identity of the character so ostentatiously celebrated, Twain's

⁹ "The Albert Memorial," unknown photographer, <http://www.19thcenturyphotos.com/The-Albert-Memorial-124904.htm>, accessed February 1, 2022.

sarcasm is not related to the aesthetic quality of the work, but to the emptiness of the message: "The finest monument in the world erected to glorify—the *Commonplace*. It is the most genuinely humorous idea I have met with in this grave land." (173) The huge Royal Albert Hall, built just across the street the year before, also generates admiring comments about its luxurious decoration and design, intended for the ruling classes, before concluding with an even more scathing remark: "This palatial place is called Albert Hall, and was erected as just one more testimonial to departed mediocrity." (174)

Twain's ferocity does not condemn national values wholesale; it castigates the governing elites who shamelessly misappropriate them. This is what happens in his analysis of the historical manipulation he perceives in the exergue of the Albert Memorial:

"QUEEN VICTORIA AND HER PEOPLE
TO THE MEMORY OF ALBERT, PRINCE CONSORT,
AS A TRIBUTE OF THEIR GRATITUDE
FOR A LIFE DEVOTED TO THE PUBLIC GOOD." (174)

The devastating text ends with a re-evaluation of the historical truth, which involves a rewriting of the official message:

Doubtless the Prince designed this monument himself, and intended to put on it this inscription:

"PRINCE ALBERT TO THE QUEEN AND HER PEOPLE,
AS A TRIBUTE OF HIS GRATITUDE FOR
INCALCULABLE BENEFITS CONFERRED UPON HIM." (174)

The writer's imagination thus becomes the poetic instrument of a necessary revision of history, by giving the pale monarchical and political icons their rightful place, that of the foils of the true geniuses—whose light they usurp.

Though only a few pages survive of the adventures that should have made up the planned book on England—or, probably, on the United Kingdom—there remains a fully completed account, published in a collection in 1874:



Picture 9¹⁰

“A Memorable Midnight Experience” recounts a nighttime visit to Westminster Abbey, in perfect harmony with the style and obsessions developed in each of Twain’s travel books. Told in a gothic vein, we discover the author visiting the abbey in the middle of the night, in cold and sepulchral darkness. Heir to a long line of specialists, his guide knows the place like the back of his hand and is an expert in the history of England. He is a scholarly version of the many tourist guides who, during the travels of the persona “Twain,” attest to the transformation of historical landmarks into consumer products. Twain enters the darkness without knowing where he is going, which is typical of the London effect already mentioned about Dollis House: “I am always lost in London, day and night” (4). When the name of the place is revealed to him, his reaction speaks volumes about its emotional power of the latter:

“It is the tomb of the great dead of England—WESTMINSTER ABBEY!”

!

(One cannot express a start—in words.) (4)

The presence of the exclamation mark in the middle (much larger than the previous one) is characteristic of the effect of the sublime, which prevents the one who experiences it from expressing what he feels, and who nevertheless tries to attempt the impossible. The physical immensity of the place, until then hardly guessed, added to the sudden discovery of its funereal dimension, seizes Twain according to a whole palette of symptoms defined by Burke, the great theorist of the sublime:

¹⁰ Front page, *Number One. Mark Twain’s Sketches*. New York: American News Company, 1874.

The passion caused by the great and sublime [...] is astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it. Hence arises the great power of the sublime, that, far from being produced by them, it anticipates our reasonings, and hurries us on by an irresistible force. Astonishment [...] is the effect of the sublime in its highest degree; the inferior effects are admiration, reverence, and respect. (Burke 1806: 77-78)

Twain's astonishment at the solemnity of the English darkness of this Gothic temple is a chaotic amalgam where admiration for the dead, veneration of their symbolic power and respect for their memory are combined. At the same time a religious, royal, political and artistic necropolis, a sanctuary and a battlefield, the abbey is also a place where the bodies of famous figures disappear and reappear, sometimes in grotesque forms. This is how, after a series of incredible adventures worthy of an American tall-tale, the poet and playwright Ben Jonson, originally buried upright in "eighteen inches of English ground," (Twain 1874: 5) now seems to be scattered in three places in the abbey, one for each of his heads. The abbey is thus above all a theater stage, where history and imagination merge to make up the British spectacle. At the heart of the latter lies the illusory character of human destiny, irremediably doomed to death and driven by vanity. One recognizes here the Shakespearean message par excellence, sketched in the text of the playwright's statue, extracted from *The Tempest* (1611 - IV, 1), which Twain reproduces entirely. An obsessive writer of visits to places and events dedicated to death (such as necropolises, cemeteries, crypts, ossuaries, catacombs, funerals and cremations), Twain presents himself as an heir to Shakespeare. That is why, when the guide presents him with "a really nice place - very comfortable" because "there's nothing down there, nothing at all," Twain immediately feels "shivers down his spine" (6). His instinctive reaction is due to the fact that he finds himself in the presence of an empty tomb, which, given the sense of identification conveyed by the visit, amounts to contemplating his own grave, which is itself condemned to an inevitable disappearance. The horror associated with the visit to this monument, more than any other dedicated to expressing the essence of the nation, does not, however, anesthetize the visitor's other senses. The darkness leads him to feel the surroundings, which leads him to a completely unexpected emotion:

I touched a cold object, and stopped to feel its shape. I made out a thumb, and then delicate fingers. It was the clasped, appealing hands of one of those reposing images—a lady, a queen. I touched the face—by accident, not design—and shuddered inwardly, if not outwardly; and then something rubbed against my leg, and I shuddered outwardly and inwardly both. (6-7)

This short passage contains enough puns to transform this seemingly innocuous moment into a truly erotic experience, through the systematic use of double entendre:

I touched a cold object, and stopped to feel its shape. I **made out** a thumb, and then delicate fingers. It was the clasped, **appealing** hands of one of those reposing images—a lady, a queen. I touched the face—**by accident, not design**—and **shuddered inwardly**, if not **outwardly**; and then something rubbed against my leg, and I **shuddered outwardly** and **inwardly** both.

The tactile discovery of the statue's thumb is expressed by the verb "to make out," which means "to distinguish" as well as "to get laid"; the hands of this English aristocrat are "appealing" that is, both "delicate" and "attractive." Twain insists that he touches the face "by accident, not design," revealing that he intended his reader to perceive the ambiguous connotation of the situation. The latter provokes a quiver in Twain, who suspects that his expression "shudder" will potentially be interpreted as an erotic sensation: indeed, he makes the meaning clear: "inward," not "outward," which in the reader may create the fleeting mental image of the coming and going of coitus (inward, then outward), an image fully confirmed by the fact that a rubbing on his leg continues the movement, from outward to inward. The prosaic explanation of the situation does little to appease the strong suspicion of an erotic and quasi-necrophilic interpretation of this fleeting moment: "It was the cat. The friendly creature meant well, but as the English say, she gave me *'such a turn.'*" (7, emphasis mine) The beautiful fantasized English lady is transformed into a cat, or rather into a "puss" (7), as indicated by the pronoun "she." "Puss" being often used as a shorter form of "pussy," the latter being a slang term for a woman's genitals, Twain's "she gave me *'such a turn'*" may actually be rephrased as "she turned me on."

Sexual puns were very common in English literature, of which many of the occupants of Westminster were masters. Shakespeare, present by his statue and his text, was one of the most brilliant experts. The victory of Eros over Thanatos to which

we are invited through bathos is a matter of comic relief, and confers legitimacy on Twain as a poet among his peers.

Conclusion

The United Kingdom composes an essential dimension of the work of travel and of fiction, through the historical, political and philosophical reflections aroused by the discovery of the colonial empire. The absence of the English book that was originally planned and that may be detected here and there in the rare "English Notes" forms a relative enigma. The fact that Twain wrote about English hospitality is to be taken seriously, as it falls under the aphorism delivered a few decades later by André Gide: "It is with noble sentiments that bad literature gets written."¹¹ Nevertheless, attentive Twain readers, who recall the many instances in which the traveler hardly bothered with such consideration, may find this respectful caution somewhat frustrating. That is why the specificity of the United Kingdom in the author's personal journey should also be given the greatest attention. His many trips and stays show an undeniable attraction for that country, which he definitely did not consider like the others. In other countries, he always presented himself as an irreducible foreigner; in the United Kingdom, he was hardly a tourist. That is probably why he did not feel the need to write about the account of his discovery, just as he did not write stories specifically dedicated to the places he inhabited in the United States when he was an established author. In the United Kingdom as in the United States, Twain devoted his time to essential activities related to his profession, primarily the protection of his copyrights, writing (especially *Following the Equator*), lecturing and networking.

His recognition by Oxford University is one of the peaks of his career, putting an end to an inferiority complex linked not only to his American origins, but also and above all to his lack of academic training. It is in that context that Westminster Abbey, the symbolic heart of the United Kingdom and its colonial empire, is also one of the *omphaloi* of Twain's travel oeuvre. He thus literally transforms it into what in French is named a *tombeau*—both a tomb for his glorious predecessors and a poetic composition in their honor. To a great extent, his respectful and whimsical tribute to the country that was instrumental in building his international fame bears relevance to himself. The comic, irreverent—almost sacrilegious—power of his distinctive

¹¹ "C'est avec les beaux sentiments qu'on fait de la mauvaise littérature," André Gide, *Journal: 1939-1949. Souvenirs*. Paris: Gallimard, Volume 54, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1954, p. 52.

cemetery-theater is characteristic of the permanence of a constant, grandiose and pathetic ambition for symbolic mastery of death.

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