

Mark Twain's Eavesdropping on Suppressed Voices:  
Female Colloquialism, Vernacular, Profanity,  
Private Letters, and Diaries

By Yuko Yamamoto

We have long misunderstood Mark Twain. We had believed that Mark Twain was a writer of original Americans, which means naturally male Americans. Joel Chandler Harris, a renowned folklorist and Twain's friend, praised Twain as "an author who has had the genius to be original, and the courage to give a distinctively American flavor to everything he has ever written."<sup>1</sup> Definitely Harris meant the "American flavor" of *men* which Twain gave to "everything he has ever written."

In addition Peter Stoneley in "Mark Twain and Gender" validates the claim that "Twain should automatically be identified with other men" (66):

Such was Twain's fame that, when he died in 1910, numerous cartoons were published in newspapers and journals to mark his passing. The artists offered sketches of his best-known characters and personae—Tom Sawyer the steamboat pilot, Colonel Sellers, the innocent abroad. Others showed a tearful Uncle Sam, his hat off and his head bowed. The most popular figure with the cartoonists was Huckleberry Finn, a boy in rags who, in one drawing, ushers Twain into the Hall of Fame . . . . Perhaps Huck also sug-

gests the typically American youthfulness of the Twain image. (66)

“This should not come as a surprise,” Stoneley says, “given the historical understanding” that the public sphere was dominated by men, while “women supposedly found their fulfillment in the home,” being nearly barred from literature and journalism. Stoneley continues, “But there is also the more particular sense that Twain was a “man’s man,” and even, at his most characteristic, a man’s writer. He tended to present himself as uncomfortable in a genteel, feminine environment, and . . . was very much concerned with the interactions, codes and pursuits of men and boys” (66).

Meanwhile many critics and scholars argued that Twain neglected women, or neglected to create an authentic portrayal of women. In *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960) Leslie Fiedler observed Twain’s widespread failure to write about adult, heterosexual relationships. Apparently under strict Victorian morals, Twain was limited and evasive when it came to describing sexuality. Moreover, his moralistic constraints or Victorian influence did not allow himself to portray women beyond the dominant image and ideal of womanhood. Even Shelley Fisher Fishkin, in *Feminist Engagements*, reluctantly approves a general view that Twain’s female characters are flat and boring for they remain no more than the conventional portraits, which belong within a narrow range of stereotypes: the charmingly innocent girl or the dull, fussy, maternal figure.<sup>2</sup>

For more than one hundred years since his death we have been under the illusion that Twain was a so-called “man’s writer” whose pleasure was to keep male company and sketch their wild American culture and language, while he felt as hesitant about female portrayal

as clumsy at it, whether it was decent or sensual. This is all wrong. Twain had an ardent curiosity about female privacy, their seclusion within their homes and their confidential conversations, which he knew to be as fascinating as any male society that he ever observed and recorded, if not more.

This paper will provide an unprecedented study of Mark Twain language—female colloquialisms, female vernacular, female profanity, and female private letters and diaries, all of which had not been given any serious thought until now. This linguistic inquiry of women was only possible after the Mark Twain Project published, for the first time, *Autobiography of Mark Twain* (Volume 1 in 2010 and Volume 2 in 2013), Mark Twain's uncensored autobiography in its entirety and exactly as he left it. This autobiography contains various female voices among others which Twain recorded, but which he instructed were to be kept suppressed from publication for 100 years after his death. Those long-buried voices of the fair sex would have sparked an upheaval in the misogynic interpretation of Twain whose female characters are mistakenly dismissed as “flat and boring.”

## I

Mark Twain is said to have had a good ear for the diversity of speech. When Twain happened to overhear interesting discourses, he recorded them word by word as he heard them. Thus he stored dialogues of people from all social ranks and in varied regions and occupations; steamboat pilots, journalists, preachers, businessmen, sailors, military officers, politicians, and aristocrats. Twain was particularly fond of swearers, whose prodigious cursings rich in vocabulary were

too vulgar even for Twain to record. Still Twain achieved fame for reconstructing rough but lively languages—vernacular English, African-American English, ungrammatical speech, and coarse language—which added an “American flavor,” as it were, to his writings most notably in the “raft episode” of *Life on the Mississippi* (originally written for *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*). Needless to say, all of these voices belong to men, not to women. Strangely enough, nobody has ever cared about female languages, as if they were not part of America.

The neglect of female voices, whether intentional or necessary, could be explained by tracing historical mainstream in a Mark Twain study. Twain started his autobiography dictation in 1906, four years before his death, and he left an enormous number of pages of manuscript, which amounted to three bulky volumes when issued in 2010 and 2013. At the same time Twain published choice excerpts from his dictated autobiography in the *North American Review* every two weeks from September 1906 to December 1907, which totaled about one fourth of his original text. Charles Neider edited these autobiographical writings in the *North American Review* to fit his own design; in his edition of *The Autobiography of Mark Twain* (1959), Neider rearranged Twain’s desultory anecdotes into approximately chronological narrative, while omitting some. Neider’s edition is one of the most read Twain autobiographies in the world, even today, for its readability and compactness, and has become the most influential book to shape Twain’s public figure.

It seems that Neider, while editing, singled out women that he believed suitable for Twain’s autobiography. Through this censorship only two types of women survived in Neider’s autobiography; those loved by Twain, and those hated by Twain. The first group includes his

mother, wife, daughters, and schoolmate girly girls who are all benevolent, virtuous, and domestic, or what is called "The Angel in the House," while the latter includes female writers, and other socially successful and practical women whom Twain condemned for their vanity, avariciousness, and obsessive pursuit of fame. Historically, female icons have been divided into two poles labeled as "The Angel in the House" and the "Femme Fatale" in the 19th century, and as the saintly virgin and the witch in the mediaeval period. Neider unexpectedly helps Twain's female acquaintances polarize into two opposites: ideal and enmity of Victorian society. Fact is that Twain recorded plenty of other women in his autobiography, those between the admired and the despised, but Twain suppressed parts of those texts and Neider left out the rest of them in his editing.

On top of the illusory polarization of women, Neider's edition leads us to the wrong impression that ladies, a gentler sex of Victorian era, did not use uneducated low vernacular, let alone any dirty and blasphemous phrases, because we never come across a single instance of this kind in it. Who imagines that Neider deleted anything to record female profanity and indecencies of language one after another? The truth is that more than anything else Neider valued linguistic gentility of women, and only collected stories to support it. The most preferred quotations from Neider's selection are that Twain's upright and proper wife Olivia expostulated with him on the impropriety of cursing, and censored his manuscript to expurgate profane and obscene expressions. It also seems to be that his mother, Jane, made him pledge temperance reform before he left home as a young man, and this promise included abstinence from swearing. Thus the myth of female linguistic decency and moral superiority became more deeply rooted in the mind of

Twain's readers.

Roughly ten years after Twain's death Van Wyck Brooks condemned women for their feminine and genteel influence on Mark Twain in *The Ordeal of Mark Twain* (1920), in which he complained that Twain's wife and his female literary advisers "tamed" or "civilized" him within the artificialities and restraints of polite society only to moderate his independent, unbridled, and spirited creativity. Brooks added that Twain could have created additional masterpieces like *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) if he had not restrained himself in fear of narrow-minded female readers who protested against Huck's vernacular English as immoral. Brooks' criticism stemmed from the conventional concept or rather Victorian ideal that any woman, as a moral guardian, willingly devoted her whole life to guiding indecent men, and was far less appreciative of their indecent language and humor.

The idea that Brooks believed, and Neider falsely confirmed, was that none of the women in Twain's familiar circle cursed or spoke roughly, or even enjoyed this in any way: and that they developed genteel and civilized femininity in their language. Contrary to this prevalent hypothesis or the Victorian ideal, Twain's daughters had a mastery of profanity at an early age, and Twain not only took great pleasure in listening to their casual eruptions of blasphemous phrases, but also admired their uncultivated, ungentle, and lawless language.

## II

Twain had three daughters, Susy, Clara, and Jean. Twain cherished the diary that Susy, the eldest, wrote at the age of about thirteen, and he occasionally quoted it in his autobiography to bring back mem-

ories of the distant past. Here Susy talked about her father and her five-year-old sister, Jean:

. . . Papa and I had a long time to discuss and laugh over German profanity. One of the German phrases papa particularly enjoys is "O heilige maria Mutter Jesus! [(O holy Mary mother of Jesus!)]" Jean has a German nurse, and this was one of her phrases, there was a time Jean exclaimed "Ach Gott! [(Oh God)]" to every trifle, but when mama found it out she was shocked and instantly put a stop to it. (*Autobiography of Mark Twain Volume I* 394)

And Twain continued in this diary:

It brings that pretty little German girl vividly before me—a sweet and innocent and pump little creature with peachy cheeks . . . . She was just from Germany, and knew no English. She was always scattering her profanities around, and they were such a satisfaction to me that I never dreamed of such a thing as modifying her . . . . To the children, the little maid's profanities sounded natural and proper and right, because they had been used to that kind of talk in Germany, and they attached no evil importance to it . . . . The trial of that little creature's life was the children's hair. She would tug and strain with her comb, accompanying her work with her misplaced pieties. And when finally she was through with her triple job she always fired up and exploded her thanks toward the sky, where they belonged, in this form: "Gott sei Dank ich bin schon fertig mit'm Gott verdammtes Haar!" (I believe I am not quite brave enough to translate it.) (*Autobiography of Mark Twain*

*Volume 1* 394)

The last sentence, which Twain did not feel brave enough to translate, is in English: “Thank God I’m really finished with the God damned hair!” Twain enjoyed the girls’ profanities to his satisfaction and even took pains to keep their “misplaced pieties” from being found out and stopped by his wife Olivia, as was usual with her. Twain published this episode in the *North American Review*, though Neider left it out.

In his autobiography Twain inserted another piece of Susy’s diary which revealed that Susy and her little sisters appreciated *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and its vulgarities. Susy told of her mother’s censorship and said “with what pangs of regret we used to see” their mother scratching out some dreadful but perfectly fascinating parts in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, without which “we thought the book would be almost ruined”(27). One of “delightfully dreadful” parts was probably a ghost story in which Jim describes his midnight encounter with a naked male cadaver in a medical school dissecting room. The naked dead body in the story must have gave Twain’s daughters much thrill and then delight, but their mother considered it improper to talk about the bare body of man in the Victorian strict codes. Thus Twain recorded how his daughters innocently enjoyed vulgar and obscene passages, but Neider did not allow to include this episode, which was inappropriate for supposedly well-mannered young ladies, in his autobiographical edition.

I would like to quote another instance that demonstrates how much Twain enjoyed female indecencies, which, however, remained unpublished until the new autobiographical edition (Volume 2) came out in 2013. Twain spoke of his unfinished book which might be entitled “The



Refuge of the Derelicts”:

In the manuscript the story has no title, but begins with *a pretty brusque remark* by an ancient admiral, who is Captain Ned Wakeman under a borrowed name . . . .

Two or three months ago I wanted that nameless manuscript heretofore mentioned, and I asked my secretary to call up my New York home on the long-distance and tell my daughter clara to find that manuscript and send it to me. The line was not in good order, Miss Lyon found great difficulty in making Clara understand what was wanted . . . and that she would find it among the manuscriptural ruffraff in my study somewhere. Then she wanted to know by what sign she should recognize it. She asked for the title of it.

Miss Lyon—using a volume of voice which should have carried to New York without the telephone's help, said—

“It has no title. It begins with a remark.”

It took some time to make Clara understand that. Then she said,

“What is the remark?”

Miss Lyon shouted—

“Tell him to go to hell.”

*Clara.* “Tell him to go—where?”

*Miss Lyon.* “To hell.”

*Clara.* “I can't get it. Spell it.”

*Miss Lyon.* “H-E-L-L.”

*Clara.* “Oh, *hell.*” (*Autobiography of Mark Twain Volume 2*

At the time of this conversation the secretary Isabel Lyon was in her early thirties and Twain's daughter Clara in her twenties. Twain grinned with joy at the beautiful and respectable ladies who were made to swear to each other under the irresistible circumstance while he enthusiastically recorded their dialogues.

Victorian morals strictly forbade Lyon and Clara, and any other woman either in middle class or in the wild frontier, to curse and utter a foul obscenity because it was considered evil, although male cursings and obscenities were relatively tolerated<sup>3</sup>. That is why Twain treasured female profanities and obscenities; for him forbidden sin was much sweeter than condoned one. How could he miss the precious opportunity of overhearing women swearing and enjoying foul passages?

### III

As mentioned, Twain had a good ear for languages, but he "acquired" male and female languages differently. Twain recorded what he heard openly from male casual conversations. However, when it came to female conversations, he recorded what he overheard as he carefully eavesdropped on the confidential conversations among women, such as when he listened in on his daughters and German maid "scattering" their profanities, which was confined within the children's quarter unknown to their mother. Women were barred from the public society dominated by men, likewise men were not admitted to the female private company in which wives and daughters gathered for gossiping over tea or knitting in the parlor. Twain felt it blissful to peep into and have a glimpse of the hidden garden of women in which they revealed themselves something other than the victorian dominant im-

age or ideal of women.

On August 29, 1906 Twain remembered about a couple of “divine” letters he obtained by chance the previous day through a neighbor, “a man of good character and established veracity—and he gives” Twain “his word of honor that they are genuine” (*Autobiography of Mark Twain Volume 2* 191). Twain introduced the first letter, saying “the source of these letters is this”:

When the appeal for clothing for the sufferers by the San Francisco fire and earthquake went abroad over the land the kind-hearted writer of letters took a suit of clothes belonging to her brother's wife and carried them to the Armory in her town and generously devote them to the cause, delivering them to Miss Blank Blank, chairman of the committee in charge of the matter, and receiving in return Miss Blank's cordial thanks. This is letter No. 1:

Miss Blank dear friend i took some Close into the armerry and give them to you to Send too the suffrers out to California and i Hate to truble you but i got to have one of them Back it was a black oll woole Shevyott With a jacket to Mach trimed Kind of Fancy no 38 Burst measure and passy menterry acrost the front And the color i woodent Trubble you but it blonged to my brothers wife and she is Mad about It I thought she was willin but she want . . . .

Providence R. I.

May the 3th 1906

(*Autobiography of Mark Twain Volume 2* 191)

The neighbor who showed this semi-literate letter excised the names of the writer (Jennie Allen) and the addressee (Ann Stockbridge), so that Twain gave the addressee a provisional name, Miss Blank Blank, here.

Twain was excited over these letters, saying “I am glad I have lived to read those letters. They are a benefaction.” Twain glorified the female vernacular letters “so free, so independent, so majestically lawless” (191) of spelling as to reproduce how the writer would have spoken in the Maine dialect, among her relatives. Twain even found a literary value and humor in her written vernacular, because she used her own spelling as if “She never saw a spelling book in her life” (276). Twain’s rejoicing came mainly from the fact that he could seize this rarest chance offered by these letters to peep into or, I might say, eavesdrop on uncultivated female vernacular of an out-of-the-way countryside.

Lindsay Ann Reid explained in “English in Maine” that “Maine dialect in particular “is frequently exploited to add local flavor and a distinctive sense of place to stories set in Maine. It is also variously employed to emphasize characters’ lack of education or stress their rustic identities” (“English in Maine” 7). Reid also says “the idea that Maine’s rustic natives speak in an idiosyncratic, archaic, nasal and twangy regional dialect . . . is a prevalent one in tourist literature” (3). Under these circumstances, female native tongue outside their communities might have aroused scornful laughter from elegant city people or high-tored middle-class citizens. Or at least Jennie’s misspelled, though phonetically exact, rustic vernacular writings were considered exceedingly funny for Twain because of their unbecomingness to supposedly and ideally sophisticated fair sex.

The receiver of the letters, Ann W. Stockbridge in Yarmouth, Maine, also had had the same feeling as Twain. Stockbridge read these

outstandingly humorous letters aloud to entertain friends and passed them around. The letters finally reached Twain, a renowned humorist, with an expectation to attract his interest.

One week after Twain acquired the letters and even after he read one of them at the Associated Press conference after he vouched for its genuineness, he got a letter of apology from Stockbridge, the original receiver of the letters, saying that Jennie Allen, the sender of the letters, did not exist anywhere in Maine. Stockbridge said she had become quite interested in Jennie and wrote her, but was dismayed to find there was no such person at all. Stockbridge at last hit upon a female historian from Machias Maine, Grace Donworth, who acknowledged that she had forged the letters under the disguise of an uneducated Maine native and housewife. "Jennie's" letters was Donworth's hoax; she perhaps gloated over the letters, which were accepted as genuine by scores of people, and which even deceived Twain. Twain decided not to publish Donworth's letters, in case "they were to be multiplied and a book is to be made of them" (247). Twain promised to offer his assistance in finding a publisher, with his approval that "this whole fake was delightful." In 1907 the "Jennie Allen" letters ran serially in the *Ladies' Home Journal*; Donworth admitted authorship only when she published them in book form the following year.

Twain and other readers of "Jennie's" letters had the pleasure of peeping and eavesdropping on humiliating female privacy rarely seen through their concealment, and Donworth, a clever woman, took advantage of their voyeuristic curiosity in deceiving them. Twain, a guileless prey of this female hoax, failed to peek in real letters, nevertheless at least he learned of female gift for written vernacular and hoax, and female appreciative sense of indecent humor, contrary to

Brooks' claim of female inferiority in these matters.

Long before the "Jennie's" letters, Twain had already picked up the custom of peeking into female letters and diaries. After his wife passed away, Twain read her diary to recall the past, and probably to look inside her heart and, accordingly, her true self. The diary never came out in public for Twain and his daughter destroyed all but a few pages, probably because it contained highly private matters.

Twain also reserved letters from a betrayed and abused ignorant young widow, which had been originally sent to Mollie Clemens, the wife of his brother Orion thirty years before. This young widow had had an affair with a married man who then deserted her. After having his baby, she took temporary lodging with Mollie and her husband. In her letter the young widow, helpless and with a baby, asked Mollie for her support; she told her of her misery and the grudge against her betraying lover. When reading the letters again years later, Twain said in his autobiographical dictation that he felt "as if the incidents had happened yesterday; and not to strangers, but to personal friends of mine" (122), and insisted that "That young woman's letter exhibits the fact that she has had very little schooling. It is unlikely that she has had much practice with the pen, yet how moving and convincing are her simple phrases, her unstudied eloquence. Her letter is *literature*—good literature—and the most practiced pen cannot surpass it, out of the best-trained head. She speaks from the heart" (127). Twain again decided to suppress these letters from the abused widow because of their scandalous nature.

By eavesdropping and "peeping" Twain knew that women could have a mastery of volcanic swearing, vernacular English, hoax, fraud, dirty humor, obscene talk, immoral secret, anything that was consid-

ered unfeminine or unideal for women and, all the more for that, immoral for women. Twain, the “man’s man,” could imagine how the other sex spoke in their own voices “from their hearts” when they put off the masks of preferable virtuous women or Victorian model by peeking into their confidential letters and diaries, the “moving and convincing” literature.

#### IV

Women, no doubt, committed sins—adultery, vulgarities, and many others—against the Victorian cult of womanhood, all of which Twain knew from eavesdropping and peeping. Twain could not expose the so-called female sins, but allowed us to peek and eavesdrop through his literature in which women spoke mostly in their careless native tongue, not decorated elegant speech. Twain experimented with literary eavesdropping and peeping, so to speak, in his works. In 1876 Twain wrote *Date 1601: Conversation As It Was by the Social Fireside in the Time of the Tudors* to experiment with Elizabethan dialogue and to amuse his friend Joseph Twichell. Twain “contrived that meeting of the illustrious personages in Queen Elizabeth’s private parlor, and started most picturesque and lurid and scandalous conversation between them” (*Autobiography of Mark Twain Volume 2* 156), while the Queen’s cup-bearer was present and dutifully took down everything they said, because it was the Queen’s desire. Through the eyes of the cup-bearer, Twain enjoyed peeping into the Queen’s private parlor in which ladies discussed matters as sexual intercourse and flatulence with neither embarrassment nor any sense of impropriety. Twain did not published *Date 1601*, and showed it to only trusted male friends, because he, through

his literature, wanted to share the pleasure of stealth peeping within his close male circle.

Twain recorded what he overheard while eavesdropping in a jail in “Just ‘One More Unfortunate’” (1965). Twain visited a city jail to seek news as a journalist of *Territorial Enterprise*, and “saw a girl in the city prison last night who looked as much out of place there as I did myself—possibly more so. She was petite and diffident, and only sixteen years and one month old. To judge by her looks, one would say she was as sinless as a child.” She told her story as a school-girl that she had been living with a strapping young nigger for six months with no one else to support her but him:

O, woman, thy name is humbug! Afterwards, while I sat taking some notes, and not in sight from the women’s cell, some of the old blisters fell to gossiping, and lo! young Simplicity chipped in and clattered away as lively as the vilest of them! It came out in the conversation that she was hail fellow well met with all the old female rascallions in the city, and had had business relations with their several establishments for a long time past. She spoke affectionately of some of them, and the reverse of others; and dwelt with a toothsome relish upon numberless reminiscences of her social and commercial intercourse with them. She knew all manner of men, too—men with quaint and suggestive names, for the most part—and liked “Oyster-eyed Bill,” and “Bloody Mike,” and “The Screamer,” but cherished a spirit of animosity toward “Foxy McDonald” for cutting her with a bowie-knife at a strumpet ball one night. She a poor innocent kitten! Oh! She was a scallawag whom it would be base flattery to call a prostitute! She a candidate for the Industrial



Mark Twain's Eavesdropping of Suppressed Voices

School . . . . In the ordinary branches she is equal to the best; and in the higher ones, such as ornamental swearing, and fancy embroidered filagree slang, she is a shade superior to any artist I ever listened to. (*Early Tales and Sketches* 2:236)

From this sixteen-year-old girl who was an outcast prostitute, Twain learned that women could switch between two kind of languages depending on occasions, sometimes masking themselves with ladylike speaking. With Twain's eavesdropping and peeking, we get a glimpse of the girl's true self—her skill of “ornamental swearing,” and her anger and misery—that she never let out before decent citizens and we hardly notice in our life; she was humbug prostitute and for her illegal business she had to endured violent treatment from her customers like “Foxy McDonald” who, she said, was “cutting her with a bowie-knife at a strumpet ball one night.”

*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, the slave Jim ran away because he overheard Miss Watson talking to her sister, the Widow Douglas, about her intention of selling him down the river to the so-called deep South, the hell for slaves. Jim probably spied around Miss Watson, and peeped into her cruel evil nature, which was displayed only in her inconspicuous discussion with her sister.

In *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* Huck dropped in the Phelps farm and overheard that Aunt Silas and neighboring farmer's wives were gossiping over the runaway slave Jim, making “such another clack a body never heard” (345). “Old Mrs. Hotchkiss was the worst; her tongue was agoing all the time. She says:”

“Well, sister Phelps, I've ransacked the-air cabin over, an' I

b'lieve the nigger was crazy. I says so to Sister Damrell—didin't I, Sister Damrell?—s'I, he's crazy, s'I—them's the very words I said. You all hearn me: he's crazy, s'I; everything shows it, s'I, look at that-air grindstone, s'I: want to tell me't any creature 'ts in his right mind 's agoin' to scabble all them crazy things onto a grindstone, s'I?" (345)

Huck heard female conversing in lowdown Arkansas dialect, which is one of dirtiest examples of female English Twain showed us. Outrageous female vernacular was rarely seen in print or exposed before the people outside their communities, because it impresses us “characters’ lack of education or stresses their rustic identities” like Maine dialect. Yet Twain, through the eyes of Huck, also allowed us to peek and eavesdrop on the wives’ chattering in coarse Arkansas dialect, in which they spoke what they shut up within their mind, what they dared not say to their husband. In the Twain’s literature female vulgarities and vernacular denoted their unpretentious true voices and true selves. In this discourse, the women confined the dark secret of their community that only women detected, but this is another matter I would like to discuss in a next paper.

Twain definitely admired women for their gentility and virtuousness, meanwhile he was fascinated by their vulgarity and unpretentious selves, a momentary peek of which inspired him to create his literature, allowing his readers to peep and eavesdrop on unknown portrait of women.

#### Notes

1. This passage was quoted from a letter that Joel Chandler Harris wrote in

## Mark Twain's Eavesdropping of Suppressed Voices

honor of Twain's fiftieth birthday and sent to *The Critic* of 28 November 1885 (253). Twain also inserted this whole letter in his autobiographical dictation (*Autobiography of Mark Twain Volume 2* 265).

2. John Cooley published a collection of stories featuring young female protagonist, "rebellious girls & daring young women" under the title of *How Nancy Jackson Married Kate Wilson* and tells in its introduction;

He experimented boldly with a wide range of unconventional, even socially unacceptable female personalities, and he placed his girl characters in challenging plots that required unexpected skills and daring actions. Unlike the helpless Becky Thatcher and the naive Mary Jane Wilks, Twain's "new girls" leend capably for themselves. Not only do they respond effectively to the challengers before them, their male counterparts appear indecisive or incapable of effective action. These stories give readers an opportunity to witness the evolution of his female characters over four decades. (xi)

However, those evolutionary female protagonists which Cooley compiled in his collection are relatively few, and exceptional in Mark Twain's portraits of female characters.

3. See "Masculine Men and Feminine Women" in *Women And Men on the Overland Train* by John Mack Faragher, which details about overland female emigrants as "society's moral guardians."

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