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## The Laws of Literary Life Cycle: Reading Mark Twain's *Is He Dead?* as a Transnational Play

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### INTRODUCTION: MARK TWAIN'S *IS HE DEAD?*

I have long meditated on the laws of literary life cycle, chiefly inspired by the literary giant of Meiji Japan, Natsume Sōseki (1867–1916), who was so eager to clarify the psychological origins and social factors of literature as to come up with the science of literature while studying in London between 1900 and 1901. He published a highly speculative book on the subject, *Bungakuron (Theory of Literature)* in 1907.<sup>1</sup> Coinciding with the rise of modernism around the turn of the century, this book is considered to be comparable with French structuralism and Russian formalism in the same period. A twenty-first century perspective will, however, allow us to reinterpret Sōseki's *Theory of Literature* as a post-Spencerian social evolutionist hypothesis about the laws of literary life cycle, in which certain social factors bring literature into this world and cause it to flourish and wither, and in which a writer will succeed or fail in acquiring fame for their major work, either applauded or criticized during his or her lifetime or posthumously.<sup>2</sup> Without his solitary transnational situation in London at the turn of the century, Sōseki could not have deeply meditated on the fate of writers in general.

In Book 5 of his *Theory of Literature* Sōseki wrote about the distinguished British novelist Jane Austen (1775–1817). He noted that she faced hardships

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in getting published, and that even after she became a professional writer she was not paid much. Thus, he concluded: “It is often the case, I regret to say, that genius is usually given an unfair reception.”<sup>3</sup> Finding this observation applicable to French artist Jean-François Millet (1814–75), Sōseki added that, although he had been in an obscure position during his lifetime, Millet’s death brought him worldwide fame overnight, with his masterpiece *The Angelus* selling for 553,000 francs. Sōseki concluded that there are more geniuses than the ones recorded in history, and geniuses often have to be content with the fate of the unsung hero during their lifetimes.<sup>4</sup>

Sōseki’s insightful observation reminds us of a black comedy, *Is He Dead?*, written by Mark Twain (1835–1910) in Vienna in 1898, with the artist Millet serving as the protagonist.<sup>5</sup> Twain shared with Sōseki an interest in what could well be designated as the laws of literary life cycle, and he went further to propose an idea for getting out of the artistic predicament of lack of fame during one’s lifetime.

Of course, today Millet is widely acclaimed as one of the major French artists, who learned a lot from sixteenth-century Flemish painters of peasant life such as Pieter Bruegel, and who had a tremendous impact on fin de siècle impressionists such as Claude Monet, Camille Pissarro, and Paul Cézanne.

Nevertheless, it is also known that Millet struggled with poverty all of his life. Five years before his play *Is He Dead?* Twain published a short story titled “Is He Living or Is He Dead?” (1893), featuring Millet who disguises himself as another in order to deceive a debt collector.<sup>6</sup> We should note here that “Is He Living or Is He Dead?” is the first story of Twain’s translated into Japanese, by Isoo Yamagata and included as “Seishi Ikan” in the November 1893 issue of *Shonen Bunko* (Literature for Boys), immediately after Twain published the original story. It was later adapted by distinguished novelist Takeo Arishima as *Domomata no Shi* (The death of Domomata) in 1922. Arishima’s novel was made into a film of the same name in 2007 by director Shutaro Oku.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the fascinating concept, Twain’s short story lacked an engaging plot. Later, Twain beautifully transformed the story into an exciting dramatic black comedy. Twain himself suffered from huge debts in the 1890s, so much so that he left North America in 1897 for Vienna. It was there that he familiarized himself with the local theater and completed writing a play based on the short story on February 5, 1898.<sup>8</sup>

The plot is simple. A vicious usurer, Bastien André, has been tormenting the young genius Millet so ferociously that Agamemnon Buckner

(nicknamed “Chicago”), who was the latter’s good friend at Yale University, joins forces with other friends to stage Millet’s funeral, disguising Millet as his own younger sister. Since they know it is the death of a genius that drives up the market value of an artist’s works, Millet and his friends plan to make a large profit out of his “death.”

Literary history convinces us that while some writers such as antebellum bestseller novelist George Lippard achieved fame during their lifetime, others like all-time canonical author Herman Melville were re-appraised posthumously. Although poststructuralist critics such as Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault did not believe in the concept of the author as an entity,<sup>9</sup> we still consider the actual death of an author as a trigger for an alternative narrative that could not have been composed during his or her lifetime. For example, Edgar Allan Poe’s death in 1849 led his chosen literary executor, Rufus Wilmot Griswold—who had long felt jealous of Poe’s genius—to start a negative campaign against his supposed friend’s reputation. In the article “Memoir of the Author” written as a preface to his compilation *The Works of the Late Edgar Allan Poe*, Griswold invented the creepy image of Poe as a madman in the attic who not only drinks but also takes a shot of opium, morphine, laudanum, hashish, and who-knows-what.<sup>10</sup> The same thing is true of the reputation of Paul de Man, the boa-deconstructor of the Yale school, who revolutionized the scholarship of literary studies with poststructuralist strategies from the 1970s through the mid-1980s. Gilbert Adair’s novel *The Death of the Author* (1992) spelled out that it was the death of this distinguished scholar-critic in 1983 that induced Ortwin de Graef, a Belgian graduate student at the University of Leuven, to research the wartime journalism and reveal the hidden history of de Man as a young man when he wrote for collaborationist journals in Belgium during World War II.<sup>11</sup> Because it was a close reading a la mode which long neglected the historicity of the authors and their times, deconstructionism was thus required to be contextualized, in the post-Foucauldian New Historicist milieu.

As Mark Twain scholar Shelley Fisher Fishkin has pointed out, already in *The Innocents Abroad* (1869) Twain had said “Is he dead?” in response to the guide in Genoa, Italy, who boasted of “Christopher Columbo” as the discoverer of America, of whom Twain and other Americans had “heard nothing.”<sup>12</sup> Twain was clearly commenting on the Europeans’ overestimation of the work of dead celebrities vis-à-vis Americans’ preference for living artists.<sup>13</sup> In his observation of how Europeans value dead geniuses in this episode lies the transnational origin of the short story

“Is He Living or Is He Dead?” and the black comedy *Is He Dead?* Whether the author is dead or alive gives us a chance to re-evaluate his or her works in a way that otherwise would not have been acceptable and to reexamine the transnational laws of literary life cycle.

What is literary life? To put it simply, what is the life span of a work of art which is swayed by or which survives the fluctuations in reputation of artists and/or authors? How is this life span intertwined with the capitalist market? And how does a dead author get forgotten, overcome being neglected, and acquire his or her second life? With Twain’s black comedy as an example, in this article I investigate the post-Spencerian universal laws of literary evolutionism which govern transnational literary history.

#### THE TRANSATLANTIC SIGNIFICANCE OF *THE ANGELUS*

Let me start by outlining the career of the French artist Jean-François Millet, who was sixteen years older than Twain. This painter of peasants was born on October 4, 1814, in the village of Gruchy, commune of Greville, canton of Baumont (Manche). He was the second child and the eldest son of Jean-Louis-Nicholas Millet, a farmer, and his wife, Aimee-Henriette-Adelaide Henry. Jean-François demonstrated an unexpected artistic talent as a child, and at twenty-three moved to Paris where he got the opportunity to study with Paul Delaroche, a distinguished painter whom “every one pointed to as the greatest talent of that time.”<sup>14</sup> In 1840, Millet made his professional debut at the Salon of the Louvre with a portrait of his close friend Louis Marolle’s father, M. L. F. In 1841, Millet married a nice Cherbourg girl, Pauline-Virginie Ono, in his hometown. She was delicate in health and died of tuberculosis in Paris in 1844. In 1845 Millet remarried, this time to a young girl, Catherine Lemaire, who gave birth to many children and remained a devoted companion throughout Millet’s life.<sup>15</sup> Millet started over in Paris in December 1845 with his new wife. In Rue Rochechouart they found three mansard rooms where he arranged a very informal studio, whose furniture consisted of three chairs and an easel.<sup>16</sup> Millet made money chiefly by painting naked women and portraits. His art became so popular that in April 1848 Alexandre Auguste Ledru-Rollin, minister of the interior in the provisional government of the Second Republic, came to see Millet and gave him a commission of eighteen hundred francs for an original painting. What is more, Ledru-Rollin, who was a champion of the working class, bought one of Millet’s masterpieces, *The Winnower*, for five hundred francs.<sup>17</sup> The political downfall of Ledru-

Rollin in June 1849, however, radically changed Millet's life. Ledru-Rollin had attacked the new president Louis-Napoleon, who in 1849 attempted to destroy the republican government in Rome and helped the Pope reconquer Rome. Ledru-Rollin, in vain, called for a mass demonstration in Paris. Furthermore, in 1849 there was an outbreak of cholera.<sup>18</sup> With eighteen hundred francs, Millet moved with his family to Barbizon near the forest of Fontainebleau in north-central France, where he decided to focus on painting peasant life, not the nudes he had been notorious for.

The only tavern in Barbizon, Guanne's, attracted not only Millet but also many other talented artists who had escaped from Paris, to avoid the political upheaval. The Barbizon school was identified with those who frequented this tavern. Millet himself stayed in Barbizon from 1849 through 1875, the year of his death, completing many masterpieces such as *The Sower* (1850), *The Gleaners* (1855), *The Angelus* (1857–59), *The Shepherd Taking Back a Flock of Sheep at Dusk* (1857–60), *Shepherdess with Her Flock* (1864), and *The Goose Girl* (1867).<sup>19</sup> He undoubtedly entered his major phase during the Barbizon years, particularly in the 1850s and the 1860s. Sōseki, who pointed out the posthumous value of *The Angelus* in his aforementioned *Theory of Literature*, became so fascinated with *The Goose Girl* that he imitated it in 1903 in his own painting, which is now on permanent exhibit at Yamanashi Prefectural Museum of Literature in Japan.

*Shepherdess with Her Flock* in particular brought Millet tremendous fame when it was shown at the Salon of 1864 along with *Peasants Bringing Home a Calf Born in the Fields*, and the director of the Beaux Arts offered Millet fifteen hundred francs for it. Millet, however, had already sold the painting to someone else for two thousand francs so that he only received a medal at the Salon.<sup>20</sup> Since by 1863 Millet had become a patriarch responsible for a huge family consisting of his wife, their nine children, and a couple of younger brothers, he had to make intense effort to support them financially. Therefore, he not only signed a long contract with several Belgian art dealers but also sold, after 1867, fifty-six paintings to John Quincy Shaw, one of the wealthiest Boston Brahmins, who was to become the greatest collector of Millet after his death in 1875.

*The Angelus*, painted in the late 1850s, is doubtless a masterpiece from Millet's major phase. At this point, we should not overlook the American background of the work. Millet made the painting between 1857 and 1859, commissioned by an American writer and a patron of the fine arts, Thomas Gold Appleton of Boston, brother-in-law of distinguished poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and an acquaintance of Twain's friend William Dean

Howells. Strangely, Appleton did not take possession of *The Angelus* when it was completed. Fishkin has determined that this painting, which Millet had originally sold to Appleton for 1,800 francs, changed hands a number of times, ending up with Antonin Proust in the 1889 bidding war between the Louvre Museum and the American Art Association offering his winning bid of 553,000 francs (\$111,000), “an astronomical price for a painting.”<sup>21</sup> Proust was representing the French government that wanted to keep the masterpiece in France. The French government, however, hesitated to authorize the expenditure and this masterpiece came to be owned by the Americans. Thus, James Sutton, representing the American Art Association, exhibited it on tour in the United States. In this way the Americans became fascinated with Millet’s work.

#### THE AMERICAN FACE OF JEAN-FRANÇOIS MILLET

The brief biography of Millet outlined above will very naturally lead to problematization of the general image of Millet as a typical artist of honest poverty. It is true that when he was born on October 4, 1814 in the village of Gruchy, Jean-François Millet was named after Saint Francis of Assisi who embodied holy poverty.<sup>22</sup> And yet, with a huge family to support, Millet made much money by managing his own market. Moreover, given that he married Catherine in 1845, only a year after the death of his wife Pauline, it is difficult to consider him a kind of saint. It is highly plausible that Twain composed *Is He Dead?* because he felt so uncomfortable with the general idealized image that he wanted to deface, disfigure, and demythologize the genius. To accentuate this purpose, Twain decided to characterize Millet as a young man in his play.

Before discussing Twain’s ambitious play, let us first pay attention to the way Millet himself regarded the genre of drama and actors.

The Luxembourg first gave me a strong dislike to the theatre; and, although I was not insensible to the famous dramas which were to be seen in Paris, I must say that I have always retained an invincible feeling of repulsion for the exaggerations, falseness and grimaces of actors and actresses. Since those days, I have seen something of people of this sort in private life, and I am convinced that by constantly trying to put themselves into the place of others they lose the sense of their own personality, and can only speak in the character of the parts they play. So in the end they become deprived of truth and common sense,

and lose the simple sentiment of plastic art. It seems to me, that if your art is to be true and natural, you must avoid the theatre.<sup>23</sup>

It is undeniable that Millet abhorred the falsity of theatrical performance. Nevertheless, here Twain takes the liberty of developing the general image of Millet as a man of honest poverty who wants to survive economic distress by refashioning himself as an heiress of himself. With this concept in mind, Twain started by radically revising Millet's biography. His headnote reads, "Note. The time is really before 1848, and Louis Philippe is still king. Millet was born before 1820 (I've forgotten the date, but it is not important.) In this piece he is about 25."<sup>24</sup>

As a reminder, Millet's major phase was between the 1850s and the 1860s, and *The Angelus* was created from 1857 through 1859 in Barbizon. Its price soared after his death in 1875, especially between 1881 and 1889. In Twain's art of creative anachronism he casts Millet as twenty-five and very active in the painters' village of Barbizon in 1839, already well-known for his masterpiece *The Angelus*. In fact, Millet left Paris for Barbizon in 1849 after the downfall of Ledru-Rollin and the spread of the cholera. Why did Twain radically modify these facts, providing us with an alternate history?

In my opinion, there are three reasons. First, insofar as *Is He Dead?*, despite being black comedy, centers around the romantic love between Millet and his sweetheart Marie, Twain had to start the narrative before Millet's marriage with his first wife Pauline in 1841. Second, since in 1840 Millet made his professional debut with a portrait exhibited at the Salon of the Louvre in the 1830s, he had to be leading a life of failure and disgrace; he could not get along with his mentor Delaroche and was deprived of a chance to get a scholarship to study in Rome. Third, the portrait of Millet as a young, poor, and unsuccessful artist beautifully mirrors the playwright Twain himself in the 1890s, as he had just faced personal tragedies: bankruptcy in 1894, following the loss of his investment in the Paige Compositor, and the death of his twenty-four-year-old daughter Olivia Susan "Suzy" Clemens from spinal meningitis in 1896. By 1898, however, Twain was able to resolve his financial problems and move to Vienna.<sup>25</sup> He settled with his creditors by collecting the royalties from his books and launching a year-long lecture circuit. In *Is He Dead?* Millet and Marie's family resolve their financial problems when they defend themselves against André's crafty exaction.

At this point, we should point out that distinguished art historian Alfred

Sensier's 1881 biography, *Jean-François Millet, Peasant and Painter*, had an overwhelming impact on the American reception of the French artist. His portrait of Millet as an artist of honest poverty and noble simplicity, who had long been shamefully neglected in his own country, appealed to a wide audience in postbellum America.<sup>26</sup>

One of Millet's closest friends and devoted supporters, Sensier was born in Paris in 1815 and died there in 1877. On the day of Sensier's funeral, it was decided among his family and close friends that his Millet biography, still in manuscript, if arranged and completed carefully, should be published.<sup>27</sup> Thus, the manuscript was given to art critic Paul Mantz to complete. Finding that Sensier only related Millet's life up to 1864, Mantz very tactfully mixed the already prepared biography with the author's notes and correspondences documenting the last decade of Millet's life. An abridged version of the biography was serialized in *Scribner's Monthly Magazine* in 1880 with Helena de Kay as translator, and the full edited biography was published in book form in 1881 by James R. Osgood and Company in Boston.<sup>28</sup> Herein lies the origin of the Millet myth that captured the American imagination.

Of course, it is important that the Millet myth had been prepared by Millet's American disciples. William Perkins Babcock, who studied art in Barbizon in 1848, introduced Millet's works of art to his friends in Boston. William Hunt Morris went to Barbizon in 1851 and informed Millet of Ralph Waldo Emerson's transcendentalist essays, especially "The American Scholar" (1837), whose basic concept harmonized with Millet's vision: "I ask not for the great, the remote, the romantic; what is doing in Italy or Arabia; what is Greek art, or Provencal minstrelsy; I embrace the common, I explore and sit at the feet of the familiar and the low."<sup>29</sup> Edward Wheelwright as the art editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* wrote a long 1876 essay on Millet which became influential in shaping the general image of Millet in the United States.<sup>30</sup>

Millet's major phase (1850s–1860s) coincides with what F. O. Matthiessen in 1941 termed the "American Renaissance," the peak of American Romanticism. In this period the expansionist slogan "Manifest Destiny," first proposed by John O'Sullivan in 1845, implied the virtues of honest Puritan poverty and republican pragmatism. This resulted in antebellum Americans pushing back the wilderness and expanding agriculture until the eventual closing of the frontier in 1890.<sup>31</sup> It is safe to assume that Emerson's transcendentalist aesthetics regarding nature invited Millet to notice a coincidence between the American and French pastoral

style. The Barbizon school in France coincided with the heyday of the Hudson River school of art founded by Thomas Cole and influenced American Renaissance writers such as Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville. Millet, from the beginning, was situated to become popular in the United States. Millet's boom peaked when Sensier's 1881 biography intrigued the American audience by presenting Millet as an artist of honest poverty and noble simplicity. Therefore, it is highly plausible that after reading Sensier's biography of Millet and analyzing why it appealed to Americans, both Twain and Sōseki became keenly aware of the creation of the Millet myth.

Thus, Twain's work *Is He Dead?* is important because it demythologizes Millet. As noted, Millet's marriages and skillful marketing of his paintings convince today's audience that he is in fact neither a holy man of poverty nor a saint. Although he appealed to the American audience with his paintings of peasants, he himself rarely communicated with villagers, only welcoming his fellow artists and critics, as Wheelright pointed out.<sup>32</sup> The Millet myth was no more than a product of sales promotion by his heirs and Sensier's heirs.

#### POE, TWAIN, HWANG: TRANSPACIFIC ADVENTURES

Twain's headnote to *Is He Dead?* specifies the setting as "really before 1848." In fin de siècle Vienna, when Twain started writing the play, the Millet myth had already been established. Therefore, demythologizing Millet as an ambitious and defiant young man induces us to assume that in this black comedy Twain not only mocks Millet and French art criticism but also weaves out his own theory about literary life cycle, the first law of which is embedded in his 1893 short story "Is He Living or Is He Dead?": "The merit of every great unknown and neglected artist must and will be recognized, and his pictures climb to high prices after his death."<sup>33</sup> Expanding the idea, Twain succeeds in formulating what I would like to call the first law of literary life cycle in *Is He Dead?*:

CHICAGO. Dutchy said, "*When there's a great Master, the people don't know it—and they let him starve, and when he is dead and it is too late, his name fills the whole world, and the riches come.*"

(pause)

One of us must seem to die—must change his name and disappear—we'll make his name sound throughout the world, and the riches will come.

(Raising his glass in left hand)

François Millet must die! . . .

(With genuine feeling and solemnity)

Friends, you will drink, in silence and standing. . . .

To the sacred memory of him who was always our stay, our comfort, and our refuge in time of distress—the best friend that ever man had in this world—the late Jean François Millet, who sleeps in peace, God rest his soul!

(Toast drunk in silence)<sup>34</sup>

This very black comedy, even after the author's death in 1910, had never been discovered let alone performed until the early twenty-first century, after Fishkin, while conducting research in the UC Bancroft Library, noticed Twain's unpublished play.<sup>35</sup> The literary life cycle of not only the author but also the text itself needs to be considered.

It is well-known that Twain's own major phase, from the 1870s through the 1880s, resulted in popular masterpieces such as *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876), *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), and *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889). *Is He Dead?*, written in 1898, undoubtedly is part of Twain's late style, which is known for its satirical tone. Therefore, Twain himself was deeply aware that works like "The War-Prayer" (1905), a scathing satire on the Spanish-American War (1898) and the Philippine-American War (1899–1902), could not be published during his lifetime.<sup>36</sup> Nonetheless, *Is He Dead?* is another story—the author ardently hoped to publish the play and see it performed on the stage in vain, as Fishkin noted.<sup>37</sup> *Is He Dead?* was supposed to be performed at London's Lyceum Theatre, managed by Twain's British agent Bram Stoker, who had become famous for the novel *Dracula* (1897). But the theater burned down. In consequence, *Is He Dead?* remained unnoticed for more than a century.

This radical belatedness has made the farsighted play ahead of its time. If it had been staged around the turn of the twentieth century, *Is He Dead?* might have caused a serious controversy. The rise of imperialist America from the 1890s through the 1900s was made possible through Caucasian heterosexual masculinity embodied by the twenty-fifth president William McKinley and the twenty-sixth president Theodore Roosevelt, as discussed by E. Anthony Rotundo and Kathleen Dalton.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, the United States started with the vision of modern democracy. And yet, hemispheric history links the New World revolutionary experience of postcolonial nationalism with the ongoing process of Euro-American imperialism.<sup>39</sup> Post-

Revolutionary America paradoxically came to champion the cause of postcolonialism not as future democracy but as a discourse of cryptoimperialism. Thus, embodying American imperialist masculinity, Theodore Roosevelt declared in 1904 the right of the United States to intervene in South and Central America in order to maintain economic stability and democracy.<sup>40</sup> Roosevelt made explicit the responsibility of the United States to not only protect the Western Hemisphere but also police it.<sup>41</sup> Featuring Millet's transvestism in fin de siècle America would likely have challenged American masculinity. Considering discourses of heterosexuality and masculinity pervading fin de siècle imperialist America, it is not difficult to assume that if actually performed on stage, Twain's late style experiment in gender bending would have sounded very radical, profoundly disturbing the sensible audience.

More than a century after Twain's original writing of the play, the theatergoer is armed with postcolonialist theory as developed by Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak as well as being familiar with queer theory as proposed by Michael Warner and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. Educated readers and theatergoers are now able to appreciate the literary and cultural experiments of *Is He Dead?*

The turning point in enjoying transvestite theater is the transvestite tragicomedy *M. Butterfly* written in 1988 by distinguished Chinese American playwright David Henry Hwang and premiered in Washington, D.C., synchronous with the dawn of postcolonialism and gender politics.<sup>42</sup> Just as *Is He Dead?* shows the way the transvestite artist Millet outwits the vicious usurer, *M. Butterfly* narrates the way a Chinese male spy disguised as a beautiful actress outwits a French diplomat who believes in his own Orientalist fantasy. While Twain, at sixty-three, criticized American masculine imperialism as represented by the Spanish American War (1898), the Chinese American playwright, who came of age after the end of the Vietnam War, mocked Caucasian masculine Orientalism in the queer theater when he was thirty-one. From this vantage point, we can describe *Is He Dead?* as a black comedy written in the author's late style, which presaged the advent of postmodern drama. Hence the second law of literary life cycle based on Edward Said's theory outlined in his monograph *On Late Style* (2006): "But what of artistic lateness not as harmony and resolution but as intransigence, difficulty, and unresolved contradiction? . . . Lateness therefore is a kind of self-imposed exile from what is generally acceptable, coming after it, and surviving beyond it."<sup>43</sup>

This second law convinces us of the writer's later years as detachment

from, overcoming and revolutionizing of, what he or she has patiently achieved in the whole career. With this law in mind, I would like to consider the enormous impact of Twain's radical representation of Millet as a transvestite to be far ahead of its time. Keenly aware of the usurer Bastien André's male gaze, Twain's Millet, disguised as wealthy widow Daisy Tillou, exhibits how his/her female body is skillfully constructed of prostheses. Since André has long proposed to the widow, Millet/Daisy plans to deeply insult and disgrace his/her suitor by uncovering his/her monstrosity. This weird masquerade reaches a climax when Millet/Daisy asks her servant, a chimney sweep, for an artificial eye, perfectly aware that André is peeping at her from behind the door:

WIDOW. Bring me a fresh glass eye—*clean* one. . . .  
 Sho! I've turned it with *the gilded side* to the front.  
 (*Hand-glass.*)  
 Why, it looks like a torch.  
 (*Works at it.*)  
 There—now it's right.<sup>44</sup>

The “widow”'s masquerade disillusions André dramatically and miserably.

ANDRÉ. Talk about the ruins of ancient Rome!—I wish—I wish—I suppose there is no way to get out of here without her seeing me. . . . Think of it—she would do that every night before she went to bed. A body couldn't stand it. It would give him night-mare. . . . Isn't any part of her genuine? . . . *Nothing solid about her.* . . . I wouldn't marry that debris if she was worth a billion. I'm going to get out or die.<sup>45</sup>

Note that Millet/Daisy refers to “the gilded side” of the “fresh glass eye,” whereas André discovers “nothing solid about her.” This brings to mind *The Gilded Age: A Tale of Today* cowritten by Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner in 1873, which satirized the high economic growth in postbellum America which masked social problems with a thin gold gilding.

It is also apparent that, in creating the fake identity of the widow, Twain was inspired by a short story, “The Man That Was Used Up,” written in 1839 by Edgar Allan Poe. The narrator of the tale attempts to investigate the identity of Brevet Brigadier General John A. B. C. Smith, a “truly fine-

looking fellow,” who turns out to be a kind of cyborg whose body, thoroughly mutilated during a battle with Indians, consists of prostheses. This fictional general is modelled after Vice President Richard Mentor Johnson, who was severely wounded in the Battle of the Thames in Upper Canada in 1813, where he killed the Shawnee chief Tecumseh. According to Stuart and Susan Levine, whoever read the tale in antebellum America “would have recognized Poe’s target.”<sup>46</sup> Now let us compare Twain’s representation of Millet/Daisy with Poe’s description of Brevet Brigadier General John A. B. C. Smith, who asks his slave for an artificial eyeball: “O yes, by-the-by, my eye—here, Pompey, you scamp, screw it in! Those Kickapoos are not so very slow at a gouge; but he’s a belied man, that Dr. Williams after all; you can’t imagine how well I see with the eyes of his make.”<sup>47</sup>

A comparative glance at “The Man That Was Used Up” and *Is He Dead?* will clarify that here Twain paid homage to, or even stole Poe’s construction of cyborgian identity. The most remarkable authority of Brevet Brigadier General John A. B. C. Smith was intricately and prosthetically reconstructed. Likewise the noble dignity of Millet/Daisy was technically invented. Inheriting this literary tradition, David Henry Hwang wrote *M. Butterfly* as a satirical allegory about the Orientalist construction of identity as analyzed above. In the denouement of *M. Butterfly* Song Liling, who had long disguised himself as a beautiful opera singer, reveals to a French diplomat, Rene Gallimard, his identity as a male spy. Rather than getting disillusioned with his Orientalist romance, Rene starts looking for the true Madama Butterfly. Thus, he calls down curses on Song: “You? You are as real as hamburger. Now get out! I have a date with my Butterfly and I don’t want your body polluting the room.”<sup>48</sup>

Here we witness the way the literary history of transvestism has been radically revised through not only transatlantic negotiations but also transpacific interactions.

#### CONCLUSION: FROM ORIGINALITY TO SELF-PLAGIARISM

Let me conclude the essay with the third and last law of literary life cycle by quoting from the last scene of *Is He Dead?* After an elaborate funeral for himself, Millet disguised as Widow Daisy Tillou a.k.a. Millet’s sister starts his second life as a new artist whose name “Placide Duval” was invented by his fellow artists Charles Everest and others deeply involved with this conspiracy from the beginning. Sandy Ferguson and Chicago support the

idea: “You’re a rich amateur. . . . Marvelously successful imitator of the late lamented.”<sup>49</sup>

Although David Ives’s 2008 adaptation of *Is He Dead?* for Broadway resurrects Jean-François Millet himself in the final sequence, I find Twain’s original ending more profound. In Ives’s version, Millet supposedly hides in the Barbary Coast of North Africa, whereas Widow Daisy is revealed to be an imaginary figure:

INSPECTOR MONNET. Where is the Barbary Coast?

MILLET. Just off the coast of Barbary. Wracked by debt and deep in despair I decided to disappear for a while—only to return and find my funeral in progress.

INSPECTOR MONNET. Well, it’s no surprise. You have been dead for a week, according to your so-called sister.

MILLET. Sister? What sister?

INSPECTOR MONNET. The Widow Tillou.

MILLET. I have no sister and I’ve never heard of any Widow Tillou.

INSPECTOR MONNET. Ah-ha! So she was not only an imposter—she didn’t even exist!

MILLET. It looks like somebody’s been having a joke at my expense. At my great expense.<sup>50</sup>

Compared with this happy ending, Twain’s original ending sounds pessimistic. The idea of living his next life as a new artist called “Placide Duval,” though carefully conceived by his good friends, could not but disappoint Millet deeply:

WIDOW. (*Sorrowfully*) Ah boys, I never thought of this. You’ve killed me for good. Ah. To live maybe fifty years, and suffer the daily torture of that bastard fame—successful imitator of my own works!<sup>51</sup>

To live as Placide Duval means imitating Millet’s own masterpieces forever. Although Millet’s transvestite masquerade in this play resolves his financial problems, it deprives him of future possibilities: he is forced to be content with past achievements, a “successful imitator” of his own works. Of course, we may also assume that as Placide Duval, Millet is expected to create more. However, this is another story. As far as Twain’s ironic ending is concerned, the playwright seems to superbly allegorize the third law of literary life cycle: self-plagiarism. Thus, Millet/Daisy accepts this fate and

waves good-bye to the friends:

WIDOW. You will let me say good-bye, and God bless you all—we shall meet no more. I go back to my country home and my desolate life. To-morrow a rich stranger will occupy this grand house—with his young wife—a good man and kind, but a recluse—a man with a secret sorrow gnawing at his heart—he thought he was born to fame, but knows he must die unknown. You will know him. Be good to him. He goes disguised—pretend not to notice it.

(*Marie looks up wistfully.*)

He bears a fictitious name—Placide Duval—

(*Marie rises, gazing*)

—Keep his secret. And so, good-bye dear friends. . . .<sup>52</sup>

Herman Melville's major works were published from 1846 through 1857. Henry James reached his literary peak from 1887 through 1904. And Natsume Sōseki published masterpieces from 1905 through 1916. A writer wanting to last beyond the major phase will be required to rearrange and reproduce his or her past narrative patterns. Twain himself found it necessary to continue writing Tom and Huck stories in his later years, works that included *Tom Sawyer*, *Detective* (1906) and *The Mysterious Stranger* (1916), creating a star system of famous characters from his own literature. It is also true that as they are winning transnational fame in the later years it gradually becomes indispensable for experienced writers to determine whether they should repeat, reenact, or self-plagiarize their work for a growing international audience. Of course, self-plagiarism as a late style might sound a hopeless choice. However, a writer's self-reflexive mannerism can also be recognized as a truly original style, which may be imitated by other latecomer writers. In this way the seemingly weird ending of *Is He Dead?* initiates us not only into the truth of art and literature but also the laws of literary life cycle: first, posthumous fame; second, a late transgressive style; third, self-plagiarism. At this point, let us recall how Sandy Ferguson and Chicago comforted Millet disguised as Widow Daisy Tillou: "You're a rich amateur. . . . Marvelously successful imitator of the late lamented" (emphasis mine). Taking full advantage of his own financial, ontological, and transnational predicaments, in his later years Mark Twain skillfully recreated the painter Millet in his own image and brilliantly formulated a universal paradox—that it is imperative for a professional writer to recover the spirit of amateurism full of his or her original intentions

if he/she wishes to survive as a writer after his/her major phase has peaked.

#### NOTES

This article was first delivered in Japanese at the panel “Twain and the Dramatic Imagination” at the annual conference of the Japan Mark Twain Society, held on November 2, 2019, at Keio University, Mita. The illuminating comments of fellow panelists Rie Egashira (University of Teacher Education Fukuoka), Yoshiko Uzawa (Keio University), and Hideyuki Yamamoto (Kobe University), allowed me to complete the written text. For the Japanese version, see *Journal of Mark Twain Studies*, 19 (2020): 12–20.

<sup>1</sup> Natsume Sōseki, *Bungakuron*, 2 vols. (1907; repr., Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2007). In Meiji Japan, Soseki is an all-Japanese writer very well-known for digesting the essence of modern English literature and establishing modern Japanese literature.

<sup>2</sup> For a rereading of *Bungakuron* in the context of structuralism and Russian formalism, see chapter 1 of Karatani Kōjin’s *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature* (1980; tr. Brett de Bary, repr., Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 11–44. Nonetheless, we should also note that in the late Victorian era Herbert Spencer’s social evolutionism gave impacts on a major literary historian Thomas Sergeant Perry’s *English Literature in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1883).

My aim, however, has been rather to supplement the histories by pointing out, so far as I could, the more evident laws that govern literature. I have accordingly tried to show the principles that went to the formation of the literature of the last century, and also the causes of its overthrow. Many will doubtless be unwilling to subscribe to the belief that letters are controlled by laws. Mrs. Oliphant, a writer who deserves and receives the respect of all her many readers, affirms, in her admirable “Literary History of England in the End of the Eighteenth and the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century” (i. 7 and 8), that “every singer is a new miracle—created if nothing else is created—no growth developed out of precedent poets, but something sprung from an impulse which is not reducible to law.” If this statement is correct, literature forms a singular exception to what has seemed a universal rule. When we consider Mrs. Oliphant’s delightful novels we find them occupying a normal position in the development of fiction, with their exact drawing of life and avoidance of direct moral teaching. (vi–vii, emphasis mine)

In this book, Professor Perry clearly attacked the belief that genius was outside the “laws that govern literature.”

<sup>3</sup> Sōseki, *Bungakuron*, vol. 2, 333. All the quotations from the text are by the author.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 341.

<sup>5</sup> Although *Is He Dead?* was written in 1898, the author could not publish it at the time for various reasons. Thus, the play remained unknown for more than a century. In 2002 Shelley Fisher Fishkin came across the manuscript in the Mark Twain Papers at the University of California, Berkeley’s Bancroft Library. Fishkin decided to rescue from obscurity this delightfully ebullient play—from the period when Twain was known for much darker work. She published it in 2003 with a lengthy afterword detailing background information useful to

anyone performing the play today. The result is the following definitive text: Mark Twain, *Is He Dead? A Comedy in Three Acts*, ed. Shelley Fisher Fishkin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003). See also Fishkin, "Foreword: Bringing Mark Twain's *Is He Dead?* to Life" in David Ives, *Is He Dead? A New Comedy by Mark Twain* (New York: Playscripts, 2008), 7.

<sup>6</sup> Mark Twain, "Is He Living or Is He Dead?," in *The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg and Other Stories and Essays*, ed. Shelley Fisher Fishkin (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 181–96.

<sup>7</sup> It is notable that this short story was translated into Japanese much earlier than *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, which were published in translation in 1919 and 1921, respectively. See Tsuyoshi Ishihara, *Mark Twain in Japan: The Cultural Reception of an American Icon* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2005).

<sup>8</sup> Although Twain had been tantalized and frustrated by the world of the theater all his life, his stay in Vienna in 1897–98 radically transformed his image of it. According to Fishkin, "Surrounded by a broad range of superb productions in spectacular state-of-the-art theatres and courted as a collaborator by one of Austria's leading playwrights, Twain couldn't resist the siren call of the stage. He jumped into a frenzy of projects—translating plays that were hits on the Viennese stage for production in the United States, collaborating with Viennese playwright Siegmund Schleginger on a series of plays about contemporary social issues, and writing a new comedy of his own." The collaboration turned out to be a failure. It is significant, however, that at the same time that Twain was writing *Is He Dead?*, a play that features an extraordinary "heroine," he and Schleginger were working on a play tentatively titled "Der Gegenkandidat, oder die Frauen Politiker" (The opposing candidate, or women politicians) featuring female characters in an unprecedented way. Fishkin, afterword to *Is He Dead?*, 151–54.

<sup>9</sup> See Roland Barthes's essay "The Death of the Author" (1967) and Michel Foucault's "What Is an Author?" (1969). Rpt. in Robert Con Davis and Ronald Schleifer, eds., *Contemporary Literary Criticism: Literary and Cultural Studies* (New York: Longman, 1998), 280–83, 364–76.

<sup>10</sup> Stuart Levine, "Introduction: The New Image of Poe," in *The Short Fiction of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. Stuart and Susan Levine (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1976), xv–xxx. For Rufus Wilmot Griswold's debasement of Poe, see his "Memoir of the Author" included in his edited *The Works of the Late Edgar Allan Poe: With a Memoir* (New York: Redfield, 1857), xxi–lv.

<sup>11</sup> See Gilbert Adair, *The Death of the Author* (1992; repr., New York: Melville House, 2008); and Evelyn Barish, *The Double Life of Paul de Man* (New York: Norton, 2014).

<sup>12</sup> Fishkin, afterword to *Is He Dead?*, 182.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Alfred Sensier, *Jean-François Millet, Peasant and Painter*, ed. Paul Mantz, trans. Helena de Kay (Boston: James R. Osgood, 1881), 53.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>18</sup> Julia Cartwright, *Jean François Millet; His Life and Letters* (1896; repr., London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1902), 100.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 105–360.

<sup>20</sup> Sensier, *Jean-François Millet*, 172.

<sup>21</sup> Fishkin, afterword to *Is He Dead?*, 170.

<sup>22</sup> Sensier, *Jean-François Millet*, 22.

<sup>23</sup> Cartwright, *Jean François Millet*, 60.

<sup>24</sup> Twain, *Is He Dead? A Comedy in Three Acts* (hereafter abbreviated as *IHD*), xv.

<sup>25</sup> Fishkin states that Mark Twain wrote *Is He Dead?* in 1898 as he emerged from one of the darkest periods of his life. “A crippling bankruptcy had forced Twain to give up his home in the U.S. and embark on a world-wide lecture tour to pay back his creditors, and while he was abroad, in 1896, his youngest daughter had died suddenly. It would not be surprising if Twain had wondered whether he’d ever manage to laugh again. But by 1898, Twain had come out of the gloom that had enveloped him and found himself ready to transform death and debt into the raw material for a hilarious, over-the-top comedy.” Fishkin, foreword to Ives, *Is He Dead?: A New Comedy by Mark Twain*, 7.

<sup>26</sup> Regarding the enormous impact of the Millet myth on the American audience, Fishkin observes: “Although twentieth-century critics, most notably Robert Herbert, have endeavored to revise and rectify Sensier’s exaggerations and misstatements, it was the myth promoted by Sensier and others that fascinated Americans—and that clearly intrigued Mark Twain.” Fishkin, afterword to *Is He Dead?*, 168. Also see Robert L. Herbert, *Peasants and Primitivism: French Prints from Millet to Gauguin* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997); and Yoichiro Ide, *Nomingaka Millet no Shinjitsu [The truth of Millet the painter of peasants]* (Tokyo: NHK Books, 2014).

<sup>27</sup> Paul Mantz, “Alfred Sensier,” Sensier, *Jean-François Millet*, viii.

<sup>28</sup> Note that James R. Osgood, the publisher of the first English translation of Sensier’s biography of Millet in the United States, was also Twain’s publisher and also published *The Prince and the Pauper* in 1881.

<sup>29</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The American Scholar,” in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature Shorter Ninth Edition: Beginnings to 1865*, ed. Robert S. Levine et al. (New York: Norton, 2017), 593–94.

<sup>30</sup> Edward Wheelright, “Personal Recollections of Jean-Francois Millet.” *Atlantic Monthly*, September 1876. Wheelright was one of Millet’s American disciples. For more details about Millet’s American disciples, see Fishkin, afterword to *Is He Dead?*, 162–63.

<sup>31</sup> For the interactions between American Romanticism and expansionism, see F. O. Matthiessen’s *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941); and Edward L. Widmer, *Young America: The Flowering of Democracy in New York City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>32</sup> Wheelright, “Personal Recollections of Jean-Francois Millet,” 257–76.

<sup>33</sup> Twain, “Is He Living or Is He Dead?,” 188.

<sup>34</sup> Twain, *IHD*, act 1, 46–47, emphasis mine.

<sup>35</sup> See note 5.

<sup>36</sup> Recently I discovered that the eighth and ninth editions of *The Norton Anthology of American Literature* I have been using as a wonderful textbook for my class on American literary history lacks any reference to the Philippine-American War (1899–1902). Although the Spanish-American War (1898–99) is clearly inscribed in the chronology, it is brief and simply followed by the entry at the year 1900: “U.S. population exceeds seventy-five million.” Obscured by this chronology is the fact that the Spanish-American War did not so clearly end but rather continued in the Philippine-American War, which itself did not end in 1902 so clearly either but expanded to include the slaughter of the natives and the battle between one thousand Moros and many US soldiers in 1906. This war is such an inconvenient fact that official history of the United States tends to erase it. As was clarified in the second volume of the Japanese journal *Mark Twain Studies* (2006), with Fishkin as guest editor, Mark Twain was so deeply aware not only of the Spanish-American War but also of the Philippine-American War that he wrote “The War-Prayer” (1905), a black humorous critique of Christianity, nationalism, and imperialism.

<sup>37</sup> Fishkin, afterword to *Is He Dead?*, 196–197.

<sup>38</sup> E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Perseus, 1993); Kathleen Dalton, *Theodore Roosevelt: a Strenuous Life* (New York: Vintage, 2002).

<sup>39</sup> Gretchen Murphy, *Hemispheric Imaginings: The Monroe Doctrine and Narratives of U.S. Empire* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 2.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, vii. For Theodore Roosevelt's imperialistic masculinity, see Rotundo, who focuses on Roosevelt's famous "Strenuous Life" speech of 1899, in which "Roosevelt treated the martial ideals for the individual man and for the nation as barely distinguishable from one another," *American Manhood*, 235. For the antagonism between Theodore Roosevelt and Mark Twain, see Dalton, *Theodore Roosevelt*, 322–23.

<sup>42</sup> David Henry Hwang, *M. Butterfly* (New York: Dramatist Play Service, 1988).

<sup>43</sup> Edward Said, *On Late Style* (New York: Pantheon, 2006), 7, 16.

<sup>44</sup> *IHD*, act 3, 136–37, emphasis mine.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 135–39, emphasis mine.

<sup>46</sup> Stuart and Susan Levine, *Short Fiction of Edgar Allan Poe*, 438.

<sup>47</sup> "The Man That Was Used Up," in *Short Fiction of Edgar Allan Poe*, 448.

<sup>48</sup> Hwang, *M. Butterfly*, 67.

<sup>49</sup> *IHD*, act 3, 128.

<sup>50</sup> Ives, *Is He Dead? A New Comedy by Mark Twain*, 97.

<sup>51</sup> *IHD*, act 3, 129.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 142–43.