

A “BANISHED ADAM”:

MARK TWAIN AND THE FATHER OF THE HUMAN RACE

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ABSTRACT

While Mark Twain has long been viewed as irreligious, scholarship in recent years has underscored the fact that Christianity, the God of the Bible, and the Presbyterianism of his youth play an integral part in his work. Appearing with particular frequency is the story of Adam and his Fall; although Twain did not believe in the literal existence of Adam, the story of the Fall resonated deeply with him and appears again and again in his works. At times, Twain uses Adam for merely comic effects, but in his in-depth treatments of the Fall, Twain uses Adam as a symbol for the entire human race, through whom he can celebrate, lament, and rage about the human condition, which he saw as subject to a controlling determinism.

While Twain’s Adamic works have long been overlooked and underappreciated, this neglect is unwarranted. In fact, these works, while failing to reach the artistic heights of some of his more well-known writings, can be viewed as the intersection of some of the questions Twain felt were most important. This work examines Twain’s religious and philosophical development over the course of his life and how these two elements affect his extensive treatment of the story of the Fall of Man. Particularly, Twain’s use of Adam reflects the influence of his childhood Calvinism, the deterministic ideas present in his treatise, *What Is Man?*, and his lifelong obsession with the question of human origins.