opinion

A Defense of Twain and Swift

To The Editor:

I would like to take this opportunity to offer a word in defense of Mark Twain and Jonathan Swift. In a recent column, "Some Observations of our Capital City," remarks, "Does Mr. Grant consider Mark Twain or Jonathan Swift躺枕, or examples of 'sick Cambridge liberalism'?" Although I must admit my ignorance on that last matter—I was not aware that either Swift or Twain ever resided in Cambridge—the use of sarcasm is not, as Ms. Pollack says, "a relatively nonviolent way of constructively criticizing a society."

Mark Twain, the first of the great Neoclassic satirists, suggests the correct way to satirically offer constructive criticism, in wit, avoiding "the mention of great crimes, but rather representing 'little extravagancies.' Swift and Twain avoided sarcasm as a vehicle for their satire. Those of us who have read and learned their works are grateful for them. If they had not, they would have been but mediocre representatives of their art. Rather, they made intelligent suggestions (as in A Modest Proposal), used allegory (as in Letters from Earth), and evoked little extravagancies (as in A Description of a City Shower). Phone, Ms. Pollack, be as sarcastic as you please. But do not defame the names of two of the greatest English language satirists.

Stuart C. Alver

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