

QUESTION 46

Do you agree with Mark Twain that you have to experience something in order to write about it?

Jay Halio

Twain may be right, but only up to a point. Surprisingly he obviously fails to account for the autonomy of the imagination. How did Swift experience Gulliver's travels to Lilliput, for example, or the voyage to the Houyhnhms, but through the imagination, the most powerful attribute of the human intellect? Consider also Shakespeare's contemporaries Edmund Spenser and *The Faerie Queen*, Marlowe's *Faustus* and *Tamburlaine*. How else could they have been experienced but through the imagination? Shakespeare's imagination carried him everywhere, through time as well as space, and has never been surpassed.