MARK TWAIN'S PESSIMISM: A STUDY
OF SKEPTICAL ELEMENTS IN
THE EARLY WRITINGS

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PREFACE

The majority of literary critics have looked upon Mark Twain as a vernacular humorist who became a pessimist during the last twenty years of his life. Numerous theories have been advanced in attempts to explain the causative factors underlying the apparently violent metamorphosis from a state of supposed happy contentment to one of apparently extreme disillusionment.

For some years, I have felt that Mark Twain's philosophical development may have been misjudged, that his early fiction may have been generally misinterpreted. The purpose of this study is, then, to explore the writings of the early years for signs of what came to be called his pessimism. If my findings are valid, subsequent Mark Twain scholarship will look upon him not as an artist who made tragic compromises with his society, nor as an unconscious artist, nor as a man who became pessimistic in his dotage. He may be assessed, instead, as a life-long realist who in the fashion of Swift and Voltaire hid his social criticism beneath a facade of humor and burlesque.

I am greatly indebted to Dr. Clinton C. Keeler for his inspiration and guidance, and I am grateful to Dr. Samuel H. Woods, Jr., for his perceptive advice and criticism.

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CHAPTER I

CHARGE AND COUNTERCHARGE

No critical appraisal of Mark Twain can be made without making an assessment of his so-called pessimism. It has been widely accepted that his writings after 1890 exhibit a strong and somewhat unnatural pessimism, the origins of which have formed the basis of a great critical debate. Most critics have assumed that the antisocial elements of these works are manifestations of a deep philosophical reorientation. There is reason to believe, however, that similar elements were present in his earlier writings. I have investigated works which appeared before 1890, hoping to find sufficient evidence to suggest an answer to this question. The burden of my discussion will deal with: pessimistic elements present before 1875; Twain's reaction to the artistic environment, 1860-1890; and interpretations of _The Adventures of Tom Sawyer_ and _A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court_.

Prior to his death in 1910, Mark Twain had become a world idol, a symbol of American success. Although his fame rested largely upon his reputation as a humorist, he had achieved belated acceptance in literary circles as a serious artist, but this appreciation was to be short-lived. The official _Biography_, which Albert Bigelow Paine published in 1913, revealed facets of Mark Twain which had not hitherto been widely dis-

seminated.[1] In addition, critics were beginning to discover What Is Man?, which had been privately published in 1906. One may imagine that they were shocked to find this Mark Twain a different man from the mere teller of tall tales with whom they had been familiar. The surprise was compounded when Paine pieced together and published The Mysterious Stranger.[2] This posthumous work, they discovered, contained the familiar humor, but it was overbalanced by his derogation of Man and his bitter indictment of commonly cherished beliefs and institutions. A reappraisal was obviously called for.

In 1919 Waldo Frank compared The Mysterious Stranger with the earlier books and decided that Twain, a born artist, had been cowed by his environment and as a result had built up a resentment over the years which he eventually became powerless to check.[3] The following year, Van Wyck Brooks embellished upon this theory by concluding that Twain had been psychologically warped by a mother-wife domination which culminated in the vituperative rebellion of the late years. He said:

> No, there was a reason for Mark Twain's pessimism, a reason for that chagrin. . . . It is an established fact, if I am not mistaken that. . . . bitterness of his was the effect of a certain miscarriage in his creative life, a balked personality, an arrested development of which he was himself almost wholly unaware, but which . . . destroyed the meaning of life.[4]

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[1] Mark Twain: A Biography (New York, 1913).

[2] (New York, 1916).

[3] Our America (New York, 1919).

[4] The Ordeal of Mark Twain, 2nd ed. (New York, 1933), p. 25. Hereinafter cited as The Ordeal.

Brooks went on to develop an ingenious but imaginative theory in which he portrays Twain as a writer who had made cowardly compromises with his society:

Moreover, he had so involved himself in the whole popular complex of his Gilded Age that he could not strike out in any direction without wounding his wife or his friends. . . . As an irresponsible child himself, he could not even feel that he had a right to exercise a will-to-satire that violated the wishes of those to whom he had subjected himself. Consequently, instead of satirizing the spirit of his age, he outwardly acquiesced in it and even flattered it.[5]

Brooks concluded:

We shall see that in the end, never having been able to develop, to express itself, to fulfill itself, to air itself in the sun and wind of the world . . . [his artistic spirit] turned as if it were black and malignant, like some monstrous, morbid inner growth, poisoning Mark Twain's whole spiritual system.[6]

The Ordeal was received as a revolution in criticism. Eager to find fault with the preceding age for its artistic inadequacies and anxious to apply the new principles of psychoanalysis to literary criticism, the critics received Brooks' views with acclaim. Lewis Mumford wrote in 1926:

Like all his generation, Mark Twain was incapable of active choice. He accepted the values that surrounded him, and since they were not central human values--and he was too honest not to realize this--he stored up, secretly, the bile of despair.[7]

Granville Hicks was in general agreement: "Only after success of a kind had come to him, after he had seen much of

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[5]Ibid., p. 216.

[6]Ibid., p. 176.

[7]The Golden Day: A Study in American Literature and Culture (New York, 1926), pp. 178-179.

life in the Gilded Age, did doubt and despair overtake him."[8] And Vernon Parrington conceded that Brooks was at least partially correct in assuming that "the change resulted from a thwarting of the creative artist by a disastrous surrender to the ideals of the Gilded Age."[9]

By 1932, however, there were dissenters who resented Brooks' questionable logic and high-handed treatment of Twain. Ludwig Lewisohn's questioning of his Freudian conclusions[10] was followed shortly by the appearance of Bernard DeVoto's defense of the author in Mark Twain's America, which set off the heated conflict that continues to the present. He shrewdly observed that:

> The initial undertaking of Mr. Brooks's psychoanalysis is to discover why Mark Twain, a man of genius, fame, wealth, and happy social relations was a pessimist. . . . The need grew out of a discomfort traditional to criticism in America: the literature of disillusionment has always had to be explained as something other than the sense of reality.[11]

But DeVoto's book was more of an attack on Brooks than a detached analysis of Mark Twain. DeVoto rather heroically defended the West and the vernacular tradition which Brooks had impugned, and despite his chastisement of Brooks for his need to seek an explanation for Twain's pessimism, he forwarded his own theory:

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[8] The Great Tradition (New York, 1933), p. 48.

[9] The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America, Vol. III: Main Currents in American Thought (New York, 1930), pp. 88-89.

[10] Expression in America (New York, 1932).

[11] (New York, 1932), p. 229.

This period of Mark Twain's life has not been adequately described. A series of disasters brought about a reorientation of his personality and gave his talent a different shape. His publishing firm failed; his fortune and his wife's were dissipated in the failure of the Paige typesetting machine; his health broke and, bankrupt at the age of sixty, he had to make a heartbreaking effort to pay off his debts; his oldest daughter died; his youngest daughter developed epilepsy; his wife declined into permanent invalidism. His world toppled in ruins.

He continued:

All three [Autobiography, What Is Man?, and The Mysterious Stranger] originate in the same need. . . . They are an interpretation of personal tragedy, a confession of guilt, a plea for understanding and pardon, a defiance of fate, and a judgment passed on mankind and its place in the universe. They were produced by the climactic experiences of Mark's life and they represent, not a complete change . . . but a new orientation of his personality.[12]

By the centenary anniversary of Mark Twain's birth, the conflict was fully developed and the forces were about equally divided between Brooks and DeVoto. The charges and countercharges were not without a certain chauvinism. Minnie Brashear, for example, set out to prove that Hannibal was a Mecca of culture rather than the rough frontier town characterized by Brooks.[13] Newton Arvin accepted the psychoanalytical approach but wondered if Twain's "puerile humors" were really worth arguing over.[14] Confusion reigned. Delancey Ferguson observed that, although the psychoanalytical critics

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[12]Introduction, Mark Twain in Eruption (New York, 1940), pp. xix-xx. Hereinafter cited as MTE.

[13]Mark Twain: Son of Missouri (Chapel Hill, 1934).

[14]"Mark Twain: 1835-1935," The New Republic, LXXXIII (1935), pp. 125-127.

were in error, Mark Twain was born with an "inner weakness . . . [that] enabled external influences to warp him permanently."[15] It seems that at least part of what everyone wrote is acceptable, but much of it remains questionable.

Almost everyone felt the need to explain logically why Mark Twain, humorist, eventually turned into the author of The Mysterious Stranger. Henry Seidel Canby expressed the general attitude of the first fifty years of twentieth-century Mark Twain criticism when he remarked that "something was wrong with Mark. . . . What reversed his faith in human nature?"[16] To the majority of critics, Mark Twain's pessimism--as they chose to call it--was aberrational. Few could conceive that it might have been extant before 1890. As DeVoto said, "the literature of disillusionment has always had to be explained as something other than the sense of reality." But he could not avoid making the same error, and his inconsistency is typical of most Twain criticism. There was one voice, however, whose remarks were not in harmony with those of either group.

Theodore Dreiser, himself a novelist of the school of disillusionment, was perhaps the first to observe that there was no radical change in Mark Twain's personality; no pessi-

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[15] "The Case for Mark Twain's Wife," Univ. of Toronto Quarterly, IX (1939), pp. 9-21. Quoted in A Casebook on Mark Twain's Wound, ed. Lewis Leary (New York, 1962), p. 160.

[16] Turn West, Turn East: Mark Twain and Henry James (New York, 1951), p. 249.

mistic period specifically fostered by repression or grief. He wrote in 1935:

> The truth is, as you see, that Twain was not two people, but one--a gifted but partially dissuaded Genius who, in time, and by degrees changed into his natural self. This second Twain was observing the world as it truly is.[17]

Unfortunately, Dreiser apparently based his conclusions on intuition. Consequently, they attracted little attention. Further, the critical world was not ready to believe that Mark Twain had been a conscious artist to any degree, and to have accepted Dreiser's thesis would have been to assume, indirectly, that his art was conscious. T. S. Eliot noted that upon re-reading Huckleberry Finn he found a great deal more depth than he had remembered, but he chose to identify it as "unconscious depth."[18] Many still agree with him, but Gladys Carmen Bellamy defends Mark Twain as a conscious artist. She says:

> Critics have found it difficult to explain why Mark Twain--man of genius, fame, wealth, happy domestic relations, and pleasant social environment--should have become a pessimist. He did not in fact become a pessimist, for pessimism flares out occasionally even in his early work.[19]

She continues:

> The degree to which his early writing anticipates his later social and political commentary . . . has not been adequately recognized by Mark Twain scholarship.[20]

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[17] "Mark the Double Twain," English Journal, XXIV (1935), p. 249.

[18] Introduction, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (New York, 1950).

[19] Mark Twain as a Literary Artist (Norman, 1950), p. 25.

[20] Ibid., p. 99.

Miss Bellamy opens new vistas for Mark Twain criticism. If the early writings do indeed anticipate the late works, most critics have then failed to understand the former. Working on the same basic premise, Philip Foner traces Mark Twain's social criticism through most of the non-fiction. He ably demonstrates that differences between Twain of the Enterprise and Twain à fin de siècle are minor.[21] But most critics retain old concepts.

Henry Nash Smith presents a revision of DeVoto's basic principles. While not denying the validity of DeVoto's premise that the pessimistic writings were provoked by the personal tragedies, he says:

> Such a procedure does provide an imaginative escape from his sense of guilt. But it has a significantly close relation to ideas and themes that appear not only in Pudd'nhead Wilson and "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg" but in A Connecticut Yankee, which was written before any of the misfortunes mentioned by DeVoto. The despair expressed in Mark Twain's late work had its origins in an intellectual crisis antedating the period of his personal misfortune.[22]

He goes on to develop the theory that both A Connecticut Yankee and Huckleberry Finn are roman experimentals. Since he sees Twain as an unconscious artist, he believes that his ideological reorientations occur during the process of writing. He asserts, for instance, that Twain's disillusionment began when he realized that Huck and Jim could not escape simply

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[21] Mark Twain: Social Critic (New York, 1958).

[22] Mark Twain: The Development of a Writer (Cambridge, Mass., 1962), p. 186. Hereinafter cited as Development of a Writer.

by reaching Cairo. There is reason to believe, however, that Mark Twain was more the conscious writer than has been suspected. If an unbroken thread of social criticism extends through the non-fiction--as Foner illustrates--it would not be untoward to assume, temporarily, that a similar phenomenon might be observable in the fiction.

One aspect of the argument over Mark Twain is seldom discussed. This is, in essence, whether the term "pessimism" is applicable to him. A pessimist is one who takes the gloomiest possible view of his world. Mark Twain is never this, not even in The Mysterious Stranger. He doubtless appears to, however, to those who have grown accustomed to judging him as a humorist, a writer of boy's tales, but if it may be shown that even the early fiction contains strains of skepticism and iconoclasm, then the output of the last years may be assumed to have been merely a continuation of that. In this light, even The Mysterious Stranger may be judged as an example of extreme realism rather than pessimism in the sense in which the term is commonly applied. The novel is an open attack against conventional values, but its theme does not differ greatly from the works of other twentieth-century novelists. Twain states unequivocably that the old values are false, outworn, and perverting, but his young contemporaries were saying essentially the same things and they were not adjudged pessimists. The charges of pessimism levied against Twain are more likely to have resulted from

the evaluations of critics who have misunderstood the early works. To them the differences between Tom Sawyer and The Mysterious Stranger seem so unintelligibly overwhelming that pessimism seems the only logical answer. But Mark Twain is, first of all, a humanist who, having set out to destroy the old gods, feels nevertheless that there is still hope for man if he can learn to laugh at his own absurdities:

> For your race, in its poverty, has unquestionably one really effective weapon--laughter. Power, money, persuasion, supplication, persecution--these can lift at a colossal humbug--push it a little--weaken it a little, century by century, but only laughter can blow it to rags and atoms at a blast. Against the assault of laughter nothing can stand.[23]

He gives this advice near the end of The Mysterious Stranger. It is neither pessimistic nor misanthropic, and when he expresses doubt that mankind will ever learn this lesson, his despair is a proof of sorts that there is still hope. Without hope there is no need to encourage reform, and Mark Twain was, to the end, a reformer.

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[23] p. 736-737.

CHAPTER II

EVIDENCES OF EARLY PESSIMISM

Van Wyck Brooks made the first important indictment against Mark Twain because it did not appear to him that the author had substituted a new ideal for the racial ideals he had abandoned. Herein lies one of Brooks' most egregious errors, for Mark Twain was never solely an iconoclast. He usually writes in support of some humanitarian cause with a missionary's zeal. As Gladys Bellamy observes:

> From the early days in the west to the time when he last lays his pen aside, he is never long without some cause to champion, some wrong to right, some victim to defend. He is always fiercely stirred; he becomes a willing channel for what has been called the Anglo-Saxon corrective passion. Almost abnormally sensitive, he looks upon the woes of the world, and he suffers. He asks himself, Who has put these wrongs upon mankind? And he answers himself, Mankind. Very well then; he will reform mankind.[1]

A man of this sort is no pessimist; neither is he a misanthrope; his anger is traceable, like Swift's, to a love for man. Mark Twain was an idealistic humanist who was goaded to frequent anger by man's blindness and his gross inhumanity to his fellow man.

It is difficult to pinpoint the time, exactly, when Mark

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[1]Mark Twain as a Literary Artist, p. 56.

Twain began to show skeptical tendencies, but the following passage from the Autobiography hints that he had begun to exhibit them quite early:

> Four years ago [1902] I was invited by the University of Missouri to come out there and receive the honorary degree of LL. D. I took that opportunity to spend a week in Hannibal. . . . It had been fifty-five years since Tom Nash and I had had that adventure.[2] When I was at the railway station, ready to leave . . . there was a great crowd of citizens there. I saw Tom Nash approaching me across a vacant space, and I walked toward him, for I recognized him at once. . . . He came up to me, made a trumpet of his hands at my ear, nodded his head toward the citizens, and said confidentially--in a yell like a fog horn--"Same damned fools, Sam."[3]

The implication is that Tom and Sam had shared this view as boys. What Philip Foner characterizes as Mark Twain's first political satire bears out this conclusion. The story, featured in the Hannibal Journal of September 23, 1852, appeared above the pen name, W. Epaminondas Adrastus Blab. As Foner describes it:

> The article explained that an extra session of the State Legislature had been called by the Governor, expressly for the purpose of changing the writer's surname from Perkins to Blab. "My title was altered, shortened, and greatly beautified," the correspondent boasted, "and all at a cost of only a few thousand dollars to the State."[4]

This is Twain's first known expression of contempt for corrupt legislators, and it serves as a reliable indication that he had, by his mid-teens, begun to develop the perceptive clarity of his maturity. It was this which enabled him to

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[2]Nash and Twain had been trapped on the Mississippi during an ice break-up. Nash fell into the water and had, says Twain, contracted scarlet fever which resulted in deafness.

[3]Mark Twain's Autobiography, ed. Albert Bigelow Paine (New York, 1924), II, 99.

[4]pp. 14-15.

observe the horrible irony of the situation when his well-meaning fellow-townspeople placed a heavy Bible on the chest of Dave Smarr, who was dying from a chest wound. As Twain recalled years afterward: "In all the throng of gaping and sympathetic onlookers there was not one with common sense enough to perceive that an anvil would have been in better taste . . . and swifter in its atrocious work. In my nightmares I gasped and struggled for breath under the crush of that vast book for many a night."[5] It was this sensitivity which enabled him to see through the facade of the dominant culture to find that it was decadent and perverted within. Old absolutes had become outworn. Few people lived conscious lives. As Henry Nash Smith says: "They . . . [were] mere bundles of tropism, at the mercy of scoundrels like the Duke and the King who . . . [knew] how to exploit their prejudices and delusions."[6]

It is difficult to understand Brooks' assertion that Mark Twain's artistic development was arrested by this environment. In the first place, he had left Hannibal before reaching manhood. Secondly, without its stimulating impress he may have never risen above mediocrity. Artistic sensibility is inborn rather than acquired, but one must imagine that Twain's was stimulated into an earlier awareness by what Ber-

[5]Autobiography, I, 131.

[6]Development of a Writer, p. 117.

nard DeVoto calls the "black nightmares" of Hannibal. It is also doubtful that the Calvinism of Jean Lampton Clemens warped her son's mind any more than would have the sheltered intellectual atmosphere of some well-regulated eastern academy. Life in any village--east or west--gave children an introduction to life which was never taught in the boarding schools.

For a part of 1856 Sam Clemens worked in Cincinnati where he boarded with a self-styled philosopher named Macfarlane, who had formulated his own pre-Darwinian theory of evolution. In the evenings, Clemens, as he tells us, would often sit by the fire and listen as the older man talked:

> Macfarlane considered that the animal life in the world was developed in the course of aeons of time from a few microscopic seed germs, or perhaps <u>one</u> microscopic seed germ deposited upon the globe by the Creator in the dawn of time; and that this development was progressive upon an ascending scale toward ultimate perfection until <u>man</u> was reached; and that then the progressive scheme broke pitifully down and went to wreck and ruin!
>
> He said that man's heart was the only bad heart in the animal kingdom; that man was the only animal capable of feeling malice, envy, vindictiveness, revengefulness, hatred, selfishness, the only animal that loved drunkenness, almost the only animal that could endure personal uncleanliness and a filthy habitation, the sole animal in whom was fully developed the base instinct called <u>patriotism</u>, the sole animal that robs, persecutes, oppresses, and kills members of its own immediate tribe, the sole animal that steals and enslaves the members of any <u>tribe</u>.
>
> He claimed that man's intellect was a brutal addition to him and degraded him to a rank far below the plane of the other animals, and that there was never a man who did not use his intellect daily all his life to advantage himself at other people's expense. The divinest divine reduced his domestics to humble servitude under him by advantage of his superior intellect, and those servants in turn were above a

still lower grade of people by force of brains that were still a little better than theirs.[7]

Mark Twain had, then, by his twenty-first year been exposed to highly subversive philosophical views. Social conformity and religion might have kept most young men's thoughts within the bounds of social acceptability, but not Mark Twain. As a boy he had concluded that prayer was a rather poor method of assuring the attainment of anything.[8] In 1860 he could write Orion, "What a man wants with religion in these breadless times surpasses my comprehension," and he had found on the river that ideal beauty was for those who could see only the surface of nature.[9] Behind every perception of the beautiful there were facts of another sort. Once the facts were known, all of the "romance and beauty" were gone. Still another influence was his association with the Freemasons, which began in 1861. Here Twain was

introduced to Deistic ideas which supplemented those gleaned from the writings of Tom Paine. The basic doctrine of the order was that all organized religions are mere sects, containing distorted versions of a universal truth once held by all mankind.[10]

With such an apprenticeship, it is not surprising that "pretended or misguided piety and other perversions of Christianity [came to] head the list of counts in Mark Twain's in-

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[7]Autobiography, I, 146.

[8]MTE, p. 109.

[9]Mark Twain's Letters, ed. Albert Bigelow Paine (New York, 1917), I, 45. Hereinafter cited as MTL.

[10]Foner, p. 130.

dictment of the prewar South. And properly: for it is of course religion that stands at the center of the system of values in the society of this . . . world and by implication in all societies."[11] Neither is it surprising that Mark Twain's early writings reflect his dissatisfaction with the shams and hypocrisies of religion as well as those of society in general, but it is not widely held that his views of man and his institutions were as acid and penetrating in the period, 1860-1890, as they were to become thereafter. This warrants clarification.

As William Dean Howells states in _My Mark Twain_, his discussions with Twain ranged widely, but that "at times he would reason high--

> Of Providence, foreknowledge, will and fate,
> Fixed fate, free will, foreknowledge absolute."[12]

Providence, with all of the meanings society gave it, interested Twain until the end. In the late writings we find him debunking the common view which holds that a benevolent God stands ready, awaiting the call of needy man for intercession. That this was not a product of the final two decades --as DeVoto seems inclined to believe--may be seen in the following passage from _The Innocents Abroad_, wherein Twain speaks through the persona of the Quaker City's Executive Officer:

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[11] Henry Nash Smith, p. 118.

[12] _Memories_ (New York, 1910), _Selected Writings of William Dean Howells_ (New York, 1950), p. 887.

"There they are, down there every night at eight bells, praying for fair winds--when they know as well as I do that this is the only ship going east this time of the year, but there's a thousand coming west--what's a fair wind for us is a head wind for them--the Almighty's blowing a fair wind for a thousand vessels and this tribe wants him to turn it clear around so as to accomodate one,--and she a steamship at that! It ain't good sense, it ain't good reason, it ain't good Christianity, it ain't common human charity. Avast with such nonsense!"[13]

This skeptical attitude permeates, as shall be shown, his writings and his fiction from the "Jumping Frog" through The Mysterious Stranger.

Hypocrisy in any form was one of Mark Twain's favorite targets, particularly when it was observable in the acts of the clergy--where to him it became a mortal sin. As early as 1865 he attacked them in an imaginary exchange of letters in the Californian with three ministers from the East who had supposedly refused a call to the Grace Church of San Francisco because the proffered salary was inadequate. He wrote satirically:

That $7000 dodge was only a bid--nothing more. . . . I will go to work and get up a little competition among the cloth, and the result of it will be that you will make more money in six months here than you would in New York in a year. I can do it. I have a great deal of influence with the clergy here . . . I can get them to strike for higher wages anytime.[14]

If he was not a Christian ideologically, he tried to be morally. He believed in the humanitarian principles on which Christian morality is based, and when members of the ministry

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[13]Author's National Edition (New York, 1899), I, 76. This edition will be used, hereinafter, whenever possible.

[14]Quoted in Foner, p. 142.

departed from the code in its strictest interpretation, Mark Twain was on hand to point out the error of their ways.

In 1870 he was outraged by the decision of a Brooklyn minister, T. De Witt Talmage, to exclude poor people from his church because they smelled bad.[15] The following year, he attacked a Reverend Sabine for refusing to bury the well-known actor, George Holland--because he was an actor. In this philippic he went so far as to state that Holland had done more to advance the doctrine of Christianity--according to Christ--than had most ministers.[16] The year 1873 saw him chastising clergymen who supported the temperance movement:

> It seems to me that it would better become clergymen to teach their flocks to respect the laws of the land, and urge them to refrain from breaking them. But it is not a new thing for a thoroughly good and well-meaning preacher's soft heart to run away with his soft head.[17]

From the time of his first visit to the Sandwich Islands until his death, Twain harbored a violent dislike for imperialism and missionaries. He perceived that these two widely separated aspects of nineteenth and twentieth-century civilization were often oddly connected. He saw that the missionary frequently opened the door for imperialism by bringing

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[15] Contributions to the Galaxy: 1868-1871, Facsimile Reproductions, ed. Bruce R. McElderry, Jr. (Gainesville, Fla., 1961), May, 1870. Hereinafter cited as Galaxy.

[16] Ibid., February, 1871.

[17] Europe and Elsewhere, ed. Albert Bigelow Paine (New York, 1923), p. 30.

his own civilization to primitive areas. The articles, "To the Person Sitting in Darkness," and "To My Missionary Critics," both published in the North American Review in 1901, are often cited as evidence of his late pessimism.[18] But his earlier writings express identical sentiments and opinions. As Philip Foner points out: "Within a year following his return from the Islands, he was publicly ranked with the anti-expansionists. In 1867, his satire helped defeat Secretary of State William H. Seward's schemes to annex the Danish island of St. Thomas."[19] And again in the New York Tribune of January 9, 1873, we find an article which satirically decries missionary practices and annexing:

> We must annex those people. We can afflict them with our wise and beneficent government. We can introduce the novelty of thieves, all the way up from streetcar pickpockets to municipal robbers and government defaulters and show them how amusing it is to arrest them and try them and then turn them loose--some for cash, and some for "political influence." We can make them ashamed of their simple and primitive justice.
> We can give them juries composed of the most simple and charming leatherheads. We can give them railway corporations who will buy their Legislatures like old clothes, and run over their best citizens. We can furnish them some Jay Goulds who will do away with their old-time notions that stealing is not respectable.
> We can make that little bunch of sleepy islands the hottest corner on earth and array it in the moral splendor of our high and holy civilization. Annexation is what the poor islanders need. "Shall we to men benighted the lamp of life deny?"[20]

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[18] Ibid., pp. 250-296.

[19] Foner, p. 240.

[20] Mark Twain: On the Damned Human Race, ed. Janet Smith (New York, 1962), p. 70. Hereinafter DHR.

DeVoto and Brooks and their followers have curiously insisted that Mark Twain's agnosticism was a facet of the pessimism of his dotage. Indeed, Howells, in _My Mark Twain_, gave credence to this position by implying that Clemens had at one time enjoyed a more than shallow faith in a standard Christian theology as an adult.[21] But this may be attributable to his life-long efforts to keep the public image of Twain acceptable, for there are numerous instances in their letters which imply that a lack of orthodoxy prevailed in the minds of both. Despite Howells' innocent facade, we find in a letter from Clemens to his brother Orion, of March 23, 1878, that Howells had also absorbed Arian teachings. Clemens wrote: "Neither Howells nor I believe in hell or the divinity of the Savior."[22]

There can be no doubt that Mark Twain, to win the hand of Olivia Langdon, was forced to become a Christian in appearance. Mrs. Langdon's letters of inquiry to Mrs. Fairbanks make this clear, and for a time after the marriage we know that he attempted to observe at least the forms of Christian worship. But it is manifest from his own description that it was a poor effort:

> Behold then Samuel L. Clemens--now become for everybody Mark Twain, the great American humorist--the rough days of his western life put behind him, settled down at number 472

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[21] p. 901.

[22] _MTL_, I, 323.

Delaware Avenue, Buffalo, trying hard to be respectable. Here he lives the model life of a family man, joins in the morning prayer and listens as best he can to the daily reading of the Scriptures. More than that, he even makes desperate efforts to give up smoking.

He has his wife at his side, his desk at his elbow and the world at his feet. After all, what does tobacco matter? Let's have another chapter of Deuteronomy.[23]

From the tone of this survey of his circumstances, one would be fairly safe in assuming that this situation could not long continue--it did not. Before they had celebrated their first anniversary, Mark compulsively exploded one day to Livy: "You may keep this up if you want to, but I must ask you to excuse me from it. It is making me a hypocrite. I don't believe in this Bible. It contradicts my reason. I can't sit here and listen to it, letting you believe that I regard it as you do, in the light of gospel, the word of God." The effects of this declaration had strange manifestations, particularly in Livy, for by December, 1871 she could write him: "It is so long since I have been to church. . . . I did not tell her [Mrs. C. D. Warner] how almost perfectly cold I am toward God."[24] Neither of them ever returned to conventional beliefs. Shortly before her death Twain said to her, "Livy, if it comforts you to lean on the Christian faith do so," and she answered, "I can't Youth. I haven't any."[25] Their beliefs, therefore, were greatly at odds with

[23]Quoted in Foner, p. 131.

[24]Ibid.

[25]Biography, p. 650.

those of conventional society. Van Wyck Brooks would have had Twain advertise this fact to prove his freedom. He did, but Mr. Brooks never understood, because the advertisement was by implication. To do otherwise had been foolish. With characteristic frankness he revealed his position to Reverend Twichell in 1878. "Joe," he said, "I'm going to make a confession. I don't believe in your religion at all. I've been living a lie right straight along whenever I pretended to."[26] And in an unpublished item in his notebook, dated 1887, he indicated that his view was essentially the same as he had outlined in his letter to Orion in 1860: "I cannot see how a man of any large degree of humorous perception can ever be religious--except he purposely shut the eyes of his mind & keep them shut by force."[27]

As we have seen, Mark Twain, while not accepting Christianity as a religion, insisted upon upholding its moral code. The ease with which avowed Christians abridged the code and distorted it to justify questionable ends was a constant source of irritation. He thoroughly disliked such people; this is apparent in his late chastisements of Rockefeller, Gould, and others of their ilk. These diatribes are, again, said to be indicative of age-engendered pessimism, but similar philippics are found early in his career when he attempted

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[26] Ibid., p. 132.

[27] Ibid.

to show that aristocracy of the "Big Barbecue" could trace its financial success to crooked dealing rather than to the fabulous laws of Ben Franklin as the public was led to believe.

In an article for Packard's Monthly of March, 1869, he was probably thought to be joking when he said: "If a man be rich he is greatly honored, and can become a legislator, a governor, a general, a senator, no matter how ignorant an ass he is."[28] His point was, of course, that "Columbia of the Market Place," to rephrase Ruskin, had become the reigning goddess of the land, and that all means employed in the begetting of money--no matter how immoral or inhuman--were acceptable and justifiable so long as they did indeed result in the accumulation of wealth. In 1870 his articles in Galaxy refute the aphorisms of Franklin and the Sunday school success stories.[29] As the Innocent abroad, we find him already attacking the pragmatic views of a civilization which had begun to worship Mammon.[30] "The Facts in the Case of George Fisher Deceased," which appeared in the Galaxy of January, 1871, presented an account of a Florida family which had, with the assistance of corrupt legislators, succeeded in making and collecting false claims against the

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[28]Ibid., p. 156.

[29]Galaxy, May, 1870.

[30]Innocents Abroad, I, 122.

government. He had shown previously, in "The Facts in the Case of the Great Beef Contract," that corrupt bureaucracy made it nearly impossible to collect legitimate claims.[31] One of his more acrimonious attacks on corruption in government was aimed at the Tweed machine. It was presented in the form of a catechism and appeared in the New York Tribune of September 27, 1871. It was entitled, "The Revised Catechism" and was printed, in part, as follows:

> Q. What is the chief end of man?
> A. To get rich.
>
> Q. In what way?
> A. Dishonestly, if we can, honestly if we must.
>
> Q. Who is God, the only one and true?
> A. Money is God. Gold and greenbacks and stocks--father, son, and the ghost of the same--three persons in one: these are the true and only God, mighty and supreme; and William Tweed is his prophet.
>
> . . . .
>
> Q. Do we progress?
> A. You bet your life.[32]

Two years later, in the same paper, he announced, "To my mind, Judas Iscariot was nothing but a low, mean premature Congressman."[33] But perhaps his most moving denunciations of government appeared in the letters ostensibly written by a Chinese immigrant, entitled, "Goldsmith's Friend

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[31]Galaxy, May, 1870.

[32]Foner, p. 68.

[33]DHR, p. 105.

Abroad Again." They appeared periodically in Galaxy and reveal with great feeling, Mark Twain's hatred of man's shabby treatment of his fellow men. The immigrant, Ah Song Hi, innocently satirizes, by innuendo, the laws, the courts, and the government of this "great and good and noble country . . . [which] hates all forms of vice and chicanery."[34] He notes the two-dollar fee collected from each immigrant by the Consul of the United States and remarks that although this practice had not yet been approved by Congress, its approval was imminent. He naively continues:

> Ah, if the law-makers had only known there were plenty of doctors in the city glad of a chance to vaccinate people for a dollar or two, they would never have put the price up so high [ten dollars] against a poor friendless Irish, or Italian or Chinese pauper fleeing to the good land to escape hunger and hard times.[35]

In an ensuing letter, Ah Song Hi tells that he is imprisoned. Twain, momentarily dropping the artifice of persona until the last word of the paragraph, speaks directly to the reader to describe San Francisco justice:

> Overwhelming proofs were necessary to convict an Irishman of crime, and even then his punishment amounted to little; Frenchmen, Spaniards, and Italians had strict and unprejudiced justice meted out to them, in exact accordance with the evidence; negroes were promptly punished, when there was the slightest preponderance of testimony against them; but Chinamen were punished always, apparently.[36]

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[34] October, 1870.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid., November, 1870.

Twain had included a vignette on the same subject in the Galaxy of the previous May. It was called, "The Disgraceful Persecution of a Boy"; in it he ironically derides the police for arresting a boy who had stoned a Chinaman. The butt of his satire is, of course, the society which had taught the boy that stoning Chinese was acceptable socially.[37] He had written several articles of this nature during his brief stay with the San Francisco Daily Morning Call, none of which were ever published because the editors felt that they might arouse the anger of the Irish. This censorship and Twain's refusal to submit to it ultimately cost him his job with the paper, and in part taught him a valuable lesson which he was not soon to forget. It taught him--as publisher's refusals and poor sales taught Melville--that the American public was not ready for the truth in unveiled form, and we may imagine that it was this lesson which brought about his adaptation of a literary disguise.

The Innocents Abroad is full of his scorn for the masses --and by masses he seldom means only commoners. Twain's persona castigates their love of gore as attested to by the inquisitive crowds which swarmed to the Paris morgue: "Now this [the corpse of a drowned man] don't afford you any satisfaction--a party with his head shot off is what you need";[38]

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[37]Ibid., May, 1870.

[38]I, 181.

he establishes his position on the Negro question: "Negroes are deemed as good as white people, in Venice, and so this man [a Negro] feels no desire to go back to his native land. His judgment is correct";[39] through the media of artists he derides the worship of men by men: "Their nauseous adulation of princely patrons was more prominent to me . . . than the charms of color and expression. . . . Gratitude for kindnesses is well, but it seems to me that some of those artists carried it so far that it ceased to be gratitude, and became worship. If there is a plausible excuse for the worship of men, then by all means let us forgive Rubens and his brethren";[40] he abundantly lampoons any religious practices and beliefs which he deems foolish or false; but most of all, he satirizes his fellow-countrymen.

Mark Twain, the man whose so-called misanthropy did not supposedly develop until his old age, was capable of writing in 1884: "Isn't human nature the most consummate sham & lie that was ever invented? Isn't man a creature to be ashamed of in pretty much all his aspects? Is he really fit for anything but to be stood up on the street corner as a convenience for dogs?"[41] But it was his respect for man's dignity, his

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[39]Ibid., p. 308.

[40]Ibid., p. 185.

[41]_Mark Twain-Howells Letters_: _The Correspondence of Samuel L. Clemens and William D. Howells, 1872-1910_, ed. Henry Nash Smith and William M. Gibson (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), II, 501. Hereinafter cited as _MTHL_.

love for this ideal which was so often compromised, that aroused his anger and anguish. Acute perception and the Anglo-Saxon spirit of evangelism created Mark Twain, the author, from the man Samuel Clemens. As Mark Twain once said, "I have always preached." This is why the reader may find--if he looks--in even those writings which have no apparent purpose other than humor, a veiled sermon.

For example, an anecdote which derives from his stay in Washington, circa 1868, takes place in the boarding house at which Twain and his friend Riley lived. Their landlady weeps affectedly over the fate of an old Negro servant:

> "And oh to think she should meet death at last!--a-sitting over the red-hot stove at three o'clock in the morning and went to sleep and fell on it and was actually _roasted_! . . . I am but a poor woman, but even if I have to scrimp to do it, I will put up a tombstone over that lone sufferer's grave--and Mr. Riley, if you would have the goodness to think up a little epitaph to put on it which would sort of describe the awful way in which she met her--"
>
> "Put it '_Well done_, good and faithful servant!'" said Riley and never smiled.[42]

The tragic irony within this old pun rests upon the fact that the maudlin landlady wishes to atone, with ostentation, for her previous callousness of requiring the servant to work at three o'clock in the morning. Such glossings neutralize the humor, but they are necessary to achieve an understanding of Mark Twain.

This pessimism, if it is such, is not a facet of his personality which emerged in his old age as a manifestation

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[42] _Galaxy_, November, 1870.

of life-long repression; nor is it a result of the great personal tragedies which beset his declining years; it was, instead, something which he had possessed in some degree of fulness from 1860 on. It emerged from the combination of his inherited Calvinistic evangelism with his artist's sensitivity. It was necessary for him--were he to avoid extreme mental anguish--to undertake reform. He was not unlike Swift in this respect, who once wrote to Alexander Pope:

> When you think of the world give it one lash the more at my request. I have ever hated all nations, professions, and communities, and all my love is toward individuals. . . . But principally I hate and detest that animal called man, although I heartily love John, Peter, Thomas, and so forth. This is the system upon which I have governed myself many years, but do not tell, and so I shall go on till I have done with them. . . . and I never will have peace of mind till all honest men are of my opinion.[43]

It does not seem untoward to imagine that this passage might have come from a letter of Mark Twain's to his friend William Dean Howells.

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[43] _Jonathan Swift: Selected Prose and Poetry_, ed. Edward Rosenheim, Jr. (New York, 1959), p. 409.

CHAPTER III

THE ORIGINS OF COMPROMISE

We have seen that Mark Twain had had difficulty in adapting himself to current newspaper mores in California. His rebellion against a perversion of his truth by censorship was to be a milestone. He was approaching full stature as a satirist and social critic; hence, it was with wrath that he arose against attempts to make his writing socially acceptable. His immediate reaction was to stop writing, and he did--after a fashion, turning his mundane reportorial chores over to Smiggy McGlural. But finally, even such an arrangement, however comfortable it might be, became unbearable, and the association with the _Daily Morning Call_ came to an end.

Mark Twain's life had reached its nadir. He had experienced literary success of a sort in Virginia City, but had let his vanity get the best of him; he had migrated to California, and a prideful honesty had cost him his job. Resentful and discouraged, at odds with the world, he withdrew for a time. Eventually, he recovered and returned to journalism, a wounded but wiser man. Out of the period, October, 1864, to February, 1866, came little more than "The Jumping Frog," but even it reflects the change that had taken place. Instead

of open satire with incidental humor, we find humor predominating over veiled satire. As Edgar Branch says, "He was becoming more practiced in fighting for a cause," he had, in other words, learned that there were more ways than one to skin a cat.[1]

Late in February of 1866, he contracted with the Sacramento Daily Union to write a series of travel letters on the Sandwich Islands. It was during this trip that his changed attitude became more noticeable. Henry Nash Smith observes that:

> This assignment tended to detach him from his irresponsible Bohemianism and make him into a spokesman for respectable opinion. . . . he made intermittent efforts to live up to his new role by representing himself as a relatively dignified traveler and inventing a traveling companion Brown to take the vernacular point of view.[2]

And so Mark Twain was no longer the ebullient westerner of the Enterprise. He had learned the lesson that every writer must learn if he is to find publishers and readers. "The editor of a newspaper cannot be independent . . .; no clergy-man is a free man . . .; writers of all kinds are manacled servants of the public. We write frankly and fearlessly, but then we 'modify' before we print."[3] He had learned the necessity of compromise. Had Herman Melville

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[1] The Literary Apprenticeship of Mark Twain (Urbana, 1950), p. 157.

[2] Development of a Writer, p. 13.

[3] Mark Twain, quoted by Walter Blair, Mark Twain and Huck Finn (Berkeley, 1960), p. 71.

learned this lesson his quarter-century of isolation would have been unnecessary. Despite the fact that Van Wyck Brooks holds up Melville's withdrawal for emulation as an act of the courageous and incorruptible artist, it is doubtful that he could have found a market for his manuscripts: he had already damaged his reputation.

Mark Twain had also learned, while working for the Enterprise, that the truth could be stated with impunity beneath the guise of humor. It is doubtful that, as the Brooksian school insists, this early compromise was made for personal aggrandizement completely. That his purpose was primarily an ethical one is attested to by his chagrin at having gained his first wide notoriety through the "Jumping Frog." He knew that the message it contained would be too delicately concealed for his readers to perceive it. He had no desire to be grouped with the Petroleum Nasbys and the Artemus Wards whose aim was to tickle the sensibilities of the masses. No, Mark Twain was serious. His humor was a vehicle for his moral sermons. But the die was cast, and his early lecture tours did little to change the public's opinion of him, and by the time Innocents Abroad was published, he was firmly established as the reigning backwoods humorist of the nation. It would take his life time to invalidate this image, and even then favorable critical appreciation as a serious artist was to be of short duration.

To the world, Mark Twain is still known mainly as a

humorist. The children's card game, "Authors," includes The Mysterious Stranger as one of Mark Twain's titles, probably under the misapprehension that it is a funny and wholesome book like Tom Sawyer. Theodore Dreiser noted in 1935 that it was included on numerous Christmas-gift suggestion lists for children. All of which is to say that:

> The humorist must pay the penalty of his humor; he must run the risk of being tolerated as a mere funmaker, not to be taken seriously, and unworthy of critical consideration. This penalty is being now paid by Mark Twain. In many of the discussions of American literature he is dismissed as though he were only a competitor of his predecessors, Artemus Ward and John Phoenix, instead of being, what he is really, a writer who is to be classed with Cervantes and Moliere. . . . Mark Twain has had to live down his past.[4]

Traditionally, humor is thought to be vulgar and satire divine. And yet, in every generation, low humor--Rabelais, Fielding, Swift, and Cervantes--has turned out to be highest satire. Unfortunately, the discovery has been usually post-mortem. That the stigma of the humorist was undesirable to the man of letters in the Gilded Age is made clear by an apology of James Russel Lowell's:

> If I put on the cap and bells and made myself one of the court-fools of King Demos, it was less to make his majesty laugh than to win a passage to his royal ears for certain serious things which I had deeply at heart. I say this because there is no imputation that could be more galling to any man's self-respect than that of being a mere jester.[5]

In order to win a passage to the ears of King Demos,

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[4]Brander Matthews, introduction, Author's National Edition.

[5]Introduction, The Biglow Papers, Vol. XI: The Complete Writings (Cambridge, Mass., 1904), p. 8.

Twain had donned the cap and bells, but the imputation that he was only a jester became unbearably galling. His introductory remarks in his maiden column for Galaxy reflect his sentiments rather directly:

These Memoranda are not a "humorous" department. I would not conduct an exclusively and professedly humorous department for anyone. I would always prefer to have the privilege of printing a serious and sensible remark, in case one occurred to me without the reader's feeling obliged to consider himself outraged. . . . I am liable, some day, to want to print my opinion on jurisprudence, or Homeric poetry, or international law, and I shall do it.[6]

His distaste for the jester-reputation is frequently reflected in his letters to Howells. In 1875 he planned to organize a movement among authors to force copyright legislation on Congress by presenting a petition under the auspices of the New England literary aristocracy:

Then I'll have the whole thing lithographed . . . & move upon the President & Congress in person, but in the subordinate capacity of a party who is merely the agent of better and wiser men--men whom the country cannot venture to laugh at.[7]

When Howells praised Tom Sawyer for evidences of "a growing seriousness of meaning in the apparently unmoralized drolling . . . [of a] subtile humorist," in the Atlantic for December, 1875, Twain penned a revealing letter of thanks:

Yours is the recognized critical Court of Last Resort in this country . . . and so to have gained this decree of yours before I am forty years old, I regard as a thing to be downright

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[6] Galaxy, May, 1870.

[7] MTHL, I, 99.

proud of. Mrs. Clemens says, "Tell him I am just as grateful to him as I can be." (It sounds as if she were grateful to you for heroically trampling the truth under foot in order to praise me--but in reality it means that she is grateful to you for being so bold to utter a truth which she fully believes all competent people know, but which none has heretofore been brave enough to utter.) You see, the thing that gravels her is that I am so persistently glorified as a mere buffoon, as if that entirely covered my case--which she denies with venom.[8]

His charge is justified, but a few of his readers had already begun to look beneath the "apparently unmoralized drolling." Bret Harte in 1866 had mentioned that there was more to Twain than simply the humorist, and Charles Henry Webb, the publisher of his first book, had insisted in 1867 that he was primarily a moralist and only secondarily a humorist.[9] In a review of A Tramp Abroad, the Chicago Tribune observed in 1880 that:

The author is unfortunate in one respect. Every time he opens his mouth and puts his pen to paper he is credited with the intention of making you laugh. That is his avowed object in life. For that he exists. That is his profession. When he fails to make laughter--no matter how much useful information he may convey, or whatever else he may accomplish--his work is apt to be regarded as a failure.[10]

But perceptive criticism of this kind was unfortunately rare in America until after 1890. Critical acceptance in Europe, however, came earlier, and by 1883 Mark Twain was highly regarded there as a serious writer. Thomas Hardy said to How-

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[8]Ibid., I, 107.

[9]Foner, p. 38.

[10]Ibid., p. 46.

ells one night at dinner: "Why don't people understand that Mark Twain is not merely a great humorist."[11]

By the turn of the century, however, Twain had at last captured the respect of scholar and critic alike, both at home and abroad. Howells had been an admirer for years, Brander Matthews had become a supporter as had other professors, and in a review of "The Man Who Corrupted Hadleyburg," William Archer said:

> Perhaps you wonder to find Mark Twain among the moralists at all? If so, you have read his previous books to little purpose. They are full of ethical suggestions. Sometimes it is true, his moral decisions are a little summary. Often. . . his serious meaning is lightly veiled in paradox, exaggeration, irony. But his humor is seldom entirely irresponsible . . . and it often goes very deep into human nature.[12]

It is not surprising, therefore, that when he reached his seventieth birthday he could decide with equanimity to retire from the world of literature, feeling that he had in some measure accomplished what he had set out to do. After all, America's best-known humorist had been awarded the scarlet gown of Oxford. He had at last been accepted as he had wished, and he felt that the time had come to make a confession:

> [All the time] I have been playing professional humorist before the public, I have had for company seventy-eight other American humorists. Each and every one of the seventy-eight rose in my time . . . and by and by vanished.
> . . . .

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[11] *Biography*, p. 747.

[12] Quoted in Foner, p. 51.

> Why have they perished? Because they were merely humorists. Humorists of the "mere" sort cannot survive. Humor is only a fragrance, a decoration. Often it is merely an odd trick of speech and of spelling. . . . There are those who say a novel should be a work of art solely, and you must not preach in it, you must not teach in it. That may be true as regards novels but it is not true as regards humor. Humor must not professedly teach, and it must not professedly preach, but it must do both if it would live forever. . . . I have always preached . . . If the humor came of its own accord and uninvited, I have allowed it a place in my sermon, but I was not writing the sermon for the sake of the humor. I should have written the sermon just the same, whether any humor applied for admission or not.[13]

The new appreciation ended, approximately, with an article by Archibald Henderson in Harper's of May, 1909. Henderson lauded Twain for his humanity and the universality of his humor, and said: "He had been a factor of high ethical influence in our civilization; and the philosopher and the humanitarian look out from the twinkling eyes of the humorist." He continued by asserting that in George Bernard Shaw's opinion, Twain was a sociologist rather than a humorist, and reported Shaw as having said that "Mark Twain is in much the same position as myself: he has to put matters in such a way as to make the people who would otherwise hang him believe he is joking."[14]

Mark Twain had, then, been forced into an untenable position by 1870. He had found it a necessity to write social criticism for his own satisfaction, but found directness disastrous. To find relief he had resorted to humorous

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[13] MTE, p. 200.

[14] Quoted in Foner, p. 53.

writings, but to his disappointment the public never apprehended the moral. As a result, he was forced to make still another compromise if he was to fulfill the demands made by his evangelistic spirit. This final concession culminated in his search for respectability and most likely figured in his removal to the east, his marriage to Livy, his correspondence with Mrs. Fairbanks, and the development of his friendship with Howells. He knew that when the New England writers spoke the nation listened--seriously. They had respectability, and Mark Twain correctly assumed that if he was to heard in the desired manner, he too would have to gain the respect of both public and critics as something other than a humorist.

To Van Wyck Brooks, the artist must reach fulfillment by public expostulation, but it would appear that he ignored literary history. He regrets that Twain did not have the courage of Emerson, forgetting that Emerson had, by virtue of birth and education, begun with the respectability that Twain was forced to earn, and overlooking the fact that Emerson's inhibitions--as radical as he was--were far in excess of those which Mark Twain manifested. But Brooks was angry with society for the restraints it placed on artists--and justifiably so--but he had forgotten that all societies in all times had had more or less the same restrictive impress. In societies where authors wrote for the intellectual elite, they could understandably deal openly with advanced ideas, but in post-Civil War America, the reading public extended

to every farm and hamlet, and the artist had, therefore, to direct his writing--insofar, at least, as the surface-level meaning was concerned--to meet the standards of public mores. Melville apparently attempted to go too far too fast, and he spent what might have been the most productive years of his life behind a shabby desk in a customs house. Brooks would have liked it if Twain had done the same. As he saw it, Mark Twain

> had so involved himself in the whole popular complex of his Gilded Age that he could not strike out in any direction without wounding his wife or his friends, without contravening some loyalty that had become sacred to him. . . . He had never risen to the conception of literature as a great impersonal social instrument. An irresponsible child himself, he could not even feel that he had a right to exercise a will-to-satire that violated the wishes of those to whom he had subjected himself. Consequently, instead of satirizing the spirit of his age, he outwardly acquiesced in it and even flattered it. . . . Far from having any stimulus to satire, therefore, Mark Twain was perpetually driven back by the innumerable obligations he had assumed into the role that gave him, as he said, comfort and peace.[15]

This criticism bears the imprint of one who had never fully grasped the implications of Huckleberry Finn or The Gilded Age, but he wrote in a time when such views could be popular and did attract a vociferous following.

Throughout history, the genteel reviewers have written off the popular humorists as low, perverse, coarse, squalid, or depressing; they have dismissed them as caricaturists and portrayers of "the worst" or "the less attractive side of human nature." Scholars have taken Mark Twain to pieces and

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[15]The Ordeal, p. 215.

scarcely a facet of his life and work has not been examined. Yet he is still scornfully regarded by some intellectuals, and fondly by the general public, as "the average adolescent-minded American-rooter at ball games, political banquets, exhibitions of pseudo-heroic claptrap."[16] Or as Alfred Kreymborg writes, Twain is "America's last buffoon."[17] All such modern criticism stems from Brooks' expansion of the concepts advanced by Waldo Frank in the decade following Mark Twain's death. Oddly enough, the Brooksian school--although not agreeing in theory or principle--arrive at the same estimate of Mark Twain as did their predecessors of the genteel tradition.

One of the major weapons in the Brooksian arsenal is based on Twain's willingness to accept the criticism of Mrs. Clemens and Howells. There is no question that his books were sometimes damaged by the application of their standards of propriety, but as DeLancey Ferguson points out:

> Mark Twain had even less capacity for self-criticism than have most geniuses . . . But he also realized that in the heat of composition he was apt to lose sight of his work's effect on the reader, and accordingly sought, and followed, other people's judgment.[18]

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[16]Lewisohn, p. 217.

[17]Review of <u>The Ordeal</u>, <u>Spectator</u>, CXXX (1923), p. 701.

[18]"The Case for Mark Twain's Wife," <u>University of Toronto Quarterly</u>, IX (1939), p. 13, quoted in <u>A Casebook on Mark Twain's Wound</u>, ed. Lewis Leary (New York, 1962), p. 164.

His mind was too completely objective to understand the false nuances of social propriety; his comprehension too large, his thoughts too great, and so he needed guidance in the conventionalities. He was able to see nothing wrong, for example, "with the frank indelicacies of speech permissible among ladies and gentlemen in . . . [the Elizabethan period]. . . . this conversation seemed real. . . . and [seemed] the kind of talk which ladies and gentlemen did actually indulge in in those pleasant and lamented ancient days."[19] What, therefore, he said to himself, could be wrong with it?

The reception of Huckleberry Finn by the guardians of the genteel tradition bears out the assertion that some sort of censorship was needed. The book was banned by the public library of Concord, and the Boston Literary World hailed the library committee's stand: "We are glad to see that the commendation given to this sort of literature by its publication in the Century has received a check by this action at Concord."[20] The book was received with aloofness by the critics. Louisa May Alcott reflected their offended sensibilities when she wrote indignantly: "If Mr. Clemens cannot think of something better to tell our pure-minded lads and lassies, he had better stop writing for them."[21] The book was, of course, not

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[19] MTE, p. 206.

[20] Quoted in Foner, p. 47.

[21] Ibid.

intended for children, but the Louisa May Alcotts were a long time in finding it out. The over-all critical reaction was summed up in a word: "trash!"

Kenneth Lynn comments that "women in post-Civil War America came to compose an enormous bloc of the reading population. . . . to this audience . . . how could one be honest about the West," or East?[22] To face this audience, Twain needed Howells' experience and Livy's intuition. He once said:

Ever since we have been married, I have been dependent on my wife to go over and revise my manuscripts. . . . I don't always know just where to draw the line in matters of taste. Mrs. Clemens has kept a lot of things from getting into print that might have given me a reputation I wouldn't care to have, and that I wouldn't have known any better than to have published.[23]

"If Livy had not edited Mark Twain," Edward Wagenknecht observes, "his publishers and editors would, indeed, have been compelled to do so. . . . compared to the enlightened Richard Watson Gilder, Mrs. Clemens was a liberal editor indeed."[24] If we are to accept the words of Howells and Katy Leary on the magnitude and frequency of Twain's use of profanity, Mrs. Clemens was a model of liberality, and modern scholarship has begun to view her in this light. Paul Carter made a study of her comments on the manuscript pages of Fol-

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[22]Mark Twain and Southwestern Humor (Boston, 1959), p. 41.

[23]Quoted in Edward Wagenknecht, Mark Twain: the Man and His Work (Norman, 1961), p. 165.

[24]Ibid., p. 172.

lowing the Equator. As he pointed out, "she was usually more concerned about the accuracy and readability of the manuscript" than anything else. He said further, that "the tone of Mark's comments on Livy's suggestions reveals his awareness of the value of her services, while his refusal to accept some of her changes shows that he was not always submissive and certainly never cowed."[25] Wagenknecht notes with tongue in cheek that Paine felt compelled to bowdlerize Livy's strong language: she wrote "a lie," he revised to "an untruth."[26]

Brooks' assertion that strength depends upon a bold and masculine language is sound--to a point--but from his implications, his emphasis, one might think he would select 1601 as Twain's best work. Bernard DeVoto, his earlier fury mellowed, had come, by 1942, nearer to agreement with Brooks in this matter. This tendency may be seen in his criticism of the "Royal Nonesuch" passage in Huckleberry Finn:

> More annoying is the avoidance of words which could be objected to only on the ground that they were strong. Where the . . . text originally read, "I smelt rotten eggs by the barrel, and rotten cabbages and such things; and if I know the smell of a dead cat, and I bet I do, there was sixty-four of them went in. I shoved in there for a minute, but it was too rancid for me . . ." The substitution of "sickly" for the first "rotten" is defensible but "signs" for "smell" and "various" for "rancid" are obvious evasions.[27]

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[25]"Olivia Clemens Edits Following the Equator," American Literature, XXX (1958), p. 194.

[26]Wagenknecht, p. 166.

[27]Mark Twain at Work (Cambridge, Mass., 1942), p. 83. (Italics mine.) Hereinafter cited as MTAW.

DeVoto's sense of humor fails him here. Twain may have changed some of these words for euphemistic reasons, but he made artistic gains. The passage appeared, finally, as follows:

I smelt sickly eggs by the barrel, and rotten cabbages, and such things; and if I know the signs of a dead cat being around, and I bet I do, there was sixty-four of them went in. I shoved in there for a minute, but it was too various for me; I couldn't stand it.

By making the indicated changes Twain elevated the passage from squalid naturalism to imaginative humor. The connotations of the replacement words give variety to an otherwise fetidly monotonous catalogue. Much humor came to the passage with sickly and various, and, in any event, Brooks and DeVoto forget that, despite such revisions, Mark Twain's language was stronger and more masculine than was that of most of his peers--or most of his successors for years to come.

Mark Twain's compromises, then, were not the cowardly acts of a misguided artist who sold his soul to the Gilded Age. They were, instead, practical concessions made in the interest of art. As Philip Foner says:

Despite all hesitations and contradictions, he was true to the precept that the man of letters must with all his force oppose every form of tyranny. "Satirize all human grandeurs & vanities," he wrote in his notebook.[28]

This he did.

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[28]p. 309.

CHAPTER IV

THE UNPENETRATED VEIL

When Elinor Glyn visited Mark Twain on January 13, 1908, she was seeking support for her new novel. Her mission was a failure. As Twain wrote later:

> I couldn't furnish it. . . . She implored me to publish these views of mine, but I said, "No, such a thing is unthinkable." I said that if I, or any otherwise, intelligent and experienced person, should suddenly throw down the walls that protect and conceal his real opinions . . . it would at once be perceived that he had lost his intelligence and wisdom and ought to be sent to the asylum.

He explained that Miss Glyn:

> Was young enough, and inexperienced enough, to imagine that whenever a person has an unpleasant opinion in stock which would be of educational benefit to Tom, Dick, and Harry, it is his duty to come out in print with it and become its champion. . . . She believed that when a man held a private unpleasant opinion of an educational sort, which would get him hanged if he published it, he ought to publish it anyway and was a coward if he didn't.[1]

Miss Glyn's and Brooks' concept of the role of the artist in society are in concord. Brooks charged that Twain was a coward for not speaking his mind, for making compromises with society, for lacking the so-called maturity of purpose which should have enabled him to rise above the need for compromise. Brooks also repeatedly contrasts Twain with

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[1]MTE, pp. 316-317.

Emerson, to Twain's disadvantage. At one point he chastises him for satirizing sixth-century England instead of nineteenth-century America in _A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court_. At another he criticizes him for not satirizing England. Brooks wrote with sarcasm: "Can one imagine Emerson prevented from writing _English Traits_?"[2] But there is a difference between Twain and Emerson which Brooks overlooks: the one is a New England philosopher garbed in the respectability of an aesthetic tradition; the other is a vernacular satirist at war with that tradition. Brooks and his cohorts, trained to believe in an aesthetic ideal, never to understand that art, although the manifestation of rebellion, is never absolutely insular, never detached completely so as to be free from contamination by social pressures. Emerson was corrupted--in the Brooksian sense--because he did conform to accepted aesthetic standards. Had he been a popular writer; had he, in other words, written for the public, he should have been forced to conform to still other standards. The neoclassic age provides a pertinent analogy.

Emerson, like Pope, wrote for an intellectual minority, and both, either consciously or subconsciously, by predilection or by necessity, wrote to please their readers. They were careful to avoid excesses which might not meet with the approval of their audiences. Twain, like Swift, wrote for a much wider audience, and both refused to accept either the

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[2]_The Ordeal_, p. 142.

then current social or artistic mores. They chose to be free to attack man's follies wherever they might appear. Ironically, such satirists are, if they wish to be able to write tomorrow, required to write with discretion today. They were a great deal more honest than were their more conventional literary peers, but they were forced to veil their honesty to survive.

In a letter to Pope of September 20, 1723, Swift wrote:

> You are so much the wiser and happier, because both parties will approve of your poetry as long as you are known to be of neither. But I who . . . am every day persuading myself that a dagger is at my throat, a halter about my neck, or chains about my feet. . . can never arrive at the serenity of mind you possess.[3]

Twain, we may assume, imagined the same restraints in a figurative sense. Swift went on to write the brilliant satire of Gulliver's Travels, which was so skillfully veiled that, expurgated, the book is still perhaps most widely known as a children's book. And yet it was decried in the nineteenth-century by the conventional Macaulay as "horrible, shameful, unmanly, blasphemous. . . . filthy in word, filthy in thought, furious, raging, obscene."[4] Macaulay, a brilliant artisan, like Brooks, could never penetrate the veil, could only wallow confusedly in the effluvium of the great hidden truths.

It is only in recent years that enlightened scholarship

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[3]Selected Prose and Poetry, p. 405.

[4]Quoted by Merrel D. Clubb in "The Criticism of Gulliver's 'Voyage to the Houyhnhnms,' 1726-1914," Stanford Studies in Language and Literature (California, 1941), p. 221.

has begun to provide answers to Swift's conundrums. A similar phenomenon has occurred in American literature as well. Brooks could not see behind the well-built facade of Hawthorne to find, as did D. H. Lawrence, "that blue-eyed darling Nathaniel [who] knew disagreeable things in his inner soul. . . . [and who] was careful to send them out in disguise."[5] Brooks, fighting against the stultifying conventions of American society, is so hamstrung by convention of another sort that he has never developed empathy with American literary art. He praises Melville, but does not perceive that Melville's career is closely paralleled by Twain's. He knows only the Melville of the post-Moby Dick period, the Melville without a veil. As Lawrence intimated and Lawrance Thompson illustrates in detail, Melville's early works were not, philosophically, much different from Pierre or The Confidence Man or Billy Budd.[6] Brooks is not alone. Most American critics have not seen much similarity between the Melville of Typee and the Melville of Pierre, nor have they perceived that the Twain of Tom Sawyer was the Twain of The Mysterious Stranger. And yet Melville had explained it all in "Hawthorne and His Mosses." Of Hawthorne he observed that:

He craftily says, or sometimes insinuates the things which

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[5]Studies in Classic American Literature (New York, 1923), p. 93.

[6]Melville's Quarrel with God (Princeton, 1952).

we feel to be so terrifically true, that it were all but madness for any good man, in his own proper character to utter, or even hint of them.

Of his blackness he said:

Nor . . . will all readers discern it; for it is mostly insinuated to those who may best understand it, and account for it; it is not obtruded upon every one alike.

Of his truth he said:

In this world of lies, Truth is forced to fly like a scared white doe in the woodlands; and only by cunning glimpses will she reveal herself, as in Shakespeare and other masters of the great Art of Telling the Truth,--even though it be covertly and by snatches.

Of his genius he said:

Whereas, great geniuses are parts of the times, they themselves are the times, and possess a corresponding coloring. It is of a piece with the Jews, who, while their Shiloh was meekly walking in their streets, were still praying for his magnificent coming: looking for him in a chariot, who was already among them on an ass.

And finally:

If you travel away inland into his deep and noble nature, you will hear the far roar of his Niagara. . . . And by confessing him you thereby confess others; you brace the whole brotherhood. For genius, all over the world, stands hand in hand, and one shock of recognition runs the whole circle round.[7]

The world of literature does not generally think of Hawthorne as a writer who prostituted his art to conventions; few saw the "blue-eyed darling Nathaniel." Nor has it been censorious of Melville for telling "Truth . . . covertly and by snatches," in the early works, but it has not hesitated to add to the obloquy of Mark Twain, humorist, who broke ar-

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[7] The Romantic Triumph: American Literature from 1830-1860, ed. Tremaine McDowell (New York, 1949), pp. 513-517.

tistic conventions. We might ask, "Is Melville's language more masculine than Twain's?", "Is the theme of Billy Budd different from that of The Mysterious Stranger?", "Is Hawthorne's fixation on the theme of 'Evil in the Human Heart' at odds with Twain's theme in What Is Man?" These questions have seldom been answered, because--one supposes--Mark Twain, the humorist, is thought to have stood apart from the main currents of literature; the blackness of Hawthorne and the pessimism of Melville are seldom conjoined with the pessimism of Twain, when the fact is that they all stem from the same source--life in nineteenth-century America. But Hawthorne and Melville are artists and Twain is only a humorist, but an honest one. Of the trio, only Twain was understood to have spoken frankly--until recently. Melville tried, but some American scholars still interpret Billy Budd as a final affirmation. They have yet to penetrate his veil, and they have yet to penetrate Mark Twain's veil in some of his early fiction.

Mark Twain, who broke literary conventions to produce art, is judged a slave of the genteel tradition because he wrote "books for boys," and yet he is capable of arousing in his reader--as were Hawthorne and Melville--the "shock of recognition [that] runs the whole circle round."

During the Enterprise period, Mark Twain learned that the public often misunderstood him, particularly when he wished to be most devastating. He found that his irony

became so subtle, apparently, that his readers missed it completely. In the Galaxy for June, 1870, he discussed this problem at some length in an essay entitled, "A Couple of Sad Experiences":

> To write a burlesque so wild that its pretended facts will not be accepted in perfect good faith by somebody, is very nearly an impossible thing to do. . . . One can deliver a satire with telling force through the insidious medium of a travesty, if he is careful not to overwhelm the satire with the extraneous interest of the travesty, and so bury it from the reader's sight and leave him a joked and defrauded victim, when the honest intent was to add to either his knowledge or wisdom.

He goes on to discuss "The Petrified Man," which he had intended as a satire on the then-current interest in anthropological discoveries:

> As a satire . . . my Petrified Man was a disheartening failure; for everybody received him in innocent good faith. . . . I was so disappointed at the curious miscarriage of my scheme that at first I was angry and did not like to think about it; but by and by . . . I began to feel a soothing secret satisfaction . . . as my gentleman's field of travel broadened, and . . . he steadily and implacably penetrated territory after territory, State after State . . . my cup was full, and I said I was glad I had done it.

Another hoax--again unintentional--of the period was to have been a veiled criticism of yellow journalism:

> The idea that anybody could ever take my ["Bloody Massacre"] for a genuine occurrence never once suggested itself to me, hedged about as it was by all those tell-tale absurdities and impossibilities. . . . But I found out then, and never have forgotten since, that we never read the dull explanatory surroundings of marvellously exciting things when we have no occasion to suppose that some irresponsible scribbler is trying to defraud us; we skip all that and hasten to revel in the blood-curdling particulars and be happy.

These incidents occurred before 1866, and Mark Twain "never," as he says, "forgot," he had learned his lesson well,

as he was to demonstrate amply in his subsequent fiction. The Innocents Abroad and Roughing It are still looked upon as not much more than joke-books of the "jester of the Pacific slope," but Theodore Dreiser, who felt the "shock" of Twain's genius when his reputation was at a temporary low, made some interesting comments about Roughing It:

> True, belly-shaking caricature plays over a cold sense of fact, yet the tragedy of the silver boom town is apparent as its comedy. . . . A single turn of the pen at any point . . . and you have a story which would startle, terrify, as well as thrill and entertain, the most avid seekers of realistic truth.[8]

Dreiser understood that Twain's joking about the life in a wild western town was not intended to be free of bitter irony and was not written purely for the sake of humor. He realized that the conversion of Scotty Briggs and his subsequent employment as a Sunday school teacher by the young eastern minister was an attack on the society which permitted such hypocrisy, and that it was not unlike his essays on the Rockefeller Bible-class--except that the Nevada society was more straightforward than its eastern counterparts. Scotty Briggs and Buck Fanshaw never killed except in a good fight--unless their opponents were "greasers" or "Micks." They never "throwed down on their mothers," and they were scions of their society. Henry Nash Smith says: "The narrator is now fully identified with the point of view of an upper class that considers itself to be custodian of the

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[8]"Mark the Double Twain," p. 623.

official values," but this is doubtful.[9] Mark Twain begins the chapter under discussion as follows:

> Somebody has said that in order to know a community, one must observe the style of its funerals and know what manner of men they bury with most ceremony. I cannot say which class we buried with most éclat . . . the distinguished public benefactor or the distinguished rough--possibly the two chief grades or grand divisions of society honored their illustrious dead about equally.[10]

He very subtly and with almost invisible irony equates the benefactors and the roughs--something he was to do frequently the rest of his life, generally giving the edge to the latter. The final touch of irony comes near the chapter's end when Twain elaborates on Briggs' qualifications as a Sunday school teacher and Christian: "and it transpired that the man who had it in him to espouse the quarrel of the weak [unless they were "greasers" or "Micks"] out of inborn nobility of spirit was no mean timber whereof to construct a Christian."[11] Twain is suggesting that Scotty, being guilty of only those sins condoned by his society, was a typical church-goer.

Twain knew "that it were all but madness for any good man, in his own proper character, to utter, or even hint" truths of this nature. He knew that outspokenness gained little but opposition and this is probably why he told the truth covertly. He did not wish it to be "obtruded upon

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[9] Development of a Writer, p. 62.

[10] Roughing It (Boston, 1872), II, 42.

[11] Ibid., II, 52-53.

every one alike," but only "insinuated to those who may best understand it." He once commented on Susy's biography: "If I am as transparent to other people as I was to Susy, I have wasted much effort in this life."[12] Howells, despite his own contrived facade of ingenuousness, understood from the start. He once explained Clemens' success with the subscription trade by saying that his books sold because "the susbscription public never knew what good literature they were."[13] Howells is criticized for his attempts to "sanitize" Twain's literature, but he had no objection to covert sermons. In 1880 Twain wrote him concerning an article which had been published in the _Atlantic_:

> I never really expected you to print that article; so when I came to . . . I said to myself, "All right, if he wants all those pious people after his scalp . . . it will be a spectacle not without interest." . . . by the way, these praiseful letters have usually come from strong church members--think of that!--& they take _me_ to be one--think also of that! Blame it, they are the very people I expected to make skip around & cuss.[14]

Apparently missing the satire of _The Prince and the Pauper_, Van Wyck Brooks cites it as a damning example of Twain's surrender to Gilded Age conventions, but Howells wrote: "It is such a book as _I_ would expect from you, knowing what a bottom of fury there is to your fun; but the pub-

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[12] _Autobiography_, II, 92.

[13] "The Man of Letters as a Man of Business," _Literature and Life_ (New York, 1902), p. 15.

[14] _MTHL_, I, 320.

lic ought to be led to expect it, and must be."[15] But the public was not, and the critics were not; his duplicity was not apprehended, and Mark Twain is charged with geriatric pessimism. Nevertheless, as Leslie Fiedler observes:

> Duplicity is the most notable, perhaps the essential characteristic of the greatest American novelists; and surely the most duplicitous of all is Mark Twain, precisely because he wears the mask of straightforward simplicity. . . . He writes to a friend, "I think I can carry the reader a long way before he suspects I am laying a tragedy-trap." . . . he can scarcely be trusted.[16]

When Brooks and his early followers first wrote they did not have the advantage of familiarity with the Twain writings published after 1940, but their criticism did, nevertheless, show an uncommon lack of perspicacity in their interpretations of his fiction. Brooks allowed that Twain had permitted himself "a certain number of acid glances at the actual face of reality," but he also charged him with "making the main thread [of The Gilded Age] the happy domestic tale of . . . a young man who finds in this very stubbly field the amplest and softest straw for the snug family nest he builds in the end."[17] This romantic sub-plot was, of course, Charles Dudley Warner's contribution to the novel, but, typically, Brooks was either unaware of it or simply chose to ignore it. His short-sightedness is amply demonstrated by a five-page survey in The Ordeal in which he excoriates Twain for his lack of courage:

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[15] Ibid., I, 338

[16] Love and Death in the American Novel (New York, 1960), p. 553. Hereinafter cited as Love and Death.

[17] p. 220.

It is notable therefore, that having begun with contemporary society in The Gilded Age, he traveled backward into the past for his pseudo-satirical themes: he felt free to express his social indignation only in terms of [the past]. . . . For the first of these books alone contains anything like a contemporary social implication, and that, the implication of A Connecticut Yankee, is a flattering one.

. . . .

In short, instead of doing the unpopular thing, which he really wanted to do, he does the most popular thing of all: he glorifies the Yankee mechanic . . . and pours ridicule upon the two things that least needed ridicule for the good of the Yankee mechanic's soul . . . England and the Middle Ages.

. . . .

Mark Twain was sincerely angry, there is no doubt about that. But is it not curious how automatically his anger was deflected from all its natural and immediate objects, objects it might have altered, and turn like an air-craft gun upon the vacuity of space itself?[18]

But, of course, Mark Twain had not turned upon the vacuity of space, and, fortunately, some of his contemporaries understood this. They at least touched at the heart of the satire in the Connecticut Yankee, realizing according to their particular persuasions that the book was global and timeless, rather than local and periodic. There is a strong probability, furthermore, that the characterization of the Yankee mechanic is not so favorable as it appears on the surface.

Henry Nash Smith notes that Mark Twain's attitudes were quite unstable. He observes that on one page Twain often seems to be the spokesman for the official culture, on the

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[18]Ibid., pp. 221-225.

next he burlesques it, and on the one which follows he returns to a neutral position. Smith points out that this "instability" was also characteristic of his lectures. Referring to the Sandwich Islands lecture, he reasons that:

> Although he repeated the lecture perhaps a hundred times over a period of seven years, he was never able to achieve a stable attitude toward his own exalted rhetoric. Sometimes he treated it seriously, sometimes he made fun of it.
> He had several . . . ways of undercutting his own oratory. He might comment, "Let someone beat that for harnessing adjectives together." He sometimes applauded himself at the end of the passage until the audience joined in. . . . As late as 1873, when he took the lecture to England, the Liverpool Journal reported that "perhaps the greatest surprise after all was the sudden introduction at different points of the lecture without any notice or change of manner of two of the most eloquent pieces of descriptive composition that ever fell from the lips of man."[19]

It may be seriously doubted, however, that it was a matter of instability with Twain, for as Fiedler asserts, "the figure through whom Clemens speaks and whom he impersonated on the lecture platform, he called Mark Twain. . . . This was more than a conventionally comic pseudonym; it was an open declaration of his duplicity."[20] Mark Twain's scorn for conventional rhetoric is well-known. His almost exclusive use of the vernacular is sufficient evidence of this, and on those rare occasions when he adopted a conventional style, he meticulously avoided its excesses. From this we might suspect the sudden emergence of conventional prose in a lecture or in literature to be one form of a satiric barb,

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[19] Development of a Writer, p. 19

[20] Love and Death, p. 554.

inverted of course, aimed at the taste of a public which could like such stuff. His undercutting was his satiric indicator. The comments of a reviewer for the Boston Daily Advertiser of November 11, 1869, support this view:

> The audience gets into a queer state after a while. It knows not what to trust: for while much is meant to be seriously taken, the fun is felt to be the real life of the thing; and yet they never know where the fun will come in. Even when Mr. Clemens has made a really fine period, or introduced a brilliant descriptive passage, he takes pains to turn the affair into a joke at the end. As, for instance, after a very graphic and well written description of the great volcanic eruption in the Sandwich Islands, delivered with perfect indifference and almost as with an effort--he paused just an instant, and then said in the same passionless tone "There! I'm glad I've got that volcano off my mind.[21]

Twain could indeed carry the reader or listener a long time before he suspected a trap, and he could not resist deriding what the public considered excellent art. He had hoped, always, that some of the people would understand him; to help them he provided clues. The patent disclaimers he used were intended to allay the suspicions of some while acting as signposts to others. There is no real difference, it should be noticed, between the literary disclaimer and verbal undercutting.

In the preface to Roughing It, after having denied that the book was to be anything more than a "personal narrative," Twain proceeds to warn and inform the reader:

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[21]Quoted in Walter Francis Frear, Mark Twain and Hawaii (Chicago, 1947), p. 443.

> Yes, take it all around, there is quite a good deal of information in the book. I regret this very much; but really it could not be helped: information appears to stew out of me naturally, like the precious ottar of roses out of the otter.

In _Sketches_: _New and Old_, we find a disclaimer in an end-note to "A Curious Dream, Containing a Moral." The essay is concerned with the decrepitude of graveyards, but the disclaimer is typical:

> Note.---The reader is assured that if the cemeteries in his town are kept in good order, this Dream is not leveled at his town at all, but is leveled particularly and venomously at the _next_ town.[22]

Some readers, no doubt, believed that he had the cemeteries of Tonawanda in mind rather than those of Buffalo, and readers of this caliber might also take his "Conclusion" to _Tom Sawyer_ at face value. When he said that he would stop the story before it became the history of a man, he was both denying and affirming that the book really dealt with more serious matter than boys. The famous notice with which he prefaced _Huckleberry Finn_ was another statement of veiled intent:

> Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot.

There could be, after all, no motive in a boy's story; there was no moral in the Sunday school sense; neither was there anything like a conventional plot. The average reader must have thought,"Ah, that Mark Twain, he is so full of fun."

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[22]p. 264.

Twain's predilection for disclaimers was so great that Fiedler suggests the main function of Tom Sawyer Abroad may have been to act as one for Huckleberry Finn, making it appear by analogy to have been nothing but "good, clean, quite undangerous fun."[23]

It is clear, then, that Mark Twain must be read a great deal more closely than one might read a humorist like Artemus Ward or another contemporary novelist such as Henry James. This despite Wright Morris' assertion that Twain was, contrasted to James, an unconscious artist:

> Not knowing what he was doing, never truly having known, Twain soon gave it up. He distracted himself with a series of books for growing boys.[24]

This is, however, perhaps the most widespread fallacy concerning Mark Twain, but it continues to be propagated by those who do not deign to read him seriously. Unconscious, he never was, his humor is never without a sermon. This may be borne out by a review of his earlier fiction.

Henry Nash Smith notes that Twain's early vernacular heroes are generally underdogs who meet defeat through the chicanery of men. His animal heroes all have human attributes. They are portrayed as likeable beings, straightforward and trustworthy. They are also idealists whose world crumbles about them when they are betrayed. Symbolically,

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[23]Love and Death, p. 556.

[24]The Territory Ahead (New York, 1957), p. 84.

they are men, and yet they are portrayed as dumb animals who are taken advantage of by fellow animals. This then is the "moral" of the "Jumping Frog." In it we find strong reflections of Macfarlane's deterministic misanthropy. Man is an animal. Man is the only animal who is intentionally cruel to other animals. Man is the only animal with intellect, and he uses his intellect daily to advance himself at the expense of others of his species. Man is inhuman to man. This is the message which lies buried beneath the vernacular humor, and it was probably no accident that the "Frog" was published in the same volume with "The story of the Bad Little Boy who Did not Come to Grief."

First appearing as "The Christmas Fireside . . .by Grandfather Twain," in the Californian for December 23, 1865, the tale dealt with a boy who, contrary to the Sunday school tradition, "got wealthy by all manner of cheating and rascality; and [became] . . . the infernalest wickedest scoundrel in his native village."[25] He gained universal respect and became a member of the legislature.

Aside from illustrating the practical fallacies--according to Twain--of the Sunday school morality, it is a restatement of the hidden theme of the story with which it appeared. Dan'l Webster is a good frog who lives by the rules. He has been taught that if he lives cleanly and always jumps as if

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[25] Sketches: New and Old, p. 59.

his life depended on it, success will be sure to follow. He learns belatedly, however, that he can always be beaten by men who pervert the rules for personal advantage while allegedly following them. Ironically, Webster is ultimately defeated because of his master's perfidy, but Dan'l is an innocent pawn. He is of the good heart, and Mark Twain seems to say that "he of the good heart will always lose to malevolent intellect."

"The Ram's Tale" of Jim Blaine is again a rudimentary attempt at fiction in which Mark Twain explodes another popular conception he thought ridiculous. The narrative first appeared in Roughing It, but it is included in more finished form in Mark Twain in Eruption. As Jim says, "No sir, there ain't no such thing as an accident. Whenever a thing happens that you think is an accident you make up your mind it ain't no accident at all--it's a special providence."[26]

To prove his point, he tells how his Uncle Lem--drunk, with his dog by his side--saw a stranger struck and killed by an Irishman who fell from a scaffold. Based on Uncle Lem's description, Jim awards the death to Providence, but there are skeptics. "The people said 'special providence--sho! the dog was there--why didn't the Irishman fall on the dog? Why warn't the dog app'inted?' Fer a mighty good reason--the dog would 'a' seen him a-coming; you can't depend on no dog to carry out a special providence."[27]

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[26]MTE, p. 222.
[27]Ibid.

Twain is, of course, trying to make his audience conscious of the inconsistencies which he finds in the widely held belief that all acts are providential. It is implicitly suggested that the stranger would not have been killed by any falling Irishman either, if he "would 'a' seen him a-coming." The ultimate irony, however, rests in the fact that Twain used a believer in the doctrine--one who was "symmetrically drunk" to boot--to illustrate its supposed fallacies. To the contemporary westerner, as Mark Twain indicated in Roughing It and elsewhere, "Micks" were near the bottom of the human scale. No self-respecting citizen would willingly condone much sacrifice to save the life of an Irishman. As Scotty Briggs says, "No Irish need apply." But Jim Blaine, as Twain shows, gladly deserts a cherished vernacular prejudice to grasp at a drunken tale which supports his more highly cherished belief in "special providence." Mark Twain expressed his views similarly in the Autobiography:

When Providence washes one of his worms into the sea in a tempest, then starves him and freezes him on a plank for thirty-four days, and finally wrecks him again on an uninhabited island, where he lives on shrimps and grasshoppers and other shell-fish for three months, and is at last rescued by some old whisky-soaked, profane, and blasphemous infidel of a tramp captain, and carried home gratis to his friends, the worm forgets that it was Providence that washed him overboard, and only remembers that Providence rescued him. He finds no fault, he has no sarcasms for Providence's crude and slow and labored ingenuities of invention in the matter of life-saving, he sees nothing in these delays and ineffectiveness but food for admiration; to him they seem a miracle; and the longer they take and the more ineffective they are, the greater the miracle; meantime he never allows himself to break out in any good hearty unhandicapped thanks for the tough old shipmaster who really saved him, he damns

him with faint praise as "the instrument," of his rescue "under Providence."[28]

By 1870 Mark Twain had written several inverted parable-like stories in which he had attempted to illustrate several of the fallacies of typically "right-minded" thinking. The first of these, "The story of Mamie Grant, The Child Missionary," tells of a young girl who receives a series of callers while watching the house during the absence of her uncle and aunt. Mamie met each visitor at the door, with a religious tract in her hand and a sermon on her lips. As a result each caller had fled in self defense without accomplishing his mission. As Franklin Rogers observes: "By evening, her uncle is completely ruined, his property is attached and his family is faced with eviction, but Mamie is satisfied."[29] In "The Blasphemous Sailor Awfully Rebuked," Mamie comments on the seaman's profanity: "I do not know what those dreadful nautical terms mean, for I am not educated & deeply learned in the matters of practical everyday life like the gifted theological students."[30] Similarly veiled satire is found in "William Baxter, the Reformed Inebriate, or, Saved as by Fire." Baxter gets drunk, kills his wife and children,

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[28] I, 209.

[29] _Mark Twain's Burlesque Patterns: As Seen in the Novels and Narratives, 1855-1885_ (Dallas, 1960), p. 98.

[30] Ibid.

reforms, and then repeats the procedure twice more. "The third time, after slaying his latest crop of babes with a junk bottle and throwing the 'wife of his bosom' from the third-story window,

> he woke from his drunken stupor to find himself alone in the world, a hopeless, friendless outcast. Be warned, be warned by this experience. But see what perseverance may accomplish. Thoroughly reformed at last, he now traverses the land a brand plucked from the burning & delivers temperance lectures and organizes Sunday schools.[31]

Here again, Twain's satire is not obscure, but to an audience consisting of people who were commonly taken in by the William Baxters of their times it may have been misunderstood, hidden by the greater illumination of the "extraneous interest of the travesty."

Mark Twain, it would seem, was more of a conscious artist than he has been given credit for being, but he often did his best to appear otherwise. He knew that sermons, when announced as such, bored people. He also knew that the sermons he wished to preach were "at war with almost everybody's private opinion."[32] These were perhaps two of his reasons for using subterfuge, another may have been personal pleasure. In any event, the early Mark Twain was no mere jester. His humor usually serves as a vehicle for moral instruction. Never a coward, he took pleasure in placing his dicta beneath the noses of those at whom they were directed. His veil,

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[31] Ibid.

[32] <u>MTE</u>, p. 316.

a traditional satiric blind, was in addition a convention of American literature of the nineteenth century. As D. H. Lawrence observed, echoing Melville:

> The Americans refuse everything explicit and always put up a sort of double meaning. They revel in subterfuge. They prefer their truth safely swaddled in an ark of bulrushes, and deposited among the reeds until some friendly Egyptian princess comes to rescue the babe.[33]

But Van Wyck Brooks, and Bernard DeVoto, and a host of American critics all concurred in judging Twain's humor as low. Brooks went so far as to insist that "it was in consequence of pursuing it . . . that he was arrested in his moral and aesthetic development."[34] It was to critics such as these that Lawrence exhorted:

> Well, it's high time now that someone came to lift out the swaddled infant of truth that America spawned some time back. The child must be getting pretty thin, from neglect.[35]

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[33] Studies in Classic American Literature, p. vi.

[34] The Ordeal, p. 193.

[35] Studies in Classic American Literature, p. vii.

CHAPTER V

A BOY'S STORY

Interpretations, or misinterpretations, of The Adventures of Tom Sawyer have probably done more harm to Mark Twain's reputation as a serious literary artist than anything else. That the critics who could misunderstand the satire of The Gilded Age might also conclude that Tom Sawyer was merely a book for growing boys is not singular. Traditional criticism has never seen it as anything other than a boy's book, and so it was perhaps excusable for Van Wyck Brooks to say:

> Mark Twain had assumed: the character of his middle years; he had only truly lived . . . as a child, and the experience of childhood was the only experience he had assimilated. That is why he was perpetually recurring to his early life in Hannibal, why the books he wrote con amore were books about childhood, and why he instinctively wrote not only about, but also for children. It is true that he seems often to have believed that Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer could be understood only by mature readers.[1]

Granville Hicks agreed. Of cowardly Mark Twain, he wrote: "He knew what was happening in contemporary America, and he felt all that Americans were feeling; and yet for purposes of literature he looked back on a different kind of life."[2] Leslie Fiedler concurs: "Tom Sawyer was always

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[1] The Ordeal, pp. 172-173.

[2] The Great Tradition, p. 45.

a boy's book, even when Twain thought he was writing for adults."[3] Henry Nash Smith says: "He was not clear in his own mind whether he was writing a story for boys or a story about boys for adults."[4]

Mark Twain, the jester, they say, not wanting to insult anyone, thwarted by his wife, turned to the idyllic world of boyhood where his immature fancy was more at ease than it was in the real world. Had not Swift, however, taken a series of voyages to far-off lands? Had not both Rabelais and Sterne written novels concerned with the maturing of young men--boys? But Twain's view of Hannibal is considered idyllic in the first books.

Bernard DeVoto implies that the story is only a pen's breadth from tragedy:

> But darker needs are also voiced and allayed. The book's enchantment is so strong that it beguiles one into forgetting how much of the spell issues from dread and horror. The story pivots on body-snatching, revenge, murder, robbery, drowning, starvation, and the fear of death. It exists in a medium darkened by witchcraft and demonology; ghosts are only an amulet's width away; and malevolence of the unseen world is everywhere a danger as tangible as Injun Joe. All these . . . crystallize, more perfectly than anywhere else in literature.[5]

Is there a possibility that there might be satire in Tom Sawyer? Charles A. Allen seems to think so:

> Tom Sawyer is a curious story in more ways than one. The

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[3] Love and Death, p. 566.

[4] Development of a Writer, p. 82.

[5] MTAW, p. 22.

> novel can be read as a satire on Sunday school morality, as Walter Blair has suggested. The subject and theme is childhood revolt against an adult conception of the "Model Boy." More generally the subject and theme is childhood rebellion against the orthodox conscience.[6]

I suggest that it may have been a satiric rebellion--on Mark Twain's part--against the dominant culture.

It may be easily understood how Tom Sawyer, if interpreted as merely a book for growing boys, could affect Twain's appreciation as a serious artist. As a boy's book, it may well be seen to be a symbol of his so-called compromise with the genteel tradition. It follows, then, that any pessimism which might appear in later years could be construed to have resulted from intervening pressures of one kind or another. Obviously, only a jester could write a book like Tom Sawyer whose manifest intent was to provoke laughter and a sentimental tear or two over a boy's antics. Equally obviously, so the logic goes, it would take extreme stimuli--great repressions, or great sorrows-- to transform the man who could write Tom Sawyer, boy's book, into the man who could later write The Mysterious Stranger. In other words, if one accepts the premise that the book was for children, then one must necessarily assume that the late writings are the product of a mind which had undergone radical change. The next step is to manufacture reasons for that change, as so many critics have done.

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[6] "Mark Twain and Conscience," Literature and Psychology, VII (1957), p. 19.

The interpretation of Tom Sawyer becomes, then, a major key in the evaluation of Mark Twain as an artist. If the book was not written for children, if it is as Blair and Allen have suggested, a satire, then it seems probable that Twain never underwent any great change at all.

Sometime early in November, 1875, Twain sent the manuscript of the book to Howells. After reading it he responded warmly:

> I finished reading Tom Sawyer a week ago, sitting up till one A. M., to get to the end, simply because it was impossible to leave off. . . . It will be an immense success. But I think you ought to treat it explicitly *as* a boy's story. Grown-ups will enjoy it just as much *if* you do, and if you should put it forth as a study of boy character from the grown-up point of view, you'd give the wrong key to it.[7]

The key-word here is *explicitly*.

Twain took Howells' advice and commenced to remove what might appear to the public as objectionable in a boy's book. By January of 1876, the revision was nearly complete. Twain wrote Howells about an indecency which had been overlooked by Mrs. Langdon and Livy as well as Howells himself:

> Since the book is now professedly & confessedly a boy's & girl's book, that dern word ["they comb me all to hell"] bothers me . . . but it never did until I had ceased to regard the volume as being for adults.[8]

So Mark Twain had made the book patently acceptable to Howells. He, we may assume, was interested only in removing explicit satire or indecencies which could be recognized as such by the likes of the Concord Library Committee. As

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[7] *MTHL*, I, 110.

[8] Ibid., I, 122.

Clemens tells us, the chaste editor of the Atlantic took great pleasure in private indecencies, and we have seen that articles by Twain were published in the magazine despite the fact that they contained veiled subversive elements. Howells had developed an extremely fine awareness of what the public would take, as his own frequent use of delicate but biting satiric nuances indicates. He was, then, most likely interested only in removing the conspicuous socio-critical elements and would not necessarily rule out indirect or veiled satire.

Before evaluating Tom Sawyer, it is germane to investigate briefly "the 'Boy's Manuscript,' which . . . [Twain] wrote in 1870, and which is the seed of all the later books about Huck and Tom, [and] is an account of a love affair between eight-or-nine-year-olds--involving flirtation, jealousy, and reconciliation."[9]

The tale, as Henry Nash Smith observes, "translates the story of an adult courtship (possibly with some reference to Mark Twain's own) into the vocabulary provided by the Matter of Hannibal."[10] The names of the characters are different--Billy Rogers and Amy Johnson versus Tom and Becky--but much is the same. Bernard DeVoto describes the narrative in Mark Twain at Work:

> The love affair between Billy Rogers and Amy had ever so many more aspects of an adult romance than the affair be-

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[9] Love and Death, p. 562.

[10] Development of a Writer, p. 82.

tween Tom and Becky. This is so strong, considering the time it was probably written and considering the time Mark had in marrying Olivia Langdon, that one cannot but suspect that he drew his emotion first hand at 40 [35], and that the children are really adults in disguise. If this is so, Twain would be saying that adults are merely kids with inhibitions. This might explain why he considered Tom Sawyer at first to be an adult book until Howells talked him out of it. If this is so, the terrors the boys live with might be considered adult terrors also giving an entirely new light.[11]

The manuscript proves the aptness of DeVoto's judgment. At one point, Billy asks Amy to be his "little wife."[12] And when the children get around to discussing the type of house they wish to live in, we find a humorous thrust aimed at the disparity between the romantic conception of marriage and practical social requirements of the genteel tradition:

But I said she could make suggestions--she ought to say what kind of a house she would rather live in. So she said she would prefer to have a little cosy cottage, with vines running over the windows and a four-story brick attached where she could receive company and give parties--that was all.

Billy's associations with Wart Hopkins serve to show human selfishness and avarice as they appear in adult business transactions. They also subtly indicate how difficult it is for the individual to recognize those faults in himself which he sees with clarity in others:

I was in business with him once, and we had to get out. We had a circus and both of us wanted to be clown, and he wouldn't give up. He was always contrary that way . . . . We charged two pins admission for the big boys and one pin

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[11]p. 30.

[12]Ibid., p. 32. All subsequent quotations from the "Boy's Manuscript" will come from pp. 30-44 of this work. Specific page numbers will not be cited.

> for the little ones--and when we came to divide up he wanted to shove off all the pins on me that hadn't any heads on. . . . I hated Wart Hopkins.

Toward the end of the manuscript, Billy becomes sick and Amy's mother does something which even modern mothers of eight-year-old girls would not be apt to do: she delivers a love letter of Amy's to Billy.

It is apparent, as DeVoto has suggested, that the "Boy's Manuscript" dealt with adults garbed as children, and it would be logical to assume, as he also suggests, that Tom Sawyer might do the same. St. Petersburg, instead of being an idyllic boy's environment, becomes the veiled symbol of an adult society--a microcosm of life in America--and the alleged acts of children become representations of adults as they are in reality. Tom is a homunculus and as such he embodies the attributes of a typical grown-up. He is romantic, in the tradition of Scott, and yet he is pragmatic. He goes to Sunday school, sees through its shams, and yet conforms to its symbols of status. Huck, unsullied by social conditioning, was "cordially hated and dreaded by all the mothers of the town," because he was different. And yet Huck is basically honest and trustworthy, he has not been taught the graces of the social lie.

"Tom," says Henry Nash Smith, "is a kind of embryonic Everyman.

> In church and school he confronts institutions that seem to him alien and at times hostile; on Jackson's Island he enjoys the comradeship with his fellows and he responds to the physical environment. Natural man beleagured by society, but

able to gain happiness by escaping to the forest and river.[13] But Tom always makes concessions to conformity in the end in civilized fashion, and while Twain treats his surrenders with understanding, there is also a suggestion of remorse.

As Smith interprets the novel:

> The reader is evidently meant to see Tom's badness as nothing more than endearing mischief, indicative of a normal amount of imagination and energy; it is not bad at all. Mark Twain has written the Sunday-school story about the Good Little Boy Who Succeeded all over again with only a slight change in the hero's make-up and costume.[14]

But it was "The Story of the Bad Little Boy Who Succeeded" and became the "infernalest scoundrel." Tom could develop into a character of this sort and, in fact, does to a degree. He wins success and admiration through cheating and luck, but he is always lovable as an individual, as were the Johns, Peters and Thomases of Swift, but the methods which society has taught him are abominable.

When Tom manages to have the fence white-washed by his hoodwinked friends, Aunt Polly rewards him with an unearned apple and "an improving lecture upon the added value and flavor a treat took to itself when it came without sin through virtuous effort. And while she closed with a happy scriptural flourish, he 'hooked' a doughnut."[15] His antics are laugh-

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[13] Development of a Writer, p. 88.

[14] Ibid., p. 89.

[15] The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, p. 23. All subsequent references will be annotated parenthetically in the text.

able if he is a boy, but as a man they are something else again. In this passage Twain illustrates again how the rewards in life usually come to those who take advantage of the rules to "hook" doughnuts. This develops into the hidden theme of the book: that society, all shining at the surface, is all corrupt underneath. This is supposedly why Twain is against contemporary organized religion. His animosity is strongly evident throughout the book.

We find that the Sunday school was "a place that Tom hated with his whole heart" (p. 36), but he is forced, nevertheless, by convention to attend. He has the courage to rebel but not to escape. When Twain tells of the German boy who went after his religion in the approved manner, there is scant benignity in the humor. The boy failed pathetically:

He once recited three thousand verses without stopping; but the strain upon his mental faculties was too great, and he was little better than an idiot from that day forth. (p. 47)

The anecdote is certainly funny, but its purpose is not wholly humorous.

Twain strikes out at the facade which even the more mundane citizens adopt on the Sabbath. He gives his veiled opinion of Sunday school superintendents when he has Tom say: "Why robbers, of course--who'd you reckon? Sunday-school sup'rintendents" (p. 220)? More directly, he writes:

His Sunday-school voice had acquired a peculiar intonation which was wholly absent on week-days. . . . "Now children, I want you all to sit up just as straight and pretty as you

can and give me all your attention for a minute or two. There--that is it. That is the way good little boys and girls should do. . . . I want to tell you how good it makes me feel to see so many bright clean little faces assembled in a place like this, learning to do right and be good." and so forth and so on. It is not necessary to set down the rest of the oration. It was of a pattern which does not vary, and so it is familiar to us all. . . . and the conclusion of the speech was received with a burst of silent gratitude. (p. 39)

Ironically, Tom in learning to do good, has acquired, through illicit trading, enough scripture tickets to win a prize. Again a lack of virtue is rewarded, but Twain is sympathetic to the individual. Tom is confronted, Twain implies, with two choices: he can either memorize the required number of verses and take a chance on becoming insane; or he can cheat, as he has seen others do, and get the applause without any of the strain. Twain reiterates in hidden manner that the end is more important to society than the means used to attain it anyway. His point is that beneath the genteel facade, which is all hypocrisy and sham, society is rotten. Note the Temperance Tavern, of which Tom observes: "Why, it's ha'nted with whisky! Maybe <u>all</u> the Temperance Taverns have got a ha'nted room, hey, Huck" (p. 249)? The congregation's sham respect for the minister also gives the facade the lie. This august divine was a horrible speaker:

[He] . . . gave out his text and droned along monotonously through an argument that was so prosy that many a head by and by began to nod--and yet it was an argument that dealt with limitless fire and brimstone and thinned the predestined and elect down to a company so small as to be hardly worth the saving. (p. 51)

Nevertheless:

He was always called upon to read poetry; and when he was through, the ladies would lift up their hands and let them fall helplessly on their laps, and "wall" their eyes, and shake their heads, as much as to say, "Words cannot express it; it is too beautiful too beautiful for this mortal earth." (p. 49)

Tom, speaking to Becky, summed it up for Mark Twain. He said: "Church ain't shucks to a circus," implying, of course, that while church was a form of humorous entertainment, it was even in this respect second-rate (p. 76). But there is still another passage which illuminates Mark Twain's opinion of religious concepts.

In a heavily melodramatic chapter, Twain describes the finding of Injun Joe's body in the cave. The discoverers noted that Joe had broken off the top of a stalagmite and had placed a hollowed-out stone on it to catch a few drops of drinking water. Henry Nash Smith comments:

The emphasis on Injun Joe's thirst is implausible in view of numerous earlier references to water in the cave; Tom and Becky had encountered him near a spring. Furthermore, such a burst of eloquence is quite out of keeping with the tone of the book. It serves no purpose except to demonstrate that the narrator can produce the kind of associations held in esteem by the dominant culture.[16]

But Smith overlooks the fact, I believe, that Injun Joe has starved to death and, hence, probably became too weak, ultimately, to make his way to the spring. More important, however, the burst of eloquence is probably included to derogate the concept of "special providence." There is reason to believe, in addition, that Twain's use of conventional rhetoric

[16] Development of a Writer, p. 84.

is an example of inverted satire. The passage is, in part, as follows:

> The drop was falling when the Pyramids were new; when Troy fell; when the foundations of Rome were laid; when Christ was crucified; when the Conqueror created the British Empire; when Columbus sailed. . . . It's falling now; it will still be falling when all these things shall have sunk down the after noon of history, and the twilight of tradition, and been swallowed up on the thick night of oblivion. Has everything a purpose and a mission? Did this drop fall patiently during five thousand years to be ready for this flitting human insect's need? and has it another important object to accomplish ten thousand years to come? No matter. . . . but to this day the tourist stares longest at that pathetic stone and that slow-dropping water when he comes to see the wonders of McDougal's cave. (pp.295-296)

Twain, with subtle irony, converts the conventional catalogue into an instrument against itself and the idea which it was generally used to illustrate. Beginning with "It's falling now . . ." he deftly continues the analogy to show that the coincidence of the dripping water was merely a freak of chance. No doubt Smith is correct in assuming that the passage pleased the dominant culture. I suggest that they were so lulled by the rhetoric, that they missed the import.

Mark Twain attacked falsely elevated diction whenever the opportunity presented itself. Sometimes, as above, the attacks were subtle, but sometimes--as in the case of Fenimore Cooper--they were quite direct. In Tom Sawyer he excoriates the compositions presented on Examination Evening at the St. Petersburg school:

> A prevalent feature in these compositions was a nursed and petted melancholy; another was a wasteful and opulent gush of "fine" language; another was a tendency to lug in by the

ears particularly prized words and phrases until they were worn entirely out; and a peculiarity that conspicuously marked and marred them was the inveterate and intolerable sermon that wagged its crippled tail at the end of each and every one of them. No matter what the subject might be, a brain-racking effort was made to squirm it into some aspect or other that the moral and religious mind could contemplate with edification. The glaring insincerity of these sermons was not sufficient to compass the banishment of the fashion from the schools, and it is not sufficient to-day. . . . and you will find that the sermon of the most frivolous and the least religious girl in the school is always the longest and the most relentlessly pious. . . . Homely truth is unpalatable. (pp. 197-198)

Rather strong language for a boy's book. On succeeding pages Twain quotes sample orations, but at the end of the chapter he makes it plain that he is not criticizing school-girl compositions, only. In a note he says:

The pretended "compositions" quoted in this chapter are taken without alteration from a volume entitled "Prose and Poetry, by a Western Lady"--but they are exactly and precisely after the school-girl pattern, and hence are much happier than any mere imitations could be. (p. 201)

When Mark Twain wrote Tom Sawyer, he had been married only six years, and there is no reason to believe that the union was not an exceptionally happy one. Nevertheless, he deals satirically with man-woman relationships--as he had in the "Boy's Manuscript"--placing particular emphasis on contemporary romantic ideals. When Tom makes the mistake of letting Becky know that he had been "engaged" previously, her reaction is adult and false. After a fine histrionic display--during which Tom attempts to appease her, but leaves finally in despair--she realizes her mistake. Her exhibition is a caricature of the way a woman was expected to act when she discovered that her lover's emotions were

not pure. Mark Twain subtly ridicules the hypocrisy of the convention.

In a satiric glance at the romantic view of ideal love as contrasted to the natural facts of it, Twain tells how Tom was overwhelmed by Becky in a passage which is largely borrowed from the "Boy's Manuscript":

He had been months winning her; she had confessed hardly a week ago; he had been the happiest and the proudest boy in the world only seven short days ago, and here in one instant of time she had gone out of his heart like a casual stranger whose visit is done. (p. 25)

And Huck, who may be judged, generally, to be speaking for Mark Twain when he talks on such subjects, advises Tom against getting married:

"Tom, you--why, you ain't in your right mind."

"Wait--you'll see."

"Well, that's the foolishest thing you could do. Look at pap and my mother. . . .

"That ain't anything. The girl I'm going to marry won't fight."

"Tom, I reckon they're all alike. They'll all comb a body. Now you better think 'bout this a while. I tell you, you better. (p. 223)

Man's cruelty and injustice to his fellow-man was always a sore subject with Mark Twain. He could never understand and never failed to be furious with men who mistreated other humans without just cause. Muff Potter, the harmless village drunk, was charged erroneously for the murder of Dr. Robinson, and human nature manifested its innate depravity and cowardice as this dialogue between Huck and Tom shows:

"But I hate to hear 'em abuse him so like the dickens when he never done--that."

"I do too, Tom. Lord, I hear 'em say that if he was to get free they'd lynch him." (p. 210)

While the inhabitants were quick to accuse, pre-judge, and threaten Muff Potter, since he was safely locked up in jail, they thought it wise to let justice take its course with Injun Joe:

The villagers had a strong desire to tar-and-feather Injun Joe and ride him on a rail . . . so formidable was his character that nobody could be found who was willing to take the lead in the matter, so it was dropped. . . . [and] it was deemed wisest not to try the case in the courts at present. (p. 115)

Another facet of the human character which tried Twain's patience was the mock sentiment with which men overlaid their true feelings. Twain discusses the funeral service held for the missing boys:

Every soul there, thinking he recognized these pictures, felt a pang in remembering that he had persistently blinded himself to them, always before, and had as persistently seen only faults and flaws in the poor boys. The Minister related many a touching incident in the lives of the departed too, which illustrated their sweet, generous natures, and the people could easily see, now, how noble and beautiful those episodes were, and remembered with grief that at the time they occurred they had seemed rank rascalities, well deserving of the cowhide. (p. 167-168)

When he describes the funeral of Injun Joe, Twain shows both the depravity and sentimental foolishness of the human heart:

Injun Joe was buried near the mouth of the cave; and people flocked there in boats and wagons from the towns and from all the farms and hamlets for seven miles around; they brought their children, and all sorts of provisions, and confessed that they had had almost as satisfactory a time at the funeral as they could have had at the hanging.

This funeral stopped the further growth of one thing--

the petition to the Governor for Injun Joe's pardon. The petition had been largely signed; many tearful and eloquent meetings had been held, and a committee of sappy women been appointed to go in deep mourning and wail around the Governor, and implore him to be a merciful ass and trample his duty underfoot. Injun Joe was believed to have killed five citizens of the village, but what of that? If he had been Satan himself there would have been plenty of weaklings ready to scribble their names to a pardon-petition, and drip a tear on it from their permanently impaired and leaky water-works. (pp. 296-297)

To Mark Twain, democrat, any social system which placed one man above another because of race, color, creed, birth, wealth, or tradition was wrong. Even in Tom Sawyer he takes time to illustrate, with irony, the injustices of such systems. Huck discusses Kings with Tom: "Well, if they like it, Tom, all right; but I don't want to be a king and have only just a given name like a nigger" (p. 222). He later praises Uncle Jake:

That's a mighty good nigger, Tom. He likes me, becuz I don't ever act as if I was above him. Sometimes I've set right down and eat *with* him. But you needn't tell that. A body's got to do things when he's awful hungry he wouldn't want to do as a steady thing. (p. 250)

Tom is, ironically, ashamed of his friendship with Huck. Twain intimates: "Tom was off at once. He did not care to have Huck's company in public places" (p. 243). And even Injun Joe takes pride in his elevated social status. He says angrily: "He had me *horsewhipped*!--horsewhipped in front of the jail like a nigger!--with all the town looking on" (p.259)!

Bernard DeVoto writes that:

There had not been before Jay Gould (there had not been that is, in Hannibal) the worship of wealth which he saw every-

where about him.[17]

But he had apparently forgotten Tom Sawyer and the manner in which the boys were treated after their new-found wealth had become common knowledge:

Wherever Tom and Huck appeared they were courted, admired, stared at. The boys were notable to remember that their remarks had possessed weight before; but now their sayings were treasured and repeated; everything they did seemed somehow to be regarded as remarkable; they had evidently lost the power of doing and saying commonplace things; moreover, their past history was raked up and discovered to bear marks of conspicuous originality. The village paper published biographical sketches of the boys. (p. 313)

Wealth may not have been worshipped in Hannibal, but it is certain that Mark Twain is lampooning the worship of financial success in this passage as it was practiced in the Gilded Age. Is such satire prevalent in boy's books?

A close look at the boys' mock-battle suggests that the author even turned his lance for a moment on the folly of wars and military conventions:

Tom was general of one of these armies. . . . These two great commanders did not condescend to fight in person--that being better suited to the still smaller fry--but sat together on an eminence and conducted the field operations by orders delivered through aides-de-camp. (p. 24)

Mark Twain's literary and personal honesty were two of his most admirable traits. The fact that he was prone to indulge in absurdities never kept him from criticizing himself or others who made the same mistakes. Throughout his life he was prone to try the latest medical quackeries. So was his mother--or at least, so was Aunt Polly:

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[17] MTE, p. xxiv.

She was a subscriber for all the "Health" periodicals and phrenological frauds; and the solemn ignorance they were inflated with was the breath to her nostrils. All the "rot" they contained about ventilation, and how to go to bed, and how to get up, and what to eat, and what to drink, and how much exercise to take, and what frame of mind to keep one's self in, and what sort of clothing to wear, was all gospel to her, and she never observed that her health-journals of the current month customarily upset every thing they had recommended the month before. (p. 117)

As R. W. B. Lewis notes in The American Adam, there is a well-established tradition in American literature in which the anarchic hero leaves society and sets out for virgin land. The conclusion of Huckleberry Finn closely follows this pattern. Huck finds society too corrupting and confusing for his tastes and he lights out for the Territory. Through Huck's previous adventures, he found that life was always happiest when he and Jim are alone in nature. There are several passages in Tom Sawyer which form a prelude, as it were, for the symphony which was to follow.

When Tom had left Becky sobbing over his previous "engagement," he went off into the woods to find solace:

He . . . picked his pathless way to the center . . . and sat down on a mossy spot under a spreading oak. . . . It seemed to him that life was but a trouble, at best, and he more than half envied Jimmy Hodges, so lately released. (p. 81-82)

Later, Tom, Joe Harper, and Huck go off to Jackson's Island to lick their wounds:

It seemed a glorious sport to be feasting in that wild free way in the virgin forest of an unexplored and uninhabited island, far from the haunts of men, and they said they never would return to civilization. (p. 135)

On the island, the boys live an idyllic life in harmony

with nature, but Joe's and Tom's conditioning--in concert with the noumenal aspects of nature and tobacco--eventually forces their return. Nevertheless, Mark Twain hints that withdrawal from society is a possible solution to man's predicament, and he develps the theory more fully in later novels. He also, in the Jackson's Island sequence, touches briefly on the concept of conscience--or the moral sense--as something other than an inborn phenomena. Tom and Joe have difficulty in getting to sleep, but: "He [Huck] slept the sleep of the conscience-free and the weary" (p. 133). Huckleberry Finn, untainted by society, was at one with the natural world.

When Mark Twain trimmed the Sunday school speech down to the first two sentences and tried to leave no suggestion of satire, he did a first-rate job of it. He left no suggestion of satire that would be apparent to the reader who might best not understand it, and account for it; he did not obtrude it upon everyone alike, for most were overwhelmed with the "extraneous interest of the travesty."

Buried among the melodrama and the idyls of Tom Sawyer are bits and pieces of satiric realism which link it to the chain which extends from Epaminondas Blab to Eseldorf. In the book we find familiar themes: the depravity of man; man's gullibility; the corruptive and degrading influences of society; man's inhumanity to man; the ugliness behind the genteel facade; and the ridiculousness of man's petty shams and hypocrisies. Other boy's books show no traces of these,

they are not guilty. George Peck's Bad Boy, written in the vernacular tradition, is full of rough and raucous humor, but it is innocent. Howells' A Boy's Town, except for a little pious moralizing, also has a clean slate, as does Aldrich's Bad Boy and Tarkington's Penrod series. And Mark Twain, the humorist, was not supposed to write seriously in his boys books, and so, although Tom Sawyer is guilty, it has escaped with the innocence of undetection. This seeming innocence has caused critics much trouble. Had they studied Tom Sawyer closely, they would not have asked the questions:

> What reversed his faith in human nature? . . . Why did his old vein of tender boyish imagination lead only to baleful fire and ashes? [What caused] his shift from a confident optimism to a bitter cynicism?[18]

And further, they would not have been put to the trouble of finding adequate answers for them. This is not to say that Mark Twain's bitterness did not increase as he grew older, but it is evident that the Mark Twain of Tom Sawyer expressed pessimistic thoughts similar to those expressed by the Mark Twain of The Mysterious Stranger. Mark Twain's development after A Connecticut Yankee was not arrested, as has been suggested, by a sudden change from optimism to pessimism. The so-called pessimism had been there all along.

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[18] Canby, Turn West, Turn East, p. 249.

CHAPTER VI

A CARPETBAGGER IN ENGLAND

The years between the publication of Tom Sawyer in 1876 and the appearance of A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court in December of 1889 were fruitful ones for Mark Twain. A Tramp Abroad was published in 1880; the first draft of what was to become What Is Man? was presumably written the following year; The Prince and the Pauper appeared in 1882: Life On the Mississippi, in 1883; Huckleberry Finn--after eight years of gestation--in 1884; and finally A Connecticut Yankee. Mark Twain continued to write cautiously in his fiction, but it may be supposed that experience taught him that the veil had been too dense in Tom Sawyer, for his satire becomes progressively more open. His pessimism--attested to by the several papers he presented to the Monday Evening Club--continued unabated. The Prince and the Pauper contains an attack on the economic and social evils of monarchy and expresses Twain's deterministic theories. Huckleberry Finn placed natural innocence in juxtaposition with American society to show the latter's corruption and inane practices. Even Life On the Mississippi is more than a romantic excursion. In it Twain explores a past colored with romanticism and views it in the light of the insights provided by experience. After

1889, however, some few members of his audience began to catch occasional glimpses of the real Mark Twain as his social criticism became more open. Edmund C. Stedman advanced an interpretation of _A Connecticut Yankee_ which was a great deal more perceptive than the majority of those offered in the succeeding forty years. He wrote in a letter to Clemens:

> My belief is, on the whole, that you have written a great book: in some respects your most original, most imaginative, --certainly the most effective and sustained. . . . You are going at the _still existing_ radical principles or fallacies which made "chivalry" possible once & servilities & flunkeyism & tyranny possible now.[1]

But generally speaking, the critics could not accept the book as a serious treatment of vital social issues by a man who they dismissed as a mere humorist, or a violent indictment of traditions and institutions they revered. By 1920 Van Wyck Brooks could still write that:

> _A Connecticut Yankee_ was an assault, not upon a corrupt social institution, but upon the principle of beauty, an assault, moreover, committed in the very name of the shrewd pioneer business man.[2]

Brooks believed that Mark Twain was attacking the medieval traditions of chivalry and Christianity while lauding the spirit of a brassy American ignoramus. Granville Hicks agreed:

> Mark Twain made no attempt to come to terms with the world in which he lived. . . . not one of his major fictions con-

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[1]_MTHL_, II, 609. See note 2.

[2]_The Ordeal_, p. 210.

cerns itself with the movements and events of American life in the latter half of the nineteenth century.[3]

By 1930, however, Vernon Parrington had expressed a critical opinion which remains virtually unchallenged today:

It is in A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court--a curious medley, half philippic and half farce--that Mark Twain's passion for justice rises to white heat. The book has been grossly misunderstood. It is not an attack on chivalry--at least not primarily; it is rather an attack on thirteen centuries of reputed Christian civilization that under pretense of serving God has slaved and despoiled the children of God. . . . It is a world of slaves still as it was in King Arthur's day. The human animal cannot lift himself to heaven by his own bootstraps, and heaven will not stoop to lift him. For a "clammy atmosphere of reverence, respect, deference," it has substituted smartness, vulgarity, irreverence.[4]

But tradition is strong, and although Newton Arvin did not entirely disagree with Parrington, he insisted that Twain's apparent satire was no more than a venting of his fury "through perhaps unconscious symbols."[5] To the traditional critic, the humorist can seldom be considered an artist. The same year, 1935, Theodore Dreiser noted, with an artist's perception, that Twain was always the conscious, pessimistic realist. And fifteen years later, Gladys Carmen Bellamy followed in his footsteps to debunk the "unconscious" theory, but in 1962, Henry Nash Smith, who otherwise presents an excellent critical evaluation of the novel wrote:

Since A Connecticut Yankee presents an almost continual con-

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[3]The Great Tradition, p. 45.

[4]The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America, p. 97.

[5]"Mark Twain: 1835-1935," p. 126.

> flict between manifest and latent meanings, and has in constantly shifting degree the "unconscious depth" that T. S. Eliot found in Mark Twain's fiction one hesitates to draw conclusions from any single passage.[6]

Smith assumes, consequently, that Twain's unconscious entanglements over unresolved inner conflicts produced the paradoxes of Hank Morgan's character. He assumes, as did DeVoto, that Hank began as a mature and yankified Huck Finn or, in other words, a vernacular hero. The probability is great, however, that the Yankee is a mature and yankified Tom Sawyer, whose characterization was a conscious act.

The answer to the question: "Was Mark Twain a conscious writer?" is the focal point of all modern Mark Twain criticism. If one accepts the assumptions of DeVoto and Smith, then one may assume that Twain's pessimism was not to any great degree conscious until after _A Connecticut Yankee_--the earlier evidences are construed as manifestations of "psychological latency." If, on the other hand, one assumes--as I do--that Mark Twain was always a conscious artist, one may conclude that the fiction always contained some evidences of a realistic pessimism, at first covertly presented but gradually becoming more open until a climax is reached in _The Mysterious Stranger_.

Within _A Connecticut Yankee_, resolution of this problem hinges on the interpretation of Hank Morgan's characterization. If Twain intended to portray him as a folk-hero, Smith's con-

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[6]_Development of a Writer_, p. 165.

clusions are valid. If Twain created him as a caricature of the mythic Yankee hero, my assumptions are correct.

The condemnations presented in the book are universal, but the specific target of Twain's satire is now generally conceded to have been nineteenth-century American society. Mark Twain created, in Tom Sawyer, an individual who was conditioned by and bore the ineradicable stamp of the society of his origin. We have seen that Tom's characterization was conscious. Regardless of this, however, it stands to reason that the Yankee, purveyor of American society to Arthur's court, would bear the marks of his origins as well. Mark Twain's determinism was too well entrenched to permit him to create a character who was not the product of his environment, and of course he did not.

As has been discussed, the money-lust sired by the industrial revolution was one of the things which Twain wished to deride, but ironically, as Professor Smith notes: "The only industrial capitalist in the cast of characters is Hank Morgan."[7] But Smith judges the irony of the situation to have been an unconscious reflection of the inner struggle of Mark Twain, and that the ultimate disillusionment and despair were brought on by Twain's gradual realization, as he wrote the novel, that his faith in mechanized civilization was forced and was, hence, no longer tenable.

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[7]Ibid.

Bernard DeVoto asserts that the novel "is the last of Mark Twain's books which we can call certainly first rank. . . . He was at the summit of his personal happiness."[8] Henry Nash Smith, who perceives the duality of Hank, agrees that the novel's purpose was a glorification of American ideals but differs by identifying it as a roman experimental which turned out badly:

> Hank Morgan's conclusion that the mass of the nation in Arthur's Britain was only "human muck," which was of course a judgment on the mass of the American nation in the 1880's proclaimed the bankruptcy of the writer's idealisms. The outcome had been in sight since the moment when Mark Twain confronted the fact that Huck's and Jim's quest for freedom was doomed to failure. Hank Morgan's doctrinaire republicanism in A Connecticut Yankee translated into ideological terms the broader, deeper, subtler affirmations that had been frustrated in Huckleberry Finn. Since Mark Twain was trying to sustain by force of will a belief that had already lost its intuitive solidity, the outcome of the story was latent in it from the beginning.[9]

Tony Tanner agrees that the novel was a roman experimental, and he also concludes that Twain's disillusionment was brought about by an "unconscious fatalism."[10]

If the obverse is true, however, if the prostitution of Hank's doctrinaire republicanism was intentional from the start, and if Hank's portrayal was, therefore, intended to be a caricature, A Connecticut Yankee was not a product of, nor was it the instrument which ended, Twain's supposedly hap-

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[8] MTAW, p. 106.

[9] Development of a Writer, p. 166.

[10] "The Lost American: The Despair of Henry Adams and Mark Twain," Modern Age, V (1961), p. 162.

py period. It was, instead, just another of Twain's books in which his satire has gone begging.

Mark Twain had no quarrel with ideal democracy, but he had long been critical of American practices which corrupted the ideal. He came to believe that man's depravity was capable of undermining even the best ideology, and he freely voiced his skepticism of so-called beneficent contemporary practices. Bernard DeVoto, benightedly, pronounced a dictum which misled many. In the introduction to The Portable Mark Twain, he said:

> He [Twain] thought too that the nineteenth century, especially as Progress, and more especially as Progress in the United States, was the happiest estate of man; he believed that it was bringing on a future of greater freedom and greater happiness.[11]

Mark Twain did indeed think these things, but only relatively. He was not so much in step with the "Big Barbecue" to be blind to the fact that the noble ideals of the republic were being despoiled by the money and power lusts of the industrial revolution. Another look at "The Revised Catechism" of 1871 shows that Twain had been cognizant of these evils for some time:

> A. Money is God. . . . mighty and supreme.
> Q. Do we progress?
> . . . .
> A. You bet your life.[12]

In this light, the following letter which he wrote to

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[11](New York, 1946), p. 15.

[12]See page 24 above.

Twichell in 1905 can no longer be judged as a manifestation of his late pessimism, but it can be interpreted as a more definitive expression of the views expressed in the "Catechism."

> Well, the 19th century made progress--the first progress after "ages and ages"--colossal progress. In what? Materialities. Prodigious acquisitions were made in things which add to the comfort of many and make life harder for many more. But the addition to righteousness? Is that discoverable? I think not. The materialities were not invented in the interest of righteousness; that there is more righteousness in the world because of them than there was before, is hardly demonstrable, I think. In Europe and America there is a vast change (due to them) in ideals--do you admire it? All Europe and all America are feverishly scrambling for money. Money is the supreme ideal. . . . Money-lust has always existed, but not in the history of the world was it ever a craze, a madness, until your time and mine. Has the Kingdom of God advanced in. . . . Europe and America, considering the vast backward step of the money-lust? . . . there has been no change.[13]

Twain had observed in his travels before 1870 that the American tourist abroad was worthy of small respect and admiration, and he never changed his opinion:

> We are by long odds the most ill-mannered nation, civilized or savage, that exists on the planet today, and our president stands for us like a colossal monument visible from all ends of the earth. He is fearfully hard and coarse where another gentleman would exhibit kindliness and delicacy.[14]

Considering these views, the likelihood is strong that Hank Morgan was not intended to be an epic hero. He was most likely intended to be a caricature of the Yankee as he appeared to the rest of the world. Although Twain thought

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[13] MTL, II, 769.

[14] MTE, p. 33.

it would be his last work of fiction, he still wrote with caution, since the subject was so sensitive. He explained this in a letter to Howells:

I don't care to have them [the critics] paw the book at all. It's my swan-song, my retirement from literature permanently, & I wish to pass to the cemetery unclodded.[15]

But his irony was unmistakable in the explanation which accompanied selections in Century magazine in November, 1889:

He [the Yankee] has privately set himself the task of introducing the great and beneficent civilization of the nineteenth century and of peacefully replacing the twin despotisms of royalty and aristocratic privilege with a "Republic on the American Plan" when Arthur shall have passed to rest.[16]

He had described the Yankee to Dan Beard earlier that year:

This yankee of mine has neither the refinement nor the weakness of a college education; he is a perfect ignoramus. . . he can build a locomotive or a Colt's revolver, he can put up and run a telegraph line, but he's an ignoramus nevertheless.[17]

So Twain, it would seem, had known what he was about from the novel's inception. An anomaly often overlooked is Hank's unnatural desire--having come back to modern times--to return to sixth-century England. This facet of the novel is frequently conjectured to have been appended by Twain after he had experienced his supposed disillusionment, but as Henry Nash Smith observes:

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[15] MTHL, II, 610.

[16] Quoted in Smith, p. 150. This should be compared with the passage quoted on page 19 (this thesis) concerning annexation, wherein may be found Twain's ideas of what the beneficence consisted of in 1873.

[17] Biography, II, 887-888.

Morgan's yearning for a preindustrial Arcadia was not a touch added to the story at the last moment. An entry in Mark Twain's notebook made not later than January 1886, at a time when the book was only begun, reads as follows: "He mourns his lost land--he has come to England & revisited it, but it is all changed & become old, so old!--& it was so fresh & new, so virgin before . . . Has lost all interest in life--is found dead next morning--suicide."[18]

The obvious implication is that the Yankee, having experienced both, prefers life in the sixth century to that of the nineteenth.

In a speech echoing the raftsmen passage which had been deleted from Huckleberry Finn, the Yankee boasts: "So I am a Yankee of the yankees--and practical; yes, and nearly barren of sentiment, I suppose--or poetry, in other words. My father was a blacksmith, my uncle was a horse doctor, and I was both along at first."[19] He immediately characterizes himself as a blatant, coarse, and ignorant, self-styled, big-time operator who overconfidently speaks in a jargon of cheap cliches:

> One thing at a time, is my motto--and just play the thing for all it is worth, even if it's only two pair and a jack. . . . I would boss the whole country inside of three months. . . . I'm not a man to waste time after my mind's made up and there's work on hand. (p. 24)

This is the language of the "get-ahead" man of the nineteenth century. Mark Twain had no love for the opportunist, and he lets Morgan libel himself in this manner frequently but not

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[18] Development of a Writer, p. 156.

[19] A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court (New York, 1889), p. 14. Subsequent citations will be made parenthetically in the text.

consistently. For he is a mouthpiece for Twain when he says:

> Inherited ideas are a curious thing, and interesting to observe and examine. I had mine, the king and his people had theirs. In both cases they flowed in ruts worn deep by time and habit, and the man who should have proposed to divert them by reason . . . would have had a long contract on his hands. (p. 66)

Nevertheless, his flashes of apparent perception do not add greatly to his stature, because he is never able to apply the truths he utters to situations other than those of a horse-trade nature.

The Mark Twain of 1889 felt differently toward art than did the Innocent of 1867. Philip Foner notes that by 1879 Twain had changed to the degree that he no longer exalted chromos over real works of art.[20] And Arthur L. Scott discusses unpublished passages from "The Innocents Adrift" which illustrate this modified viewpoint.[21] When Morgan, therefore, glorifies the chromo as middle-class taste in art, his ideas may be understood to have been presented in a satiric vein similar to that employed in Huck's description of the art at the Grangerford's, only in reverse:

> I had been used to chromos for years, and I saw now that without suspecting it a passion for art had got worked into the fabric of my being, and was become a part of me. It made me homesick to look around over this proud and gaudy but heartless barrenness and remember that in our house in East Hartford, all unpretending as it was, you couldn't go into a room but you would find an insurance-chromo or at

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[20] P. 160.

[21] "The Innocents Adrift' Edited by Twain's Official Biographer," PMLA, LXXVIII (1963), pp. 234-235.

least a three-color God-Bless-Our-Home over the door; and in the parlor we had nine. (p. 55)

Hank's crassness is further accentuated by his taste in literature. He advises Sandy on the use of dialect:

You ought to give him a brogue, or at least a characteristic expletive; by this means one would recognize him as soon as he spoke, without his ever being named. It is a common literary device with the great authors. (p. 120)

He truly loves yellow journalism. Of the sixth-century vocabulary he says:

Dear me, what would this barren vocabulary get out of the mightiest spectacle?--the burning of Rome in Nero's time, for instance? Why, it would merely say, "Town burned down; no insurance; boy brast a window, fireman brake his neck!" Why, _that_ ain't a picture. (p. 118)

Of the efforts of the novice editor of his newspaper, Hank judged:

Of course . . . [his] report lacked whoop and crash and lurid description, and therefore wanted the true ring; but its antique wording was quaint and sweet and simple, and full of the fragrances and flavors of the time. (p. 72)

Two-thirds through the book, Hank's brassiness becomes somewhat mellowed:

It was delicious to see a newspaper again, yet I was conscious of a secret shock when my eye fell upon the first batch of display headline. I had lived in a clammy atmosphere of reverence, respect, deference, so long that they sent a quivery little cold wave through me. . . . Yes, it was too loud.[22] Once I could have enjoyed it and seen nothing out of the way about it, but now its note was discordant. It was good Ar-

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[22]Some critics suggest that Hank's taste for yellow journalism constitutes, in part, Twain's rebuttal to Matthew Arnold, who had criticized the brashness of the American press. This passage is, however, probably more representative of Twain's personal opinions. He would, nevertheless, have defended an editor's right to publish as he wished--on democratic principles.

kansas journalism, but this was not Arkansas. . . . I found myself unpleasantly affected by pert little irreverencies which would have seemed but proper and airy graces of speech at an earlier period of my life. (p. 235)

The Yankee is at first shocked by the antique flavors and fragrances of everyday speech:

Many of the terms used in the most matter-of-fact way by this great assemblage of the first ladies and gentlemen in the land would have made a Comanche blush. . . . However, to the unconsciously indelicate all things are delicate. King Arthur's people were not aware that they were indecent, and I had presence of mind enough not to mention it. (p. 38)

Mark Twain, as he shows here, was against the euphemistic excesses of genteel society. Typically, he permits Hank a moment of astuteness in the middle of the speech, but he quickly discredits it by placing him back into character at the end. Elsewhere in the novel he holds up Hank's nineteenth-century sense of propriety for ridicule.

The Yankee is scandalized at the thought of taking off his armor before Sandy, despite the fact that he has clothing on beneath it. He is aghast at the proposal that he and Sandy ride unchaperoned through the countryside. His idea of love--like Becky Thatcher's--is in the best tradition of the friendship offering. He speaks of his great amour with Puss Flanagan:

[She was] just . . . [Sandy's] age and was so gentle and lovely, and all the world to me, and whom I shall never see again! How the thought of her carries me back over wide seas of memory to a vague dim time, a happy time, so many, many centuries hence, when I used to wake in the soft summer mornings, out of sweet dreams of her, and say "Hello, Central!" Just to hear her dear voice come melting back to me with a "Hello, Hank!" that was music of the spheres to my enchanted ear. She got three dollars a week, but she was worth it. (p.121)

Here Twain's satire is more comprehensible when it is linked with his dissatisfaction with the early telephone. As Katy Leary, longtime maid of the Clemens' household, said, the telephone

> made Mr. Clemens so mad--"just to hear the damned thing ring," he said. Yes, that telephone used to make Mr. Clemens wild, because he would hear all right, but he couldn't give his message out good. It wasn't very good service in them days, and he used to fight the telephone girls all the time. He'd say: "Why damn it, are you all asleep down there? If you don't give me better service you can send somebody right up here now and pull this thing out. I won't have this damned thing in the house--it's a nuisance!"
>
> . . . .
>
> He kept shouting, "If I don't get better service than this I am going to have this pulled right out of my house, if I don't get any better service from you hello girls down there!"[23]

His anger lasted over a period of several years, and had grown to the point that he refused to wish Alexander Graham Bell a Happy New Year about the time of the failure of the typesetting machine.[24]

The passage serves as an excellent example of Twain's satiric use of conventional rhetoric. He permits Hank to speak in the jargon of the gilt-edged romance, only to destroy the carefully built illusion at the end with a Byronic twist.

Although Hank's clever opportunism ranks with that of the Dauphin and the Duke of Bridgewater, Mark Twain never

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[23]Mary Lawton, A Lifetime with Mark Twain: The Memoirs of Katy Leary (New York, 1925), pp. 98-99.

[24]Ibid., p. 100.

lets him become intelligent enough to perceive the inadequacies of the society of his birth, until too late. This enables the author to use him as a gullible foil. The last sentence of the following paragraph is an indication that Hank is blind to the satire which precedes it:

In my day, in my own country, this money was collected from imposts, and the citizens imagined that the foreign importer paid it, and it made him comfortable to think so; whereas in fact it was paid by the American people, and was so equally distributed among them that the annual cost to the 100-millionaire and the annual cost to the suckling child of the day-laborer was precisely the same--each paid $6. Nothing could be equaler than that, I reckon. (p. 233)

On the same page, the Yankee demonstrates his unflagging economic practicality and gives Twain an opportunity to get off barbs at Sunday school morality, statesmen, and missionaries:

In making this substitution I had drawn upon the wisdom of a very remote source--the wisdom of my boyhood--for the true statesman does not despise any wisdom, howsoever lowly may be its origin: in my boyhood I had always saved my pennies and contributed buttons to the foreign missionary cause. The buttons would answer the ignorant savage as well as the coin, the coin would answer me better than the buttons; all hands were happy and nobody hurt. (p. 233)

In such passages there is a recognizable kinship between Hank and Tom Sawyer.

When Sir Boss questions Alisande La Carteloise as if she were a stenographer applying for a job, Twain is railing at industrial society's growing reliance on the questionnaire, and in typical fashion he used Hank to prove his argument from both sides. The Yankee is questioned himself when he attempts to cash a large banknote:

I went right on and furnished them a lot of information voluntarily; told them I owned a dog, and his name was Watch, and my first wife was a Free Will Baptist, and her grandfather was a prohibitionist, and I used to know a man who had two thumbs on each hand and a wart on the inside of his upper lip, and died in hope of a glorious resurrection, and so on, till even that hungry village questioner began to look satisfied. (p. 280)

Twain demonstrates his Yankee's addiction to the same sort of thing when he gives the young squires who are applying for commissions as knights an oral examination. He asks typical arithmetic problems which are impossible combinations of vegetables, animals, and abstractions. A sampling of test questions from the entrance examinations of West Point, circa 1889, shows that Twain did not exaggerate greatly. Hank asks one of the noblemen a question. In a significant change of persona, Mark Twain borrows the tongue of the squire:

Verily, in the all-wise and unknowable providence of God, who moveth in mysterious ways his wonders to perform, have I never heard the fellow to this question for confusion of the mind and congestion of the ducts of thought. Wherefore I beseech you to let the dog and the onions and these people of the strange and godless names [A, B, X, etc.] work out their several salvations from their piteous and wonderful difficulties without help of mine, for indeed their trouble is sufficient as it is, whereas an I tried to help, I should but damage their cause the more and yet mayhap not live myself to see the desolation wrought. (pp. 223-224)

Numerous additional passages might be quoted to support the thesis that the Yankee's characterization was consciously pejorative, but they would be, I think, redundant. As the book progresses, however, the Yankee brass is given a patina of softness by the Arthurian culture. We have seen that he grew to dislike Arkansas journalism, and could even applaud the King's bravery in the face of dread smallpox, but in the

end he significantly reverts to type. Motivated by what Mark Twain identified as the Anglo-Saxon spirit, Hank becomes a demagogue when he learns that the people have risen against him. He rejects those democratic principles which hold that the will of the masses should rule and gladly passes up an opportunity to escape in order to fight. The bloody battle of the sand belt ensues. When the fight was over he read the following communique to his cadet soldiers:

This mighty victory, having been achieved utterly without loss, stands without example in history. So long as the planets shall continue to move in their orbits, the BATTLE OF THE SAND-BELT will not perish out of the memories of men. (p. 394)

Before the end, he shows his ultimate degradation when he cries: "We shall kill them all" (p. 394). This, in spite of his realization that the will of the people, fickle as it might be, was with the knights.

Mark Twain wrote in 1906:

For good or for evil we continue to educate Europe. We have held the post of instructor for more than a century and a quarter now. We were not elected to it, we merely took it. We are of the Anglo-Saxon race. At the banquet last winter of . . . the Ends of the Earth Club, the chairman . . . proclaimed in a loud voice, and with fervency, "We are of the Anglo-Saxon race, and when the Anglo-Saxon wants a thing <u>he just takes it</u>."

He continued:

Our public motto is "In God we trust," and when we see those gracious words on the trade-dollar . . . they always seem to tremble and whimper with pious emotion. That is our public motto. It transpires that our private one is, "When the Anglo-Saxon wants a thing <u>he just takes it</u>." Our public morals are touchingly set forth in that stately and yet gentle and kindly motto which indicates that we are a nation of gracious and affectionate multitudinous brothers compacted into one--"<u>e pluribus unum</u>." Our private morals

find the light in the sacred phrase, "Come, step lively.!"

> . . . We have taught Europe many lessons . . . . But for us, Europe might never have known the interviewer; but for us certain of the European states might never have experienced the blessing of extravagant imposts . . . but for us the long delayed resumption of Yellow Journalism in Europe might have been postponed for generations to come. Steadily, continuously, persistently, we are Americanizing Europe, and in all good time we shall get the job perfected.[25]

Hank Morgan, in addition to taking the industrial revolution to ancient England, took the interview, extravagant imposts, yellow journalism, and the "step lively" doctrine of yankee trading. To Mark Twain, these items were undesirable aspects of nineteenth-century progress; he did not care for them, and yet he has his symbol of America, his Connecticut Yankee, introduce these developments of the "great and beneficent civilization on the 'American Plan'" to medieval Europe. Could the purveyor of such practices, so despicable to Twain, be judged his hero? Hardly.

Some interpretations of A Connecticut Yankee are buttressed on Twain's known admiration for young leaders in the labor movement. They neglect to remember that Hank was a foreman and that he was dispatched to the sixth century by a blow from the laboring class. No, Hank was a potential plutocrat in the tradition of the Andrew Carnegies and the Jay Goulds; he was a grown-up Tom Sawyer, completely conditioned and shaped by his society, a pragmatic visionary but still an ignoramus.

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[25] MTE, pp. 382-383.

Mark Twain knew what he was about from the Yankee's first lines: "I am a Yankee of the Yankees," and he sent him off with the hope that the American people might see themselves through him and learn that money-lust and the ill-founded doctrine of progress could result only in the destruction of their cherished ideals. He tried to tell them that they, like Morgan, would one day yearn for the preindustrial Arcadia, he hoped before it was too late.

Twain's preoccupation with the Paige typesetting machine throughout the period during which he wrote the novel bears investigating. He had written the book, primarily, to replenish funds which the machine had consumed. About a year after the book was published, Mark Twain described the inventor of the machine:

> I will remark here that James W. Paige, the little bright-eyed, alert, smartly dressed inventor of the machine is a most extraordinary compound of business thrift and commercial insanity; of cold calculation and jejune sentimentality; of veracity and falsehood; of fidelity and treachery; of nobility and baseness; of pluck and cowardice; of wasteful liberality and pitiful stinginess; of solid sense and weltering moonshine; of towering genius and trivial ambitions; of merciful bowels and a petrified heart; of colossal vanity and--But there the opposites stop. His vanity stands alone, sky-piercing, as sharp of outline as an Egyptian monolith. . . . There is another point or two worth mentioning. He can persuade anybody, he can convince nobody. He has a crystal clear mind as regards the grasping and concreting of an idea which has been lost and smothered under a chaos of baffling legal language; and yet it can always be depended upon to take the simplest half dozen facts and draw from them a conclusion that will astonish the idiots in the asylum. It is because he is a dreamer, a visionary. His imagination runs utterly away with him. He is a poet, a most great and genuine poet, whose sublime creations are written in steel. He is the Shakespeare of mechanical invention.

Of his shrewdness, Twain said:

> In drawing contracts he is always able to take care of himself; and in every instance will work into the contracts injuries to the other party and advantages to himself which were never considered or mentioned in the preceding verbal agreement.
>
> . . . .
>
> Paige and I always meet on effusively affectionate terms, and yet he knows perfectly well that if I had him in a steel trap I would shut out all human succor and watch that trap till he died.[26]

Knowing Mark Twain's tendency to draw characters from real-life, it is not, perhaps, untoward to suggest that Hank Morgan may have been patterned after James W. Paige. They had much in common.

Henry Nash Smith has asserted that when Hank Morgan characterized the commoners of England in the sixth century as "Human Muck," he was proclaiming the "bankruptcy of the writer's idealisms." Smith argues that Twain consciously hoped that things might turn out differently, but his selection of the sixth-century as a setting would indicate that he did not. Had Hank been successful, the course of history would have had to have changed, and this change reflected fictionally in the novel. So Morgan was doomed to failure from the start. It is noteworthy that Hank does not see the people as muck until they fail to be taken in by his trickeries. But this is not the first time that Mark Twain had unleashed his venom at the sheep-like masses.

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[26] Autobiography, I, 72-78.

In Tom Sawyer the villagers had turned en masse on the defenseless Muff Potter, but nobody had the courage to act against Injun Joe--although such action would have been justified morally and legally. In the same book, Twain demonstrated the foolish tendency of the townspeople to worship the wealthy--the aristocracy of industrial democracy. These people, then, exhibited the same characteristics which, when displayed by King Arthur's people, provoked Hank's "muck" epithet. Colonel Sherburn's speech to the lynch-mob in Huckleberry Finn is certainly as open a declaration of this theme as any appearing in A Connecticut Yankee, and it would therefore appear that the idealism of Mark Twain had been bankrupt long before Hank proclaimed the people to be "human muck"--if indeed it ever became bankrupt.

A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court is not the novel which transformed Mark Twain into a cynic. It is simply another novel in which Mark Twain, reformer, attempted to speak the truth as he saw it, another in the progressive revelation of an artist's soul.

CHAPTER VII

THE FINAL PHASE

The development of Mark Twain's major fiction from _Tom Sawyer_ through _A Connecticut Yankee_ is, then, one of progressive philosophical revelation. The satire of the former is scarcely visible beneath the facade of the narrative, but in the intervening novels social criticism becomes more salient, and finally, as we have seen, _A Connecticut Yankee_ brings Mark Twain, the reformer, into the open.

This novel is conspicuously intended to be a sermon--as was _Tom Sawyer_, by comparison, a hymn--but the object of its criticism is so ingeniously veiled that it continues to mislead critics. _A Connecticut Yankee_, as Twain told Howells, was intended to be his "swan-song," and he therefore spoke more forthrightly than he had done previously. The critics, as a result, belatedly recognized that Mark Twain was something more than a mere jester, and at last began to accord him the recognition as a man of letters which had long been his due. His message was noted, if not understood. Twain found that the clodding was not so bad as he had expected, and it is not surprising, therefore, that the sermon was still more open in _Pudd'nhead Wilson_.

Who can forget David Wilson's sometime vitriolic homilies, and the fact that the novel deals openly with a problem which is still extremely sensitive? No American writer of stature had ever before dared to present miscegenation openly. Mark Twain dared, under the guise of slick detective melodrama, even while _Plessy vs. Ferguson_ was in the courts. And Pudd'nhead's deadliest aphorisms--forming a contrapuntal theme of sorts--had only the camouflage of persona and the apparent nullification which came from juxtaposition with their openly humorous counterparts to hide their outspokenness. When Twain has Wilson write:

> Whoever has lived long enough to find out what life is, knows how deep a debt of gratitude we owe to Adam, the first great benefactor of our race. He brought death into the world.[1]

he has him follow with;

> Adam and Eve had many advantages, but the principal one was, that they escaped teething.[2]

to soften the harshness of the first. But there can be no doubt that Pudd'nhead, through his calendar, speaks as Mark Twain's persona. The inclusion of many of the ideas he had previously aired, such as determinism, providence, and the depravity of social man rules out coincidence. This novel partially embodies the essential philosophy--as had its predecessors--of _The Mysterious Stranger_: the philosophy which

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[1] _Pudd'nhead Wilson and Those Extraordinary Twins_ (New York, 1893-1894), p. 30.

[2] Ibid., p. 38.

Mark Twain had presented in written form as early as 1882.[3] In 1875 he had produced a prototype of The Mysterious Stranger in "Some Learned Fables, for Good Old Boys and Girls." Here, in a satire on archaeology, science, scholarship, and mankind, he presented the earth as being inhabited only by insects who, on an archaeological expedition discover the remains of a long defunct civilization of the long extinct species of lower animal life--man. Twain in dead-pan satire presents the report of the bug scientists:

> To sum up. We believe that Man had a written language. We *know* that he indeed existed at one time, and is not a myth; also, that he was the companion of the cave bear, the mastodon, and other extinct species; that he cooked and ate them and likewise the young of his own kind; also that he bore rude weapons, and knew something of art; that he imagined he had a soul, and pleased himself with the fancy that it was immortal. But let us not laugh; there may be creatures in existence to whom we and our vanities and profundities may seem as ludicrous.[4]

At the story's end, the insects discover evidences of man's writings, and their spokesman says surprisedly: "Then there are lower animals than man!"[5]

Frank R. Stockton wrote in the *Forum* for August, 1893:

> His philosophy of course, came in with his humor and although the fact was not always noticed, it often formed part of it. Later this philosophic spirit grew and strengthened until it was able to stand alone, and in some of his more recent writings it not only stands up very steadily but it does some bold fighting.[6]

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[3] *MTE*, p. 239.

[4] *Sketches*, p. 161.

[5] Ibid., p. 167.

[6] Quoted in Foner, pp. 49-50.

And so it had, but the transformation was less a change than a ripening. His anger over compromised ideals grew fiercer as he grew older and it became more important to him that he speak honestly of what he had been thinking and discussing for years. He affirms this in a letter to Howells of 1899:

> For several years I have been intending to stop writing for print as soon as I could afford it. At last I can afford it, & have put the pot-boiler pen away. What I have been wanting was a chance to write a book without reserves--a book which should take into account no one's prejudices, opinions, beliefs, hopes, illusions, delusions; a book which should say my say, right out of my heart, in the plainest language & without a limitation of any sort. I judged that that would be an unimaginable luxury, heaven on earth. There was no condition but one under which the writing of such a book would be possible; only one--the consciousness that it would not see print.[7]

He had already completed What Is Man? and The Mysterious Stranger, but he had come to see that his own evangelism smacked of the preaching which he so liked to ridicule. In addition, unlike other socio-critical writers of the period, he was read by the masses and knew that they were not yet ready for what he had to say. As a hero of the American people he felt an obligation to them, and so he chose to refrain, while he lived, from giving them something which they had already proven their inability to understand. In Harper's of September, 1899, he had published as essay entitled, "Concerning the Jews." In one of his letters we find:

> The Jew article is my "gem of the ocean." . . . Neither Jew nor Christian will approve of it, but people who are neither

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[7]MTHL, II, 698.

Jews nor Christian will approve of it, for they are in a condition to know the truth when they see it.[8]

Twain's fraternization with the leaders of industry such as Rockefeller, Rogers, and Carnegie is often cited as evidence of his compromise with the official culture, but it is seldom remembered that he chastised and ridiculed them unmercifully, except for Henry H. Rogers. Rogers had been the only man to offer aid after the financial failures of the 1890's. Through his efforts Twain was able to recover honorably, and he never forgot Roger's kindness.

The accumulation of personal tragedy had, no doubt, a certain debilitating effect upon Mark Twain, but it did not--as DeVoto suggested--produce major philosophical reorientations. On the other hand, a close examination of the early writings indicates that the philosophy of the late works was simply a more open manifestation of what had been said before and not the result of suppression or repression by his environment. Certainly the elimination of "they comb me all to hell" is offset by the retention of episodes such as Colonel Sherburn's, and Mark Twain cannot be charged with cowardice because the critics were unable to understand the satire of Tom Sawyer or A Connecticut Yankee. It has been said, recently, that "the race as a whole has understood Mark Twain better than the literary branch of it. For it has accepted

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[8]Quoted in Foner, p. 229.

the spirit . . . of his great confession."[9] Who can deny that the pessimism of the following passage is subordinate to the anguished compassion? Who cannot see that this Mark Twain is the same Mark Twain who wrote "The Jumping Frog"; the Mark Twain who had spent his life attempting to make man aware of his ridiculous plight, hoping that the ensuing laughter would destroy the deeply graven images which twenty centuries of European civilization had inculcated? He wrote in 1907:

> Nietzche published his book, and was at once pronounced crazy by the world--by a world which included tens of thousands of bright, sane men who believed exactly as Nietzsche believed but concealed the fact and scoffed at Nietzsche. What a coward every man is! and how surely he will find it out if he will just let other people alone and sit down and examine himself. The human race is a race of cowards; and I am not only marching in that procession but carrying a banner.[10]

This remark conveys, as much as anything else, what was fundamental in Mark Twain: his total identification with--what he saw as that miserably hypocritical and cowardly creature--his fellow man.

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[9]Maxwell Geismar, Introduction, DHR, p. xviii.

[10]MTE, p. xxix.

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