MARK TWAIN:
THE DISILLUSIONMENT OF INNOCENCE

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by

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Mark Twain reached the pinnacle of his artistry with Adventures of Huckleberry Finn and could not reach that height again due to his growing disillusionment with humanity, his personal grief from financial failure and the death of his wife and daughters, and his inability to create a literary alter ego as effective as the first person narrator of his masterpiece Huckleberry Finn. His disillusionment with humanity stemmed from his concept of man's nature. He believed in the prevailing American myth of innocence, of man's innate goodness. Though possessing
a potentially corrupt nature, man has the power of choice and the inner strength to act upon the right course of action. Huck follows his sound heart and does not fall victim to social convention. But later characters become society's victims due to Twain's growing belief in the predestined environmental corruption of the individual.

Twain was unable to create an alter ego who was as successful as Huck in unifying point of view, tone, and structure, as well as remain a sympathetic character who embodied his philosophical beliefs. The combination of first person point of view and the vernacular idiom is one of the most notable achievements of *Huckleberry Finn*.

Twain wrote his masterpiece during the happiest period of his life. Later, personal tragedies spiritually exhausted him. At the same time his pessimism regarding man's nature grew along with his conviction that man's predestined fate is to suffer a world full of pain, repression, disillusionment and viciousness. He took refuge in the role of the detached observer, setting himself apart from humanity, being immune to pain and suffering. Removed from life, finding no meaning in man or society, his creativity died.
Mark Twain played many roles in his colorful lifetime, some successfully, others not. The foundation of his writing career was set at the end of his celebrated Hannibal childhood when he became an apprentice printer. The printing office was the poor boy's college. Not only did it expose him to the ideas and events of the world, but it taught him to read and write beyond the skill learned in the schoolroom. Twain said, "One isn't a printer ten years without setting up acres of good and bad literature, and learning--unconsciously at first, consciously later--to discriminate between the two, within his mental limitations; and meanwhile he is consciously acquiring what is called a 'style.'" He later gained a varied background of experience while working as a Mississippi River pilot, a Civil War soldier, a Nevada miner, and a western newspaperman. He was influenced by and began writing in the tradition of the Southwestern humorists, and would draw from his western experience to produce such works as "Jim Smiley and his Jumping Frog" and Roughing It. While assigned as a newspaper correspondent, he visited the Sandwich Islands, Europe and Palestine. He found his first success on the lecture circuit with his subject the Sandwich Islands. His humor and an antic, drawling, shuffling style of delivery gave him a presence altogether his own which delighted his audience. A couple years later in 1869, his travel letters from Europe and Palestine led to his first successful novel, The Innocents Abroad. Though he drew from his travels for lecture and writing material, it was remembering his boyhood
days in Hannibal that inspired his imagination, crucial to his best art as a novelist. Twain was most successful in perfecting the art of oral delivery, bringing to the occupation of humorist a greater power and artistry than it had ever had. He was deeply loved by the public world-wide and enjoyed success up to his death at age 75. Yet when solely examining his literary works, one can see the decline of a great American writer. Twain reached the pinnacle of his artistry with Adventures of Huckleberry Finn in 1884 and could not reach that height again due to the growing disillusionment with humanity, his personal grief from financial failure and the death of his wife and daughters, and his inability to create a literary alter ego as effective as the first person narrator of his masterpiece Huckleberry Finn. We can better understand why his literary vision failed as we examine these three reasons.

It is no secret that Twain's increasingly pessimistic view of "the damned human race" ultimately turned the comic tone in his novels to bitterness. This disillusionment with humanity arose from his basic concept of man's nature. He examined man's nature as a major theme in his novels, and as he grew more "experienced" along with his characters by presenting them in various life situations, the more he realized the extent of his pessimism. He adhered to the prevailing American myth of "innocence" and began to realize that the innocent was being destroyed by the ideals of Eastern gentility. It was a period of time Twain called
the "Gilded Age." The public and private morality of America had reached its lowest ebb as the "robber barons" of industry and finance appeared amid a general atmosphere of speculation and chicanery. Poverty and the increase of new slums did not concern President Grant's corrupt administration or the treasury-looting, vote-selling political bosses. Though the realists of the 1870's were aware of the social problem, their emphasis was on the character of the individual confronted by hardships or moral dilemmas. The idea of innocence, of essential human goodness, was a generally accepted theme. Walt Whitman, influenced by Emerson, believed in the transcendental or intuitional temperament that trusts the innate spiritual intimations of the individual and makes him responsible to them. Henry James offset his portrayals of the evil tendencies of life toward greed, treachery and pathological dualism by the constant representation of innocence, lofty choices and moral idealism. "Innocence" entails the belief that the individual, operating in a naturally permissive environment, can dictate right action without recourse either to institutional dogma or to educated reason. Intuitively sure of his rightness, of his affinity with God in nature, the innocent hero usually confronts the world with infinite good will and expects it to deal with him in the same spirit. He generally behaves as if a pure heart were the source of unconquerable strength, and he seldom recognizes any force in the world which he cannot identify, isolate and conquer.

In most of Twain's major works, a youthful and generally
naive central character sets out on a course of adventures which teach him the ways of the world. The outcome of this "initiation" is a new awareness on the part of the innocent that the world is full of pain, repression, disillusionment, and viciousness, and that the free and naturally benign world of his youth was an illusion born of inexperience. As Twain presents this myth, a moral problem arises when the innocent hero who behaves with an instinctive sense of rightness confronts characters and situations which represent the force of evil. The virtuous hero is self-sufficient, naturally compassionate, and highly individualistic, whereas his evil adversaries represent the social sins of uniformity, hypocrisy and repression of virtuous instinct. Since Twain adhered to the republican ideal of the free individual, he generally associated the apostle of the self-determined spirit with goodness and the minions of civilized institutions with evil, and because he denied the possibility of compromise between good and evil, there was no possible compromise between the individual and society. Being on the side of the individual, his strict adherence to this faith led him to inevitable disillusionment as industrialization and urbanization extended social control over nineteenth century America.

Consequently, another aspect of this myth is the conflict between agrarian and urban, industrial values. Twain's innocents come from the country and derive their strength from an inherent union with unspoiled nature. God is in nature, and like an un Fallen Adam, the innocent is in
harmony with nature, a part of it, deriving his essential
goodness from it. Even innocents bred in the city, like the
greenhorn of *Roughing It*, become virtuous and compassionate
as soon as they leave the artificiality and confinement of
the city and enter the wide-open spaces of the country. Huck
Finn is blissfully in communion with nature while on the
river, and instinctively his sound heart instructs him, yet
he struggles within himself upon the right course of action
when influenced by the corrupt societies he encounters when
he is away from the river. Again, Twain's moral judgments
were tied to impossible situations, for the country was
vanishing in the nineteenth century as quickly as was the
absolutely free man. Equating goodness with the rapidly
disappearing wilderness, Twain set himself up for inevitable
disillusionment. He was not alone in his despair. He put
in artistic form the vague apprehensions and fears of late
nineteenth and early twentieth century Americans in regard
to the sprawling industrial age corrupting the rugged
individual.

Twain was continually examining the reliability of his
faith by putting it to the imaginative test of setting,
character, and action. The body of his work discloses a
coherent development; he moves from early experiments with
character and situation to various accounts of the innocent's
adventures, and then to increasingly frantic attempts to
find a setting in which the innocent can act at all. Twain
clung to traditional values in an age which increasingly
denied their validity and ultimately destroyed his faith.

In The Innocents Abroad (1869), Twain has difficulty keeping the role of the narrator consistent when he moves him from innocent enthusiast to sardonic sinner to practical Joker. Yet it is essentially the story of a simple-minded innocent who expects the cruise to be highly glamorous but is disillusioned by the "funeral gloom legislated on shipboard by the pilgrims, the tedium of Old Masters, the poverty and degradation of foreign countries, the ugliness of Palestinian landscape, and the constant importunities of guides and beggars." Though the innocent is disillusioned, he does not succumb to the forces of the superstitious, established Old World and makes many jokes in the face of her venerated sites. The tone of the story leads us to conclude that illusion is preferable to reality. It is unfortunate that the naive, romantic innocent must shed his illusions as he experiences harsh reality. Though Twain did not fully develop his innocent hero, it was the start of his growing affection for the imaginative state of blissful ignorance, serenity and ease; his increasing disgust with the disheartening realities of life; and his mounting interest in the fate which befalls innocence when it is made to face reality.

Roughing It (1872) is Twain's first full length study of a character. He does not simply report the facts or recite elegant associations as in Innocents Abroad, but he gives us an imaginative interpretation of his western experience, showing us the innocent's progress from
repressive urban life to the glories of rural freedom. When the greenhorn leaves the city and enters the prairie, he gives up "toiling and slaving" and experiences "an exhilarating sense of emancipation from all sorts of cares and responsibilities." The West represents freedom and the disintegration of boundaries and limitations. It also provides firsthand experience which strips the innocent of his shallow optimism and romantic dreams. He expects exciting adventures like being hanged or scalped, but instead, romance turns to reality as he crosses the desert, and naive optimism becomes disenchantment when he finds that silver mining is mostly drudgery. Unlike the unfortunate disillusionment of Innocents Abroad, this innocent's change from callowness to enlightenment is desirable. As a greenhorn, he is blind and inefficient, but when he learns mining, sharetrading, and other esoteric Western sciences, he becomes a member of a select society and part of the large, free land. Illusion, created by romantic fiction, is a hindrance and has no redeeming value in the West. The narrator of Roughing It never longs for his lost illusions as does the narrator of Innocents Abroad.

Twain attempts to treat loss of innocence as a fortunate circumstance in The Adventures of Tom Sawyer (1876), but is unsuccessful. He repeatedly shifts his opinion of Tom, and this inconsistency is due to his divided sympathies between the genteel East and the uncivilized West. In the end, Tom joyously accepts wealth and adult responsibility, and recognizing the benefits of civilized society, even tries to
talk Huck into accepting "respectability." Twain's tone makes us question whether this is a positive change, and he shifts his point of view several times. First, Tom is seen as a child in an adult's world, and we are amused by his foolish antics. When portrayed as an innocent, Tom is shown in rapport with nature as he prances in the sunlight along the sand bar or sheds his clothes frolicking in the woods. The tone is idyllic and he is seen as a sympathetic character, an object of admiration and envy. When Tom matures and begins to embrace respectability, Twain's tone changes to contempt, even hostility. When Tom explains, "Well, everybody does it that way, Huck," Huck replies, "Tom, it don't make no difference. I ain't everybody." Twain's sympathies are with Huck now, for Huck is asserting his right to be a free individual, while Tom has sold out his freedom and innocence for acceptance and security. Tom started out as a typical, irresponsible boy who found ways to escape the rigid conventions and training imposed upon him, yet matures by the end of the book to accept those conventions and training.

Twain was disappointed with Tom and shifted his attention to the outcast Huck. For plot purposes, he needed a hero more hostile toward the dominant culture than Tom, and Huck was far more alienated from conventional values. Tom has harmless fantasies of escape from society and plays the "bad boy" role, but Huck does not play; he is a social pariah. Beginning with Huck giving up the money and leaving
the Widow Douglas again, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) arises directly out of *Tom Sawyer*, and it offers a definitive statement of American innocence. It explores the moral problems that arise when an individual must develop for himself an identity to carry him intact through life in a society that no longer offers him a significant and fulfilling view of himself.

*A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889) and *The Mysterious Stranger* (1916) present a picture bleaker than their predecessors, of disillusionment about the truth and efficacy of innocence. *Connecticut Yankee* shows the evils of which the undisciplined will is capable when the innocent invests his natural sagacity in technological progress. Both portray the despair which accompany the defeat of the innocent by a predatory and opportunistic society. After *Connecticut Yankee*, Twain's pessimism toward the fate of man's innocence grows in "*The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg*" (1899) and ultimately culminates in *The Mysterious Stranger*. "Hadleyburg" is about the corruption of a small town and, by extension, America's loss of innocence. The plot is designed to show that men and women are corruptible, the most pious among us being capable of deceit if offered the right temptation. Twain's interest in morality and its enforcer, the conscience, and his scorn for fraud have come together in this story. What we call "conscience" is simply the ultimate fraud, the result of the way we have been programmed, as opposed to genuine inner strength. Twain's conception of the conscience
and his belief that man has an immense capacity for corruption and can no longer remain an innocent provide the foundation for the pessimism which overwhelmed his literary vision.

Five years after *Connecticut Yankee*, Twain made notes for a book which reflected his acceptance of defeat. In this projected but unwritten story, Tom and Huck, both sixty years old, come back from their travels, mourn all the good things long gone, and agree that for each of them life has been a failure. Then they die together in Hannibal. Though we can be relieved that this particular story was never written, Twain did attempt to revive Tom and Huck several times. In 1894 he exploited them in *Tom Sawyer Abroad* where Tom, Huck and Jim travel around the world in a self-propelled balloon. Twain was going bankrupt and was writing with the express purpose to make money, which he did. He tried to capture the spirit of Tom and revive him as the innocent hero, but his heart was not in the material, and the book is very superficial. Tom, Huck and Jim are simple cardboard characters. Without hope or faith in their innocence, they have no life, and there are no unforgettable pastoral passages as in *Tom Sawyer*. There are no moral issues either because he could not seriously address them due to the incompatibility of his innocent heroes and his pessimistic viewpoint.

Two years later *Tom Sawyer, Detective* was published as simply a repeat of his 1894 "milking" of the Tom Sawyer fame. In *Tom Sawyer Abroad*, Twain picked up the idea of the boys travelling in a balloon from Jules Verne who was popular at
the time. With the same commercial intent, Tom Sawyer, Detective attempted to cash in on the rage for Sherlock Holmes. The content of these stories did not concern Twain, but only how much money they would make. He also needed to write for his own pleasure though, and since the Tom Sawyer stories were unfulfilling, he wrote Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc whose heroine was partly modeled on his beloved daughter Susy. It was an unabashedly sentimental idealization of innocence and spirituality, and it was written out of love and "not for lucre," he said, and it was to be his refuge from work, worry and increasingly frustrating business trips. It was Twain's escape from his troubled reality--writing about how he once dreamed innocence should be, using his daughter for inspiration.

By 1898 Twain was able to pay his debts in full. With financial security regained, he was able to return to serious writing with "a pen warmed up in hell." In the form of Theodor and Satan, he again revived the Tom and Huck child characters in The Mysterious Stranger, this time for the purpose of showing that innocence does exist as a state of mind, but it is powerless to act in a predominantly evil world.

In an early work, "The Facts Concerning the Recent Carnival of Crime in Connecticut" (1876), the theme of man's corrupt nature and the burden of his conscience is dealt with little more than superficially. Twain believes man does indeed have a conscience. The narrator informs us that his
own conscience has brought him nothing but misery. Addressing the little green dwarf who is his conscience, he lets his feelings be known: "Curse you, I have wished a hundred million times that you were tangible, and that I could get my hands on your throat once!" After the narrator has successfully exorcised his conscience (by murdering it), he proceeds to commit all the long repressed criminal acts that his conscience formerly prohibited him from committing. This implies that man has an immense capacity for evil, hence the rampage the narrator immediately embarks upon when he is unhindered by a conscience. We may assume he had the same desires when he had a conscience, but it prevented him from acting immorally. Therefore, the conscience must be a potent force directing man's actions. "Carnival of Crime" is an early attempt to earnestly explore man's nature and moral issues with humor, but its seriousness is severely undermined when Twain did not resist falling into burlesque at the end of the story.

During the first half of Twain's writing career, he dealt with the belief in man's corruption and immoral desires with humor and a faith in the power of the conscience to control man. Huck Finn's conscience is a potent factor in guiding his actions, and his sound heart triumphs over society's effort to corrupt him. Twain's later characters, though, progress to a more helpless condition, becoming victims of a corrupt society. Society's conventions become the major determinant of the individual's actions. Twain
lost faith in the ability of the conscience to make man a moral being, primarily because he saw the conscience as what society has trained it to believe, and since society is corrupt, so is the conscience. Twain eventually adopted a determinist view of life in which free will is an illusion and man's fate entirely predestined. The violence of The Mysterious Stranger shows his ultimate inability to imagine any alternative beyond a nihilistic denial of life.

This development in Twain's belief can be clearly traced through his writings where he struggles to find a workable morality apart from the hypocrisy-ridden morality that society presents. When he murders the conscience in "Carnival of Crime," he uses the grotesqueness of the dwarf to symbolically reveal the moldy and despicable condition of conventional morality. But this story simply presents the condition, albeit in a very humorous manner that Twain's audience expected. Tom Sawyer dealt with relatively minor moral issues, but it helped crystallize his belief in the inner strength of innocence prevailing over evil, and also helped him find Huck, the perfect vehicle to express the great moral issues of slavery and conscience which appear in Huckleberry Finn. Tom is an innocent child who faces a moral struggle when he must decide whether he will break his blood oath and endanger his life by testifying that Muff Potter did not kill the doctor, or whether he will let Muff die for a crime he did not commit. When Tom chooses to do the right thing, he rises not only above himself, but also above the villagers, for he is the
only person with the moral courage to accuse Injun Joe.

Soon after Tom Sawyer, Twain began work on its sequel, Huckleberry Finn, but became bogged down when he attempted to deal with more serious moral problems. When he pigeon-holed the manuscript to wait for inspiration to return, he changed to the setting of 16th century England to write The Prince and the Pauper (1881) where he could deal with the issues of class, caste and slavery, retaining the theme of the boy-hero. Both Prince Edward and Tom Canty go through a moral development which, though limited, leads toward the moral development of Huck Finn. Tom Canty takes on the role of prince, with all its glory and moral indifference, while the prince becomes a pauper, with its baseness and humility. Both characters have basically the same personalities. Their only individuality comes in their moral developments which are determined by the environment in which each finds himself. Both escape from their restricting native environments into a land which is free and happy in their dreams but turns out to be confining and evil in reality. The innocent boys proceed from ignorance to enlightenment. Prince Edward's moral journey begins in ignorant pride and ends in enlightened humility when he becomes a humanitarian through directly experiencing the suffering of the common people. Tom Canty goes through a negative moral development as he grows more accustomed to his role of prince, becoming so inured to the luxuries and idleness of the court that he ignores his own mother during a public appearance. This is Twain's first
statement of environmental determinism. In Edward's development of a moral sense through suffering, and in Tom's comparative loss of a moral sense through luxury, Twain is showing to what extent man's personal status affects his moral judgments. But there is still room for moral choice.

In *The Prince and the Pauper*, and triumphantly so in *Huckleberry Finn*, Twain shows us his belief that an innate intuition is the basis of good action. Tom Canty, being guided by his good heart, relieves suffering and evil when he is empowered to do so. Prince Edward is also shown as being naturally good. He demonstrates this initially when he saves Tom from the rod of the palace guard. He later becomes frustrated when he cannot convince anyone that he is indeed the prince, yet his frustration turns to humility and compassion rather than anger and outrage. He sees the injustice of the law, and the burdens it places on the people, and vows to remove the unjust laws and to keep the "sorrowful spectacles fresh and in his memory and the springs of pity replenished in his heart."

The major crisis Tom Sawyer faces is his decision to testify against Injun Joe. Even though he shows commendable compassion for Muff Potter, Tom's decision is not completely unselfish. His conscience would not give him any peace if he let an innocent man die. The emphasis should be placed on the fact that Tom lets himself be guided by his conscience, doing what he has been taught is the right thing to do, which shows that he is maturing and accepting adult
responsibility. The moral decisions of Tom Canty and Prince Edward carry more significance than Tom Sawyer's decision. They have more choice either to act compassionately or indifferently. The choice does not really affect the individual personally as much as it affects the whole society. Huck Finn faces a much greater moral decision. He shows compassion for everything from a dog to the Wilks sisters, and even for the scoundrels being tarred and feathered or the murderers caught on the sinking boat. There is no doubt he possesses a good nature, but his moral decision is superior to all others because he listens to his heart to do the right thing. He decides against society in order to help Jim, thinking he is eternally damned for it. He would rather go to hell than see Jim suffer. What also makes Huckleberry Finn a much greater novel is Twain's creative power of characterization. He develops Huck to a fully sympathetic person we care about. The elaborate plot of The Prince and the Pauper, that of the reversal of stations of Prince Edward and pauper Tom Canty, and the limitation of action to the three week period between the death of Henry VIII and the coronation of Edward, do not allow the characters of either the prince or the pauper to be fully developed. But this superficial treatment of the moral development of the two boys, along with the theme of environmental corruption of the individual, helped Twain's well of inspiration to fill again in readiness for the more serious statement he had yet to finish in Huckleberry Finn.
Nearly twenty years after he began *Huckleberry Finn*, Twain described it in his notebook as "a book of mine where a sound heart and a deformed conscience come into collision and conscience suffers defeat." He went on to describe how unquestioned the institution of slavery had been in his boyhood: "The conscience—that unerring monitor—can be trained to approve any wild thing you want it to approve if you begin its education early and stick to it." The dwarf conscience is not the voice of God as one might expect, but is only the voice of the people. If an innocent like Huck could reject the community, or at least maintain a critical distance from it, he could win his freedom from the tyranny of conscience. Huck, like the narrator of "Carnival of Crime," has a conscience which brings him misery. He is told by society how he should act and, if he does not act in this manner, his conscience will bother him. But Huck's tendencies are naturally guided by friendship and love. He has not yet learned that he should listen to the feelings in his heart, so he suffers and blames his conscience for his unhappiness when his deepest feelings do not correspond to society's rules. Huck makes his inner conflict and resulting unhappiness very clear in Chapter 16. Shortly after deciding to turn Jim in as a runaway, Huck fools some men who are looking for runaway slaves by telling them there is smallpox on board the raft. The men are afraid to come near the raft and Jim is saved. But Huck chastises himself because he knows that he went against society's rules by hiding Jim. He then reasons,
'I thought a minute and says to myself, hold on; s'pose you'd 'a' done right and give Jim up, would you felt better than what you do now? No, says I, I'd feel bad--I'd feel just the same way I do now." Huck has followed his sound heart, an act which puts him in opposition with society and brings about his dejection. This is Twain's most hopeful statement on innocence in his career--inner strength does have the power to control actions. Despite Huck's belief that Tom would think him an "Ab'licationist," that his townspeople would damn him, that he would go to hell, and despite every other social pressure, Huck follows his heart, guided by his love for Jim, and decides to free him if he can. This is Twain not only at his most optimistic, but at the height of his literary artistry, and at the happiest time of his personal family life.

In Huckleberry Finn man's potentially corrupt nature is taken for granted. Everyone has this potential. Even Huck has the capacity to treat Jim as an object, as the butt of a joke. This potentiality and its manifestation in the people along the river is the target of the satire in the novel. The people all have consciences, that is, they can all distinguish right from wrong. They are church-going, Commandment-spouting, pious Christians. But beyond the appearance of morally upright citizens is the reality of unthinking people controlled by the mores of a corrupt society rather than by their own inner strength. In Chapter 21 Twain gives us a look at the perversion of these people.
"There couldn't anything wake them up all over, and make them happy all over, like a dog-fight--unless it might be putting turpentine on a stray dog and setting fire to him, or tying a tin pan to his tail an see him run himself to death." This is not funny to Huck. In fact, he is horrified. Their level of sensibility finds the murder of Boggs even more exciting than a blazing dog. As the townspeople crowd around to watch Boggs die, "the folks behind . . . was saying all the time, 'Say, now, you've looked enough, you fellows; 'taint right and 'taint fair for you to stay all the time, and never give nobody a chance; other folks has their rights as well as you.'"

When Huck follows his sound heart and does not fall victim to social pressure, he makes definite steps in his moral development. When Jim first joins Huck, he promises not to tell on him even if "people would call me a low-down Abolitionist and despise me for keeping mum . . . ." (Chapter 8) To the realist Huck, a promise is a promise. Keeping the promise has nothing to do with Jim's human rights. Huck does not yet realize Jim's humanity. Twice Huck plays tricks on him. The first time, when he puts the dead rattlesnake on Jim's bed and Jim is bitten by the snake's mate, Huck hides his responsibility by throwing the snakes into the woods, not because he is ashamed of hurting Jim, but because he is ashamed to have forgotten the snake folklore. Huck's second prank, when he tries to make Jim believe their separation in the fog is a dream, results in a dignified and moving rebuke
from Jim on what common decency between men is. Huck is not going to play any more "mean tricks" on Jim, and when he humbles himself and apologizes to him, he is beginning to see the moral implications and gravity of helping Jim escape. When he meets the slave hunters in Chapter 16, he faces a choice between what is legal and what is moral, and even though Huck knows it is wrong to hide a slave, he decides to follow his moral instinct. In the Wilks family episode, again Huck must do wrong in order to do right. He struggles with the abstractions of right and wrong and decides, "I got to steal that money somehow." Finally, it is when Huck sees Jim as more than Miss Watson's property that he makes some conscious moral decisions. He chooses to "go to hell" rather than turn his back on Jim. Huck assumes his personal feelings are sinful because they are in disagreement with society, but his innate humanity overcomes his duty to social conformity.

Even though Huck's heart is a potent factor in guiding his actions, he is a solitary, weak figure, only a child who has been raised apart from society. If his innocence is the ray of hope in the novel, then we cannot have much hope for society as a whole. In the end, Huck realizes that society will not supply the freedom his nature demands, and he runs off to "the Territory." Twain makes no compromise between innocence, symbolized by Huck, and the life he has witnessed in the towns. But in 1885 the territory was almost conquered and civilized, and so Twain's final statement is that individual freedom in its purest sense is no longer possible.
The novel is nostalgic, recalling a happy time when there was still a place for the unspoiled individual in American life. Because Huck is the protagonist and his sound heart triumphs, we feel a degree of optimism for the power of the individual in a hypocritical society. In his later years, Twain continued to seek new "territories" in which the innocent could survive.

At this point in his career, Twain seems to have brought all his beliefs together so that they do not conflict thematically. He is able to give articulate voice to his literary vision—he is able to tell a powerfully dramatic story in which his beliefs are conveyed by the character's very actions. In *Huckleberry Finn* Twain does not come out and tell us that man is corrupt; we witness the murder of Boggs, the senseless feud of the Grangerfords, and the endless swindles of the Duke and Dauphin. He does not tell us that people have corrupt consciences; he shows how people mouth eloquent Commandments to ease them. He does not simply tell us that a decision guided by the heart rather than conscience is not easy; he shows us Huck's despair in his crisis. Most important, he does not tell us of his faith in the power of the individual's heart; he lets Huck embody that faith. Twain's belief is in Huck's choice.

The turning point in Twain's belief about human nature which also brought the decline of his creative genius can be seen in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889). Twain said he wanted to contrast the values of 19th century
American commercial, technological and social advancement over medieval backwardness and injustice. But his own emerging skepticism regarding modern progress and his pessimistic view of man's nature conflicted with his original intent and has led to confusion over the real meaning behind the novel. Henry Nash Smith argued that *A Connecticut Yankee* "precipitated in Mark Twain something like a negative conversion, a loss of faith in progress and human perfection."

I also agree with Roger B. Salomon who finds its theme to be "the absurdity of optimism and the impermanence of progress . . . because of the aggressiveness and rapacity of modern industrial man, the false promise of technology and--ultimately because of the deep-rootedness of human evil." 12

Yankee Hank Morgan, a 19th century superintendent of a machine shop, finds himself suddenly in sixth century feudal England--a brutal, child-like society rotten with the effects of superstition, ignorance and absolute government. With his 19th century knowledge and mechanical skill, he sets up schools, factories and other 19th century trappings, becoming an omnipotent magician who can remake the world. Remake it he does--only to blow up his technological marvels and defeat himself. The Yankee is properly horrified by the injustice, cruelty and backwardness he encounters. Even with his reform, the stupidity and viciousness of the medieval people necessitates the complete destruction of his new civilization. The people are not worthy of the system. It is Twain's first blast at the "damned human race," but we are not prepared
for the grim horror of Hank, in self-defense, dynamiting the remaining bits of his civilization and electrocuting 25,000 knights, whereupon all his camp die from the poisoned air caused by the putrefying bodies piled around them. Twain's visual description of putrefying bodies mirrored the battlefield in his mind where his faith in humanity lay rotting. It is his "first blast at the human race" because it is the first time he shows how base all mankind is, signalling the destruction of his last shred of hope for innocence to exist.

His original intent was to demonstrate the wonderful strides mankind has made toward justice and personal comfort since the feudal era, but while showing the injustice and cruelty of the sixth century, he realized the extent of Hank's insensitivity and corruptness inherited from modern society.

The characterization of Hank is marred by the inconsistencies found in Twain's beliefs. He still adheres to the theme of evil modern society versus natural innocence. On one hand we have Hank as an innocent abroad in the sixth century, trying to enlighten the Dark Ages, yet on several occasions Twain describes Camelot as an innocent, idyllic land and Hank as an insensitive devotee of modern commercial corruption. Hank invades Arthur's Camelot and teaches its happy, ignorant citizens the ways of 19th century America, but in doing so, he leads them out of innocence and destroys them, realizing too late what he has lost. Sometimes Twain uses the Yankee to condemn cruelty and injustice, but at other times he is the object of Twain's scorn as the modern
con man who is out to enrich himself at any cost. However humane Hank likes to think himself, he can be cruel when it suits his purpose. He is outraged when Morgan Le Fay is about to execute a musician for playing poorly and intervenes in order to avoid "wanton extremities," but after he has heard a performance, he gives permission to hang the entire band.

Indeed, Hank not only kills anyone who gets in his way, but describes with satisfaction the imaginative method by which he does the killing:

Yes, it was a neat thing, very neat and pretty to see. It resembled a steamboat explosion on the Mississippi; and during the next fifteen minutes we stood under a steady drizzle of microscopic fragments of knights and hardware and horseflesh. Hank's ability to kill comes from his lack of real feeling. He does not see men as men but as "human muck," and the mass destruction of them is a matter of little concern. He tells us again and again that he wants to educate the backward people of Camelot and free them from superstition. But in order to preserve his special status and enhance his prestige, he spends much of his time staging elaborate performances that depend upon exploiting the public's gullibility. He deliberately encourages people to think that he is a magician, keeping his knowledge of technology to himself and a few chosen followers. His professed mission to enlighten the Dark Ages is thus as false as his capacity for feeling and his egalitarian principles. Not only is he a fraud, but also a hypocrite who is unaware of the discrepancy between
what he asserts and what he believes. Hank may have been a basically good person and sincere in his efforts of reform, but social institutions victimized his innocence and made him an unscrupulous opportunist, bent on replacing old institutions with new ones merely for the sake of self-glorification and personal gain.

Hank tells us that an ideal citizenry can be programmed by the state and says:

Training--training is everything; training is all there is to a person. We speak of nature; it is folly; there is no such thing as nature; what we call by that misleading name is merely heredity and training. We have no thoughts of our own; no opinions of our own; they are transmitted to us, trained into us.\(^1\)

Hank's belief that "training is everything" leads him frequently to reflect upon the nature of "inherited ideas." In his view, "Old habit of mind is one of the toughest things to get away from in the world." In an uncharacteristic moment of self-knowledge, Hank speaks of the frequently unexamined ideas a person automatically assumes as a result of the time and place in which he lives, and admits, "I had mine, the king and his people theirs." Hank is as much the victim of his own background as the people of Camelot are of theirs.\(^2\)

Twain began *Connecticut Yankee* on the assumption that moral and material progress were the lessons of history, the facts of the present, and guides to the future. But as he put his belief to the test by attempting to realize it in fiction, he "betrays a sense of something untrue in such
optimism, some hideous, uncontrollable fact of life that prevented beneficent progress and made human history a necessary journey away from goodness, toward evil and despair."16 By the end of Connecticut Yankee, Twain had lost his faith in progress and human perfectibility. He expresses little remorse for Hank's or Camelot's fate. There is no heroic moral character worth saving. Neither the past nor the present is any more ideal than human nature itself. If humor seems eventually to disappear toward the end of the novel, it is because the apocalyptic conclusion denies us the possibility of hope. Presented with a vision of history in which corruption seems to triumph, a vision in which the present is but a logical extension of the past, we are ultimately left scorched by Twain's anger at the perpetual stupidity of men.17 We may be able to account for such a final, grisly description of the slaughter of the knights at the end of the novel as Twain's aggressive cry of disillusionment and frustration. Hank is speaking for Twain when he observes, "I reckon we are all fools. Born so, no doubt."

The Mysterious Stranger (1916) deepens the disillusionment of Connecticut Yankee. It is a story filled with despair and disgust for mankind. Twain declared to William D. Howells that he intended to "tell what I think of Man, and how he is constructed, and what a shabby poor ridiculous thing he is."18 It is a depressing, dogmatic story that in its unrelenting pessimism and sense of ultimate futility, approaches the absurdist view of life. In The Mysterious Stranger, Twain
still expounds the belief that man has a potentially corrupt nature and a conscience, or Moral Sense, which only serves to make him unhappy. Now advocating a determinist philosophy, Twain believes that the individual's inner strength, or heart, no longer has the power to influence his actions. Man's actions are completely determined by society and by the law of cause and effect in the universe. Free will is an illusion and man's fate entirely predestined.

The story is set in a small town, similar to Hannibal, in 16th century Austria. The town's name is Eseldorf, translated from German as "Assville." (Though there is much said about the three unfinished manuscript versions of The Mysterious Stranger and Paine's presumptuous "coauthorship," I will refer to the "Eseldorf" version as edited by Paine and Duneka.) As the town's name suggests, the people are ignorant, cruel, foolish and bigoted. Theodor, the narrator, greets us with familiar themes. He meets Satan's nephew, a boy angel also named Satan, who shows him abundant examples of the corruption of which society is capable: the hypocritical Father Adolf, the conniving astrologer, some violent mob scenes, and how people, even if they have good intentions, act with meanness. Theodor is admonished by Satan for throwing a rock at a woman who is being lynched. "Yes, I was laughing at you, because, in fear of what others might report about you, you stoned the woman when your heart revolted at the act . . . I know your race. It is made up of sheep." Twain's theme has not changed. If
not innately corrupt, man is at least liable to corruption by society.

Until the very end of the story, Theodor behaves much as Huck Finn does—both are good hearted boys whose natural compassion is restricted only by their environments. Theodor has a kind word for Wilhelm when it costs him nothing. When Satan admonishes him for throwing a rock at the suspected witch, Theodor says, "They hanged the lady and I threw a stone at her, although in my heart I was sorry for her, but all were throwing stones and each was watching his neighbor, and if I had not done as the others did it would have been noticed and spoken of." But prior to another lynching he is unwatched, and so gives the victim an apple. Satan, the mysterious stranger, is a cold, dispassionate spectator who comments on mankind "in quite a matter-of-course way, and without bitterness, just as a person might talk about bricks or manure or any other thing that was of no consequence."

Satan's most significant trait is his complete indifference and his lack of a Moral Sense. It is this Moral Sense, Satan states, that characterizes mankind and makes him despicable:

No brute ever does a cruel thing—that is the monopoly of those with the Moral Sense. And he does not inflict pain for the pleasure of inflicting it—only man does that.¹⁹

Like Huck Finn's conscience, it is clear that the Moral Sense brings about more than its share of unhappiness. It leads man to believe he can distinguish "right" from "wrong" with sanctimonious viciousness. Theodor cannot win. He is distressed when he ignores it, and horrified when he sees
the harm he brings when he exercises his Moral Sense. He
convinces Satan to help other people out of impending
disasters. In one instance he causes his best friend to
die rather than live 46 years in a coma; in another he
causes Frau Brandt to be burned at the stake; in the same
episode, he causes the man who accuses Frau Brandt of
blasphemy to go to hell rather than to heaven. Desiring
instinctively to do what is right, but dominated by social
institutions in the form of a Moral Sense, Theodor represents
the human situation. His journey of enlightenment assumes
an allegorical significance as he moves toward cosmic
innocence and away from the human attributes which prevent
him from being good. Theodor loses the happy innocence of
children, born from lack of knowledge, but when he loses
the Moral Sense, he gains cosmic innocence as embodied in
Satan. He is Everyman struggling for perfection, and he
achieves this state only by completely divorcing himself
from his human limitations.20

Twain goes one step further in advocating death over
life. Two children die as the result of Satan's intervention,
but he assures Theodor that he is doing them a favor.
Nikolaus would otherwise have become "a paralytic log" for
forty-six years, "praying for the blessed relief of death."
Lisa's early death saves her from "ten years of pain,"
followed by "nineteen years' pollution, shame, depravity,
crime, ending with death at the hands of the executioner."
Impressed by the visions Satan reveals to him, Theodor
reflects, "we do not know good fortune from bad and are always mistaking the one for the other."

In *The Mysterious Stranger* Twain has changed his belief about the power of the heart's innate goodness as a determinant of action. Not only does the Moral Sense cause perverted action, but the mechanical cause and effect nature of the universe in general is so beyond man's comprehension that even when a man thinks he is doing right, he is really only bringing about someone's material downfall or eternal damnation. Man is ultimately helpless to better himself or others and will only cause trouble by trying. Theodor is corrupt because he is trained with a Moral Sense, and he is impotent, even when he has the fantastic chance to change lives with Satan's help, because he cannot conceive of the complexities of mankind's determined existence.

In a particularly notable scene, Satan models tiny people out of clay, and when their insect-like buzzing annoys him, he merely crushes the life out of them. The distorted size of the little people and the perversity of their murder serves to emphasize the randomness and insignificance of human life and tragedy that Twain wants to convey. That Satan gives no thought to this "murder" is indicative of Twain's own deep sense of futility, and sadly, his need to identify with an apathetic observer coolly watching a wretched, petty species which is hardly worth contempt. Because Satan has no Moral Sense, he is above man who does wrong because he knows what it is. For
Satan, no act is sinful, and so he murders the little people he created for the amusement of his friends, promotes war, corrupts Ursula with money, and tells lies. But he cannot be blamed for these acts, for as Theodor ironically says, "He was only an angel and did not know any better." Satan frees Theodor from the grip of the Moral Sense and eventually liberates him from his mortal state at the end of the story. Satan is the "divine innocent" who can act because he is not subject to human weakness and because he can easily overcome the obstacles which evil sets in his path. For example, when the evil astrologer threatens to spoil his magic, he simply sends the old man off to the dark side of the moon. With Satan's assistance, the young Theodor finally comes to the realization of the futility of man and society; that man is no more than an irresponsible machine, incapable of a single thought or action outside of his environmental promptings and hereditary capabilities. Twain, as Satan, sums up human existence the only way he can when his disillusionment is so complete:

> there is no God, no universe, no human race, no earthly life, no heaven, no hell. It is all a dream—a grotesque and foolish dream.  

Once the Moral Sense is removed, there is no longer any need for heaven and hell since all actions have equal moral value. Furthermore, when one views the world with sufficient detachment and sees it "theoretically" as Satan teaches Theodor, rather than experientially, it assumes a purely theoretical significance. It can be dismissed by rejecting
the theory which one has formulated. As Theodor realizes, the thought which remains is "a vagrant thought, a useless thought, a homeless thought wandering forlorn among empty eternities." Having first rejected the mind as a satisfactory guide to action in his deterministic philosophy, Twain now abandons reality. If all the universe is just a thought, then there is no pain and suffering in the world.

Twain himself must have been overwhelmed by the complexities of human existence to attribute man's unhappiness and corrupt nature to what he feels is man's determined life. But a belief in determinism only set the foundation; it was the loss of his belief in the individual's innate goodness as a determinant of action that led to his despair. Man no longer can decide his fate and, even if he tries, he is doomed to wreaking more havoc. Satan tells Theodor that 99 out of 100 people are strongly against the foolishness of killing witches, yet apparently everybody hates witches and wants them killed. He continues saying that 62 of the 68 people had no more desire to throw a stone at the lady accused of being a witch than Theodor did. People do not decide what to do; they are only sheep. The single choice Huck Finn made, inspired by his instinctive, unperverted Moral Sense, is much more heroic and precious to mankind than denying a choice at all and grasping for refuge in the assertion that "life is but a dream."
When Twain began his writing career as a newspaperman, he wrote stories in the Southwestern vernacular. His earliest comic pieces are verbal pranks and simple sketches which contrast rural simplicity with urban sophistication. Uncouth manners and speech disguised the backwoods character's rugged honesty and homely wisdom which made an implicit accusation of empty elegance and refinement. Native humor provided Twain with themes, situations, a style, and above all, a point of view hostile to the values ostensibly dominant in American culture. His work was shaped by the opposing forces of the genteel East, with her conventional attitudes, and the western frontier, with her native American humor. His hostility toward social convention remained throughout his career, but his point of view changed as much as his beliefs about the nature of man did, sometimes several times in one novel. When his point of view changed, his tone changed. He also had plot construction difficulties. He usually did not see clearly where he was going when he began to write, and we can observe him in the act of making discoveries both in meaning and in method as he goes along. He would begin with a certain intent but it would take on new meaning as he wrote. These problems made his writing inconsistent and confusing. The solution was to employ a narrative mode that would force him to stay within a certain structure, point of view and tone, and also one which would help him develop and identify with a character rather than be detached and unsympathetic. The combination of the first-
person point of view and the vernacular idiom is one of the most notable achievements of *Huckleberry Finn*. Twain was unable to create an alter ego in his later works who was as successful as Huck in bringing together point of view, tone and structure, as well as remain a sympathetic character who embodied his philosophical beliefs.

Twain's early writings show a wavering between acceptance and rejection of conventional attitudes. As a Southwest humorist, his aim was to show the superiority of the vernacular character. During his trip to the Sandwich Islands in 1866, he showed signs of accepting some of the attitudes he had previously satirized. Henry Nash Smith thinks that the change was related to how Twain was feeling about himself. After leading a life of irresponsible Bohemianism the past few years, his newspaper assignment gave him prestige and made him the spokesman for respectable opinion. He invents an uncouth traveling companion named Brown to take the vernacular point of view for the purpose of criticizing conventional attitudes, and he is identified with the dignified first-person narrator. The ironic use of a first-person narrator with genteel attitudes was a poor choice for Twain to employ simply because he could not resist the opportunity for purple passages. He launches into flights of eloquence about the landscape that sound seriously intended and are not deflated by Brown. In these instances, Twain adopts the attitudes to be expected in a spokesman for the dominant culture.”
The Innocents Abroad is Twain's first attempt to construct a book-length narrative. He blends various kinds of writing modes, from straight journalistic reporting mingled with fanciful improvisation, to autobiographic accounts with strong subjective coloring. There are some passages in which Twain speaks in his own person and others where the narrator is a fictitious character, but the book has a relatively small fictional element. In order not to have to extensively rewrite the newspaper dispatches, he had to make his fictional narrator similar to himself in age, speech and class. His stated intent was to expose a simple-minded narrator to disillusionments such as the tedium of Old Masters and ugliness of Palestinian landscape. Twain endows the narrator with a well-intentioned but almost childish innocence. Henry Nash Smith thinks that Twain's presenting his narrator as a fictional character clearly less sophisticated than himself was a momentous technical discovery in his development as a writer and would lead to Roughing It and Huckleberry Finn.

Once the innocent is on his way, the theme of disillusionment is forgotten. Twain tried to develop the antagonism between sinners and pilgrims into a narrative pattern since he recognized that it gave concrete form to much of his subversive feeling about the dominant culture. The innocent enthusiast has nothing in common with the sardonic sinner of the overland journey through Palestine, and neither of them is similar to the practical joker who is the narrator in the
French and Italian sequences. Twain's beliefs are represented by the narrator who adopts the attitude of the Vandal in triumphantly demonstrating the inferiority of the old world to the new, but that role is not congruous with the narrator's need to assert his own gentility by making historical associations for celebrated sites. The fact that the narrator is seen from so many different perspectives may be due to the source of his material being newspaper dispatches, but Twain shows us in the next novel, *Roughing It*, that he can master characterization. Not only will he need to find a consistent point of view, but also he will need to establish a consistent belief and not vacillate between the vernacular and genteel traditions.

*Roughing It* shows a marked advance toward the management of viewpoint. Theme, character, and structure are all implicit in the narrative method. The veteran narrator recalls his experiences that have taken him from innocence to his present state of enlightenment. The juxtaposition of the two points of view creates the irony which prevades the whole narrative, deriving its humor at the greenhorn's expense. The second half of the book is episodic. Twain drew from his scrapbooks and again fell back on summaries of his writings as he did in *Innocents Abroad*. Besides the flawed second half of the book, and besides bursts of eloquence showing that the narrator has not entirely cut himself loose from literary conventions, *Roughing It* is very good. Twain has created a literary alter ego that serves the story well.
Most of the time Twain's creative writing served as a catharsis in his desire to understand human behavior and find a workable faith by which to live. He seemed to take delight in stating that he never worked because his books wrote themselves. His narrative novel would start with a burst of enthusiasm and flurry of writing, but then bog down and he would pigeon-hole it, perhaps for years, to wait till "his tank filled up again." Twain once confessed to his boyhood friend Will Bowen that almost all recollections of their Hannibal days had faded from his memory. A couple years later Bowen wrote a letter which, Twain said, stirred him to the bottom.

The fountains of my great deep are broken up and I have rained reminiscences for four and twenty hours. The old life has swept before me like a panorama; the old days have trooped by in their old glory again; the old faces have looked out of the mists of the past. The atmosphere and incidents of the Hannibal boyhood came crowding back to his memory as he began to write *Tom Sawyer*; he had only to set them down. He perfectly illustrated Howell's comment that he was not enslaved to the consecutiveness in writing which the rest of us try to keep chained to. That is, he wrote as he thought, and as all men think, without sequence, without an eye to what went before or should come after. If something beyond or beside what he was saying occurred to him, he invited it into his page, and made it as much at home there as the nature of it would suffer him.

*Tom Sawyer* violated every rule of a coherent novel, but for Twain nothing mattered except the effectiveness of the episode.
that was in his mind at the moment. For example, the new boy Alfred Temple, with whom Tom fought in the first chapter, should figure later in the book, but he does not. After the third chapter when Twain realized he needed an older girl to fill the role in the book which his sister Pamela filled in his own life, Tom's "cousin Mary danced in, all alive with the joy of seeing home again after an age-long visit of one week in the country." She was not needed earlier in the novel, so Twain did not mention her as a member of the family, just as he did not mention the character of Huck until he was needed three chapters further along. The only thing resembling a conventional plot is furnished by Injun Joe, and even his episodes are separated by long sections which have no connection with them. Twain's method of writing as things presented themselves in his mind, drawn from his own experiences, without much forethought to plot construction, made it imperative that he identify with the protagonist in order to rely on clear characterization to give the novel continuity and a consistent, sympathetic perspective.

When Twain wrote to Howells shortly after finishing Tom Sawyer, he was correct in assuming that he had "perhaps made a mistake in not writing it in the first person." If he had, Tom Sawyer would not have its problem of a vacillating point of view where one moment the omniscient narrator sees Tom as a young hero, other times he is seen condescendingly as a child or as a reprehensible adult. Tom may be the occasional victim of Twain's irony, especially in the
scenes in which he shows a naive enthusiasm for romantic fiction, but he is presented sympathetically for the most part. Apparently, Twain was satisfied with that part of the novel which he relates through Tom's eyes, but not those portions which he told as a detached observer. Tom's viewpoint is seen most in the passages which portray him as an innocent. These passages are also the ones in which Twain most closely identifies with Tom. The passages are clearly the result of the "reminiscences for four and twenty hours" of his boyhood in Hannibal that "stirred him to the bottom." It evoked in Twain that dreamy time of child innocence and enabled him to write the beautiful pastoral passages that have given Tom the status as the symbol of America's boyhood.

I have shown that due to Twain's method of writing, it was imperative that he adopt the right narrative voice to give structure and unity to his work. He needed to create a literary alter ego so that he could identify with his protagonist and treat him with a consistent and sympathetic point of view. His alter ego would embody his set of philosophical beliefs throughout the novel. Twain's novels thus far have been on a line of development leading to Huck as the ideal narrator.

When Huck declares at the outset of Huckleberry Finn that he, not Mark Twain, will write this book, the language immediately defines character and action. With Huck telling his story in his own words, the author is eliminated, thus resolving the difficulties with point of view and style in
earlier books. Though Twain did not maintain a consistent point of view in *Tom Sawyer*, his sympathies did, for the most part, lie with Tom. Since Tom conforms to society in the end, indirectly Twain is accepting the dominant culture. This is no doubt why his tone changes toward Tom at the end of the novel, and why his sympathies shift to Huck. At this point Twain has formulated a set of beliefs pertaining to man's nature which includes a reaffirmation of the superiority of the vernacular and a basic distrust of modern society. He finds the perfect voice in the outcast Huck to assert those beliefs. Twain manages to identify with him and to look at the world through his eyes only. This created a beneficial restraint on his writing—a limitation on what he could say and how he could say it. By selecting a narrator who is less intelligent than himself, he relieves himself of the responsibility of defining explicitly certain problems which would occur to his adult mind but not to the limited intelligence of an adolescent boy. William Spengemann believes Twain imposed this limitation upon himself because

he was unable to explain the incomprehensible forces which were restricting and annoying him with greater malignity every year. His whole intellectual biography is a procession of personal disenchantments, bitter renunciations, confused gropings among quack sciences for pat systems, and weak philosophies. When he retired into Huck's mind, he regressed into a world he could understand, a world he longed for with embarrassing regularity throughout his adult life.28

Twain began *Huckleberry Finn* possessing an optimistic set of beliefs, but during the course of several years of writing it, he was beginning to be disenchanted with them. With Huck
the controlling factor, he was able to write about his moral development in a corrupt society in keeping with a consistent set of beliefs. When seeing life only through Huck's eyes, there was no vacillating on principles between different points of view. It is not so much, as Spengemann feels, that Twain "regressed" or "retired" into Huck's world as much as it was Huck making him stay there, until at least Tom shows up in the last part of the book. Twain did not know how to resolve the problems the moral journey down the river presented, and it was easier to write comedy and revert to the Huck that Tom Sawyer thought he knew. The tedious ending does serve the purpose of greatly illuminating Huck's moral development. We are back in the same setting the book opened with (which is good for the sake of unity), but we feel completely different about Huck. We still see the world from his eyes, but we question why he goes along with Tom's foolishness in light of his new awareness. Huck has consistently been a passive observer as the river propelled him into situations. Just as he witnesses the violence and ugliness along the river, he watches Tom make a game out of what he has learned is very serious business. Huck has always reacted as a young, powerless outcast from society. He lets the Duke and Dauphin, symbols of fraud and a perverted social scale, completely take control of his world. Tom is a respected citizen of society, and it is in keeping with Huck's character that he lets Tom take over. The only recourse he has is to run from society. He runs away with
Jim, and in the end, he lights out for the Territory.

Our understanding of Connecticut Yankee depends a great deal on how we feel about Hank Morgan. Is he a good and trustworthy narrator reflecting Twain's attitudes, or is he the imaginary forerunner of a modern fascist dictator, leading his people to genocide? The question is further complicated by the fact that the characterization of Hank is inconsistent. I have previously shown these inconsistencies (page 22). Sometimes Twain's attitudes are reflected by Hank. Occasionally he uses him as a mouthpiece to condemn cruelty and injustice, but Hank's opinions cannot be accepted at face value because he is, in Twain's own words, "a perfect ignoramus." Twain disassociates himself from Hank by emphasizing his limitations such as his inability to appreciate beauty, yet he invests him with the traits of innocence and has him speak in the vernacular. Recognizing that Hank thinks himself a "superior being," we should hesitate before accepting his judgments as our own.

When I started to the chapel, the populace uncovered and fell back reverently to make a wide way for me, as if I had been some kind of superior being--and I was. I was aware of that. ... I could hardly get to sleep for glorying over it. 29

Hank's arrogance is incongruous with the vernacular character as developed in Twain's earlier books. Also incongruous is Hank's unaccountable nostalgia which contradicts virtually every judgment he has rendered against feudal society, and it suggests that those pronouncements have been incorrect all along.
Twain began *Connecticut Yankee* with the intent to illustrate how the advance of technology fosters the moral improvement of mankind, but by the end, his uncertainty concerning the effects of the industrial revolution undercut the ideology of progress he intended to advocate. His skepticism regarding modern progress is what keeps Hank's ideas from assuming credibility and persuasiveness. When Twain put his belief to the test by attempting to realize it in fiction, he became convinced that his faith in progress and human perfectibility was groundless. What had seemed the inevitable perfection of man by the course of history now seemed man's inevitable damnation by the same power, operating as the training that perverted every member of society.\(^{30}\)

What was brilliant and captivating in conception became seriously flawed due to an inconsistent, unsympathetic narrator and a changing set of beliefs. When the smoke cleared at the end of *Connecticut Yankee*, Twain realized the tragic extent of his new belief. He would need a different type of spokesman, and he found it in the adoption of the "detached observer." He viewed the human condition so pathetically that he found his escape by creating a transcendent figure with whom he could identify himself. The detached observer exists beyond the limits of human experience, so Twain can now treat man with complete indifference and be immune to the pain and suffering in the world. His later work returns repeatedly to the themes of the immunity
of the detached observer and the degradation of man in society.\textsuperscript{31}

Man is made of dirt--I saw him made. . . . Man is a museum of disease, a home of impurities; he comes today and is gone tomorrow; he begins as dirt and departs as stench.\textsuperscript{32}

This is Satan's definition of man in \textit{The Mysterious Stranger} and is representative of the work's tone as a whole. The first person narrator is Theodor, but it is very clear that Twain identifies with Satan, who dominates the action and thrust of the story. He takes full control and the character of Theodor simply becomes an object to which Satan directs his Socratic dialogue, filled with contemptuous stabs at the human race. With an omnipotent character such as Satan who has the power to direct the story to whatever whim the author wishes to indulge, the more easily the author can write himself into a corner and end with a fantastic and unsatisfying conclusion. It is to Twain's credit that \textit{Mysterious Stranger} is well controlled and has a consistent point of view and tone. He found the voice he would employ through the rest of his career--distant, mocking and somber. His use of Satan as an alter ego may have suited his purpose, which was, as he told Howells, to

\begin{quote}
write a book without reserves--a book which should take account of no one's feelings, delusions; a book which should say my say, right out of my heart, in the plainest language and without a limitation of any sort.\textsuperscript{33}
\end{quote}

Identifying with Satan freed him from any possible limitation. He is a detached satiric observer, a good mouthpiece for
Twain's misanthropy. Additionally, his supra-human status renders somewhat more palatable Twain's assault on the rational and ethical pretensions of the "damned human race." Satan's role is at all times the instructor, and every speech and action tends towards the communication of knowledge and "truth." Very little that Satan reveals is ultimately true, yet he continually provides partial illumination, relative to the particular plateau of enlightenment that has been reached at that point in the story. Considering Twain's views about the determinism of ideas, it would hardly have done for the narrator to accept at once the full implications of his view of the world; his mind had to be prepared step by step, since the mind can only accept that for which it is prepared by previous experience. In this progressive illumination resides both the content and the form of The Mysterious Stranger. Abstracted, ideational determinism is plot; extended, it is also Twain's content, subject, and material. Gradually, Satan has suggested the truth to the narrator, and through a long series of lessons, he has prepared the will for acceptance. Through the technique of gradual revelation where Twain puts his characters through these various progressive phases from unreality (literal materiality) to reality (solipsistic ideality), he has laid out his basic beliefs in an artistic pattern that demonstrates a surprising direction and continuity.

The Mysterious Stranger is one of Twain's more organized pieces of work. His characterization, point of view and
tone remain constant in the story. While failing to offer a coherent and systematic creed, it offers an understanding of the conflicts with which Twain struggled in the last decade of his life. It was his misfortune that he came to believe, with Hank Morgan, that all men are fools and that he alone perceived the truth. It caused him to pick up his pen as a detached observer, removed from life, and since he could no longer find any meaning in man or society, his creativity died.

Nearing forty-five, Mark Twain stood on the top rung of the ladder of fame and had everything a man could want—wealth, happiness, a beautiful wife and children, and an envied domestic life. That summer of 1880 his wife Livy gave birth to their third daughter, Jean. Their second daughter Clara was born in 1874, and the eldest, Susy, born in 1872, was already idolized and claimed by her father with an intensity and extravagance that would later prove to be catastrophic. The private life of the Clemens household was intimate and demonstrative, but they also had an endless stream of guests at their Hartford mansion. The expense of keeping up the house and entertaining their friends added up to about as much as Twain earned from royalties and investments. In 1881 he spent about one hundred thousand dollars in all, over thirty thousand of which went toward expanding and renovating the mansion. They lived a very rich life style. In 1880 A Tramp Abroad was published, the biggest
success since *Innocents Abroad*, reversing a declining pattern of sales and popularity. In 1881 *The Prince and the Pauper* came out, also a financial success, but more important and gratifying to Twain was that it received high critical acclaim. In 1882 he visited Hannibal and the Mississippi River, giving him material and impetus for more than a year and a half of productive work on two books, *Life on the Mississippi* and *Huckleberry Finn*. During the euphoric summer of 1883 at Quarry Farm, he reported to his mother and Orion, "I am piling up manuscript in a really astonishing way. I believe I shall complete, in two months, a book which I have been fooling over for 7 years. This summer it is no more trouble to me to write than it is to lie." He had reached the high point of his life as a writer of fiction. Often writing three or four thousand words at a sitting, he finished *Huckleberry Finn* that summer, and was no longer tentative about it, saying it was "rattling good." All things seemed possible at the time, and the future was open for living, creating, and speculating to the hilt in "the raging, tearing, booming nineteenth century."

Twain was sitting on top of the world in 1883. Although it was mild compared with the panics and depressions of 1873 and 1893, the financial crisis of 1884, a "little panic," had a decisive effect on Twain's life. "Losses, ill luck, and botched business" had rocked him out of his accustomed prosperity, and he was forced to take to the lecture circuit again. The tour wore him out in spirit and
patience, drove him to tantrums, demeaning feuds with Southern novelist George Cable, his partner, and fits of depression and self-loathing during which he felt he had allowed himself to become "a mere buffoon." At this same time, the panic caused former President Grant to go bankrupt. Twain had just set up his nephew Charley Webster in business to handle, among other ventures, Huckleberry Finn, and was determined to perform a double act of piety and commerce by publishing Grant's memoirs to keep him out of the poorhouse. It was a successful venture, but unfortunately, it encouraged Twain to go on to bigger and better business ventures--"excesses of enterprise," Howells called them--which debilitated him as a writer, came close to destroying him as a man, and brought him into bankruptcy within a decade.

By the time Twain published A Connecticut Yankee in 1889 he had begun to see more hope and reward for himself in business than in the practice of literature. The bibliographical entry for the year 1890 in Paine's biography was, "No important literary matters this year. Mark Twain engaged in promoting the Paige typesetting machine." It is interesting to note that Twain lost interest in writing while pursuing the catastrophic gamble of Paige's machine directly after A Connecticut Yankee was written. Both the book and the machine were tests of his century's faith in democracy, technology, progress, the entrepreneurial motive, and the gospel of success. The growing skepticism regarding technological progress in Yankee may have been triggered by the
disappointments of the typesetter.

The structure of Twain's domestic life was crumbling along with his morale as a writer. Livy entered a period of invalidism during which she suffered the onset of acute hyperthyroid heart disease. His daughters had grown to dread his "sharp tongue and uncertain temper" and often preferred not to be left alone with him. Jean underwent an alarming change in personality; her ailment was soon diagnosed as epilepsy. Susy was a student at Bryn Mawr and bitterly missed by her father. On her fell the burden of his worship, his accompanying demands for perfection, and his vulnerability to her slightest criticism.

In 1891, with his creditors closing in on him, the Hartford house, the warm and opulent center of his happiness at Nook Farm, had finally become impossible to keep up. He and his family left for Europe for an indefinite stay and as a matter of financial necessity. They were gone for nearly nine years. That summer when they arrived in Europe, Twain took a ten day trip by raft down the Rhône. But this symbolic return to the river of his earlier years, to a life of lazy comfort, failed to replenish him, and the title of the book-length account he planned to write of the trip but never finished, The Innocents Adrift, characterizes his state of mind.

Between 1892 and 1894 he made four trips home due to the rapidly worsening condition of his publishing house, still more promises for the typesetter, and a general
collapse of the economy. At a terrible low point in late 1893, when he felt "the billows of hell" rolling over him, he was rescued by Henry Rogers, who advised him to enter bankruptcy proceedings, abandon his publishing house, and give up hope for the typesetter. Only then, when the machine took on its final aspect of a dissolved dream, did Twain comprehend the full horror of his business failures and bankruptcy. The only way he could escape from his "hellish dream," Rogers and Livy both told him, was to act contrary to all the conventional understandings of bankruptcy—he was going to pledge himself publicly to paying off every penny of his debts. In 1895 Twain set out on a year-long round-the-world lecture tour, a very grueling tour, but he found himself considerably restored in morale and prosperity by his earnings and by the ovation he received. When he was in England getting ready to write a travel book about his world tour, he received a cable that Susy had died of meningitis in Hartford. Nearly ten years later he reflected, "It is one of the mysteries of our nature, that a man, all unprepared, can receive a thunder-stroke like that and live." Livy wrote to Mary Fairbanks, "We are a broken-hearted family, and such I think we must always remain." In their rented house in England, Susy's sisters listened to their father rage against the vileness of life and the human race. He accused himself of being selfish and neglectful, and even if Susy were to come back from the dead, he would still be selfish and neglectful, for he was
condemned to obey the iron, brutish laws of his own nature and his race. "It is an odious world, a horrible world."

He also turned his grief and anger against himself, and what partially saved him was self-exploration, time and work. He decided that as soon as he finished his travel book Following the Equator, he would start another book in less than an hour between. "I have many unwritten books to fly to for my preservation," he told Twichell. He was writing a travel book "whose outside aspect had to be cheerful, but whose secret substance was all made of bitterness and rebellion." Following the Equator inevitably reflects the demoralizing circumstances of its composition, from its copyright caption in the name of Olivia L. Langdon (who Rogers made sure was a preferred creditor) to the rueful reflection on its last page, "Human pride is not worthwhile; there is always something lying in wait to take the wind out of it."

For a long time Twain had been occupied with the blurred distinction between dream and reality. For about two years after Susy died, he explored a sort of deliberate, self-induced dream state in which the reality was what he dreamed and the fantasy what he lived by day, and he wrote stories about men whose bad dreams have become more real for them than waking reality. "When we remember that we are all mad," he wrote in his notebook, "the mysteries of life disappear and life stands explained." Twain wrote his "symbolic writings" at this time, tons of manuscripts, often
with no thought of publication. Bernard DeVoto, the first
to recognize the role of these manuscripts in Twain's ordeal,
said it seems hardly possible that one man could write so
much. There are no near masterpieces, but instead a lot of
defeat and false starts, poignant evidences of a man on the
edge of nullity and saving himself through work. What he
had learned about the workings of the dream mind had carried
him as far as he could go toward exonerating himself.\textsuperscript{37}
Eventually he turned to a philosophical nihilism which enabled
him to blur the distinction between the real world and the
dream world. It is the "Nothing exists but a vagrant
thought" world of \textit{The Mysterious Stranger}.

In 1898 Twain paid his debts in full, and in 1900,
the family returned to America. In 1904 Livy died, but it
was a relatively peaceful passing compared to the ordeal of
Susy's death. These were the years when Twain was over
sixty and spiritually exhausted by his misfortunes. He did
little creative writing, and devoted his time to social
issues and his autobiography.

This chronology of the major events that influenced
his writing shows that Twain was the most creative and most
prolific during the summer of 1883 when he finished
\textit{Huckleberry Finn} at Quarry Farm. It was the happiest
period of his life when he had his young family, his dream-
house, and a set of hopeful beliefs about the nature of man
and his future. When he became involved with the typesetter,
publishing house and other business ventures, he did little
writing up until *Connecticut Yankee* was published in 1889. During the years following bankruptcy, *Tom Sawyer Abroad*, *Tom Sawyer, Detective* and *Following the Equator*, all minor works, were written primarily for financial reasons. When Susy died, he wrote to help himself through his ordeal, but the stories are of more relevance to the biographer and psychologist than the common reader. Finally, the philosophical nihilism of *The Mysterious Stranger* is the closing statement from a great writer who was spiritually exhausted by his personal grief. This grief and his despairing view of man's nature left him with no inspiration for his imagination to soar again.
Notes


6. Ibid., p. 18.

7. Smith, p. 90.


9. Ibid., p. 155.

10. Ibid., p. 130.

11. Spengemann, p. 82.


15. Miller, p. 126.


17. Miller, p. 135.


23. Smith, p. 4.


25. Ibid., p. 45.


27. Ibid., p. 175.


31. Ibid.


33. Ferguson, p. 179.


35. Ibid.

36. All biographical information and quotes are from Justin Kaplan's books *Mr. Clemens and Mark Twain* and *Mark Twain and his World*, published by Simon and Schuster, Inc. in New York.

Bibliography


