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The Pessimistic Themes of The Mysterious Stranger
As Reflected in Mark Twain's Previous Novels
(TITLE)

BY

Judy Dale Hill Walker

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of Arts in English

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the thesis is to demonstrate that the pessimism exhibited in the themes of The Mysterious Stranger is evident in the themes of The Adventures of Tom Sawyer (1874-1876), The Prince and the Pauper (1877-1882), The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1876-1885), A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court (1888-1889), and Pudd'nhead Wilson (1891-1894). The thesis also demonstrates that the pessimism becomes more dominate as the novels progress chronologically through the repetition of the themes and the increasing number of themes being treated.

The introduction briefly discusses the arguments over the origins of Twain's pessimism as set forth by Van Wyck Brooks, who credits Twain's pessimism to Twain's mother, wife, and Elmira, Edward Wagenknecht, who credits Twain's pessimism to Twain's personal experiences, and E. Hudson Long, who credits Twain's pessimism to Twain's personal experiences and observation of man's history.

The body of the thesis begins by citing The Innocents Abroad and Roughing It to exhibit the seeds of Twain's pessimism in his earliest works in which he criticizes the corruption of the church, man's treatment of minorities, and man's prejudices.

Twain's pessimistic themes treated in The Adventures of Tom Sawyer are man's manipulation of man and man's self-deception.

Twain's pessimistic themes treated in The Prince and the Pauper are the effects of the multi-class system and the inequality of classes, criticism of monarchical government, man's inhumanity to man, and the benefits of death over life on earth.

Twain's pessimistic themes treated in The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn are man's inhumanity to man through meaningless feuding, cowardly mob violence and mob behavior, man's disregard for human life, and effects of slavery.

Twain's pessimistic themes treated in A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court are the corruptive effects of monarchical government and the aristocracy, the effects of the multi-class system and slavery, man's disregard for human life, the corruptive effects of religion and the Established Church, cowardly mob behavior, and the power of laughter to destroy.

Twain's pessimistic themes treated in Pudd'nhead Wilson are the effects of slavery, determinism, the bad-seed theory, man's inferiority to other animals, the evil of money, and the benefits of death over life on earth.

All of the above themes are treated in The Mysterious Stranger in which Twain condemns man's oppressive institutions, man's behavior, man's image of himself, man's belief in life and after-life, and man's fate in life. The comparisons of the previous novels to The Mysterious Stranger are made throughout the body of the thesis as the novels are treated in chronological order.

I

INTRODUCTION

Mark Twain once remarked to Albert Bigelow Paine that "the man who isn't a pessimist is a d---d fool," ¹ The causes of Twain's pessimism have resulted in many disputes, including the dispute over the psychological origins of Twain's pessimism set forth by Van Wyck Brooks in The Ordeal of Mark Twain published in 1920. A brief summation of Brooks' theory and the theories proposed by Brooks' opponents will suffice for the purpose of this theses.

Brooks' purpose is "to explain the bitter pessimism that developed in Twain's mind, the despair which made him regard man as the meanest of animals and life as a tragic mistake."² Brooks believes that Twain became a "frustrated spirit, a victim of arrested development, [and] the poet, the artist in him consequently withered into the cynic and the whole man became a spiritual valetudinarian."³

¹ Albert Bigelow Pain, Mark Twain: A Biography, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1912), IV, p. 1508.

² E. Hudson Long, Mark Twain Handbook (New York: Hendricks House, 1957), pp. 60-61.

³ Van Wyck Brooks, The Ordeal of Mark Twain (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, Inc., 1933), pp. 40-41.

Brooks insists there is "some far more personal root some far more intimate chagrin"⁴ that caused Twain's pessimism. Brooks maintains that Twain was repressed by his mother, his wife, and the town of Elmira. Twain wrote to please them, not himself, and it was this that caused Twain's pessimism.⁵

Edward Wagenknecht, who disagrees with Brooks, "attributes the pessimism of Twain's last years to his tenderness, his idealism, his hopes and dreams for the human race, which led him to expect mankind to be less cruel, mean, and degraded than it actually was."⁶ Wagenknecht maintains that all of Twain's experience in life led to his pessimism:

During his boyhood in Hannibal, Sam Clemens encountered horrible incidents, he saw all shades of life on the river boats, he observed the human animal in the mining camps; and what he knew of the more civilized aspects of life did not alter his conviction that while there are noble human individuals the race as a whole is despicable.⁷

⁴ Brooks, p. 20

⁵ Long, pp. 64-65.

⁶ Long, p. 44.

⁷ Long, p. 44.

Wagenknecht concludes,

The griefs and sorrows of Mark Twain's personal life pass over then, as by a natural transition, into his sympathy for humanity, impelling him powerfully in the direction of pessimism as he contemplates the wrongs that humanity has to bear.⁸

E. Hudson Long agrees with Wagenknecht that Twain's life experience contributed to Twain's pessimism, but Long concludes that the experiences were more than just Twain's personal observations:

The origin of Twain's pessimism, however, was more than ontogenetic. Had not the course of human history been one of strife and bloodshed?--all ages had been filled with crime, ignorance, cowardice, and violence. Reading history, Clemens found the human race selfish, stupid, bungling in the main, rescued from its bondage at times through the efforts of a few noble souls who offered their lives in atonement. But the race itself never improved; individual crime and mass murder through war persisted in spite of science and enlightenment. Intellectual progress was only perverted to wicked use for material gain and selfish power through ex-

⁸ Edward Wagenknecht, Mark Twain: The Man and His Work (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1935), p. 229.

ploitation. Every age had its prejudices; its own particular brand of witch-hunting.⁹

A remark made by Mark Twain in his later years provides a synthesis of Wagenknecht's and Long's theories in that it combines both Twain's personal and historical observations:

A myriad of men are born; they labor and sweat and struggle for bread; they squabble and scold and fight; they scramble for little mean advantages over each other; age creeps upon them; infirmities follow; shames and humiliations bring down their prides and their vanities; those they love are taken from them and the joy of life is turned to aching grief. The burden of pain, care, misery grows heavier year by year; at length ambition is dead; pride is dead; vanity is dead; longing for release is in their place. It comes at last--the only unpoisoned gift earth ever had for them--and they vanish from a world where they were of no consequence, where they have achieved nothing, where they were a mistake and a failure and a foolishness; where they have left no sign that they ever

⁹ Long, P. 262.

existed--a world which will lament them for a day and forget them forever.¹⁰

This pessimism of Twain is most evident in his final years of writing with The Mysterious Stranger more closely paralleling all the above sentiments than any of his other works.

However, in looking at Twain's earlier novels, these same sentiments are expressed through his attacks on slavery, religion, monarchical government, mob violence, man's inhumanity to man, and other despicable acts of the human race.

In making a comparison of the themes of Twain's earlier novels to The Mysterious Stranger, it is important to look at the publication dates of these novels. The Mysterious Stranger was "begun in the fall of 1897, when Mark Twain was in Vienna, and continued until January, 1898, the Eseldorf version resumed from May until October, 1899, dropped, and again taken up from June to August of 1900, before being finally abandoned."¹¹ Of the novels being considered in

¹⁰ Edward Wagenknecht, Mark Twain: The Man and His Work, 3rd ed., (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967), pp. 202-203.

¹¹ John S. Tuckey, Mark Twain and Little Satan (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1963), pp. 25-40, 43-53 cited by James M. Cox, Mark Twain: The Fate of Humor (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 269.

the comparisons, The Adventures of Tom Sawyer was begun in 1874 and published in 1876. The Prince and the Pauper was begun in November, 1877, and published in 1882. Adventures of Huckleberry Finn was begun in 1876 and published in 1885. A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court was begun in 1888 and published in 1889. Pudd'nhead Wilson was begun in 1891 and published in 1894.¹² All of these novels were written before Twain began The Mysterious Stranger, yet there are similar pessimistic themes among them.

This thesis, then, will demonstrate that the pessimism exhibited in Mark Twain's themes of his last work is evident in his earlier novels. This thesis will also demonstrate how the pessimism becomes a more dominating aspect of his novels as his writing progresses chronologically.

II

THEMES

Mark Twain's pessimism begins in his earliest works with lightly barbed comments about man's inhumanity to man and man's oppressive institutions.

Beginning with The Innocents Abroad, published in 1869, Twain condemns the oppression of the church and the government. Twain speaks of the rich churches of Italy with beggars standing outside the door. He asks, "Now, where is the

¹² Justin Kaplan, Mr. Clemens and Mark Twain (New York: Simon and Schuster. 1966), passim.

use of allowing all those riches to lie idle, while half of that community hardly knows, from day to day, how they are going to keep body and soul together?"¹³ Twain blames the government of Italy in saying, "As far as I can see, Italy, for fifteen hundred years, has turned all her energies, all her finances, and all her industry to the building up of . . . church edifices, and starving half her citizens to accomplish it."¹⁴ Twain comments on the human race when he says that "Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts."¹⁵

Roughing It, published in 1872, speaks of America's exploitation and treatment of minorities, specifically the Chinese. He says, "Any white man can swear a Chinaman's life away in the courts, but no Chinaman can testify against a white man. Ours is the 'land of the free' . . . [Maybe it is because we won't let other people testify.]"¹⁶

The statements of The Innocents Abroad and Roughing It show evidence of the seed of pessimism in his early writings. This seed germinated and grew through Twain's middle years of writing upon which this thesis will concentrate in comparing

¹³ Mark Twain, The Innocents Abroad (London: Collins, 1964), p. 159.

¹⁴ Twain, The Innocents Abroad, p. 159.

¹⁵ Twain, The Innocents Abroad, p. 343.

¹⁶ Mark Twain, Rough It (Chicago: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1953), p. 290.

the pessimistic themes of those writings to The Mysterious Stanger.

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer was begun in 1874 and published in 1874. This novel "satirizes, . . . , all the conventional values of 'maturity,' social success and social power and place."¹⁷

The famous whitewashing scene of the novel becomes a "paraody of the 'acquisitive society,' or of capitalism's spurious wealth gained by devilish manipulation and double-talk on the part of the novel's hero."¹⁸ Tom, given the Saturday morning chore of whitewashing the fence, felt that "life seemed hollow, and existence but a burden."¹⁹ Tom pretended to be having fun whitewashing the fence and manipulated the other boys into doing his work for him. As one boy worked, "the retired artist sat on a barrel in the shade close by, dangled his legs, munched his apple, and planned the slaughter of more innocents."²⁰

¹⁷ Maxwell, Geismar, Mark Twain: An American Prophet (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1970), p. 87.

¹⁸ Geismar, p. 45.

¹⁹ Mark Twain, The Adventures of Tom Sawyer (New York: The Heritage Press, 1936), p. 23.

²⁰ Twain, The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, p.28.

"And when the middle of the afternoon came, from being a poor poverty-stricken boy in the morning, Tom was literally rolling in wealth."²¹ Tom "had discovered a great law of human action, without knowing it--namely, that in order to make a man or a boy covet a thing, it is only necessary to make the thing difficult to attain."²² Tom learns that by manipulating the boy into the deception that the work is fun, he could accomplish his work with little or no effort.

This same theme of the manipulation of man and his self-deception is found in The Mysterious Stranger. Theodor Fischer, the narrator of The Mysterious Stranger, says,

Satan was accustomed to say that our race lived a life of continuous and uninterrupted self-deception. It duped itself from cradle to grave with shams and delusions which it mistook for realities, and this made its entire life a sham.²³

²¹ Twain, The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, p. 28.

²² Twain, The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, p. 29.

²³ Mark Twain, The Mysterious Stranger in his The Mysterious Stranger and other Stories (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1916), p. 247.

In comparing the themes of man's manipulation and self-deception in The Adventures of Tom Sawyer and The Mysterious Stranger, both relate the same idea, but in varying degrees. Tom, in the lesser degree, relates this theme through his manipulation of the boys into the self-deception that white-washing a fence is fun, not work. Satan, in the greater degree, relates man's self-deception that his life had meaning and purpose. By advancing from the lesser degree in Tom Sawyer to the greater degree in The Mysterious Stranger, the growth of Twain's pessimism is exhibited.

Twain's next novel, The Prince and the Pauper is a "charming romance and historical novel, both dramatic and humorous,"²⁴ it has "as its deeper current the underlying injustice in any form, shows the inequality of the classes and the severe punishments exacted by governments, especially monarchical government.

The plot of The Prince and the Pauper relates the exchange of clothes and identities between a future king and a beggar. Without these uniforms of social class distinction, the boys are identical. But there the similarity ends. The life of the prince is vastly different from that of the

²⁴ Long, p. 204.

²⁵ Long, p. 204.

pauper. The prince lives a life of privilege and luxury with attendants to grant his every wish and supervise his every move. Tom Canty, however, lives to "go forth in his rags and beg a few farthings, eat his poor crust, take his customary cuffs and abuse, and then stretch himself upon his handful of foul straw 26

In The Mysterious Stranger, Twain denounces monarchical forms of government which have a wide gap between social classes and which exploit the lower classes. After viewing his theater of the last two or three centuries of man' struggle to survive, Satan says,

For a million years the race has gone on monotonously propagating itself and monotonously reforming this dull nonsense--to what end? No wisdom can guess! Who gets a profit out of it? Nobody but a parcel of usurping little monarchs and nobilities who despise you; would feel defiled if you touched them; would shut the door in your face if you propped to call; whom you slave for, fight for, die for, and are not ashamed of it, but proud; whose existence is a perpetual insult to you and

²⁶ Mark Twain, The Prince and the Pauper in The Complete Novels of Mark Twain, Vol I, ed. Charles Neider (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1964), p. 572.

you are afraid to resent it; who are mendicants supported by your alms, yet assume toward you the airs of benefactor toward beggar; who address you in the language of master to slave; and are answered in the language of slave to master; who are worshipped by you with your mouth, while in your heart--if you have one--you despise yourselves for it.²⁷

As evidence of Twain's growing pessimism, the denouncement of The Mysterious Stranger is much stronger than that of The Prince and the Pauper. The denouncement of monarchical government in the latter is rather oblique in that Twain relates the difference in the social classes of England only by describing the diametrical lives of the prince, representing the ruling class, and the pauper, representing the lower classes. In the denouncement of monarchical government in the former, Twain is very direct and adamant in relating the differences between the ruling class and the lower classes of all nations and of all ages.

Not only does Twain denounce class systems in monarchical government in The Prince and the Pauper, he also denounces the severe punishments that man often imposes on his fel-

²⁷ Twain, The Mysterious Stranger, p.234.

low man. This is one of the aspects of Twain's recurring pessimistic theme of man's inhumanity to man.

The Prince and the Pauper describes several types of punishment common during the sixteenth century. For example, a man convicted of poisoning another man is sentenced to be boiled in oil.²⁸ A woman and a little girl convicted of selling themselves to the devil are sentenced to be hanged.²⁹ The prince himself witnesses the burning at the stake of two women. The event, though horrible in itself, is made even more horrible by the children of one of the women. The one child begs to be allowed to die with her mother because she will be all alone in the world.³⁰ Upon witnessing this, the prince says, "That which I have seen, in that one little moment, will never go out from my memory, but will abide there; and I shall see it all the days and dream of it all the nights, till I die. Would God I had been blind!"³¹

Mark Twain expresses similar pessimism of man's inhumanity to man in The Mysterious Stranger. In the village of Eseldorf, the setting of The Mysterious Stranger, the inci-

²⁸ Twain, The Prince and the Pauper, p. 635.

²⁹ Twain, The Prince and the Pauper, p. 637.

³⁰ Twain, The Prince and the Pauper, p. 694.

³¹ Twain, The Prince and the Pauper, p. 694.

dents of witchcraft have been at an all time high in the past year. Theodor Fischer tells of eleven girls who have been found to have red and inflamed backs. The girls are imprisoned in isolation from each other for ten days. Finally one confesses after having all her dealings with the devil called to her mind by her interrogator. Not being mentally stable, she agrees with all charges. After the one girl confesses, the other girls also confess and are sentenced to be burned at the stake.³² As Theodor watches this execution, he says, ". . . when I saw that one of them was a bonny sweet girl I used to play with, and looked so pitiful there chained to the stake, and her mother crying over her and devouring her with kisses and clinging around her neck, and saying 'Oh, my God! oh, my God!' it was too dreadful, and I went away."³³ Like the prince, Theodor cannot stand to see man's punishment of his fellow man.

Another theme of pessimism found in The Prince and the Pauper is Twain's belief that if a man leads a miserable life on earth, he can only rejoice at dying, as in the case of Yokel, the farmer/slave. Yokel relates the following story of his miserable life on earth:

³² Twain, The Mysterious Stranger, pp. 198-199.

³³ Twain, The Mysterious Stranger, p. 199.

I am Yokel, once a farmer and prosperous, with loving wife and kids--now am I somewhat different in estate and calling; and the wife and kids are gone; mayhap they are in heaven, mayhap in--in the other place--but the kindly God be thanked, they bide no more in England! My good old blameless mother strove to earn bread by nursing the sick; one of these died, the doctors knew not how, so my mother was burnt for a witch, whilst my babes looked on and wailed. English law!--up, all, with your cups!--now all together and with a cheer!--drink to the merciful English law that delivered her from the English hell! Thank you, mates, one and all. I begged, from house to house--I and the wife--bearing with us the hungry kids--but it was a crime to be hungry in England--so they stripped and lashed us through three towns. Drink ye all to the merciful English law!--for tis lash drank deep of my Mary's blood and its blessed deliverance came quick. She lies there, in the potter's field, safe from all harms. And the kids--well, whilst the law lashed me from town to town, they starved. Drink lads--only a drop--a drop to the poor kids, that

never did any creature harm. I begged again--begged for a crust, and got the stocks and lost an ear--see, here bides the stump; I begged again, and here is the stump of the other to keep me minded of it. And still I begged again, and was sold for a slave--here on my cheek under the stain, if I washed it off, ye might see the red S the branding iron left there! A SLAVE! Do ye understand that word! An English SLAVE!--that is he that stands before ye. I have run from my master, and when I am found--the heavy curse of heaven fall on the law of the land that hath commanded it!--I shall hang!³⁴

Yokel considers all those already dead better off than he because they no longer have to suffer the abusive treatment of this earth.

A similar theme occurs in The Mysterious Stranger in the case of Frau Brandt, the mother of Lisa who had drowned. The mother, upon seeing her dead child, utters blasphemies. She continues to be so distressed in the days to follow, that the boys ask Satan if he can change her life to happier one. Satan changes the next three minutes of her life with the

³⁴ Twain, The Prince and the Pauper, pp. 647-648.

result that she is charged with blasphemy and sentenced to be burned at the stake. When Satan notices how horror-stricken the boys are over the fate that Frau Brandt has come to because of their interference,³⁵ Satan says,

What you are thinking is strictly human-like-- that is to say foolish. The woman is advantaged. Die when she might, she would go to heaven. By this prompt death she gets twenty-nine years more of heaven than she is entitled to, and escapes twenty-nine years of misery here.³⁶

Another character in The Mysterious Stranger expresses similar sentiments when she is condemned to be burned at the stake for witchcraft. When Theodor asks her why she confessed, she replies,

I am old and very poor, and I work for my living. There was no way but to confess. If I hadn't they might have set me free. That would ruin me, for no one would forget that I had been suspected of being a witch, and so I would get no more work, and wherever I went they would set the

³⁵ Twain, The Mysterious Stranger, pp. 226-228.

³⁶ Twain, The Mysterious Stranger, p. 228.

dogs on me. In a little while I would starve. The fire is best; it is soon over.³⁷

Again, as in other comparisons made, the pessimism expressed in The Mysterious Stranger is stronger than that of the earlier novel. In The Prince and the Pauper, Yokel speaks only of the escape of the dead from English law. He does not actually say he welcomes his own death to escape the misery of earth, but only says that he will die. In the case of The Mysterious Stranger, the old lady says she wants to die to escape the misery of earth, and Satan says that the dead are better off to have escaped the misery of life on earth.

The third novel under consideration in comparing the similarities of themes of Twain's progressive pessimism is Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, begun in 1876 and published in 1885. Twain's pessimistic themes became more dominant and the similarities between Adventures of Huckleberry Finn and The Mysterious Stranger become more numerous. Huckleberry Finn is "a deeply pessimistic book that prepares for the bitterness and disillusion that characterizes his later work."³⁸

³⁷ Twain, The Mysterious Stranger, p. 199.

³⁸ I. M. Walker, Mark Twain (New York: Humanities Press, Inc., 1970), p. 79.

The theme of man's inhumanity to man is present in even greater frequency in Huckleberry Finn. Again, as in previous works, Twain continues to denounce man's oppressive institutions which result in man's inhumanity to man.

Huck Finn first encounters the institution of feuding when he comes ashore to be greeted by the Grangerfords, who take him in as guest once they determine that he is not connected with the Shepherdsons. When Huck asks what a feud is, Buck replies,

A man has a quarrel with another man and kills him; then that other man's brother kills him; then the other brothers on both sides, goes for one another; then the cousins chip in--and by and by everybody's killed off, and there ain't no more feud. But it's kind of slow, and takes a long time.³⁹

When Buck says he cannot remember what caused the feud, Huck asks whether anyone remembers. Buck says, "Oh, yes, pa knows, I reckon, and some of the other old people; but they don't know now what the row was about in the first

³⁹ Mark Twain, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (New York: Scholastic Book Services, 1962), p. 137.

place."⁴⁰.

Huck then witnesses his last experience with the feud "from the fork of a cottonwood where he is hiding. Outnumbered by Shepherdsons, Buck and his nineteen-year-old cousin Joe attempt to revenge the death of Colonel Grangerford and Buck's two older brothers. While they are attempting an escape by swimming wounded down the river, the Shepherdson men run along the bank firing and yelling, 'Kill them, kill them!' Later Huck drags the two bodies ashore, sick at heart and crying a little, because Buck had been 'mighty good to him.'"⁴¹ Huck then says,

It made me so sick I most fell out of the tree. I ain't a-going to tell all that happened--it would make me sick again if I was to do that. I wished I hadn't come ashore that night to see such things. I ain't ever going to get shut of them--lots of times I dream about them.⁴²

⁴⁰ Twain, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, p. 138.

⁴¹ William M. Gibson, The Art of Mark Twain (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 116.

⁴² Twain, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, p. 146.

Huck has "witnessed 'gentlefolk' conducting a miniature war, the original cause of which has long been forgotten. He has also witnessed the crumbling of Christian principle, of any sense of fair play, of regard for the young or respect for the old."⁴³

In The Mysterious Stranger, there is a similar theme of man's inhumanity to man in the incidence of a miniature war created by Satan. Satan creates miniature men who begin to quarrel. "Satan reached out his hand and crushed the life out of them with his fingers, threw them away, wiped the red from his fingers on his handkerchief, and went on talking where he had left off."⁴⁴ The boys who witnessed this "were so shocked and grieved at the wanton murder he had committed--for murder it was, that was its true name, and it was without palliation or excuse, for the men had not wronged him in any way. It made us miserable, . . . ah, it lowered him so, and we had had such pride in him."⁴⁵ "Then, in the toy kingdom, the wives of the dead men start to lament, a priest arrives, masses of people assemble to grieve and weep--and Satan, annoyed by the tiny tumult, wipes out the

⁴³ Gibson, p. 116.

⁴⁴ Twain, The Mysterious Stranger, p. 170.

⁴⁵ Twain, The Mysterious Stranger, p. 170.

whole assemblage."⁴⁶ "It made us sick to see that awful deed,"⁴⁷ says Theodor Fischer.

Both Huck Finn and Theodor Fischer are sickened by their witness of the wanton disregard for human life. In both incidents, the murder of human beings is committed without reason or for an unknown reason.

Twain continues his theme of man's inhumanity to man in Huckleberry Finn through the inhabitants of Bricksville. "Huck introduces the town to the reader with sketches of a 'mighty ornery lot' of tobacco-chewing loafers, who like to sick the dogs on a sow and her piglets, or put turpentine on a stray dog and set fire to him, or tie a tin pan to the tail and watch him run himself to death."⁴⁸

Among the citizens of Bricksville is Boggs, "who is good-natured and harmless drunk or sober but blusters and threatens people when he is drunk."⁴⁹ There is also Colonel Sherburn, who is the "keeper of the biggest store in town."⁵⁰ Boggs begins "calling Sherburn everything he

⁴⁶ Geismar, p. 335.

⁴⁷ Twain, The Mysterious Stranger, p. 170.

⁴⁸ Gibson, p. 117.

⁴⁹ Gibson, p. 117.

⁵⁰ Gibson, p. 116.

could lay his tongue to"51 He continues until Sherburn comes out and tells him he will "endure it till one o'clock. . . [and] no longer."52 "When the hour came, . . . Colonel Sherburn fired both barrels of his pistol into Boggs"53 who had been quietly crossing the street in order to escape.

"The act of murder is deliberate and cold-blooded; Sherburn speaks only one word to gain Boggs' attention, carefully takes aim, then shoots again to make certain he has killed his victim. Finally he throws the gun on the ground and turns on his heel in a gesture of contempt. He feels no strong emotion and experiences no remorse; it is as if he has killed a rat or some similar vermin."54

An example from The Mysterious Stranger which approximates the above example of man's inhumanity to man is the occurrence of Satan's recreation in miniature of the history of man to entertain the boys. At one point he shows the boys visions of hell with "poor babes and women and girls and lads and men shrieking and supplicating in anguish."55

51 Twain, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, p. 181.

52 Twain, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, p. 181.

53 Gibson, p. 117.

54 Gibson, p. 117.

55 Twain, The Mysterious Stranger, p. 172

Theodor says, "We could hardly bear it, but he was as bland about it as if it had been so many imitation rats in an artificial fire."⁵⁶ Satan then sends lightning to set the miniature castle on fire and brushes the people back inside the flames to die. The boys begin to weep, but Satan tells them not to cry because "they are of no value. . . . we can make plenty more."⁵⁷

Just as Sherburn regards Boggs as no more than an animal or less, Satan considers man of no value. As in past novels, the pessimism of The Mysterious Stranger is more powerful than that of Huckleberry Finn. Sherburn murders one individual while Satan destroys a large group of men which exhibits the indifference of the universe to man. Both Sherburn and Satan, however, murder without feeling any remorse. Theodor's description of Satan's attitude can apply as well to Sherburn's regard for Boggs:

He said it in a quite matter-of-course way and without bitterness, just as a person might talk about bricks or manure or any other thing that was

⁵⁶ Twain, The Mysterious Stranger, p. 172.

⁵⁷ Twain, The Mysterious Stranger, p. 173.

of no consequence and hadn't feelings.⁵⁸

The Sherburn-Boggs affair brings about Twain's comments concerning another of man's cruelties, mob violence. In Huckleberry Finn, Buck Harkness demands that Sherburn ought to be lynched for murdering Boggs. "The townspeople, now a lynch-mob carrying clotheslines, swarmed over Sherburn's fence, then stopped dead still when Sherburn stepped onto his front-porch roof with a double-barreled gun."⁵⁹ Sherburn lectures group on mob behavior:

The pitifulest thing is a mob; that's what an army is--a mob; they don't fight with courage that's born in them, but with courage that's borrowed from the mass, and from their officers. But a mob without any man at the head of it is beneath pitifulness. Now the thing for you to do is to drop your tails and go home and crawl in a hole.⁶⁰

Another variation of Twain's denouncement of mobs in Huckleberry Finn is the fate of the King and the Duke, albeit the King and the Duke have given the citizens good cause to

⁵⁸ Twain, The Mysterious Stranger, p. 172.

⁵⁹ Gibson, p. 117.

⁶⁰ Twain, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, p. 187.

punish them for their fleecing of the citizens. Once the King and the Duke are discovered to be the frauds they are, the citizens tar and feather them and ride them out of town on a rail. As Huck watches the "raging rush of people with torches,"⁶¹ he says,

We jumped to one side to let them go by; and as they went by I see they had the king and the duke, though they was all over tar and feathers, and didn't look like nothing in the world that was human--just looked like a couple of monstrous big soldier-plumes. Well, it made me sick to see; and I was sorry for them poor pitiful rascals, it seemed like I couldn't ever feel any hardness against them any more in the world. It was a dreadful thing to see. Human beings can be awful cruel to one another.⁶²

And Huck said earlier, "It was enough to make a body ashamed of the human race."⁶³

⁶¹ Twain, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, p. 294.

⁶² Twain, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, pp. 294-295.

⁶³ Twain, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, p. 208.

The Mysterious Stranger contains a parallel statement about mob violence and mob behavior. Satan condemns man's behavior in a mob by saying,

I know your race. It is made up of sheep. It is governed by minorities, seldom or never by majorities. It suppresses its feelings and its beliefs and follows the handful that makes the most noise. Sometimes the noisy handful is right, sometimes wrong; but no matter, the crowd follows it. The vast majority of the race, whether savage or civilized, are secretly kind-hearted and shrink from inflicting pain, but in the presence of the aggressive and pitiless minority they don't dare to assert themselves.⁶⁴

Satan says this in referring to the mob that has lynched and stoned a woman suspected of witchcraft. Theodor, himself, "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."⁶⁵ Satan laughs at Theodor and the others in the mob because each person in the mob feels as Theodor does.⁶⁶ Thus Theodor's feelings confirm what Satan said about mob behavior.

⁶⁴ Twain, The Mysterious Stranger, p. 238.

⁶⁵ Twain, The Mysterious Stranger, p. 236.

⁶⁶ Twain, The Mysterious Stranger, p. 238.

The final institution condemned in Twain's pessimism of man is the institution of slavery. The institution of slavery is attacked throughout Huckleberry Finn through the character of Jim or discussions about Jim. For example, Jim has been imprisoned in a shed on the Phelps' plantation, and Huck and Tom Sawyer have decided to free him. However, Tom would like to prolong the process:

He said it was the best fun he ever had in his life, and the most intellectual; and said if he only could see his way to it we would keep it up all the rest of our lives and leave Jim to our children to get out; for he believed Jim would come to like it better and better the more he got used to it.⁶⁷

This comment by Tom "satirizes the pre-Civil War view that slaves are content in slavery, and that slavery will come to fade away in time, at some later day in a later generation."⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Twain, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, p. 318.

⁶⁸ Gibson, p. 112.

An analogy of this belief is found in The Mysterious Stranger. Theodor speaks of common people, who in the sixteenth century would be considered slaves, whether black or white. He states,

Knowledge was not good for the common people, and could make them discontented with the lot which God had appointed for them, and God would not endure discontentment with His plans.⁶⁹

Finally in Twain's pessimistic view of the human race in Huckleberry Finn, "the hope of freedom that has sustained their [Huck's and Jim's] journey down the river vanishes as Cairo is lost in the fog, and by the time he reaches Phelps' farm Huck realizes that their freedom has been betrayed."⁷⁰ "After all this long journey, . . . here it was all come to nothing, everything all busted up and ruined," ⁷¹ "The novel ends where it began, amid the cruel inanities of 'civilization', where truth has surrendered to plausibility, and where a sickly veneer of sentimental-

⁶⁹ Twain, The Mysterious Stranger, p. 162.

⁷⁰ Walker, p. 79.

⁷¹ Twain, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, p. 270.

ity covers over grossness, violence and deceit."⁷²

The Mysterious Stranger ends in much the same way in that, in the words of Huck Finn, "everything was all busted up and ruined."⁷³ Satan destroys Theodor and Seppi's whole concept of life, God, the universe, etc., when he says,

It is true, that which I have revealed to you: 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. Nothing exists but you. And you are but a thought--a vagrant thought, a useless thought, a homeless thought, wandering forlorn among the empty eternities!⁷⁴

The awful truth finally comes upon Theodor. "He vanished, and left me appalled; for I knew, and realized, that all he had said was true."⁷⁵ Theodor, just as Huck and Jim have been betrayed, has been betrayed into believing in life, God, heaven, and hell.

⁷² Walker, p. 79.

⁷³ Twain, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, p. 270.

⁷⁴ Twain, The Mysterious Stranger, p. 253.

⁷⁵ Twain, The Mysterious Stranger, p. 253.

In the previous novels of The Adventures of Tom Sawyer and The Prince and the Pauper, the pessimism expressed by Twain is much milder than that of The Mysterious Stranger, even though the themes are parallel. However, the degree of pessimism becomes closer in Huckleberry Finn. Twain's satirical censure of man's oppressive institutions and man's inhumanity to man in Huckleberry Finn is at times worded in the same language as that in The Mysterious Stranger. An illustration is found in the reaction of both narrators to the disregard for human life. Both Sherburn and Satan express the same views on mob behavior. Both contend that a mob is a cowardly action brought about by a minority followed by the rest who do not have the courage to defy the minority. The institution of slavery, however, does not yet receive Twain's full reprimand. The tone of Twain's pessimism concerning slavery is much milder in Huckleberry Finn than it will be in later works since Twain concentrates more on just the institution of slavery rather than the inhuman treatment accorded slaves. Thus, the growth of Twain's pessimism continues to grow toward the maturity of The Mysterious Stranger.

The fourth novel under consideration in comparing thematic similarities within Twain's growing pessimism is A

Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court, begun in 1888 and published in 1889. Wagenknecht observes,

As the Connecticut Yankee he [Twain] first vaunted his Americanism against the old culture and the old corruptions of Europe, attacking with leather-lunged frontier laughter everything that the frontier could not understand; then, widening his scope, he began to think in broadly human terms, assailing selfishness and oppression everywhere, himself gone 'grailing' in behalf of loftier dreams than ever King Arthur knew.⁷⁶

One of the recurring subjects treated by Twain in A Connecticut Yankee is the institution of government. "While writing the Connecticut Yankee Mark [Twain] filled his diary with invectives against monarch" ⁷⁷ Throughout the novel, Twain deprecates monarchical government and the aristocracy.

Early in the novel, Twain writes of Hank Morgan's rescue of forty-five noble ladies in an ogre's castle. Accompanied by Sandy, he "perceives the castle as a pigsty and the ladies

⁷⁶ Wagenknecht, Mark Twain: The Man and His Work, 3rd. ed., pp. 3-4.

⁷⁷ Long, p. 29.

as swine."⁷⁸ Hank's "comparison of the princesses to hogs gives vent to his [Twain's] hatred of the aristocracy:"⁷⁹

We had to drive those hogs home--ten miles; and no ladies were ever more fickle-minded or contrary. They would stay in no road, no path; they broke out through the brush on all sides, and flowed away in all directions, over rocks, and hills, and the roughest places they could find. And they must not be stuck, or roughly accosted; Sandy could not bear to see them treated in ways becoming their rank. The troublesomest old sow of the lot had to be called my Lady, and your Highness, like the rest. It is annoying and difficult to scour around after hogs in armor. There was one small countess, with an iron ring in her snout and hardly any hair on her back, that was the devil for perversity. She gave me a race of an hour, over all sorts of country, and then we were right where we had started from, having made not a rod of real progress. I

⁷⁸ Henry Nash Smith, Mark Twain: The Development of a Writer Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1962), p. 141.

⁷⁹ Smith, p. 141.

seized her at last by the tail, and brought her along, squealing. When I overtook Sandy, she was horrified, and said it was in the last degree indelicate to drag a countess by her train.⁸⁰

Later in the novel, Hank Morgan and King Arthur are sold as slaves with the king bringing the lower price. In comparing the aristocracy to the common man, Hank says,

It seemed strange to me . . . that the King of England and the chief minister, . . ., could move by all manner of idle men and women, . . ., and yet never attract a curious eye, never provoke a single remark. Dear, dear, it only shows there is nothing diviner about a king than there is about a tramp, after all.⁸¹

In the persona of Hank Morgan, Twain gives his overall view of aristocracy and monarchical government in two situations. In describing the loyalty of the people to their king, Hank remarks,

⁸⁰ Mark Twain, A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court (New York: Bantam Books, 1981), p. 106.

⁸¹ Twain, A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court, pp. 213-214.

It was pitiful for a person born in a wholesome free atmosphere to listen to their humble and hearty outpourings of loyalty toward their king and Church and nobility; as if they had any more occasion to love and honor king and Church and noble than a slave has to love and honor the lash, or a dog has to love and honor the stranger that kicks him! Why, dear me, any kind of royalty, howsoever modified, any kind of aristocracy, howsoever pruned, is rightly an insult; It is enough to make a body ashamed of his race to think of the sort of froth that has always occupied its thrones without shadow of right or reason, and the seventh-rate people that have always figured as its aristocracies--a company of monarchs and nobles who, as a rule, would have achieved only poverty and obscurity if left, like their betters, to their own exertions.⁸²

And in describing the loyalty of the freemen, Hank further remarks,

⁸² Twain, A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court, p. 38.

You see my kind of loyalty was loyalty to one's country, not to its institutions or its office-holders. The country is the real thing, the substantial thing, the eternal thing; it is the thing to watch over, and care for, and be loyal to; institutions are extraneous, they are its mere clothing, and clothing can wear out, become ragged, cease to be comfortable, cease to protect the body from winter, disease, and death. To be loyal to rags, to shout for rags, to worship rags, to die for rags--that is a loyalty of unreason, it is pure animal; it belongs to monarchy was invented by monarchy; let monarchy keep it.⁸³

As for the relationship of the aristocracy to the English people as a whole, Hank Morgan believes:

The most of King Arthur's British nation were slaves, pure and simple, and bore that name, and wore the iron collar on their necks; and the rest were slaves in fact, but without the name; they imagined themselves men and freemen, and called themselves so. The truth was, the nation as a body

⁸³ Twain, A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court, pp. 64-65.

was in the world for one object, and one only: to grovel before king and Church and noble; to slave for them, sweat blood for them, starve that they might be fed, work that they might play, drink misery to the dregs that they might be happy, go naked that they might wear silks and jewels, pay taxes that they might be spared from paying them; be familiar all their lives with the degrading language and postures of adulation that they might walk in pride and think themselves the gods of this world. And for all this, the thanks they got were cuffs and contempt; and so poor-spirited were they that they took even this sort of attention as an honor.⁸⁴

In The Mysterious Stranger, Twain gives vent to his hatred of monarchical government when he says through the character of Satan:

For a million years the race has gone on monotonously reperforming this dull nonsense--to what end? No wisdom can guess! Who gets a profit out of it? Nobody but a parcel of usurping little monarchs and

⁸⁴ Twain, A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court, p. 38.

nobilities who despise you; . . . who are worshiped by you with your mouth, while in your heart--if you have one--you despise yourselves for it.⁸⁵

In both A Connecticut Yankee and The Mysterious Stranger, Twain denounces the aristocracy and monarchical government. By the time of A Connecticut Yankee, Twain's pessimistic view of government has grown to such a degree that the denunciation is equally strong. Even the language of the quote from A Connecticut Yankee and the quote from The Mysterious Stranger are similar.

Incorporated in Twain's denunciation of monarchical government is his aversion to the class or caste system in A Connecticut Yankee. While Twain speaks out against this social structure in previous novels, he speaks out increasingly against these differences in A Connecticut Yankee.

In Arthurian England, there are three distinct classes--the aristocracy, the freemen, and the slaves. Of the three, the freemen makes up the largest section of the population. Yet, the freemen are not actually free. Hank Morgan describes their life as little better than that of a slave:

⁸⁵ Twain, The Mysterious Stranger, p. 234.

They were freemen, but they could not leave the estates of their lord or their bishop without his permission; they could not prepare their own bread, but must have their corn ground and their bread baked at his mill and his bakery, and pay roundly for the same; they could not sell a piece of their property without paying him a handsome percentage of the proceeds, nor buy a piece of somebody else's without remembering him in cash for the privilege; they had to harvest his grain for him gratis, and be ready to come at a moment's notice, leaving their own crop to destruction by the threatened storm; they had to let him plant fruit trees in their fields, and then keep their indignation to themselves when his heedless fruit gatherers trampled the grain around the trees; they had to smother their anger when his hunting parties galloped through their fields laying waste the result of their patient toil; they were not allowed to keep doves themselves, and when the swarms from my lord's dovecote settled on their crops they must not lose their temper and kill a bird, for awful would the penalty be; when the harvest was at last gathered, then came the procession of robbers to

levy their blackmail upon it: first the Church carted off its fat tenth, then the king's commissioner took his twentieth, then my lord's people made a mighty inroad upon the remainder; after which, the skinned freeman had liberty to bestow the remnant in his barn, in case it was worth the trouble; there were taxes, and taxes, and taxes, and more taxes, and taxes again, and yet other taxes--upon this free and independent pauper, but none upon his lord the baron or the bishop, none upon the wasteful nobility or the all-devouring Church; if the baron would sleep unvexed, the freeman must sit up all night after his day's work and whip the ponds to keep the frogs quiet; if the freeman's daughter--but no, that last infamy of monarchical government is unprintable; and finally, if the freeman, grown desperate with his tortures, found his life unendurable under such conditions, and sacrificed it and fled to death for mercy and refuge, the gentle Church condemned him to eternal fire, the gentle law buried him at midnight at the crossroads with a stake through his back, and his master confiscated all his property and turned his

widow and his orphans out of doors.⁸⁶

A member of the aristocracy has no more regard for the common peasant than he has for an object. If a noble sees a peasant walking down the road, "when had he ever turned aside himself--or ever had the chance to do it . . . ? . . . it was his [the peasant's] place to look out himself, and if he hadn't skipped he would have been placidly ridden down, and laughed at besides.⁸⁷

The nobility despises the freemen, especially those of the lower castes of freemen. Hank compares these freemen and their treatment to his own time (the nineteenth century) to show that things have not changed since the sixth century:

It reminded me of a time thirteen centuries away, when the "poor whites" of our South who were always despised and frequently insulted, but the slave-lords around them, and who owed their base condition simply to the presence of slavery in their midst, were yet pusillanimously ready to side with slave-lords in all political moves for the upholding and perpetuating of slavery, and did also

⁸⁶ Twain, A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court, pp. 62-63.

⁸⁷ Twain, A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court, p. 165.

finally shoulder their muskets and pour out their lives in an effort to prevent the destruction of that very institution which degraded them. And there was only one redeeming feature connected with that pitiful piece of history; and that was, that secretly the "poor white" did detest the slave-lord, and did feel his own shame.⁸⁸

The lowest class of men in Arthurian England is the slave. "The middle and later sections of A Connecticut Yankee," Geismer notes, "are almost obsessively concerned with a feudal slavery"⁸⁹ As badly as the freemen are treated in Arthurian England, the slave suffers even more. The queen says of the slave and commoner (freeman):

A master might kill his slave for nothing: for mere spite, malice, or to pass the time--just as we have seen that the crowned head could do it with his slave, that is to say, anybody. A gentleman could kill a free commoner, and pay for him--cash or garden truck. A noble could kill a noble without expense, as far as the law was concerned, but reprisals in kind were to be expected. Anybody

⁸⁸ Twain, A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court, p. 18.

⁸⁹ Geismar, p. 120.

could kill somebody, except the commoner and the slave; these have no privileges. If they killed, it was murder, and the law wouldn't stand murder. It made short work of the experimenter--and his family too, if he murdered somebody who belonged up among the ornamental ranks.⁹⁰

A description of an Arthurian slave makes them out to be hopeless, and the similarity of their expressions cause them to seem more like objects than human beings. After all, they are not considered to be human beings, but property. Hank and Sandy came upon such a group:

Early in the afternoon we overtook another procession of pilgrims; but in this one was no merriment, no jokes, no laughter, no playful ways, nor any happy giddiness, whether of youth or age. Yet both were here, both age and youth: gray old men and women, strong men and women of middle age, young husbands, young wives, little boys and girls, and three babies at the breast. Even the children were smileless; there was not a face among all these half a hundred people but was cast down and bore

⁹⁰ Twain, A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court, p. 92.

that set expression of hopelessness which is bred of long and hard trials and old acquaintance with despair. They were slaves.⁹¹

At this point, Hank feels empathy for the slaves, but remains in a state of detached ambivalence. Only after King Arthur and he are sold as slaves does he come to know the true horror of being owned. Hank then acknowledges that ". . . the minute law and the auction block came into my personal experience, a thing that had been merely improper before became suddenly hellish."⁹²

In The Mysterious Stranger, Satan has the same regard for man as the aristocracy has for the freemen and slaves of Arthurian England. When Satan destroys the miniature men and women he created for the boy's amusement, he says, "Oh, it is no matter; we can make plenty more."⁹³ Similarly, the aristocracy can always obtain more peasants and slaves, who are therefore of no consequence if they are killed.

Later Theodor says of Satan's regard for men:

⁹¹ Twain, A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court, p. 113.

⁹² Twain, A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court, p. 213.

⁹³ Twain, The Mysterious Stranger, p. 173.

He always spoke of men in the same old indifferent way--just as one speaks of bricks and manure piles and such things; you could see that they were of no consequence to him, one way or the other. He didn't mean to hurt us, you could see that; just as we don't mean to insult a brick when we disparage it; a brick's emotions are nothing to us; it never occurs to us to think whether it has any or not.⁹⁴

Just as Satan does not consider that man has feelings and Theodor does not consider that bricks have feelings, the Arthurian aristocracy does not consider those of the lower classes to have human feelings. They think of the freemen and slaves as mere objects.

The pessimism concerning social class structures expressed in A Connecticut Yankee is close to the pessimism expressed in The Mysterious Stranger. However, the former is not as annihilating in that the statements are directed to one man's social class over another man's social class. In the latter, humanity is considered of the lower class to be subjected to the unfeeling and a moral indifference of the universe.

⁹⁴ Twain, The Mysterious Stranger, p. 176.

Twain not only blames monarchical government and the caste system for the common man's suffering; he also blames the corruptive influences of religion and the established Church as can be noted in previous quotes from A Connecticut Yankee. In Twain's pessimistic denunciation of the Church, Hank says,

There you see the hand of that awful power, the Roman Catholic Church. In two or three little centuries it had converted a nation of men to a nation of worms. Before the day of the Church's supremacy in the world, men were men, and held their heads up, and had a man's pride and spirit and independence; and what of greatness and position a person got, he got mainly by achievement, not by birth. But then the Church came to the front, with an ax to grind; and she was wise, subtle, and knew more than one way to skin a cat--or a nation; she invented "divine right of kings," and propped it all around, brick by brick, with the Beatitudes--wrenching them from their good purpose to make them fortify an evil one; she preached (to the commoner) humility, obedience to superiors, the beauty of self-sacrifice; she preached (to the commoner)

meekness under insult; preached (still to the commoner, always to the commoner) patience, meanness of spirit, nonresistance under oppression; and she introduced heritable ranks and aristocracies, and taught all the Christian populations of the earth to bow down to them and worship them.⁹⁵

Twain's contempt for the Church does not encompass just the Church of Arthurian England. Through Hank, Twain says of his own time, "How curious. The same thing had happened in the Wales of my day, under this same old Established Church, which was supposed by many to have changed its nature when it changed its disguise."⁹⁶

Twain's pessimistic attitude toward religion is equally damning in The Mysterious Stranger. Just as the people of Arthurian England are trained in the ways the Church wants them to be, so are the boys of Eseldorf. Theodor Fischer says of Nikolaus, Seppi and himself, "Mainly we were trained to be good Christians; to revere the Virgin, the Church, and the saints above everything. Beyond these matters, we were

⁹⁵ Twain, A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court, p. 39.

⁹⁶ Twain, A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court, p. 105.

not required to know much; and, in fact, not allowed to.⁹⁷

Satan, unlike Hank, reviews the entire history of Christianity and the Church and its effect on the human race. Hank speaks, for the most part, in terms of Christianity's effect on the people of Arthurian England. Satan, while showing the boys a view of the human race's development, says in his invective against the Church:

Next, Christianity was born. Then ages of Europe passed in review before us, and we saw Christainity and Civilization march hand in hand through those ages, "leaving famine and death and desolation in their wake, and other signs of the progress of the human race."⁹⁸

As for the future of Christianity, Satan sees that the effect of the Church upon man and man's development will be such that in "a few centuries from now he will have so greatly improved the deadly effectiveness of his weapons that without Christian civilization war must have remained a poor

⁹⁷ Twain, The Mysterious Stranger, p. 163.

⁹⁸ Twain, The Mysterious Stranger, pp. 232-233.

and trifling thing to the end of time"⁹⁹ and that "two or three centuries from now it will be recognized that all the competent killers are Christians; then the pagan would go to school to the Christians--not to acquire his religion, but his guns."¹⁰⁰

Leaving his pessimism toward man's institutions of government, social classes, and religion, Twain goes on in A Connecticut Yankee to vent his feelings about human behavior, especially mob behavior, a subject that is treated in both past and in future works. In A Connecticut Yankee, Twain, as in previous works, abhors mob behavior which always results in inhuman treatment of a fellow man. The queen says of public executions that "all the world came to see the show, and crack jokes, and have a good time."¹⁰¹

"During the disguised king's voyages with the Yankee guide [Hank] savage mobs of ignorant peasants become just as distasteful as the slave-masters who burn up women and children for their own warmth and comfort."¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Twain, The Mysterious Stranger, p. 233.

¹⁰⁰ Twain, The Mysterious Stranger, p. 234.

¹⁰¹ Twain, A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court, p. 92.

¹⁰² Geismar, p. 122.

The mob also has a "good time" when someone is put in the pillory. The mob "begins by clodding him; and they laugh themselves to pieces to see him try to dodge one clod and get hit with another."¹⁰³ "Then they throw dead cats at him" ¹⁰⁴ Yet if "he has a few personal enemies in that mob, . . . stones and bricks take the place of clods and cats. . . ." ¹⁰⁵ The end result at best is that the man is "crippled for life . . . --jaws broken, teeth smashed out--or legs mutilated, gangrened, presently cut off--or any eye knocked out, maybe both eyes."¹⁰⁶

"A young mother and her babe are killed for stealing because of their hunger, while, in a holiday of hellions, a mob of men, women, and children rejoice in the spectacle of her suffering."¹⁰⁷

In A Connecticut Yankee, Smith states,

¹⁰³ Twain, A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court, p. 202.

¹⁰⁴ Twain, A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court, p. 202.

¹⁰⁵ Twain, A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court, p. 202.

¹⁰⁶ Twain, A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court, p. 203.

¹⁰⁷ Geismar, p. 122.

The term 'mass,' so frequently applied to the Yankee audiences, is particularly ambiguous. At first it may refer merely to the physical image of a crowd so large and so densely packed that individuals can hardly be distinguished. But in later passages, the word carries the implication that the members of the multitude have surrendered their identity to a larger more powerful, yet sub-human organism. This image . . . is conspicuous in the description of the mob confronted by Sherburn in Huckleberry Finn. . . . Since so much else in A Connecticut Yankee points forward to The Mysterious Stranger, it is relevant that the later book emphasizes the power of mob spirit to coerce individuals into cruelties they inwardly strive to avoid.¹⁰⁸

While both A Connecticut Yankee and The Mysterious Stranger are concerned with mobs and mob behavior, The Mysterious Stranger is more pessimistic than A Connecticut Yankee. According to A Connecticut Yankee, the majority of the people in a mob seem to be enjoying themselves. Yet

¹⁰⁸ Smith, p. 165.

according to Satan, this is not true. He says that the human race is made up of sheep governed by a minority, whether that minority is right or wrong. He further says that the human race is basically kind-hearted but is afraid to assert themselves when involved in a mob. (Exact quote given on Page 27)¹⁰⁹ Satan's view of a mob and its behavior is much more pessimistic in that man seems not to have a will of his own, but only goes along with the crowd, which does not speak well for man.

A similar theme of A Connecticut Yankee and The Mysterious Stranger is the power of laughter to destroy. Walker notes in the episode of Hank rescuing the princesses whom he perceives as hogs, that "the comparison of princesses to sows allows Twain to express his dislike of aristocracy, but the vehemence of his satiric attack is mitigated by the comic extravagance of the scene. . . ." ¹¹⁰

We had to drive those hogs home--ten miles; and no ladies were ever more fickle-minded or contrary. They would stay in no road, no path; they broke out through the brush on all sides, and flowed away in all directions over rocks, and hills, and the

109 Twain, The Mysterious Stranger, p. 238.

110 Walker, p. 92.

roughest places they could find. And they must not be struck, or roughly accosted; Sandy could not bear to see them treated in ways unbecoming their rank. The troublesomest old sow of the lot had to be called my Lady, and your Highness, like the rest. It is annoying and difficult to scour around after hogs, in armor. There was one small countess, with an iron ring in her snout and hardly any hair on her back, that was the devil for perversity. She gave me a race of an hour, over all sorts of country, and then we were right where we had started from, having made not a rod of real progress. I seized her at last by the tail, and brought her along, squealing. When I overtook Sandy, she was horrified, and said it was in the last degree indelicate to drag a countess by her train.

We got the hogs home just at dark--most of them. The princesses Nerovens de Morganore was missing, and two of her ladies in waiting: namely, Miss Angela Bohun, and the demoiselle Elaine Courtemains, the former of these two being a young black sow with a white star in her forehead, and the latter a brown one with thin legs and a slight

limp in the forward shank on the starboard side--a couple of the tryingest blisters to drive, that I ever saw. Also among the missing were several mere baronesses--and I wanted them to stay missing; but no, all that sausage meat had to be found; so, servants were sent out with torches to scour the woods and hills to that end.

Of course the whole drove was housed in the house, and great guns--well, I never saw anything like! Nor ever heard anything like it. And never smelt anything like it. It was like an insurrection in a gasometer.¹¹¹

"This technique Twain employes", Walker concludes, "is one of deflation and reduction in which the hated image is distorted and debased."¹¹²

Satan, in The Mysterious Stranger, defines humor:

You have a mongrel perception of humor, nothing more; a multitude of you possess that. This multitude see the comic side of a thousand low-grade and trivial things--broad incongruities, mainly; gro-

¹¹¹ Twain, A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court, p. 106.

¹¹² Walker, p. 92.

tesqueries, absurdities, evokers of the horselaugh. The ten thousand high-grade comicalities which exist in the world are sealed from their dull vision. Will a day come when the race will detect the funniness of these juvenilities and laugh at them--and by laughing at them destroy them? 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. You are always fussing and fighting with your other weapons. Do you ever use that one? No, you leave it lying rusting. As a race, do you ever use it at all? No, you lack sense and the courage.¹¹³

Walker observes:

Although Satan here associated laughter with a sense of humor, what he defined was not humor at all but satire. The laughter of Satan did not mock

¹¹³ Twain, The Mysterious Stranger, pp. 247-248.

like the laughter of mark Twain in The Innocents Abroad and Roughing It, it destroyed and hated like the laughter of Pudd'nhead Wilson and Hank Morgan in A Connecticut Yankee. Laughter here was a 'weapon' which 'assaulted' the 'colossal humbug' of existence, and by so doing 'can blow it to rags and atoms at a blast.' The violence and destructive power of Satan's laughter had little affinity with the self-mockery of Mark Twain; it belonged rather to the violent helpless world of Hank Morgan the Yankee mechanic who came as a 'mysterious stranger' to enlighten the darkness of Arthurian England. . . . 114

"It is not surprising", Cox writes, "that the terms of Satan's definition of laughter actually have their origin in the world of Hank Morgan. Thus the prejudices of Morgan, the first of Mark Twain's alien strangers, are fulfilled in the 'philosophy' of the last stranger, Philip Traum."¹¹⁵

The themes of A Connecticut Yankee and The Mysterious Stranger are quite similar. The pessimism expressed in the

114 Walker, p. 90.

115 James M. Cox, Mark Twain: The Fate of Humor (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 286.

two novels becomes closer in identity than the pessimism expressed in comparisons of previous novels. As Ferguson put it:

. . . the design [of The Mysterious Stranger] differs only slightly from the Yankee. The survey of human cruelty and stupidity are the same; Father Adolf is blood brother to the ecclesiastics of King Arthur's court; the astrologer is Merlin. Even the Protestant gibe about the foundling asylum connected with the priory and the nunnery is repeated in the earlier work.¹¹⁶

The fifth and final novel to be considered in the thematic similarity within Twain's growing pessimism is Pudd'nhead Wilson, begun in 1891 and published in 1894. The dominating themes of the novel are the effects of the institution of slavery and the determinism the station of birth makes in a person's life. "Pudd'nhead Wilson" Walker emphasizes, "is an investigation into the nature of slavery, what slavery does to the human psyche, and how slavery is a metaphor for the human condition."¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ DeLancey Ferguson, Mark Twain: Man and Legend (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company Publishers, 1943), p. 280.

¹¹⁷ Walker, p. 89.

The plot of Pudd'nhead Wilson presents the story of two identical children, one negro and one white, who are switched by Roxy, the mother of the Negro. The false Tom Driscoll becomes,

. . .spoiled, arrogant, deceitful, vicious-tempered, nasty; even while the history of the transposed white 'aristocrat' now turned into the black Chambers reveals how easily a slave is made. The transposed 'black child' takes on the worst aspects of the white master race, while Chambers becomes so versed in human servility, obedience, docility that even when he regains his true personality and social position, he cannot unlearn the slave idiom--the slave ideology--of his youth.¹¹⁸

Geismar's evaluation of Pudd'nhead Wilson is echoed in The Mysterious Stranger:

The man's circumstances and environment order it. His first act determines the second and all that follow after. But suppose, for argument's sake, that the man should skip one of these acts; an apparently trifling one, for instance. . . . That

¹¹⁸ Geismar, p. 140.

man's career would change utterly, from that moment; thence to the grave it would be wholly different from the career which his first act as a child had arranged for him. Indeed, it might be that if he had gone to the well he would have ended his career on a throne, and that omitting to do it would set him upon a career that would lead to beggary and a pauper's grave.¹¹⁹

Both Pudd'nhead Wilson and The Mysterious Stranger express this deterministic philosophy of Twain by which a person's life will be lived. Baldanza summarizes Twain's philosophy by saying, "The first act of the infant determines his entire train of fate, but paradoxically, one minute's change in the course of determined events can change the entire remainder of a life."¹²⁰

In Pudd'nhead Wilson, if Roxy had not dressed her child in Tom Driscoll's clothes and had not noticed how alike they were, she would not have thought of switching the two babies in order to prevent her child from living the life of a slave with the fear of being sold down the river:

¹¹⁹ Twain, The Mysterious Stranger, p. 204.

¹²⁰ Frank Baldanza, Mark Twain: An Introduction and Interpretation (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1961), p. 139.

She stepped over and glanced at the other infant; she flung a glance back at her own; then one more at the heir of the house. Now a strange light dawned in her eyes, and in a moment she was lost in thought. She seemed in a trance; when she came out of it she muttered, "When I 'uz a-washin' 'em in de tub, yistiddy, his own pappy asked me which of 'em was his'n."

She began to move about like one in a dream. She undressed Thomas a Becket, stripping him of everything, and put the tow-linen shirt on him. She put his coral necklace on her own child's neck. Then she placed the children side by side.¹²¹

Similarly in The Mysterious Stranger, "by having Nikolaus awaken one night to close the window against the rain, Satan causes him to sleep several minutes later the next morning; thus he arrives too late at the lake in which Lisa was to drown, thereby causing both to die, whereas they would have lived otherwise."¹²²

¹²¹ Mark Twain, Pudd'nhead Wilson (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1922), pp. 20-21.

¹²² Baldanza, p. 139.

Closely related to the pessimism of Twain's determinism is the blood heritage of a person. In Pudd'nhead Wilson, this is brought out in the definition of a slave; while in The Mysterious Stranger, this is brought out in a person's treatment due to the actions of an ancestor.

In Pudd'nhead Wilson, Roxy is a slave because of her blood lines, even though she appears to be white:

To all intents and purposes Roxy was as white as anybody, but the one-sixteenth of her which was black outvoted the other fifteen parts and made her a negro. She was a slave, and salable as such. Her child was thirty-one parts white, and he, too, was a slave, and by a fiction of law and custom a negro.¹²³

In The Mysterious Stranger, a boy named Gottfried Narr is shunned by the other inhabitants of Eseldorf because of his grandmother. He is described as:

. . . a dull, good creature, with no harm in him and nothing against him personally; still, he was under a cloud, and properly so, for it had not been six months since a social blight had mildewed the

¹²³ Pudd'nhead Wilson, p. 12.

family--his grandmother had been burned as a witch. When that kind of a malady is in the blood it does not always come out with just one burning.¹²⁴

Although the circumstances of Roxy and Gottfried Narr are different, it is the blood which dictates their lives. Twain's pessimistic determinism is shown equally in both works in that both Roxy and Gottfried were unfairly treated either sociologically or socially.

To be considered separately from the story of Pudd'nhead Wilson are the maxims which begin each chapter. These "are purportedly the creation of David Wilson, attorney-at-law. . . and are independently memorable as assertions of Mark Twain, rather than as utterances of the shadowy Pudd'nhead Wilson in the context of the story of Roxy and her 'children.'"¹²⁵ Many of these maxims are on themes also treated in The Mysterious Stranger. Such themes include man's inferiority to other animals, the corruptions of money, and the benefits of death over life.

Wagenknecht notes that Mark Twain "was completely, and quite seriously, convinced that man was the least admirable

¹²⁴ Twain, The Mysterious Stranger, p. 197.

¹²⁵ Gibson, p. 159.

figure in the animal kingdom."¹²⁶ "As his pessimism grew upon him, as he became more and more disgusted with the damned human race, he turned to them [animals] for comfort."¹²⁷.

In the maxims of Pudd'nhead Wilson, Twain compares the courage of a flea to the courage of man:

Courage is a resistance to fear, mastery of fear--not absence of fear. Except a creature be part coward it is not a compliment to say it is brave; it is merely a loose misapplication of the word. Consider the flea!--incomparably the bravest of all the creatures of God, if ignorance of fear were courage. Whether you are asleep or awake he will attack you, caring nothing for the fact that in bulk and strength you are to him as are the massed armies of the earth to a sucking child; he lives both day and night and all days and nights in the very lap of peril and the immediate presence of death, and yet is no more afraid than is the man who walks the streets of a city that was threatened by an earthquake ten centuries before. When we

¹²⁶ Wagenknecht, 3rd. ed., p. 133.

¹²⁷ Wagenknecht, 3rd. ed., p. 134.

speak of Clive, Nelson, and Putnam as men who "didn't know what fear was," we ought to add the flea--and put him at the head of the procession.¹²⁸

By comparing the lowly flea to man, Twain diminishes what man defines as courage and those men labeled as courageous.

A second maxim by Twain speaks of man's feeling insulted to be called as ass:

There is no character, howsoever good and fine but it can be destroyed by ridicule, howsoever poor and witless. Observe the ass, for instance: his character is about perfect, he is the choicest spirit among all the humbler animals, yet see what ridicule has brought him to. Instead of feeling complimented when we are called an ass, we are left in doubt.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Twain, Pudd'nhead Wilson, p. 101.

¹²⁹ Twain, Pudd'nhead Wilson, p. 1.

By saying that man should feel complimented to be called an ass, Twain further diminishes man since man has always felt the ass to be one of the more stupid members of the animal kingdom.

"Man's inferiority to other animals is most seriously argued in The Mysterious Stranger, where Satan comments feelingly on the calculated gall human beings manifest when they describe hideously cruel acts as 'brutal.'"¹³⁰

Satan exclaims,

It is like your paltry race--always lying, always claiming virtues which it hasn't got, always denying them to the higher animals, which alone possess them. No brute ever does a cruel thing--that is the monopoly of those with the Moral Sense. When a brute inflicts pain he does it innocently; it is not wrong; for him there is no such thing as wrong. And he does not inflict pain for the pleasure of inflicting it--only man does that.¹³¹

¹³⁰ Wagenknecht, p. 133.

¹³¹ Twain, The Mysterious Stranger, pp. 192-193.

Twain's philosophy on the inferiority of man in best summed up in a Pudd'nhead Wilson maxim:

If you pick up a starving dog and make him prosperous, he will not bite you. This is the principal difference between a dog and a man.¹³²

Mark Twain was often disillusioned with monetary problems in his personal life. In Pudd'nhead Wilson, Twain says of money,

The holy passion of Friendship is of so sweet and steady and loyal and enduring a nature that it will last through a whole lifetime, if not asked for money.¹³³

The pessimism expressed in The Mysterious Stranger about the evils of money is stronger than that of Pudd'nhead Wilson. Satan says,

The love of it is the root of all evil. There it lies, the ancient tempter, newly red with the shame of its latest victory--the dishonor of a priest of God and his two poor juvenile helpers in

¹³² Twain, Pudd'nhead Wilson, p. 142.

¹³³ Twain, Pudd'nhead Wilson, p. 56.

crime. If it could but speak, let us hope that it would be constrained to confess that of all its conquests his was the basest and the most pathetic.
134

As in The Prince and the Pauper, Twain praises death. In Pudd'nhead Wilson, there are three maxims glorifying death:

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.¹³⁵

Why is it that we rejoice at birth and grieve at a funeral? It is because we are not the person involved.¹³⁶

All say, "How hard it is that we have to die"--a strange complaint to come from the mouths

243. ¹³⁴ Twain, The Mysterious Stranger, p.

¹³⁵ Twain, Pudd'nhead Wilson, p. 18.

¹³⁶ Twain, Pudd'nhead Wilson, p. 69.

of people who have had to live.¹³⁷

All three of the above maxims reflect Twain's belief that the dead are better off for having escaped the miseries of earth.

This same theme is reflected in The Mysterious Stranger. An old lady who has been sentenced to burn at the stake for witchcraft says,

"I am old an very poor," she said, "and I work for my living. There was no way but to confess. If I hadn't they might have set me free. That would ruin me, for no one would forget that I had been suspected of being a witch, and so I would get no more work, and wherever I went they would set the dogs on me. In a little while I would starve. The fire is best; it is soon over."¹³⁸

Satan also says that death is better than living. when Frau Brandt is destined to be burned at the stake, Satan comments,

137 Twain, Pudd'nhead Wilson, p. 76.

138 Twain, The Mysterious Stranger, p. 199.

The woman is advantaged. Die when she might, she would go to heaven. By this prompt death she gets twenty-nine years more of heaven than she is entitled to, and escapes twenty-nine years of misery here.¹³⁹

Pudd'nhead Wilson and The Mysterious Stranger are analogous in the pessimistic themes that they share. Twain's determinism so expressly demonstrated in The Mysterious Stranger is also present in the structure of the plot of Pudd'nhead Wilson. In both novels, an alteration in a life causes an irreversible change. Frau Brandt will die, the real Tom Driscoll will forever act the slave, and the real Chambers will forever feel the "nigger" in himself.

III

CONCLUSION

"Mark Twain's strong sense of justice," Long writes, "makes him sensitive to any deviation, large or small. In his books, we see humanity in the mass struggling through

¹³⁹ Twain, The Mysterious Stranger, p. 228.

ignorance, stupidity, and cowardice. . . ."140

"Theoretically, Mark Twain is the Devil's Advocate in the case of the Universe versus Humanity; no man ever poured fiercer scorn upon his own kind. He is willing to admit that he himself rests upon this self-pronounced condemnation. . . ."141

In Mark Twain In Eruption, DeVoto quotes Twain as saying,

Every man is in his own person the whole human race, with not a detail lacking. I am the whole human race without a detail lacking; I have studied the human race with diligence and strong interest all these years in my own person; in myself I find in big or little porportions every quality and every defect that is findable in the mass of the race.142

Edward Wagenknecht quotes Twain as saying, "Man is a museum of diseases, a home of impurities; he comes to-day and is gone tomorrow; he begins as dirt and departs as

140 Long, p. 394.

141 Wagenknecht, p. 140.

142 Bernard DeVoto, ed., Mark Twain in Eruption
(New York: Harper

stench."¹⁴³ Twain "wondered whether it might not be possible to exterminate the race by means of some device which should withdraw the oxygen from the air for a period of two minutes."¹⁴⁴

Mark Twain's work The Mysterious Stranger expresses all the faults of man of which Twain felt a part. The themes of The Mysterious Stranger condemns man's oppressive institutions, man's behavior, man's image of himself, man's belief in life and after-life, and man's fate in life. These same themes are evident in his previous works.

In the Adventures of Tom Sawyer, there are the themes of self-deception and man's manipulation of his fellow man. In The Prince and the Pauper, there are the themes of Mark Twain's condemnation of the social class structure, the corruptive effect of monarchical government, the advantages of death, and man's inhumanity to man. In Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, there are the themes of Mark Twain's condemnation of man's inhumane institution of slavery, man's institution of meaningless feuding, mob behavior, and the repeated theme of man's inhumanity to man. In A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court, there are the themes of Mark Twain's condemnation of the Church, the power of laughter to

¹⁴³ Wagenknecht, 3rd. ed., p. 117.

¹⁴⁴ Wagenknecht, 3rd. ed., p. 117.

destroy, and the repeated themes of the corruptive effects of monarchical government and slavery, man's inhumanity to man, the advantages of death, the effects of social class structure, and mob behavior. In Pudd'nhead Wilson, there are the themes of determinism, blood heritage, man's inferiority in the animal kingdom, the evil of money, and the repeated theme of the advantages of death. All these themes are treated in The Mysterious Stranger.

The pessimism of the above themes becomes more dominant as the novels progress chronologically in their writing. And, as the pessimism becomes more dominant, the themes become more repetitious. The Mysterious Stranger is the culminating work of Twain's previous novels, and the work is wholly pessimistic and without humor.

As Satan says of life in the annihilating close of The Mysterious Stranger, "It is all a dream--a grotesque and foolish dream. Nothing exists but you. And you are but a thought--a vagrant thought, a useless thought, a homeless thought, wandering forlorn among the empty eternities."¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ Twain, The Mysterious Stranger, p. 253.

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