

THE PLACE OF FOLKLORE IN THE
CREATIVE ART OF MARK TWAIN

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Preface

This study was prompted by a lifelong interest in the writings of Mark Twain and, more specifically, by the discovery that little critical attention has been directed toward Twain's use of folklore. Although the folklore of "The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" is well known, Twain's use of such tall tales and other types of lore in his writing has gone virtually unnoticed. Only Victor R. West and Bernard DeVoto have given any concentrated attention to this aspect of his work. Twain employed folk materials extensively throughout his writings, often achieving through them effects so skillfully suited to his material that they widen the dimension of his art. This thesis is an attempt to show the extent of folklore usage in each of his principal books and to evaluate what folklore contributes to each work.

A knowledge of the organization of this study will make clearer the significance of the findings. The development depends upon neither a chronological nor a subject arrangement. A chronological ordering was not feasible because this would have meant imposing an order upon writings which quite naturally fall into three principal divisions of their own: the travel books, the historical novels, and those books conceived in the spirit of the Hannibal period. A subject division was discarded so that this examination could show more clearly what folklore contributes to each work as a whole within each group. The arrangement, then, is by group types. This

arrangement is particularly valuable because a definite pattern can be seen in each group. For example, one group may, for certain reasons, illustrate a generally inept handling of folk materials, whereas another group, for quite different reasons, may reveal folk materials being employed with exceptional artistry. Upon these distinctions the final verdict regarding the place of folklore in Twain's creative art depends.

I wish to express here my sincere gratitude for the understanding and guidance which Professor John T. Flanagan has given me in the preparation of this study and to acknowledge the helpfulness of the library staff of the University of Illinois.

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Chapter I

Folklore Influences on the Life of Mark Twain

Mark Twain was born in a two-room shack in the village of Florida, Missouri, in 1835. The visitor to Florida today may still see the gray hull of this shack with its sway-backed roof and warped clapboards which show the deterioration of more than a century. Florida, too, is a hull of its former self, little more than a side-road ghost town. A sagging store slowly decaying behind a gas pump at the village intersection supplies the few citizens who remain. The Florida of 1834, to which the Clemens family came from Tennessee, was an energetic village grown to approximately one hundred citizens¹ who shared the spirit of opportunity engendered by the frontier and looked forward to a prosperous future. The houses on the two dusty streets were either frame or log; a church of logs rose near-by;² and two grist mills and a saw mill marked the town's beginning industry.³ By 1837, Florida had a hemp manufacturing firm⁴ and four or five distilleries.⁵ The Salt River, angling

¹ Mark Twain, Mark Twain's Autobiography, ed. Albert B. Paine (New York, 1924), I, 95.

² Dixon Wecter, Sam Clemens of Hannibal (Boston, 1952), p. 41.

³ Minnie M. Brashear, Mark Twain, Son of Missouri (Chapel Hill, 1934), p. 49.

⁴ Alphonso Wetmore, Gazetteer of the State of Missouri (St. Louis, 1837), p. 121.

⁵ Brashear, p. 49.

eastward eighty-five miles to the river, was Florida's hope; for everyone believed that Salt River would eventually be deepened, thus allowing direct commerce with the Mississippi River. The belief in slave economy also gave comfort to this hope. The proportion of slaves in the county was high.⁶ Twain's uncle, John Quarles, who lived on a farm four miles from Florida, owned thirty slaves.⁷ The Salt River was never deepened, however, and the young town was doomed to fall to pieces on the river banks. During the autumn of 1839, the Clemenses set out for Hannibal to try new fortunes.

Compared to Florida, Hannibal was a thriving city. Located on the Mississippi, it was an important river port and carried on direct trade with St. Joseph, the gateway to the Great West.⁸ In 1839, Hannibal had about 450 people. Within the next ten years this figure had risen to one thousand, and the town boasted "two pork houses...four general stores, three sawmills, two planing mills, three blacksmith shops, two hotels, three saloons, two churches, two schools, a tobacco factory, a hemp factory, and a tanyard, as

⁶ The 1830 Census shows that Ralls County, in which Florida was situated at that time, had 3,536 free persons and 839 slaves. United States Census Office. 5th Census, 1830, Abstract of the Returns of the Fifth Census...(Washington, 1832 [New York, 1944?]), p. 41. During the next ten years, the proportion diminished because the country was settled so rapidly; but the number of slaves in Monroe County in 1840 (Monroe County was subdivided from Ralls County in 1831 and included Florida) shows a good seven to one ratio. United States Census Office. 6th Census, 1840, Compendium of the Enumeration of the Inhabitants and Statistics of the United States...(Washington, 1840), pp. 88-90.

⁷ Brashear, Son of Missouri, p. 52.

⁸ Wecter, Sam Clemens, p. 57.

well as a flourishing distillery up at the stillhouse branch."⁹
The Clemenses found that there were a few mansions in Hannibal, and
that the average house was far superior to the dwellings of Florida.¹⁰
They also discovered that the slave ratio for Hannibal's Marion
County was greater than that of neighboring Monroe County: the 1830
Census shows that there were three free persons to every slave in
Marion County;¹¹ and in 1840 the ratio of seven free to two slave¹²
was still quite high. Looking back upon this period many years
later, Twain was able to recapture some of the general atmosphere
and characteristics of the town:

In the small town of Hannibal, Missouri, when I
was a boy, everybody was poor, but didn't know it; and
everybody was comfortable, and did know it. And there
were grades of society--people of good family, people
of unclassified family, people of no family. Everybody
knew everybody, and was affable to everybody, and nobody
put on any visible airs; yet the class lines were quite
clearly drawn and the familiar social life of each class
was restricted to that class. It was a little democracy
which was full of liberty, equality, and Fourth of July,
and sincerely so, too; yet you perceived that the aristo-
cratic taint was there. It was there, and nobody found
fault with the fact, or ever stopped to reflect that its
presence was an inconsistency.

I suppose that this state of things was mainly due to
the circumstance that the town's population had come from
slave states and still had the institution of slavery
with them in their new home.¹³

The people Twain knew as a boy were hardy frontier stock,
"honest, kindly, lazy, half-literate rustics who chewed tobacco,

⁹ Wecter, Sam Clemens, 60.

¹⁰ Bernard DeVoto, Mark Twain's America (Boston, 1932), p. 29.

¹¹ United States Census Office. 5th Census, 1830, p. 41.

¹² United States Census Office. 6th Census, 1840, pp. 88-90.

¹³ Twain, Autobiography, I, 119-120.

drank hard liquor and loved to wrestle, but who seldom saw a book or magazine..."¹⁴ Their religion, which was a vital part of their lives, was a curious mixture of fundamentalism and superstitious beliefs. Whereas the Negroes combined Christianity with the mysteries of voodoo with its charms, its incantations and the evil-eye, the whites with their fundamentalist faith in hell-fire and damnation found it natural to be apprehensive concerning ghosts and spirits. The step from the pulpit-shaking brimstone of the church to forms of superstition was short, since both traditions had their bases in stark, emotional fear. A ghost story, to the white as well as to the Negro, was more often regarded as a piece of news than as fiction.¹⁵ Traveling lecturers giving talks on spiritualism frequently came to this river town, one of the most celebrated being a Professor Barton from London who spoke upon witchcraft and demonology.¹⁶ In later life, Twain said of his boyhood, "In these days it seems incredible that people believed in ghosts so short a time ago. But they did."¹⁷

Young Sam Clemens was surrounded by a world of living folklore. Although this folklore made an impression upon most of the youths of Hannibal, it made an inordinately pervasive impression

¹⁴ Wecter, Sam Clemens, p. 50.

¹⁵ Mark Twain, "'Ghost Life on the Mississippi,' Mark Twain Manuscript with a Foreword by Samuel C. Webster," Pacific Spectator, II, 485.

¹⁶ Wecter, p. 196.

¹⁷ Mark Twain, Life on the Mississippi, in The Writings of Mark Twain (New York, 1904), IX, 397. Hereafter cited as Works unless otherwise indicated.

upon him; and whereas many of the Hannibal youths undoubtedly grew up to recall this part of their childhood with a vague detachment, these experiences remained starkly vivid in Sam's mind. His brother Orion once recalled of their earlier days together that Sam's "organization is such as to feel the utmost extreme of every feeling";¹⁸ and there is no doubt that a man who was essentially a rationalist but who could be moved to tears by the beauties of a winter ice storm, or who could ecstatically shout his happiness while skipping down the bank of a plunging mountain stream,¹⁹ was gifted with an extreme sensitiveness far beyond an ordinary person's perceptions.²⁰ Upon this sensitiveness of young Sam Clemens the mysteries of folklore broke with an impact that was to endure.

Much of Twain's knowledge of folklore came from his own home. His mother, Jane Clemens, though an ardent Presbyterian,²¹ (Twain once asserted that she was the model for Tom Sawyer's Aunt Polly),²² was nevertheless influenced by ghostlore and superstitions. She was

¹⁸ Albert B. Paine, Mark Twain (New York, 1912), II, 1592.

¹⁹ Ibid., I, 629.

²⁰ The most revealing evidence of this is found in Mark Twain's essay, "Concerning the Recent Carnival of Crime in Connecticut," in which he details the torture his conscience inflicted upon him throughout his life. Twain, Works, XX, 305-325.

²¹ George I. Bidewell, "Mark Twain's Florida Years," Missouri Historical Review, XL (January, 1946), 168.

²² Twain, Autobiography, I, 102. She seems to have been the person Twain was referring to when he said that before he was fifteen years old he had been forced to read the Bible through. Paine, Mark Twain, II, 1281.

not bookish, having undoubtedly received only the rudimentary education given to girls of her time. She seems to have cared little for books except the Bible. Her narrowly prescribed reading interest denied her a familiarity with ideas which would undermine superstitious beliefs and this, in addition to her attention to the Bible with its passages of phenomenal occurrences, may very well have contributed to her deep interest in supernatural lore. She knew many stories told to her by friends regarding their narrow escapes from spirits, and she too had seen ghosts' work. She recalled that when Sam's younger brother, Henry, was killed in the wreck of the steamboat Pennsylvania, a favorite picture of his had fallen from the wall at the hour of his death.²³ She was just as apt to consult an herb doctor or a mental healer as a registered practitioner when illness struck the family. Mark Twain always remembered the faith doctor, Mrs. Utterback; the Indian doctor, a taciturn savage; and the old women healers who went to the woods for their medicines "and knew how to compound doses that would stir the vitals of a cast-iron dog."²⁴ A faith-healer once told Jane Clemens that her granddaughter possessed healing powers, and for a long time thereafter Jane Clemens called upon her granddaughter to relieve her headaches.²⁵ Mark Twain's mother had a constant interest in spiritualism, and in her old age in Fredonia, New York, she frequently

²³ Statement by Webster, in Twain, "Ghost Life on the Mississippi," p. 486.

²⁴ Twain, Autobiography, I, 107-108.

²⁵ Doris Webster and Samuel Webster, "Whitewashing Jane Clemens," Bookman, LXI (July, 1925), 532.

discussed the subject with a Dr. Brown.²⁶

His mother's preoccupation with the folklore of the supernatural made an impression on young Sam Clemens, and this lore was always supported and emphasized by the doctrinal religion of his home. The Presbyterianism Sam knew was a primitive fundamentalism preoccupied with sin, the Last Judgment, and eternal damnation. The terrors of this early indoctrination he never entirely threw off.²⁷ This faith, he wrote later, gave one "the right to be punished as a Presbyterian hereafter; that is, the substantial Presbyterian punishment of fire and brimstone...The heaven and hell of the wildcat religions are vague and ill defined but there is nothing mixed about the Presbyterian heaven and hell. The Presbyterian hell is all misery; the heaven all happiness--nothing to do."²⁸ The terrors of the Presbyterian sense of sin and hell made a family death the occasion for unfounded self-reproaches²⁹ and grim broodings. The first such scene occurred at the death of Sam's sister, Margaret, when Sam was only four years old. Almost a week before the child died, Sam came into her sickroom one evening, walking in

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Wecter, Sam Clemens, p. 88.

²⁸ Mark Twain, "Reflections on the Sabbath," in The Washoe Giant in San Francisco, ed. Franklin Walker (San Francisco, 1938), p. 116.

²⁹ Throughout his life Mark Twain always sought to blame himself regarding tragedies with which he was associated. A constant grief was his conviction that he, in his carelessness, had caused the death of his infant son. Paine, Mark Twain, I, 456-457.

his sleep, and tugged at the bedding near Margaret's shoulder. The family read this as an instance of second sight, which was confirmed in their minds the next morning when Margaret was observed "picking at the coverlet," an infallible sign that death was near.³⁰ But the death which made by far the most lasting impression on the child Sam Clemens was his brother Ben's, which occurred when Sam was not quite seven years old. Jane Clemens made Sam kneel beside the child's corpse while she wept and moaned in anguish.³¹ These were the scenes of fear which were not far removed in their emotional mysticism from the fear of the world of ghosts, and the fact that the Clemens family took Sam's sleep-walking and pulling of the coverlet as evidences of second sight and a sign of impending death illustrates how the world of church dogma and that of superstition at times ran close together. Dixon Wecter remarks that Sam Clemens grew up in a family "that took its losses hard, and, like most folk from the hills of Kentucky and the highlands of Tennessee, tended to clothe these griefs in the grim retrospection of certain dreams, visions, and premonitions, along with heartbreaking farewells and lingering touches of self-reproach."³²

This home life in which times of tension were likely to involve supernatural interpretation left young Sam Clemens extremely receptive to his principal source of folklore knowledge, the Negro. When Sam was born, the Clemens family owned two slaves, Jennie and Uncle Ned. From the time the child was able to understand, he heard ghost

³⁰ Ibid., p. 22.

³¹ Twain, Autobiography, I, 115-116.

³² Wecter, Sam Clemens, p. 51.

stories, legends, superstitions, and tales from these two slaves who had charge of the children.³³ Sam heard the animal tales, so widespread in Negro lore, which the black folk brought with them from Africa. Many of these tales had an intrinsic charm especially delightful to children. The common trickster theme in which the rabbit, through superior cunning triumphed over his stronger enemies, and such stories as "Why the Dog Hates the Cat" and "Why the Porpoise Has His Tale on Crossways"³⁴ were always appealing. Not so well known is the fact that many of these tales dealt in stark animal terror. Most illuminating is a comparison of the delightful Uncle Remus story of the tar baby with some of its variants. One such variant depicted the tar baby as a living creature whose black lips were always fixed in an ugly grin.

This monster tar-baby, which haunted the woods and lonely places about the plantation, was represented as wholly vicious in character, ever bent upon ensnaring little folks into its yielding, though vice-like embrace.³⁵

This description points out the essential aspect of Negro folklore: it was basically a lore of fear. The impending dangers of the unseen world were a constant source of terror, and the animals symbolized the Negro fear. Most of the stories young Sam Clemens heard from these two household slaves were not the pleasant animal tales one identifies with Uncle Remus but were narrations of horror and

³³ Paine, Mark Twain, I, 15.

³⁴ Zora Hurston, Mules and Men (Philadelphia, 1935), pp. 201-203.

³⁵ Louis Pendleton, "Notes on Negro Folk-Lore and Witchcraft in the South," Journal of American Folklore, III (July, 1890), 201. Hereafter cited as JAF.

blood.³⁶

Outside the Clemens home were additional, and just as forceful Negro influences. The children of the neighborhood in Florida, and also in Hannibal, received the same occult training from the blacks, with the result that much of their talk concerned these mysteries of African origin as they learned to believe in spells, charms, spirits, and bad luck signs.³⁷ It is not difficult to guess the character of this lore, since it followed the same general pattern among the slaves. For the most part, this folklore had to do with the supposed malevolence of the supernatural world. The night was especially to be feared as a time most frequented by spirits and witches; but the daylight, too, failed to bring a feeling of complete security, since at this time one was able to see signs and omens of approaching evil. Death signs were especially numerous. A buzzard circling lazily in the sky;³⁸ a cow lowing at night or a whippoorwill's shrill at midnight;³⁹ a shawled woman coming suddenly into view;⁴⁰ a dark Christmas;⁴¹ a dead body that failed to stiffen quickly⁴²--all of these were signs of death. Many signs predicted

³⁶ Mary Lawton, A Lifetime with Mark Twain, the Memories of Katy Leary (New York, 1925), p. 21.

³⁷ Paine, Mark Twain, I, 16.

³⁸ Georgia Writer's Project, Drums and Shadows (Athens, 1940), p. 4.

³⁹ Carl Carmer, Stars Fell on Alabama (New York, 1934), p. 287.

⁴⁰ Virginia Hurdle, "Folklore of a Negro Couple in Henry County," Tennessee Folklore Society Bulletin, XIX (September, 1953), 77. Hereafter cited as TFSB.

⁴¹ Martha Emmons, "Dyin' Easy," in Tone the Bell Easy, Publications of the Texas Folk-Lore Society, No. X (Austin, 1932), p. 55.

⁴² Carmer, p. 287.

ill fortune short of death. To see the new moon through the tree tops or over the left shoulder meant certain bad luck during that moon,⁴³ and to sneeze on Sunday was a particularly bad sign forecasting ill luck for the rest of the week. Bad luck, too, would follow if a rabbit crossed one's path.⁴⁴

In addition to signs of impending evil, Sam Clemens undoubtedly heard fearsome tales of spirits and witches, preternatural beings which were lurid realities to the Negro. One's spirit was certain to stalk the earth if that person was either murdered⁴⁵ or died in the midst of some unfinished business.⁴⁶ This last, of course, included almost every corpse. The Negro was positive that spirits filled the night air. A touch of warm breath on the back of the neck revealed their presence; so did the low sound the forest made when the wind did not blow.⁴⁷ The Negro's principal terror of witches was that they might ride him, an experience which happens to Jim in the early pages of Huckleberry Finn; and many Negroes were ready to testify that they had been through this experience. To ride a person, the witch gently rolled the sleeping victim on his stomach, deftly slipped a bit between his teeth, jumped upon his back, and began a nightmarish journey that might

⁴³ N.F. Woodall, "Old Signs in Alabama," JAF, XLIII (July, 1930), 325.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 325.

⁴⁵ Hurston, Mules and Men, p. 332.

⁴⁶ Mildred Parsons, "Negro Folklore from Fayette County," TFSB, XIX (September, 1953), 68.

⁴⁷ Pendleton, "Notes," p. 206.

cover the entire world.⁴⁸ The victim awoke in a state of nervous exhaustion bordering on hysteria. Dixon Wecter, commenting on the influence such Negro tales as these had on young Sam Clemens, declares, "To analyze the part that terror, sheer animal terror, plays in a book like Huckleberry Finn, where death lurks at every bend of road or river, is to glimpse the effect of this early education upon the mind of a child."⁴⁹

But the slaves also acquainted the children of Florida and Hannibal with a preventative lore. There were many charms, for example, to ward off evil in general: a person could wear a silver coin around his neck;⁵⁰ he could carry mustard seed⁵¹ or a pair of Adam and Eve roots sewn together in a little bag.⁵² Particular preventatives were more reliable, however, for they struck at a defined cause of evil. If one placed his hand on the head of a dead man, that man's spirit would never haunt him.⁵³ To dissipate the bad luck set in motion by a rabbit crossing the path, a person must immediately make a cross mark, take three steps backward, turn around to his right, and spit on the ground.⁵⁴ Specific preventatives

⁴⁸ Tom P. Cross, "Folk-Lore from the Southern States," JAF, XXII (April, 1909), 252.

⁴⁹ Wecter, Sam Clemens, p. 46.

⁵⁰ Pendleton, "Notes," p. 203.

⁵¹ Zora Hurston, "Hoodoo in America," JAF, XLIV (October, 1931), 412.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Carmer, Stars Fell, p. 287.

⁵⁴ Woodall, "Old Signs," p. 325.

existed for witches. A good witch trap could be made by putting a handfull of salt on a sifter turned upside down,⁵⁵ and to hang a sifter on the doorknob or to turn the key crosswise in the keyhole prevented witches from entering the house.⁵⁶

Possibly the most elaborate system of charms belonged to the voodoo, sometimes called hoodoo, worshipers of Louisiana and the Gulf Coast. Voodoo was the name of a most powerful supernatural being which took the earthly form of a harmless snake.⁵⁷ Negroes held frequent night bacchanalian dances before a chosen king and queen, guardians of the snake, who usually sat by an altar lit with a few candles. On the altar rested a box which held the sacred snake.⁵⁸ High priests of this form of worship were the voodoo doctors, who were thought to be in league with this power. They employed an elaborate system of charms, spells, and potions to conjure a man into sickness or cure a person under such a spell. It is astonishing that these doctors often helped their patients, and the reason must lie in the fanatic belief of their followers,⁵⁹ this resulting in a kind of mind cure which accounts, to some

⁵⁵ Richard Dorson, "Negro Witch Stories on Tape," Midwest Folklore, II (Winter, 1952), 240.

⁵⁶ Cross, "Folk-Lore," p. 252.

⁵⁷ George W. Cable, "Creole Slave Songs," Century Magazine, XXXI (April, 1886), 815.

⁵⁸ For specific accounts of these rites, see Cable, pp. 815-821, and also Newbell N. Puckett, Folk Beliefs of the Southern Negro (Chapel Hill, 1926), pp. 181-183. The use of the altar and candles reveals the superficial Christianity which sometimes appeared in these rites.

⁵⁹ Puckett, Folk Beliefs, p. 300.

degree, for Mark Twain's lifelong interest in mental healing⁶⁰ and mental telegraphy.⁶¹

Although the elaborate rites of the voodoo worship remained confined, for the most part, to the Louisiana area, fragments of this belief were to be found among Negroes everywhere in America.⁶² Much of the medical lore which appears frequently in Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn most certainly stems from voodoo, for all voodoo doctors practiced root medicine and knew charms against disease.⁶³ In addition to the medical lore in these two books, such as the cures for warts and rattlesnake bites, Sam Clemens must have heard many other charms. Dead cats, for example, had other uses than the wart cure known to Huck. The skin of a black cat dried in the autumn sun and worn as a belt was a cure for rheumatism.⁶⁴ The chewing of stripped flux weed alleviated all manner of stomach ailments.⁶⁵ A person could save himself from the dreaded lock-jaw if he drew out the nail and drove it into the sunrise side of a green tree.⁶⁶

⁶⁰ Twain was much interested in the Christian Science dogma of healing, and also in the "mind curist" Dr. Whipple. Twain's daughter Susy became converted to mental healing; and in a letter to her Twain assured her, "I have no language to say how glad and grateful I am that you are a convert to that rational and noble philosophy. Stick to it; don't let anybody talk you out of it." Mark Twain, The Love Letters of Mark Twain, ed. Dixon Wecter (New York, 1949), pp. 285; 316.

⁶¹ Telegraphy was Twain's term for what is more commonly called mental telepathy today. Paine, I, 543.

⁶² Hurston, "Hoodoo," p. 318.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 414.

⁶⁴ Cross, "Folk-Lore," p. 255.

⁶⁵ Hurdle, "Folklore of a Negro Couple," p.72.

⁶⁶ Hurston, "Hoodoo," p. 415.

Young Sam Clemens undoubtedly experienced the most insistent influence of this Negro lore of cures, ominous signs, and evil spirits at the farm of his uncle, John Quarles. Quarles was well-to-do, owned many slaves, and enjoyed a comfortable life. It is his farm and its slave quarters which appear in the last portion of Huckleberry Finn.⁶⁷ During the Florida years, and even after the family moved to Hannibal, Sam spent much of his time on this farm. He loved its expanse and beauty, he idolized his uncle, and he was fascinated by the slaves. There was Auntie Cord, the Quarles' cook, who made such an impression on him that the essay, "A True Story," is supposed to be her narrative, word for word.⁶⁸ There was Aunt Hannah, a bedridden old Negress who was said to have come out of Egypt with Moses. Her accumulated wisdom made her infallible with regard to witches; and when spirits were about, she tied her hair into little tufts to dissipate their power. Sam and the other children on the Quarles place visited her almost every day.⁶⁹ Of the slaves on this farm, however, the one who made the strongest impression on Sam was Uncle Dan'l, who became the Jim of the novels.⁷⁰ He was about sixty at this time and a masterful storyteller. In the evenings, in the great kitchen, where the only light flickered dimly behind the teeth of the stove vents, Dan'l would hold the

⁶⁷ Twain, Autobiography, I, 96.

⁶⁸ Twain, Works, XIX, 265-272.

⁶⁹ Twain, Autobiography, I, 99-100.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 100.

children spellbound with his stories. The tale they always anticipated, because it strung them to such a pitch of terror, was "The Golden Arm,"⁷¹ a ghost story concerning a Negro who dug up his wife's grave to steal her golden arm and who almost died from fright when her wailing ghost stalked him, moaning, "W-h-o -- g-o-t -- m-y -- g-o-l-d-e-n -- a-r-m ?"⁷² Uncle Dan'l's startling climax, "You've got it!" was a master stroke, and if one wishes to trace Mark Twain's brilliant success in telling stories on the lecture platform, one should begin his investigations here, for Twain learned the basic art from the slaves long before he encountered the California raconteur, Jim Gillis, during his western years.⁷³ This folklore of the Negroes early worked itself into young Sam's being and exerted frequent influence, giving a certain direction to his interpretation of things. His speaking of the spinning wheel on the farm "whose rising and falling wail, heard from a distance, was the mournfulest of all sounds to me, and made me homesick and low spirited, and filled my atmosphere with the wandering spirits of the dead,"⁷⁴ is typical. These summers on the Quarles farm ended when Sam's father died in 1847, and Sam, then twelve years old, was apprenticed to the printer's trade,⁷⁵ but he was never to forget the superstitions he learned there nor the admiration he bore

⁷¹ Mark Twain, Mark Twain to Uncle Remus 1881-1885, ed. Thomas H. English. Emory University Publications, Sources and Reprints, 7th Series, No. 3 (Atlanta, 1953), p. 11.

⁷² Twain, Works, XXII, 7-15.

⁷³ Wecter, Sam Clemens, p. 46.

⁷⁴ Twain, Autobiography, I, 102-103.

⁷⁵ Wecter, p. 101.

the Negro.⁷⁶

Mark Twain served in the printer's trade for nine years, after which, in 1857, he began training as a pilot on the Mississippi River. It is well to consider the influence of these pilot years now, for their influence with respect to the world of the supernatural is more closely related to Twain's boyhood experiences among the slaves than to his printer years, which concern a literary folklore that becomes most important after Mark Twain's piloting experience.

Twain heard many ghost stories and tales of the supernatural during his years on the Mississippi. Much of this lore is discussed in the next chapter, but it should be emphasized here that superstitions encountered on the land were easily adapted to life

⁷⁶ This admiration is observed most clearly in Twain's love of singing and acting out the Negro spirituals. Katy Leary, the Clemens' maid, tells the following story: "I heard about one night when there was company at the Warners' and Mr. Clemens was there, and it was a perfectly lovely night and there was a full moon outside and no lights in the house. They was just settin' there in the music room, looking out at the moonlight. And suddenly Mr. Clemens got right up without any warning and begun to sing one of them negro Spirituals. A lady that was there told me he just stood up with both his eyes shut and begun to sing kind of soft like--a faint sound, just as if there was wind in the trees, she said; and he kept right on singin' kind o' low and sweet, and it was beautiful and made your heart ache somehow. And he kept on singin' and singin' and became kind of lost in it, and he was all lit up--his face was. 'Twas somethin' from another world, she said, and when he got through, he put his two hands up to his head, just as though all the sorrow of them negroes was upon him; and then he begun to sing, 'Nobody Knows the Trouble I Got, Nobody Knows but Jesus.' That was one of them negro spiritual songs, and when he come to the end, to the Glory Halleluiah, he gave a great shout--just like the negroes do--he shouted out the Glory, Glory, Halleluiah! They said it was wonderful and none of them would forget it as long as they lived." Lawton, A Lifetime, pp. 212-213. See also Clara Clemens, My Father Mark Twain (New York, 1931), p. 188; James B. Pound, Eccentricities of Genius (New York, 1900), p. 231; and William Dean Howells, My Mark Twain (New York, 1910), p. 99.

on the river, and the crews of the steamboats had their own tales of the occult. Mark Twain's niece, Anne Moffett, remembered Twain's narrating a story concerning a phantom pilot, a tale which transfixed her with horror.⁷⁷ This story does not appear in Life on the Mississippi, which is to be regretted, for it has a logic which urges belief and is one of the best ghost stories Twain ever wrote. It concerns a Captain Jones who was seized by the devil for running Goose Island, a dangerous stretch of the river, and who returned one night as a ghost, took the wheel from the apprehensive pilot who was nearing Goose Island, and steered the boat through.⁷⁸ Twain professed to believe the story, and though it may be argued that this was just a device to make the tale more realistic, there are passages in Life on the Mississippi, as will be seen, in which he strongly stated his belief in a superstition where no such artistic purpose is evident. Later in his life, too, he had an experience which convinced him for a time that he had actually encountered a ghost.⁷⁹ One cannot be certain what his attitude towards ghosts was, but he felt the influence of this lore keenly, and perhaps he appraised it best himself when he said of hell that although he didn't believe in it, he was much afraid of it.

The folklore of second sight, which Mark Twain may have learned from the slaves,⁸⁰ and which was supported by his family's reminding

⁷⁷ Remark by Webster in Mark Twain, Mark Twain Business Man, ed. Samuel C. Webster (Boston, 1946), p. 48.

⁷⁸ Twain, "Ghost Life on the Mississippi," pp. 486-490.

⁷⁹ See below, p. 34.

⁸⁰ Wecter, Sam Clemens, p. 197.

him of his pulling the coverlet prior to the death of his sister Margaret, had become a part of Twain's nature before he left printing for the river; and during his pilot years he had two experiences which confirmed him in this lore and contributed to his becoming a strong believer in mental telegraphy. While on the river, he once dreamed that a girl he hardly knew, Fannie Maltbie, had died. The dream upset him, for since he was not well acquainted with the girl, he supposed that a member of his family was ill. When he next returned home, his niece opened the door and surprised him with, "Uncle Sam, Fanny Maltbie is dead."⁸¹ But the dream which made Mark Twain a believer in second sight foretold the death of his brother Henry, a dream amazingly exact in its details. One night, while ashore between trips on the river, Twain dreamed of seeing Henry's corpse.

He lay in a metallic burial case. He was dressed in a suit of my clothing, and on his breast lay a great bouquet of flowers, mainly white roses, with a red rose in the center. The casket stood upon a couple of chairs.⁸²

At the time, Henry was working on the steamboat, the Pennsylvania, and a few weeks after this dream, that ship blew up near Memphis and Henry died shortly thereafter from inhaling the scalding steam from the ship's boilers. What followed in the makeshift hospital where Henry died is best told in Twain's own words:

He was carried to the dead-room and I went away for a while to a citizen's house and slept off some of my

⁸¹ Reported by Webster, in Mark Twain Business Man, p. 46.

⁸² Twain, Autobiography, I, 308-309.

accumulated fatigue--and meantime something was happening. The coffins provided for the dead were of unpainted white pine, but in this instance some of the ladies of Memphis had made up a fund of sixty dollars and bought a metallic case, and when I came back and entered the dead-room Henry lay in that open case, and he was dressed in a suit of my clothing. I recognized instantly that my dream of several weeks before was here exactly reproduced, so far as these details went--and I think I missed one detail, but that one was immediately supplied, for just then an elderly lady entered the place with a large bouquet consisting mainly of white roses, and in the center of it was a red rose, and she laid it on his breast. ⁸³

Mark Twain's dreams were surprisingly vivid. All through his life he was able, upon awaking, to recall each detail, each facial expression, with startling exactness; ⁸⁴ and this, coupled with an occasional fulfilled prophecy he encountered in sleep, led him to assert that the life of dreams is a reality and that this "spiritualized" reality ⁸⁵ is what continues after death, that in this enduring dream we encounter other living spirits. ⁸⁶

That Mark Twain loved the Mississippi River his references to it in Tom Sawyer, Huckleberry Finn, and Life on the Mississippi show. Stephen Leacock was right when he observed that "Twain's knowledge of the great river and his abiding feeling for it became part of his life and the inspiration...of the finest of his work." ⁸⁷ This response to the Mississippi is frequently colored by Twain's use of folklore symbols to describe its attraction for him. A

⁸³ Twain, Autobiography, I, 311-312.

⁸⁴ Mark Twain, "My Platonic Sweetheart," in The Mysterious Stranger and Other Stories (New York, 1922), p. 302.

⁸⁵ Mark Twain, Mark Twain's Notebook, ed. Albert B. Paine (New York, 1935), pp. 351-352.

⁸⁶ Twain, "My Platonic Sweetheart," p. 303.

⁸⁷ Stephen Leacock, Mark Twain (Edinburgh, 1932), p. 29.

passage in a letter to his wife, written in 1882 during his return visit to the river, is typical.

The dense foliage was beautiful in the fog. Every time we made a crossing we would be out of sight of land for some minutes, & then the great groves, like the faintest & filmiest spectres, would loom into view. ⁸⁸ They did not seem real, but only the spirits of trees.

The folklore Twain learned on the Mississippi River extended his knowledge of folk materials and continued unbroken the constant influence such lore had always exerted upon him. When Twain left piloting in 1861 because of the Civil War and went West, he was never again to be so insistently under the influence of the folklore of the supernatural as he had been up to this time. The training in this lore he encountered in his own home and in the tales of the Negroes was at an end. However, this influence endured. He was to draw upon folklore for the rest of his life and be susceptible to the tales and spells of other countries during his travels. But if his training in the supernatural lore of his native land was terminated, he now developed a knowledge of a new, literary genre of folklore which was to become the second major folklore influence upon his writing. This was the tall tale and its ancillary characteristics, the hoax, the artistic lie, the shrewd boast, the careful understatement, and wild extravaganza.

The tall tale grew out of the early days of the expanding frontier and constitutes America's specific contribution to world folklore. The backwoodsman's stories were greatly influenced by the

⁸⁸ Twain, Love Letters, p. 213.

vastness, the dangers, and the wildness of the frontier. Strength, size, and power became the ideals of the pioneer in the wilderness, and these were manifested in his talk. His stories, abounding in exaggeration of incident and character, reflected his environment. "It was the wilderness," writes Constance Rourke, "with its impenetrable depths, the wild storms of the West, the great rivers, the strange new wonders on every side, that produced the content of these stories..."⁸⁹ The tall tale also took strong root in the frontiersman's inclination to defend himself against criticism by exaggerating the habit under abuse. He increased his swagger when he was called truculent; he embroidered his exploits when dismissed as a braggart.⁹⁰ Probably the most fundamental reason the tall tale sprang up on the frontier was that it provided an important need: it gave the pioneer a tradition of strength which he sorely needed in a wilderness involving dreadful odds,⁹² and one has only to turn to the legends of Davy Crockett and Mike Fink to see a frontiersman bragging himself into a courage with which to face the dangers of the frontier. The tall tale involved more than exaggeration. The exaggeration had to be strikingly picturesque, usually

⁸⁹ Constance Rourke, American Humor (New York, 1953), p. 40.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 49. For other discussions of the tall tale, see Franklin J. Meine, "Introduction," in Tall Tales of the Southwest (New York, 1946), pp. xv-xxx; V.L.O. Chittick, "Introduction," in Ring-Tailed Roarers (Caldwell, 1946), pp. 13-25; and DeVoto, Twain's America, p. 243.

⁹¹ Rourke, p. 46.

⁹² Grant C. Loomis, "The American Tall Tale and the Miraculous," California Folklore Quarterly, IV (April, 1945), 110.

in the manner of comparison. Mody Boatright gives the following example:

No old-time cowboy would expect to amuse you by saying that the outfit for which he worked owned a billion acres of land, as gross an overstatement as this would be. He would say that they used the state of Arizona for a calf pasture; that it took three days to ride from the yard gate to the front gallery; that the range reached so far that the sun set between headquarters and the west line camp.⁹³

It involved understatement; it often rambled into an endless tale; but always there was a basic, logical progression colored by the fancy of the teller which, when done with extreme art, often played down striking exaggeration and only gradually allowed the listener to suspect that he was taking in an impossible narration. Regarding this kind of tall tale, Boatright declares, "For the tallest of tall tales as distinguished from mere tall talk had logic and structure. The tall tale is logical in all points but one. It begins plausibly and builds carefully to a climax, and the narrative must not topple until the climax is reached."⁹⁴

Although Mark Twain was to experience this folklore most fully after his piloting days when he went to the gold and silver mining regions of Nevada, he first encountered this lore during his boyhood. When Twain was growing up, many of these folk stories were in the wind all through Missouri.⁹⁵ Twain's uncle, John Quarles, was

⁹³ Mody C. Boatright, Folk Laughter on the American Frontier (New York, 1949), pp. 87-88.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 90.

⁹⁵ Minnie M. Brashear, "The Missouri Short Story as It Has Grown Out of the Tall Tale of the Frontier," Missouri Historical Review, XLIII (April, 1949), 200.

a splendid storyteller, and the tall yarns he spun as a candidate for county judge, as a store owner in Florida, and as landlord of the Virginia House, which was the county seat during the Civil War, had a wide celebrity.⁹⁶ Quarles told a variant of the jumping frog story long before Twain heard it from Ben Coon in the California hills.⁹⁷ His remark that the lightning never struck the trees in Tennessee because those trees were so tall and twisting that the bolt would get lost before it found the ground has the true tall tale ring.⁹⁸

After his father died in 1847, Mark Twain worked on newspapers in Hannibal, first on Joseph Ament's Missouri Courier and then on his brother Orion's paper, the Weekly Dollar Journal, during the late 1840's and 1850's. At this time, the tall tale and its humorous by-products, the hoax and the elaborate joke, were basic newspaper productions,⁹⁹ and Twain set these stories in type and became familiar with them. He continued to see them when he traveled as a printer in New York, Philadelphia, Keokuk, and Cincinnati from 1853 to 1857. Later, in Nevada, when his attempts to strike it rich in the mines proved a fiasco and he found work in Virginia City on the newspaper, the Territorial Enterprise, he was not without

⁹⁶ "A Journey to the Home Town of Mark Twain," Kansas City Star, May 19, 1912, p. 1B.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Meine, "Introduction," p. xv. See also Edgar M. Branch, The Literary Apprenticeship of Mark Twain (Urbana, 1950), pp. 5-6, and Ray B. West, Jr., "Mark Twain's Idyl of Frontier America," University of Kansas City Review, XV (Winter, 1948), 93-96.

some training. An earlier letter to his mother in which he describes the Carson River as having "wandered into the country without intending it, and had run about in a bewildered way and got lost, in its hurry to get out again before some thirsty man came along and drank it up,"¹⁰⁰ and his mock Fourth of July speech which first caught the notice of the Enterprise and which began, "I was sired by the Great American Eagle and foaled by a continental dam,"¹⁰¹ --these showed a talent worth developing.

The miners of Nevada sought relief from a hard existence, and this Joe Goodman, editor of the Enterprise, provided. The paper was filled with gigantic hoaxes, burlesques, and tall tales that shook the territory. William Wright, who signed himself Dan De-Quille, had the paper's most effective pen in this vein, and he taught Mark Twain something of his art. Twain's elaborate hoaxes of "The Petrified Man" and "The Empire City Massacre" made him famous to the Pacific coast. Noah Brooks, a newspaper man on the Alta California, recalled that during this period, "I was advised to read certain amusing squibs and sketches in a Nevada newspaper (the "Virginia City Enterprise"), if I would see specimens of genuine American humor--frolicksome, extravagant, and audacious. These contributions, when signed at all, were over the somewhat puzzling signature of 'Mark Twain.'"¹⁰² It was this genuineness, this contact with the folklore of the people, which became his daily concern

¹⁰⁰ Mark Twain, Mark Twain's Letters, ed. Albert B. Paine (New York, 1917), I, 54-55.

¹⁰¹ Paine, Mark Twain, I, 203.

¹⁰² Noah Brooks, "Mark Twain in California," Century Magazine, LVII (November, 1898), 98.

on the Enterprise and which led one critic to assert, "No man ever sprang more thoroughly from the people or was better qualified to interpret the people."¹⁰³

Twain had served not quite two years on the Enterprise when he became involved in a duel with a rival editor and was forced to flee the country in front of the law. He and Steve Gillis, a close friend and fellow worker on the Enterprise, went to California and obtained positions on the San Francisco Morning Call, but this paper's stringent editorial policy placed unfamiliar restraints on Mark Twain. He shortly lost interest and was asked to resign. At this point, Joe Goodman asked Twain to contribute pieces to the Enterprise and to write as he wished. Twain did so. He lashed the corruption he found in San Francisco, and when the issues of the Enterprise arrived in California, they shook San Francisco's City Hall. The police officials watched for an opportunity to move in on their tormentor, and when Steve Gillis was arrested during a barroom fight and Mark Twain put up the bail, an opportunity seemed to offer. Gillis did not appear in court and the police moved against both him and Twain. The pair fled to Calaveras County in the California Tuolumne Hills, where Steve's brother, Jim Gillis, a pocket miner, had a cabin in the woods on Jackass Hill. In this cabin, Twain listened to the finest tall tale spinner he had ever heard. Steve Gillis was a good storyteller in his own way, but his brother Jim was incomparable. From Jim Gillis, Twain learned the

¹⁰³ Gamaliel Bradford, "Mark Twain," Atlantic Monthly, CXXV (April, 1920), 463.

narration of "The Burning Shame," which appears, cleaned and considerably cut, as the king's cameleopard in Huckleberry Finn; he listened to the story of the mining cat, Tom Quartz, which found its way into Roughing It; and, above all, he heard the yarn of the blue-jay that tried to fill a house with acorns, a story which appears in A Tramp Abroad and is one of Mark Twain's best known tales.¹⁰⁴ On Jackass Hill, Twain also listened to the saturnine Ben Coon tell a story of a jumping frog that was filled with shot.¹⁰⁵ This may have recalled to Twain the variant of this story he had heard as a boy from John Quarles. At any rate, Twain wanted to keep this story in mind. He jotted its outline in his notebook, and when Artemus Ward arrived in San Francisco and listened to Mark Twain tell the story, Ward told him to send it East. The story appeared in the Saturday Press in November, 1865, as "Jim Smiley and His Jumping Frog."¹⁰⁶ This tall tale made Twain's name known over America and gave him the means by which to establish a far-reaching reputation. A year after the publication of the story, Twain left for Hawaii as a feature writer for the Sacramento Daily Union to write the letters which would increase this reputation.

When Mark Twain left for Hawaii, he had learned from the West a folklore which would play a significant role in his later work. The tall tale exerted an influence upon him which contributed basic

¹⁰⁴ Mark Twain, Mark Twain in Eruption, ed. Bernard DeVoto (New York, 1940), pp. 361-362.

¹⁰⁵ Paine, Mark Twain, I, 271.

¹⁰⁶ This was the original title. Paine, Mark Twain, p. 278.

units to his humor,¹⁰⁷ the studied exaggeration, the elaborate frontier anecdote, and the ability to turn a startling phrase. His travel books, his novels, and his essays are seldom free from this influence. His tall tale sketch, "The Canvasser's Tale,"¹⁰⁸ for example, presents a huckster who makes a living selling echoes; and within the melodrama of his "A Double-Barreled Detective Story,"¹⁰⁹ Twain opens a chapter with a paragraph of description that is a hoax of contradictions in the best manner of his Enterprise days. Twain's frontier breadth of phrase one observes, for example, in his savage attack upon the lunatic who assassinated the Empress of Austria in 1898:

And who is the miracle-worker who has furnished to the world this spectacle? All the ironies are compacted in the answer. He is at the bottom of the human ladder, as the accepted estimates of degree and value go: a soiled and patched young loafer, without gifts, without talents, without education, without morals, without character, without any born charm or any acquired one that wins or beguiles or attracts; without a single grace of mind or heart or hand that any tramp or prostitute could envy him; an unfaithful private in the ranks, an incompetent stone-cutter, an

¹⁰⁷ Miss Brashear rightly asserts, "His autobiographical narrative as well as his best-known stories partake of the manner and matter of the tall tale." Brashear, "Missouri Short Story," p. 207.

¹⁰⁸ Twain, Works, XX, 363-370.

¹⁰⁹ "It was a crisp and spicy morning in early October. The lilacs and laburnums, lit with the glory-fires of autumn, hung burning and flashing in the upper air, a fairy bridge provided by kind Nature for the wingless wild things that have their homes in the tree-tops and would visit together; the larch and the pomegranate flung their purple and yellow flames in brilliant broad splashes along the slanting sweep of the woodland; the sensuous fragrance of innumerable deciduous flowers rose upon the swoning atmosphere; far in the empty sky a solitary oesophagus slept upon motionless wing; everywhere brooded stillness, serenity, and the peace of God." Twain, Works, XXIII, 312-313.

inefficient lacky; in a word, a mangy, offensive, empty, unwashed, vulgar, gross, mephitic, timid, sneaking, human polecat.¹¹⁰

The proposed epitaph he wrote for King Leopold of Belgium is shorter but carries the same sting in its wild phrasing:

Here under this gilded tomb lies rotting the body of one the smell of whose name will still offend the nostrils of men ages upon ages after all the Caesars and Washingtons & Napoleons shall have ceased to be praised or blamed & been forgotten--Leopold of Belgium.¹¹¹

These essays, written periodically during his life, pretty well indicate how thoroughly Mark Twain had assimilated the folklore he learned in his home, from the Negroes, during his pilot days, and on the frontier. He frequently draws upon this lore when the reader least expects him to, and does it with an unconscious ease that reveals an author thoroughly familiar with folklore materials. In his "In Defense of Harriet Shelley," for example, one of his few pieces of literary criticism, Twain lashes out at Dowden's Life of Shelley, among other things condemning the cunning of Dowden's style, comparing the prose to the pretense and posturing of the traditional Negro fashion show, the cake-walk.¹¹² In his essay, "Is Shakespeare Dead?" written late in life, Twain tries to make a point for the Baconians by employing the figure of the tar-baby, drawn from Negro lore, to illustrate how the worship of an idol can contradict reason and endure for centuries.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Mark Twain, "The Memorable Assassination," in What Is Man? (New York, 1917), pp. 169-170.

¹¹¹ Quoted by Albert B. Paine. Paine, Mark Twain, II, 1231.

¹¹² Twain, Works, XXII, 17-18.

¹¹³ Twain, What Is Man?, p. 365.

Certain essays throw a revealing light on Mark Twain's conception of spirits. Twain's vivid memories of family deaths and the terrors of his nighttime dreams led him to associate the lore of spirits with these two things. The night always fascinated him and held for him a note of apprehension not unlike the nighttime broodings of Huckleberry Finn. A letter to Olivia Langdon during their courtship dramatizes this fascination:

They [a frog chorus] made good music to-night, especially when it was very still & lonely & a long-drawn dog-howl swelled up out of the far distance & blended with it. The shadows seemed to grow more sombre, then, & the stillness more solemn, & the whispering foliage more spiritual, & the mysterious murmur of the night-wind more freighted with the moanings of shrouded wanderers from the [grave] tombs. The "voices of the night" are always eloquent.¹¹⁴

In his essay, "The Turning-Point of My Life," he easily adopted spirit imagery to describe the actions of his family when a deadly epidemic of measles threatened the house: "...the family moved spectrally about on tiptoe, in a ghostly hush."¹¹⁵ This recalls a letter he wrote to his friend Mrs. Fairbanks in 1870 in which he described the household where his father-in-law lay dying: "It is the saddest, saddest time. There is no sound in the house; 'the mourners go about' like spirits."¹¹⁶ On shipboard in the Pacific one evening, he felt the mystery of the night when watching a porpoise plunge by and appropriately drew upon spirit figures:

¹¹⁴ Twain, Love Letters, p. 89.

¹¹⁵ Twain, What Is Man?, p. 131.

¹¹⁶ Mark Twain, Mark Twain to Mrs. Fairbanks, ed. Dixon Wecter (San Marino, 1949), p. 133.

The night was so dark that the actual surface of the sea was not distinguishable, and so it was a weird sight to see this spiral ghost come suddenly flashing along out of the solid gloom and stream past like a meteor.¹¹⁷

As Twain grew older, this habit of associating sickness and the night with the supernatural developed into his feeling that the silent spirits of the dead return to the house in which their bodies died. In his old age, this feeling became a positive conviction, for two reasons: his knowledge of folklore would not let him reject the idea lightly; in addition, he gained some comfort from this idea in his loneliness of watching his friends and his own family drop around him. When his daughter Jean died in 1909, a year before Mark Twain's own death, he poured out his feelings in the essay, "The Death of Jean" and uttered his final word regarding the spirits of the dead:

The spirits of the dead hallow a house, for me. It was not so with other members of my family. Susy died in the house we built in Hartford. Mrs. Clemens would never enter it again. But it made the house dearer to me. I have entered it once since, when it was tenantless and silent and forlorn, but to me it was a holy place and beautiful. It seemed to me that the spirits of the dead were all about me, and would speak to me and welcome me if they could...¹¹⁸

These examples from the essays illustrate that folklore for Mark Twain was not a passive knowledge to be used for literary effects when the mood prompted but was actually a living part of his thought. He was ready to admit, if asked frankly, that he was superstitious.¹¹⁹ Although he frequently deprecated mindreaders and

¹¹⁷ Twain, Notebook, p. 251.

¹¹⁸ Twain, What Is Man?, p. 118.

¹¹⁹ Paine, Mark Twain, II, 1410. He also made this statement about himself (see below) when describing his visit to Cheiro, the palmist.

spiritualists,¹²⁰ he always consulted them.¹²¹ In Hartford he knew the spiritualist Hooker very well and is said to have believed Hooker when he said his little girl appeared before him during a seance.¹²² When in London, Twain was much interested in Frederic Myers, a spiritualist who edited the Psychical Research Magazine.¹²³ This acquaintance may have led him to the London palmist who predicted death for Mrs. Clemens within a year, a prediction which upset Twain terribly.¹²⁴ But the man who convinced Twain was the famous Cheiro.¹²⁵ After Twain experienced financial misfortune during his sixties, he consulted this palmist. Cheiro made a prediction which Twain felt was fulfilled when he later signed a new contract with

¹²⁰ Twain, Mark Twain in Eruption, p. 339. See also, Twain, Mark Twain Business Man, p. 57.

¹²¹ The knowledge he gained from them prompted his making his famous character, Colonel Sellers, a spiritualist, among other things, in an abortive play he and William Dean Howells collaborated upon. Howells, My Mark Twain, p. 23.

¹²² Lawton, A Lifetime, pp. 210-211.

¹²³ Clara Clemens, p. 184. Frederic Myers lived from 1843 to 1901. He was a leading London spiritualist and one of the founders of the Society for Psychical Research. Dictionary of National Biography, the Concise Dictionary from the Beginning to 1930 (London, 1939), pp. 924-925.

¹²⁴ Lawton, A Lifetime, p. 182.

¹²⁵ Count Louis Hamon, who called himself "Cheiro," lived from 1866-1936. He was probably the most famous palmist of his day. The New York Times, October 9, 1936, p. 25.

the Harper firm. As Twain tells the story, one cannot help catching his tone of sincere belief.

In 1895 Cheiro, the palmist, examined my hand and said that in my 68th year (1903), I would become suddenly rich. I was bankrupt and \$94,000 in debt at the time, through the failure of Chas. L. Webster & Co. Two years later--in London--Cheiro repeated this long-distance prediction and added that the riches would come from a quite unexpected source. I am superstitious. I kept the prediction in mind and often thought of it. When at last it came true, Oct. 22, 1903, there was but a month and nine days to spare.¹²⁶

Concomitant with Mark Twain's interest in spiritualism was his preoccupation with mental telegraphy. From 1874 he kept a record of supposed mind communications¹²⁷ and asserted that he had a superstitious conviction of the validity of some of his experiences regarding telegraphy.¹²⁸ "The things which pass through my mind when I lie awake in the morning," he noted, "are pretty sure to be the topics introduced by others at breakfast or dinner, that day or the next."¹²⁹ Twain closely linked mental telegraphy with spiritualism, and it was this that led to an experience which proved to him that he had never really denied, to himself, the possibility of the existence of ghosts. It was natural that his folklore background would prompt his associating spiritualism, mental telegraphy, and ghostlore in the same way he associated the mystery of the dark and spirits; and although, as has been noted, Twain asserted in Life on the Mississippi that it was strange that the people of his

¹²⁶ Twain, Notebook, p. 381.

¹²⁷ Twain, Works, XXI, 365. See also, Twain, Notebook, pp. 368-369.

¹²⁸ Twain, Works, XXI, 376.

¹²⁹ Twain, Notebook, p. 166.

boyhood believed in ghosts, this experience illustrates that he himself had never made a final break from such belief. A man who could feel the presence of the spirits of the dead was not likely to. As Twain relates the experience,

...I was standing on the porch one day, when I saw a man coming up the walk. He was a stranger, and I hoped he would ring and carry his business into the house without stopping to argue with me; he would have to pass the front door to get to me, and I hoped he wouldn't take the trouble; to help, I tried to look like a stranger myself--it often works. I was looking straight at the man; he had got to within ten feet of the door and within twenty-five feet of me--and suddenly he disappeared. It was as astounding as if a church should vanish from before your face and leave nothing behind it but a vacant lot. I was unspeakably delighted. I had seen an apparition at last, with my own eyes, in broad daylight. I made up my mind to write an account of it to the society. I ran to where the specter had been, to make sure he was playing fair, then I ran to the other end of the porch, scanning the open grounds as I went. No, everything was perfect; he couldn't have escaped without my seeing him; he was an apparition, without the slightest doubt, and I would write him up before he was cold. I ran, hot with excitement, and let myself in with a latch-key. When I stepped into the hall my lungs collapsed and my heart stood still. For there sat that same apparition in a chair all alone, and as quiet and reposeful as if he had come to stay a year! ...How did this man stand two minutes at that door, within five steps of me, and I did not see him? ... During at least sixty seconds that day I was asleep, or at least totally unconscious, without suspecting it. In that interval the man came to my immediate vicinity, rang, stood there and waited, then entered and closed the door, and I did not see him and did not hear the door slam.¹³⁰

The fact is that Mark Twain was a good deal more superstitious than has been recognized. Robert Underwood Johnson recalled that in Vienna Twain was much interested in occult things, in dreams, and

¹³⁰ Twain, Works, XXI, 386-387.

second-sight.¹³¹ In a letter to his friend Henry H. Rogers, who helped him out of his financial difficulties, Twain stressed that he had always been lucky and superstitious, that the former quality had saved him from death many times and the latter forbade his ever having business dealings with his family and certain friends who had always been unlucky.¹³² Whenever he left Quarry Farm, where he loved to do his writing, he would leave something behind so as to be sure of returning.¹³³ In the Strand Theatre one evening, when watching his friend William Gillette act in Secret Service, a black cat, not in the play, walked across the stage during the second act. Twain exclaimed to his companion, "Mark my words, Dr. Jim, poor Gillette is in for some misfortune or other this evening"; and upon going backstage at the end of the act, Twain discovered his prophecy as he saw Gillette dressing his forefinger, which he had cut badly on the telegraph key.¹³⁴ During the months that his wife lay dying, he always uttered his good luck word, "Unberufen," whenever her condition seemed to improve.¹³⁵ Lastly, Mark Twain felt

¹³¹ Robert Underwood Johnson, Remembered Yesterdays (Boston, 1923), p. 320.

¹³² Twain, Mark Twain's Letters, II, 621-622.

¹³³ Edward Wagenknecht, Mark Twain the Man and His Work (New Haven, 1935), p. 197.

¹³⁴ J.R. Clemens, "Some Reminiscences of Mark Twain," Overland Monthly, LXXXVII (April, 1929), 105.

¹³⁵ Paine, Mark Twain, II, 1216-1217. See also, Twain, Love Letters, pp. 267; 269; 286, for uses of this word in other hopeful circumstances.

that in some way his life was related to the great orbit of Halley's Comet. In 1909 he told Paine, his biographer, "I came in with Halley's comet in 1835. It is coming again next year, and I expect to go out with it."¹³⁶ This did happen. Of Mark Twain's feeling about this, Dixon Wecter shrewdly sums up the influences of a lifetime:

To Mark Twain, schooled in the omens and clairvoyance of the backwoods, this apparition seemed mystically bound up with his own span from birth to death.¹³⁷

To appreciate the active part folklore played in Mark Twain's life is to begin to understand why this lore received so frequent attention in his writing; but to appreciate this fully, one must know something of Twain's methods of composition. His friend William Dean Howells remarked of Twain:

...he wrote as he thought, and as all men think, without sequence, without an eye to what went before or should come after.¹³⁸

This agrees with Mark Twain's own remarks concerning his writing procedure:

...narrative should flow as flows the brook down through the hills and the leafy woodlands, its course changed by every boulder it comes across and by every grass-clad gravelly spur that projects into its path; its surface broken, but its course not stayed by rocks and gravel on the bottom in the shoal places; a brook that never goes straight for a minute, but goes, and goes briskly, sometimes ungrammatically, and sometimes fetching a horseshoe three-quarters of a mile around, and at the end of the circuit flowing within a yard of the path it traversed an hour before; but always going, and always

¹³⁶ Clara Clemens, My Father, p. 279.

¹³⁷ Wecter, Sam Clemens, p. 43.

¹³⁸ Howells, My Mark Twain, p. 17.

following at least one law, always loyal to that law, the law of narrative, which has no law.¹³⁹

Elsewhere he says of the writer just addressing himself to his paper:

He has no clear idea of his story; in fact he has no story. He merely has some people in his mind, and an incident or two, also a locality. He knows these people, he knows the selected locality, and he trusts that he can plunge those people into those incidents with interesting results.¹⁴⁰

Although there are times when Mark Twain writes with a calculated artistry, with a keen eye to future developments,¹⁴¹ these statements are, in general, factual and indicate to what degree he relied upon inspiration. The inspiration, however, must be grounded in experience¹⁴² which has slowly accumulated in the mind.

A foreigner can photograph the exteriors of a nation, but I think that that is as far as he can get. I think that no foreigner can report its interior--its soul, its life, its speech, its thought. I think that a knowledge of these things is acquirable in only one way; not two or four or six--absorption; years and years of unconscious absorption; years and years of intercourse with the life concerned; of living it, indeed...¹⁴³

One may now perceive how inevitable it was that folklore should play an important role in the writings of an author saturated with

¹³⁹ Twain, Autobiography, I, 237.

¹⁴⁰ Twain, Works, XIV, 229.

¹⁴¹ His using folklore to forecast events in a novel is the most striking example. See Chapter V.

¹⁴² In a fragment of a letter, written in 1891, Twain wrote, "I confine myself to life with which I am familiar when pretending to portray life." Twain, Mark Twain's Letters, II, 541.

¹⁴³ Twain, Works, XXII, 145.

folk materials and holding these views regarding his art. This method of composition, this heavy reliance upon inspiration, is responsible for some of Mark Twain's most brilliant passages and for some of his most painful incongruities. Burlesque and extravaganza, for example, often break the harmony of a passage and leave it a shambles of misdirection. Mark Twain's use of folklore is intrinsically bound up with this unevenness in his work; folk materials continually appear, but they appear to different purposes and achieve different effects. Sometimes, as in passages in Tom Sawyer, and Huckleberry Finn, folk materials are controlled with fine artistry, but in some other works the results are not always as happy. In order to appreciate exactly Twain's artistic achievement where folklore is used to good advantage and contributes much to a particular work, one should first be familiar with examples of his writings which, although some may contain brief passages of excellence, show a frequent uncertain handling of folk materials. The best examples of this are found in the travel books.

Chapter II

The Travel Books

A review of the travel accounts of the principal American literary figures from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the appearance of Mark Twain's first published travel book, The Innocents Abroad (1869), reveals that only the early Washington Irving approached Twain's interest in using folk materials in such books. Longfellow's Outre-Mer (1833-34), for example, a series of sketches of France, Spain, and Italy in the manner of Irving's Sketch Book, discloses a youthful writer concentrating on a pastoral prose style to color his European sketches and hints only dimly at his later enthusiasm for folk materials, especially the Indian legends which enter his more mature work.¹ In Nathaniel P. Willis' Pencillings by the Way (1835), a lengthy work widely read in its day, one finds Willis covering much the same ground Mark Twain later treated in The Innocents Abroad and A Tramp Abroad; but the legends and other lore Twain associated with Europe and Asia received scant notice

¹ Longfellow's discussion in Outre-Mer of medieval French songs in the chapter "The Trouvères" and of ancient Spanish ballads in a chapter of that title and his legend "The Monk of St. Anthony," for which he lists a Norman fabliau as a source, indicate this beginning enthusiasm. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Outre-Mer, in The Works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (Boston, 1886), VII, 32-47; 90-101; 153-172.

from Willis.² James Fenimore Cooper's Notions of the Americans (1828) and Gleanings in Europe (1837-38) reveal a man shrewdly observing French and English manners and political institutions, attacking the foreign literature critical of America, and striving to point out that the principles of society and government of the new world were quite different from the old.³ In these travel books Cooper became, in fact, the political theorist and found little use for folk materials within his focus. Nile Notes of a Howadji (1851) and The Howadji in Syria (1852) by George W. Curtis, widely popular in their day, contain elaborate descriptive passages but no significant folklore usage. Bayard Taylor's travel books, Views A-Foot (1846) and the extensive At Home and Abroad (1860), contain enough folklore to reveal Taylor's positive interest in this material⁴ although this interest does not approach that of Washington Irving and

² The very few examples of folklore which do appear, such as a Greek cab driver's fear of the evil-eye in the chapter "Letter VIII," are inadvertent. Nathaniel P. Willis, Pencillings by the Way (London, 1844). At no time does Willis indicate a real interest in folk materials.

³ Robert E. Spiller, "Introduction," in Gleanings in Europe (New York, 1928-1930), I, xxviii-xxix.

⁴ Mark Twain realized this interest. With regard to animal lore, Twain asserted that Taylor "could interpret the dim reasonings of animals, and understood their moral natures better than most men..." Mark Twain, A Tramp Abroad, in The Writings of Mark Twain (New York, 1904), III, 161. Hereafter cited as Works, unless otherwise indicated.

Mark Twain.⁵ Emerson's English Traits (1856) still remains one of the most penetrating evaluations of English character but contains a negligible amount of folklore. Emerson early asked himself, "Why England is England," and his ranging mind covered such a variety of sources that one expects the infrequent allusions to folk tradition,⁶ but Emerson did not focus upon this lore long enough to discover how it might bear upon his question. Nathaniel Hawthorne in Our Old Home (1863) was more interested in the antiquity of England than in its folk beliefs. In the French and Italian Note-Books (1858-60), Hawthorne attended to cathedrals, sculpture, and painting as he strove to gain an artistic appreciation of these arts, a consideration which shut out other matters. Only in his description of a seance held by a Mr. Hume and in his reference to Mrs. Powers' belief in ghosts⁷ did he touch upon folklore. James Russell Lowell's narrative of a trip through the Mediterranean and through Italy,

⁵ The occasional references in these works are principally to legends and the supernatural. Views A-Foot, for example, contains the Gaelic legends of "Bulls Rock," the story of the building of the Cologne Cathedral, and the legend regarding the body of Johannes of Nepomuck. Bayard Taylor, Views A-Foot, in The Prose Writings of Bayard Taylor (New York, 1903), XV, 47; 95; 217. At Home and Abroad, in addition to occasional legends, contains discussions of supernatural phenomena. Bayard Taylor, At Home and Abroad, in The Prose Writings of Bayard Taylor (New York, 1891; 1902), I, 140-169; II, 433-509.

⁶ For example, see his reference to the sagas of Norway as being the Iliad and Odyssey of English history and his allusion to the banshee. Ralph Waldo Emerson, English Traits, in The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson (Boston, 1903), V, 57-58; 93.

⁷ Nathaniel Hawthorne, Passages from the French and Italian Note-Books, in The Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne (Boston, 1883) X, 411-414.

which he recounted in his Fireside Travels (1864), contains no appreciable folklore, nor does William Dean Howells' spirited, and often prejudiced, Italian Journeys (1867). Oliver Wendell Holmes' Our Hundred Days in Europe (1887) describes the writer's return visit to England, Scotland, and the city of Paris after an absence of over fifty years. The book is a parade of old memories, once again freshened, in which folklore has no part.

Thus, from Washington Irving's last book of foreign travel, The Alhambra (1832), to Mark Twain's The Innocents Abroad (1869) no major American author of this period drew significantly upon folklore as a means of partially explaining the culture, temperament, and manners of the countries he visited. In Mark Twain's The Innocents Abroad, and in his later travel books, folk materials are again widely used. Twain employed this lore with a greater variety than Irving, largely because Irving had learned much of his folklore second hand. Stimulated by his conversations with Sir Walter Scott, Irving turned to the lore of German literature and later continued to gather the legends of countries he visited. Irving was also well acquainted with the folklore of his own country. He knew the folk traditions and customs of the Hudson Valley, especially those of its Dutch settlers. He used the folk conception of the Yankee for much of his characterization of Ichabod Crane in "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow."⁸ But "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," as well as "Rip

⁸ Daniel G. Hoffman, "Irving's Use of American Folklore in 'The Legend of Sleepy Hollow,'" PMLA, LXVIII (June, 1953), 429-430.

Van Winkle," though both are placed in the Hudson Valley, are not as original as they at first seem. Irving, in fact, followed German sources closely in both cases, often doing little more than direct copying. The main incidents of "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," are derived from the German legends of Rübezahl;⁹ and "Rip Van Winkle" is heavily indebted to the German tale, "Peter Klaus the Goatherd."¹⁰ This illustrates two things about Irving which one does not find in Mark Twain. Irving lacked real creative energy. "He was never able," writes Daniel Hoffman, "successfully to transcend the limited aims of a 'sketch'..."¹¹ Secondly, compared to Mark Twain, Irving's knowledge of folklore was academic. Twain absorbed most of his folklore from actual experience and was not as dependent upon literary sources as Irving. This is perhaps the reason that Irving continued to maintain a certain detachment in his work in which a genial humor replaced strong emotional involvement. "Time and again," writes Pochmann, "Irving takes up some bit of supernatural legend, and by a turn of a phrase here or there, an odd touch of characterization at the right moment, twists the whole into a whimsical medley of the gruesome and the ludicrous."¹² Twain, on the other hand, frequently employed folklore structurally and thematically.

In Mark Twain's travel books folk materials, in many cases,

⁹ Henry A. Pochmann, "Irving's German Sources in The Sketch Book," Studies in Philology, XXVII (July, 1930), 498-504.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 489-496.

¹¹ Hoffman, p. 434.

¹² Henry A. Pochmann, "Irving's German Tour and Its Influence on His Tales," PMLA, XLV (December, 1930), 1178.

are used only as a type of window dressing, a straining for a laugh to lighten a chapter too heavily weighted with narrative facts and prosaic descriptive material. But humor is not always employed for its own sake. It frequently lies in the background or is completely submerged while folklore satirizes abuses, comments on the culture of a civilization, and probes the meaning of human activity. Tall tales, studied exaggeration, superstitions, legends, animal tales, and folk character types perform these functions. This is not to say that the folklore forms an organic pattern which knits these travel books into proportioned wholes. All of the travel books ramble, are filled with digressions, and read more like inspired talk than studied exegeses. Critics have observed for a long time that the excellence of these works lies in their periodic flashes of humor, satire, and penetration,¹³ and to these folklore contributes an important part.¹⁴

To illustrate how this variety of purpose is achieved by means of a folklore type, one has only to follow through these works Mark Twain's handling of animal lore. Twain always personified animals. His interest in them--"Animals talk to each other, of course. There can be no question about that..."¹⁵--has led Wagenknecht to remark,

¹³ Fred Lewis Pattee's remark concerning Twain's Roughing It can, in large measure, be applied to the other travel books. He points out that Roughing It "has no sequence, no chronology, no completeness" and sums up his analysis by saying that it is "literary vaudeville with marvellous interludes." Fred Lewis Pattee, "Introduction," in Mark Twain, Representative Selections (New York, 1935), p. xxxi.

¹⁴ For example, Bernard DeVoto feels that the structural unit of these works is the frontier anecdote which gives each travel book its basic movement. Bernard DeVoto, Mark Twain's America (Boston, 1932), pp. 245-246.

¹⁵ Twain, Works, III, 24.

"Like most lovers of animals, Mark Twain refuses to believe that they cannot think, or that they do not converse with one another. He thinks of them as individuals, describes their individual characteristics in such a way that they seem almost human."¹⁶ This interest had begun early. In a letter to a girl friend, Anne Taylor, written when he was twenty years old, Twain described at length the actions of bugs and beetles flying about a gas lamp, picturing them as members of a camp meeting, a formidable beetle leading the services.¹⁷ It was natural that this interest should color his travel accounts.

Sometimes animal characterizations are brief and written only for purposes of humor. Thus, in Twain's early Sandwich Island letters we encounter his horse, Oahu, who becomes "absorbed in meditation" in his efforts to outwit his rider.¹⁸ In Roughing It a jackass rabbit is "thinking about his sins" before being startled; the easy lope of a coyote enrages a pursuing dog who "begins to strain and weep and swear, and paw the sand higher than ever";²⁰ and a trusting camel, after eating the author's manuscript, chokes horribly on some of the statements.²¹ Such humor, of course, is

¹⁶ Edward Wagenknecht, Mark Twain, the Man and His Work (New Haven, 1935), p. 154.

¹⁷ Quoted in Minnie M. Brashear, Mark Twain, Son of Missouri (Chapel Hill, 1934), pp. 167-169.

¹⁸ Mark Twain, Letters From the Sandwich Islands, ed. G. Ezra Dane (Stanford University, Calif., 1938). p. 35.

¹⁹ Twain, Works, VII, 29.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 50.

²¹ Ibid., p. 33.

obvious and moves on a surface level only, but this personification is a basic type that Twain draws upon time and again to keep the reader amused.

A more artistic use of humor involving animal lore is found in the tale of the cat, Tom Quartz, a feline expert in the art of pocket mining for gold. The story is told by Tom's owner and relates how the cat, unused to any gold mining not done with a pan and pick on surface ground, unsuspectingly wandered into a shaft mine that his owner had recently sunk, trusted his unfamiliar surroundings, curled up by a dynamite blast, was blown sky-high, and fell to earth "the orneriest lookin' beast you ever see."²² Here again one finds the surface humor in the episode situation; Tom's appearance after the blast is described in detail and forms the nub of the joke. However, unlike the first examples discussed above, the humor in this story moves on another level that is carefully constructed. Upon a second reading, one begins to pay more attention to the narrator of the story, Dick Baker, than he does to the adventures of the cat. Baker, a frontier miner, is just as interesting as the story he relates. Pocket mining, scraping the hillsides for pockets of gold, is a lonely occupation, and it soon becomes clear that Baker attributes to Tom Quartz a rational mind and human personality. Baker, starving for company, is always quick to read human motives into Tom's most natural cat activities. Mark Twain carefully lets the reader in on this secret and, in this way, reveals with subtle humor a facet of Dick Baker's personality.

²² Ibid., VIII, 188.

Baker tells of the cat's ability to sniff out gold--gold that Baker, carefully relying upon his own skill, had already struck, which exhilarating experience easily stimulates his imagination. All the cat really does is to come to Baker, fall asleep, awake, and come near him again. Baker does the rest.

"But if the ground suited him, he would lay low 'n' keep dark till the first pan was washed, 'n' then he would sidle up 'n' take a look, an' if there was about six or seven grains of gold he was satisfied--he didn't want no better prospect 'n' that--'n' then he would lay down on our coats and snore like a steamboat till we'd struck the pocket, an' then get up 'n' superintend. He was nearly lightnin' on superintending."²³

When Baker and a friend sink a shaft to find a gold lode, a form of mining with which Tom Quartz was unfamiliar, Tom follows curiously, examining his new surroundings as a cat might do, but his master knows Tom's mind is working all the time.

"But by an' by Tom Quartz begin to git sort of reconciled a little, though he never could altogether understand that eternal sinkin' of a shaft an' never pannin' out anything. At last he got to comin' down in the shaft, hisself, to try to cipher it out. An' when he'd git the blues, 'n' feel kind o' scruffy, 'n' aggravated 'n' disgusted--knowin' as he did, that the bills was runnin' up all the time an' we warn't makin' a cent--he would curl up on a gunny sack in the corner an' go to sleep."²⁴

After the cat is blown from the shaft, he confronts his master as a human accuser. One should note how quickly Baker's mind jumps from the fancy that Tom Quartz talked to the conviction that he did so.

²³ Ibid., pp. 186-187.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 187.

"Well, sir, it warn't no use to try to apologize--we couldn't say a word. He took a sort of a disgusted look at hisself, 'n' then he looked at us--an' it was just exactly the same as if he had said--'Gents, may be you think it's smart to take advantage of a cat that 'ain't had no experience of quartz minin', but I think different'--an' then he turned on his heel 'n' marched off home without ever saying another word."²⁵

The story of Tom Quartz is one of Mark Twain's most celebrated animal tales. Dick Baker's manner of speech and his absolute belief in the personality of his cat create beneath the surface episode a humorous study of human character which allows the humor to work on both levels at the same time. The dual conception of Tom Quartz bridges these two levels, and it is no small achievement that Baker's conviction makes the cat, in fact, a living personality.

Birds fascinated Mark Twain most of all, and for them he reserved his most thoughtful animal stories. Twain felt that birds possessed so strong a personality that it often became embarrassing to meet them. The crow of India, for example, has a certain cunning and independence.

Nothing escapes him; he notices everything that happens, and brings out his opinion about it, particularly if it is none of his business.²⁶

A group of these birds shame Twain by scrutinizing him closely and discourteously.

If I sat on one end of the balcony, the crows would gather on the railing at the other end and talk about me; and edge closer, little by little, till I could almost reach them; and they would sit there, in the most unabashed way, and talk about my clothes, and my hair, and my complexion, and probable character and vocation and politics,

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 188-189.

²⁶ Ibid., VI, 32.

and how I came to be in India...and so on, and so on, until I could not longer endure the embarrassment of it...²⁷

This same device is employed in the earlier A Tramp Abroad as an introduction to the most praised animal tale Twain ever wrote, "Baker's Bluejay Yarn." While walking alone in the woods in Germany and thinking about the forest as the source of so many legends and tales of the supernatural, Twain was startled by a sleek raven flicking his wings and peering at him from an overhead branch; and, as was true with the Indian crow, Twain was immediately uncomfortable.

I felt something of the same sense of humiliation and injury which one feels when he finds that a human stranger has been clandestinely inspecting him in his privacy and mentally commenting upon him. I eyed the raven, and the raven eyed me. Nothing was said during some seconds. Then the bird stepped a little way along his limb to get a better point of observation, lifted his wings, stuck his head far down below his shoulders toward me, and croaked again --a croak with a distinctly insulting expression about it. If he had spoken in English he could not have said any more plainly than he did say in raven, "Well, what do you want here?"²⁸

Other ravens glided to the limb and discussed the intruder freely, their fun rising to a high pitch of laughter as Mark Twain's shame, by degrees, became more complete.

They craned their necks and laughed at me (for a raven can laugh, just like a man), they squalled insulting remarks after me as long as they could see me. They were nothing but ravens--I knew that,--what they thought about me could be a matter of no consequence,--and yet when even a raven shouts after you, "What a hat!" "Oh, pull down your vest!" and that sort of thing, it hurts you and humiliates you, and there is no getting around it with fine reasoning and pretty arguments.²⁹

After taking this great care to impress upon the reader the

²⁷ Ibid., p. 33.

²⁸ Ibid., III, 22-23.

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 23-24.

human qualities of the raven so that Jim Baker's story of the blue-jay will seem all the more credible, Mark Twain begins the yarn itself. The tale is related with a clarity and directness which rivals the best of Aesop's fables. It turns on a trickster theme. A jay, a common trickster protagonist, is searching for a place to store his acorns against a hard winter; he presently lights upon an abandoned miner's shack and spying a hole in the roof decides to drop his acorns here for safekeeping. For hours he tries to fill this hole and becomes more and more angry when he finds he cannot. Reason forsakes him and blind pride spurs him to fill the hole. Other jays come to watch and question. Each looks into the hole and "delivered a more chuckle-headed opinion about the mystery than the jay that went there before him."³⁰ At last, a wise old jay has the presence of mind to sweep down and look through the open door of the shack. "There lay the acorns, scattered all over the floor. He flopped his wings and raised a whoop. 'Come here!' he says, 'Come here, everybody; hang'd if this fool hasn't been trying to fill up a house with acorns!'"³¹

The surface humor of the trickster theme is here unmistakable, but this yarn has another point to make, as did the earlier story concerning Tom Quartz, which raises this narrative to a serious commentary upon human nature and action. This tone is carefully sounded by Jim Baker just before he begins the actual narrative. He picks up Twain's earlier remark that jays possess human characteristics and elaborates this idea until, for all practical purposes, jays become human beings.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 31.

³¹ Ibid.

"You may call a jay a bird. Well, so he is, in a measure-- because he's got feathers on him, and don't belong to no church, perhaps; but otherwise he is just as much a human as you be. And I'll tell you for why. A jay's gifts, and instincts, and feelings, and interests, cover the whole ground. A jay hasn't got any more principle than a Congressman. A jay will lie, a jay will steal, a jay will deceive, a jay will betray; and four times out of five, a jay will go back on his solemnest promise. The sacredness of an obligation is a thing which you can't cram into no bluejay's head....A jay can cry, a jay can laugh, a jay can feel shame, a jay can reason and plan and discuss, a jay likes gossip and scandal, a jay has got a sense of humor, a jay knows when he is an ass just as well as you do--maybe better..."³²

Thus, "Baker's Bluejay Yarn" is double-edged. The implications of this tale widen to include the stubbornness, the pathetic rages, and the stupidity that make up much of the character of mankind. On the story level the yarn is funny; on the symbolic level it is deadly serious.

Lastly, Twain could make use of animals to expose fraud. He hated weak sentimentality and romanticism, which to him represented the same thing, for he felt they did not exhibit a true picture of life. We shall observe later how this hatred permeates The Innocents Abroad. Whenever the opportunity offered, he satirized the romantic fictions of tradition. In A Tramp Abroad, he excoriated the traditional wisdom of the ant. While hiking across Germany, Twain paused to observe the ant at work; watched him make a capture and become lost in trying to find his way home; observed the awkward way he carried his plunder; noted that he engaged in a senseless battle with another ant;--all of which drove the author to an inescapable indictment.

³²Ibid., pp. 25-26.

Science has recently discovered that the ant does not lay up anything for winter use. This will knock him out of literature, to some extent. He does not work, except when people are looking, and only then when the observer has a green, naturalistic look, and seems to be taking notes. This amounts to deception, and will injure him for the Sunday-schools. He has not judgment enough to know what is good to eat from what isn't. This amounts to ignorance, and will impair the world's respect for him. He cannot stroll around a stump and find his way home again. This amounts to idiocy, and once the damaging fact is established, thoughtful people will cease to look up to him, the sentimental will cease to fondle him. His vaunted industry is but a vanity and of no effect, since he never gets home with anything he starts with. This disposes of the last remnant of his reputation and wholly destroys his main usefulness as a moral agent, since it will make the sluggard hesitate to go to him any more. It is strange, beyond comprehension, that so manifest a humbug as the ant has been able to fool so many nations and keep it up so many ages without being found out.³³

Unlike the animal folklore, which shows a variety of form and purpose, the tall tales in the travel books have one basic role to play, the humorous interlude. They provide comic relief for passages loaded with set, descriptive material or serious discussion, and since most of the tall tales are separate and complete units having no relation to the travel material, this folklore becomes more a kind of window dressing designed to keep the reader periodically amused than an organic necessity to the material surrounding it. Significantly, most of these tall tales appear in Roughing It, for in this description of his trip across western America, Mark Twain drew upon the typical lore of the West. In The Innocents Abroad, however, a good western tall tale appears which illustrates very well two basic characteristics of this genre, artful exaggeration and understatement. The tale concerns the taciturn easterner, Oliver, who had moved into the wild country of Nevada. He, Twain

³³ Ibid., pp. 221-222.

and another man set out for the Humboldt Mountains, Twain and his friend to mine, Oliver to become the probate judge of Humboldt County. Oliver, striving to accept his new environment and to avoid offense, never complains. This is the hinge upon which the tale turns. Exaggeration is employed to measure the scope of Oliver's fortitude. The figures involving the wagon-tires and ox-chains are exactly in the tall tale tradition.

We started across [the desert] at eight in the morning, pushing through sand that had no bottom; toiling all day long by the wrecks of a thousand wagons, the skeletons of ten thousand oxen; by wagon-tires enough to hoop the Washington Monument to the top, and ox-chains enough to girdle Long Island...³⁴

Each misfortune that befalls Oliver is worse than its predecessor, but finally a series of events so besets him that he weakens. This climax of the tale depends on Oliver's understatement, his first complaint, "This thing is growing monotonous!"³⁵

Aside from the typical tall tale characteristics presented here, this story of Oliver performs the function of comic interlude. It follows Twain's imaginatively detailed account of an afternoon's gladiatorial combats in the Roman Colosseum. Twain informs the reader that he relates the tale to show how monotonous and over-worked has become that trite standby of Roman description, "butchered to make a Roman holiday." But the real reason for this story is to relieve the bloody description of the gladiatorial games.

The tall tales in Roughing It have, in the main, the same purpose. Witness the story told of Horace Greeley. The tale is

³⁴ Ibid., I, 362-363.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 365.

simple, the humor consisting in a famous man being placed in an awkward position. Greeley, discovering he is late for a lecture engagement in a neighboring town, pleads with the stage driver to hurry. The driver nearly spins the wheels off the hubs; "The coach bounced up and down in such a terrific way that it jolted the buttons all off of Horace's coat, and finally shot his head clean through the roof of the stage..."³⁶ The driver got him there on time, "what was left of him." Here, the tall tale element does not wholly reside in the story itself but in what happens to the last man who begins to tell the story. Twain hears this story time and time again as he journeys across the West. Each teller is more melancholy and destitute than the one previous to him. Finally, Twain can stand no more. He prevents a starving wanderer from relating the story.

We were saved. But not so the invalid. In trying to retain the anecdote in his system he strained himself and died in our arms.³⁷

Here again, the tale has a structural function, following as it does an oppressively blistering description of the Utah Alkali Desert and the even more depressing chapter concerning the unbelievable poverty of the Goshoot Indians.

Also in Roughing It, there is the story Jim Blaine tells of

³⁶ Ibid., VII, 161.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 165. Twain had used this formula of the often repeated anecdote in the earlier The Innocents Abroad. As he nears Gibraltar, the legend of the queen's chair is frequently inflicted upon him. Ibid., I, 101-102. But in the Innocents, the story remains only an anecdote, for Twain does no more than express extreme discontent. In Roughing It, he saw the possibilities of expanding it.

his grandfather's old ram, a tale patterned almost exactly on the much earlier "The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" and almost as good. Blaine's talk rambles along in the manner of Simon Wheeler as he tells one story after another, each more humorous than those told before, all this culminating in the unfortunate experience of William Wheeler who was caught in the machinery in a carpet factory.

...[he] went through in less than a quarter of a minute; his widder bought the piece of carpet that had his remains wove in, and people come a hundred mile to 'tend the funeral. There was fourteen yards in the piece. She wouldn't let them roll him up, but planted just so--full length.³⁸

This story, too, provides the important comic relief, coming as it does between a factual chapter on mining and a chapter which vividly describes the hard lot of the Chinese in San Francisco. Twain had a real fear that the chapter on mining would bore the reader: "Since I desire, in this chapter, to say an instructive word or two about the silver mines, the reader may take this fair warning and skip, if he chooses."³⁹

These examples, then, illustrate a definite principle Mark Twain employed in his travel books, especially in Roughing It. The device is clumsy with respect to the organic structure because discussion is completely halted to make way for the tall tales, but Twain felt that the humor and reawakened interest achieved justified the method.

Ancillary to the discussion of the tall tales is the subject

³⁸ Ibid., VIII, 126.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 111.

of the folk character types which appear in these books. Many of them are involved in the tall tales. For example, there is Jim Blaine, the narrator of the tale of his grandfather's old ram, who stems from the early characterization of Simon Wheeler, for both gain their individuality from a kind of mental process Mark Twain had frequently observed in some men during his younger days as a pilot on the Mississippi. This singular mental characteristic rises from that kind of memory which nets everything and turns nothing back.

Such a memory as that is a great misfortune. To it, all occurrences are of the same size. Its possessor cannot distinguish an interesting circumstance from an uninteresting one. As a talker, he is bound to clog his narrative with tiresome details and make himself an insufferable bore. Moreover, he cannot stick to his subject. He picks up every little grain of memory he discerns in his way, and so is led aside.⁴⁰

Here is Simon Wheeler beginning his story of the jumping frog:

"Rev. Leonidas W. H'm, Reverend Le--well, there was a fellow here once by the name of Jim Smiley, in the winter of '49--or may be it was the spring of '50--I don't recollect exactly, somehow, though what makes me think it was one or the other is because I remember the big flume warn't finished when he first come to the camp; but any way...⁴¹

It is, of course, the rambling nature of Wheeler's discourse which adds so much to the entire story. This allows Wheeler to tell a few rollicking yarns before coming to the principal one about the frog. In this way, the picture of Wheeler we receive from an

⁴⁰ Ibid., IX, 113.

⁴¹ Ibid., XIX, 28.

introductory description and the manner of his talk, the stories which precede the main yarn, and the narration of the frog adventure contribute to an order of climax of hilarious proportions. This order is very important because it enabled Twain to depict amusingly the character of Wheeler which he described in the passage from Life on the Mississippi, given above, and also to impose upon the entire sketch a structure which awakens interest, whereas in real life Wheeler would be "an insufferable bore." Jim Baker, too, is plagued with mental short circuits, so much so, in fact, that he never quite gets to his story of the ram, for each story he tells has an element in it which prompts another, until Baker's original intention is lost. A look at the way he begins indicates the hopeless confusion that is at hand.

"I don't reckon them times will ever come again. There never was a more bullier old ram than what he was. Grandfather fetched him from Illinois--got him of a man by the name of Yates--Bill Yates--maybe you might have heard of him; his father was a deacon--Baptist--and he was a rustler, too; a man had to get up ruther early to get the start of old Thankful Yates; it was him that put the Greens up to jining teams with my grandfather when he moved west. Seth Green was prob'ly the pick of the flock; he married a Wilkerson..."⁴²

Mark Twain did not rely only on this formula of rambling speech to represent a frontier character vividly. He had an unusual ability to write conversation with the rhythms and inflections of actual sound, and it is for this reason that when relating a frontier story he did not have to keep reworking the device of the rambling mind. He discovered he could realize extraordinary effects not by formulas but by shaping his dialogue to the actual speech of the

⁴² Ibid., VIII, 121.

frontier which he knew so well. Mark Twain had a philologist's interest in language: when in the Sandwich Islands he remarked on Hawaiian slang;⁴³ in Roughing It he devoted a few paragraphs to western slang;⁴⁴ a passage in Following the Equator discussed some of the idioms of Australia;⁴⁵ in Life on the Mississippi he showed interest not only in the expressions of the South and other areas, but especially in its pronunciation of certain words;⁴⁶ and in an essay originally meant for A Tramp Abroad Twain discussed the differences in English and American pronunciation and word connotations with all the scientific exactness he could command.⁴⁷ This interest enabled Mark Twain to move from delineating character by the formula of the too retentive mind to the more natural and, consequently, more forceful method of capturing authentic idiom. True, Simon Wheeler and Jim Blaine have a believable conversational speech, but it is forced into the mechanics of a formula. The characterizations of the narrators, Dick Baker and Jim Baker, are different.

Twain described Dick Baker briefly before Baker begins the story of his wonderful cat, Tom Quartz. Baker's intonations, his sentence breaks, his grammar, and, above all, the seeming effortlessness of his colorful idiom bring him to life. One does not read his language; he hears it.

⁴³ Twain, Letters from the Sandwich Islands, pp. 69-70.

⁴⁴ Twain, Works, VIII, 60-61.

⁴⁵ Ibid., V, 225-226.

⁴⁶ Ibid., IX, 332-335.

⁴⁷ Ibid., XX, 396-400.

"Gentlemen, I used to have a cat here, by the name of Tom Quartz, which you'd a took an interest in I reckon--most anybody would. I had him here eight year--and he was the remarkablest cat I ever see. He was a large gray one of the Tom specie, an' he had more hard, natchral sense than any man in this camp--'n' a power of dignity--he wouldn't let the Gov'ner of Californy be familiar with him. He never ketched a rat in his life--'peared to be above it. He never cared for nothing but mining. He knowed more about mining, that cat did, than any man I ever, ever see. You couldn't tell him noth'n' 'bout placer diggin's --'n' as for pocket-mining, why he was just born for it."⁴⁸

An even more artistic delineation of character through folk speech occurs when Jim Baker prepares to tell his bluejay yarn in A Tramp Abroad. Bernard DeVoto has said of Baker, "His patient, explanatory mind actually works before our eyes and no one can doubt him. His speech has been caught so cunningly that its rhythms produce complete conviction."⁴⁹ There is a certain intensity present in Baker's speech, too, which contributes just as much to his actualness. DeVoto must have had something like the following passage in mind.

"There's more to a bluejay than any other creature. He has got more moods, and more different kinds of feelings than other creatures; and, mind you, whatever a bluejay feels, he can put into language. And no mere commonplace language, either, but rattling, out-and-out book-talk--and bristling with metaphor, too--just bristling! And as for command of language--why you never see a bluejay get stuck for a word. No man ever did. They just boil out of him! And another thing: I've noticed a good deal, and there's no bird, or cow, or anything that uses as good grammar as a bluejay. You may say a cat uses good grammar. Well, a cat does--

⁴⁸ Ibid., VIII, 185-186.

⁴⁹ DeVoto, Twain's America, p. 251.

but you let a cat get excited once; you let a cat get to pulling fur with another cat on a shed, nights, and you'll hear grammar that will give you the lockjaw. Ignorant people think it's the noise which fighting cats make that is so aggravating, but it ain't so; it's the sickening grammar they use. Now I've never heard a jay use bad grammar but very seldom; and when they do, they are as ashamed as a human; they shut right down and leave."⁵⁰

So far I have discussed only those characters who relate stories, but this method of revealing a character primarily through his conversation with a minimum of intruding description by the author⁵¹ goes far beyond this. A few examples will indicate the variety of Twain's portraits.

Some of the characters bellow the free-swinging language of tall talk. An example will represent this idiom much better than any description of it, but in general it is the tall tale reduced to sentences. The tall talk of the boasting, strutting raftsmen of the Mississippi, spoiling for a fight, was well known in the West, and in Life on the Mississippi Twain gives one of the purest examples of it on record.

"Whoo-ooop! bow your neck and spread, for the kingdom of sorrow's a-coming! Hold me down to the earth, for I feel my powers a-working! whoo-ooop! I'm a child of sin, don't let me get a start! Smoked glass, here, for all! Don't attempt to look at me with the naked eye, gentlemen! When I'm playful I use the meridians of longitude and parallels of latitude for a seine, and drag the Atlantic Ocean for whales! I scratch my head with the lightning and purr

⁵⁰ Twain, Works, III, 24-25.

⁵¹ It should be noted that this method anticipated Hemingway's almost total reliance upon conversation to depict character, this being especially true, for example, in The Sun Also Rises. This is certainly one of the reasons for Hemingway's admiration of Mark Twain's work. See Ernest Hemingway, The Green Hills of Africa (New York, 1935), p. 22.

myself to sleep with the thunder! When I'm cold, I bibe the Gulf of Mexico and bathe in it; when I'm hot I fan myself with an equinoctial storm; when I'm thirsty I reach up and suck a cloud dry like a sponge; when I range the earth hungry, famine follows in my tracks!"⁵²

Tall talk of a different nature occurs in this next example. Twain was a master in describing action. Here the tall tale of the inverted cows (a common animal figure in frontier talk) is used at the climax of the description of a landslide. A farmer caught in front of the slide is speaking.

"...by George, when I heard that racket and looked up that hill it was just like the whole world was a-ripping and a-tearing down that mountain side--splinters and cord-wood, thunder and lightning, hail and snow, odds and ends of haystacks, and awful clouds of dust!--trees going end over end in the air, rocks as big as a house jumping 'bout a thousand feet high and busting into ten million pieces, cattle turned inside out and a-coming head on with their tails hanging out between their teeth..."⁵³

Slang is frequently employed to define a character. The best known such figure is Scotty, the hero of "Buck Fanshaw's Funeral" in Roughing It.⁵⁴ His speech contrasts sharply with the studied conversation of an eastern minister, newly arrived in the Nevada territory. Both men find language more a barrier than an aid. Scotty is speaking.

"I reckon you've stumped me again, pard. Could you say it over once more, and say it slow?"

"Well, to simplify it somewhat, was he, or rather had he ever been connected with any organization sequestered

⁵² Twain, Works, IX, 33.

⁵³ Ibid., VII, 267.

⁵⁴ Ibid., VIII, 61-71.

from secular concerns and devoted to self-sacrifice in the interests of morality?"

"All down but nine--set 'em up on the other alley, pard.

"What did I understand you to say?"

"Why, you're most too many for me, you know. When you get in with your left I hunt grass every time. Every time you draw, you fill; but I don't seem to have any luck. Let's have a new deal."⁵⁵

Gambling, of course, played an important role in life on the frontier. The terms common to such games as poker, roulette, and faro, for example, became a natural part of frontier speech. The resulting idiom was in direct contrast to the schooled, literary talk which the frontiersman seldom heard.

The portrait of "Cholley Adams" in A Tramp Abroad comprises both the slang of Scotty and the exaggerated tall talk of the frontier and illustrates how flexibly Mark Twain could use these materials. Adams, an overfriendly American encountered in Germany, encumbers Twain and some friends with his joy in discovering countrymen in a foreign land.

"Americans, for two-and-a-half and the money up! Hey?"

"My tongue's all warped with trying to curl it around these _____ forsaken wind-galled nine-jointed German words here..."

"I'm homesick from ear-socket to crupper, and from crupper to hock joint; but it ain't any use, I've got to stay here, till the old man drops the rag and gives the word,--yes, sir, right here in this _____ country I've got to linger till the old man says Come!--and you bet your bottom dollar, Johnny, it ain't just as easy as it is for a cat to have twins!"⁵⁶

In addition to using tall talk and slang to delineate character, Mark Twain sometimes deemphasized these speech traits in order

⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 67-68.

⁵⁶ Ibid., III, 193-195.

to enter more directly into the mind of a character and by exposing twisted mental processes reveal a personality. The bully Arkansas, who appears in Roughing It, is a good example. Always spoiling for a fight, Arkansas finally traps a harmless man who has been talking about Pennsylvania.

"Wha-what do you know a-about Pennsylvania? Answer me that. Wha-what do you know 'bout Pennsylvania?"

"I was only goin' to say--"

"You was only goin' to say. You was! You was only goin' to say--what was you goin' to say? That's it! That's what I want to know. I want to know wha-what you ('ic) what you know about Pennsylvania, since you're makin' yourself so d--d free. Answer me that!"

"Mr. Arkansas, if you'd only let me--"

"Who's a henderin' you? Don't you insinuate nothing agin me!--don't you do it. Don't you come in here bullyin' around, and cussin' and goin' on like a lunatic--don't you do it. 'Coz I won't stand it. If fight's what you want, out with it! I'm your man! Out with it!"⁵⁷

The degenerate drunk is an important character type in Mark Twain's works. One should compare this selection with the speech Pap makes against the government in Huckleberry Finn, also a study in unjustified inference.

"They call that a govment that can't sell a free nigger till he's been in the State six months. Here's a govment that calls itself a govment, and lets on to be a govment, and thinks it is a govment, and yet's got to set stock-still for six whole months before it can take a hold of a prowling, thieving, infernal, white-shirted free nigger..."⁵⁸

One other character type also anticipates Huckleberry Finn: the ordinary man who ornaments his speech with the big word, using it for its sound more than for its meaning and sometimes inventing words to meet the occasion. The basis for this characterization is twofold. The people of the frontier had a fondness for these words

⁵⁷ Ibid., VII, 243.

⁵⁸ Ibid., XIII, 49.

which appealed to them because of their strength and color.⁵⁹ More immediate, however, is the fact that for Mark Twain, this character type stemmed from Minister Harris, an actual person Twain particularly despised. Harris appears in the early Sandwich Island letters as a thoroughly incompetent man attempting to hide his limitations behind colorful and meaningless oratory.

He raises his hand aloft and looks piercingly at the interpreter and launches out into a sort of prodigious declamation, thunders upward higher and higher toward his climax--words, words, awful four-syllable words, given with convincing emphasis that almost inspires them with meaning, and just as you take a sustaining breath and 'stand by' for the crash, his poor little rocket fizzles faintly in the zenith and goes out ignominiously.⁶⁰

In The Innocents Abroad, Mark Twain's next important writing, we meet the Oracle, a figure who represents the pompous side of Minister Harris; but Twain does not make the Oracle as hated an object as Harris but, rather, exploits the Oracle's coinages and use of the complex word for comedy. The comedy is, however, always satiric. Twain introduces the Oracle in almost the same words he chose for Harris.

...the Oracle is an innocent old ass...and never uses a one-syllable word when he can think of a longer one, and never by any possible chance knows the meaning of any long word he uses, or ever gets it in the right place; yet he will serenely venture an opinion on the most abstruse subject, and back it up complacently with quotations from authors who never existed...⁶¹

Almost overcome by a view of scenic grandeur, the Oracle breaks the fountains of his emotions and overflows.

⁵⁹Constance Rourke, American Humor (New York, 1953), p. 58.

⁶⁰Twain, Letters from the Sandwich Islands, p. 91.

⁶¹Twain, Works, I, 104-105.

"Well, that's gorgis, ain't it! They don't have none of them things in our parts, do they? I consider that them effects is on account of the superior refragability, as you may say, of the sun's diramic combination with the lymphatic forces of the perihelion of Jubiter. What should you think?"⁶²

In Roughing It, written after The Innocents Abroad, Twain goes prospecting with a Mr. Ballou, an elderly man having the peculiarity of "loving and using big words for their own sakes."⁶³ With Ballou we have come a long way from Minister Harris, although Harris is behind this creation. Ballou is a thoroughly kindly and admirable man whose diction serves to individualize his charm. Ballou's reason for turning out a dog who was in the habit of crawling in bed with the miners is irrefutable. The dog had to go because he was "so meretricious in his movements and so organic in his emotions."⁶⁴ Ballou is the only character of this kind who does not receive Twain's scorn.

Thus, one may trace this character type from Minister Harris through the Oracle to Ballou. The type also influences the King's character in Huckleberry Finn. When the King attempts to swindle the Wilks family out of their inheritance while they grieve for old Peter Wilks, he almost tips his hand when speaking of the preparations for Wilks' coming "funeral orgies." But he quickly recovers.

"I say orgies, not because it's the common term because it ain't--obsequies bein' the common term--but because orgies is the right term. Obsequies ain't used in England

⁶² Ibid., pp. 130-131.

⁶³ Ibid., VII, 218.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 219.

no more now--it's gone out. We say orgies now in England. Orgies is better, because it means the thing you're after more exact. It's a word that's made up out'n the Greek orgo, outside, open, abroad; and the Hebrew jeesum, to plant, cover up; hence, inter. So, you see, funeral orgies is an open er public funeral."⁶⁵

Obviously, to appreciate fully Mark Twain's extraordinary ability to draw flesh and blood characters, one must attend carefully to the portraits in the travel books, especially the early Innocents Abroad and Roughing It, for here are revealed character types which draw their breaths, to a great extent, from folklore. It required a great deal of skill for Mark Twain to give the characters in the travel books the reality of life when, unlike a novel, they appear for a moment and are then gone and have not the aids of incident and a continuous plot to keep their actualness before the reader. Mark Twain's knowledge of folk speech supported by his real interest in language make these figures hard to forget.

In addition to the animal tales, the tall tales, and the folk characterizations, there is one other folklore motif which plays a major role in the travel books, the legends. These legends serve many purposes and achieve different effects, and to discern what Twain is about, one must know, in particular, his attitude regarding romanticism.

Mark Twain hated pretense and what he felt to be dishonest coloring of the actual.⁶⁶ Certainly he may be charged with coloring

⁶⁵ Ibid., XIII, 223-224.

⁶⁶ This is, of course, another point of contact between Twain and Hemingway. Hemingway lives for the experience of the actual. Even his style which pares away ornateness and keeps to direct statements connected by "and" seems to reflect this.

his own material with humorous exaggeration, but the reader is always aware of the humor and the coloring. The important facts, the necessary realities under his exaggeration, are not obscured. It was the serious, calculated art which passed off the exaggeration for truth that Mark Twain so abominated. He felt that only a knowledge of unadorned fact enabled a person to comprehend exactly and clearly problems of the moment and opened the way for society to progress. This is the reason he attacked Sir Walter Scott so bitterly in Life on the Mississippi; he felt that Scott's love of "decayed and degraded systems of government; with the sillinesses and emptinesses, sham grandeurs, sham gauds, and sham chivalries of a brainless and worthless long-vanished society" so weakened the South that "he is in great measure responsible for the [Civil] war."⁶⁷ Twain hated sentimentality. In a letter to Will Bowen, he upbraided Bowen's nostalgia and asserted, "Will, you must forgive me, but I have not the slightest sympathy with what the world calls Sentiment--not the slightest."⁶⁸ The maudlin note in Longfellow's "The Wreck of the Hesperus" Twain lampooned in his parody, "The Aged Pilot Man."⁶⁹

Mark Twain's vital interest in folklore and his violent criticism of sentimentality and romanticism account in great measure for the different ways in which he handles the legendary materials,

⁶⁷ Twain, Works, IX, 347-348.

⁶⁸ Mark Twain, Mark Twain's Letters to Will Bowen, ed. Theodore Hornberger (Austin, 1941), p. 24.

⁶⁹ For a more detailed discussion of this, see S.B. Liljegren, The Revolt Against Romanticism in American Literature as Evidenced in the Works of S. L. Clemens (Upsala, 1945), p. 24.

which most often are a close combination of folklore and the romantic, in his travel books. Some legends he takes seriously, some he gently undermines with playful humor, and some he ridicules with all the savagery he can bring to bear. Most of the legends in this first group have an important common trait: they do not contradict reason. In the legend of the founding of Venice, for example, it was necessary, so the story goes, to steal St. Mark's bones out of Egypt past the Mohammedan guards and into the city, this being done by hiding the bones in vats of pork lard. The guards passed the hated substance. The trickery of this deed was plausible enough for Twain to honor the legend and repeat it without critical overtones. Again, the curse laid on the city of Jericho must have been a valid one, for that city has been swept from the plains and no other city built to take its place, all of this, Twain reasons, despite the fact that "it is one of the very best locations for a town we have seen in all Palestine."⁷¹ But the best example of Mark Twain's trusting logic to validate legend concerns the tradition of the location of the crucifixion. In this case, Twain partly follows the reasoning of William C. Prime in his book, Tent Life in the Holy Land. A doubter of this location, says Twain, should remember certain important facts.

He remembers that Christ was very celebrated, long before he came to Jerusalem; he knows that his fame was so great that crowds followed him all the time; he is aware that his entry into the city produced a stirring sensation, and that his reception was a kind of ovation; he cannot overlook the fact that when he was crucified there were very

⁷⁰ Twain, Works, I, 291-292.

⁷¹ Ibid., II, 372.

many in Jerusalem who believed that he was the true Son of God. To publicly execute such a personage was sufficient in itself to make the locality of the execution a memorable place for ages; added to this, the storm, the darkness, the earthquake, the rending of the vail of the Temple, and the untimely walking of the dead, were events calculated to fix the execution and the scene of it in the memory of even the most thoughtless witness. Fathers would tell their sons about the strange affair, and point out the spot; the sons would transmit the story to their children, and thus a period of three hundred years would easily be spanned--at which time Helena came and built a church upon Calvary to commemorate the death and burial of the Lord and preserve the sacred place in the memories of men; since that time there has always been a church there.⁷²

There are a few legends Twain treats with sincere respect, not because they have logical foundations but because of their intrinsic beauty or the hard nub of thought they may hold. The legend of Dilsberg Castle which tells of the tragic heartbreak of two young lovers is related with feeling and grace.⁷³ The Hindoo legend of the god Hanuman⁷⁴ gives this deity powers far beyond the exploits of Samson, powers which do much to explain why the missionaries have trouble advancing their religion whose heroes appear impotent by comparison.

The legends Twain narrates humorously are frequently employed as comic interludes and are dropped into his pages in the same way as the tall tales and anecdotes serve as window dressing in Roughing It; they are additional devices for keeping the reader amused. The

⁷² Ibid., pp. 343-344.

⁷³ Ibid., III, 178-184. At the risk of appearing sentimental, Mark Twain lets his companion Harris praise the legend, but it is really Twain speaking: "Now that I have seen this mighty tree /where the lovers lie buried/ vigorous for its four hundred years, I feel a desire to believe the legend for its sake; so I will humor the desire..." Ibid., p. 184.

⁷⁴ Ibid., V, 133-135.

legend of Count Guido in The Innocents Abroad is based on the legend of Richard the Lion Hearted's returning to England and bringing happiness to a land long oppressed by his brother. The ending of the tale of Guido indicates the burlesque manner Twain uses through this legend.

Count Luigi bound his usurping brother hand and foot. The practiced knights from Palestine made holiday sport of carving the awkward men-at-arms into chops and steaks. The victory was complete. Happiness reigned. The knights all married the daughter. Joy! wassail! finis!

"But what did they do with the wicked brother?"

"Oh, nothing--only hanged him on that iron hook I was speaking of. By the chin."

"As how?"

"Passed it up through his gills into his mouth."

"Leave him there?"

"Couple of years."

"Ah--is--is he dead?"

"Six hundred and fifty years ago, or such a matter."

"Splendid legend--splendid lie--drive on."⁷⁵

In reporting the legend of the founding of Frankfort in A Tramp Abroad, Twain plays the role of the humorous questioner.

Frankfort is one of the sixteen cities which have the distinction of being the place where the following incident occurred. Charlemagne, while chasing the Saxons (as he said), or being chased by them (as they said), arrived at the bank of the river at dawn, in a fog. The enemy were either before him or behind him; but in any case he wanted to get across, very badly. He would have given anything for a guide, but none was to be had. Presently he saw a deer, followed by her young, approach the water. He watched her, judging that she would seek a ford, and he was right. She waded over, and the army followed. So a great Frankish victory or defeat was gained or avoided; and in order to commemorate the episode, Charlemagne commanded a city to be built there, which he named Frankfort,--the ford of the Franks. None of the other cities where this event happened were named from it. This is good evidence that Frankfort was the first place it occurred at.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Ibid., I, 275-276.

⁷⁶ Ibid., III, 10.

By far the most extravagant comic legend in the travel books is "The Legend of the 'Spectacular Ruin,'" ⁷⁷ which is certainly Twain's invention throughout. ⁷⁸ The story concerns a beggarly knight who kills the dragon and wins the king's daughter after all other gallant knights have failed and disappeared down the dragon's throat. The beggarly knight, a man of science, used a fire extinguisher; and this, of course, anticipates the Connecticut Yankee's winning the tilting match with a lasso. The victorious knight wins not only the girl but the monopoly of the important German spectacle-manufacturing industry, which enables this "legend" to die on the rack of a pun. This legend is told only for laughter and is the purest window dressing.

I turn now to the group of legends which received Mark Twain's most serious treatment, those he attacked for their romantic dishonesty. The appeal to reason which enabled him to believe in some legends also fired his hatred against those springing from sentimental tradition, and against these he directed some of the bitterest satire to be found in the travel books. In the early Sandwich Island letters one finds the prelude to his later outrage. He condemned as fraud a spear shown to him, said to be that of a renowned chief who reigned hundreds of years ago, for he noted that the

⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 148-152.

⁷⁸ Twain had written in the flyleaf of the edition of A Tramp Abroad he gave to his friend Joe Twichell, who was with him on much of this journey, "All the 'legends of the Neckar,' which I invented for that unstoried region, are here..." Albert B. Paine, Mark Twain (New York, 1912), I, 667. It is impossible to tell which legends are reworked from models and which are pure invention, but this burlesque must certainly be entirely Mark Twain's.

spear had survived too well the decay of centuries;⁷⁹ and elsewhere in these letters he ridiculed the legend that the corpulent Queen Kaahumanu escaped her husband's temper by crawling under a rock to the safety of a cave. Simple measurements destroy this tradition.⁸⁰

Twain's attitude towards the legends of Heloise and Abelard and of Petrarch and Laura, in The Innocents Abroad, was more than ridicule. It was outright rage. Abelard becomes the villain of the piece, the abandoned seducer of the trusting Heloise. Twain listed point after point Abelard's shameful conduct regarding her, conduct which prevented Abelard feeling sincere love for the girl. To people who shed tears over the tomb of the lovers, Twain pointed out that this was not a love story but the tale of the heartbreak of a gentle girl and a trusting father at the hands of a man who felt not the slightest love for either. "Such is the history--not as it is usually told, but as it is when stripped of the nauseous sentimentality that would enshrine for our loving worship a dastardly seducer like Pierre Abelard."⁸¹

⁷⁹ Twain, Letters from the Sandwich Islands, p. 79.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 190.

⁸¹ Twain, Works, I, 198. One thing so mars this legend that it almost vitiates its rational attack: the slang and tortured puns which Twain shovels into the narrative. No more painful example exists, perhaps, of Mark Twain's attempt to have the laugh at any price. That he is serious in his attack upon Abelard cannot be doubted, but the style adopted for his attack makes the telling ludicrous and the humor a crime. The opening lines will do for an example: "Heloise was born seven hundred and sixty-six years ago. She may have had parents. There is no telling. She lived with her uncle Fulbert, a canon of the cathedral of Paris. I do not know what a canon of a cathedral is, but that is what he was. He was nothing more than a sort of a mountain howitzer, likely, because they had no heavy artillery in those days. Suffice it, then, that Heloise lived with her uncle the howitzer, and was happy." Ibid., p. 191. This kind of fumbling stems directly from the mixture of the humorous and the serious which governed so much of Twain's early work.

Sentimentality is also much wasted on the legend of Petrarch and Laura. Again Twain found that romantic tradition had clouded the true picture, misdirecting sympathy. He struck this note in his opening sentence.

We saw a manuscript of Virgil, with annotations in the handwriting of Petrarch, the gentleman who loved another man's Laura, and lavished upon her all through life a love which was a clear waste of the raw material.⁸²

Sentiment, being blind, takes little note of "Mr. Laura." "How do you suppose he liked the state of things that has given the world so much pleasure?"⁸³ It is for him that Twain showed emotion.

In A Tramp Abroad, legends are again used to attack romanticism. Legends have depicted the actions of Pontius Pilate and St. Nicholas, and Twain carefully compared the two. Tradition held that Pilate, after spending years in Switzerland trying to expiate his sin, finally drowned himself. Near the lake in which Pilate took his life was the home of St. Nicholas who, Twain found, deserted his wife and children to become a hermit and gave his life over to pious contemplation. Of these two men, Mark Twain had more respect for Pontius Pilate: "Pilate attended to the matter of expiating his sin while he was alive, whereas St. Nicholas will probably have to go on climbing down sooty chimneys, Christmas eve, forever, and conferring kindness on other people's children, to make up for deserting his own."⁸⁴

⁸² Ibid., p. 238.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid., IV, 24.

Thus far in this chapter I have discussed the basic folk materials present in Mark Twain's travel books: animal characterizations, tall tales, folk characterizations achieved through folk speech idiom, and the legends. These folklore elements appear with varying degrees of emphasis in Mark Twain's novels and, consequently, represent the principal areas of his folklore interests. Now that these basic themes can be recognized, I wish to examine the travel books one at a time in order of their appearance, pointing out at times pertinent folklore not yet covered, and, most important, showing what folklore contributes to each book.

Mark Twain's first extended writings of any kind are his letters from the Sandwich Islands to the Sacramento Daily Union, which paper began publishing the letters in the spring of 1866. Twain had come to California from Nevada where he had worked on the Territorial Enterprise newspaper in Virginia City and had written broad burlesques, extravaganzas, and such hoaxes as "The Petrified Man" and "The Empire City Massacre." The reputation gained on this paper made him famous in the West and enabled him to secure a roving assignment in Hawaii for the Daily Union.⁸⁵ In his letters to the Union, he wished to give a clear picture of the islands, especially the political institutions and social customs there. In these letters he employed for the first time in a sustained piece of writing the critical judgments of new surroundings that would play so important a role in his next travel book, The Innocents Abroad, evaluating a people from the standpoint of their economic condition and

⁸⁵ Edgar M. Branch, The Literary Apprenticeship of Mark Twain (Urbana, 1950), p. 83.

their moral state.⁸⁶ But above all, Twain wanted these letters to be interesting. He had a reputation to maintain and, if possible, expand. As a result, the folklore in these letters was employed in two principal ways: to reveal something of the beliefs and society of these people and, just as important, to provide another field to exploit for humorous effects. These two purposes tend to work against one another, making it difficult for him to use folklore as a significant background against which to evaluate the facets of this little known culture. Instead of concentrating upon folklore for a specific purpose, he scattered his fire, achieving a variety without a synthesis.

Twain's treatment of Hawaiian legends illustrates this ambivalence between the serious and comic. A legend presented seriously may be marred by the most obvious laughter. The seriousness of his attack on the tradition of the ancient spear, discussed above,⁸⁷ is dealt a blow by the concluding remark concerning the old chieftain: "...he was a 'brick,' we may all depend on that."⁸⁸ His account of an ancient Hawaiian battlefield evidences the same incongruities. He rode into the mountains to see this field one night and under a full moon looked down from a rise on its jackstraw scattering of human bones. No one knew the history of this field and Twain's imagination interested itself in this symbol of the violent past. He

⁸⁶ Gladys Bellamy, Mark Twain as a Literary Artist (Norman, 1950), pp. 169-170.

⁸⁷ See pp. 71-72.

⁸⁸ Twain, Letters from the Sandwich Islands, p. 79.

recalled two legendary narratives of island war which might refer to this battleground. One concerned the bloody war between old king Kamehameha and the Oahuans, and Twain's account of it is compelling. But the serious mood had lasted too long. Without break or transition, he abruptly parodied the sentimental effusions he had read concerning Hawaii and, because of the juxtaposition, he also parodied his seriousness of a moment before.

'What a picture is here slumbering in the solemn glory of the moon! How strong the rugged outlines of the dead volcano stand out against the clear sky! What a snowy fringe marks the bursting of the surf over the long, curved reef! How calmly the dim city sleeps yonder in the plain!... How the grim warriors of the past seem flocking in ghostly squadrons to their ancient battlefield again--how the wails of the dying well up from the--'

At this point the horse called Oahu deliberately sat down in the sand.⁸⁹

In recounting the story of Captain Cook and how he exploited the native's belief that he was their returned great god Lono, Mark Twain achieved his finest writing in these letters. His purpose was serious. He wished to debunk the romantic accounts of Cook's visit and show that the natives were justified in killing this man who posed as a god, filled his ships with their food stores and gifts, treated them harshly, and evinced the greatest contempt for their pagan religion. When he relates the history of Cook's visit Twain's style is vivid, his sentences are strong, and his serious tone is well preserved; but when he digresses to tell the reader of the Lono deity, he can not resist occasional comic tricks of slang that work against this tone: Lono, finally driven mad, as tradition relates, presents us "the singular spectacle of a god traveling

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 49.

'on the shoulder'" who fights and conquers all opponents until at last "this pastime soon lost its novelty, inasmuch as it must necessarily have been the case that when so powerful a deity sent a frail human opponent 'to grass' he never came back any more."⁹⁰

This account sheds some light on Mark Twain's terribly inept handling of the story of Heloise and Abelard in The Innocents Abroad; for here one finds the same principles operating, although in a less striking antagonism: Twain wrote to take the romance out of Cook's assassination;⁹¹ he presented the facts as accurately as he could; and he weakened the tone by introducing ill-advised humor. Since this habit of mixing the serious and comic had become a fixed pattern for him by the time of The Innocents Abroad, it may well be that when he came to ridicule the Heloise and Abelard legend, his familiarity with this pattern kept him from seeing how impossible was the incongruity he had achieved.

This awkward handling of the legends can be also explained in part if one observes how Mark Twain frequently mixed the serious and comic with respect to his own experience on the islands. While Twain was in Hawaii, the island queen, Victoria, died. Bishop Staley, then missionary head of the island, had allowed the natives to revive certain pagan rites. This freedom enabled Twain to observe a ceremony which revealed many Hawaiian customs which had flourished before the early missionaries, for these burial rites comprised such folk ceremonies as the singing, the measured drum

⁹⁰ Ibid., pp. 181-182.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 156.

beats, and the renowned hula-hula. Twain was keenly interested in this death lore and described in detail what occurred from the time of Victoria's death to the time of her burial. He described the wails of the sorrowing and the death dances, and he hinted at the funeral orgies of the priests within the sacred temple.⁹² But soon the tone turned to ridicule. Twain had read in James Jarves' History of the Sandwich Islands that at certain times in the old pagan days when a powerful member of the royal family died, all laws were suspended for a period after the funeral rites and all manner of crime raged over the land. He was so shocked by this that he found it impossible to evaluate these rites in any way but as representing the moral degradation of the people. Savagely he attacked Bishop Staley⁹³ and his rule, but unfortunately he greatly weakened the sincerity of his condemnation by the method he used to prepare his attack. His ridicule of the mourning rites touched off the attack, but this ridicule is the purest farce, a by-play between Twain and his fictional traveling companion, Brown, in which Brown wishes to "get up here and read the Riot Act" to the dancers and utters a mock-pious "Jesus wept" at the end of each division of the rites.⁹⁴ This break in tone is shattering.

⁹² Ibid., p. 100.

⁹³ Ibid., pp. 115-118.

⁹⁴ Ibid., pp. 112-115. In these letters and in his early Travels with Mr. Brown, written between his return from the Sandwich Islands and his writing The Innocents Abroad, Twain used the mythical Brown as his alter ego. Brown voiced Twain's criticisms of the countries they visited which protected Twain from offending his readers. Twain dropped Brown in The Innocents Abroad, possibly because he realized that this was a clumsy device and he was becoming well enough established to be able to speak his own mind.

The death rites of Victoria stimulated Twain to learn other religious customs and superstitions of the Hawaiian people. He was fascinated by the City of Refuge, a group of three temples to which any criminal or enemy soldier could flee to sanctuary. This tradition of church protection still prevailed in the western world, and Twain asked the interesting question, "Where did these isolated pagans get this idea of a City of Refuge--this ancient Jewish custom?"⁹⁵ He described at length the Hawaiian custom of hiding the bones of a king, "some say, to prevent evil-disposed persons from getting hold of them and thus being enabled to pray a descendant to death; others say, to prevent the natives from making fishhooks out of them, it being held that there were superior virtues in the bones of a high chief."⁹⁶ This custom of hiding the dead resulted in Twain's writing the fantasy, "A Strange Dream,"⁹⁷ which describes the author's descent into the giant crater of the volcano Kilauea and his discovery of the bones of the venerated king Kamehameha. A tone of supernatural mystery and terror is well sustained, illustrating how easily Twain entered into the spirit of these superstitions.

Although there is much folklore in this work, it does not provide a major focus of the book but rather is a useful method of explaining something of Hawaii's history and customs. Twain might have used folklore to greater advantage here by probing more insistently into these matters, but his constant striving for humorous

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 188.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 128.

⁹⁷ Walter Frear, Mark Twain and Hawaii (Chicago, 1947), pp. 251-255.

effects led him to introduce legends in order to exploit them for laughter and also laugh at those at first treated seriously. He did this for two reasons: he had not yet developed the circumspection often manifested in his later work, and, secondly, he wrote these letters to establish himself and in a manner he felt would be most apt to please and interest his newspaper readers. The use of folk materials in these letters, therefore, does not conform to any carefully worked out plan. All one can say is that in these letters Mark Twain was extremely interested in folklore, but he did not begin to grasp how it might be employed with telling effect.

The Innocents Abroad, Mark Twain's next travel book, does reveal a plan. The Innocents, as is true of all of Twain's travel books, is, in general, so sprawling, ranging, and patterned upon a series of flashes which illuminate the interest of the moment that folk materials are scattered over a wide area of interest. In this travel book, however, a folklore pattern does exist in which folk materials are coherently related to achieve a particular purpose.

This folklore pattern concerns Mark Twain's attitude toward the religious customs and practices he observed in Europe and Asia. The savagery he loosed upon the Heloise and Abelard legend is again evident in his exposure of the dishonesty inherent in certain church relics, legends, and traditions. The climax of this hatred was reached late in The Innocents Abroad when he entered the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. This train of hatred is so carefully developed through the book that one has the feeling that the indignation Twain experienced at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre stimulated him to go back over his manuscript and arrange the incidents contributing to this indignation with as much care as possible,

resulting in the most concentrated and sustained effort in his book.

This growing indignation, as was true of the Heloise and Abelard legend, sprang from Twain's hatred of what he felt to be dishonest coloring of the actual and can be observed in the things he attacked not related to church affairs. He punctured the myth advanced in the guidebooks of the time that the Nazarene girls were exceptionally beautiful, a myth that most of Twain's traveling companions knew so well that their discrimination was blinded and their praise followed their reading. Twain's remarks were those of a realist and are remarks that Brown, his companion of the Sandwich Islands, would have made had he been along. Picking out a certain girl as the average, he observed, "She is not tall, she is short; she is not beautiful, she is homely; she is graceful enough, I grant, but she is rather boisterous," and continued, "Commend me to Fenimore Cooper to find beauty in the Indians, and to Grimes [an earlier traveler (fictitious name) in Palestine who wrote in a maudlin vein] to find it in the Arabs."⁹⁸ Cooper was a favorite target of Twain's anti-romanticism; elsewhere in The Innocents Abroad Twain asserted, "It isn't worth while, in these practical times, for people to talk about Indian poetry--there never was any in them--except in the Fenimore Cooper Indians. But they are an extinct tribe that never existed."⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Twain, Works, II, 296.

⁹⁹ Ibid., I, 263-264.

This hatred of romantic coloring led Mark Twain to test each religious relic and tradition he encountered. The cumulative anger resulting from each test begins early in the book. A piece of the true cross was shown to him at a church in the Azores. At Notre Dame he viewed another piece of the true cross,¹⁰⁰ and a nail or two. In every church he visited, these and other relics were brought out until at last he asked,

But isn't this relic matter a little overdone? We find a piece of the true cross in every old church we go into, and some of the nails that held it together. I would not like to be positive, but I think we have seen as much as a keg of these nails. Then there is the crown of thorns; they have part of one in Sainte Chapelle, in Paris, and part of one, also, in Notre Dame. And as for the bones of St. Denis, I feel certain we have seen enough of them to duplicate him, if necessary.¹⁰¹

Seeing the same frauds practiced in Italy brings this denunciation: "We were in the heart and home of priestcraft--of a happy, cheerful, contented ignorance, superstition, degradation, poverty, indolence, and everlasting unaspiring worthlessness."¹⁰²

Legends and traditions of the Catholic Church fare no better. In Rome Twain was shown St. Peter's ashes, the place where he had been confined in prison, where, tradition asserts, he made water flow from the stones. "But," said Twain, "when they showed us the print of Peter's face in the hard stone of the prison wall and said

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 89. He observed, "It was polished and hard, and in as excellent a state of preservation as if the dread tragedy on Calvary had occurred yesterday instead of eighteen centuries ago." Twain used the same reasoning here he used to disprove the antiquity of the chieftain's spear in the Sandwich Island letters. Twain, Letters from the Sandwich Islands, p. 79.

¹⁰¹ Twain, Works, I, 218.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 268.

he made that by falling up against it, we doubted."¹⁰³ As he and his party neared Jerusalem, Twain noted how traditions were forced into the convenient limitations of a grotto. In the Latin convent of Nazareth he remarked, "They have got the 'Grotto' of the Annunciation here; and just as convenient to it as one's throat is to his mouth, they have also the Virgin's Kitchen, and even her sitting-room, where she and Joseph watched the infant Saviour play with Hebrew toys eighteen hundred years ago."¹⁰⁴ Twain hated the sham, and relented only enough to say that at least the monks have preserved some of the places where Biblical history took place, thus giving the imagination the focus it needs to realize that this is actually the land on which a god walked.¹⁰⁵ He fully realized the shrewdness of the monks: "The old monks are wise. They know how to drive a stake through a pleasant tradition that will hold it to its place forever."¹⁰⁶

When Mark Twain viewed the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, however, he saw such obvious fraud, such an open lumping of traditions under one roof, that he found nothing in reason to enable him to qualify his anger. The church most held in honor was to be most condemned. In this church he was shown the Stone of Unc-tion, the grave of Jesus, the spot where the Lord was supposed to have appeared to Mary, a column which marked the center of the earth from under whose base the Lord gathered the dust to form Adam, and,

103 Ibid., p. 351.

104 Ibid., II, 292.

105 Ibid., pp. 293-294.

106 Ibid., p. 294.

lastly, the tomb of Adam, over which he shed tears of thankfulness in having found the grave of a blood relative in a strange land.¹⁰⁷

Legends concerning St. Helena's discovery of these relics and locations did not aid belief. For example, Twain heard the legend which told how Helena, searching over the ground of Jerusalem, "discovered" the three crosses of Calvary. The people were joyous. Sorrow followed, however, when the people wondered which cross bore the Saviour. "But," Twain asked, "when lived there a holy priest who could not set so simple a trouble as this at rest?"¹⁰⁸ One at a time, the crosses were brought into the room of a woman critically ill, and the priests reported a miracle: the true cross healed the sufferer. Twain's analysis of this legend is typical:

When we listen to evidence like this, we cannot but believe. We would be ashamed to doubt, and properly, too. Even the very part of Jerusalem where this all occurred is there yet. So there is really no room for doubt.¹⁰⁹

The oppressiveness of these frauds sobered Mark Twain a good deal. All through the first volume of The Innocents Abroad he allowed extravagant humor to break in upon passages of raging satire, but here, in the late chapters of the book, he confined his attention to this religious fakery. As in the above example, his humor was always grim as he threw into the teeth of a fraud the logic which allowed it to survive. Twain's final verdict regarding this experience illustrates that only his realization that a god actually

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., pp. 337-338.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 332.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 333.

moved about over this land raised his experiences in Jerusalem above the meanness before him everywhere.

And so I close my chapter on the Church of the Holy Sepulchre--the most sacred locality on earth to millions and millions of men, and women, and children, the noble and the humble, bond and free. In its history from the first, and in its tremendous associations, it is the most illustrious edifice in Christendom. With all its clap-trap side-shows and unseemly impostures of every kind, it is still grand, reverend, venerable--for a god died there; for fifteen hundred years its shrines have been wet with the tears of pilgrims from the earth's remotest confines; for more than two hundred, the most gallant knights that ever wielded sword wasted their lives away in a struggle to seize it and hold it sacred from infidel pollution. Even in our own day a war, that cost millions of treasure and rivers of blood, was fought because two rival nations claimed the sole right to put a new dome upon it. History is full of this old Church of the Holy Sepulchre--full of blood that was shed because of the respect and the veneration in which men held the last resting-place of the meek and lowly, the mild and gentle, Prince of Peace!¹¹⁰

This is Mark Twain's final word on the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, in fact, his final work on his experiences in the Holy Land. A man who so deprecated the idealized exaggeration of romanticism was certain to react violently against what he felt to be fraudulent relics, legends, and traditions being offered as truths to the pilgrims by the priests of the temple. This duplicity of manipulating legends and traditions assured a religious conviction in the masses of such strength that it amounted to superstition, a point Twain was careful to make above regarding his being in the land of priestcraft. Mark Twain's focusing upon this religious duplicity allowed a sustained and coherent attack that gathers intensity from the church in the Azores to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and constitutes the only such organized pattern which employs

¹¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 346-347.

legend, tradition, relics, and the literary folklore of romanticism to be found in The Innocents Abroad. Except for the Holy Land chapters, folklore is used incidentally, constituting an additional card the author can play for humorous purposes or to add an edge to a satirical analysis. The Holy Land chapters are especially prominent and constitute Twain's best writing here, and to this achievement folklore contributes a major part.

In Mark Twain's next travel book, Roughing It, folk materials do not carry the purpose of several chapters. With one exception, the folklore here, as is true in general of the previous two travel books, is employed capriciously, as window dressing. For example, when describing an earthquake in San Francisco, Twain drew upon a common superstition:

One lady who was coming down stairs was astonished to see a bronze Hercules lean forward on its pedestal as if to strike her with its club. They both reached the bottom of the flight at the same time,--the woman insensible from the fright. Her child, born some little time afterward, was club-footed.¹¹¹

Upon entering the strange land of the Mormons, which was like a visit to a new world in those early days, he used folklore to describe his impressions: "This was fairy-land to us, to all intents and purposes--a land of enchantment, and goblins, and awful mystery."¹¹² Elsewhere in Roughing It a chapter is devoted to a lost mine, the fabulously rich Whiteman cement diggings, and Twain's abortive search

¹¹¹ Ibid., VIII, 167.

¹¹² Ibid., VII, 112.

for its treasure.¹¹³ Again, the expected hatred of romanticism is present as Twain lashed out at those who romanticize the West and descended particularly upon his favorite target, James Fenimore Cooper. Seeing the squalor and filth of the Goshoot Indians, Twain recalled Cooper's idealized Indians and especially Cooper's inability to capture the genuine folk idiom of the frontier.

Let us forget that we have been saying harsh things about the Overland drivers, now. The disgust which the Goshoots gave me, a disciple of Cooper and a worshiper of the Red Man--even of the scholarly savages in the "Last of the Mohicans" who are fittingly associated with backwoodsmen who divide each sentence into two equal parts; one part critically grammatical, refined, and choice of language, and the other part just such an attempt to talk like a hunter or a mountaineer as a Broadway clerk might make after eating an edition of Emerson Bennett's works and studying frontier life at the Bowery Theatre a couple of weeks--I say that the nausea which the Goshoots gave me, an Indian worshiper, set me to examining authorities, to see if perchance I had been over-estimating the Red Man while viewing him through the mellow moonshine of romance.¹¹⁴

These examples are representative of the folklore which Twain periodically drew upon. These folk materials were, for the most part, inserted without method, for they have nothing to do with relating chapters or themes in the book. There is, however, one folklore motif present which is the result of careful planning, for it serves the same purpose as was observed in some of the tall tales, that of comic relief. This motif comprises the trickster tales. Lucy Hazard has pointed out that the elaborate practical jokes which

¹¹³ Ibid., pp. 286-293. For additional information on the folklore of lost mines see Wayland Hand, "Folklore from Utah's Silver Mining Camps," Journal of American Folklore, LIV (July, 1941), 140-142.

¹¹⁴ Twain, Works, VII, 157.

have come down to us as trickster tales supplied a welcome kind of drama to the frontiersman who was artful in making his own fun.¹¹⁵ These tales, however, have a more important duty than to indicate a facet of frontier society. Since they perform a certain duty to Roughing It as a whole, they have an organic importance.

I have mentioned how the tall tale which Jim Blaine tells of his grandfather's old ram relieves the bloody description of an afternoon at the Roman gladiatorial games and how other tall tales serve as focal points of relief. Many trickster tales perform the same function, achieving a calculated pattern. The widely known story, for example, which relates how the innocent Twain was tricked at a horse auction into buying a ferocious Mexican plug¹¹⁶ establishes the comedy that Twain felt was necessary to carry the reader through the factual chapters dealing with Nevada history and politics which follow this tale. The story of the Mexican plug is an individual unit and has no relation to what follows or to the description of Twain's camping at Lake Tahoe which precedes it. The chapter which presents a hoax law suit in which an eastern lawyer is tricked into trying a mythical case for a man who claimed his neighbor's land slid down a mountain over his own farm and deprived him unlawfully of his property is an hilarious tale¹¹⁷ which relieves an absorbing description of how Mark Twain and two companions nearly froze to death in a western blizzard. Two trickster

¹¹⁵ Lucy Hazard, The Frontier in American Literature (New York, 1927), p. 199.

¹¹⁶ Twain, Works, VII, 193-200.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 265-272.

tales dealing with drunks¹¹⁸ supply the necessary comedy following a poignant account of the hard life of the Chinese on the Pacific coast, which description, it has been noted, was prepared for by the story of "Grandfather's Old Ram." Thus, the trickster tales support the tall tales in creating a tissue of humorous interludes in Roughing It designed to hold the reader's attention by supplying welcome variety to passages of deep seriousness.

In A Tramp Abroad, published eight years after Roughing It, Mark Twain wrote principally of Germany, France, Switzerland, and Italy. Of these countries, he found Germany the most interesting. It was an entirely new experience for him, and its traditions, legends, and songs so captivated him that fully one half of this travel book, and almost all of the first volume, deals with this country. As was true in the Sandwich Islands and on the Mediterranean cruise, he was extremely receptive to the folklore of a new country. He always sought to increase his knowledge of folk materials, and in A Tramp Abroad the lore of Germany both delighted him and made him feel closer to the genuine heart and personality of the country. As soon as he arrived in Germany, he read widely in the folk legends, traditions, and superstitions of the land, one of his favorite books being F.J. Keifer's Legends of the Rhine. This reading stimulated his imagination to regard German scenery in terms of the traditions and superstitions which sprang from it.

One never tires of poking about in the dense woods that clothe all these lofty Neckar hills to their tops. The great deeps of a boundless forest have a beguiling and impressive charm in any country; but German legends and

¹¹⁸ Ibid., VIII, 142-144.

fairy tales have given these an added charm. They have peopled all that region with gnomes, and dwarfs, and all sorts of mysterious and uncanny creatures. At the time I am writing of, I had been reading so much of this literature that sometimes I was not sure but I was beginning to believe in the gnomes and fairies as realities.¹¹⁹

This lore gave the Neckar hills a mysterious fascination that intensified Twain's appreciation of the region. When walking in the Black Forest, the birthplace of so many of the German folk stories, Twain described how the milky light falling in shafts through the dense leaves appealed to his imagination: "The suggestion of mystery and the supernatural which haunts the forest at all times is intensified by this unearthly glow."¹²⁰ Lastly, the folk music of Germany moved him deeply, especially the "Lorelei"¹²¹ and the "Fremersberg"; the latter, he confided, "so delighted me, warmed me, moved me, stirred me, uplifted me, enraptured me, that I was full of cry all the time, and mad with enthusiasm."¹²²

This interest in German folklore as a reflection of German culture and background constitutes Mark Twain's most serious treatment of folk materials in A Tramp Abroad and, consequently, results in his most even use of such material; for in the rest of the lore emphasized in this work, one again encounters the ambivalence of serious interest and comic jesting which, at one time or another, marred his previous travel books. His treatment of legends supplies

119 Ibid., III, 21.

120 Ibid., p. 211.

121 Ibid., p. 136.

122 Ibid., p. 242.

the best example. Twain tells one legend after another in A Tramp Abroad; but they are scattered points of focus, to be used as the whim of the moment prompts; they are never fused into a coherent pattern indicative of the cultural background of the German nation. For example, Twain may recount a legend with a sincerity that amounts to adoration, as is the case with the earlier mentioned "Legend of Dilsberg Castle," but at any moment the reader may encounter a narration as farcical as the "Legend of the 'Spectacular Ruin.'" It may seem strange that he would here adopt this attitude toward the legends, whereas elsewhere in A Tramp Abroad, as I have shown, the songs, superstitions, and traditions gathered him so closely to the heart of the country as to move him almost to tears. The answer lies in the fact that as we have seen before Twain placed laughter first, a practise which occasionally resulted in his exploiting for comic purposes the very thing he might have treated with the most tender seriousness but a short time before. The legends, together with the earlier discussed animal tales and characterizations found in A Tramp Abroad, outweigh those folk materials which seriously interested Twain as revealing an important facet of the German character; consequently, even though one must allow his occasional seriousness when in the region of the Neckar, one must conclude that the folklore in A Tramp Abroad is handled unevenly and does not reveal a coherent usage of these materials.

Life on the Mississippi contains less folklore than any of the travel books discussed thus far. The most celebrated part of this work, the first half of the book, which details the young Mark Twain's experiences in learning to pilot the Mississippi River,

contains no significant folklore. Here, as in the extended account of mountaineering in A Tramp Abroad, Twain focused his attention so intently upon the narrative that he excluded folk materials and left the narrative a lean account of action. In the second part of Life on the Mississippi, however, which deals with Twain's return to the great river after an absence of many years, one observes a man in a reflective mood, giving the reader recollections of adventures, legends, tales, and superstitions in a rambling, unguided way, using this material as he had done, for the most part, in the other travel books, dropping it in here and there as the mood prompted him. Remembering some Indian legends of the river, Twain thought of Schoolcraft's collection of these legends, and after praising the author, he included in his pages as an example Schoolcraft's story of "Peboan and Seegwun."¹²³ A chapter entitled "Tough Yarns," bearing no relation to the chapters around it, is employed, as in Roughing It, as comic interlude and sets forth the amazing habits of giant mosquitoes.¹²⁴ Superstitions are mentioned from time to time in an incidental way, such as the belief "that the Mississippi would neither buoy up a swimmer nor permit a drowned person's body to rise to the surface."¹²⁵ This incidental folklore could be stripped from the book with little damage, but there are examples of folklore here which are important both because they add a certain quality of mystery to the subject of the river and because they emphasize devices used in Huckleberry Finn.

¹²³ Ibid., IX, 441.

¹²⁴ Ibid., pp. 274-276.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 215.

The first example concerns the traditional frontier bad man. Mark Twain was keenly interested in the wandering killer of the frontier and in Roughing It devoted much space to the exploits of the outlaw Slade. In Life on the Mississippi he centered his attention on the bandit king who had been the terror of the Mississippi region, Murrell.¹²⁶ Murrell, as other killers were to do, became a legend during Twain's lifetime. Twain had known about Murrell for a long time, and his account of him in Life on the Mississippi confirms his interest in this character type. The important thing to note is that the vivid picture which Twain carried of this outlaw contributed a good deal to the characterization of the King in Huckleberry Finn. First, the King is a rascal as unprincipled as Murrell though not as bloody. Interestingly, Twain mentioned that "on occasion, this Murel could go into a pulpit and edify the congregation."¹²⁷ Twain quoted from a history of the time which relates that Murrell traveled in the disguise of an itinerant preacher and preached "soul-moving" sermons.¹²⁸ In this respect, both Murrell and the King are picaro types. The King, too, travels often as a preacher and in one of the more vivid scenes in Huckleberry Finn spellbinds a camp meeting with a sermon calculated to dupe the congregation.

¹²⁶ John A. Murrell was born in 1804. The exact year of his death is not known, although it is usually given as 1844. Murrell was a Negro stealer and land pirate who organized a gang whose operations extended all through the South along the Mississippi River. For an account of him, see Robert M. Coates, "Murrel," in The Outlaw Years (New York, 1930), pp. 169-302.

¹²⁷ Twain, Works, IX, 229.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

Mark Twain also used folklore in Life on the Mississippi to amplify the deep significance of the river. It has been mentioned that Twain was an apprentice pilot and then pilot on those waters from 1857 until the outbreak of the Civil War. Page after page of Life on the Mississippi reveals his deep feeling for this river, a feeling that appears often in Huckleberry Finn where Huck's wonder at the beauty, power, and terror of the river amounts to worship.¹²⁹ Twain emphasized these aspects of the river time and again in Life on the Mississippi. One sees the Mississippi in its lazy beauty, slipping easily between its banks under the summer sun, unmindful of time and the restrictions of civilization, giving to those floating on its crest a feeling of the purest freedom. One sees the river at night, rolled and whipped by lashing storms, a danger to everything in its path; and one observes it in flood time, eating the river banks and jeopardizing stilt houses and sometimes entire villages. The river always moves with an unpredictable energy, thus possessing the mystery characteristic of a deity.

In order to reveal something of this mystery Twain related certain carefully chosen superstitions and strange occurrences connected with the Mississippi. He told of the phantom steamer, a steamboat that on a fearfully dark night mistook the markings of an island and entered an abandoned water cutoff instead of keeping to the main channel of the river. The fury of the pilots prompted them to swear foolishly that they wished they might never get out of the

¹²⁹ Lionel Trilling, "Introduction," in The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, by Mark Twain (New York, 1952), viii.

cutoff. This was granted.

So to this day that phantom steamer is still butting around in that deserted river, trying to find her way out. More than one grave watchman has sworn to me that on drizzly, dismal nights, he has glanced fearfully down that forgotten river as he passed the head of the island, and seen the faint glow of the specter steamer's lights drifting through the distant gloom, and heard the muffled cough of her 'scape-pipes and the plaintive cry of her leadsmen.¹³⁰

The story of the phantom pilot is so astonishing and told with such conviction that one suspects that the supernatural elements of both man and river combined to direct a fantastic adventure. On particularly dark nights, pilots blotted out every light on the steamboat and especially in the pilot house in order to have the best river vision possible. On a certain steamboat there was a pilot, whom Twain calls Mr. X, who was given to sleepwalking. A particularly black night found all lights covered on this ship. Mr. X's fellow pilot George Ealer was at the wheel, and Mr. X was below, for it was not yet his watch. By certain houses on the banks, familiar islands, and trees which he descried dimly in the night, Ealer knew he was approaching a fearful stretch of water, full of stumps, shoals, and other dreadful matter. At that moment, Ealer heard the pilot house door open and Mr. X's voice ask him for the wheel, saying he knew this stretch of water very well. Ealer watched fascinated as Mr. X slipped the steamboat easily through shoals and jutting towheads. He then left Mr. X for a few moments to run below for a cup of coffee. Minutes passed. Suddenly, the watchman burst in upon Ealer exclaiming that there was no one at

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Twain, Works, IX, 154.

the wheel.

The next moment both men were flying up the pilot-house companion-way, three steps at a jump! Nobody there! The great steamer was whistling down the middle of the river at her own sweet will! The watchman shot out of the place again; Ealer seized the wheel, set an engine back with power, and held his breath while the boat reluctantly swung away from a "towhead," which she was about to knock into the middle of the Gulf of Mexico!¹³¹

The amazing Mr. X had been in a trance the entire time.

The superstition of the preacher and the gray mare also emphasizes the supernatural aspect of steamboating on the river; and this superstition, more than the examples above, indicates Mark Twain's attitude towards this river folklore. Twain explained at length that a pilot who allowed both a preacher and a gray mare to come upon his boat was inviting disaster. The gray mare superstition derives from Negro lore and was believed to be a sign of death.¹³² The preacher symbol may go back to the prophet Jonah.¹³³ Twain pointed out that the steamboat Paul Jones went down because this combination was aboard. Twain's companion, Uncle Mumford, cited other examples from his own experience. The urgent sincerity of Twain's concluding paragraph is important:

That this combination--of preacher and gray mare--should breed calamity seems strange, and at first glance unbelievable; but the fact is fortified by so much unassailable proof that to doubt it is to dishonor reason. I myself remember a case where a captain was warned by numerous friends against taking a gray mare and a preacher with him, but persisted in his purpose in spite of all that could be

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 100.

¹³² Newbell N. Puckett, Folk Beliefs of the Southern Negro (Chapel Hill, 1926), p. 476.

¹³³ S.B. Hustvedt, "The Preacher and the Gray Mare," California Folklore Quarterly, V (January, 1946), 110.

said; and the same day--it may have been the next, and some say it was, though I think it was the same day--he got drunk and fell down the hatchway and was borne to his home a corpse. This is literally true.¹³⁴

There is no mistaking Mark Twain's seriousness here; and, at first glance, it is puzzling, for nowhere else does he so sincerely urge belief in a superstition. These examples of river folklore, the phantom steamer, the exploit of Mr. X, and this last superstition, are related with convincing sincerity. He does not undermine legend and superstition with satiric logic or humorous lampoons as he was so careful to do on occasion in the other travel books. Here, the awaited laughter never comes. There is a very good reason why it doesn't. This river he knew so well had become a part of him. Mark Twain could not be otherwise than deadly serious when contemplating even its folklore. It is unlikely that he absolutely believed these superstitions of the river; but his seriousness here sprang from a sincere wish to believe them, for the wish to believe enabled him to participate sympathetically in this supernatural lore and through it experience an emotional response to the mysteries he felt these waters possessed.

Following the Equator, Mark Twain's last travel book, was written when the author was old and sick, trying to realize a profit from this travel account large enough to discharge the debt thrown upon him by the fiasco of the Paige typesetting machine. This book has its brilliant passages,¹³⁵ but more than the other travel books, with the possible exception of the Letters from the Sandwich Islands,

¹³⁴ Twain, Works, IX, 202.

¹³⁵ For example, see the description which compares the Taj Mahal to an ice storm. Ibid., VI, 276-279.

it rambles, plunges into digressions so lengthy as to shatter all emphasis, and often reveals a tired man obviously padding his material.¹³⁶ Mark Twain asserted that this book was written in hell, but he added that he did enjoy India.¹³⁷

As the new experience of Germany in A Tramp Abroad had so forcefully struck Twain's imagination, largely because of the folklore of that country, one observes the same thing happening again with regard to India. He saw clearly that India lived by legends, superstitions, and traditions and that one must comprehend this in order to understand the country. Victor R. West has pointed out that in Following the Equator Twain almost became the anthropologist, so active was his interest in this lore.¹³⁸ This is not to say that Mark Twain dwells at great length upon these folk materials. He does not. What he does do is to remind the reader constantly that these things comprise the life of India and permeate the culture and behavior of the people to an amazing degree. "Let me make the superstitions of a nation," he concluded, "and I care not who makes its laws or its songs either."¹³⁹ As was true of the folklore of the river in Life on the Mississippi, in Following the Equator there is a seriousness behind the folklore offered that was

¹³⁶ Of the over-extended historical background material, the chapters on the Thugs, the British wars in India, and the chapters on the Boar wars are examples.

¹³⁷ Mark Twain, Mark Twain's Letters, ed. Albert B. Paine (New York, 1917), II, 676.

¹³⁸ Victor R. West, Folklore in the Works of Mark Twain (Lincoln, 1930), p. 7.

¹³⁹ Twain, Works, VI, 179.

not always true of Twain's earlier travel books; for, like the Negroes he knew so well from childhood, here was a race whose folklore was its life.

The aspect of India that most interested Twain was the complexity which resulted from evolution of beliefs and customs through the centuries. Observing that India, "grandmother of legend, great-grandmother of tradition,"¹⁴⁰ possessed the oldest folk materials, he concluded that this lore, far from dying, continued to grow in power. As an example, he repeated the lamentation of Missionary X who informed him that the missionaries made few Hindoo converts because the ancient Hindoo religious mythology had brought forth stronger gods, more spectacular gods, and older gods than any the Christians could boast of.¹⁴¹ Especially regarding Hindoo religion did Twain comment upon this complexity:

I should have been glad to acquire some sort of idea of Hindoo theology, but the difficulties were too great, the matter was too intricate. Even the mere A, B, C of it is baffling. There is a trinity--Brahma, Shiva, and Vishnu--independent powers, apparently, though one cannot feel quite sure of that, because in one of the temples there is an image where an attempt has been made to concentrate the three in one person. The three have other names and plenty of them, and this makes confusion in one's mind.¹⁴²

Mark Twain's keen interest in these matters soon revealed to him a principal cause of India's fascination for him. These complexities, accumulating over the centuries, were at times clear and at other times merged with each other causing blurs upon the historical perspective that allowed the result of a traditional belief or

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 26.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., V, 132-135.

¹⁴² Ibid., VI, 176.

custom to endure, but the causes of that custom lay in the darkness of the millennia. Tradition, myths, and other folkways, merging, changing, and developing for untold ages, giving birth to certain beliefs and practices, had done their work most amply in India, giving to that country a variety of mores which to Twain appeared unaccountable.

They [the Indians] are much the most interesting people in the world--and the nearest to being incomprehensible. At any rate, the hardest to account for. Their character and their history, their customs and their religion, confront you with riddles at every turn--riddles which are a trifle more perplexing after they are explained than they were before. You can get the facts of a custom--like caste, and Suttee, and Thuggee, and so on--and with the facts a theory which tries to explain, but never quite does it to your satisfaction. You can never quite understand how so strange a thing could have been born, nor why.¹⁴³

This attitude of curiosity which owed much to folk materials stimulated Twain to examine the mysteries of the strange civilization of India and come close to it in much the same way as he learned to know Germany in A Tramp Abroad and the greatness of the river in Life on the Mississippi.

This survey of the folklore in the travel books allows one to reach certain conclusions regarding Mark Twain's attitude towards this lore and his use of it. From the early Letters from the Sandwich Islands to his last travel book, Following the Equator, Twain always used folklore in some way. Not since Washington Irving had an American writer drawn so heavily upon these materials.¹⁴⁴ The

¹⁴³ Ibid., pp. 143-144.

¹⁴⁴ Since Herman Melville used folklore to a great extent in Moby Dick and The Confidence Man, one might expect to find a proportionate use in his travel books, for example in Omoo and Typee. However, this is not the case; nor did his use of folklore in his travel books approach that found in Twain's travel writings.

travel books evidence that Mark Twain was always looking for folklore and constantly seeking to increase his knowledge of it by examining the folkways, customs, and traditions of a new land. These folk materials in the travel books, however, are more diffuse than concentrated, for no travel book reveals folklore employed in so coherent a manner as to establish a definite pattern that is of organic importance to the work as a whole. Much of the lore is only superficial, an additional area the author can draw upon for comedy and variety. Moreover, Twain's lifelong habit of mixing passages of deep seriousness with broad farce is revealed in the travel books, and the mixture weakens folklore usage as moods and tones shift without apparent purpose. For these reasons, one cannot speak of Mark Twain's artistic achievement with respect to his handling of folklore in any particular travel book, but must, instead, attend to isolated instances in these books which reveal an author using folklore for specific effects and achieving these effects with assurance and force. Twain's employment of folk materials to satirize sham and hypocrisy, especially as they appear in romanticism, is an important example. His exceptional ability to depict character, especially his achievements in dialogue, is rooted in his experience on the frontier and his interest in its folklore. The use of folk materials to reveal something of the majesty and unknown power of the Mississippi River constitutes, perhaps, Mark Twain's most conscious effort in these books to use the instruments of folklore to probe the underlying causes of a phenomenon. Although the folklore in the travel books is, in general, handled unevenly, it is sometimes introduced with fine artistry; these evidences of artistic usage are even more apparent in the novels.

Chapter III

The Gilded Age and the Historical Novels

Because the novel imposes a certain organization upon its material in order to show, to some degree, a certain progression of character and incident, it enjoys a degree of coherence denied the travel book, which, although necessarily chronological, is by its nature more episodic and discontinuous. For this reason, Mark Twain's early novel, The Gilded Age, and his later historical novels show an apparent advance in folklore technique over the travel books. Although Twain always had difficulty with plot structure,¹ he found that the characteristic progression and unity of the novel provided limits of expression more clearly than was possible in the rambling, often extemporaneous, travel writings. As a result, the sudden descents into wild extravaganzas, frontier burlesque, and tall tales which frequently break the tone of an otherwise sustained passage in the travel books do not so often appear in the novels. More frequently than in the travel books the folklore in the historical novels performs a significant role: it may color a characterization or motivate important incidents which have continuing implications throughout the book.

¹ For his theory concerning the art of writing, see Chapter I, pp. 36-38.

One should not assume, however, that the more coherent form of the novel, which dictates that its parts be related in some way, necessarily raises the folklore usage found here to high artistic achievement because of its involvement in these relationships. One could as well argue that it is because of the superior unity of the novel form that a man as familiar with folklore as Mark Twain would necessarily, and perhaps unconsciously, add folk elements to his novels from time to time without thinking of making such lore the dominant force in his writing. The truth lies somewhere between these extremes. The books under consideration here do not contain enough folklore to make its usage vital to the conception of the entire work; that is, characterization, action, and themes are rarely integrally related to folk motifs. Therefore, as with the travel books, one cannot speak of any great artistic achievement in Mark Twain's use of folk materials with regard to The Gilded Age and the historical novels if one considers each work as a whole. Rather, the artistry is discovered at particular points in these novels, giving insight into a character, motivating an incident, or lending additional color to a particular scene.

The Gilded Age was written by Twain in collaboration with his close friend Charles Dudley Warner. Although the distribution of the work between the two authors is known,² there is frequent internal evidence characteristic of Twain's folklore usage that enables one to surmise that certain passages are his work. Early in

² See Albert B. Paine, Mark Twain (New York, 1912), I, 477, and also Ernest E. Leisy, "Mark Twain's Part in The Gilded Age," American Literature, VIII (January, 1937), 445-447.

the book, as the Hawkins family travels to Missouri with its two slaves, Uncle Dan'l and Aunt Jinny, an obvious reference to Twain's family slaves Uncle Ned and Jennie, Twain describes how the blacks have conditioned the children's imagination regarding their new surroundings.

Whatever the lagging dragging journey may have been to the rest of the emigrants, it was a wonder and delight to the children, a world of enchantment; and they believed it to be peopled with the mysterious dwarfs and giants and goblins that figured in the tales the negro slaves were in the habit of telling them nightly by the shuddering light of the kitchen fire.³

The last part of this quotation is autobiographical and alludes to the evenings Twain spent as a child on the farm of his uncle, John Quarles, listening to old Uncle Dan'l's tales of horror by the flickering kitchen fire. By letting the reader see part of this journey from Tennessee to Missouri through the children's eyes, Twain emphasizes through folklore the children's provincialism, uncertainty, and ignorance of real conditions. The children's point of view becomes a chorus to the entire journey; for the parents of the children, too, in their supposed maturity, are provincial, uncertain, and ignorant of what awaits them in Missouri. In another reference to Uncle Dan'l and the children, folklore again indicates the gamble the Hawkins family has taken. One night, on the banks of the Mississippi, Dan'l mistakes the lights of a passing steamboat for "de Almighty," and leads the children in their growing fear at

³ Mark Twain, The Gilded Age, in The Writings of Mark Twain (New York, 1904), X, 33. Hereafter cited as Works, unless otherwise indicated.

the apparition's approach. His leadership of these young innocents has its parallel in the innocent Hawkins family journeying to Missouri at the bidding of their misguided friend, Colonel Sellers, who is to become their leader, a man whose only reality lies in his fanciful daydreams of money speculation and wealth. In following his leadership, the Hawkins family is none the less innocent, nor is Sellers less mistaken in his dreams, than was Uncle Dan'l in confusing God with a steamboat.

As was seen in the first chapter, Twain frequently employed folklore when describing the night to indicate something of its mystery. The description of evening which sets the scene for Dan'l's fear of the steamboat is typical of this usage in which folk elements suggest uncertainty and loneliness.

The moon rose and sailed aloft through a haze of shredded cloud-wreaths; the somber river just perceptibly brightened under the veiled light; a deep silence pervaded the air and was emphasized, at intervals, rather than broken, by the hooting of an owl, the baying of a dog, or the muffled crash of a caving bank in the distance.

The little company assembled on the log were all children (at least in simplicity and broad and comprehensive ignorance), and the remarks they made about the river were in keeping with the character; and so awed were they by the grandeur and the solemnity of the scene before them and by their belief that the air was filled with invisible spirits and that the faint zephyrs were caused by their passing wings, that all their talk took to itself a tinge of the supernatural, and their voices were subdued to a low and reverent tone.⁴

The ominous animal cries, the stillness, and the awful presence of spirits are characteristic of Twain's descriptive structure in such

⁴ Twain, Works, X, 34.

scenes. He undoubtedly heard these sounds and experienced these fears many times as a boy on the Quarles farm. One should compare this passage with the more celebrated night description in Huckleberry Finn, in which much the same folk materials appear with much the same effect.⁵

Mark Twain's characteristic folklore touches appear elsewhere. The description of a splendid river pilot as the "regular gold-leaf, kid-glove, diamond-breastpin pilot Wash Hastings,"⁶ has the rhythm and cumulative intensity of frontier phraseology, especially frontier profanity. This example is of particular interest because its cadence and balance accord almost exactly with the only published example of Twain's swearing, which terms a man "a quadrilateral astronomical incandescent son of a bitch."⁷ These two examples illustrate how easily frontier profanity, an elaborate art especially known for its skillfully chosen, knockdown modifiers which precede the clinching last word, influenced the paler expressions which sprang from it. Typical also is Twain's description of the slowness of the trains to Washington. This description possesses the basic attributes of the tall tale: story, action, and exaggeration offered in the deliberate manner of truth; and is, in fact, a tall tale in outline which could be amplified with detail into such a yarn as "Bemis and the Buffalo" which appears in Roughing It.

⁵ Ibid., XIII, 17-18.

⁶ Ibid., X, 49.

⁷ Letter to William Dean Howells, in Mark Twain, The Portable Mark Twain, ed. Bernard DeVoto (New York, 1946), p. 783.

Senator Dilworthy was so anxious to know what the New York papers would say about the bill, that he had arranged to have synopses of their editorials telegraphed to him; he could not wait for the papers themselves to crawl along down to Washington by a mail train which has never run over a cow since the road was built, for the reason that it has never been able to overtake one. It carries the usual "cowcatcher" in front of the locomotive, but this is mere ostentation. It ought to be attached to the rear car, where it could do some good; but instead, no provision is made there for the protection of the traveling public, and hence it is not a matter of surprise that cows so frequently climb aboard that train and among the passengers.⁸

Lastly, the folklore touch at the deathbed of old Squire Hawkins, "The emaciated fingers began to pick at the coverlet, a fatal sign,"⁹ comes directly from Twain's childhood and was the sign, it will be recalled, the Clemens family waited for at the deathbed of Twain's sister, Margaret.

Although these examples show that in his first novel Mark Twain drew occasionally upon the folklore of his own experience, such examples are widely scattered and do not exert a sustained influence on the book. Twain's characterization of Colonel Sellers, however, generally recognized as the best thing in The Gilded Age, depends upon folklore for a certain amount of its vitality. Sellers typifies the spirit of the years closely following the Civil War in which the opportunities of the expanding frontier, the temptation to exploit the country's newly developed resources, and the extraordinary growth of America's industry stimulated wild speculation and government corruption and seemed to promise untold wealth to the imaginative individual. A main purpose of this book is to satirize the

⁸ Twain, Works, XI, 132.

⁹ Ibid., X, 111.

abuses of these opportunities and the men who build their actions on selfish dreams. Sellers is a composite representation of these men. Every morning he wakes to glittering prospects of sudden riches. Opportunity confronts him everywhere, and this anticipation of impending wealth gives him his only stability, making anticipation his only reality. He is impoverished, but his dreams turn his near starvation diet at home into imported delicacies and his shabby room furnishings into priceless art objects. Above all, money is everything, and action is the way to get it. His letter to the Hawkins family sums up his energy, his enthusiasm, his impetuosity.

"Come right along to Missouri! Don't wait and worry about a good price, but sell out for whatever you can get, and come along, or you might be too late. Throw away your traps, if necessary, and come empty-handed. You'll never regret it. It's the grandest country--the loveliest land--the purest atmosphere--I can't describe it; no pen can do it justice. And it's filling up every day--people coming from everywhere. I've got the biggest scheme on earth--and I'll take you in; I'll take in every friend I've got that's ever stood by me, for there's enough for all, and to spare. Mum's the word--don't whisper--keep yourself to yourself. You'll see! Come!--rush!--hurry!--don't wait for anything!"¹⁰

Colonel Sellers is, in truth, a mythological figure, in whom certain characteristics unite to form a composite representation of an era. He is as much a folk product of the gilded age as was the half-man, half-alligator woodsman born of the rampaging frontier.¹¹

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 26.

¹¹ Constance Rourke notes an additional parallel by comparing Sellers with "those earlier strollers who were fakers and believers with unbounded confidence." Constance Rourke, American Humor (New York, 1953), p. 174.

His traits which encourage his optimistic dreams rest primarily upon a foundation of shallowness, and to indicate this fatal weakness in the Colonel's personality Twain scattered proverbs throughout Sellers' conversation, allowing these worn phrases of speech to echo the thinness of Sellers' dreams. "Children will be children,"¹² satisfactorily accounts for any surprising conduct of his youngsters. He rationalizes his hard poverty with the compensating reflection that "high living kills more than it cures in this world, you can rest assured of that."¹³ He is certain that a young man is generally poor in business matters, because "A man like that always exposes his cards, sooner or later";¹⁴ and he congratulates the good fortune of a close friend with a garbled, "It's a long turn that has no lane at the end of it, as the proverb says, or somehow that way."¹⁵ Since Sellers' world is built of dreams, he is particularly fond of proverbs which offer hope. When at last he is dealt a financial blow that seems to obliterate all his speculations and succeeds for the first time in shaking his confidence, he lets proverbs serve for thought at a time when clear thought is most needed. He again garbles some of the proverbs he most relies upon, even inverting them, which indicates the hopelessness of his condition. He is speaking to his partner:

"Don't give up the ship, my boy--don't do it. The wind's bound to fetch around and set in our favor. I

¹² Twain, Works, X, 126.

¹³ Ibid., p. 127.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 330.

¹⁵ Ibid., XI, 329.

know it....Lord bless us, this is all nonsense! Night doesn't last always; day has got to break some time or other. Every silver lining has a cloud behind it, as the poet says; and that remark has always cheered me, though I never could see any meaning to it. Every body uses it, though, and everybody gets comfort out of it. I wish they would start something fresh. Come, now, let's cheer up; there's been as good fish in the sea as there are now."¹⁶

In general, The Gilded Age is diffuse, is burdened with too much plot, and is often obscure in intent;¹⁷ but amid this confusion the characterization of Colonel Sellers gives the novel a sustained reference to the age it satirizes and reaches for a certain unity through him in which folklore plays a significant role.

Folklore contributes similarly to the historical novels. Whereas the difficulties of joint authorship may well have limited Twain's ability to concentrate more thoroughly upon folklore themes in The Gilded Age, the historical novels also imposed a limitation, for they drew Twain away from his own experience, making it difficult for him to transpose easily the folklore of his own life to a period familiar to him only through his reading. His preoccupation with historical background and, in the case of Joan of Arc, historical narrative necessarily relegated folklore to a minor role; and although each of these novels contains an example in which folklore usage is sustained and performs an important function in the novel,

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 225.

¹⁷ Twain remarked of the lack of organization in The Gilded Age, that he and Warner wrote "in the superstition that we were writing one coherent yarn, when I suppose, as a matter of fact, we were writing two incoherent ones." Paine, Mark Twain, I, 477.

none of these novels employs folk materials so continuously throughout a particular work so as to create extensive patterns of influence, although the Connecticut Yankee approaches this. For the most part, folk materials are used intermittently, periodically coloring the narrative.

The Prince and the Pauper affords one of the clearest examples of this usage. Throughout the story, Mark Twain's characteristic folklore touches are apparent. A scene in which the Prince wanders alone through a wood at night is pictured in terms of the world of spirits and supernatural dangers typical of Twain's night descriptions.

All his sensations and experiences, as he moved through the solemn gloom and the empty vastness of the night, were new and strange to him. At intervals he heard voices approach, pass by, and fade into silence; and as he saw nothing more of the bodies they belonged to than a sort of formless drifting blur, there was something spectral and uncanny about it all that made him shudder.¹⁸

In another woods scene, the Prince again experiences much the same feelings; the sounds natural to the forest which come to his intent ears seem "not to be real sounds, but only the moaning and complaining ghosts of departed ones."¹⁹ Twain used a legend form for the story the Prince's friend, Hendon, relates concerning his being dispossessed, during an extended absence, by his brother from the estate rightfully belonging to him.²⁰ Most probably, Twain heard many such folk narratives during his travels in Italy, for in his

¹⁸ Twain, Works, XV, 175-176.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 190.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 224-239.

Innocents Abroad he burlesqued just such a legend.²¹ This legend has the function of providing the reason for Hendon and the Prince being thrown into the castle cells after Hendon confronts his brother, affording Twain the opportunity to comment upon the unjust legal system of Henry VIII's time as Hendon and the Prince learn the histories of their fellow prisoners. This is one of the most savage passages in the book, and it is unfortunate that it springs from the obviously artificial circumstances of this legend which deserved nothing better than burlesque at Twain's hands elsewhere.

By far the most important use of folklore in The Prince and the Pauper concerns the characterization of Tom Canty, the boy from the London slums who succeeds in meeting the Prince, changing places with him, and because of the resulting mistaken identity, ruling for him, while the true Prince roams his country, a forlorn outcast. This situation allowed Twain to satirize the abuses of Henry's England, and the force which motivates this situation is Tom's being mistaken for the Prince. Twain did not wish the realism of his scenes devoted to the attack on monarchical government to be weakened by clumsy motivation and artificial handling of the basic incident of mistaken identity. Having a waif from the slums exchange places with a court-educated prince was a difficult enough situation, and a reading of these early pages may lead many to feel that the result is artificial at best; but the important fact is that Mark Twain did his best to make the circumstance of the exchange as plausible as possible. He relied on folklore to a great extent to achieve this end.

²¹ Ibid., I, 269-276.

Two basic problems confronted Twain: he had to supply a reason for Tom Canty's desire to meet the Prince; and, more importantly, he had to rub the rough edges from Tom's background so that the boy would present a convincing appearance to the court in his new role. Amid Tom's squalid surroundings lives the priest, Father Andrew, who gains the boy's confidence and interest by relating to him "charming old tales and legends about giants and fairies, dwarfs and genii, and enchanted castles, and gorgeous kings and princes."²² Tom continues to see the priest who little by little teaches him something of reading and writing, and always tells him stories. These tales give Tom an escape from his slum life, the necessity to beg, and the beatings given to him by his father and release him to the happiness of enchanted dreams. Soon the dreams become his reality, and he longs to see the living symbol of his new world, the young Prince of England. As Tom reads more and more of these tales in Father Andrew's books, his wish to see the Prince becomes an obsession, giving him the desperate courage which at last enables him to achieve his ambition.

These events also have great influence upon Tom's improvement in his manner of speech. The influence of Father Andrew's conversation and Tom's own reading in the lore of princes and enchanted castles make him familiar with polite conversation. In order not to emphasize the magnitude of this task, Twain only tells the reader what Tom says at such and such a time when he is living in the slums and does not give his conversation directly until the boy actually

²² Ibid., XV, 21.

meets the Prince. Then Tom is able to match the Prince's refined speech. Twain is careful to point out to the reader that this courtly speech should be expected and has Tom assert after he has been mistaken for the Prince, "'tis not for nought I have dwelt but among princes in my reading, and taught my tongue some slight trick of their broidered and gracious speech withal!"²³

Probably the principal reason that Twain conceived Tom Canty in terms of folklore from the very beginning and thus hit upon the method of Tom's taking the place of the Prince lies in the fact that Tom Canty is a good deal like Tom Sawyer. Canty, too, becomes a gang leader and the envy of the other boys because of his fertile imagination and his intelligence acquired from books.²⁴ Mark Twain, in trying to make believable Tom Canty's obsession to see the Prince and the resulting change of place, first had to create a boy who was real to him so that he might best imagine how such a boy might act. This meant the boyhood of Tom Sawyer, which was to a great extent Twain's own boyhood. Tom Sawyer is a child of folklore, much of whose environment concerns the Negro world of ghosts, omens, and superstitions. His belief in these is absolute and, as will be shown in a later place, often motivates his actions. Tom Canty's world of dreams concerns the folklore of giants, demons, and enchanted castles which he learned from Father Andrew, who emerges as a refined Uncle Dan'l. In this way, Mark Twain found the answer to the basic problem of his book by letting folklore become

²³ Ibid., p. 58.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 23.

the stuff of Tom Canty's dreams, the source of his obsession, and the cause of his polished manners and speech.

Since folklore supplies Tom's original motivation to seek the Prince, it also symbolizes Tom's break with his former life when he becomes a prince in fact. During his first night in the castle, Tom falls into a deep sleep and dreams that he is in a meadow, alone, "when a dwarf only a foot high, with long red whiskers and a humped back, appeared to him suddenly and said, 'Dig, by that stump.'"²⁵ He does so, and finds a small treasure. In his dream, Tom runs home to tell his mother and sisters that they will no longer have to beg their way out of starvation. He throws some coins in his mother's lap as the words are on his lips--and awakens. His dream vanishes, and at his bedside kneels the resplendent First Lord of the Bedchamber.

This dream completes a cycle in the boy's life. It looks back to the time Father Andrew first stirred Tom's imagination with the folklore stories that were to change his life. This dream preserves the integrity of Tom's character, for it is natural that in his first night in the castle he would continue to have the folklore dreams which had become his world of reality in the London slums. Because of these associations, Tom's shock in recognizing that he is back in the castle is all the more severe.

This cycle, this order of events which leads to Tom's changing places with the Prince, is the only instance in the book where folklore governs motivation of incident and dominates the basic traits of a characterization; and although, as has been said, folklore

²⁵ Ibid., p. 119.

is not extensively used in The Prince and the Pauper, it does underlie the original circumstances which give the basic impetus to the book.

Mark Twain's Joan of Arc is usually termed an historical biography, but only the trial scene in the last section of this work is consistently accurate enough to be called history. Much of the book is fictional embellishment of the principal facts of Joan's life, and much of this embellishment depends on folk materials. Actually, the first half of this work is more an historical novel than a history and deserves consideration here. Joan of Arc exhibits almost exactly the same methods of folklore usage as are found in The Prince and the Pauper. Folklore appears intermittently throughout this extensive work at particular, unrelated points; but as in The Prince and the Pauper, folklore early in the book achieves an importance fundamental to the progress of the entire work.

Twain published this work anonymously, fearing that his reputation as a humorist would undermine the seriousness with which he wrote this history. However, a careful reader familiar with Twain's manner could hardly fail to receive certain hints of its authorship. Scattered examples of folklore point directly to Mark Twain. For example, his description of the famous French general, La Hire, piles up explosive frontier phrases to indicate the energy of the soldier:

"Why, she [Joan] has sent for Satan himself--that is to say, La Hire--that military hurricane, that godless swashbuckler, that lurid conflagration of blasphemy, that Vesuvius of profanity, forever in eruption."²⁶

²⁶ Ibid., XVII, 207.

To describe the fear of the French soldiers as they passed under the guns of British forts, Twain drew from his boyhood days the example of ghosts in the night:

"Passing the forts in that trying way required the same sort of nerve that a person must have when ghosts are about him in the dark, I should think."²⁷

Joan's standard-bearer, the Paladin, as two critics have remarked,²⁸ is conceived more in terms of the American frontier than medieval France, for he is the boaster and tall tale spinner Twain knew so well during his western years. When accused of cowardice during a certain engagement, the Paladin counterattacks with explosive exaggeration:

"I went always to the front, where the fighting was thickest, to be remote from you, in order that you might not see and be discouraged by the things I did to the enemy. It was my purpose to keep this a secret in my own breast, but you force me to reveal it. If you ask for my witnesses, yonder they lie, on the road we have come. I found that road mud, I paved it with corpses. I found that country sterile, I fertilized it with blood. Time and again I was urged to go to the rear because the command could not proceed on account of my dead. And yet you, you miscreant, accuse me of climbing trees! Pah!"²⁹

Twain's description of the Paladin's storytelling art is really an account of the wonderful powers of Twain's friend, Jim Gillis, who told him many a tall tale in the California hills.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 263.

²⁸ DeLancey Ferguson, Mark Twain: Man and Legend (Indianapolis 1943), p. 262; and W.P. Trent, "Mark Twain as an Historical Novelist," Bookman, III (May, 1896), 210.

²⁹ Twain, Works, XVII, 146-147.

Most people who have the narrative gift--that great and rare endowment--have with it the defect of telling their choice things over the same way every time, and this injures them and causes them to sound stale and wearisome after several repetitions; but it was not so with the Paladin, whose art was of a finer sort; it was more stirring and interesting to hear him tell about a battle the tenth time than it was the first time, because he did not tell it twice the same way, but always made a new battle of it and a better one...³⁰

An episode during one of Joan's battles also reveals Twain's hand in this book to any reader familiar with A Tramp Abroad. During the siege of Troyes, the French promised to let the English and Burgundians leave the city with their goods if Troyes surrendered. Tradition maintains that the English and Burgundians came out, leading their French captives, claiming them as their goods; and Janet Tuckey's Joan of Arc, one of Twain's sources, relates the incident in this way.³¹ However, Mark Twain altered the usual account, having the English and Burgundians leave the city carrying their prisoners on their backs.³² This twisting of the story closely resembles the German legend which Twain narrated in A Tramp Abroad, concerning a besieged castle receiving the ultimatum that only women and children would be spared, but that each woman "may bear with her from this place as much of her most valuable property as she is able to carry."³³ The women saved their husbands by carrying them out on their backs. When Twain was writing Joan of Arc, he either

³⁰ Ibid., p. 172.

³¹ Janet Tuckey, Joan of Arc (New York, 1880), p. 75.

³² Twain, Works, XVIII, 44.

³³ Ibid., III, 106-107.

confused these two narratives or else deliberately used the German legend because he felt, perhaps, that it contained the more striking scene.

The example of folklore, however, which most obviously reveals a frontier humorist and not a professional historian writing the life of Joan of Arc is the story of Joan's Uncle Laxart and the bees. This story is based upon a yarn told by George W. Harris in his Sut Lovingood tales entitled "Sicily Burns's Wedding."³⁴ Harris lived most of his life in East Tennessee and knew the people of the Great Smoky Mountains and the life of the French Broad and Tennessee Rivers, becoming at one time a river pilot.³⁵ Sut Lovingood is a product of Harris' experience, "a rough, lanky, uncouth mountaineer of the Great Smokies, whose real ambition in life is to raise 'pertikler' hell."³⁶ It is a fair assumption that the story of Sicily Burns' wedding was on the lips of the people before Harris set it down in print. Twain was familiar with Harris' work³⁷ and either consciously or unconsciously used this story in his history of Joan of Arc. In Harris' yarn, Sut Lovingood, angry at not being invited to Sicily Burns' wedding, gets even by putting a basket over a bull's horns and watching the frightened animal back over the bee bench and then, enraged at being stung, lurch into the house and reduce the wedding to a shambles. Old man Burns, trying to pull the

³⁴ See D.M. McKeithan, "Mark Twain's Story of the Bull and the Bees," Tennessee Historical Quarterly, XI (September, 1952), 246-253; and E. Hudson Long, "Sut Lovingood and Mark Twain's Joan of Arc," Modern Language Notes, LXIV (January, 1949), 37-39.

³⁵ Franklin J. Meine, "Introduction," in Tall Tales of the Southwest (New York, 1946), p. xxiii.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ McKeithan, p. 250.

basket from the bull's horns, is flipped onto the back of the enraged animal. They disappear down the road, old man Burns swatting bees all the way.³⁸ Twain's story is very similar. Only the details differ. Old Laxart, late for a funeral, climbs on a bull and whips him up. The enraged bull races down the road toward the village, knocking down some beehives on the way. Bull, bees, and a terrified Laxart crash through the village "like a hurricane, and took the funeral procession right in the center, and sent that section of it sprawling, and galloped over it, and the rest scattered apart and fled screeching in every direction, every person with a layer of bees on him, and not a rag of that funeral left but the corpse..."³⁹

This story appears following the account of the coronation of Charles VII at Reims, the culmination of Joan's triumphs. As Joan leaves the church, she sees her father and her uncle Laxart in the crowd and immediately brings them to her and asks them for the latest information from her home. Just prior to this meeting, the supposed narrator of this history, Louis de Conte, stresses how Joan appears to him and her other personal friends now that she has made possible the crowning of Charles:

She was the Commander-in-Chief, we were nobodies;
her name was the mightiest in France, we were invisible
atoms; she was the comrade of princes and heroes, we of
the humble and obscure; she held rank above all Personages

³⁸ George W. Harris, Sut Lovingood Yarns Spun by a Nat'ral Born Durn'd Fool (New York, 1867), 89-94.

³⁹ Twain, Works, XVIII, 74.

and all Puissances whatsoever in the whole earth, by right of bearing her commission direct from God. To put it in one word, she was JOAN OF ARC--and when that is said, all is said. To us she was divine. Between her and us lay the bridgeless abyss which that word implies.⁴⁰

One of the reasons Twain introduced this story of Laxart and the bees was to emphasize this point Louis de Conte makes by contrasting his point of view with the naïveté of Joan's father and Laxart, who in telling such a story to Joan and thinking that she will consider it seriously, reveal that they still think of her as a little girl back in Domremy.

Those simple old men didn't realize her; they couldn't; they had never known any people but human beings, and so they had no other standard to measure her by. To them, after their first little shyness had worn off, she was just a girl--that was all.⁴¹

Another function of this tale is to show that after all Joan is a flesh and blood person, possessing that most important characteristic of naturalness, a sense of humor.⁴² She laughs readily at the seriousness with which Laxart relates his story. Twain may well have begun to suspect here, midway through his book, that his obvious worship of Joan, given by de Conte, was stripping her of life, and that he could not let de Conte's words stand without a tampering, humanizing influence being added to them. The resulting descent from a lofty tone of deep seriousness which pervades the book thus far to the fast paced action of frontier farce creates a glaring incongruity, reminiscent of the most inept sections of the

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 71.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 72.

⁴² McKeithan, "Bull and the Bees," p. 253.

travel books. This is the kind of farce Twain could write so well and which he tried to banish from this work, for he realized he must keep a sustained tone of seriousness, something he does succeed in doing to a surprising degree; and although his reasons were sound, the accomplishment is badly out of place.

Aside from these scattered examples of folk materials, there exists in the early pages of this work an important example of folklore usage that is fundamental to Mark Twain's conception of the entire book. Most of the histories dealing with Joan of Arc refer to a majestic beech tree and a fountain near it, lying close to Joan's village, Domremy. Tradition held that fairies often came to dance around this tree at night. Once each year, in honor of the fairies, the children of Domremy spent a day dancing around the tree and hanging garlands on its branches, after which they ate a meal by the fountain. The parish priest became alarmed concerning the tree, fearing that its legend might imply devil's work, and so he gave a service underneath its boughs to purify it. Historians make passing reference to these things because when Joan was tried for witchcraft the prosecution labored to prove that the fairies were instruments of the devil and exerted a strong influence on her.

Mark Twain took these sketchy incidents and amplified them

into a lengthy second chapter⁴³ whose purpose is to anticipate symbolically, against a background of folklore, Joan's future role as liberator of France; and, in addition, to establish, by means of this background, the fundamental virtues of Joan's character.⁴⁴ The chapter opens with a pleasant description of the village of Domremy and then quickly darkens into a sobering account of the nearby forest.

...from the rear edge of the village a grassy slope rose gradually, and at the top was the great oak forest--a forest that was deep and gloomy and dense, and full of interest for us children, for many murders had been done in it by outlaws in old times, and in still earlier times prodigious dragons that spouted fire and poisonous vapors from their nostrils had their homes in there. In fact, one was still living in there in our own time. It was

⁴³ An examination of Twain's sources for Joan of Arc, which he lists before his "Translator's Preface" (see bibliography), discloses that none of his sources does more than sketch the incidents given above regarding the beech tree, the dancing children, the hanging of flowers, the fountain, and the anxiety of the parish priest. For these basic incidents which he was to amplify, Twain most probably followed one (see note 44) of the following: Clémentine de La Morre Chabannes, La Vierge Lorraine, Jeanne d'Arc (Paris, 1890), pp. 16-17; Marius Sept, Jeanne d'Arc, 3d ed. (Tours, 1891), pp. 166-167; and H. Wallon, Jeanne d'Arc (Paris, 1876), pp. 30-32. (Twain's list of sources does not give full bibliographic entries but includes only author and title, making it impossible for one to know the exact editions he consulted.)

⁴⁴ Twain felt almost completely free to color this history as he wished. In a letter to his friend Henry Rogers he speaks of his extensive improvisations in these early portions of the work: "The first two-thirds of the book were easy; for I only needed to keep my historical road straight; therefore I used for reference only one French history and one English one--and shoveled in as much fancy work and invention on both sides of the historical road as I pleased." Mark Twain, Mark Twain's Letters, ed. Albert B. Paine (New York, 1917), II, 624. The English source he lists is Ronald Gower's Joan of Arc (London, 1893), which gives only a line to these incidents.

as long as a tree, and had a body as big around as a tierce, and scales like overlapping great tiles, and deep ruby eyes as large as a cavalier's hat, and an anchor-fluke on its tail as big as I don't know what, but very big, even unusually so for a dragon, as everybody said who knew about dragons. It was thought that this dragon was of a brilliant blue color, with gold mottlings, but no one had ever seen it, therefore this was not known to be so, it was only an opinion. It was not my opinion; I think there is no sense in forming an opinion when there is no evidence to form it on....As to that dragon, I always held the belief that its color was gold and without blue, for that has always been the color of dragons. That this dragon lay but a little way within the wood at one time is shown by the fact that Pierre Morel was in there one day and smelt it, and recognized it by the smell. It gives one a horrid idea of how near to us the deadliest danger can be and we not suspect it.

In the earliest times a hundred knights from many remote places in the earth would have gone in there one after another, to kill the dragon and get the reward, but in our time that method had gone out, and the priest had become the one that abolished dragons. Père Guillaume Fronte did it in this case. He had a procession, with candles and incense and banners, and marched around the edge of the wood and exorcised the dragon, and it was never heard of again, although it was the opinion of many that the smell never wholly passed away.⁴⁵

This reference to a tradition of dragons in the woods bordering Domremy is in none of Twain's sources, and it is most likely that for this description he drew upon the German folklore which so fascinated him when he tramped through that country.

This account of the dragon performs an important function with respect to the development of the book; it enabled Twain very early to indicate the superstitious nature of the people, a point he continued to emphasize during the course of this history;⁴⁶ and, in

⁴⁵ Twain, Works, XVII, 23-25.

⁴⁶ For example, in one scene de Conte crosses himself and utters the name of God to break a supposed enchantment of the fairies; when the governor visits Joan, he is careful to bring a priest "to exorcise the devil that was in her in case there was one there"; the point is made that many in Joan's army believed she "was a witch, and had her strange pluck and strength from Satan"; her generals "had a deep and superstitious reverence for her"; the enemy, from the start, felt Joan was a witch. Ibid., pp. 89, 115, 132, 223, 267; 282.

addition, to point out that the Church, too, made little distinction between Christian dogma and the lore of superstition but held much the same fears as the people. In serving as the people's protector against evil spirits, witches, and all manner of instruments of the devil, the Church concentrated in itself enormous power which it frequently misused. It was the Church which tried and condemned Joan of Arc, largely upon evidence of a superstitious nature; and, thus, this account of the dragon reveals a phase of the medieval mind to the reader which looks forward to the climactic scenes of the trial and condemnation of Joan. The Church judges did not charge Joan with belief in dragons, but they did try to show that the fairies of the beech tree were evidence of Satan's influence on her; and, therefore, the dragon passage, coming directly before the description of the fairies, the beech tree, and the dancing children, places added emphasis upon an area of Joan's life that was later used against her. The fact that Twain introduced the dragon and greatly amplified, as will be shown, the passage concerning the fairies illustrates the importance he attached to superstition as a motivating factor in Joan's history.

In addition to amplifying the superstitious character of the medieval mind, the passage concerning the fairies makes the more significant point that even as a child in these early dancing days, Joan possessed a sympathy for the oppressed and undertook their defense. Twain extended the historical accounts of the fairy passage by having Joan take up the fairies' cause after Father Fronte exorcised them by holding a mass under the beech tree. The children ran to Joan with the story of Fronte's action. She confronted

Fronte and convinced him that he had done an injustice. The old priest vowed to do penance by wearing sackcloth and ashes, but Joan "seized the shovel and deluged her own head with the ashes"⁴⁷ and by this martyrdom took upon herself the forgiveness of Father Fronte and exonerated the fairies.

This episode contains important parallels to the future action of the book. The fairies, to a certain degree, symbolize the position of France in Joan's time, a country of great potential happiness oppressed not only by English armies skirmishing on its soil, but also by a superstitious and powerful church. Joan had to combat both the armies of England and the elements in the Church, especially the Dauphin's adviser, the Archbishop of Reims,⁴⁸ in order to free her country. Her young martyrdom anticipates her later martyrdom for France at the hands of the Church court. Obviously in this passage Twain used folk materials to indicate the principal events in Joan's career; he conceived this chapter as a symbolic forecasting of the historical events which follow.

This passage also uses folklore to reveal the principal traits of Joan's character. Twain amplified the legend of the beech tree beyond its being the dancing ground of fairies and made it become a sign of approaching death and heavenly reward to the children of Domremy. The narrator, de Conte, gives this improvised tradition in detail.

I know that when the Children of the Tree die in a far land, then--if they be at peace with God--they

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 36.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 149.

turn their longing eyes toward home, and there, far-shining, as through a rift in a cloud that curtains heaven, they see the soft picture of the Fairy Tree, clothed in a dream of golden light; and they see the bloomy mead sloping away to the river, and to their perishing nostrils is blown faint and sweet the fragrance of the flowers of home. And then the vision fades and passes--but they know, they know! and by their transfigured faces you know also, you who stand looking on; yes, you know the message that has come, and that it has come from heaven.⁴⁹

When Joan is at the height of her victories, defeating the English armies and loosening their grasp from the neck of France, she turns to de Conte and says, dreamily, "Before two years are sped I shall die a cruel death!"⁵⁰ For de Conte, this meant but one thing:

I KNEW she had seen the vision of the 'Tree. But when? I could not know. Doubtless before she had lately told the King to use her, for that she had but one year left to work in. It had not occurred to me at the time, but the conviction came upon me now that at that time she had already seen the Tree. It had brought her a welcome message; that was plain, otherwise she could not have been so joyous and light-hearted as she had been these latter days. The death-warning had nothing dismal about it for her; no, it was remission of exile, it was leave to come home.⁵¹

Joan's calmness, despite her realization that she must die cruelly, and especially her welcoming this sign of death emphasize her closeness with the deity from whose angels come the voices which command her. Always during the battles, Twain draws attention to her physical calmness under fire, her poise, and her assurance which make her seem divinely inspired. Through the legend of the Tree, Twain stresses Joan's spiritual calmness and assurance which is the real source of her strength.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 27-28.

⁵⁰ Ibid., XVIII, 9.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 12.

The principal traits of Joan's character, however, are revealed in the passage concerning the fairy tree when Joan confronts Father Fronte. Her keen reason, which later enables her to learn quickly the art of warfare, to make sound decisions when confronted by the unexpected on the field of battle, and to speak adroitly before learned councils is early turned on Fronte. Remembering that the evidence that the fairies were dancing around the tree at night was given by a person who chanced upon them, the child Joan presents her argument which persuades Fronte of his error:

"The fairies were to go if they showed themselves to people again, is it not so?"

"Yes, that was it, dear."

"If a man comes prying into a person's room at midnight when that person is half naked, will you be so unjust as to say that that person is showing himself to that man?"

"Well---no." The good priest looked a little troubled and uneasy when he said it.⁵²

Possibly the trait of character which Twain valued in Joan of Arc above all others was her total lack of self-interest. He referred to this from time to time, especially during the coronation scene: when the King asks Joan what she desires as a reward, she requests only that her village be freed from taxation.⁵³ When Father Fronte wonders why Joan so heatedly champions the fairies and asks, referring to the banishment, "what loss have you suffered by it?"⁵⁴ de Conte comments on this trait, which, in fact, explains much regarding her absolute religious dedication to the liberation of her country.

⁵² Ibid., XVII, 34.

⁵³ Ibid., XVIII, 59.

⁵⁴ Ibid., XVII, 38.

Was he never going to find out what kind of a child Joan of Arc was? Was he never going to learn that things which merely concerned her own gain or loss she cared nothing about? Could he never get the simple fact into his head that the sure way and the only way to rouse her up and set her on fire was to show her where some other person was going to suffer wrong or hurt or loss?⁵⁵

By having folklore motivate Joan's actions so that they reveal her personality and by employing the folklore of dragons and fairies to indicate Joan's role as the heroine of France, Twain made this early chapter something more than a descriptive background scene of Joan's childhood. He may have begun the chapter in this way, elaborating the brief historical accounts of the legends of Domremy because of his sympathy for folk materials, but he soon discovered that by using folklore as a motivating and characterizing influence, he could achieve a significant prelude to the entire book, giving the reader an early appreciation of his heroine. This passage, therefore, is fundamental to an understanding of Twain's point of view in this work and constitutes one of the best examples of his folklore art.

In A Connecticut Yankee, one finds an important advance over The Prince and the Pauper and Joan of Arc in the handling of folklore. There is less diffusion, less scattering of folk elements which have only a surface glint. The area of concentration is greater, tending to pull all folk materials into a common relationship. To appreciate how this happened, one must understand Twain's conception of the principal character, the Yankee.

The purpose of this novel is to show, through the eyes of the practical nineteenth century Yankee, the rottenness of the Church,

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 39.

the stupidity of the rulers, the worthless character of the institution of chivalry, and the absolute belief in superstition typical of sixth century England. The Yankee tells his story in his own person as he comments on his life in King Arthur's realm. It soon becomes apparent to the reader that Twain, to a great degree, cast himself in the role of the Yankee and in doing this saw much of the Yankee in terms of his own life, in much the same way that he had visualized Tom Canty as Tom Sawyer in The Prince and the Pauper. The fact that A Connecticut Yankee is placed in a more remote and more primitive time than either The Prince and the Pauper or Joan of Arc with a less accessible historical background to command Twain's attention also may have prompted him to assume the role of the Yankee. As a result, Twain easily employed folk materials from his experience, and for this reason there is more folklore in A Connecticut Yankee than in either The Prince and the Pauper or Joan of Arc. The Yankee constitutes the central focus and supplies a definite unity to the book. He is always present, almost always motivates the action. In his character lie both the strength and the weakness of folklore usage in this work.

Twain employed the folklore of the frontier to a great degree to depict the Yankee and the life around him. The Yankee's traveling companion, the talkative Sandy who guides him to supposed deeds of glory against the mighty ogres, is modeled on the garrulous frontier woman who appears in the pages of Roughing It. In the Roughing It scene, Twain's hesitant attempt during a stagecoach journey to begin conversation with a husky woman who had maintained an air of composed silence for hours brings an immediate reaction:

The Sphynx was a Sphynx no more! The fountains of her great deep were broken up, and she rained the nine parts of speech forty days and forty nights, metaphorically speaking, and buried us under a desolating deluge of trivial gossip that left not a crag or pinnacle of rejoinder projecting above the tossing waste of dislocated grammar and decomposed pronunciation!

How we suffered, suffered, suffered! She went on, hour after hour, till I was sorry I ever opened the mosquito question and gave her a start. She never did stop again until she got to her journey's end toward daylight...⁵⁶

Sandy's talkativeness works the same effect upon the Yankee:

She was a quite biddable creature and good-hearted, but she had a flow of talk that was as steady as a mill, and made your head sore like the drays and wagons in a city. If she had had a cork she would have been a comfort. But you can't cork that kind; they would die. Her clack was going all day, and you would think something would surely happen to her works, by and by; but no, they never got out of order; and she never had to slack up for words. She could grind, and pump, and churn, and buzz by the week, and never stop to oil up or blow out. And yet the result was just nothing but wind. She never had any ideas, any more than a fog has. She was a perfect blatherskite; I mean for jaw, jaw, jaw, talk, talk, talk,⁵⁷ jabber, jabber, jabber; but just as good as she could be.

The characterization of Sandy, however, is more than a comic device of frontier humor wrenched from the nineteenth century and dropped into the sixth. In a well known paragraph,⁵⁸ Twain points out that Sandy's rambling speech is in fact the parent of the German language; and this not only convincingly places Sandy in her own era, but also is another detail which emphasizes the sixth century setting.

Twain again borrows from Roughing It the comic formula of having an outsider try to discover meaning in the slang-ridden speech

⁵⁶ Twain, Works, VII, 23.

⁵⁷ Ibid., XVI, 96.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 190.

of the frontiersman. Scotty Briggs' talk bewildered the parson in the Roughing It sketch, "Buck Fanshaw's Funeral." In A Connecticut Yankee, Twain uses the same formula as the Yankee tries to get his meaning across to Sandy.

On my way home at noon, I met Sandy. She had been sampling the hermits. I said:

"I would like to do that myself. This is Wednesday. Is there a matinée?"

"A which, please you, sir?"

"Matinée. Do they keep open afternoons?"

"Who?"

"The hermits, of course."

"Keep open?"

"Yes, keep open. Isn't that plain enough? Do they knock off at noon?"

"Knock off?"

"Knock off?--yes, knock off. What is the matter with knock off? I never saw such a dunderhead; can't you understand anything at all? In plain terms, do they shut up shop, draw the game, bank the fires--"

"Shut up shop, draw--" ⁵⁹

Although this passage appealed to Twain because of its comedy, it has the more important function of touching off the Yankee's deep affection for Sandy, which later leads to their marriage. Sandy in rambling, yet dignified speech rebukes the Yankee for his impatience in expecting her to know this language. He admires her spunk, and realizing his error, remarks, "I was gradually coming to have a mysterious and shuddery reverence for this girl..."⁶⁰

When the Yankee starts a newspaper in Arthur's England, Twain readily drew upon his own experience of frontier reporting in Nevada, where extravagant humor, wild exaggeration, and elaborate jokes were basic to a reporter's success. The Yankee indicates this

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 188.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 190.

when he remarks of an apprentice's first effort, "Of course this novice's report lacked whoop and crash and lurid description, and therefore wanted the true ring..."⁶¹ In one instance, Twain reworked one of his elaborate jokes for a part in this book. Nineteen years before the publication of A Connecticut Yankee Twain wrote an extravagant burlesque on agricultural newspaper reporting entitled, "How I Edited an Agricultural Newspaper," in which he offered such advice as,

Turnips should never be pulled, it injures them. It is much better to send a boy up and let him shake the tree.

It is evident that we are to have a backward season for grain. Therefore it will be well for the farmer to begin setting out his cornstalks and planting his buckwheat cakes in July instead of August.⁶²

Twain found a use for this sketch in a scene that finds the Yankee and King Arthur, traveling in disguise as commoners, lodging at a farmer's house. The Yankee is alone with the farmer and his friends, the King having left the room momentarily, and has discovered that he and the King are in great peril, for the farmers are convinced that he and the King are traveling informers. The Yankee falls silent, trying feverishly to think of a way to win back the farmers' confidence. At this point the King returns, obviously determined to impress the farmers with his erudition. The King's words do not help the situation:

"--were not the best way, methinks, albeit it is not to be denied that authorities differ as concerning this point, some contending that the onion is but an unwholesome berry when stricken early from the tree...whileas others

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 72.

⁶² Ibid., XIX, 309-310.

do yet maintain, with much show of reason, that this is not of necessity the case, instancing that plums and other like cereals do be always dug in the unripe state ...yet are they clearly wholesome, the more especially when one doth assuage the asperities of their nature by admixture of the tranquilizing juice of the wayward cabbage--"63

It is now impossible to win the farmers' confidence. The Yankee and the King are rushed and barely escape with their lives. Although Twain obviously used this sketch to have the farmers believe the King mad and in this way continue the narrative action which leads to the Yankee and the King being sold into slavery, Twain was in this case more interested in the joke, a success of his earlier days, than he was in the realities of the situation. The humor here is irrelevant. It is impossible to imagine that the King would try to impress an audience with the very subject he knew would be his undoing. This passage results in farce, weakening the characterization of the King.

Frontier tall talk also appears in this work. The Yankee uses it to describe how he won the friendship of the monks:

At last I ventured a story myself; and vast was the success of it. Not right off, of course, for the native of those islands does not, as a rule, dissolve upon the early applications of a humorous thing; but the fifth time I told it, they began to crack in places; the eight [sic] time I told it, they began to crumble; at the twelfth repetition they fell apart in chunks; and at the fifteenth they disintegrated, and I got a broom and swept them up.⁶⁴

He uses it to bewilder some shopkeepers who are reluctant to accept the Yankee's newly minted coin and ask him a stream of personal questions:

⁶³ Ibid., XVI, 310.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 184.

...I went right on and furnished them a lot of information voluntarily; told them I owned a dog, and his name was Watch, and my first wife was a Free Will Baptist, and her grandfather was a Prohibitionist, and I used to know a man who had two thumbs on each hand and a wart on the inside of his upper lip, and died in the hope of a glorious resurrection, and so on, and so on, and so on, till even that hungry village questioner began to look satisfied, and also a shade put out...⁶⁵

These examples are the purest window dressing, giving a particular incident the momentary color of frontier exaggeration. However, unlike these examples, a much earlier use of tall talk, which almost succeeds in rising above being but a string of boasts to the continuity of the tall tale, plays an important role in this book. In the opening pages, the Yankee is captured by the knight, Sir Kay, and brought before King Arthur's court. Sir Kay's account of this exploit, which actually consisted in his dragging the frightened Yankee from a tree, is designed to increase the knight's reputation. The Yankee is speaking:

Now Sir Kay arose and began to fire up on his history-mill with me for fuel. It was time for me to feel serious, and I did. Sir Kay told how he had encountered me in a far land of barbarians, who all wore the same ridiculous garb that I did--a garb that was a work of enchantment, and intended to make the wearer secure from hurt by human hands. However, he had nullified the force of the enchantment by prayer, and had killed my thirteen knights in a three hours' battle, and taken me prisoner, sparing my life in order that so strange a curiosity as I was might be exhibited to the wonder and admiration of the king and the court. He spoke of me all the time, in the blandest way, as "this prodigious giant," and "this horrible sky-towering monster," and "this tusked and taloned man-devouring ogre", and everybody took in all this bosh in the naivest way, and never smiled or seemed to notice that there was any discrepancy between these watered statistics and me. He said that in trying to escape

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 280.

from him I sprang into the top of a tree two hundred cubits high at a single bound, but he dislodged me with a stone the size of a cow, which "all-to brast" the most of my bones, and then swore me to appear at Arthur's court for sentence.⁶⁶

The principal function of this boasting tall talk is to illustrate, at the very beginning of the book, the childish gullibility of the people, a gullibility which does much to explain why superstition has such a hold on them. Their institution of chivalry has, in fact, such a power over them that they believe in its legendary idealism to the contradiction of their senses. They never stop to question if it is a valid institution but continue to act foolishly in the expected way: "The boys all took a flier at the Holy Grail now and then. It was a several years' cruise. They always put in the long absence snooping around, in the most conscientious way, though none of them had any idea where the Holy Grail really was, and I don't think any of them actually expected to find it, or would have known what to do with it if he had run across it."⁶⁷

The more sobering aspect of all this is that both knights and commoners, always failing to exercise reason, are prey to all superstitious forms, especially those of the Church, for the monks are almost as ignorant and superstitious as the rest of the people. Merlin's power is held in awesome respect by both church and laity. It is because of this that the Yankee becomes a power in the land, for through his knowledge of science he works magic with gunpowder and other devices which shatters Merlin's reputation and gives the

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 37-38.

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 75-76.

Yankee the freedom to attempt to civilize these people in terms of the technical advances of the nineteenth century. An important thesis of the book has to do with why the Yankee failed. The confident Yankee experiences no disturbing doubts about his plans, for he grasps an important trait of human nature.

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.⁶⁸

He is certain that the blessings of nineteenth century science and democracy will free these people from the curse of chivalry, superstition, and the monarchical system. But the Yankee looking forward so intently to his civilizing projects never thought to look behind, else he would have seen that the heritage of many centuries would outlast any innovations he could bring about in his brief life span. Near the close of the book, when the Church has moved against him with the dreaded interdict which plunges the people into superstitious fear and torpor, his friend Clarence sums up the inability of human reason to contend against established tradition when he asks, "Did you think you had educated the superstition out of those people?"⁶⁹ The tall talk of Sir Kay early reveals the character of these people and lays the foundation for this final climax.

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 143-144. Twain elsewhere revealed his strong belief in the shaping power of environment when he asserted, "Training is everything. The peach was once a bitter almond; cauliflower is nothing but cabbage with a college education." Ibid., XIV, 49.

⁶⁹ Ibid., XVI, 380.

The indebtedness of the characterization of the Yankee to frontier folklore, especially to tall talk, whereas the true New Englander would rely more upon the homely idiom,⁷⁰ illustrates that Mark Twain's Yankee is not a pure folk creation. There are other inconsistencies. The traditional Yankee is a shrewd, bargaining man of a keenly practical turn of mind who seldom misses the main chance and possesses little poetry of sentiment in his nature. Twain was well aware of this tradition. In his "Some Rambling Notes of an Idle Excursion," he shows two old, hard-bitten Yankees bargaining over graveyard lots. A close rendering of New England dialect sharpens the Yankee character.

"...I took No. 9. And I'll tell you for why. In the first place, Deacon Shorb wanted it. Well, after the way he'd gone on about Seth's wife overlappin' his prem'ses, I'd 'a' beat him out of that No. 9 if I'd 'a' had to stand two dollars extra, let alone one. That's the way I felt about it. Says I, what's a dollar, anyway? Life's on'y a pilgrimage, says I; we ain't here for good, and we can't take it with us, says I. So I just dumped it down, knowin' the Lord don't suffer a good deed to go for nothin', and cal'latin' to take it out o' somebody in the course o' trade. Then there was another reason, John. No. 9's a long way the handiest lot in the simitery, and the likeliest for situation. It lays right on top of a knoll in the dead center of the buryin' ground; and you can see Millport from there, and Tracy's, and Hopper Mount, and a raft o' farms, and so on. There ain't no better outlook from a buryin' plot in the State. Si Higgins says so, and I reckon he ought to know. Well, and that ain't all. 'Course Shorb had to take No. 8; wa'n't no help for 't. Now, No. 8 jines on to No. 9, but it's on the slope of the hill, and every time it rains it'll soak right down on to the Shorbs. Si Higgins says 't when the deacon's time comes, he better take⁷¹ out fire and marine insurance both on his remains."

⁷⁰ Rourke, American Humor, 33; 49.

⁷¹ Twain, Works, XX, 255-256.

The hero of A Connecticut Yankee, although not calculating to the point of dishonesty, is fully within this tradition:

I am an American. I was born and reared in Hartford, in the State of Connecticut--anyway, just over the river, in the country. So I am a Yankee of the Yankees--and practical; yes, and nearly barren of sentiment, I suppose--or poetry, in other words.⁷²

Elsewhere the Yankee asserts, "I had never been accustomed to getting left, even if I do say it myself."⁷³

Mark Twain, in using his own experience in the West as well as his knowledge of the Yankee type acquired during his later years in New England,⁷⁴ tended to associate himself with his hero; but his writing the book in the first person and, more importantly, the savage attacks on the corrupt institutions of Arthur's England which came right from his blood stream made this association absolute. Carl Van Doren has rightly said, "The Yankee's opinion about monarchy and hierarchy are [sic] unmistakably Mark Twain's."⁷⁵ This association led Twain to abandon the Yankee dialect so he could more directly unleash his savage indignation. The result is that the folk type character of the Yankee is not always maintained. Periodically, Mark Twain steps before the reader and speaks in the

⁷² Ibid., XVI, 14.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 106.

⁷⁴ Twain's friend, Archibald Henderson, has remarked that Twain easily accommodated himself to a new environment; that he readily became well acquainted with New England, which helped him so much in drawing the character of the Yankee. Archibald Henderson, Mark Twain (New York, 1910), pp. 163-164. Twain made his home in Hartford from 1871 to 1900.

⁷⁵ Carl Van Doren, "Introduction," in A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court, by Samuel L. Clemens (New York, 1949), p. vii.

carefully turned prose a Yankee would never use. Here, for example, is the true Yankee, speaking in his straightforward manner about the troubadours:

There never was such a country for wandering liars; and they were of both sexes. Hardly a month went by without one of these tramps arriving; and generally loaded with a tale about some princess or other wanting help to get her out of some far-away castle where she was held in captivity by a lawless scoundrel, usually a giant. Now you would think that the first thing the king would do after listening to such a novelette from an entire stranger, would be to ask for credentials--yes, and a pointer or two as to locality of castle, best route to it, and so on. But nobody ever thought of so simple and common-sense a thing at [sic] that.⁷⁶

Here is Twain's voice, speaking through the character of the Yankee:

The blunting effects of slavery upon the slaveholder's moral perceptions are known and conceded, the world over; and a privileged class, an aristocracy, is but a band of slaveholders under another name. This has a harsh sound, and yet should not be offensive to any--even to the noble himself--unless the fact itself be an offense: for the statement simply formulates a fact.⁷⁷

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.⁷⁸

The Yankee, too, is endowed with Twain's poetry:

Straight off, we were in the country. It was most lovely and pleasant in those sylvan solitudes in the early cool morning in the first freshness of autumn. From the hill-tops we saw fair green valleys lying spread out below, with streams winding through them, and island groves of trees here and there, and huge lonely oaks scattered about and casting black blots of shade; and beyond the valleys

⁷⁶ Twain, Works, XVI, 83.

⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 216-217.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 105.

we saw the ranges of hills, blue with haze, stretching away in billowy perspective to the horizon, with at wide intervals a dim fleck of white or gray on a wave-summit, which we knew was a castle.⁷⁹

Regardless of this occasional unevenness in the characterization of the Yankee, the Hartford mechanic emerges principally as the New England folklore type. This was Twain's specific design. In order to achieve the sharpest kind of contrast between what he felt to be the blessings of science working in a democracy and the indefensible institutions of sixth century England, and by this contrast obtain the necessary background against which to project his satire, Twain wanted a hero who would not only bring scathing objectivity to bear on sixth century England, but also would sharpen the contrast as much as possible by undertaking improvements designed to educate these people out of the dark ages. As Carl Van Doren has observed, the best man for the job "was a mechanic, an all-round handyman."⁸⁰ Better yet, however, a Yankee, for his observations would spring from the bedrock of common sense, and his practical mind would prompt the most ingenious use of his mechanical knowledge to attain his purpose in this strange and uneducated land.

From the time the Yankee introduces himself as the American from Hartford, Twain carefully endows him with rustic New England traits. The Yankee's hard common-sense is frequently refined down to the touchstone of a proverb. When the Yankee sees that the people miss one of his neat figures of speech making use of a geological term, he vows he will educate the people up to his remark,

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 92.

⁸⁰ Van Doren, "Introduction," p. vi.

observing, "It is no use to throw a good thing away merely because the market isn't ripe yet."⁸¹ When Arthur's court condemns the Yankee to die, he compresses into a proverb a vivid picture of his anguish: "The mere knowledge of a fact is pale; but when you come to realize your fact, it takes on color."⁸² He uses the forceful proverb to give the reader a conception of his elation in becoming a power in the land after he has used the magic of gunpowder to blow up Merlin's castle: "To be vested with enormous authority is a fine thing; but to have the on-looking world consent to it is a finer."⁸³ When the Yankee finds he must cut through a deception to know his course of action, he observes, "In all lies there is wheat among the chaff; I must get at the wheat in this case."⁸⁴ The following example emphasizes the Yankee's keen grasp of human nature. He puts into a proverb the power of advertising, thinking how this will increase his reputation as he casts the trappings of magic over the ordinary task of repairing the monastery well.

As a matter of business it was a good idea to get the notion around that the thing was difficult. Many a small thing has been made large by the right kind of advertising. That monk was filled up with the difficulty of this enterprise; he would fill up the others. In two days the solicitude would be booming.⁸⁵

A significant contrast exists between the way in which the Yankee uses proverbs and the way Colonel Sellers used them. For the gifted Yankee, proverbs become the succinct containers of hard

⁸¹ Twain, Works, XVI, 37.

⁸² Ibid., p. 47.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 63.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 84.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 188.

common-sense, the product of his keen reason. Colonel Sellers' proverbs have nothing behind them, but exist in his mind independent of practical significance, reveal his mental confusion, and indicate rather a groping for thought than the possession of it.

As the proverbs illustrate the Yankee's common-sense, his homely figures of speech indicate his New England environment. Although homely idiom appeared in the West, it first was regarded as a basic ornament of Yankee speech,⁸⁶ undoubtedly because the Yankee preceded the Westerner into print as a fully drawn character type.⁸⁷ The speech of Twain's Yankee is strewn with these folk figures which emphasize the Yankee's practical turn of mind. The helmets worn by the knights have "the shape of a nail-keg with slits in it."⁸⁸ When a hoped for event does not turn out, the Yankee finds himself "up a stump."⁸⁹ The knights around the Round Table talked like children: "There did not seem to be brains enough in the entire nursery, so to speak, to bait a fish-hook with."⁹⁰ The Yankee undergoes the torture of hearing worn-out jokes in the sixth century which had given him "the dry gripes"⁹¹ in the nineteenth. The description of castle lighting facilities is particularly vivid:

⁸⁶ Rourke, American Humor, p. 33

⁸⁷ In the 1820's Yankee sayings in almanacs, joke-books, and especially in Seba Smith's Jack Downing papers made their way throughout the country. Sketches of the expanding frontier were not to gain wide popularity for at least another ten years. For a detailed comparison of these two movements, see Ibid., pp. 1-69.

⁸⁸ Twain, Works, XVI, 15.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 16.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 29.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 37.

There was no gas, there were no candles; a bronze dish half full of boarding-house butter with a blazing rag floating in it was the thing that produced what was regarded as light.⁹²

The Yankee explains that a man in armor is too weighted for much movement, and when the time comes to mount a horse, "They carry you out, just as they carry a sun-struck man to the drug store..."⁹³

He remarks elsewhere that a nauseous odor "was like an insurrection in a gasometer."⁹⁴

These homely idioms do more than emphasize the Yankee as a folk type. They individualize him in terms of his proper century; and as he uses these idioms of his own home from time to time, the fact that he is really a visitor from another world is kept always before the reader. This realization was very important to Twain because on it all the implications of the book, all the narrative action, and all the satiric force depend.

The Yankee's keen mind illustrated by the proverbs and his down-to-earth manner indicated by his homely idioms combine with his native shrewdness and enterprise to enable him to become a power in early England. The Connecticut Yankee is an excellent example of the active New England folk type who must always be "a-doin'."⁹⁵ He is not long in Camelot before he realizes the possibilities before him:

⁹² Ibid., p. 56.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 91.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 166.

⁹⁵ Rourke, American Humor, p. 34.

Look at the opportunities here for a man of knowledge, brains, pluck, and enterprise to sail in and grow up with the country. The grandest field that ever was; and all my own; not a competitor; not a man who wasn't a baby to me in acquirements and capacities; whereas, what would I amount to in the twentieth century? I should be a foreman of a factory, that is about all; and could drag a seine down street any day and catch a hundred better men than myself.⁹⁶

He meets occasional setbacks with typical Yankee fortitude: "Well, one must make the best of things, and not waste time with useless fretting, but get down to business and see what can be done."⁹⁷ It is this enterprise which enables him to effect incredible changes in the country which convince him that his dream of a republic is possible:

A happy and prosperous country, and strangely altered. Schools everywhere, and several colleges; a number of pretty good newspapers. Even authorship was taking a start....Slavery was dead and gone; all men were equal before the law; taxation had been equalized. The telegraph, the telephone, the phonograph, the typewriter, the sewing-machine, and all the thousand willing and handy servants of steam and electricity were working their way into favor.⁹⁸

The Yankee is able to hold his dream until the Catholic Church moves against him with the interdict.

These examples show that Mark Twain selected New England folklore with care to establish a true characterization of the Yankee. Except for this, however, and the tall talk of Sir Kay which anticipates the climax of the book, Twain remained true to his theory

⁹⁶ Twain, Works, XVI, 63.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 84.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 361.

of composition, let the story tell itself, and improvised as he went along. Thus, one finds strong western folk elements mixed with New England folklore which weakens the purity of the characterization of the Yankee. This is indicative of the freedom Twain allowed himself once he had used New England lore to establish the Yankee folk type. His frequent personal intrusion damages the continuity of his folk creation even more. It is the Yankee, therefore, who demonstrates the most concentrated use of folklore in the historical novels and also affords the reason why this folklore is not as coherently employed as it might be.

The use of folk materials in these novels provides one of the strongest proofs that folklore for Mark Twain was a basic writing instrument. In the travel books one might expect a writer who grew up under the influence of folk traditions to devote much space to the folk materials he encountered during his travels. One would not be as apt to expect a similar attention to folklore in the historical novels since the necessary attention to historical background discouraged the introduction of contemporary folklore into the remote historical setting of another life. That Mark Twain did introduce as much folklore into these novels illustrates that such materials were of constant importance to him and might be employed whenever he picked up his pen. Although the travel books and the historical novels evidence a significant indebtedness to folk materials, they are not as dependent upon folklore as those novels of Mark Twain's which derived neither from his travels nor his interest in the past but from his boyhood world in Missouri.

Chapter IV

The Mysterious Stranger, Pudd'nhead Wilson, and The Adventures of Tom Sawyer

The Mysterious Stranger provides one of the clearest examples that Mark Twain attached increasing importance to folklore in the novels imagined in the spirit of the Missouri period. That Twain in The Mysterious Stranger achieved a more artistic use of folklore with regard to a work as a whole than in the historical novels resulted to a great degree from the fact that this story was conceived as a fantasy. Twain was thus freed from worry about historical background drawn from secondary sources and could let his imagination carry his satire against mankind as he wished. Thus, the most important reason for Twain's folklore achievement is apparent. It has been shown that, for the most part, the best examples of folklore usage in the earlier books occurred in situations which reminded Twain vividly of his own folklore experiences. It is important to note that although The Mysterious Stranger is placed in the middle ages, its setting is really Hannibal, Missouri, and was conceived in those terms. A jotting in Twain's Notebook, anticipating The Mysterious Stranger, makes this clear:

Story of little Satan Jr. who came to Hannibal, went to school, was popular and greatly liked by those who knew his secret....He was always doing miracles--his pals knew they were miracles, the others thought they were mysteries.¹

¹ Mark Twain, Mark Twain's Notebook, ed. Albert B. Paine (New York, 1935), p. 369.

The opening description of Eseldorf, Austria, where the story takes place, is Tom Sawyer's St. Petersburg, Twain's Hannibal, in medieval dress with the Mississippi flowing below the town carrying rafts, and Cardiff Hill looming in the background:

At its front flowed the tranquil river, its surface painted with cloud-forms and the reflections of drifting arks and stone-boats; behind it rose the woody steps to the base of the lofty precipice; from the top of the precipice frowned a vast castle, its long stretch of towers and bastions mailed in vines...²

The children of the story, Theodore and his friends, are the companions Twain had in his own childhood.³ Their dislike of schooling and their pipe smoking, for example, remind one of Tom Sawyer.⁴ Twain's days in Missouri were constantly in his mind when he wrote The Mysterious Stranger, prompting him to use folklore to depict background, color the principal characterizations, and, to some degree, motivate basic plot action.

Twain did not wish his thesis that man is a barbarous and ignorant creature in an unfeeling world to be damaged by having his protagonist, Satan, perform miracles against a common, everyday background. Accordingly, Twain went to the world of folklore for the proper background, conceiving the entire story in terms of fantasy, wherein all things are possible. So that the reader could more easily detach himself from reality, Twain placed his story in

² Mark Twain, The Mysterious Stranger and Other Stories (New York, 1922), p. 3.

³ See Bernard DeVoto, Mark Twain at Work (Cambridge, 1942), p. 128; and also Dixon Wecter, Sam Clemens of Hannibal (Boston, 1952), p. 63.

⁴ Twain, The Mysterious Stranger, pp. 4; 11.

time past. He indicated in the opening paragraphs that the action unfolds in a world of fantasy by introducing the setting as a dream vision. The narrator seems to be in a reverie, thinking out his story.⁵

It was in 1590--winter. Austria was far away from the world, and asleep; it was still the Middle Ages in Austria, and promised to remain so forever. Some even set it away back centuries upon centuries and said that by the mental and spiritual clock it was still the Age of Belief in Austria. But they meant it as a compliment, not a slur, and it was so taken, and we were all proud of it. I remember it well, although I was only a boy; and I remember, too, the pleasure it gave me.

Yes, Austria was far from the world, and asleep, and our village was in the middle of that sleep, being in the middle of Austria. It drowsed in peace in the deep privacy of a hilly and woodsy solitude where news from the world hardly ever came to disturb its dreams, and was infinitely content.⁶

This opening description not only introduces the story as a fantasy, but also anticipates the book's final chapter, wherein the universe, the world, man, everything is held to be only a dream, no more substantial in its seeming reality than the dreamy, sleep-laden atmosphere which surrounds Eseldorf and makes it real to the narrator.

This background, this world of fantasy, is a superstitious world in which witches and devils are lurid realities. The unseen world holds the people in a grip of terror. The priest, Father Adolf, is much feared, and respected also, because he is the only Christian ever known by the town to have openly professed no fear of the devil. This makes the people wonder: "...there must be

⁵ E. S. Fussell, "The Structural Problem of The Mysterious Stranger," Studies in Philology, XLIX (January, 1952), 97.

⁶ Twain, The Mysterious Stranger, p. 3.

something supernatural about him."⁷ This is a natural assumption, for since the Church lives in fear of devils, demons, and witches and is the only effective force against this supernatural evil, Father Adolf seemed to have some insight transcending earthly knowledge to feel secure in a time so governed by fear that his colleague, Father Peter, is strongly suspected of believing that "God was all goodness and would find a way to save all his poor human children."⁸ The village astrologer, too, is a power in the land, much respected for his ability to read the future. The fact that Father Adolf holds great respect for the astrologer indicates the reaches of superstitious fear and poses the ludicrous spectacle of a devout Christian people worshiping pagan power, innocent of any inconsistency in their action.

Always there is danger. Witches are a constant menace: "We had tried to extirpate the witches," exclaims little Theodore, the narrator of the story, "but the more of them we burned the more of the breed rose up in their places."⁹ The people are accustomed to making the sign of the cross frequently in order to weaken Satan's power.¹⁰ An important function of the priest is to purify bewitched objects.¹¹ The people's belief in palmistry and prophecy is absolute. At one point Satan terrorizes a crowd which a moment before

⁷ Ibid., pp. 4-5.

⁸ Ibid., p. 5.

⁹ Ibid., p. 58-59.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 5.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 47.

threatened his and Theodore's life by asserting that he has noticed the palms of the ringleaders and that they are soon to die. "You could see the superstitious crowd shrink and catch their breath, under the sudden shock."¹²

Such folk beliefs provide the background against which Twain projects his thesis regarding the ignorance of mankind. The people believe they act rationally; the Church believes it acts rationally. Both trust reason which, in reality, is but an unthinking response to fears of the supernatural. The burning of witches, the naïve conclusion that witches multiply as quickly as they are burned, the esteem held for the astrologer, the superstitious Church--all this shows what man is capable of when he puts faith in his limited reason. At one point Twain uses folklore as a touch to reveal the gulf lying between the wisdom of Satan and man and how superstition feeds upon the ignorance to which man is condemned: Satan gives death to Theodore's friends, Nikolaus and Lisa, on the 13th,¹³ a lucky day for the children since death spares them a tortured life; but their deaths will further confirm the fear their elders hold for this date.

The principal characters, too, except Satan, are sensitive to this background of folk beliefs. The boy Theodore and his companions Nikolaus and Seppi have a friend in the old servingman of the nearby castle, Felix Brandt, who tells them terror stories of the

¹² Ibid., p. 116.

¹³ Ibid., p. 92.

supernatural world.

When it stormed he kept us all night; and while it thundered and lightened outside he told us about ghosts and horrors of every kind, and of battles and murders and mutilations, and such things, and made it pleasant and cozy inside; and he told these things from his own experience largely. He had seen many ghosts in his time, and witches and enchanters, and once he was lost in a fierce storm at midnight in the mountains, and by the glare of the lightning had seen the Wild Huntsman rage on the blast with his specter dogs chasing after him through the driving cloud-rack. Also he had seen an incubus once, and several times he had seen the great bat that sucks the blood from the necks of people while they are asleep, fanning them softly with its wings and so keeping them drowsy till they die.¹⁴

The boys, being the products of their age, quite naturally believe these stories. They also believe in witches, as Theodore's earlier remark concerning the difficulty of stamping them out indicates. They know something of fairy lore also, fearing that some money Satan gave Father Peter "would crumble and turn to dust, like fairy money."¹⁵

It was important to Twain's conception of the story, however, to have these boys less saturated with superstition than the average person in Eseldorf, for they are to become Satan's confidants, enjoying his company and by their naïveté prompting his stinging evaluations of humankind. If Twain had portrayed them as being as superstition-ridden as their elders, they would have flown from Satan when he early revealed himself to them. Since Satan, the boys, especially the narrator Theodore, and the village of Eseldorf are the principal points of focus in the book, Twain faced a

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 9.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 33.

basically simple situation in which contrast runs from the highest perfection of Satan's perceptive intellect to the lowest objects of God's work, the people of the mundane village. The bridge to this contrast is supplied by the boys who stand midway in the scale, having not enough superstition to fear Satan and not enough wisdom to respect his judgments against mankind, although Theodore is convinced at last that Satan speaks the truth. In order for Theodore and his companions to accept Satan readily as a friend, Twain had to present them as not blindly superstitious although possessing this knowledge of their own era which bids them apologize for man's actions. The way Twain accomplished this shows a careful handling of folk materials which both prepares the boys for their meeting with Satan and at the same time creates a scene of dramatic intensity.

First, as has been shown, the scene in which old Felix Brandt tells the boys folk tales of horror establishes the boys' knowledge of this lore. But soon an important modification takes place.

He [Brandt] encouraged us not to fear supernatural things, such as ghosts, and said they did no harm, but only wandered about because they were lonely and distressed and wanted kindly notice and compassion; and in time we learned not to be afraid, and even went down with him in the night to the haunted chamber in the dungeons of the castle.¹⁶

Then the talk shifts abruptly to angels:

But the strangest thing was that he had seen angels--actual angels out of heaven--and had talked with them. They had no wings, and wore clothes, and talked and looked and acted just like any natural person, and you would never know them for angels except for the wonderful things they did which a mortal could not do, and

the way they suddenly disappeared while you were talking with them, which was also a thing which no mortal could do. And he said they were pleasant and cheerful, not gloomy and melancholy, like ghosts.¹⁷

The next morning, while playing in the hills, the boys meet Satan, although at first they do not know who he is:

Soon there came a youth strolling toward us through the trees, and he sat down and began to talk in a friendly way, just as if he knew us. But we did not answer him, for he was a stranger and we were not used to strangers and were shy of them. He had new and good clothes on, and was handsome and had a winning face and a pleasant voice, and was easy and graceful and unembarrassed, not slouchy and awkward and diffident, like other boys. We wanted to be friendly with him, but didn't know how to begin.¹⁸

Satan amuses the boys, and makes them a little fearful when he interests them by lighting a pipe with his breath, creating apples and grapes out of the air, and making birds from clay and setting them free to fly. Then the children ask him who he is.

"An angel," he said, quite simply, and set another bird free and clapped his hands and made it fly away.¹⁹

Remembering old Brandt's words concerning angels, the boys are only momentarily frightened. Here before them is the personification of an angel. When the boys learn Satan's name their shock passes quickly, for their new friend remarks to them that Satan, too, was once an angel.²⁰ After this, Satan quickly charms them.

He made us forget everything; we could only listen to him, and love him, and be his slaves, to do with us as he would. He made us drunk with the joy of being with

17 Ibid., p. 10.

18 Ibid., pp. 10-11.

19 Ibid., p. 13.

20 Ibid., p. 14.

him, and of looking into the heaven of his eyes, and of feeling the ecstasy that thrilled along our veins from the touch of his hand.²¹

The folklore characterization of Satan differs widely from the traditional representation which pictures him as either red or black and handsome in a very sinister way, with pointed ears, horns on his forehead, a pointed tail, bat's wings on his shoulders, and cloven hoofs instead of feet.²² In The Mysterious Stranger Twain ignored the traditional characterization and made Satan a charming youth, thus pointing out man's ignorance in trying to define what he does not know. The universe is not evil, only uncaring.

Once he [Satan] even said, in so many words, that our people down here were quite interesting to him, notwithstanding they were so dull and ignorant and trivial and conceited, and so diseased and rickety, and such a shabby, poor, worthless lot all around. 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 of no consequence and hadn't feelings.²³

Satan is not man's enemy; he only views man with a quizzical detachment from the vantage point of sublime knowledge. The fact that Satan symbolizes all wisdom and power is an additional reason why Twain disregarded the traditional picture of Satan, for the folklore regarding Satan places certain restrictions upon his powers.²⁴ Twain undoubtedly wanted no such implication associated

²¹ Ibid., p. 18.

²² Funk & Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend, ed. Maria Leach (New York, 1950), II, 973.

²³ Twain, The Mysterious Stranger, pp. 19-20.

²⁴ For such folklore see Stith Thompson, Motif-Index of Folk-Literature, Folklore Fellows Communications, Nos. 108-109 (Helsinki, 1934), III, 226-229.

with his Satan who, in fact, emerges as Twain himself, or at least the vehicle of his ideas. As in A Connecticut Yankee, Twain unleashed his satire by having a visitor from another world appraise mankind. The Yankee, for the most part, commented upon human nature. In The Mysterious Stranger, however, the thoughts and conclusions advanced are far above the powers of even the sharp-thinking Yankee; for Twain attempted here to build a philosophic system in which a necessitarian doctrine, condemning man to ignorance, leads to a final conclusion of solipsism. Therefore Twain required an observer capable of the profoundest insight and qualified to judge the worth and aspirations of mankind, whose judgments would have an authority beyond question. Only God or Satan possessed such capability. Because of the final conclusion of futility and complete denial, only Satan would do.

Twain felt a close association with his principal character, as he did in A Connecticut Yankee, and used much of the folklore of his own life to depict him. That Satan can read palms, a subject of much interest to Mark Twain, has already been mentioned. Satan, too, is an expert in mental telegraphy, another of Twain's interests, knowing the boys' thoughts before they put them into questions.²⁵ Twain, as has been pointed out, felt that animals have their own language. He gave Satan the power to know this language and comfort a dog that had been severely beaten.

...that poor dog came along now...and went straight to Satan, and began to moan and mutter brokenly, and Satan

²⁵ Twain, The Mysterious Stranger, pp. 15-16; 88.

began to answer in the same way, and it was plain that they were talking together in the dog language.²⁶

Satan has the ghost's power to materialize himself or melt away. In

"A Ghost Story," Twain described the slow emergence of a ghost:

I watched it with fascinated eyes. A pale glow stole over the Thing; gradually its cloudy folds took shape--an arm appeared, then legs, then a body, and last a great sad face looked out of the vapor. Stripped of its filmy housings, naked, muscular and comely, the majestic Cardiff Giant loomed above me!²⁷

Just so, Satan stands before the fascinated Theodore and leisurely drifts away to nothingness:

He stood up, and it was quickly finished. He thinned away and thinned away until he was a soap-bubble, except that he kept his shape. You could see the bushes through him as clearly as you see things through a soap-bubble, and all over him played and flashed the delicate iridescent colors of the bubble, and along with them was that thing shaped like a window-sash which you always see on the globe of the bubble. You have seen a bubble strike the carpet and lightly bound along two or three times before it bursts. He did that. He sprang--touched the grass--bounded--floated along--touched again--and so on, and presently exploded--puff! and in his place was vacancy.²⁸

Invisible ghosts and spirits frequently make their presence known by a warning breeze. Twain knew the Cardiff ghost was approaching because "I felt a faint gust of air fan my cheek..."²⁹ Theodore always knows when Satan is near, for he too receives a sign: "I was walking along the path, feeling very down-hearted, when a most

²⁶ Ibid., p. 55.

²⁷ Mark Twain, Sketches New and Old, in The Writings of Mark Twain (New York, 1904), XIX, 287-288. Hereafter cited as Works, unless otherwise indicated.

²⁸ Twain, The Mysterious Stranger, p. 27.

²⁹ Twain, Works, XIX, 287.

cheery and tingling freshening-up sensation went rippling through me, and I was too glad for any words, for I knew by that sign that Satan was by."³⁰

Satan's unlimited power, his ability to perform miracles, read minds, and possess individuals, establishes him as the principal folklore influence on plot and incident motivation. His performing delightful miracles early in the story to charm Theodore and his friends and win them to him has been mentioned. The action then shifts to the village of Eseldorf and to a consideration of the human hive. One of Satan's first miracles begins the train of action of the book. Father Peter, penniless and under suspicion because of his liberal thought, is led by Satan's influence to find a wallet containing a treasure in gold. The resulting happiness of Peter and his niece, Margaret, is cut short when Peter advertises his good fortune by paying his debts. People suspect witchcraft, or theft. Peter's enemy, the astrologer, sees his opportunity, wrongfully accuses Peter of stealing the money from him, and has him thrown into prison.

Twain then balanced the meanness of mankind with the pettiness of its vanity. Margaret's maid, Ursula, begs from house to house to keep herself and Margaret alive, and this act moves Satan to give Ursula an enchanted cat that provides wine, food, and money at a wish. Ursula, noble in poverty but a short time ago, is now quickly corrupted.

³⁰ Twain, The Mysterious Stranger, pp. 40-41.

Ursula gave us [Theodore and Satan] a small item of information: money being plenty now, she had taken on a servant to help about the house and run errands. She tried to tell it in a commonplace, matter-of-course way, but she was so set up by it and so vain of it that her pride in it leaked out pretty plainly.³¹

This wealth brings suspicion upon the house. Father Adolf, representative of the superstitious church militant, bids the flock go to Margaret's house, eat her food, talk pleasantly, and spy on her, for "there must be witchcraft at the bottom of it."³² Father Adolf and the astrologer go with them, and in due time they rise before the crowd to proclaim the house bewitched; but Satan immediately possesses Adolf and the astrologer, making them appear bewitched, and thus saves Margaret from the stake.³³

Margaret, however, is saved only to experience the greatest grief. Father Peter's case is brought to trial, and Satan possesses Peter's lawyer, giving him a brilliant tongue which brings an acquittal. Satan then appears before Father Peter in prison and tells him he has been found guilty and is a ruined man. This drives Peter happily insane, which is the blow Margaret was spared to witness. Satan points out that happiness is only for the insane: "No sane man can be happy, for to him life is real, and he sees what a fearful thing it is."³⁴ Margaret's grief is but an example of human

³¹ Ibid., p. 58.

³² Ibid., p. 63.

³³ Ibid., pp. 69-70.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 130. This has led Henry Seidel Canby to remark that Satan's "purpose on earth, it would seem, is to bring happiness even if he does not leave it behind." Henry Seidel Canby, Turn West, Turn East (Boston, 1951), p. 246.

ignorance of this fact. At this point the plot, which began with Peter's finding the gold, closes. A final chapter in which Satan steps before Theodore and pulverizes the universe brings the book to an end.

"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!"³⁵

Thus, in The Mysterious Stranger one observes three principal examples of folklore being used with fine art: the dream vision fantasy which makes credible the impossible and thus harmonizes with the wonders Satan performs; the important scene in which Felix Brandt tells the boys tales of the supernatural and unknowingly prepares them for their impending meeting with Satan; and, finally, the characterization of Satan as the principal motivating force in the plot. These three examples show a wider dissemination of folk materials to the vital parts of a work than was true of any of Twain's historical novels. There is a good reason for this. The fact that Eseldorf is really Hannibal, that Brandt is Uncle Dan'l in a medieval setting, and that the boys are Tom Sawyer's gang illustrates that as Twain more and more returned to the Missouri period, even in fantasy, he was drawn more and more to the use of folk materials.

In the short novel, Pudd'nhead Wilson, Twain again distributed folklore among the vital areas of his story. That much of the plot action depends upon folk materials is apparent in the opening pages of the book. An unfortunate remark dropped in public by David

³⁵ Twain, The Mysterious Stranger, p. 140.

Wilson, a young eastern-trained lawyer newly come to the Mississippi River town of Dawson's Landing in 1830, brings him immediate celebrity. Referring to the piercing howl raised by a dog around the corner of the street, Wilson had said,

"I wish I owned half of that dog."

"Why?" somebody asked.

"Because I would kill my half."

The group searched his face with curiosity, with anxiety even, but found no light there, no expression that they could read. They fell away from him as from something uncanny, and went into privacy to discuss him.³⁶

This folk witticism, closely akin to the riddle--presented here, in fact, in riddle form--is just the kind of terse remark that would quickly draw attention. Twain thoroughly believed that a seemingly innocent circumstance could initiate a chain of events which would determine a person's life,³⁷ and for this circumstance in Pudd'nhead Wilson, he used a clever folk quip certain to make an impression upon the slow-witted loafers of Dawson's Landing, who take the remark seriously and saddle Wilson with the name "Pudd'nhead." Wilson is laughed out of any chance of success in the law. He turns his attention to his interests in fingerprinting, then a new thing, and palmistry.

After establishing Wilson as the town's laughingstock, Twain turned his attention to the Negress, Roxy, the book's most commanding figure. She is as fair as any white person, but one-sixteenth part Negro blood runs in her veins, making her a slave. The bitterness and frustration of years of slavery coupled with her fear that

³⁶ Twain, Works, XIV, 16.

³⁷ See Mark Twain, "The Turning-Point of My Life," in What Is Man? and Other Essays (New York, 1917), p. 127; and also Satan's speech on determinism in Twain, The Mysterious Stranger, pp. 81-82.

her master, Percy Driscoll, "a fairly humane man toward slaves and other animals," might one day sell her infant son down the river determine her to exchange her master's son and her own fair child in their cradles. This folklore motif of the transposed babies becomes the basis of the plot; and although Twain is usually criticized for employing a structural cliché, one must remember that his purpose of condemning slavery by studying the soul of the Negro could hardly be more vividly presented than through the striking contrasts he achieved by this means. Twain also injected the same motif into a Negro sermon concerning Calvinistic predestination which Roxy attends in the hope of gaining a measure of peace in the knowledge of her crime. The preacher uses the example of babies being transposed in the court of kings in order to illustrate how capriciously God may select those who are to be saved. Roxy feels much better when she realizes from this illustration that "Dey done it--yes, dey done it; en not on'y jis' common white folks nuther, but de biggest quality dey is in de whole bilin'. Oh, I's so glad I 'member 'bout dat!"³⁸ Roxy nevertheless remains uneasy. Under this pressure of fear her drop of superstitious Negro blood gains control of her nature and guides her into actions which prepare her final exposure in the courtroom. She resolves to show the babies to Pudd'nhead Wilson, not only because she is one of the few people in Dawson's Landing who believes Wilson to be an intelligent man, but also because she is certain he has magical power: "Blame dat man, he worries me wid dem ornery glasses o' hisn; I b'lieve he's a

³⁸ Twain, Works, XIV, 35.

witch."³⁹ Roxy knows that the verdict of a person possessed with supernatural power would be a stringent test. Wilson does not notice that one child has been put into the other child's clothing. As a matter of course he takes the children's fingerprints. Roxy returns home satisfied, not dreaming that in relying upon the man she thinks possesses magical power she has sought out the only man in Dawson's Landing who possesses the natural power of fingerprints to expose her. And exposure is now but a matter of time. It is this set of prints, when matched with the prints Wilson had taken when the children were only a few days old, which years later reveals the fact of the transposed babies and proves Roxy's son, miscalled Tom Driscoll, the fraudulent and derelict heir to the Driscoll estate, guilty of the murder of his uncle, Judge York Driscoll.

The dramatic courtroom scene in which an innocent man, Luigi Capello, faces almost certain conviction until Wilson places the correct interpretation upon his fingerprint records owes much of its inception to the folklore of palmistry. One evening, in company with Tom Driscoll, Wilson reads Luigi's palm and discovers, quite rightly, that Luigi a few years previously had killed a man. Twain's description of the examination of the palm is certainly based upon his own experience with the palmist Cheiro.

Wilson began to study Luigi's palm, tracing life lines, heart lines, head lines, and so on, and noting carefully their relations with the cobweb of finer and more delicate marks and lines that enmeshed them on all sides; he felt of the fleshy cushion at the base of the thumb, and noted its shape; he felt of the fleshy side of the hand between the wrist and the base of the little finger, and

³⁹ Ibid., p. 36.

noted its shape also; he painstakingly examined the fingers, observing their form, proportions, and natural manner of disposing themselves when in repose. All this process was watched by the three spectators with absorbing interest, their heads bent together over Luigi's palm, and nobody disturbing the stillness with a word. Wilson now entered upon a close survey of the palm again, and his revelations began.⁴⁰

This reading prompts Luigi's description of the weapon, a dagger, and a more lengthy account of the dagger's valuable sheath. This information causes Tom, who has just stolen the dagger and sheath, to hold them for a high price. Accordingly, this becomes the weapon Tom later uses to kill his uncle whom he attempts to rob. The dagger, left near the body of Judge Driscoll, implicates Luigi, who is brought to trial for what the town believes to be his second murder, for the account of Wilson's reading Luigi's palm is now well known. This reliance upon palmistry constitutes a weakness in folklore used as a motivating influence and is an example of Twain's enthusiasm leading him into unwarranted improvisation. The accuracy of Wilson's palm reading is artificial at best, too improbable to support the incidents resulting from it.

Two worlds, the white and the slave, comprise the main frame of this work, and Twain drew liberally upon folk materials to delineate them. The white world is encountered in the opening pages.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 102-103. Cheiro asserted that when Twain left his studio he turned and said, "The one humorous point in the situation is, that I came here expecting to lose money by my foolishness, but I have gained a plot for a story, which I certainly think should be a winner." Cheiro /Louis Hamon/, Fate in the Making (New York, 1931), p. 191. This statement is entirely too pat to be believed and does not agree with Twain's own account of how he came to write this novel which he gave in the preface and "Final Remarks" to Those Extraordinary Twins. On the other hand, Twain undoubtedly learned the details given in the above passage by watching Cheiro read his palm. See Cheiro, Fate, pp. 189-191.

Twain knew very well the people he was dealing with and the folk characteristics appropriate to them, for Dawson's Landing is much like his own Hannibal.⁴¹

The scene of this chronicle is the town of Dawson's Landing, on the Missouri side of the Mississippi, half a day's journey, per steamboat, below St. Louis....The hamlet's front was washed by the clear waters of the great river; its body stretched itself rearward up a gentle incline; its most rearward border fringed itself out and scattered its houses about the base-line of the hills; the hills rose high, inclosing the town in a half-moon curve, clothed with forests from foot to summit.

Steamboats passed up and down every hour or so.⁴²

The town boasts a few highbred gentlemen: Cecil Burleigh Essex, the Driscolls, and Pembroke Howard are all from the first families of Virginia. But the average run of the citizens, many of them loafers, are the folk types Twain sketched for Obedstown in The Gilded Age who chewed tobacco, took their hands out of their pockets only to scratch, and "occupied the top rail of the fence, hump-shouldered and grave, like a company of buzzards assembled for supper and listening for the death-rattle."⁴³ This group appears again in the "little one-horse town" of Bricksville, Arkansas, in Huckleberry Finn. The loafers of Bricksville sit on empty dry-goods boxes, "whittling them with their Barlow knives; and chawing tobacco, and gaping and yawning and stretching--a mighty ornery lot."⁴⁴ In Pudd'nhead Wilson, Twain does not describe these people directly, as he did in Obedstown and Bricksville, but lets the reader draw

⁴¹ See Wecter, p. 63; and also Bernard DeVoto, Mark Twain's America (Boston, 1932), p. 52.

⁴² Twain, Works, XIV, 11-13.

⁴³ Ibid., X, 16.

⁴⁴ Ibid., XIII, 187.

their characters solely from their language, a device he used to good effect, as has been shown, in the travel books. The folk dialect and, above all, the unimaginative habit of mind bring this group to life. They discuss Wilson's unfortunate remark concerning the dog:

"'Pears to be a fool."

"'Pears?" said another. "Is, I reckon you better say."

"Said he wished he owned half of the dog, the idiot," said a third. "What did he reckon would become of the other half if he killed his half? Do you reckon he thought it would live?"

"Why, he must have thought it, unless he is the downrightest fool in the world; because if he hadn't thought it, he would have wanted to own the whole dog, knowing that if he killed his half and the other half died, he would be responsible for that half just the same as if he had killed that half instead of his own. Don't it look that way to you, gents?"

"Yes, it does. If he owned one half of the general dog, it would be so; if he owned one end of the dog and another person owned the other end, it would be so, just the same; particularly in the first case, because if you kill one half of a general dog, there ain't any man that can tell whose half it was, but if he owned one end of the dog, maybe he could kill his end of it and--"

"No, he couldn't, either; he couldn't and not be responsible if the other end died, which it would. In my opinion the man ain't in his right mind."

"In my opinion he hain't got any mind."

No. 3 said: "Well, he's a Lummo, anyway."

"That's what he is," said No. 4, "he's a labrick--just a Simon-pure labrick, if ever there was one."

"Yes, sir, he's a dam fool, that's the way I put him up," said No. 5. "Anybody can think different that wants to, but those are my sentiments."

"I'm with you, gentlemen," said No. 6. "Perfect jackass --yes, and it ain't going too far to say he is a pudd'n-head. If he ain't a pudd'nhead, I ain't no judge, that's all."⁴⁵

In a very real sense Dawson's Landing with its aristocracy and its loafers represents a cross section of white supremacy. On all levels there is ignorance. Percy Driscoll, who treats slaves and

⁴⁵ Ibid., XIV, 16-17.

other animals humanely, displays an ignorance that is perhaps more refined than the loafers' but is just as deep.

Roxy represents the world of the Negro. She is drawn in terms of classic beauty and nobility: "She was of majestic form and stature, her attitudes were imposing and statuesque, and her gestures and movements distinguished by a noble and stately grace."⁴⁶ Her later hardness results from the pressure of the institution of slavery upon an originally fine nature. Like most of her race, she is extremely superstitious. Her belief that Wilson is a magician has been mentioned. When Roxy calls on Wilson, she is careful to "tote along a hoss-shoe to keep off de witch-work,"⁴⁷ for although she stands in awe of Wilson's supernatural power, she does not want it used against herself or the children. Wilson comes to know her well, and rightly asserts, "The drop of black blood in her is superstitious..."⁴⁸

David Wilson represents something of both these worlds. He is an amateur scientist: "...he interested himself in every new thing that was born into the universe of ideas, and studied it and experimented upon it at his house."⁴⁹ This interest and his eastern college education make Wilson the finest representative of the white race in Dawson's Landing. In intelligence he is far above the villagers, who think themselves wise in condemning him, and also above the first family of Virginia gentlemen of the village, who worship

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 22-23.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 36.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 48.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 20.

the gentlemanly forms far beyond the necessities. Wilson's interest in palmistry, however, takes him away from the world of science and places him near the superstitious world of signs, omens, and portents of the slaves. Both of these facets of Wilson's character, as has been shown, contribute to the final exposure of Roxy and Tom Driscoll.

A significant part of the background of this novel depends upon folklore. Much of the action takes place near or in a haunted house at the outskirts of the village.

This was a two-story log house which had acquired the reputation a few years before of being haunted, and that was the end of its usefulness. Nobody would live in it afterward, or go near it by night, and most people even gave it a wide berth in the daytime. As it had no competition, it was called the haunted house. It was getting crazy and ruinous now from long neglect. It stood three hundred yards beyond Pudd'nhead Wilson's house, with nothing between but vacancy. It was the last house in the town at that end.⁵⁰

Although the whites as well as the blacks fear the house, Twain related it particularly to the world of the Negro. Roxy lives here after she returns to Dawson's Landing from working on a steamboat and losing her money in a bank failure. That she would live in this house indicates her desperate circumstances, a desperation that gives her the strength to assert the dignity of her race in this house when she draws herself up before her insulting and corrupt son and pierces him with fear as she tells him who he is. The duel between Judge Driscoll and Luigi Capello is fought in the moonlight in front of the haunted house. Luigi had insulted Tom, and Judge Driscoll, enraged at Tom for not challenging the man, defends the

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 82-83

Driscoll honor. Roxy watches the duel from a place of concealment in the haunted house, a duel in which she has a very real concern since it was her initial act of exchanging the babies which, to a great degree, has led to Judge Driscoll's being before her on this field, defending a coward he mistakenly believes to be his brother's son. Roxy's famous speech in which she lashes Tom for his cowardice takes place in this house shortly after the duel:

"En you refuse' to fight a man dat kicked you, 'stid o' jumpin' at de chance! En you ain't got no mo' feelin' den to come en tell me, dat fetched sich a po' low-down ornery rabbit into de worl'! Pah! it makes me sick! It's de nigger in you, dat's what it is. Thirty-one parts o' you is white, en on'y one part nigger, en dat po' little one part is yo' soul. Tain't wuth savin'; tain't wuth totin' out on a shovel en throwin' in de gutter.⁵¹

Finally, after Tom murders the Judge, he returns to this house to disguise himself and make preparations for his escape.

By closely associating the decaying haunted house with Roxy and her son, Twain let this house symbolize something of the ruin the accepted doctrine of slavery had made of the Negro soul. All of Roxy's actions which are judged criminal by white standards are traceable not to her character but to the institution of slavery which put the Negro at a disadvantage in the battle of life. The haunted house emphasizes this distinction by serving as the background against which most of the events resulting from Roxy's first act of exchanging the children take place, while the climax of the book, in which Roxy's deed is exposed, takes place in the judicial correctness of the white man's courtroom.

Although not usually ranked with Twain's finest work, Pudd'nhead

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 138-139.

Wilson has its moments of greatness, especially in its graphic portrayal of the white and slave world as arbitrarily fixed by the institution of slavery. To this portrayal folklore is indispensable as it reveals the ignorant representatives of white supremacy in Dawson's Landing, the superstitious nature of Roxy's mind, and the twofold character of David Wilson who stands between these worlds.

In The Adventures of Tom Sawyer Mark Twain dealt more closely with the period of his own boyhood than he did in The Mysterious Stranger or in Pudd'nhead Wilson. "Most of the adventures in this book," he recorded, "really occurred; one or two were experiences of my own, the rest those of boys who were schoolmates of mine."⁵² The folk beliefs of the whites and especially the Negroes, as has been shown, exerted great influence on the mind of young Sam Clemens, for these beliefs were always present in the slaveholding town of Hannibal, the St. Petersburg of this story. "The odd superstitions touched upon," Twain continued, "were all prevalent among children and slaves in the West at the period of this story..."⁵³ For this reason, folklore forms the foundation of this book and is instrumental in coloring a boy's world, his character, and the events in which he is involved.

Much of Tom Sawyer's world is happiness. The countryside seemingly has everything that appeals to a boy's wish to enjoy freedom in all its discoverable varieties: the wood sloping up Cardiff Hill behind the town, ideal for sword fights and treasure hunts; the cave just outside of town, mysterious and fascinating in the dangers of

⁵² Ibid., XII, v.

⁵³ Ibid.

its unknown passageways; the great Mississippi River, encouraging escape to its lures of fishing and swimming; and, finally, Jackson's Island, another world out in the channel of the Mississippi. A boy's knowledge of folklore often increases his pleasure in this inviting world. When Tom wishes to be alone when walking into the wood, he is careful to cross water, knowing this precaution baffles pursuit.⁵⁴ So that he may swim in the river without the nagging fear of cramps, Tom makes certain that a bracelet of rattlesnake rattlers is around his ankle.⁵⁵ In the wood he happily expects to find a treasure of marbles for the one marble he buried with careful ceremony.

If you buried a marble with certain necessary incantations, and left it alone a fortnight, and then opened the place with the incantation he had just used, you would find that all the marbles you had ever lost had gathered themselves together there, meantime, no matter how widely they had been separated.⁵⁶

Tom cautiously digs toward the expected treasure, chanting, "What hasn't come here, come! What's here, stay here!"⁵⁷ He is amazed to discover only the original marble and throws it away in disgust. But the charm was valid, certainly. He suspects witches' work and knows how to coax the answer from nature.

...he searched around till he found a small sandy spot with a little funnel-shaped depression in it. He laid himself down and put his mouth close to this depression and called:

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 91.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 161.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 94.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

"Doodle-bug, doodle-bug, tell me what I want to know!
Doodle-bug, doodle-bug, tell me what I want to know!"

The sand began to work, and presently a small black bug appeared for a second and then darted under again in a fright.

"He dasn't tell! So it was a witch that done it. I just knowed it."⁵⁸

Sorry that he threw away the first marble, Tom tosses another in the same direction, uttering the charm, "Brother, go find your brother!", which is successful.⁵⁹

A boy's happiness in his surroundings is again observed in one of Twain's most skillful descriptions of nature, one which relies upon folklore to make the representation particularly vivid and appealing. Tom awakens on Jackson's Island in time to see the dawn growing into day and experiences the pleasure of the stillness as he watches this drama.

When Tom awoke in the morning, he wondered where he was. He sat up and rubbed his eyes and looked around. Then he comprehended. It was the cool gray dawn, and there was a delicious sense of repose and peace in the deep pervading calm and silence of the woods. Not a leaf stirred; not a sound obtruded upon great Nature's meditation. Beaded dewdrops stood upon the leaves and grasses. A white layer of ashes covered the fire, and a thin blue breath of smoke rose straight into the air. Joe and Huck still slept.

Now, far away in the woods a bird called; another answered; presently the hammering of a woodpecker was heard. Gradually the cool dim gray of the morning whitened, and as gradually sounds multiplied and life manifested itself. The marvel of Nature shaking off sleep and going to work unfolded itself to the musing boy. A little green worm came crawling over a dewy leaf, lifting two-thirds of his body into the air from time to time and "sniffing around," then proceeding again--for he was measuring, Tom said; and when the worm approached him, of its own accord, he sat as still as a stone, with his

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 95.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

hopes rising and falling, by turns, as the creature still came toward him or seemed inclined to go elsewhere; and when at last it considered a painful moment with its curved body in the air and then came decisively down upon Tom's leg and began a journey over him, his whole heart was glad--for that meant that he was going to have a new suit of clothes--without the shadow of a doubt a gaudy piratical uniform. Now a procession of ants appeared, from nowhere in particular, and went about their labors; one struggled manfully by with a dead spider five times as big as itself in its arms, and lugged it straight up a tree-trunk. A brown spotted lady-bug climbed the dizzy /sic/ height of a grass blade, and Tom bent down close to it and said, "Lady-bug, lady-bug, fly away home, your house is on fire, your children's alone," and she took wing and went off to see about it--which did not surprise the boy, for he knew of old that this insect was credulous about conflagrations, and he had practiced upon its simplicity more than once. A tumblebug came next, heaving sturdily at its ball, and Tom touched the creature, to see it shut its legs against its body and pretend to be dead. The birds were fairly rioting by this time. A catbird, the northern mocker, lit in a tree over Tom's head, and trilled out her imitations of her neighbors in a rapture of enjoyment; then a shrill jay swept down, a flash of blue flame, and stopped on a twig almost within the boy's reach, cocked his head to one side and eyed the strangers with a consuming curiosity; a gray squirrel and a big fellow of the "fox" kind came skurrying along, sitting up at intervals to inspect and chatter at the boys, for the wild things had probably never seen a human being before and scarcely knew whether to be afraid or not. All Nature was wide awake and stirring, now; long lances of sunlight pierced down through the dense foliage far and near, and a few butterflies came fluttering upon the scene.⁶⁰

If Tom were left out of this description it would still be a compelling one because of the variety of exact detail and the cumulative drama of the approaching day. The folklore touches of the hump-worm and the lady-bug, however, place Tom exactly in this description, which adds another dimension to the carefully selected details of nature. In this way the reader is encouraged to become the boy who experiences the pleasure of the sunrise. Before these

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 144-146.

folklore details enter, the reader is aware only in a general way that Tom is watching the scene. The folklore elements initiate action harmonious with the entire description that seeks the participation of the reader.

Different from Tom's pleasure in nature is the influence of his town of St. Petersburg, an average little river village in the mid-nineteenth century. St. Petersburg is a deeply religious, slave-holding village with the usual provincialisms and prejudices and a society stratification running from the highly respected Widow Douglas and Judge Thatcher down to the dispossessed Injun Joe and Huckleberry Finn's drunken father. Like so many towns of its time, it is also superstitious: cannon fire and bread loaded with quicksilver are the means of raising a body from the river;⁶¹ a slight bleeding of a dead man's wound indicates that the murderer is near;⁶² and dreams may be filled with prophecy.⁶³ The fearful dogma of the town's Calvinistic religion "that dealt in limitless fire and brimstone and thinned the predestined elect down to a company so small as to be hardly worth the saving"⁶⁴ exerts a pressure giving rise to superstitious beliefs. Tom does not dare, for example, attempt to catch a fly in church during the prayer, for "he believed his soul would be instantly destroyed if he did such a thing while the prayer was going on."⁶⁵ On Jackson's Island the boys' freedom

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 148-149.

⁶² Ibid., p. 122.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 181.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 62.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

is not complete, for superstitious fear, based on church discipline, dictates that they say their prayers before going to sleep in the wilderness:

They said their prayers inwardly, and lying down, since there was nobody there with authority to make them kneel and recite aloud; in truth, they had a mind not to say them at all, but they were afraid to proceed to such lengths at [sic] that, lest they might call down a sudden and special thunderbolt from Heaven.⁶⁶

A revival comes to St. Petersburg while Tom lies sick with measles. When the boy recovers, he finds that everyone has "got religion" and that he is without company since even his gang has been corrupted. He returns home, sure that he is lost.

And that night there came on a terrific storm, with driving rain, awful claps of thunder and blinding sheets of lightning. He covered his head with the bedclothes and waited in a horror of suspense for his doom; for he had not the shadow of a doubt that all this hubbub was about him. He believed he had taxed the forbearance of the powers above to the extremity of endurance and that this was the result.⁶⁷

Added to the superstitious fears of the whites are the folk beliefs of the Negro slaves. This combined influence is the reason for folklore being Tom's "whole structure of faith."⁶⁸ The boys of

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 142.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 214. This example of superstitious interpretation comes directly from Twain's life. Speaking of the death of Injun Joe, he recalled, "I do remember that the news of his death reached me at a most unhappy time--that is to say, just at bedtime on a summer night, when a prodigious storm of thunder and lightning accompanied by a deluging rain that turned the streets and lanes into rivers caused me to repent and resolve to lead a better life. I can remember those awful thunder-bursts and the white glare of the lightning yet, and the wild lashing of the rain against the window-panes. By my teachings I perfectly well knew what all that wild rumpus was for--Satan had come to get Injun Joe." Mark Twain, Mark Twain's Autobiography, ed. Albert B. Paine (New York, 1924), II, 175-176.

⁶⁸ Twain, Works, XII, 94.

St. Petersburg are in constant touch with the slaves⁶⁹ and learn from them their lore of spirits, witches, and spells. That the Negroes are the final authorities in these matters is revealed by Tom when he tries to convince Huck that a howling stray dog forecasts death: "That's what the niggers say, and they know all about these kind of things, Huck."⁷⁰ To the terrors of the Presbyterian night are added the ominous mysteries of the slave world: "...the boys felt a fleeting breath upon their cheeks, and shuddered with the fancy that the Spirit of the Night had gone by."⁷¹

These examples illustrate that the background of Tom Sawyer has a good deal of terror mixed with the pleasant scenes commonly associated with boyhood, this resulting from the fact that the greater part of folk beliefs concerning the supernatural were designed either to ward off evil or, at best, indicate its approach. This is nowhere better revealed than in those scenes fundamental to the plot development.

The succession of incidents leading to Tom and Huck's involvement with the murderer Injun Joe, to Huck's saving the Widow Douglas from a revenge attack by this murderer, and to Tom and Huck's seizure of Injun Joe's treasure--all develop from the scene in the St. Petersburg graveyard where the murder takes place and where the actual plot of the book begins. Up to this scene, the reader has

⁶⁹ Twain carefully indicates this from time to time: Tom learns a new method of whistling from a Negro; white and Negro children gather at the town pump; Huck has a close friend in Mr. Rogers' Negro, Uncle Jake. Ibid., pp. 20, 27, 258.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 116.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 168.

been given a series of incidents, individually complete, showing Tom in a variety of boyhood adventures: in school, in the famous whitewashing scene, in love with Becky Thatcher, and so forth. But now the deeper tone of terror enters the book, a tone made articulate principally by folk materials.

Three chapters before the graveyard chapter, Twain carefully prepares the reader for the terror that is at hand. In this episode the theme of the pleasures of boyhood is continued as Tom enters the schoolroom and falls in love with the new girl, Becky. But before Tom runs up the steps, the homeless and sinful Huckleberry Finn has entered the novel carrying a dead cat, and he and Tom have had earnest conversation. It is this conversation that hints at a break in the idyllic tone that has so far pervaded the novel and anticipates the boys' involvement in the brutal aspects of life. This scene with Huckleberry Finn is constructed entirely of folklore. Huck explains that the dead cat is a good charm for curing warts. Tom asserts that spunk-water is better. Huckleberry is not convinced, since his friend Bob Tanner had tried this charm to no effect. Tom questions Huck closely, and this brings up other cures:

"Now you tell me how Bob Tanner done it, Huck."

"Why, he took and dipped his hand in a rotten stump where the rain water was."

"In the daytime?"

"Certainly."

"With his face to the stump?"

"Yes. Least I reckon so."

"Did he say anything?"

"I don't reckon he did. I don't know."

"Aha! Talk about trying to cure warts with spunk-water such a blame fool way as that! Why, that ain't a going to do any good. You got to go all by yourself, to the middle of the woods, where you know there's a spunk-water stump, and just as it's midnight you back up against the stump and jam your hand in and say:

'Barley-corn, Barley-corn, injun-meal shorts,
Spunk-water, spunk-water, swaller these warts.'
and then walk away quick, eleven steps, with your eyes
shut, and then turn around three times and walk home
without speaking to anybody. Because if you speak the
charm's busted."

"Well, that sounds like a good way; but that ain't
the way Bob Tanner done."

"No, sir, you can bet he didn't, becuz he's the warti-
est boy in this town; and he wouldn't have a wart on him
if he'd knowed how to work spunk-water. I've took off
thousands of warts off of my hands that way, Huck. I
play with frogs so much that I've always got considerable
many warts. Sometimes I take 'em off with a bean."

"Yes, bean's good. I've done that."

"Have you? What's your way?"

"You take and split the bean, and cut the wart so as to
get some blood, and then you put the blood on one piece
of the bean and take and dig a hole and bury it 'bout
midnight at the crossroads in the dark of the moon, and
then you burn up the rest of the bean. You see that
piece that's got the blood on it will keep drawing and
drawing, trying to fetch the other piece to it, and so
that helps the blood to draw the wart, and pretty soon
off she comes."

"Yes, that's it, Huck--that's it; though when you're
burying it if you say 'Down bean; off wart; come no more
to bother me!' it's better. That's the way Jo Harper
does, and he's been nearly to Coonville and most every-
wheres. But say--how do you cure 'em with dead cats?"

"Why, you take your cat and go and get in the grave-
yard 'long about midnight when somebody that was wicked
has been buried; and when it's midnight a devil will
come, or maybe two or three, but you can't see 'em, you
can only hear something like the wind, or maybe hear 'em
talk; and when they're taking that feller away, you
heave your cat after 'em and say, 'Devil follow corpse,
cat follow devil, warts follow cat, I'm done with ye!
That'll fetch any wart."

"Say, Hucky, when you going to try the cat?"

"To-night. I reckon they'll come after old Hoss
Williams to-night."

"But they buried him Saturday. Didn't they get him
Saturday night?"

"Why, how you talk! How could their charms work till
midnight?--and then it's Sunday. Devils don't slosh
around much of a Sunday, I don't reckon."

"I never thought of that. That's so. Lemme go with
you?"

"Of course--if you ain't afeard."

"Afeard! 'Tain't likely. Will you meow?"⁷²

This scene performs several functions. Most important, its folklore initiates the plot action by supplying the motivation for the boys going to the graveyard. This motivation has been made plausible by the discussion of the spunk-water and bean charms which form an order of climax to the boys' wish to try the powers of the dead cat. In addition, this scene shows extremely well the characteristic elaborateness of this lore. In order for a charm to work, all of the proper details must be observed, and in the right order. It is no wonder that once a boy caught the imaginative appeal of this lore it became his structure of faith. This very elaborateness is the strength of superstition, for it allows the believer a ready way to rationalize satisfactorily any failure of the code and thus keep his faith intact. By making this an extended scene, Twain established this folklore as a vital part of Tom and Huck's character, a revelation which is amplified as the important plot incidents develop.

The entire graveyard episode from the time the boys approach the field of tombstones to the seizure of the innocent Muff Potter for murder moves wholly against a background of folklore which continually poses an atmosphere of terror. From the point of view of Tom and Huck this terror is especially acute, for at every step they see the interest of the unseen world in these nightmarish events. The expectation of evil comes early. Tom goes to bed on the appointed evening, hoping that midnight will soon come so that he and Huck can begin their experiment with the dead cat. But as he lies in the stillness, certain omens reveal to him that this adventure is not without danger.

Everything was dismally still. By and by, out of the stillness, little, scarcely perceptible noises began to emphasize themselves. The ticking of the clock began to bring itself into notice. Old beams began to crack mysteriously. The stairs creaked faintly. Evidently spirits were abroad. A measured, muffled snore issued from Aunt Polly's chamber. And now the tiresome chirping of a cricket that no human ingenuity could locate, began. Next the ghastly ticking of a deathwatch in the wall at the bed's head made Tom shudder--it meant that somebody's days were numbered. Then the howl of a far-off dog rose on the night air, and was answered by a fainter howl from a remoter distance. Tom was in agony. At last he was satisfied that time had ceased and eternity begun; he began to doze, in spite of himself; the clock chimed eleven, but he did not hear it.⁷³

The ticking of the deathwatch and the howling dog, also an omen of death, leave the boys only one interpretation for the sounds they hear as they climb the hill to the Hoss Williams' grave, fear of impending evil.

A faint wind moaned through the trees, and Tom feared it might be the spirits of the dead, complaining at being disturbed. The boys talked little, and only under their breath, for the time and the place and the pervading solemnity and silence oppressed their spirits. They found the sharp new heap they were seeking, and enconsced /sic/ themselves within the protection of three great elms that grew in a bunch within a few feet of the grave.

Then they waited in silence for what seemed a long time. The hooting of a distant owl was all the sound that troubled the dead stillness.⁷⁴

The hooting of the owl, another warning of the approach of evil, and possibly death,⁷⁵ keeps them within the protection of the trees.

Tom's reflections grow oppressive:

"Hucky, do you believe the dead people like it for us to be here?"

Huckleberry whispered:

⁷³ Ibid., pp. 99-100.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 101.

⁷⁵ Vance Randolph, Ozark Superstitions (New York, 1947), p. 245.

"I wisht I knowed. It's awful solemn like, ain't it?"

"I bet it is."

There was a considerable pause, while the boys canvassed this matter inwardly. Then Tom whispered:

"Say, Hucky--do you reckon Hoss Williams hears us talking?"

"O' course he does. Least his sperrit does."

Tom, after a pause:

"I wish I'd said Mister Williams. But I never meant any harm. Everybody calls him Hoss."

"A body can't be too partic'lar how they talk 'bout these-yer dead people, Tom."

This was a damper, and conversation died again.

Presently Tom seized his comrade's arm and said:

"Sh!"

"What is it, Tom?" And the two clung together with beating hearts.

"Sh! There 'tis again! Didn't you hear it?"

"I--"

"There! Now you hear it."

"Lord, Tom, they're coming! They're coming, sure. What'll we do?"

"I dono. Think they'll see us?"

"Oh, Tom, they can see in the dark, same as cats. I wisht I hadn't come."

"Oh, don't be afeard. I don't believe they'll bother us. We ain't doing any harm. If we keep perfectly still, maybe they won't notice us at all."

"I'll try to, Tom, but Lord, I'm all of a shiver."

"Listen!"

The boys bent their heads together and scarcely breathed. A muffled sound of voices floated up from the far end of the graveyard.

"Look! See there!" whispered Tom. "What is it?"

"It's devil-fire. Oh, Tom, this is awful."

Some vague figures approached through the gloom, swinging an old-fashioned tin lantern that freckled the ground with innumerable little spangles of light. Presently Huckleberry whispered with a shudder:

"It's the devils sure enough. Three of 'em! Lordy, Tom, we're goners! Can you pray?"

"I'll try, but don't you be afeard. They ain't going to hurt us. Now I lay me down to sleep, I--"

"Sh!"

"What is it, Huck?"

"They're humans! One of 'em is, anyway. One of 'em's old Muff Potter's voice."⁷⁶

The boys watch fascinated as Potter, Injun Joe, and young Doctor Robinson come to rob the grave. The body is dumped into a wheelbarrow, whereupon a violent argument arises between the doctor and Injun Joe. The doctor fells the half-breed but is caught by Potter who wrestles him to the ground. Injun Joe jumps to his feet and plunges Potter's knife into the doctor just as Potter is knocked senseless. Tom and Huck flee into the protection of the night.

The boys run to the old tannery on the outskirts of the village, and under the full moon determine to swear themselves to secrecy, fearing that Injun Joe will kill them if they talk. They decide to swear in blood, and this strongly appeals to them: "It was deep, and dark, and awful; the hour, the circumstances, the surroundings, were in keeping with it."⁷⁷ They write their oath on a shingle which they bury "with some dismal ceremonies and incantations, and the fetters that bound their tongues were considered to be locked and the key thrown away."⁷⁸ Their relief, however, is shattered by the worst possible sign: a stray dog howls outside the window of the tannery, perhaps the same dog Tom heard as he thrashed in fear in his bed earlier in the evening. Again death or great evil is at hand.

"Quick, Tom, quick! Who does he mean?"

"Huck, he must mean us both--we're right together."

"Oh, Tom, I reckon we're goners. I reckon there ain't no mistake 'bout where I'll go to. I been so wicked."⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 111.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 113.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 114.

A moment later, however, the boys' thorough knowledge of folklore shows them that they are saved:

"Look, Hucky, look! He's got his back to us!"
Hucky looked, with joy in his heart.

"Well, he has, by jingoes! Did he before?"

"Yes, he did. But I, like a fool, never thought.
Oh, this is bully, you know. Now who can he mean?"⁸⁰

The boys listen intently, hear a stirring at the other end of the tannery, and discover Muff Potter lying in a drunken sleep. They run outside and see "the strange dog standing within a few feet of where Potter was lying, and facing Potter, with his nose pointing heavenward."⁸¹

That the fates have sent the stray dog to reveal the impending doom hanging over Potter is revealed to the boys by what takes place in the graveyard the following day. Potter is apprehended and brought to the grave where a crowd looks upon the corpses of the doctor and Hoss Williams. Injun Joe is one of the crowd, confident that his having convinced Potter that Potter had stabbed the doctor in a drunken rage protects him from any suspicion. The crowd confronts Potter with his own knife and condemns him. Injun Joe tells an elaborate lie, implicating Potter. The boys' knowledge of the fire and brimstone religion of the town leads them to a superstitious conclusion.

Then Huckleberry and Tom stood dumb and staring, and heard the stony-hearted liar reel off his serene statement, they expecting every moment that the clear sky would deliver God's lightnings upon his head, and wondering to see how long the stroke was delayed. And when he had finished and still stood alive and whole,

⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 114-115.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 116.

their wavering impulse to break their oath and save the poor betrayed prisoner's life faded and vanished away, for plainly this miscreant had sold himself to Satan and it would be fatal to meddle with the property of such a power as that.⁸²

Tom and Huck see a sign that should expose the lie, but the superstitious villagers, who also know this sign, are too certain of Potter's guilt to interpret it correctly.

Injun Joe helped to raise the body of the murdered man and put it in a wagon for removal; and it was whispered through the shuddering crowd that the wound bled a little! The boys thought that this happy circumstance would turn suspicion in the right direction; but they were disappointed, for more than one villager remarked:

"It was within three feet of Muff Potter when it done it."⁸³

A sinister background, created by folklore, continues to form the dominant chord in the narrative action involving Tom, Huck, and the fearful half-breed. When Tom, conscience-ridden about the innocent Muff Potter, finally gives his damning testimony in court, Injun Joe crashes through a window to freedom. It is not long before Tom and Huck encounter the half-breed again and barely escape with their lives. In this episode folk materials are used very much in the same way they were in the graveyard scene: very gradually these materials create an ominous background, building suspense up to the point of the final encounter. At the beginning of this episode, Twain states quite matter-of-factly, "There comes a time in every rightly-constructed boy's life when he has a raging desire to go somewhere and dig for hidden treasure."⁸⁴ Huck joins Tom and is

⁸² Ibid., pp. 121-122.

⁸³ Ibid., pp. 122-123.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 227.

carefully attentive as Tom acquaints him with the folklore of procedure:

"It's hid in mighty particular places, Huck--sometimes on islands, sometimes in rotten chests under the end of a limb of an old dead tree, just where the shadow falls at midnight; but mostly under the floor in ha'nted houses."⁸⁵

Since the boys have already tried, without success, to discover buried treasure on Jackson's Island, they decide to investigate the dead-limbed trees near the haunted house near the outskirts of town. They dig under two trees with no results and strongly suspect witches are interfering, the same suspicion Tom had earlier regarding his expected marble treasure; but this thought is put aside when they discover that they have broken the ritual by omitting the important detail of digging at midnight under the shadow of the limb. The folklore background now develops a clear suggestion of terror.

The boys were there that night, about the appointed time. They sat in the shadow waiting. It was a lonely place, and an hour made solemn by old traditions. Spirits whispered in the rustling leaves, ghosts lurked in the murky nooks, the deep baying of a hound floated up out of the distance, an owl answered with his sepulchral note. The boys were subdued by these solemnities, and talked little.⁸⁶

Again the sign of the owl and the stray dog indicate danger as the scene assumes a more ominous character. Tom and Huck recall superstitions to which they are now vulnerable. Their fears rise as they think of spirits, ghosts, and the dead. It is only when Tom remembers that ghosts are powerless in the daytime that the boys decide

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 233.

to continue their search the next day in the more likely place, the haunted house.

Huck dropped his shovel.

"That's it," said he. "That's the very trouble. We got to give this one up. We can't ever tell the right time, and besides this kind of thing's too awful, here this time of night with witches and ghosts a fluttering around so. I feel as if something's behind me all the time; and I'm afeard to turn around, becuz maybe there's others in front a-waiting for a chance. I been creeping all over, ever since I got here."

"Well, I've been pretty much so, too, Huck. They most always put in a dead man when they bury a treasure under a tree, to look out for it."

"Lordy!"

"Yes, they do. I've always heard that."

"Tom, I don't like to fool around much where there's dead people. A body's bound to get into trouble with 'em, sure."

"I don't like to stir 'em up, either. S'pose this one here was to stick his skull out and say something!"

"Don't, Tom! It's awful."

"Well, it just is. Huck, I don't feel comfortable a bit."

"Say, Tom, let's give this place up, and try somewheres else."

"All right, I reckon we better."

"What'll it be?"

Tom considered a while; and then said:

"The ha'nted house. That's it!"

"Blame it, I don't like ha'nted houses, Tom. Why, they're a dern sight worse'n dead people. Dead people might talk, maybe, but they don't come sliding around in a shroud, when you ain't noticing, and peep over your shoulder all of a sudden and grit their teeth, the way a ghost does. I couldn't stand such a thing as that, Tom--nobody could."

"Yes, but Huck, ghosts don't travel around only at night. They won't hender us from digging there in the daytime."

"Well, that's so. But you know mighty well people don't go about that ha'nted house in the day nor the night."

"Well, that's mostly because they don't like to go where a man's been murdered, anyway--but nothing's ever been seen around that house except in the night--just some blue lights slipping by the windows--no regular ghosts."

"Well, where you see one of them blue lights flicker-
ing around, Tom, you can bet there's a ghost mighty
close behind it. It stands to reason. Becuz you know
that they don't anybody but ghosts use 'em."

"Yes, that's so. But anyway they don't come around in the daytime, so what's the use of our being afeared?"

"Well, all right. We'll tackle the ha'nted house if you say so--but I reckon it's taking chances."⁸⁷

Although folklore motivates Tom and Huck's plan to come to the haunted house the following day, where, in fact, they would encounter the evil presaged by the owl and the dog by running into Injun Joe who has been hiding in this ruin, a counter superstition prevents their going and makes them delay their visit by a day. It is Huck who unknowingly saves them:

"Lookyhere, Tom, do you know what day it is?"

Tom mentally ran over the days of the week, and then quickly lifted his eyes with a startled look in them--

"My! I never once thought of it, Huck!"

"Well, I didn't neither, but all at once it popped onto me that it was Friday."

"Blame it, a body can't be too careful, Huck. We might a got into an awful scrape, tackling such a thing on a Friday."

"Might! Better say would! There's some lucky days, maybe, but Friday ain't."

"Any fool knows that. I don't reckon you was the first that found it out, Huck."

"Well, I never said I was, did I? And Friday ain't all, neither. I had a rotten bad dream last night--dreamt about rats."

"No! Sure sign of trouble. Did they fight?"

"No."

"Well, that's good, Huck. When they don't fight it's only a sign that there's trouble around, you know. All we got to do is to look mighty sharp and keep out of it. We'll drop this thing for to-day, and play."⁸⁸

The following day the boys enter the house, which is now empty; but soon they hear footsteps and quickly hide in the loft as Injun Joe and his partner return to this hideout. The boys soon learn how lucky it was that they remembered the previous day was Friday when they hear Injun Joe's partner mutter his intention of leaving the

⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 234-236.

⁸⁸ Ibid., pp. 237-238.

house, and add, "I wanted to yesterday, only it warn't any use trying to stir out of here, with those infernal boys playing over there on the hill right in full view."⁸⁹ Tom and Huck wait their chance and finally escape.

The last such episode in which folklore signs bring a saving forewarning takes place near the home of the Widow Douglas. One night Huck follows Injun Joe and his partner here, hoping that they will lead him to the treasure the boys saw the fugitives carry from the haunted house.

He trotted along a while; then slackened his pace, fearing he was gaining too fast; moved on a piece, then stopped altogether; listened; no sound; none, save that he seemed to hear the beating of his own heart. The hooting of an owl came from over the hill--ominous sound! But no footsteps. Heavens, was everything lost! He was about to spring with winged feet, when a man cleared his throat not four feet from him!⁹⁰

The hooting of the owl made Huck attentive for the fraction of a second that saved his life. He now hears the half-breed's intention of harming the Widow. Huck quietly inches away from danger and runs for the help that saves the Widow.

The discovery of Injun Joe's treasure by Tom and Huck completes the plot action of the book. When Tom and Becky were lost in the cave, Tom caught a fleeting glimpse of Injun Joe standing by a cross mark on the cave's wall. After the half-breed has been found dead in the cave, Tom and Huck return to the dark passageways and soon find the cross mark. At once Huck is fearful:

"Tom, less git out of here!"
"What! and leave the treasure?"

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 242.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 265.

"Yes--leave it. Injun Joe's ghost is round about there, certain."

"No it ain't, Huck, no it ain't. It would ha'nt the place where he died--away out at the mouth of the cave --five miles from here."

"No, Tom, it wouldn't. It would hang round the money. I know the ways of ghosts, and so do you."⁹¹

But Tom remembers a counter charm more powerful than the impending evil:

"Look here, Huck, what fools we're making of ourselves! Injun Joe's ghost ain't a going to come around where there's a cross!"⁹²

This folklore has the obvious purpose of enabling the boys to pursue their search and discover the treasure. Here also is emphasized through folklore the element of fear which has exerted insistent influence from the graveyard adventure to this final action involving Injun Joe. But most important, folklore is absolutely integral to a plot which makes a fundamental contribution to the book's greatness.

A principal reason that Tom Sawyer is America's classic story of boyhood is that it exerts the widest appeal to the imagination by subtly combining two points of view in depicting a boy's world. The first point of view concerns the fact that a little over one-half of this work shows Tom in a series of episodes each complete in itself, each quite believable and realistic. Tom at home, being punished for some boyish crime; Tom in church, fretful under the sermon and looking for any diversion; Tom in school, unable to concentrate as he looks out the window to the freedom of the fields and hills, brilliant under a summer sky; Tom in love with Becky Thatcher,

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 309.

⁹² Ibid., p. 310.

a scene startlingly alive with the courting talk of children--such scenes make an authentic appeal to the experience of most readers. These episodes are narrated from the point of view of an adult who describes accurately some of the principal experiences of boyhood. The second point of view concerns the plot action which comprises the second half of the book. Here the reader no longer sees through an adult's eyes what boyhood is, but on the contrary sees through a boy's eyes the visions of grandeur every boy dreams his world could be. The plot reveals Tom in dangerous adventures, shows him aiding in the capture of wild outlaws, and permits him to find a fortune in buried treasure and become a hero in the eyes of the adult population of the town. This second point of view, therefore, is completely artificial, yet the folklore background which adds a sharper edge to the terror of the events of the plot creates an air of reality that succeeds to a great extent in joining the artificial story with the realistic episodes without a break in tone and thus harmonizes them. The fact that the episodes and the plot action are not treated entirely as separate parts but are very often enmeshed strengthens this harmony.⁹⁴ The result is a subtle union in which

⁹³ [Tom speaks:]

"Do you love rats?"

"No! I hate them!"

"Well, I do, too--live ones. But I mean dead ones, to swing round your head with a string."

"No, I don't care for rats much, anyway. What I like is chewing-gum."

"Oh, I should say so! I wish I had some now."

"Do you? I've got some. I'll let you chew it awhile, but you must give it back to me."

Ibid., p. 85.

⁹⁴ The chapters dealing with the plot action are the following: VI, IX, X, XI, XXIII-XXIX, XXXI, XXXIII-XXXV.

these two points of view of the actual world of a boy and his dream world create perhaps the widest dimension of boyhood experience that has something to say to every reader.

In addition to folklore providing a realistic background and supplying much of the narrative motivation, it is essential to the portrayal of the principal characters in the book. Obviously Tom and Huck are saturated with folklore. Their actions, happiness, and fears in the world often are markedly influenced by folk beliefs. It is in terms of folklore that these boys most commonly respond to their world. Folklore is one of the most important bonds of friendship between Tom and Huck. Both boys take one another's extensive knowledge of this lore for granted and find close companionship in evaluating, discussing, and responding to this important force in their lives. In a very real way folklore influences Tom's moral character. The reader of Tom Sawyer has the feeling that Tom, who has full quota of boyhood sins, is basically a fine boy, and naturally so. But the book makes it clear that the superstitious forms of the town's religious beliefs keep a value of right and wrong before Tom. Thus he is afraid to catch a fly in church or go to sleep on Jackson's Island before saying his prayers. He is stupefied to see Injun Joe remain standing after telling his black lie. Significantly, these superstitious forms of religion are the only religious forms Tom pays attention to. He understands them because they differ in no real way from his other superstitious beliefs: both deal with the power of the unseen world and rest on a base of fear. Lastly, the folklore characterization of Tom and Huck accounts to a great extent for the book's appeal. One more readily

associates a mind completely saturated by folklore with a boy than with an adult who outgrows most of his superstitions. For this reason the reader responds to remembered beliefs as folklore continually emphasizes a boy's interests.

Folklore also depicts the character of the people closest to these boys, Tom's Aunt Polly and Huck's pap. Huck's father does not have an active role in this book, but he deserves mention because the picture given of him indicates where Huck learned some of his superstition. Folk elements quickly present a vivid sketch of Pap by combining the assertion of his complete ignorance with striking action. This characterization is given by Huck to prove to Tom that a certain Mother Hopkins is a witch.

"She witched pap. Pap says so his own self. He come along one day, and he see she was a witching him, so he took up a rock, and if she hadn't dodged, he'd a got her. Well, that very night he rolled off'n a shed wher' he was a lay-
ing drunk, and broke his arm."

"Why, that's awful. How did he know she was a witching him?"

"Lord, pap can tell, easy. Pap says when they keep looking at you right stiddy, they're a witching you. Specially if they mumble. Becuz when they mumble they're saying the Lord's Prayer backwards."⁹⁵

More important is the characterization of Aunt Polly, who is charged with Tom's upbringing. Walter Blair has pointed out that an important feature of this book is that Tom is not the wooden boy of so many contemporary novels of the time in which stories of boyhood so often became moral exemplars for the childhood population but that Tom Sawyer has the usual amount of boyhood sins and is a

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 75.

flesh and blood child as a result.⁹⁶ Twain's wish to present an actual boy influenced his characterization of Aunt Polly. She is kindly and sympathetic; but, most important, she possesses a shallow and conventional intelligence which allows her to be tricked easily by the imaginative Tom. In the opening pages of the book Twain drew upon proverbs and speech formulas to illustrate Aunt Polly's innocent conventionality:

"Hang the boy, can't I never learn anything? Ain't he played me tricks enough like that for me to be looking out for him by this time? But old fools is the biggest fools there is. Can't learn an old dog new tricks, as the saying is. But my goodness, he never plays them alike, two days, and how is a body to know what's coming? He 'pears to know just how long he can torment me before I get my dander up, and he knows if he can make out to put me off for a minute or make me laugh, it's all down again and I can't hit him a lick. I ain't doing my duty by that boy, and that's the Lord's truth, goodness knows. Spare the rod and spile the child, as the Good Book says. I'm a laying up sin and suffering for us both, I know. He's full of the Old Scratch, but laws-a-me! he's my own dead sister's boy, poor thing, and I ain't got the heart to lash him, somehow. Every time I let him off, my conscience does hurt me so, and every time I hit him my old heart most breaks. Well-a-well, man that is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble, as the Scripture says, and I reckon it's so. He'll play hookey this evening, and I'll just be obleeged to make him work, to-morrow, to punish him. It's mighty hard to make him work Saturdays, when all the boys is having holiday, but he hates work more than he hates anything else, and I've got to do some of my duty by him, or I'll be the ruination of the child."⁹⁷

Aunt Polly's conformity is also illustrated by the fact that she too is touched by the superstitions common to the town. When she sits up one night with Joe Harper's mother grieving over the supposed drowning of Joe and Tom, a faint breeze makes the candle flame

⁹⁶ Walter Blair, "On the Structure of Tom Sawyer," Modern Philology, XXXVII (August, 1939), 75-83.

⁹⁷ Twain, Works, XII, 16-17. Italics mine.

shudder. Aunt Polly at once thinks of the spirits of the dead:

"What makes the candle blow so?" ... "Why that door's open, I believe. Why of course it is. No end of strange things now. Go 'long and shut it, Sid."⁹⁸

Like many people of her time, Aunt Polly also believes in the prophecy of dreams. Tom's sneaking back to his house from Jackson's Island and listening to his aunt and Mrs. Harper grieving provides the necessary realism when he later tells his aunt what she did that evening and pretends the account came to him in a dream on the island. Aunt Polly eagerly seizes on this as evidence sustaining her belief in a superstition:

"Well, for the land's sake! I never heard the beat of that in all my days! Don't tell me there ain't anything in dreams, any more. Sereny Harper shall know of this before I'm an hour older. I'd like to see her get around this with her rubbage 'bout superstition. Go on, Tom!"⁹⁹

Finally, it should be pointed out that Twain occasionally introduces proverbs into this work which enable him from time to time to bring the contrast of mature judgment to bear upon Tom's adventures and thus emphasize the essential focus upon a boy's world. More significantly, these proverbs indicate that Tom is maturing, for he is involved in experiences which will make him comprehend something of the ways of life. As the story proceeds, proverbs show his involvement in the lessons of experience. After the whitewashing scene Twain observes that Tom discovered, without knowing it, "that in order to make a man covet a thing, it is only

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 154.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 181.

necessary to make that thing difficult to attain,"¹⁰⁰ adding that "If he had been a great and wise philosopher, like the writer of this book, he would now have comprehended that Work consists of whatever a body is obliged to do, and that Play consists of whatever a body is not obliged to do."¹⁰¹ Elsewhere Twain points out a truth Tom may grow to realize: "Often, the less there is to justify a traditional custom, the harder it is to get rid of it."¹⁰² And when Tom joins the Cadets of Temperance because of their splendid costumes and promises to give up smoking, chewing, and profanity, he is in a torment of desire to continue his old sins, discovering "that to promise not to do a thing is the surest way in the world to make a body want to go and do that very thing."¹⁰³

It is apparent that folklore saturates Tom Sawyer and is fundamental to the creative art underlying the book's continual appeal. I have tried to show that folklore is instrumental to the portrayal of Tom and Huck--is, in fact, the principal reason they emerge as living boys, so heavily do their thoughts and actions depend upon their knowledge of this lore. The folklore conception of the background, as has been shown, further widens the appeal of boyhood. In this book, as well as in Pudd'nhead Wilson and The Mysterious Stranger, one observes folk materials being used with greater variety and purpose than was true of any group of Twain's writings so far examined. It now remains to consider the novel written in the

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 33.

¹⁰¹ Ibid..

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 60.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 211.

spirit of the Missouri period in which Mark Twain used folk materials with the finest art, Huckleberry Finn.

Chapter V

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

In Huckleberry Finn Mark Twain employed folklore with a skill and sweep not found elsewhere in his work. Twain, here, not only gave a certain color to his book through the use of superstitions, proverbs, tall tales, and other lore, but also employed folk materials with calculated artistry to influence structure, to support thematic development, to provide plot motivation, and to depict character. It is these latter and more important aspects of his writing that first deserve attention.

It is a commonplace of criticism to say that Huckleberry Finn is loosely organized. "He [Twain] was never the conscious artist," writes Constance Rourke, "always the improviser";¹ and Bernard DeVoto finds that this work "is episodic, discontinuous, a succession of incidents."² Twain himself provided the lead to such opinions in the "Notice" to his book, warning that "persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot."

Mark Twain admittedly had trouble with plot structure, yet he

¹ Constance Rourke, American Humor (New York, 1953), p. 168.

² Bernard DeVoto, Mark Twain at Work (Cambridge, 1942), p. 89; see also Fred Lewis Pattee, who observes, "Never literary creator more erratic, more temperamental. He lived from intensity to intensity, a new butterfly chase with every new day." Fred Lewis Pattee, "Introduction," in Mark Twain, Representative Selections (New York, 1935), p. xxix.

was far from being the unconscious artist,³ and his shortcomings in this respect in Huckleberry Finn result from a careful attempt at organization, not from an indifference to it. The book, of course, has a degree of organization because the episodes either float upon the river or are enacted upon its banks. "But for the River," observes T. S. Eliot, "the book might be only a sequence of adventures with a happy ending. A river, a very big and powerful river, is the only natural force that can wholly determine the course of human peregrination."⁴ But the coherent force of the Mississippi, perhaps, was an unconscious device; for once Huck and Jim are set adrift on these waters, the experiences in which Twain involves them necessarily have a common relationship to the river's power. The real evidence of Twain's striving for plot unity, however, lies in his conscious effort to achieve such a binding force by a studied use of folklore which threads its way through the main narrative and through certain supporting themes.

At first glance, the narrative comprises complete episodes which seem to chop the book into units. Huck, as the story opens, is cramped by the civilizing influence in the home of the Widow Douglas; he then enjoys a degree of freedom as a member of Tom Sawyer's gang; his father then steals him to an island and almost

³ While conceding the episodic nature of the book, Gladys Bellamy attempts to show a basic organization by dividing the work into three thematic units: the opening chapters in St. Petersburg; the trip down the river, which is the heart of the book; and the final chapters at the Phelps' farm when Tom Sawyer reappears. Gladys C. Bellamy, Mark Twain as a Literary Artist (Norman, 1950), pp. 338-347.

⁴ T. S. Eliot, "Introduction," in Samuel L. Clemens, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (London, 1950), p. xii.

succeeds in killing him before he escapes. The river episodes follow. Huck and Jim float down the river and have a series of adventures; when the raft is smashed, Huck is caught up in the Grangerford feud, and upon being reunited with faithful Jim, the King and the Duke come aboard and dominate the action until Tom Sawyer re-enters the story, after which the book drags slowly to its end. By a skillful method of forecasting by means of folklore, Twain tries to order these episodes into a closely related narrative.

This forecasting is most carefully done from the opening paragraphs until Huck meets his father. Twain chooses certain signs and omens and places them carefully in the narrative movement to achieve a cumulative suspense which reaches its climax when Huck goes to his room, opens the door, and discovers his pap. The first sign of evil is a spectacular one, because of both the striking spider symbol and the omens of fear stemming from the withheld knowledge which precede it.

The stars were shining, and the leaves rustled in the woods ever so mournful; and I heard an owl, away off, who-whooping about somebody that was dead, and a whip-powill and a dog crying about somebody that was going to die; and the wind was trying to whisper something to me, and I couldn't make out what it was, and so it made the cold shivers run over me. Then away out in the woods I heard that kind of a sound that a ghost makes when it wants to tell about something that's on its mind and can't make itself understood, and so can't rest easy in its grave, and has to go about that way every night grieving. I got so down-hearted and scared I did wish I had some company. Pretty soon a spider went crawling up my shoulder, and I flipped it off and it lit in the candle; and before I could budge it was all shriveled up. I didn't need anybody to tell me that that was an awful bad sign and would fetch me some bad luck, so I was scared and most shook the clothes off of me.⁵

⁵ Mark Twain, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn in The Writings of Mark Twain (New York, 1904), XIII, 18. Hereafter cited as

This was the worst possible sign--a death sign--for spiders were often considered to be immortal.⁶

This sign develops some direction when Huck, through his wide knowledge of death lore, discovers that the report of his father's drowning cannot be true. The river had washed the features from the face of the recovered body. The dead person had been found floating face up, and this gave Huck his certain knowledge.

I knowed mighty well that a drowned man don't float on his back, but on his face. So I knowed, then, that this warn't pap, but a woman dressed up in a man's clothes. So I was uncomfortable again.⁷

From now on, future signs can have only one direction. They come in due time, breaking sharply on Huck's freedom and happiness in Tom Sawyer's gang. One morning Huck overturns the salt-cellar, and before he can stop the evil sign by throwing some salt over his left shoulder, Miss Watson stops his arm, and the bad luck is afoot. Huck goes out of the house expecting doom, and while walking in the newly fallen snow happens to notice a particular footprint. "There was a cross in the left boot-heel made with big nails, to keep off

Works, unless otherwise indicated. DeVoto oversimplifies when he says that "All his [Huck's] misadventures, all the long wanderings of his saga, spring from the return of old man Finn--which could have been averted if Miss Watson had permitted him to toss over his shoulder some of the salt that he had spilled." Bernard DeVoto, Mark Twain's America (Boston, 1932), pp. 75-76. The passage quoted above precedes the salt omen and is much the more complex of the two, for here all of nature takes on a supernatural force of prediction which is of deeper significance and power than the simple act of spilling salt.

⁶ Funk & Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend, ed. Maria Leach (New York, 1949), I, 19.

⁷ Twain, Works, XIII, 29-30.

the devil."⁸ He knew his father was back. He consults someone wiser in superstition than himself, Nigger Jim. Using a hair ball, which had a knowing spirit hidden in it, Jim offers a ray of hope.

Yo' ole father doan' know yit what he's a-gwyne to do. Sometimes he spec he'll go 'way, en den agin he spec he'll stay. De bes' way is to res' easy en let de ole man take his own way.⁹

Huck goes home, takes a candle up to his room, and there finds Pap.

Signs continue to anticipate narrative developments. After Pap almost stabs Huck during a wild night of delirium tremens, the boy determines to escape. He notes carefully the June rise on the river the next morning, for the rise has always brought him luck. This luck brings a canoe down the channel which Huck hides and in which he soon makes his escape. Luck again floats down nine logs which his father takes to town to sell for whiskey, an action which allows Huck the needed time to execute his plan and push off down the river.

Afterwards, when Huck and Jim are on Jackson's Island, Twain carefully establishes Jim's supremacy in folklore wisdom, for it is he, and not Huck, who makes the important forecasts from now on. This is as it should be, for the Negro lore, hardly one generation removed from Africa, far exceeded the folklore knowledge of the whites, a point Huck makes clear in the final portion of this

⁸ Ibid., p. 34.

⁹ Ibid., p. 36. In this passage occurs the only instance of Jim's realizing that a superstition is a hoax, for he tells Huck that money must be put in the hair ball before it will work. In having Jim so trick Huck, Twain deals a serious blow to the characterization of Jim. Of this, Victor Royce West asserts, "How he [Jim] could be high priest of this fetish, know its secret, and yet retain his deep-rooted faith in every superstition that came to his attention, is scarcely explicable even when one considers his ignorance and his racial background." Victor Royce West, Folklore in the Works of Mark Twain (Lincoln, 1930), p. 73.

quotation.

Some young birds come along, flying a yard or two at a time and lighting. Jim said it was a sign it was going to rain. He said it was a sign when young chickens flew that way, and so he reckoned it was the same way when young birds done it. I was going to catch some of them, but Jim wouldn't let me. He said it was death. He said his father laid mighty sick once, and some of them caught a bird, and his old granny said his father would die, and he did.

And Jim said you mustn't count the things you are going to cook for dinner, because that would bring bad luck. The same if you shook the table-cloth after sun-down. And he said if a man owned a beehive and that man died, the bees must be told about it before sun-up next morning, or else the bees would all weaken down and quit work and die. Jim said bees wouldn't sting idiots; but I didn't believe that, because I had tried them lots of times myself, and they wouldn't sting me.

I had heard about some of these things before, but not all of them. Jim knowed all kinds of signs. He said he knowed most everything.¹⁰

Jim's first simple forecast comes true quickly, for the storm follows the flight of the birds, and this lends a supernatural solemnity to one of the finest descriptive passages in the book, a triumph of vividness, illustrating what heights Huck's idiom of speech is capable of achieving. The bird sign is again emphasized, and the spider symbol adds a figure of awe to the surface descriptive force.

Pretty soon it darkened up, and begun to thunder and lighten; so the birds was right about it. Directly it begun to rain, and it rained like all fury, too, and I never see the wind blow so. It was one of these regular summer storms. It would get so dark that it looked all blue-black outside, and lovely; and the rain would thrash along by so thick that the trees off a little ways looked dim and spider-webby; and here would come a blast of wind that would bend the trees down and turn up the pale under side of the leaves; and then a perfect ripper of a gust would follow along and set the branches to tossing their arms as if they was just wild; and next, when it was just about the bluest and blackest --fst! it was as bright as glory, and you'd have a little glimpse of treetops a-plunging about away off yonder in the storm, hundreds of yards further than you could

¹⁰ Twain, Works, XIII, 71.

see before; dark as sin again in a second, and now you'd hear the thunder let go with an awful crash, and then go rumbling, grumbling, tumbling, down the sky towards the under side of the world, like rolling empty barrels down stairs--where it's long stairs and they bounce a good deal, you know.¹¹

The luck of the river rise still holds and enables Huck and Jim one night to catch the lumber raft which will take them down the Mississippi. But now Huck unthinkingly handles a snakeskin, and Jim, horrified, forecasts evil. The development of this evil runs its course, culminating with Huck and Jim encountering the King and the Duke. First, Jim is bitten by a rattler and almost loses his life, a narrow escape resulting from Huck's stupidity in leaving a dead rattlesnake near Jim's blanket for a trick. The fact that Huck forgot for the moment an important bit of snake lore makes the coming evil of the snakeskin a certainty.

That all comes of my being such a fool as to not remember that wherever you leave a dead snake its mate always comes there and curls around it.¹²

Jim knew exactly what to do:

Jim told me to chop off the snake's head and throw it away, and then skin the body and roast a piece of it. I done it, and he eat it and said it would help cure him. He made me take off the rattles and tie them around his wrist, too. He said that that would help.¹³

Then Jim reemphasizes the danger of the omen of the snakeskin by saying he "druther see the new moon over his left shoulder as much as a thousand times than take up a snake-skin in his hand."¹⁴

¹¹ Ibid., p. 76.

¹² Ibid., p. 81.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 82.

Twain placed heavy emphasis on this episode because he wished to make his following chapters evolve from it. It is because of this omen that Huck and Jim float by Cairo, and Jim misses his chance for freedom.

"Doan' le's talk about it, Huck. Po' niggers can't have no luck. I awluz 'spected dat rattlesnake-skin warn't done wid its work.¹⁵

That same day Huck and Jim awake after a nap and find that the canoe has slipped away from the raft and disappeared. Huck gives the snake god its due:

We both knowed well enough it was some more work of the rattlesnake-skin; so what was the use to talk about it? It would only look like we was finding fault, and that would be bound to fetch more bad luck--and keep on fetching it, too, till we knowed enough to keep still.¹⁶

The final catastrophe occurs when they push out into the river channel in the night. A giant steamboat looms from the darkness and crushes the raft. Jim and Huck barely have time to jump for their lives. They are separated, and Huck, after swimming to shore, happens onto the house of the Grangerfords and a new series of adventures as the snakeskin evil runs its course.

Just before Jim and Huck are separated by this catastrophe, Jim interprets a dream. The evil of the snakeskin still hangs over them, for a thick fog settles on the river and Huck and Jim lose each other in the haze. When they are reunited, Huck tricks his friend into believing, for awhile, that they were not separated by the fog, but that Jim only dreamed this. This suggestion readily plays into the Negro's knowledge of dream lore. The last part of

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 131.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 132.

his interpretation looks forward to their meeting with the King and the Duke, which takes place immediately after the Grangerford chapters.

The whoops was warnings that would come to us every now and then, and if we didn't try hard to make out to understand them they'd just take us into bad luck, 'stead of keeping us out of it. The lot of towheads was troubles we was going to get into with quarrelsome people and all kinds of mean folks, but if we minded our business and didn't talk back and aggravate them, we would pull through and get out of the fog and into the big clear river, which was the free States, and wouldn't have no more trouble.¹⁷

When they are with the King and the Duke, Huck and Jim cater to their every wish, never talk back to them, and follow Huck's rule: "If I never learnt nothing else out of pap, I learnt that the best way to get along with his kind of people is to let them have their own way."¹⁸

The King and the Duke now dominate the action for many chapters and finally leave the story when Tom Sawyer reappears. It is at this point that Twain becomes so interested in satirizing the romantic novel tradition that he allows his narrative to drag terribly. This results, as will be shown, in a weakening of Huck's character as he becomes the willing follower of Tom's absurdities. This last episode, because of its incongruity with the study of human action that has preceded it, hurts the book. Twain may have suspected this, for in the last pages of the narrative he has Jim look back to a sign he and Huck discussed on Jackson's Island which predicted the future riches Jim would have because of his hairy chest. In

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 121-122. Italics mine.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 171.

the final chapter, the freed Jim exclaims:

Dah, now, Huck, what I tell you?--what I tell you up dah on Jackson islan'? I tole you I got a hairy breas', en what's de sign un it; en I tole you I ben rich wunst, en gwineter to be rich agin; en it's come true; en heah she is! Dah, now! doan' talk to me--signs is signs, mine I tell you; en I knowed jis' 's well 'at I 'us gwineter be rich agin as I's a-stannin' heah dis minute!¹⁹

This use of folklore forecasting is supported by another organizational pattern which, although not so obvious an effort to relate the episodes as the forecasting motif, also forms an important unifying web throughout the action. This pattern has to do with the theme of fear which, working mainly through forces of power and loneliness, is ever present. This theme moves on two levels. First, there is Mark Twain's factual description of it. Secondly, factual description is supported by a wealth of folklore. By this two-fold method, power, fear, and loneliness become not only more arresting, but also develop overtones of otherworldly qualities as the worlds of fact and superstition move together.

Fear and terror frequently exist on the purely animal level. The scene on the listing Walter Scott in which two gangmen decide how they will murder their cohort is a study in terror. So is Huck's eyewitness account of the Grangerford feud. In the chapter entitled, with masterly understatement, "An Arkansas Difficulty," we see the rip-snorting but harmless Boggs shot down in cold blood on the ruddy main street of a sun-baked Arkansas village. The terror of the lynching bee follows until the mob is faced down by the raw courage of the murderer, Colonel Sherburn. Another mob scene occurs

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 373-374.

at the grave of Peter Wilks, where Huck has been dragged as an accomplice to the swindling dealings of the King and the Duke. But in the river lies a more pervasive level of fear.

I have remarked that the river gives the book a certain line of development and organization. Huck loves the river. Sometimes this love is mixed with an awesome awareness of its majesty:

"...down by the village was the river, a whole mile broad, and awful still and grand";²⁰ or, "It was kind of solemn, drifting down the big, still river, laying on our backs looking up at the stars, and we didn't ever feel like talking loud, and it warn't often that we laughed--only a little kind of a low chuckle."²¹ At other times, Huck expresses his sheer happiness of being on the river:

Soon as it was night out we shoved; when we got her out to about the middle we let her alone, and let her float wherever the current wanted her to; then we lit the pipes, and dangled our legs in the water, and talked about all kinds of things--we was always naked, day and night, whenever the mosquitoes would let us....

Sometimes we'd have that whole river all to ourselves for the longest time. Yonder was the banks and the islands, across the water; and maybe a spark--which was a candle in a cabin window; and sometimes on the water you could see a spark or two--on a raft or a scow, you know; and maybe you could hear a fiddle or a song coming over from one of them crafts. It's lovely to live on a raft.²²

Trilling has observed that Huck, because of this adoration, returns to the river from the civilization on its shores with a feeling of relief and thanksgiving, and that this adoration places the river's

²⁰ Ibid., p. 23.

²¹ Ibid., p. 96.

²² Ibid., p. 163.

"noble grandeur in contrast with the pettiness of men."²³ This is vividly illustrated regarding Huck's experiences with the Grangerfords. With the horrors of the Grangerford feud still in his mind, when he has just finished covering the faces of the recently killed Grangerford boys, he runs to the river, jumps on the raft, and the magic of the river dispels the vivid and frightening experience. When Huck finishes giving us his thoughts, the episode is out of his mind. Only the river matters.

I never felt easy till the raft was two mile below there and out in the middle of the Mississippi. Then we hung up our signal lantern, and judged that we was free and safe once more. I hadn't had a bite to eat since yesterday, so Jim he got out some corn-dodgers and buttermilk, and pork and cabbage and greens--there ain't nothing in the world so good when it's cooked right--and whilst I eat my supper we talked and had a good time. I was powerful glad to get away from the feuds, and so was Jim to get away from the swamp. We said there warn't no home like a raft, after all. Other places do seem so cramped up and smothery, but a raft don't. You feel mighty free and easy and comfortable on a raft.²⁴

The power of the river is not always curative. It is more often dangerous, and untrustworthy. Its rise uproots things and carries the plunder on its crest, among them the "House of Death" which Huck and Jim explore. The steamboat Walter Scott "had killed herself on a rock,"²⁵ and it is on this ship that Huck and Jim barely escape a gang of killers. The river fog is responsible for separating Huck and Jim, leaving them to the terrors of snags and towheads in the milky loneliness. One night, as Huck sleeps, a wave

²³ Lionel Trilling, "Introduction," in Mark Twain, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (New York, 1952), p. viii.

²⁴ Twain, Works, XIII, 159-160.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 97.

slaps him overboard. And as Huck observes, the river always eats the land.

On the river front some of the houses was sticking out over the bank, and they was bowed and bent, and about ready to tumble in. The people had moved out of them. The bank was caved away under one corner of some others, and that corner was hanging over. People lived in them yet, but it was dangersome, because sometimes a strip of land as wide as a house caves in at a time. Sometimes a belt of land a quarter of a mile deep will start in and cave along and cave along till it all caves into the river in one summer. Such a town as that has to be always moving back, and back, and back, because the river's always gnawing at it.²⁶

The river, thus, is something more than an illustration of nature's beauty and power. It emerges as a god. Inspiring fear and instilling an awareness of power in its disciples, it moves in strange ways and seems to have a mind and will of its own.²⁷ It becomes a background against which are projected the superstitions of its servants, superstitions which complement its godliness.

Huck's world is basically a world of fear. His religion is not that of the civilized world but the religion of superstition he grew up with²⁸ and which he acquired mostly from the Negro. Jim reveals the fear basis of this religion in a speech to Huck on Jackson's Island. Huck is talking:

I said it looked to me like all the signs was about bad luck, and so I asked him if there warn't any good-luck signs. He says:

"Mighty few--an' dey ain't no use to a body. What you want to know when good luck's a-comin' for? Want to keep it off?"²⁹

²⁶ Ibid., p. 189.

²⁷ Trilling, "Introduction," pp. vii-viii; see also Eliot, "Introduction," pp. xiv-xv.

²⁸ Ibid., p. viii.

²⁹ Twain, Works, XIII, 72.

Good fortune was taken for granted. It would not harm; but, as has been pointed out, the malevolence of the spirit world was the Negro's constant fear. A principal aspect of superstitious lore in Huckleberry Finn is the awareness of this malevolence. Huck is a product of this superstition. He strives to prevent evil indicated by signs that confront him constantly. When the spider flips into the candle, Huck fights this evil omen as best he can:

I got up and turned around in my tracks three times and crossed my breast every time; and then I tied up a little lock of my hair with a thread to keep witches away.³⁰

Believers in the reality of spirits live in continual awareness of impending danger. "In all the squalid lore of mankind," writes Newbell Puckett, "there is nothing more ghastly than those unearthly beings, who, for the most part, were at one time men. In Negro ghost-lore this hideousness is all the more patent, since the lovable fairy or brownie is completely subordinated to the goblin, incubus, or ogre, who seeks only the harm of mankind."³¹ Nor was this fear limited to the Negro. Many whites, as has been shown earlier, shared Huck's apprehension of spirits.³² Twain periodically drew upon these beliefs to provide a continual reference to the fearful aspect of Huck's world. Jim is terrified when he meets Huck on Jackson's Island, for he had been told Huck had drowned. His superstitious faith makes it more plausible for him to believe that

³⁰ Ibid., p. 18.

³¹ Newbell N. Puckett, Folk Beliefs of the Southern Negro (Chapel Hill, 1926), p. 116.

³² See also Vance Randolph's discussion of ghost beliefs among the whites in the Missouri Ozarks. Vance Randolph, Ozark Superstitions (New York, 1947), pp. 210-239.

he is seeing Huck's ghost than to disbelieve the account of the drowning.

Doan' hurt me--don't! I hain't ever done no harm to a ghos'. I alwuz liked dead people, en done all I could for 'em. You go en git in de river agin, whah you b'longs, en doan' do nuffin to Ole Jim, 'at 'uz awluz yo' fren'.³³

When Huck wants to talk about the dead man he and Jim found in the "House of Death," Jim, having recognized the man as Huck's father and wishing to keep the secret, drops the subject with a perfectly understandable explanation: the ghost of the man might very well come and haunt them. It was an old Negro belief that a person who dies hard haunts the survivors.³⁴ When Tom Sawyer first encounters Huck during the last episode of the book, he jumps to the same conclusion that Jim did earlier.

I hain't ever done you no harm. You know that. So, then, what you want to come back and ha'nt me for?³⁵

After Huck and Tom succeed in stealing Jim from Silas Phelps' place and their elaborate preparations have been discovered, the friends of Silas Phelps see nothing unusual in attributing the extraordinary escape to spirits. A clacking woman speaks for the group:

Why, sperits couldn't a done better and been no smarter. And I reckon they must a been sperits--because, you know our dogs, and ther' ain't no better; well, them dogs never even got on the track of 'm once!³⁶

Witchcraft and demonology, too, lie behind natural occurrences.

³³ Twain, Works, XIII, 67.

³⁴ Puckett, Folk Beliefs, p. 81.

³⁵ Twain, Works, XIII, 292.

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 359-360.

Pap had driven a cross of nails in his boot heel to keep off the devil. Jim early in the book becomes an authority on witches and is sought out by other Negroes because he interpreted, with wild logic, the cause of his hat being removed while he slept, a logic far removed from the real cause, Tom and Huck.

Afterwards Jim said the witches bewitched him and put him in a trance, and rode him all over the State, and then set him under the trees again, and hung his hat on a limb to show who done it. And next time Jim told it he said they rode him down to New Orleans; and, after that, every time he told it he spread it more and more, till by and by he said they rode him all over the world...³⁷

A demon symbol comes naturally to Huck's mind as he and Jim near Cairo and look in vain in the darkness for the city and see only an occasional light. Huck felt the lights might be Jack-o'-lanterns, a demon of Negro lore adept at leading people astray, often to their deaths.³⁸

When Jim is held captive on Silas Phelps' farm, it is the fear of witches evidenced by the slave who brings Jim his food which

³⁷ Ibid., p. 22.

³⁸ Of the Jack-o'-lantern, Owens tells us the following: "This terrible creature--who on dark, damp nights would wander with his lantern through woods and marshes, seeking to mislead people to their destruction--was described by a negro who seemed perfectly familiar with his subject as a hideous little being, somewhat human in form, though covered with hair like a dog. It had great goggle eyes, and thick, sausage-like lips that opened from ear to ear. In height it seldom exceeded four or five feet, and it was quite slender in form, but such was its power of locomotion that no one on the swiftest horse could overtake it or escape from it, for it could leap like a grasshopper to almost any distance, and its strength was beyond all human resistance. No one ever heard of its victims being bitten or torn: they were only compelled to go with it into bogs and swamps and marshes, and there left to sink and die." William Owens, "Folk-Lore of the Southern Negro," Lippincott's Magazine, XX (December, 1877), 749.

enables Huck and Tom to manipulate this outsider and conceal their plans for the escape. This Negro, in order to keep spirits away, ties his hair in knots, an act Huck performed earlier after seeing the spider sign. Twain had often observed this preventative in his boyhood.³⁹

Lastly, there is the theme of loneliness. Loneliness to Huck is always a state of apprehension, with the threat of evil close at hand. This feeling prepares him for the full impact of the early spider omen: "I felt so lonesome I most wished I was dead."⁴⁰ When the fog which separates Huck and Jim lowers on the river, Huck is seized with fear: "I see the fog closing down, and it made me so sick and scared I couldn't budge for most a half a minute it seemed to me..."⁴¹ Alone in the fog, Huck naturally turns to the realm of superstition for descriptive terms.

The whooping went on, and in about a minute I come a-booming down on a cut bank with smoky ghosts of big trees on it...⁴²

Later, another fog settles so thickly that Huck and Jim feel they are alone in an unreal world, although they can hear noises elsewhere on the river. This is one of the few cases in which Huck's common sense does not let him believe the implications of his surroundings, and this reasserts Huck's practical sense in contrast to Jim's blind beliefs. This is as it should be, for Jim, of

³⁹ Mark Twain, Mark Twain's Autobiography (New York, 1924), I, 100.

⁴⁰ Twain, Works, XIII, 17-18.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 116.

⁴² Ibid., p. 117.

course, is Huck's teacher in matters of superstition.

A scow or a raft went by so close we could hear them talking and cussing and laughing--heard them plain; but we couldn't see no sign of them; it made you feel crawly; it was like spirits carrying on that way in the air.

Jim said he believed it was spirits; but I says:

"No; spirits wouldn't say, 'Dern the dern fog.'"43

The loneliness of a new environment calls up the worst kind of fear. Upon arriving at the farm of Silas Phelps, Huck is justifiably cautious.

When I got there it was all still and Sunday-like, and hot and sunshiny; the hands was gone to the fields; and there was them kind of faint dronings of bugs and flies in the air that makes it seem so lonesome and like everybody's dead and gone; and if a breeze fans along and quivers the leaves it makes you feel mournful, because you feel like it's spirits whispering--spirits that's been dead ever so many years--and you always think they're talking about you. As a general thing it makes a body wish he was dead, too, and done with it all.44

These examples show how saturated the book is with the folklore of fear. So widespread is its use that it forms a chorus to the stark animal fear so characteristic of the human society on the Mississippi's banks and to the mighty ways of the river god, and becomes a strong force which tends to bind the episodic chapters together. In this role, the fear motif sustains Twain's conscious attempts at plot unity through the use of folklore forecasting. Neither force is entirely successful. The book remains basically episodic in structure because the completeness and power of the episodes are such that we still think of these scenes as units, not as units in progression. To effect the latter, there would have to

43 Ibid., p. 163.

44 Ibid., p. 284.

be a cohesive pattern so strong that it would transcend the separate powers of the episodes, something that the folklore patterns cannot do, for they more support and amplify the scenes than direct them. However, one must take these folklore patterns into account before one can say flatly that Twain had no conception of narrative structure, for through these patterns no small degree of organization has been achieved.⁴⁵

Implicit in this examination of folklore patterns of forecasting and terror is the fact that folk materials supply the motivation for some of the most important incidents in the book. Folklore signs which foretell old man Finn's approach also give Huck at the last moment the little time he needs to frustrate his father's attempts to take his money. Huck is "on the watchout" after he spills salt at the breakfast table; and, immediately thereafter, when he spies the boot heel cross in the snow and knows that his father has returned, he quickly determines his course of action. He runs to Judge Thatcher and gives him legal authority over his small fortune. This enables Judge Thatcher to obstruct Huck's father and supplies the reason for old man Finn staying on the scene and finally, in a rage of frustration, stealing Huck to a hide-out on the banks of the Mississippi. The luck of the June rise brings down the canoe which makes Huck suddenly aware that here is his

⁴⁵ Although certain studies have dealt with the structure of Huckleberry Finn, none has mentioned folklore as a structural device. For discussions of the structure of this novel, see DeVoto, Mark Twain at Work, pp. 89-93; Eliot, "Introduction," pp. xii-xv; Bellamy, Mark Twain as a Literary Artist, pp. 338-347; and Leo Marx, "Mr. Eliot, Mr. Trilling, and Huckleberry Finn," American Scholar, XXII (Autumn, 1953), 423-440.

means of escape. The same rise, as has been seen, also floats down nine logs, an incident which motivates old man Finn's decision to set off at once for town and sell them. This action allows Huck to escape. It is this same rise which allows Huck and Jim on Jackson's Island to catch a lumber raft that supplies the means for the trip down the river. Motivation continues on the water. Huck and Jim are convinced that the handling of the rattlesnake skin initiates their series of misfortunes. It brings the fog which causes them to glide by Cairo; it is responsible for their canoe, loaded with provisions, slipping away from the raft one night; and, finally, it causes the steamboat to run over the raft, separating Huck and Jim.

In the last section of Huckleberry Finn, when Tom Sawyer re-enters the story, the traditional devices of romantic fiction concerning imprisonment and escape completely direct the action. This extended episode concerns the freeing of Jim from the Phelps farm where he is held captive. Huck characteristically has a sound and direct plan which would enable Jim to escape; but Tom Sawyer ridicules the plan because it is too simple, lacks "style," and conforms to none of the authorities Tom has read. Huck is sufficiently impressed and follows Tom's lead. Thus, the escape is delayed by Tom's elaborate preparations. The boys try to dig Jim out of the cabin with case knives. Jim must keep a journal on his shirt in blood and must carve pathetic inscriptions on the cabin wall. Tom and Huck smuggle unnecessary things into Jim in his food. They catch spiders, rats, and snakes so that Jim might tame them into pets; they smuggle a rope ladder to him; they have him carve a

message for help on a tin plate and sail it out his window.⁴⁶

During these preparations, Tom and Huck prey on the superstitious Negro, Nat, who brings Jim's food, in order that he might not detect their plans. Jim inadvertently calls Tom and Huck by name in Nat's presence when the boys first visit him. The boys, wishing to keep their friendship with Jim secret, immediately pretend that they have heard nothing and that Jim did not speak. Nat at once senses the cause of his confusion.

"Oh, it's de dad-blame' witches, sah, en I wisht I was dead, I do. Dey's awluz at it, sah, en dey do mos' kill me, dey sk'yers me so. Please to don't tell nobody 'bout it sah, er ole Mars Silas he'll scole me; 'kase he say dey ain't no witches. I jis' wish to goodness he was heah now--den what would he say! I jis' bet he couldn' fine no way to git aroun' it dis time. But it's awluz jis' so; people dat's sot, stays sot; dey won't look into noth'n' en fine it out f'r deyselves, en when you fine it out en tell um 'bout it, dey doan' b'lieve you."⁴⁷

Nat's superstitious fears again save Tom and Huck when a pack of dogs one evening come up through the hole the boys have dug and bound into the cabin. Nat easily mistakes the dark forms: "...he only just hollered 'Witches' once, and keeled over on to the floor amongst the dogs, and begun to groan like he was dying."⁴⁸ After this episode, the slow preparations continue. Finally the boys and Jim escape, but hardly through any fault of their own. Tom, true to the dictates of this literary folklore, has sent an anonymous letter warning of an intended break. As a result, Tom, Huck, and

⁴⁶ For a comparison of these activities with the sources Tom has read, see Olin H. Moore, "Mark Twain and Don Quixote," PMLA, XXXVII (August, 1922), 333-336.

⁴⁷ Twain, Works, XIII, 307.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 322.

Jim barely escape with their lives.

Possibly no more clear-cut example of improvisation leading Twain into a violation of his material exists than in this last episode which brings Huckleberry Finn to a close. In employing this literary folklore as an extended burlesque upon the artificiality of romantic fiction Twain greatly weakened his principal characters. It is inconceivable that Huck, who has now gained a knowledge of the world far beyond the average boy's experience, would allow Tom Sawyer to lead him. Tom has not matured in any way beyond the imaginative boy saturated with romantic fiction who leads his gang in the opening chapters of the book. To have Huck take a secondary role now and express the same admiration for Tom's imaginings he evidenced in the opening pages violates the hard common sense and resourcefulness that has allowed Huck to survive in his world. Jim, too, suffers by being placed secondary to the requirements of burlesque. He no longer possesses nobility; rather, he is the butt of Twain's joke as he complies with Tom's fantastic plans. The former brilliant scenes of the book which portray a vivid study of humankind suffer from the break in tone occasioned by this burlesque. It is no small tribute to this book that it rises above the fumbblings of this final episode to win general recognition as one of the finest achievements in American literature. And it should be noted that this ineptness in folklore usage in Huckleberry Finn concerns literary folklore and not the folklore that Twain held most dear, the folklore of his actual experience.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ T. S. Eliot has argued that this final episode is a natural one and not out of place. "But it is right," he says "that the mood of the end of the book should bring us back to that of the beginning." Eliot, "Introduction," p. xv. For a careful refutation of Eliot's statement, see Marx, "Mr. Eliot, Mr. Trilling," pp. 423-440.

Fully as important as the use of folklore to motivate key incidents is the way it delineates character. One night Huck, disguised as a girl, appears before the door of a Mrs. Judith Loftus, having slipped over from Jackson's Island to discover what the town knows about his escape from his father and also what preparations are underway to recapture Jim. The characterization of Mrs. Loftus is a brilliant achievement. She appears only briefly, yet is unforgettable. Part of her actualness lies in her lively speech, which clearly reveals her shrewdness:

Some folks think the nigger ain't far from here. I'm one of them--but I hain't talked it around. A few days ago I was talking with an old couple that lives next door in the log shanty, and they happened to say hardly anybody ever goes to that island over yonder that they call Jackson's Island. Don't anybody live there? says I. No, nobody, says they. I didn't say any more, but I done some thinking. I was pretty near certain I'd seen smoke over there, about the head of the island, a day or two before that, so I says to myself, like as not that nigger's hiding over there; anyway, says I, it's worth the trouble to give the place a hunt.⁵⁰

Mrs. Loftus continues to talk and supplies to Huck the information he wants. It is not her speech alone, however, that gives her permanency, for other characters, too, notably the ferryboat watchman⁵¹ and old Mrs. Hotchkiss,⁵² appear briefly and are brought to life by Twain's subtle handling of dialect; but none of them attains the actualness of Mrs. Loftus. The difference in these portraits is that Mrs. Loftus is soon involved in dramatic action in which folklore creates increasing suspense. The woman begins to suspect that

⁵⁰ Twain, Works, XIII, 87-88.

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 106-109.

⁵² Ibid., pp. 357-360.

Huck is not a girl and readily employs some traditional touchstones of folk wisdom to see if she is right. She asks Huck to thread a needle for her and watches as he holds the thread still and brings the needle to it; she encourages him to throw a lump of coal at a rat that unsuspectingly emerged from the wall and observes the ease of his arm; finally, she tosses another lump of coal into his lap and notes he claps his legs together to catch it. These occurrences are related so naturally that Mrs. Loftus' sudden question comes as a shock: "Come, now, what's your real name?" Huck sees he is in a close place and has no alternative but to drop his disguise. He tells the woman he has journeyed in from the country and missed his town. Mrs. Loftus directs him to his supposed destination, which allows Huck to escape back to Jackson's Island, but before she frees him she uses the folk wisdom of agriculture to see whether he is lying again.

"Say, when a cow's laying down, which end of her gets up first? Answer up prompt now--don't stop to study over it. Which end gets up first?"

"The hind end, mum."

"Well, then, a horse?"

"The for'rard end, mum."

"Which side of a tree does the moss grow on?"

"North side."

"If fifteen cows is browsing on a hillside, how many of them eats with their heads pointed the same direction?"

"The whole fifteen, mum."

"Well, I reckon you have lived in the country. I thought maybe you was trying to hocus me again."⁵³

She is now convinced and lets Huck escape. These two dramatic climaxes hinging on common folk wisdom further intensify Mrs. Loftus' shrewdness and make enduring her characterization and the scene in

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 91-92.

which she participates.

Folklore of another kind amplifies the characterization of the King and the Duke. In general they are picaros, wandering charlatans well versed in trickery who seldom miss the main chance to capitalize on human gullibility, a point which will be elaborated shortly. More particularly, both employ proverbs in their speech. The smooth-talking King, for example, uses a proverb as the nub of his appeal to the disgruntled Duke:

"Like as not we got to be together a blamed long time on this h-year raft, Bilgewater, and so what's the use o' your bein' sour? It'll only make things oncomfortable. It ain't my fault I warn't born a duke, it ain't your fault you warn't born a king--so what's the use to worry? Make the best o' things the way you find 'em, says I--that's my motto."⁵⁴

More significantly, the Duke, who has been a strolling actor, employs theatrical proverbs and idioms to depict himself as a lowly outcast, broken upon the wheel of fortune:

"Yes, it is good enough for me; it's as good as I deserve; for who fetched me so low when I was so high? I did myself. I don't blame you, gentlemen--far from it; I don't blame anybody. I deserve it all. Let the cold world do its worst; one thing I know--there's a grave somewhere for me. The world may go on just as it's always done, and take everything from me--loved ones, property, everything; but it can't take that. Some day I'll lie down in it and forget it all, and my poor broken heart will be at rest."⁵⁵

Twain uses folk idioms to reveal the basic ignorance of Huck's father. Old man Finn baits his son with traditional speech formulas of anger typical of an unimaginative mind:

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 170. Italics mine.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 167. Italics mine.

"Don't you give me none o' your lip," says he. "You've put on considerable many frills since I been away. I'll take you down a peg before I get done with you. You're educated, too, they say--can read and write. You think you're better'n your father, now, don't you, because he can't? I'll take it out of you. Who told you you might meddle with such hifalut'n foolishness, hey?--who told you you could?"⁵⁶

The importance of folklore in the characterization of Huck's faithful companion, Jim, has been illustrated in large measure in the discussion of folklore forecasting and the thematic pattern of fear. However, the very folklore which portrays Jim as an ignorant, superstition-ridden Negro also reveals that he possesses imagination and nobility. In the first scene in which Jim appears, Twain carefully shows that Huck's future companion, although sharing the slave's superstitions, is of a finer intelligence than his fellows and is much respected by them. Jim, in this scene, does not let his fear of the supernatural world entirely dissuade him from manipulating this world to his own advantage. When Tom and Huck move Jim's hat while he is asleep, Jim "allows" that spirits did it and then promptly amplifies this assertion, in a passage already quoted, to impress the other Negroes. Jim becomes famous immediately:

Niggers would come miles to hear Jim tell about it, and he was more looked up to than any nigger in that country. Strange niggers would stand with their mouths open and look him all over, same as if he was a wonder. Niggers is always talking about witches in the dark by the kitchen fire; but whenever one was talking and letting on to know all about such things, Jim would happen in and say, "Hm! What you know 'bout witches?" and that nigger was corked up and had to take a back seat. Jim always kept that five-center piece round his neck with a string, and said it was a charm the devil give to him with his own hands, and told him he could cure anybody with it and

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 39. Italics mine.

fetch witches whenever he wanted to just by saying something to it; but he never told what it was he said to it. Niggers would come from all around there and give Jim anything they had, just for a sight of that five-center piece; but they wouldn't touch it, because the devil had had his hands on it. Jim was most ruined for a servant, because he got stuck up on account of having seen the devil and been rode by witches.⁵⁷

Thus, Huck's future companion early emerges as a leader among his own people. As the story continues it becomes apparent that Jim is one of the finest representatives of mankind. His humanity, his spontaneous love for Huck, his openness and kindness, these have led Dixon Wecter to assert that Jim is "Mark Twain's noblest creation."⁵⁸

This nobility is specifically stated in a climactic scene which occurs when Huck finds Jim after a terrifying experience on the river during their separation by the fog. Huck climbs aboard the raft to discover the exhausted Jim asleep. The raft trails weeds and shows the marks of the desperate battle Jim has waged with the river. Jim awakes and pours out his thankfulness at seeing Huck alive. As a boyish trick Huck pretends that he has not been gone, that there has been no fog, and tells Jim he has dreamed this frightful thing. The superstitious Negro is soon convinced it was a dream. He dwells upon this nightmare, certain that its vividness means that it was a dream vision and should be so interpreted. Then Huck springs his joke by pointing to the trash caught in the raft and to the broken oar.

Jim looked at the trash, and then looked at me, and back at the trash again. He had got the dream fixed so

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 22.

⁵⁸ Dixon Wecter, Sam Clemens of Hannibal (Boston, 1952), p. 100.

strong in his head that he couldn't seem to shake it loose and get the facts back into its place again right away. But when he did get the thing straightened around he looked at me steady without ever smiling, and says:

"What do dey stan' for? I'se gwyne to tell you. When I got all wore out wid work, en wid de callin' for you, en went to sleep, my heart wuz mos' broke bekase you wuz los', en I didn' k'yer no' mo' what become er me en de raf'. En when I wake up en fine you back agin, all safe en soun', de tears come, en I could a got down on my knees en kiss yo' foot, I's so thankful. En all you wuz thinkin' 'bout wuz how you could make a fool uv ole Jim wid a lie. Dat truck dah is trash; en trash is what people is dat puts dirt on de head er dey fren's en makes 'em ashamed."⁵⁹

This noble utterance would probably never have been made had not Jim interpreted this supposed dream in terms of folk signs. Folklore so immersed him in this "dream" that the shock of recognition of Huck's juvenile cruelty became too intense to be borne as befitted a slave but prompted Jim to confront Huck with the dignity of a fellow human being and rebuke him.

But it is in the delineation of Huck that Twain brings the greatest variety of folk materials to bear upon a characterization. Homely idioms, for example, appear frequently in Huck's speech, often attaining a startling descriptive precision. Huck notes that his father's hair "was long and tangled and greasy, and hung down, and you could see his eyes shining through like he was behind vines."⁶⁰ Pap's face, instead of having a healthy color, is "a tree-toad white, a fish-belly white."⁶¹ The cave Huck and Jim stay in while on Jackson's Island looks "as big as two or three rooms

⁵⁹ Twain, Works, XIII, 122.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 38.

⁶¹ Ibid.

bunched together."⁶² The thunder of a storm is like "rolling empty barrels down stairs--where it's long stairs and they bounce a good deal, you know."⁶³ Dressed as a girl, Huck says, "I put on the sun-bonnet and tied it under my chin, and then for a body to look in and see my face was like looking down a joint of a stovepipe."⁶⁴ These homely figures not only have descriptive force, but also indicate something of the experience of the boy. The figures concerning Huck's father emphasize Huck's days as a vagabond among the hills and along the river banks prior to the Widow Douglas' attempt to civilize him and are exactly the terms we would expect him to use. Twain, in limiting himself to the descriptive vocabulary one most readily associates with Huck and in this limitation finding phrases which have striking picture-making qualities, both preserves Huck's integrity and achieves masterful effects.

Proverbs and folk idioms indicate Huck's values from time to time and prepare the reader for the climactic scene in which Huck decides to lose his soul to hell in order to save Jim. It was pointed out in the discussion of Tom Sawyer that proverbs reveal the omniscient author indicating the significance of some of the experiences in which Tom is involved, although Tom does not always perceive such significance. Huck, however, is the narrator of his own experiences, and the proverbs voiced are his own and reveal certain aspects of his character. His perceptiveness is illustrated early

⁶² Ibid., p. 75.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 76.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 83.

by his remark regarding Miss Watson's attempts to stop him from smoking: "That is just the way with some people. They get down on a thing when they don't know nothing about it."⁶⁵ This perceptiveness enables Huck at last to sense that the human being is above any societal agreement that condones his enslavement--at least Huck's heart tells him this, although his reason tells him he has sinned in depriving Miss Watson of her slave property. Huck first experiences this dilemma between his head and his heart as the raft nears Cairo where Jim is certain of escape. Huck now begins to feel he is doing wrong in aiding Jim and thinks seriously of informing on him. At this moment, two men approach the raft looking for runaway slaves. Huck pushes out to meet them in the canoe. At the crucial moment, however, he remembers Jim's love for him and can't bring himself to turn Jim in. He sends the men away with a convincing lie, but his reason troubles him. A proverb indicates the hold the wrong values of society have upon him.

They went off and I got aboard the raft, feeling bad and low, because I knowed very well I had done wrong, and I see it warn't no use for me to try to learn to do right; a body that don't get started right when he's little ain't got no show...⁶⁶

The unconscious irony of a folk idiom again emphasizes that Huck is a product of his society. When the King and the Duke impersonate Peter Wilks' brothers in order to swindle Wilks' heirs, Huck condemns the frauds in the strongest terms:

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 16.

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 129-130. Italics mine.

Well, if ever I struck anything like it, I'm a nigger. It was enough to make a body ashamed of the human race.⁶⁷

The boy, of course, does not realize that his idiom indicates an acceptance of intolerance far worse than the crime he sees.

While debating whether to stay with Jim or to reveal Jim's whereabouts to Miss Watson, Huck again uses a proverb which shows how he is bound by the wrong values of society:

It would get all around that Huck Finn helped a nigger to get his freedom; and if I was ever to see anybody from that town again I'd be ready to get down and lick his boots for shame. That's just the way: a person does a low-down thing, and then he don't want to take no consequences of it.⁶⁸

This use of proverbs and folk idiom helps one realize the magnitude of Huck's decision to go to hell for Jim, for these present the continual conflict in the boy's mind between his love for Jim and the teachings of his society and thus indicate something of his values as they spring from his reason and his heart.

Lastly, folklore emphasizes the basic virtues of Huck's character. It provides a background, revealing something of Huck's philosophy of life, against which these virtues may be accurately evaluated. No sooner is Huck before the reader than an extended passage of folklore amplifies his character. In this passage, already quoted,⁶⁹ Huck is terrified by the meaning of the sounds of the night and especially by the sign of the spider shriveled in the candle. This at once reveals Huck's only faith and depicts him as

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 216. Italics mine.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 277. Italics mine.

⁶⁹ See p. 199.

a creature of fear. His faith is primarily designed, as has been shown, either to warn of approaching evil or furnish means by which it may be combatted. This fear of the unknown world finds its parallel in the terror that exists in the real world. Thus, when Huck is in unfamiliar circumstances he uses the safest means he knows to safeguard his position, careful lying. A lie for Huck is his only way of manipulating the impending dangers of the actual world as folklore signs and charms seek to manipulate supernatural danger. Accordingly, Huck finds it necessary to protect himself by lying to Mrs. Loftus, to the watchman of the ferry, to the Grangerfords, to the King and the Duke, and to the Phelps. Only on one occasion when he is in a tight place does he tell the truth: Mary Jane Wilks wins his confidence and he reveals to her the swindle the King and the Duke have planned. His thoughts on this occasion give his philosophy of distrust:

I says to myself, I reckon a body that ups and tells the truth when he is in a tight place is taking considerable many resks, though I ain't had no experience, and can't say for certain; but it looks so to me, anyway; and yet here's a case where I'm blest if it don't look to me like the truth is better and actuly safer than a lie. I must lay it by in my mind, and think it over some time or other, it's so kind of strange and unregular. I never see nothing like it.⁷⁰

This philosophy, however, does not embitter Huck and harden him against life. He has a native humanity which it cannot touch. He tries to bring help to the endangered murderers on the Walter Scott who would have killed him had they discovered him. He humbles himself before Jim after the Negro rebukes him for pretending that the separation in the fog was a dream. The sight of a lynching mob

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 245.

turns him sick. Huck does not laugh with a barbarous circus crowd that watches a drunk climb upon a wild-eyed pony: "It warn't funny to me, though; I was all of a tremble to see his danger."⁷¹ His first thought when he learns that the King and the Duke, who have done him every unkindness, are in danger of being tarred and feathered is to warn them. Such actions as these are responsible for Dixon Wecter's judgment that "Huck has none of the unimportant virtues and all the essential ones."⁷² Only by realizing that these virtues transcend a superstitious faith that intensifies a boy's intimate experience of the world's inhumanity can one appreciate the true value of Huck's innate goodness.

In addition to the elaborate forecasting and fear patterns and the use of folklore as a motivating and characterizing influence, there are in Huckleberry Finn certain minor uses of folklore which, though not as complex, deserve mention; for they supply a certain tone, or color, to the book as well as achieve particular effects of their own. Most important are the modified tall tales, together with the closely related tall talk, and the hoaxes, both of which are characteristic of the frontier life in which Huck moves.

Certain theories and characteristics of the tall tale and tall talk have been discussed in the first chapter. It is important to note here that Twain does not halt his narrative to throw in complete tall tales as he did for example in Roughing It, The Innocents

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 199.

⁷² Dixon Wecter, "Mark Twain," in Literary History of the United States, ed. Robert E. Spiller and others (New York, 1949), II, 931.

Abroad, and A Tramp Abroad. In Huckleberry Finn his art has come a long way from those obvious asides; for here he uses only the basic characteristics of tall talk, such as exaggeration and understatement,⁷³ and strips this genre to its minimum requirements so that it can be easily accommodated to the narrative and not draw so much attention to itself. Sometimes just a few sentences give the needed exaggeration; never is more than a paragraph used, but periodically the reader encounters this form.

At first, Twain only alludes to this talk. Huck, having just escaped from Pap and floating down the river in the darkness, hears a man on shore boasting of his story-telling abilities.

One man said it was getting towards the long days and the short nights now. T'other one said this warn't one of the short ones, he reckoned--and then they laughed, and he said it over again, and they laughed again; then they waked up another fellow and told him, and laughed, but he didn't laugh; he ripped out something brisk, and said let him alone. The first fellow said he 'lowed to tell it to his old woman--she would think it was pretty good; but he said that warn't nothing to some things he had said in his time.⁷⁴

In this next example, Twain displays the true tall tale genre: exaggeration steadily accumulates and is carried by a serious tone that only gradually allows the reader to perceive the absurdity of the entire structure.

...I've always reckoned that looking at the new moon over your left shoulder is one of the carelessest and foolishst things a body can do. Old Hank Bunker done it once, and bragged about it; and in less than two years he got drunk and fell off of the shot-tower, and

⁷³ For remarks concerning the role of understatement in the tall tale, see Levette Davidson, A Guide to American Folklore (Denver, 1951), p. 45.

⁷⁴ Twain, Works, XIII, 59.

spread himself out so that he was just a kind of a layer, as you may say; and they slid him edgeways between two barn doors for a coffin, and buried him so, so they say, but I didn't see it.⁷⁵

Some of Mark Twain's exaggeration, as we shall see, is employed for its own sake, frequently resulting in burlesque which mars his writing, but this instance is not out of place. Although Twain pokes fun at this story, we can believe that Huck would swallow both the superstition and the report of the burial, so reminiscent of the "Jim Blaine and his Grandfather's Ram" tale in Roughing It. But this example has come a long way from Roughing It, or The Innocents Abroad for that matter, wherein the tall tale is a deliberate aside, occupying a chapter, and existing basically for its own laughter. In this example we have the laughter still, but the tall tale is reduced to its essence in a few sentences and accommodated to the personality of the boy, thus giving the tale a functional value with regard to Huck's character.

The next example is certainly out of place.

Well, the days went along, and the river went down between its banks again; and about the first thing we done was to bait one of the big hooks with a skinned rabbit and set it and catch a catfish that was as big as a man, being six foot two inches long, and weighed over two hundred pounds. We couldn't handle him, of course; he would a flung us into Illinois. We just set there and watched him rip and tear around till he drowned.⁷⁶

Here, Mark Twain speaks through Huck in order to tell a whopper. Huck may report as truths tall tales which he has heard, but he does not

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 82.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 82. This example illustrates very well Mody Boatright's assertion that the lie of the tall tale must be embellished by ludicrous exaggeration and imagery. Mody C. Boatright, Folk Laughter on the American Frontier (New York, 1949), p. 88.

elsewhere do so from his own experience. He relies completely upon the truth, the reality, of his own experience, which enables him to be an unconsciously perceptive critic of the actions that go on about him. In this lies much of the heart of the book, and for Twain here to vitiate Huck's character for a joke temporarily throws the narrative out of balance.

In the following example, we are confronted by a ringtailed roarer. Boggs, before being shot down by Colonel Sherburn, rips and tears like the half-men, half-alligators Twain characterized in Life on the Mississippi. Boggs' tall talk is perfectly in character, illustrating the hollow braggadocio of the irrepressible drunk which finally stings the aristocratic pride of Sherburn to action.

Boggs comes a-tearing along on his horse, whooping and yelling like an Injun, and singing out:

"Cler the track, thar. I'm on the waw-path, and the price uv coffins is a-gwyne to raise."

He was drunk, and weaving about in his saddle; he was over fifty year old, and had a very red face. Everybody yelled at him and laughed at him and sassed him, and he sassed back, and said he'd attend to them and lay them out in their regular turns, but he couldn't wait now because he'd come to town to kill old Colonel Sherburn, and his motto was, "Meat first, and spoon vittles to top off on."

He see me, and rode up and says:

"Whar'd you come f'm, boy? You prepared to die?"

Then he rode on. I was scared...⁷⁷

Closely related to the tall tale is the hoax. Whereas the tall tale is basically an artistic exaggeration, relying mainly upon carefully chosen figures for embellishment, the hoax concentrates on the trickster theme. This theme of shrewdness--the science of outwitting--is a basic folklore type.⁷⁸ By the time Mark Twain

⁷⁷ Twain, Works, XIII, 190.

⁷⁸ DeVoto, Mark Twain's America, p. 173; see also Stith Thompson, Motif-Index of Folk-Literature. Folklore Fellows Communications No. 109 (Helsinki, 1934), III, 74-149.

began writing, a hoax lore, both oral and literary, was common throughout the country. Benjamin Franklin had written hoaxes and so had Poe.⁷⁹ Among Twain's earliest efforts are "The Petrified Man" and "The Empire City Massacre," both written while he was a Washoe reporter. Both stories have the basic hoax qualities: a surface conviction which proves to be superficial under close scrutiny.⁸⁰

In Huckleberry Finn, the trickster theme takes a variety of forms. It may consist of elaborate and believable lies, such as Huck tells each time he happens upon new company, his appearances at the Grangerfords and at the Phelps being two such examples. Or a hoax may exhibit the careful preparation of "The Royal Nonesuch," which enables the King and the Duke to sell an entire town. The King and Duke hire a hall, and the Duke's imaginative advertisements pack the theater.

AT THE COURT HOUSE!
 For 3 Nights Only!
 The World-Renowned Tragedians
 DAVID GARRICK THE YOUNGER!
 And
 EDMUND KEAN THE ELDER!
 Of the London and Continental
 Theatres,
 In their Thrilling Tragedy of
 THE KING'S CAMELEOPARD,
 Or
 THE ROYAL NONESUCH ! ! !
 Admission 50 Cents
 * * *
 LADIES AND CHILDREN NOT ADMITTED.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Franklin's "An Edict by the King of Prussia" is his best hoax. Poe, in "The Adventure of Hans Pfaall," tried to make a fantastic balloon trip credible by using a wealth of scientific detail.

⁸⁰ Edgar M. Branch, The Literary Apprenticeship of Mark Twain (Urbana, 1950), p. 81.

⁸¹ Twain, Works, XIII, 201.

The curtains part, "and the next minute the king come a-prancing out on all fours, naked; and he was painted all over, ring-streaked-and-striped, all sorts of colors, as splendid as a rainbow. And-- but never mind the rest of his outfit; it was just wild, but it was awful funny."⁸²

In the manuscript, this episode is entitled "The Burning Shame," which refers to a phallic bit of lore Twain picked up from his friend of California days, Jim Gillis.⁸³ Only a watered down version appears in the book. The monster which the King portrays represents a standard trickster theme of the time. He was called the "guyuscutus," a beast of terrible appearance and ferocity. A theater would be packed, the people waiting nervously to see this animal. The manager would step before the curtain and describe the awful beast most vividly. Then the hoax would be sprung by someone running on stage, yelling "Save yourselves! The guyuscutus is loose!" B. J. Whiting has traced the King's representation to this guyuscutus and cites other stories of the time which employ this hoax.⁸⁴ Twain, here, uses both of these folklore elements in "The Royal Nonesuch." We get just a hint of the phallic background and the wild looking, but harmless, guyuscutus.

The King and the Duke, of course, employ the hoax as their stock in trade. Their very names are hoaxes. Fully as ingenious

⁸² Ibid., p. 202.

⁸³ DeLancey Ferguson, Mark Twain: Man and Legend (Indianapolis, 1943), p. 224.

⁸⁴ B. J. Whiting, "Guyuscutus, Royal Nonesuch and Other Hoaxes," Southern Folklore Quarterly, VIII (December, 1944), 251-275.

as "The Royal Nonesuch" is their attempt to defraud the heirs of Peter Wilks by posing as Peter's long absent brothers, Harvey and William. At other times, the King works towns with such traditional quackeries as fortune telling⁸⁵ and laying on of hands.⁸⁶ The Duke knows a good deal about phrenology,⁸⁷ water-witching (still widely practiced in this country), and "dissipating witch spells."⁸⁸ The gullibility of mankind which allows such lore to grow and dupe the unwary is succinctly expressed by the King.

Hain't we got all the fools in town on our side? And ain't that a big enough majority in any town?⁸⁹

Most of the hoaxes Twain uses are thoroughly appropriate; that is, they are in harmony with the conception of the character and are integral to it. The Duke and King's quackery lore, mentioned above, is completely in character, representing sharp practices we would assume them to know and which are necessary to their survival. Sometimes, however, Twain pursued a laugh into incredibility. Such an instance occurs at a camp meeting which the King mulcts by posing as a pirate. As the preacher yells and the people are caught in a trance of religious feeling, the King jumps to the platform and tells the fold that he has seen the light and owes his reformation to their godliness. At once, people hand money to him for "he was

⁸⁵ Twain, Works, XIII, 166.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid. Phrenology, stemming from the mother lore of physiognomy, is as old in English literature as Chaucer. See, for example, the characterization of the Miller in the "Prologue" to the Canterbury Tales.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 175.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 234.

going to start right off and work his way back to the Indian Ocean, and put in the rest of his life trying to turn the pirates into the true path..."⁹⁰ This so oversteps any conception of reality that it weakens the excellent realism of the camp meeting which is sustained until the King passes his hat for the collection.⁹¹

Very important is the episode in which Huck watching the circus is hoaxed by the quick-tongued clown and by the "drunk" who stands on the back of a galloping horse. Because Huck is the narrator-actor of the story and because he is so much among adults and witnesses their kindnesses and cruelties and often senseless actions, we tend to think of Huck being much older than he is and not a boy at all. But Twain wants us to remember always that Huck is a boy with a boy's usual openness and good will;⁹² for this, by contrast, sharpens the mean actions of the civilization he observes. Therefore, midway in the book, we find Huck enjoying a boy's dream of happiness, the circus; and here Huck responds typically, with a boy's naïveté. He is all admiration when he hears the clown throw snappy retorts back at the ringmaster.

The ringmaster couldn't ever say a word to him but he was back at him quick as a wink with the funniest things a body ever said; and how he ever could think of so many of them, and so sudden and so pat, was what I couldn't noway understand. Why, I couldn't a thought of them in a year.⁹³

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 179.

⁹¹ DeVoto, Mark Twain at Work, p. 255.

⁹² For example, Huck tries to save the cut-throats left on the doomed ship, the Walter Scott. He also tries to warn the King and the Duke at the last, to whom he owes nothing; and in probably the most celebrated scene in the book, he vows to go to hell for Jim.

⁹³ Twain, Works, XIII, 198-199.

A drunk reels into the center ring and demands to ride a horse; and the ringmaster, in order to save the man from the enraged people, agrees. He rides beautifully, sheds his rags as the horse gallops, and reveals himself "dressed the gaudiest and prettiest you ever saw..."⁹⁴ Huck's words concerning the ringmaster parallel those regarding the clown. An adult, of course, would see at once that these two acts were regularly given at each town. Huck, however, believing they are spontaneous, expresses perfectly the limited perception of a boy.

Then the ringmaster he see how he had been fooled, and he was the sickest ringmaster you ever see, I reckon. Why, it was one of his own men! He had got up that joke all out of his own head, and never let on to nobody. Well, I felt sheepish enough to be took in so, but I wouldn't a been in that ringmaster's place, not for a thousand dollars. I don't know; there may be bullier circuses than what that one was, but I never struck them yet.⁹⁵

After this, Huck returns to the King and the Duke and to life as it is.

In addition to the tall tales and hoaxes, there remain certain folklore usages which achieve forceful effects at particular points. An important creation myth is introduced during the early stages of the journey on the raft. Huck and Jim lie on their backs and watch the stars, realizing for the moment the luxury of unqualified freedom. This feeling is intense because their knowledge of the dangers and terrors of the river and the confining nature of the land throws the richness of this happiness into perspective. It is but a step for them to consider the heavens and probe the creation of things,

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 200.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

for this adds another background against which they are able to measure the extent of the emotion they feel: the awareness of the vastness lying beyond man's immediate attention, a vastness which is so overpowering that freedom is its only meaning. The creation myth reaches toward this awareness.

We had the sky up there, all speckled with stars, and we used to lay on our backs and look up at them, and discuss about whether they was made or only just happened. Jim he allowed they was made, but I allowed they happened; I judged it would have took too long to make so many. Jim said the moon could a laid them; well, that looked kind of reasonable, so I didn't say nothing against it, because I've seen a frog lay most as many, so of course it could be done. We used to watch the stars that fell, too, and see them streak down. Jim allowed they'd got spoiled and was hove out of the nest.⁹⁶

Another passage illustrates how completely Huck and Jim take for granted that animals have a language of their own. Many animal tales, as has been shown, were brought from Africa by the Negro. This lore merged with the animal tales of the western world; thus it is quite natural for Huck and Jim to believe in animal communication. This belief forms the basis for Jim's hard logic concerning why a Frenchman should talk like a man:

"That's a Frenchman's way of saying it."

"Well, it's a blame ridicklous way, en I doan' want to hear no mo' 'bout it. Dey ain' no sense in it."

"Looky here, Jim; does a cat talk like we do?"

"No, a cat don't."

"Well, does a cow?"

"No, a cow don't, nuther."

"Does a cat talk like a cow, or a cow talk like a cat?"

"No, dey don't."

"It's natural and right for 'em to talk different from each other, ain't it?"

"Course."

"And ain't it natural and right for a cat and a cow to talk different from us?"

"Why, mos' sholy it is."

"Well, then, why ain't it natural and right for a Frenchman to talk different from us? You answer me that."

"Is a cat a man, Huck?"

"No."

"Well, den, dey ain't no sense in a cat talkin' like a man. Is a cow a man?--er is a cow a cat?"

"No, she ain't either of them."

"Well, den, she ain't got no business to talk like either one er the yuther of 'em. Is a Frenchman a man?"

"Yes."

"Well, den! Dad blame it, why doan' he talk like a man? You answer me dat!"

I see it warn't no use wasting words--you can't learn a nigger to argue. So I quit.⁹⁷

Twain makes use of the riddle in the scene in which Huck meets young Buck Grangerford. This, together with Buck's shifts of interest in his conversation, illustrates perfectly a youngster's mind and interests and reemphasizes a fact we are apt to forget when Huck is alone, reporting the actions of grownups: Huck is, after all, a boy, a fact Twain calls attention to again, as we have seen, when Huck watches the circus.

When we got up-stairs to his room he got me a coarse shirt and a roundabout and pants of his, and I put them on. While I was at it he asked me what my name was, but before I could tell him he started to tell me about a bluejay and a young rabbit he had caught in the woods day before yesterday, and he asked me where Moses was when the candle went out. I said I didn't know; I hadn't heard about it before, no way.

"Well, guess," he says.

"How'm I going to guess," says I, "when I never heard tell of it before?"

"But you can guess, can't you? It's just as easy."

"Which candle?" I says.

"Why, any candle," he says.

"I don't know where he was," says I; "where was he?"

"Why, he was in the dark! That's where he was!"

⁹⁷ Ibid., pp. 114-115.

"Well, if you knowed where he was, what did you ask me for?"

"Why, blame it, it's a riddle, don't you see? Say, how long are you going to stay here? You got to stay always. We can just have booming times..."⁹⁸

Twain sometimes juxtaposes folklore and religion in order to satirize Christian forms. After rubbing a lamp in vain in order to summon a genie, Huck gives it up as one of Tom Sawyer's lies. His disgust is complete: "It had all the marks of a Sunday-school."⁹⁹ On Jackson's Island, Huck watches a boat fire its cannon to raise his body and sees the bread loaded with tubes of quicksilver ride down on the current. He captures the bread and enjoys his first meal in some time and reflects that the prayers of not only the Widow Douglas, but also the parson guided the bread to him.

I got a good place amongst the leaves, and set there on a log, munching the bread and watching the ferry-boat, and very well satisfied. And then something struck me. I says, now I reckon the widow or the parson or somebody prayed that this bread would find me, and here it has gone and done it. So there ain't no doubt but there is something in that thing--that is, there's something in it when a body like the widow or the parson prays, but it don't work for me, and I reckon it don't work for only just the right kind.¹⁰⁰

The superstition of the bread and quicksilver Huck would, of course, believe, but his conclusion unwittingly saddles the parson with gullibility.

Finally, in one of the most vivid chapters in the book, the shooting of Boggs, an act occurs which illustrates how people can erect a ludicrous religious folklore of their own. As Boggs lies

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 138.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 32.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 62.

dying, one of the crowd attempts to make the suffering man's last moments more holy by placing a great Bible on the man's laboring chest. This allows Boggs to die in torture: "He made about a dozen long gasps, his breast lifting the Bible up when he drew in his last breath, and letting it down again when he breathed it out--and after that he laid still; he was dead."¹⁰¹

Huckleberry Finn is generally conceded by critics to be one of the two or three finest works of literary art in American fiction.¹⁰² In the book's themes, its penetrating study of human action, and its remarkable fidelity to the American background of the Mississippi River Valley and its people lies much of its greatness. Folk materials contribute much to the superiority of this work. Nowhere else did Mark Twain use folklore with greater variety and purpose. Folklore is fundamental to the depiction of the principal characters in the book, especially Jim and Huck. Jim emerges as a high priest of folklore. For Huck, folklore is a religion influencing his actions, shaping his values, and governing his virtues. Much of the thematic development is supported by folklore: the theme of fear associates the basic element of terror in Jim and Huck's folk beliefs with the godlike quality of the river as well as with the barbaric aspects of human life; and the theme of moral rightness opposes society's traditional unjust values seen in Huck's conflict between his head and his heart. In addition, folk materials for

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 193.

¹⁰² See, for example, Jay B. Hubbell, who also terms Huckleberry Finn "probably the greatest novel that deals with Southern Life." Jay B. Hubbell, The South in American Literature, 1607-1900 (Durham), 1954, p. 832.

the first time in Twain's work become a fundamental part of narrative structure as folklore forecasting in particular relates events and supports the structural role of the Mississippi River as a directing force. It is obvious that in this work folk materials are seldom piled up for vague atmosphere but are judiciously employed for intended effects. For these reasons, Huckleberry Finn illustrates the highest reach of Mark Twain's folklore art.

Conclusion

From the early years of American literature down to the present time, writers have frequently shown an indebtedness to folk materials. Benjamin Franklin's constant use of proverbs, for example, is well known; but not so well known, perhaps, are the brilliant hoaxes he wrote during the Revolutionary period. James Fenimore Cooper's writings, too, show a dependence upon folklore, especially Indian lore and material related to the unconquered frontier. The Yankee, Hosea Biglow, of James Russell Lowell's series of Biglow Papers is an authentic creation based upon Lowell's personal observations of New England Yankees. In these papers, for the first time, the folk-type Yankee received the serious attention of an American writer of the first rank. Longfellow's antiquarian interests underlie much of his work; his "Song of Hiawatha," for example, has many parallels to Henry Rowe Schoolcraft's writings concerning Indian legends and manners. Folk materials also are present to a great extent in Hawthorne's works, especially in those dealing with the witchcraft of the Salem days. Melville's reliance upon folklore in Moby Dick and in The Confidence Man has been fully treated in Richard Chase's recent study, Herman Melville. Writers of our own time reveal a frequent interest in folk materials. William Faulkner's work, especially The Bear, and Sherwood Anderson's Poor White and Dark Laughter show examples of such interest.

It seems unlikely, however, that critical examination will

discover any American writer more interested in folklore or who used folk materials with greater art than Mark Twain. The reason is not far to seek. Twain grew up in a world of living folklore, both in slaveholding Missouri and on the rampaging frontier. The superstitions of the Negroes, and also of the whites to a certain degree, made an impression that was to remain vivid throughout his life. The West that Twain knew in the 1860's was untamed, extravagant, and alive with the awareness of its strength and individuality. The lore of this region, especially of Nevada and California, Mark Twain thoroughly absorbed. Except for one brief period of newspaper work in New York and Philadelphia, he spent the first thirty years of his life in Missouri and in the West. It was natural, then, that folk materials continually appeared throughout his work. Sometimes he failed to see how the folklore of his own experience might not be in accord with his material; particularly is this true of the story of the bull and the bees in Joan of Arc and of the King's speech in A Connecticut Yankee. But as Twain more and more conceived of his writing in terms of the period of his strongest folklore impressions, his Missouri years, he relied more and more upon folk materials as a basic writing method. In addition, he realized in the Missouri setting a natural harmony with folklore usage that had been denied him in the historical novels. The Mysterious Stranger and Pudd'nhead Wilson show this harmony to a great degree, especially in the delineation of the background.

Since Twain made folk materials a more integral part of his work as he utilized the Missouri period, one would expect his

finest folklore achievements to concern not only this period but, more particularly, his boyhood. This is exactly what happened. Both Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn are more thoroughly saturated with folklore than any other of his works, and to almost the same degree. In Tom Sawyer, the characterizations of Tom and Huck depend heavily upon folk materials. Folk materials also explain, as has been shown, much of the appeal of this book, for they give the widest amplification of boyhood by depicting a boy's dream world in juxtaposition with his real world. Huckleberry Finn is clearly the better book. Its greatness depends largely upon the artistry of the folklore usage, a usage so skillfully interwoven in the plot and made so much a part of the events and the characters as to be absolutely indispensable. The effect is such as to make Huckleberry Finn a more realistic study of human experience than Tom Sawyer, one unforgettably vivid and profound. These two books, two of Twain's finest productions, illustrate that as his creative art reached its highest fulfillment, his use of folklore attained a parallel fulfillment. The extent of the indebtedness of his art to folk materials has not been fully appreciated. Yet the importance of these materials is such that any considered evaluation of Mark Twain's work or of his place in American literature must include this most vital aspect of his creative powers.

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