

MARK TWAIN'S MISANTHROPY

by

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Mark Twain the humorist is well-known all over the world, but the misanthropist in him seems comparatively obscure. It may be because the reader is so enchanted by Mark Twain's humor that he tends to ignore the pessimistic side of the humorist. Or it may be because some people, William Dean Howells for one, consider Mark Twain a humanitarian or philanthropist instead of a misanthropist. In *My Mark Twain*, Howells strongly stresses Twain's humanitarianism in such works as *The Connecticut Yankee*. Howells observes, "Here he is to the full the humorist, as we know him; but he is very much more, and his strong, indignant, often infuriated hate of injustice, and his love of equality, burn hot through the manifold adventures and experiences of the tale....The delicious satire, the marvellous wit, the wild, free, fantastic humor are the colors of the tapestry, while the texture is a humanity that lives in every fibre."¹ Howells' argument that Mark Twain attacked human evils out of his humanitarianism seems hardly refutable. But it is also true that despite his humor Mark Twain was driven to misanthropy by his determinism and pessimism, which found powerful literary expression, especially in his later years. Although to a

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¹ William Dean Howells, *My Mark Twain* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), p. 124.

considerable degree his condemnation of mankind was paradoxically prompted by his humanitarianism, Mark Twain was also tainted with misanthropy, especially when his stark pessimism led him to deny mankind any hope of redemption. This assumption will serve as the basis of the present study, whose main purpose is briefly to examine the major causes and expressions of Mark Twain's misanthropy.

Like Jonathan Swift, Mark Twain loved individuals despite his hatred of mankind as a whole. In a letter to Alexander Pope, Swift stated, "I have ever hated all nations, professions, and communities, and all my love is toward individuals... But principally I hate and detest that animal called man, although I heartily love John, Peter, Thomas, and so forth... I have got materials toward a treatise, proving the falsity of that definition *animal rationale*, and to show it would be only *rationis capax*. Upon this great foundation of misanthropy... the whole building of my Travels is erected; and I never will have peace of mind till all honest men are of my opinion."² Mark Twain loved such individuals as his wife and daughters dearly and profoundly. As a matter of fact, it was his great love for them that made his grief over their death almost unendurable, a grief which, together with other causes, led him eventually to pessimism. Perhaps this is why Mark Twain is often said to possess a "deep strain of Swiftian bitterness."³ A comparison of Swift and Twain would be helpful in understanding their misanthropy, but it is not our principal concern in the present study.

² Jonathan Swift, a letter to Alexander Pope, September 29, 1725. Collected in *Gulliver's Travels and Other Writings* (New York: The Modern Library, 1958), pp. 514-515.

³ Cited by Richard D. Altick, "Mark Twain's Despair: An Explanation in Terms of His Humanity," *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, XXXIV (October 1935), p. 359.

Mark Twain's pessimistic attitude toward mankind began to appear in his early works. The progression from a less bitter humorist, as seen in *The Innocents Abroad* and *Roughing It*, to an extreme pessimist, as seen in *What Is Man?* and "The Mysterious Stranger," took place gradually over two decades. The change was not sudden, as implied by Richard D. Altick's analysis of Mark Twain's "surprising metamorphosis from master humorist into brooding pessimist."⁴ The fact is that Mark Twain was still in command of his power as humorist after he had become a nearly complete pessimist in his later years.

In *Life on the Mississippi*, Mark Twain states that his long experiences on the river during his youth had familiarized him with all the different types of human nature about which he eventually became disillusioned. According to Walter Blair, Mark Twain's misanthropic tendency started as far back as 1876. This attitude was shown in a letter written in that year in which he explicitly denounced the vices of Southerners and Northerners.⁵ The disillusionment derived from his experiences in Hannibal and on the river deepened during his travel abroad in 1879. Blair said that Twain's visit to France and England as well as his reading of their histories led to his disillusionment with both. "Though his condemnation of the British was less sweeping, it augmented the increasing portion of the human race which he ranked among the damned."⁶

Why did Mark Twain's earlier disillusionment with Americans and Europeans grow incessantly until it was transformed into a harsh condemnation of the whole human race in his later years? Many critics have

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Walter Blair, *Mark Twain & Huck Finn* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), p. 176.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

attempted to present adequate answers to this question, so an examination of the representative explanations will certainly be of help in understanding Mark Twain's misanthropy.

One common explanation is that, as mentioned earlier, he was embittered by a series of personal catastrophes. For example, in October, 1890, his mother died. One month later his wife's mother died. He had invested nearly a quarter of a million dollars in the Paige type-setting machine, but this grand speculation turned out to be a stunning failure at the same time that his publishing firm went bankrupt in the panic of 1893. His youngest daughter, Jean, was found to be an epileptic. On August 18, 1896, while alone in London, he was stricken by the news that his eldest daughter Susy had died of spinal meningitis. His tragedies climaxed when his dearly beloved wife Livy died in 1904. Besides, his own health became worse during these unfortunate years. He became an invalid suffering from bronchitis, rheumatism, and other ailments. All these calamities brought Mark Twain for a time, in Bernard DeVoto's words, "close to the indefinable line between sanity and madness."⁷ The grave impact of personal misfortunes on Mark Twain is evident in his own words. Referring to the death of his father-in-law, the death of a family guest, and an early illness of Livy, he wrote in mid-March, 1871: "I had rather die twice over than repeat the last six months of my life."⁸ Having suffered the loss of so many of his beloved, he even began to speak in praise of death. For instance, he wrote of Jean's death in 1909 in a poignant and cynical tone:

⁷ Bernard DeVoto, *Mark Twain's America and Mark Twain at Work* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1967), p. 108.

⁸ Walter Blair, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

Would I bring her back to life if I could do it? I would not. If a word would do it, I would beg for strength to withhold the word...In her loss I am almost bankrupt, and my life a bitterness, but I am content: for she has been enriched with the most precious of all gifts—that gift which makes all other gifts mean and poor—death. I have never wanted any released friend of mine restored to life since I reached manhood. I felt in this way when Susy passed away; and later my wife, and later Mr. Rogers. When Clara met me at the station in New York and told me that Mr. Rogers had died suddenly that morning, my thought was, Oh, favorite of fortune—fortunate all his long and lovely life—fortunate to his latest moment! The reporters said there were tears of sorrow in my eyes. True—but they were for me, not for him. He had suffered no loss. All the fortunes he had ever made were poverty compared with this one.⁹

This passage clearly reveals Mark Twain's concept of death as a release, a concept which indicates his pessimism. In fact, his tragic sense of life was already made very clear in 1906 when he said, "Life was a fairy-tale, then, it is a tragedy now. When I was 43 and John Hay was 41, he said that life was a tragedy after 40, and I disputed it. Three years ago he asked me to testify again: I counted my graves, and there was nothing for me to say."¹⁰ Here Twain admitted that life was a tragedy and that he thought this way in the twilight of his life.

However, we must not make the mistake of thinking that Mark Twain was self-centered enough to be concerned with his personal tragedies only. The important fact is that he was embittered by all the misfortunes that befall people. It was his strong sense of justice that made him so bitter, as pointed out by Hudson Long.¹¹ That Mark Twain was able to transcend his

⁹ Cited by Edward Wagenknecht, *Mark Twain: The Man and His Work* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), p. 204.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

¹¹ Hudson Long, *Mark Twain Handbook* (New York: Hendricks House, 1957), p. 394.

own misfortunes and feel indignant at the troubles facing other people was clearly shown in a passage from *In Memoriam*:

Once Twichell heard me cussing the human race, and he said, "Why, Mark, you are the last person in the world to do that—one selected and set apart as you are." I said, "Joe, you don't know what you are talking about. I am not cussing altogether about my own little troubles. Any one can stand his own misfortunes; but when I read in the papers all about the rascalities and outrages going on I realize what a creature the human animal is. Don't you care more about the wretchedness of others than anything that happens to you?" Joe said he did, and shut up.¹²

This passage can certainly be used to support the argument that Mark Twain's hatred of mankind was paradoxically rooted in his sympathy with his fellow sufferers. So Edward Wagenknecht rightly stated, "The griefs and sorrows of Mark Twain's personal life passed over, then, by a natural transition, into his sympathy for humanity, impelling him powerfully in the direction of pessimism as he contemplates the wrongs that humanity must bear."¹³ The reason why Mark Twain's "anger at the ways of the world merely grew fiercer as he grew older"¹⁴ can thus be attributed to his sense of justice and his sympathy for others. Only when the woes, injustices, brutalities, and immoralities which he had observed overwhelmed him in his old age did he become a misanthropist.

Some critics explain Mark Twain's later despair in terms of his guilt complex. For example, Coleman O. Parsons has remarked, "Samuel Clemens' guilt complex was rooted in his relations with Mother Jane and Brother Henry. His nostalgic yearning for the age of innocence

¹² Edward Wagenknecht, *op. cit.*, p. 210.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

¹⁴ Janet Smith, ed., *Mark Twain on the Damned Human Race* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1962), p. 69.

and his belief in the sinlessness of animals are evidences of his life-long compulsion to shake off the cruel burden."¹⁵ Perhaps it was his efforts to shake off the guilt complex that eventually led him to dethrone God and through the mouth of Satan blame God for all the horrors and calamities. Satan is supremely scornful of man's Moral Sense, and Mark Twain used a bitter irony to criticize man's failure to follow the dictates of the Moral Sense.

In his admirable essay entitled "The Symbols of Despair," Bernard DeVoto illustrates how Mark Twain transformed a series of personal catastrophes into some pessimistic works. In an attempt to relieve himself of his anguish and despair, DeVoto explains, Mark Twain chose Satan as the protagonist in those works, "for Satan is an angel and angels are exempt from guilt and conscience and self-condemnation also, and temptation has no meaning for them and they have no moral sense, and neither humiliation nor death nor the suffering of anyone affects them in the least."¹⁶ By thus absolving himself from his sense of guilt through a denial of man's free will, DeVoto concludes, Mark Twain finally came back from "the edge of insanity" and "brought his talent into fruition and made it whole again."¹⁷

In regard to Mark Twain's sense of guilt, Henry Seidel Canby asserts that it sprang from his neuroticism. Canby calls him a neurotic and compares him with "the curiously long list of great American writers who in the most successful country of the nineteenth century have built triumph as well as some failures upon their morbid excess of sensibility—Hawthorne, Poe, Melville, Thoreau perhaps—and in our day Robinson Jeffers and

¹⁵ Coleman O. Parsons, "The Devil and Samuel Clemens," *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, 23 (Autumn 1947), p. 586.

¹⁶ Bernard DeVoto, *op. cit.*, pp. 126-127.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

William Faulkner.”¹⁸ In Canby’s opinion, Mark Twain was betrayed by his excessive sensibility and exaggerated guilt complex, for “Even in his creative period of the Hartford-Quarry Farm days...he was subject to depressions and wild outbursts against ‘the human race.’”¹⁹

Van Wyck Brooks considers Mark Twain’s despair mainly as a result of “the suppression of his natural individuality and satirical genius in the midst of an industrial and Victorian environment.”²⁰ However, DeVoto disagrees with Brooks’ theory that the frontier thwarted the potential artist and satirist in Mark Twain.

So far we have seen that most critics—Canby is an exception—think that Mark Twain’s pessimism was not basically temperamental but to a great extent caused by outside factors. However, Delancey Ferguson holds the different opinion that Mark Twain’s deeply pessimistic moods were not primarily caused by the disasters of his later years. Ferguson writes, “The black moods were part of his nature, part of the price he paid for his lightheartedness. Later in life, as troubles thickened the moods came oftener, but the troubles did not cause them, they merely intensified them and gave them point.”²¹ Edgar Lee Masters is of a similar opinion: “He [Mark Twain] acted out the nature of a humorist, which is to take everything casually as if it amounted to nothing. Pessimism is at the bottom of such indifference.”²² Such an explanation of Mark Twain’s pes-

¹⁸ Henry Seidel Canby, “Decline and Fall: Mark Twain,” in *Mark Twain: Selected Criticism*, ed. Arthur L. Scott (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1955), p. 282.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Harry Hayden Clark, “Mark Twain,” in *Eight American Authors: A Review of Research and Criticism*, ed. Floyd Stovall (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1956), p. 326.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Edgar Lee Masters, *Mark Twain: A Portrait* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1938), p. 42.

simism, in terms of his "humorous" and "lighthearted" nature, seems reasonable but not convincing in view of his own utterances concerning his personal disasters.

Having examined the various possible causes of Mark Twain's later despair, we may now turn to a survey of his specific expressions of misanthropy. The survey will concentrate upon his representative shorter writings because it is in them that his misanthropy is most explicitly reflected. In this connection, Walter Blair rightly states, "Any account of Twain's changing philosophy—or, if that seems too pretentious a term, his evolving opinions and prejudices—also depends upon a scrutiny of short works. For his ideas about literary craftsmanship, about the drives determining men's actions, about the damned and doomed human race, often appear first and last and are most clearly set forth in shorter writings."²³

Robert Douglas correctly observes that pessimism is one of Mark Twain's main themes and that this theme has such variations as a distorted justice and relationship between human beings, death as a release, and determinism through environment and birth. He logically divides Twain's works into two broad categories, both dealing with this theme. The first group, including *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, *The Prince and the Pauper*, *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, and *Huckleberry Finn*, expresses "a struggle against a controllable society," while the second group, including *What Is Man?* and "Europe and Elsewhere," expresses "a struggle against a mechanistic and determined universe."²⁴ The first group of works indicate, Douglas says, that Mark Twain still had faith in the common man despite his

²³ Walter Blair, "Introduction," *Selected Shorter Writings of Mark Twain* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1962), vii.

²⁴ Robert Douglas, "The Pessimism of Mark Twain," *Mark Twain Journal*, 9 (Winter, 1951), p. 3.

sharp criticism of all the injustices and disorders in the world, whereas the second group announces the common man's stark hopelessness in a mechanistic universe. It is clear then that Mark Twain's misanthropy was associated with his concept of man's total futility in struggling against a mechanistic world.

As mentioned earlier, Mark Twain progressed gradually from a rather lighthearted humorist to a very bitter pessimist over a long period of time. DeVoto says that Mark Twain's "occasional pessimistic damnation of the human race exists, rude, unformed, and impulsive, in his earliest work, and its clearer expression in his later work is a development, not a catastrophic change."²⁵ True, it is a gradual development in Mark Twain's attitude toward mankind. Before scrutinizing his later short works, it may be necessary to say a few words first about his treatment of the "controllable world" as treated especially in the masterpiece *Huckleberry Finn*, so that the progression can be better understood.

Literally millions of words have been written about *Huck Finn*. But here we are particularly concerned with Huck's fight against social evil and his attitude toward "civilization." Throughout his daring adventures, Huck is constantly exposed to shams, injustices, and violence. The focus of Mark Twain's excoriation of society is on the inhuman institution of slavery. Huck bravely rescues the runaway Nigger Jim without realizing how great his deed is, and in this way the evil of slavery is forcefully attacked. As a result of his painful experiences, he becomes disillusioned with society and mankind in general and he indirectly makes his condemnation of civilization by fleeing from it resolutely at the end of the story. This resolution causes me to agree with I. M. Walker that *Huck Finn* is the turning point

²⁵ Bernard DeVoto, *op. cit.*, p. 283.

in Mark Twain's career. He states, "It constitutes his greatest achievement as a humorous writer, yet it is also a deeply pessimistic book that prepares for the bitterness and disillusion that characterize his later work."²⁶ Mark Twain expressed unrestrained contempt for the human race in a letter to William Dean Howells soon after the completion of *Huck Finn*: "Isn't human nature the most consummate sham and lie that ever was invented? Isn't man a creature to be ashamed of in pretty much all his aspects? Is he really fit for anything but to be stood up on a street corner as a convenience for dogs?"²⁷ Walker is right in adding that this feeling "that the human race is disgusting and obscene—has its imaginative origins in the scenes of violence and cruelty that permeate *Huckleberry Finn*."²⁸

Obviously determinism was a distinct aspect of Mark Twain's philosophy, especially in his later years. In fact it was the philosophical basis of the plots in *The Prince and the Pauper* and *Pudd'nhead Wilson*. In the first book, no one can tell the real prince from the real pauper after these two characters have exchanged each other's clothing. In *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, the Negro woman Roxy secretly changes the legal status of her nigger son and Tom Driscoll. The false Tom Driscoll takes advantage of his usurped position and gets a good education while the real Tom Driscoll is deprived of the opportunity for education and advancement. The deterministic impact of environment is thus vividly illustrated with the real Tom Driscoll's becoming an illiterate, vulgar, and uncouth "slave." This is why Pudd'nhead Wilson writes in his Calendar: "Training is everything. The peach was once a bitter almond;

²⁶ I. M. Walker, *Mark Twain* (New York: Humanities Press, 1970), p. 79.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

cauliflower is nothing but cabbage with a college education.”²⁹ As will be further explained later on, the reflection of determinism in these two works may be viewed as a preparation for Mark Twain’s denying free will to man and thus stripping him of any dignity in his later work.

That Mark Twain became increasingly pessimistic can also be seen from the difference in tone between *Huck Finn* and *Pudd’nhead Wilson*. As I. M. Walker points out, “*Huckleberry Finn* is steeped in terror and dominated by the fear and tragedy of slavery; yet it is also a comic novel told from the humorous and often lyrically beautiful viewpoint of a boy. If we turn to *Pudd’nhead Wilson*, written nearly ten years later, slavery is still the central issue of the fiction, but the humor and lyricism have gone...”³⁰

Indeed, slavery is one of the important subjects which drew a great deal of Mark Twain’s attention. He admitted that he had no aversion to slavery during his schoolboy days. He said, “I was not aware that there was anything wrong with it. No one arraigned it in my hearing; the local papers said nothing against it; the local pulpit taught us that God approved it...”³¹ But after he realized its evil, he had never slackened his righteous attack on it. In “My First Lie, and How I Got Out of It,” he fiercely accuses people of silent support of slavery. Here he condemns “the lie of silent assertion” which is “one of the most majestic lies that the civilization make it their sacred and anxious care to guard and watch and propagate.”³² So indignant at this kind of lie is he that he views the existence of

²⁹ Mark Twain, *Pudd’nhead Wilson and Those Extraordinary Twins* (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Co., 1968), p. 67.

³⁰ I. M. Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

³¹ Quoted by Janet Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 256.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 29.

slavery as a symbol of sham, stupidity, and inequality. He asks then, "When whole races and peoples conspire to propagatate gigantic mute lies in the interest of tyrannies and shams, why should we care anything about the trifling lies told by individuals?"³³ In "Bible Teaching and Religious Practice," he excoriates Christendom's support and encouragement of slavery.³⁴ At the same time he attacks the discrepancy between Bible teaching and religious practice as demonstrated in this case.

Mark Twain expressed his deep sympathy with the Negroes not only by words but by deeds. During the years of writing *Huck Finn*, he generously financed college education for two Negroes. In "Concerning the Jews," he says he was not prejudiced against any races except the French: "I am quite sure that (bar one) I have no race prejudices, and I think I have no color prejudices nor caste prejudices nor creed prejudices.... All that I care to know is that a man is a human being—that is enough for me; he can't be any worse."³⁵ Since he was without racial prejudices, he could extend his sympathy with the Negroes to other oppressed minorities, such as the Chinese coolie. In "Disgraceful Persecution of a Boy," he criticizes unjust discrimination against a "Chinaman." He considered the coolie labor trade "infamous."³⁶ Also, in "To the Person Sitting in Darkness," he accuses America of many brutalities and injustices done to the Chinese and the Filipinos in the name of civilization and progress. He strongly disapproved of the American conquest of the Philippine archipelago. So he urged America to withdraw and give the Filipinos their independence. Out of his sense of justice and righteousness, he claimed that he was

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

willing to be a traitor instead of a patriot. He pierced through the sham involved: "The blessings-of-civilization trust, wisely and cautiously administered, is a daisy. There is more money in it, more territory, more sovereignty, and other kinds of emolument than there is in any other game that is played."³⁷ In "A Word of Encouragement for Our Blushing Exiles," he criticizes America's "shameful history of foreign robberies, humanitarian shams, and annihilations of weak and unoffending nations."³⁸ Besides, he attacked the serious political and business corruption and graft. But to him the final deadly sin was America's "conquest of the Philippines—stealing a helpless people's liberties."³⁹ In "Comments on the Killing of 600 Moros," his attack on American's cruelties toward other weak peoples is set forth most severely and sarcastically. Six hundred Moros were slaughtered, while on the American side there were only fifteen killed and thirty-two wounded. "This is incomparably the greatest victory that was ever achieved by the Christian soldiers of the United States."⁴⁰ And he adds, "I was never so enthusiastically proud of the flag till now!"⁴¹

Another human evil which Mark Twain attacked fiercely was war. "The War Prayer" is a very powerful satire against the cruelty, stupidity, and hypocrisy of mankind. An aged stranger makes an earnest prayer immediately after the minister has finished his. In his prayer, the stranger ridicules the dirty and evil implications of the minister's "war prayer." The stranger says that he is commissioned by God to put into words what is prayed silently. He elaborates on the minister's

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

prayer for victory by saying, "...Lord, blast their [the enemies's] hopes, blight their lives, protract their bitter pilgrimage, make heavy their steps, water their way with their tears, stain the white snow with the blood of their wounded feet! We ask it, in the spirit of love, of Him who is the Source of Love..."⁴² It is implied here that the most cruel things are often committed in the name of Love. It is also implied that if God should answer this prayer, then God is not the source of love, but of hatred. But, of course, we are aware that the criticism here is of man, who has conceived of such a God, rather than God himself. In *Letters from the Earth* there are many more utterances attacking human cruelties. For example, in Letter XI, Satan writes, "Human history in all ages is red with blood, and bitter with hate, and stained with cruelties; but not since Biblical times have these features been without a limit of some kind."⁴³

In "The Lowest Animal" is found a long list of human evils which qualify man as the lowest animal, including "Hypocrisy, envy, malice, cruelty, vengefulness, seduction, rape, robbery, swindling, arson, bigamy, adultery, and the oppression and humiliation of the poor and the helpless in all ways..."⁴⁴ Indeed, Mark Twain described man's immoral qualities in an extremely bitter way. Some more examples—"Man is the only animal that deals in that atrocity of atrocities, War."⁴⁵ "Man is the only Slave. And he is the only animal who enslaves."⁴⁶ Above all, man is the only animal that has the so-called Moral Sense, which is "the secret of his

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁴³ Ed. by Bernard DeVoto (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Crest Book, 1970), p. 52.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

degradation.”⁴⁷ So hopelessly degraded is man that Mark Twain would no longer accept “the Darwinian theory of the Ascent of Man from the Lower Animals”; he came to believe in a “new and truer” theory of “the Descent of Man from the Higher Animals.”⁴⁸

The original list of man’s vices and weaknesses made by Mark Twain is of course much longer than that recorded here. By now it must be clear that Mark Twain was extremely disappointed and disgusted with “the animal called man.” As a matter of fact, he was much more than disappointed and disgusted. It seems that he had lost faith in man completely. This may be seen in such writings as “The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg,” *What Is Man?* and “The Mysterious Stranger.” The legend of Hadleyburg the Incorruptible is a plain sign of Mark Twain’s doubt about the purity and innocence of human nature. Hadleyburg is really corrupt, suffering from self-righteousness and hypocrisy. In the “honest” “upright” town, even the babies in the cradle are taught moral principles, but it turns out to be unable to resist all evil forces. It succumbs to the temptation of the fiendish sack of gold. This story implies that no man on the earth is really incorruptible. Being thus skeptical of human nature, it is only natural that Mark Twain would condemn mankind so severely and bitterly.

Mark Twain’s misanthropy is further confirmed in *What Is Man?* which he regarded as his Gospel. In 1899 he wrote Howells that “since I wrote my Bible, (last year) which Mrs. Clemens loathes, & shudders over, & will not listen to the last half nor allow me to print any part of it, Man is not to me the respect-worthy person he was before; & so I have lost my pride in

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

him & can't write gaily nor praisefully about him any more."⁴⁹ Because he had no more pride in and respect for man, he could not help denying any dignity and responsibility to man.

The Old Man, who can reasonably be taken as Mark Twain's *alter ego*, asserts that man is a machine, without any free will and thought, subject entirely to the control of training and temperament. He negates the "whole doctrine of infallibility of judgment in consciences"⁵⁰ and argues that "the mind is independent of the man."⁵¹ To him the term "instinct" is meaningless because it is "merely petrified thought; solidified and made inanimate by habit; thought which was once alive and awake, but is become unconscious...."⁵² In his opinion, "Love, Hate, Charity, Revenge, Humanity, Magnanimity, Forgiveness" are merely "different results of the one Master Impulse: the necessity of securing one's self-approval."⁵³ There is no real self-sacrifice or philanthropy, in other words, because "From his cradle to his grave a man never does a single thing which has any FIRST AND FOREMOST object but one—to secure peace of mind, spiritual comfort, for HIMSELF."⁵⁴ Actually, man is morally inferior to other creatures because his moral sense convinces him that he cannot do wrong. Having thus defined man, the Old Man reduces man virtually to an absurd object. This is why the Young Man says that the Old Man's is "infernal philosophy."⁵⁵ The Young Man comments, "...it is a desolating doctrine; it is not inspiring, enthusing, up-

⁴⁹ Cited by Edward Wagenknecht, *op. cit.*, p. 214.

⁵⁰ Mark Twain, *What Is Man?* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1917), p. 28.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 77.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

lifting. It takes the glory out of man, it takes the pride out of him, it takes the heroism out of him, it denies him all personal credit, all applause; it not only degrades him to a machine, but allows him no control over the machine;..."⁵⁶ But why did Mark Twain allow the Old Man to "strip Man bare of all his dignities, grandeurs, sublimities"?⁵⁷ The reason lies, again, in his thickening hatred of mankind.

This hatred kept growing until it led Mark Twain to reduce man to "nothingness," like a dream. In a sense, "The Mysterious Stranger" can be viewed as the climax of Mark Twain's evolving philosophy of misanthropy. In this supernatural story the human race is derided and totally condemned through the figure of Satan. Narrated in the first person by a boy, Theodor Fischer, it is a powerful manifestation of Mark Twain's misanthropy in its extreme form. Satan observes that human beings are "so dull and ignorant and trivial and conceited, and so diseased and rickety, and such a shabby, poor, worthless lot all around."⁵⁸ The theory of the Moral Sense which was also set forth elsewhere is developed here at greater length. "No brute ever does a cruel thing—that is the monopoly of those with the Moral Sense."⁵⁹ "None of the higher animals is tainted with the disease called the Moral Sense."⁶⁰ Then Satan excoriates Christianity and civilization by observing that Christian civilization has made war a highly sophisticated and complicated art. It is upon cowardice and hypocrisy that all civilizations have been built. Finally, Satan tells the astonished boy that life is only a dream. "Nothing

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

⁵⁸ Walter Blair, ed. *Selected Shorter Writings of Mark Twain* (Boston, 1962), p. 316.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 334.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 336.

exists; all is a dream. God—man—the world—the sun, the moon, the wilderness of stars—a dream, all a dream; they have no existence.”⁶¹ Before he vanishes, Satan further expounds the theme of “nothingness”: “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!”⁶² This conclusion is really appalling! Since the conclusion is reached only after Satan has thoroughly criticized human nature and human civilization, it may be safe to say that the notion of “nothingness” is rooted in total pessimism. By now Mark Twain’s disillusionment with mankind has become complete. With his need to absolve himself from guilt and responsibility, a need mentioned by DeVoto and others, Mark Twain might feel a sort of satisfaction after he had thus written off the differences between reality and dream as well as between God and man. Apparently, it was his bitter disillusionment brought about by all his sufferings and reasonings that drove him to expose “the terrible absurdity of human existence where nothing exists apart from a dream.”⁶³

Albert Bigelow Paine attempted to minimize Mark Twain’s pessimism by saying: “Mark Twain was not a pessimist in his heart, but only by premeditation. It was his observation and his logic that led him to write those things that, even in their bitterness, somehow conveyed the spirit of human sympathy which is so closely linked to hope.”⁶⁴ Paine and Howells are of a

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 387.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 388.

⁶³ I. M. Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

⁶⁴ Quoted by Edward Wagenknecht, *op. cit.*, p. 202.

similar opinion in stressing Mark Twain's human sympathy. However, judging from the extremely skeptical, cynical, and even contemptuous attitude toward mankind as manifested in the works we have discussed, one can hardly be convinced that Mark Twain was not a misanthropic pessimist in his later years.

馬克吐溫對人類的憎惡

(摘 要)

余 玉 照

世人皆知馬克吐溫的詼諧幽默，對他悲觀恨世的一面則較為陌生。本文主旨即在於探討他憎惡人類的原因以及反映他這種態度的代表作品。

馬克吐溫從較為樂觀的幽默家轉變為相當悲觀的恨世者，此一轉變乃是一個漸進的而非突變的過程。促成這種轉變的因素甚多。首先由於他親身經歷一連串不幸的打擊，諸如他深受妻女親朋相繼病故之痛，而他投資的幾種企業復遭慘敗以致負債累累；但更重要的是他深入觀察到各國社會腐敗齷齪，人心詭詐險惡，使他在強烈的正義感與人道主義驅使下，終於喪失了對人類的信心與敬意。此外也有人認為他患有一種神經病，常受到一種犯罪感的壓迫，遂藉厭惡世人以抒內心痛苦。

他在許多作品中都直接間接表達了他對人性的懷疑與厭恨，尤其是他晚期大部分作品更以抨擊或鄙斥人類為中心題旨。他較早期的一些作品便已清楚流露出他對人性與文明的不滿；這種不滿隨着他年歲漸長而愈來愈強烈，在**來自地球的信**、**人是什麼東西？**以及「神秘的陌生人」等等作品中，他以嚴厲無比的筆觸咒詛或諷刺人類的愚昧與邪惡。在他筆下，人類可說已毫無尊嚴與光榮可言；他對人類的憎恨，幾已到了澈底否定人類尚有贖救可能的地步。

總之，在這位幽默大師的思想中，悲觀恨人顯然佔據了非常重要的位置。雖然有些論者似乎試圖強調他的人道主義而藉以掩飾這個事實，但是從本文引述的作品與談話中我們不難看出這個事實是有多重佐證的。因此，若要認識馬克吐溫的真正面目，我們在激賞他的幽默之同時，不能忽視他對人類的憎惡。