MARK TWAIN AS SOUTHERNER

by

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STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

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ABSTRACT

This thesis attempts to trace the influences of Mark Twain's Southern birth and early training upon his later life and literary works. The pattern which emerges in the course of the thesis reveals that Twain at first accepted Southern attitudes, later under various influences rejected them, and finally reacted against his Southern origins by writing satirically about the South in some of his most important later works. The influence of the Southwestern tradition of humor upon Mark Twain's works is examined as an important reflection of his literary indebtedness to his native region. His two most anti-Southern novels, Huckleberry Finn and Puddin'head Wilson are analyzed for their satiric content, and new critical interpretations of portions of both novels are presented. Finally, some of the most important influences in the de-Southernization of Mark Twain are reviewed and evaluated.
CHAPTER I

THE PATTERN

There can be no disputing the fact that Mark Twain was, by both birth and breeding, a son of the South, but the extent to which he remained a Southerner in his own eyes and in the eyes of his reading public, as well as the extent and nature of his use of Southern materials in his literary works, are complex matters which merit extensive scrutiny. Concerning his Southern origin, Twain himself remarked in a speech given in 1901, "I was born and reared in a slave State, my father was a slaveowner; and in the Civil War I was a second lieutenant in the Confederate service."¹ The state referred to by Twain as the state of his birth was of course Missouri, which had been admitted to the Union as a slave-holding state under the terms of the Missouri Compromise of 1820. When John Marshall Clemens and family emigrated from Tennessee fifteen years later, bringing their slaves with them, there was good reason for settling in the slave state of Missouri. Thus, on November 30, 1835, Samuel Langhorne Clemens first opened his eyes in Florida, Missouri, a tiny frontier

village in a slave-holding border state. He was the fifth child of John Clemens, a Southern gentleman, a Whig, and the proud descendent of one of the First Families of Virginia. Although Sam's father later sold his slaves and resorted to the more liberal expedient of hiring Negro servants, slavery formed an intimate part of the boy's early family life, as well as of the life of the community as a whole. Following the family's removal, in 1839, to Hannibal -- the St. Petersburg of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn -- Sam's father served on a jury that sentenced three abolitionists to twelve years in prison for helping slaves escape from Missouri. At that time the Clemens family still owned two slaves, Jenny and Ned. Sam's uncle, John Quarles, on whose farm the boy spent seven delightful summers, was the owner of thirty slaves.

Looking backward, through the mist of six decades, Mark Twain in his Autobiography commented on the institution of slavery as it appeared to the child he had been in Hannibal:

In my schoolboy days I had no aversion to slavery. I was not aware that there was anything wrong about it. No one arraigned it in my hearing;

the local papers said nothing against it; the local pulpit taught us that God approved it, that it was a holy thing and that the doubter need only look in the Bible if he wished to settle his mind—and then the texts were read aloud to make the matter sure; if the slaves themselves had an aversion to slavery they were wise and said nothing. In Hannibal we seldom saw a slave mis-used; on the farm never.5

But Twain's memory here was apparently drawing a kindly veil over some of the brutal events which he had in fact witnessed as a child. Albert Bigelow Paine cites an incident in which young Sam saw his father beat Jenny, the Clemenses' disobedient housegirl, with a cowhide; in another scene from Sam's childhood, as related by Paine, a runaway slave was captured by six men, who, as the Clemens children watched, "took him to an empty cabin, where they threw him on the floor and bound him with ropes. His groans were loud and frequent."6 Yet another violent scene is recorded by DeLancey Ferguson: "Young Sam in the course of his boyhood saw a Negro killed when his master flung a lump of slag at his head."7

The violent aspects of the slavery of Hannibal ought not to be stressed unduly, however, for Missouri was, after all, a border state, not part of the Deep South. Indeed

7. Ferguson, p. 23.
Missouri, in the 1840's of Mark Twain's childhood, was a curious mixture containing elements of both the Old South and the frontier. Bernard DeVoto, in *Mark Twain's America*, places the emphasis decidedly on the frontier aspects of the state. "The Missouri in which the infant's eyes opened," he says, "was frontier, and that it was frontier is the whole truth about the books of Mark Twain." This assertion is quite correct if DeVoto is referring here only to those books in which Twain depicted Hannibal or its fictional counterpart, St. Petersburg. (That it is not true of the numerous other Southern villages in Twain's books will become clear at a later point in this paper when the phenomenon of Twain's village descriptions is examined in detail.) Hannibal, as depicted in the *Autobiography*, does indeed appear more Western than Southern. In his nostalgic comments on the slavery question, Twain explicitly presents a contrast between Hannibal and the plantation region "down the river," as the following two passages show:

... there was nothing about the slavery of the Hannibal region to rouse one's dozing humane instincts to activity. It was the mild domestic slavery, not the brutal plantation article. Cruelties were very rare and exceedingly and wholesomely unpopular.

The "nigger trader" was loathed by everybody. He was regarded as a sort of human devil who bought and conveyed poor helpless creatures to hell—for to our whites and blacks alike the southern plantation was simply hell; no milder name could describe it. If the threat to sell an incorrigible slave "down the river" would not reform him, nothing would—his case was past cure. That this view of Hannibal is not based entirely upon fact has already been amply demonstrated, but it is a view which was recorded, with no significant variations, in all of Twain's descriptions of Hannibal, whether under its own name or its fictitious name, St. Petersburg, throughout his long career.

At the age of eighteen Samuel Clemens left his native Missouri for an excursion to New York and Philadelphia, during which he supported himself by working as a compositor. A letter to his mother, written from New York, reveals clearly the Southern attitudes which he held at that point in his life. After making some remarks about the activities of "the infernal abolitionists" in Syracuse, he declared, "I reckon I had better black my face, for in these Eastern States niggers are considerably better than white people." Mark Twain's greatest fictional character, when he came to be born, would owe much of his convincing quality to the fact that his creator had once been capable

10. Ferguson, p. 42.
of making such a statement, for Huck Finn resembles the young Sam Clemens in that he echoes the society of his youth both in his attitudes and in the language he uses to express them -- "infernal abolitionists," "I reckon," and "considerably better" are phrases which fall as naturally from Huck's lips as from those of Sam Clemens at eighteen. The capacity to question the values of Southern society, Huck's redeeming quality and the nemesis of his "conscience," would come later in the development of Clemens's character.

His sojourn in the North, which was prolonged for several years, effected no apparent changes in Sam's Southern point of view. Leaving the East, he went to work in his brother Orion's job printing shop in Keokuk, Iowa, in the summer of 1855. Still infected with wanderlust, he later moved on to St. Louis, then to Cincinnati. Finally, in 1857, he entered upon that phase of his life which could be regarded as most typically Southern, his career as a Mississippi River pilot. During four years as one of the uncrowned princes of river life, he spent much time both afloat and ashore in the Deep South; it was these years of his association with the mighty river that Mark Twain would later remember as the happiest of his life when he looked back on them in "Old Times on the Mississippi." Just how profoundly he had been influenced by his years in the South
would become clear in 1861 when the halcyon days of steam-boating came to a sudden end with the outbreak of civil war.

Clemens was in Missouri when Federal troops arrived on the soil of his native state with the object of preventing its secession. On May 14, 1861, the pro-Southern Missouri legislature, under Governor Jackson, passed a militia act calling for volunteers to repel the "invaders." Sam was among those who responded to the call, joining a hastily organized group, the Marion Rangers, in Hannibal. Although many of his boyhood friends were members of this band, the feelings of Hannibal as a whole were opposed to secession -- Union Home Guards patrolled the village and the secessionist newspaper had been suppressed -- and the Marion Rangers comprised the more adventurous youths of the region who were willing to oppose the strong sympathies of the majority. It is clear that Sam Clemens must have felt a strong attachment to the Confederate cause when he marched away with the Marion Rangers in the dead of night to take the oath of allegiance in neighboring Ralls County, where popular attitudes toward secession were more favorable. The military career of

11. Fred W. Lorch, "Mark Twain and the 'Campaign that Failed,'" American Literature, XII (1941), 461.
12. Ferguson, p. 61.
13. Ibid., p. 62.
Sam Clemens lasted, however, only two weeks, at the end of which time he decided to light out for the territories in company with his brother Orion, who had recently been appointed Secretary of the Territory of Nevada. The reasons for Clemens' desertion of the Southern cause have been the subject of much speculation. Dixon Wecter, in his article on Mark Twain in *Literary History of the United States*, expresses the opinion that Clemens had "qualms about fighting for slavery," and "yielded to persuasion from his Unionist brother Orion. . . ."14 It is indeed tempting to imagine that Clemens left the South for reasons of principle, deserting the Confederacy at the moment of its greatest need, and resolving henceforth to become a Westerner and never again return to Southern soil. Unfortunately, there is no evidence in support of such a theory. Indeed, the facts concerning the duel which Clemens almost fought in Virginia City, Nevada, would seem to indicate that he had not yet relinquished his Southern sympathies -- but that is a later story; whatever his motives at the time may have been, Sam Clemens left the Marion Rangers after two weeks during which that body of volunteers did nothing, apparently, but scamper around the countryside avoiding imaginary detachments of Union troops,

which, according to rumors, had orders to capture and hang all secessionist militiamen. There is probably at least as much truth as poetry in Mark Twain's laconic comment in the Autobiography that he resigned his commission as Second Lieutenant in the Army of the Confederacy because he "was 'incapacitated by fatigue' through constant retreating." 15

At any rate, Sam did set out with his brother Orion for the silver diggings and newspaper offices of the Far West; except for brief visits later, he would never again return to his native South. Now, after a few false starts, he entered wholeheartedly into a career as journalist and professional writer; it was as a humorist of the Western frontier that Samuel Clemens first used the subsequently famous nom de plume "Mark Twain." Writing under that name he earned his reputation as "the Washoe Giant" and "the wild humorist of the Pacific Slope" in such typically Western tall tales as the two newspaper hoaxes, "The Petrified Man" (1862) and "The Dutch Nick Massacre" (1863), and, of course, in his first short story, "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" (1865). But a civil war was still being waged in the East during these years, and behind the Western humorist, Mark Twain, was an

ex-Confederate soldier, Sam Clemens, who had not completely severed ties with the Southern cause.

There were adherents of both sides of the national conflict in Nevada Territory, but Union sympathies were predominant; one of the projects undertaken by Unionists was the raising of money for the Sanitary Fund. The expatriate Southerner Clemens, commenting editorially -- and at least partially in jest -- in the Territorial Enterprise, suggested that the money thus collected was actually destined "to aid a Miscegenation Society somewhere in the East."16 As a joke, as DeLancey Ferguson has commented, such an editorial "was the jest of a Missouri Copperhead," and as for its reception among the residents of Nevada Territory, "it could not have been worse timed or in worse taste."17 The rival Virginia City paper, the Union, was prompt to point out this lapse in good taste, and a series of editorial polemics ensued; finally Clemens, whose father had left him "a sumptuous legacy of pride in his fine Virginia stock," as he candidly admitted in Roughing It, felt that his honor had been insulted to the point that mere words no longer constituted a sufficient reply; he wrote a private note to the editor of the Union.


17. Ferguson, p. 93.
concluding with this formula (which to a Southern gentleman admitted of only one possible response): "I now demand of you the satisfaction due to a gentleman, without alternative." James Laird, the Union editor, however, was not a Southerner; he refused to meet Clemens in a duel, declaring that the offensive articles had been written by J. W. Wilmington, and that Clemens could fight that gentleman if he wanted to shoot at someone. At this point Clemens apparently began to see that his temper had caused him to make a fool of himself; before the word could get around, before he became the laughing stock of Virginia City, he departed quietly by stage for California. Kenneth S. Lynn describes this as "one of the significant crises of his life." As Lynn interprets the situation, Clemens ran away from a possible duel with Wilmington "not because he was afraid, nor because, as he later claimed, dueling was a penitentiary offense in Nevada, but because he was wrong, and he knew it." If Lynn's theory is correct, Mark Twain was able to admit his mistake, and avoid compounding it by participating in a duel, because he

19. Ferguson, p. 94.
20. Lynn, p. 142.
had begun to absorb some of the ideas and attitudes of the free Western democracy in which he lived. As evidence of such a gradual transformation from a Southern to a Western point of view, Lynn cites a series of letters written by Twain to William H. Clagget, his former partner in a mining venture. (These letters are now in the Mark Twain Collection, and each of the following three excerpts is copyrighted by the Mark Twain Company.) In February, 1862, Twain's letter expressed a definitely Southern point of view in speaking of the fighting in Missouri: "Well, Billy, tell Tom Smith they've gone and done it. Old Curtis, you know. He has thrashed our Missourians like everything." In a letter written in March of the same year, the sarcastic remark about Yankees shows clearly that Twain was still thinking in Southern terms: "I have heard from several reliable sources that Sewall will be here shortly, and has sworn to whip me on sight. Now what would you advise a fellow to do? -- take a thrashing from the son-of-a-bitch or bind him over to keep the peace? I don't see why he should dislike me. He is a Yankee -- and I naturally love a Yankee." After having so clearly revealed his Southern point of view in these letters of February and March, it is quite surprising to find that by the end of

21. Ibid., p. 144.
22. Ibid.
the following summer he was writing to Clagget about his concern for the possible dissolution of the Union, but in fact he did write that "it appears to me that the very existence of the United States is threatened, just now I am afraid we have been playing the game of brag about as recklessly as I have ever seen it played, even on an Arkansas steamboat."23 Lynn comments on this remarkable letter: "Not only does the 'we' here refer to the Union forces, but he is disturbed that 'we' have been displaying a reckless Southern pride!"24 On the basis of such convincing evidence, Lynn's conclusions about the effects of Mark Twain's Western experience appear to be justified: "Twain in the West retained Whiggish misgivings about popular government, as his reporting of Nevada politics makes clear, but in these years he shucked off forever the outlook of the slave-holding aristocrat."25

As has already been noted, Mark Twain's journalistic persona, "the wild humorist of the Pacific Slope," was distinctly Western rather than Southern. The pose of the Western journalist was continued even after Twain became a roving correspondent, leaving the West but still

23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
continuing to write for West Coast newspapers. The fact that he was still writing for a Western audience no doubt had its effect on the style and point of view in Twain's newspaper travel writing on the Sandwich Islands (1866) and in the Quaker City excursion to Europe and the Holy Land (1867), the latter of which was reworked into The Innocents Abroad (1869). This was Mark Twain's first complete book and a best seller which established his reputation on a national basis and enabled him to leave the Western phase of his life and (after a brief residence in Buffalo) settle down with his bride Olivia in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1871, thus making himself, by choice, not only a Yankee, but a Connecticut Yankee.

Mark Twain now became in earnest, as he later put it in Life on the Mississippi, "a scribbler of books, and an immovable fixture among the other rocks of New England."26 In public life he stopped playing the uncouth Westerner (which everyone who had read The Innocents Abroad expected him to be) and attempted to fit into genteel New England society. He cultivated friendships with such respectable "rocks of New England" as William Dean Howells and the Rev. Joseph Twitchell; close neighbors in Hartford

included Charles Dudley Warner and Harriet Beecher Stowe. In the search for material for his "scribblings," however, Twain had already begun to be attracted, in a minor way, to the themes of his Southern boyhood, which, in the decades to follow, would form the very soul of his greatest works. Back in 1867, in one of his letters from New York to the Alta California before his departure for Europe, he had reminisced about the town drunkard of Hannibal, Jimmy Finn, and also about the Cadets of Temperance, with which young Sam Clemens had once briefly been affiliated. Both of these boyhood memories were to appear later in Twain's fiction, the town drunk as Pap in Huckleberry Finn, and the Cadets of Temperance as the basis of a minor episode in Tom Sawyer.

Following the trip to Europe, while reworking his series of travel letters into Innocents Abroad, Twain again began thinking about his boyhood experiences. As a result, as DeLancey Ferguson points out, he included in the book several episodes which had not appeared in the original newspaper letters:

The most significant additions to the Innocents, perhaps, are those which have nothing to do with the subject. The memory of the night when he sneaked into his father's office in Hannibal and found a dead man there, interpolated after the description of the Milanese effigy of a flayed man,

27. Wecter, p. 929.
was an afterthought. It was also his first realization, apart from a casual reference to Jimmy Finn a year earlier, of the literary possibilities of his boyhood experiences. He similarly lugged in the story of the undermined boulder that wrecked the cooper's shop at the foot of Holliday's Hill to illuminate his account of the Great Pyramid.  

Perhaps reminiscing about his boyhood in the South caused Twain to revert momentarily to his Southern set of values; at any rate, the remark which he made to Howells after the latter had given The Innocents a favorable review in his Atlantic Monthly column seems strangely out of harmony with Mark Twain's character as an immovable fixture among the rocks of New England: "When I read that review of yours," he told Howells, "I felt like the woman who was so glad her baby had come white."  

In the same year as the publication of The Innocents Abroad, 1869, Twain wrote a brief farcical sketch which indicates that, although he might still have some characteristic Southern views on miscegenation, he had definitely left behind him certain other values of the Southern gentleman. "Journalism in Tennessee," an otherwise unimportant example of Mark Twain's extravagant burlesque style, is significant in that it mercilessly satirizes the Southern institutions of polemic newspaper

28. Ferguson, p. 137.
29. Ibid., p. 146.
editorializing and the duels frequently provoked by such public name-calling -- the same childish antics in which Twain had himself been embroiled in Virginia City. The complete reversal of Twain's earlier views about dueling is evident, and the change proved to be permanent, for Twain never again mentioned the subject of dueling in his writing without taking the opportunity to heap upon it the effective sarcasms of his most heartfelt scorn.

In 1870 Mark Twain began to think of writing about his boyhood in the form of a diary which would chronicle the adventures of a "Billy Rogers"; this attempt never got beyond the manuscript stage, but two years later Twain came another step closer to what would eventually become *Tom Sawyer* when he experimented with a play about small-town boyhood. Meanwhile, he had reverted momentarily to the frontier theme in his writings with *Roughing It* (1872), a semi-autobiographical account of his experiences in the Far West. It is significant that Twain made no mention in *Roughing It* of his former opinions about the Sanitary Fund and the fiasco which had followed his publication of those opinions.

In *The Gilded Age* (1873) Twain collaborated with Charles Dudley Warner to name and define a whole era of

30. Meltzer, p. 162.
American life. Although most of the book has its setting in New York, Pennsylvania, and Washington, D. C., the South does enter into this picture of a gold-plated America in the first eleven chapters, which were written by Twain before Warner began adding his portions to the book. Twain's description of Obedstown, Tennessee, in Chapter I of The Gilded Age, may be taken as representative of his views on the South at this point in his life. While the following passage lacks the tone of vitriolic satire characteristic of Twain's later portrayals of the South, such as his descriptions of the squalor and sadism of the Arkansas villages in Huckleberry Finn, it does manage to reveal, largely by indirection, some of the milder foibles of Southerners:

Presently the United States mail arrived, on horseback. There was but one letter, and it was for the postmaster. The long-legged youth who carried the mail tarried an hour to talk, for there was no hurry; and in a little while the male population of the village had assembled to help. As a general thing, they were dressed in homespun "jeans," blue or yellow--there were no other varieties of it; all wore one suspender and sometimes two--yarn ones that were knitted at home--some wore vests, but few wore coats. Such coats and vests as did appear, however, were rather picturesque than otherwise, for they were made of tolerably fancy patterns of calico--a fashion which prevails there to this day among those of the community who have tastes above the common level and are able to afford style. Every individual arrived with his hands in his pockets; a hand came out occasionally for a purpose, but it always went back again after
service. . . . We are speaking impartially of men, youths, and boys. And we are also speaking of these three estates when we say that every individual was either chewing natural leaf tobacco prepared on his own premises, or smoking the same in a corncob pipe. Few of the men wore whiskers; none wore mustaches . . . but no part of any individual's face had seen a razor for a week.31

This is the first of Twain's many literary descriptions of Southern villages and is representative in form, if not entirely in tone, of the pattern which would later be established.

While spending the summer at Quarry Farm, in 1874, Twain heard a true story from the Negro cook, Auntie Cord, which probably had a profound influence on his attitude toward slavery and racism.32 Always of a compassionate nature, even in the early days when he had unconsciously echoed the racial prejudices of his society, Mark Twain must have listened with sympathetic attention as Auntie Cord related the tale of her former sufferings as a slave in Virginia, for when he published the story in the Atlantic Monthly in November, he declared that it was "repeated word for word as I heard it."33 In the introduction to the story, Twain went on to give a detailed account of the circumstances of its telling: "It was summer


32. Ferguson, p. 174.

33. Meltzer, p. 164.
time, and twilight. We were sitting on the porch of the
farmhouse on the summit of the hill, and 'Aunt Rachel' was
sitting respectfully below our level, on the steps-- for
she was our servant, and colored. The story of the
sixty-year-old ex-slave is then presented in her own words
-- or Twain's mental reconstruction of them -- in the Negro
dialect. It is a deeply moving account, including a
description of a slave auction in Richmond, the woman's
emotions when she is separated from her husband and seven
children, and her final accidental reunion with her son
Henry, the only member of her family she was ever to see
again, during the Civil War. The description of the slave
auction deserves to be quoted at length, for it constitutes
one of the most effective denunciations of the institution
of slavery which Twain would ever write:

Dey put chains on us an' put us on a stan' as
high as dis po'ch--twenty foot high-- an' all de
people stood aroun', crowds an' crowds. An' dey'd
come up dah an' look at us all roun', an' squeeze
our arm, an' make us git up an' walk, an' den
say, "Dis one too ole," or "Dis one lame," or
"Dis one don't mount to much." An' dey sole my
ole man, an' took him away, an' dey begin to sell
my chill'en an' take dem away, an' I begin to cry;
an' de man say, "Shet up yo' dam blubberin',"
an' hit me on de mouf wid his han'.

Twain's portrayal of "Aunt Rachel" in "A True Story" fore­
shadows later portraits of Nigger Jim and Roxana, both in

34. Samuel Langhorne Clemens, Sketches New and Old

35. Ibid., pp. 267-68.
its skillful use of dialect and in its sympathetic presentation of Negro suffering.

Between the months of January and July, 1875, Twain followed up this, his first story to appear in the *Atlantic*, with a series of sketches about his career as a cub pilot, "Old Times on the Mississippi," later to be republished as Chapters IV through XVII of *Life on the Mississippi*. The "Old Times" sketches -- as opposed to the second portion of *Life on the Mississippi*, written after Twain's 1882 visit to the river -- do not deal with Southern life and society. Rather, they are concerned primarily with the art of piloting and with the struggles of Sam Clemens to "learn the river." One notable passage in the opening article of the series, however, is Twain's description of sleepy Hannibal, the first in the series of such descriptions revealing the peculiar double vision -- mentioned earlier in connection with reminiscences in the *Autobiography* -- which enabled Twain to regard the village of his boyhood as idyllic and Western, associated only in a vague and tenuous way with the Old South or the horrors of slavery. The mood evoked by this early description of Hannibal is one of peace and drowsy tranquility:

After all these years I can picture that old time to myself now, just as it was then: the white town drowsing in the sunshine of a summer's morning; the streets empty, or pretty nearly so; one or two clerks sitting in front of the Water Street stores, with their splint-bottomed chairs tilted back
against the walls, chins on breasts, hats slouched over their faces, asleep—with shingle-shavings enough around to show what broke them down; a sow and a litter of pigs loafing along the sidewalk, doing a good business in watermelon rinds and seeds; two or three lonely little freight piles scattered about the "levee"; a pile of "skids" on the slope of the stone-paved wharf, and the fragrant town drunkard asleep in the shadow of them; two or three wood flats at the head of the wharf, but nobody to listen to the peaceful lapping of the wavelets against them; the great Mississippi, the majestic, the magnificent Mississippi, rolling its mile-wide tide along, shining in the sun; the dense forest away on the other side; the "point" above the town, and the "point" below, bounding the river-glimpse and turning it into a sort of sea, and withal a very still and brilliant and lonely one. The "white town drowsing in the sunshine" can only be aroused to life and activity by the arrival of a steamboat, and after the boat's departure, returns once more to peaceful slumber. In sharp contrast, a typical Southern town, as portrayed later by Twain in *Huckleberry Finn*, can only be aroused by such cruel diversions as dog fights or burning a stray dog that has been drenched in turpentine.

During the same months that he was writing "Old Times on the Mississippi" Twain was also working on a full-length embodiment of the Hannibal myth. In July, 1875, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* was completed; the

book was not published, however, until December, 1876. Twain himself later described Tom Sawyer as "simply a hymn, put into prose form to give it a worldly air." This is an apt characterization of the book which sings the praises of St. Petersburg, alias Hannibal, in such terms as these: "The sun rose upon a tranquil world, and beamed down upon the peaceful village like a benediction." There is also a distinctly Western atmosphere about St. Petersburg, and very few details which are suggestive of the South. Twain, in fact, refers to the setting of this story as "the West" in his Preface: "The odd superstitions touched upon were all prevalent among children and slaves in the West at the period of this story." There is, indeed, the seeming contradiction of the mention of slavery here, but the extent to which Twain deemphasized this issue and emphasized the frontier aspect of St. Petersburg is clearly indicated by the fact that the young servant Jim, the only Negro character to appear on stage, is seen only once, briefly, in the second chapter of Tom Sawyer.

37. Meltzer, p. 162.
38. Wecter, p. 930.
40. Ibid., Preface.
Sawyer, whereas Injun Joe, a typical frontier character, is a major figure in the book, the *raison d'être* of an entire sub-plot. The absence of Southern characteristics in *Tom Sawyer* is summed up succinctly in Kenneth S. Lynn's statement that "in hermetic St. Petersburg there is not the least hint of the slavery crisis, or of an oncoming civil war." 41

The same year that saw the public birth of *Tom Sawyer*, 1876, also contained the private conception of Mark Twain's masterpiece, *Huckleberry Finn*. According to the chronology worked out by Walter Blair after careful study of the Mark Twain Papers, *Huck Finn* was begun early in July of 1876, then laid aside sometime in August. 42 The beginning portion of the manuscript probably ended at the point in the narrative at which Huck's raft is rammed by the steamboat, at the end of Chapter XVI; the episode of the visit to the Walter Scott, which comes before this in the final version of the novel, is assumed to be a later interpolation and thus is theoretically excluded from the original portion of the manuscript. 43 The story as written in 1876 is clearly a continuation of the Hannibal

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41. Lynn, p. 191.
Idyll begun in *Tom Sawyer*, with St. Petersburg again presented as a frontier town. It is true that the racial theme appears in potential form with the escape of Jim and his association with Huck on the river, but the theme would not become a vital part of the novel until a later point in its composition, when the raft with its two occupants would penetrate deeper and deeper into the heartland of the Old South. Meanwhile the embryo form of Mark Twain's greatest work was destined to lie on a shelf and collect dust while its creator went off for a tramp abroad. Then, sometime between October, 1879, and June, 1880, Twain returned briefly to his *Huck Finn* manuscript, writing Chapters XVII and XVIII, the Sheperdson-Grangerford feud. He was beginning to take a more satirical view toward his Southern materials, writing with telling effect about such matters as the pretentiousness of the taste of Southern aristocrats and the senselessness of Kentucky vendettas, but again he laid the manuscript aside.

The record of his European trip was published in *A Tramp Abroad* (1880). *The Prince and the Pauper*, also European in theme, followed in 1881. In 1882 his thoughts returned once more to the Mississippi and the South: he began to add to his "Old Times" sketches with a view to

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44. Ibid., p. 199.
publishing a book about life on the Mississippi but discovered that his impressions of Southern life and manners needed to be refreshed by the stimulation of direct contact. In April of 1882 Twain departed for a steamboat trip on the Mississippi, which culminated in a visit to Hannibal, the scene of his boyhood. With the help of a notebook recording his impressions of the trip, and the additional help of borrowings from many books, including the "Raftsmen Passage," which had been part of the earliest Huck Finn manuscript, he pieced together *Life on the Mississippi*. It is worthy of note that, even after the visit, Twain's picture of his old hometown in *Life on the Mississippi* fits the pattern of the Hannibal myth already established in his writings:

It was Sunday morning, and everybody was abed yet. So I passed through the vacant streets, still seeing the town as it was, and not as it is, and recognizing and metaphorically shaking hands with a hundred familiar objects which no longer exist; and finally climbed Holliday's Hill to get a comprehensive view.  

Twain quite candidly admits that he saw Hannibal "as it was, and not as it is" and the truth of the admission is obvious as he goes on to paint the panorama he beheld from the top of Holliday's Hill in terms quite reminiscent of earlier scenes painted from memory:

From this vantage-ground the extensive view
up and down the river, and wide over the wooded
expanses of Illinois, is very handsome -- one
of the most beautiful on the Mississippi, I
think . . . it was as young and fresh and comely
and gracious as ever it had been. . . . 46

Twain's impressions in Life on the Mississippi of
those portions of the river south of Hannibal, however,
present a marked contrast to the nostalgic picture of his
boyhood home. Concerning Arkansas City, he wrote: "There
were several rows of shabby frame houses, and a supply of
mud sufficient to insure the town against a famine in that
article for a hundred years. . . ." 47 Napoleon, Arkansas,
quite probably the original of Bricksville in Huckleberry
Finn, Twain recalls as a "town of innumerable fights--an
inquest every day." 48 By way of illustrating the violence
prominent in the area below Memphis, he describes a fight
between two men, whom he designates simply as "A" and "B,
concerning property rights and some fence-rails washed
from one man's land to the other's by the flooding
Mississippi:

One day A came down on B's grounds to get his
rails. B said, "I'll kill you!" and proceeded
for him with his revolver. A said, "I'm not
armed." So B, who wished to do only what was
right, threw down his revolver; then pulled a

46. Ibid., p. 250.
47. Ibid., p. 154.
48. Ibid., p. 169.
knife, and cut A's throat all around, but gave his principal attention to the front, and so failed to sever the jugular. Struggling around, A managed to get his hands on the discarded revolver, and shot B dead with it -- and recovered from his own injuries.49

Twain left out of the published version of Life on the Mississippi a chapter dealing with the racial views of Southerners, but, as DeLancey Ferguson points out, the satire on Southern mores in this book is quite devastating without it:

The much discussed but seldom read chapter that Mark Twain deleted dealt with the postwar attitude of the South toward slavery; it was not nearly so scathing as his published arraignment of Southern ideas of delicacy, refinement, womanhood, religion and property, as illustrated by shootings and stabbings performed by Southern gentlemen.50

While the public was reading these expository views of the South, the ex-Southerner who had written them was working on the latter portions of Huckleberry Finn, a fictional view of the same subject which, in its way, was an even more bitter attack on Southern institutions. Although the satire contained in Huck Finn was not immediately apparent to many readers, subsequent analyses of the novel have amply demonstrated the often bitter anti-Southern attitudes revealed in many passages, especially

49. Ibid., p. 151.

50. Ferguson, p. 213.
in the latter half of the book. Dixon Wecter's summary of this aspect of *Huck Finn* points out some of the most outstanding examples:

We are shown the sloth and sadism of poor whites, backwoods loafers with their plug tobacco and Barlow knives, who sic dogs on stray sows. . . or drench a stray cur with turpentine and set him afire. We remark the cowardice of lynching parties; the chicanery of patent medicine fakers, revivalists, and exploiters of rustic ribaldry; the senseless feudings of the gentry. 51

But the completion of *Huck Finn* did not mark the end of Twain's interest in or criticism of the South. In 1894 he published *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, a novel whose central theme constitutes a resounding slap in the face of the Southern aristocracy by demonstrating that a light-skinned Negro with the advantages of position and training could play the role of a white aristocrat — and escape detection by his supposed superiors. Apparently satisfied with this brilliant parting shot at the South, Twain expanded the scope of his satire to include thenceforth, not just a region, or even a country, but the whole world, as the target for increasingly bitter criticism. The "damned human race" became the subject of such later works as "What Is Man?" (1906), "The Mysterious Stranger" (1916), and the greater part of the recently published "Letters from the Earth."

51. Wecter, pp. 932-33.
CHAPTER II

HUMOR

The overall pattern of the life and writings of Mark Twain reflects a strong early Southern influence, a gradual lessening of that influence during the Western period of his life, and eventual individualistic development, colored somewhat by New England gentility and European cosmopolitanism. Mark Twain's humor, an important aspect of the larger pattern, follows a similar line of development.

The earliest recovered pieces of Sam Clemens's published humor clearly indicate the Southern influences of family and community. From his father he had inherited the Virginia aristocrat's Whiggish views toward the political scene. Consequently, as Kenneth S. Lynn points out,

... one of his earliest pieces for the Hannibal Journal, a Whig newspaper briefly controlled by his older brother, Orion, was a satire on "Democratic rascality," while a travel letter of the mid-1850's, recounting Twain's experiences in Washington, D. C., featured a description of Thomas Hart Benton which endeavored to cut the giant of the Missouri Democracy down to size. . . . 1

1. Lynn, p. 140
Southern aristocratic influence is clearly seen, then, in the political content of some of the early humorous writings of Sam Clemens. Much more important, however, is the form in which the young journalist chose to express his humor. Here the influence of the Old Southwestern humorous tradition is undeniable. Missouri formed part of what is known as the Old Southwest, the frontier of the cotton economy of western Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi, which eventually flowed out across the Gulf plains and up the Mississippi to embrace Louisiana, Arkansas, Tennessee, and Mark Twain's native state. The humor of the region was the robust frontier variety, with a strong vernacular flavor. Important contributors to the literary growth of the tradition include the Georgians A. B. Longstreet and William T. Thompson, Johnson J. Hooper of Alabama, and T. B. Thorpe of Arkansas. Mark Twain had his beginnings as a humorist consciously writing within the tradition created by these men. Unpublished notebooks show that he was familiar with such books as Georgia Scenes, Flush Times, Simon Suggs, and Major Jones's Courtship. In addition to appearing in books, Southwestern humor flourished in Northern periodicals, such as the Spirit of the Times and the Carpet-Bag, and in numerous newspapers

2. Ibid.
throughout the South and up the Mississippi Valley. Young Sam Clemens was probably in charge of selecting stories from such sources for the "Miscellany" column of the Hannibal Journal. Constance Rourke, in American Humor, declares that from such reading "he must have caught the full impact of that spirit of burlesque flourishing so broadly up and down the Great Valley." Tall tales of the Southwestern variety were also widely current in oral form, and these Sam Clemens must have heard with that eagerness with which he always listened to a good story. The overall impact of Southwestern humor on Sam Clemens is summed up by Walter Blair in Native American Humor:

He grew up with that humor. It adorned the newspaper and periodical exchanges which came to his brother's newspaper, for which he set type. He heard oral versions of it in Hannibal. Specifically, perhaps, in general, certainly, he was indebted to Crockett, Longstreet, and those who followed them.

The effects of such immersion in the humorous tradition of the Old Southwest are patently revealed in "The Dandy Frightening the Squatter," the first extended piece of humor that Sam Clemens published. Written while Sam was


still setting type for his brother Orion, "The Dandy" was published in May, 1852, in the Boston Carpet-Bag. Because this piece is so indicative of Sam's early debt to the Southwestern tradition, the complete text is here reproduced so that it may be examined in some detail.

The Dandy Frightening the Squatter

About thirteen years ago, when the now flourishing young city of Hannibal, on the Mississippi River, was but a "wood yard," surrounded by a few huts, belonging to some hardy "squatters," and such a thing as a steamboat was considered quite a sight, the following incident occurred:

A tall, brawny woodsman stood leaning against a tree which stood upon the bank of the river, gazing at some approaching object, which our readers would easily have discovered to be a steamboat.

About half an hour elapsed, and the boat was moored, and the hands busily engaged in taking on wood.

Now among the many passengers on this boat, both male and female, was a spruce young dandy, with a killing moustache, &c., who seemed bent on making an impression upon the hearts of the young ladies on board, and to do this, he thought he must perform some heroic deed. Observing our squatter friend, he imagined this to be a fine opportunity to bring himself into notice; so, stepping into the cabin, he said:

"Ladies, if you wish to enjoy a good laugh, step out on the guards. I intend to frighten that gentleman into fits who stands on the bank."

The ladies complied with the request, and our dandy drew from his bosom a formidable looking bowie-knife, and thrust it into his belt; then, taking a large horse-pistol in each hand, he seemed satisfied that all was right. Thus equipped, he strode on shore, with an air which seemed to say--"The hopes of a nation depend on me." Marching up to the woodsman, he exclaimed:
"Found you at last, have I? You are the very man I've been looking for these three weeks! Say your prayers!" he continued, presenting his pistols, "you'll make a capital barn door, and I shall drill the key-hole myself!"

The squatter calmly surveyed him a moment, and then, drawing back a step, he planted his huge fist directly between the eyes of his astonished antagonist, who, in a moment, was floundering in the turbid waters of the Mississippi.

Every passenger on the boat had by this time gathered on the guards, and the shout that now went up from the crowd speedily restored the crest-fallen hero to his senses, and, as he was sneaking off towards the boat, was thus accosted by his conqueror:

"I say, yeou, next time yeou come around drillin' key-holes, don't forget yer old acquaintances!"

The ladies unanimously voted the knife and pistols to the victor. 6

Bernard DeVoto remarks of this first important sketch, "It is typical of the newspaper humor of the South and Southwest. . . . It was the sort of thing that Sam Clemens, printer's devil and journeyman printer, had seen flourishing in the little weeklies that came to the exchange desk." 7

Both the theme -- the spruce Easterner bested by a stalwart country fellow -- and many of the details of the particular plot of "The Dandy" had been used many times before in humorous sketches of the Southwest. It has been pointed

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out by Kenneth Lynn and other commentators that the sketch is imitative of the manner of Augustus Baldwin Longstreet in structure, diction, and narrative tone. Longstreet, and others of the original Southwestern school, wrote from an esthetic distance, in the character of what Lynn has termed the "Self-controlled Gentleman," who remains aloof from whatever low-life he may present in his story. The rather formal introductory paragraph in the sketch by Sam Clemens is a shortened version of a typical introduction by a Self-controlled Gentleman. Once the scene has been set, the narrator maintains a rather artificial distance between himself and his characters, the "tall, brawny woodsman" and the "spruce young dandy," who act out their story on a plane quite removed from that of the supposedly more sophisticated author. It becomes evident that Sam Clemens is straining to imitate the style of a Self-controlled Gentleman when he uses such circumlocutions as "among the many passengers on this boat, both male and female," and "seemed bent on making an impression upon the hearts of the young ladies" -- phrases which would certainly not appear in the normal conversation of a sixteen-year-old printer's devil. Edgar M. Branch sums up the influences of the Longstreet manner: "The polite, formal tone, recalling the essayistic introductions in Augustus Baldwin

8. Lynn, p. 141.
Longstreet's *Georgia Scenes*, invades the syntax and is all the more evident because of the words in quotation marks.\(^9\)

Especially noticeable is the word "squatters" in the introductory paragraph. Apparently Sam Clemens, somewhat nervous in the role of Self-controlled Gentleman, considered mere quotation marks inadequate in the case of such a slangy term and decided to italicize it for good measure.

But the polite manner of A. B. Longstreet was only one of the many influences of the Southwest which young Sam Clemens absorbed. Another time-honored tradition of the region was the editorial feud, a custom, as has been seen, in which Mark Twain indulged once too often in Nevada and later satirized in "Journalism in Tennessee." Sam found the opportunity to engage in his first journalistic feud a few months after the publication of "The Dandy," when Orion took a trip to Tennessee and left his younger brother to get out the Hannibal *Journal* by himself. In the issue of September 16, 1852, there appeared a woodcut, executed by Sam himself, which caricatured "Local," the editor of a rival newspaper, who had recently been jilted. Beneath the illustration was an explanatory paragraph:

"Local," disconsolate from receiving no further notice from "A Dog-be-Deviled Citizen," contemplates Suicide. His "pocket pistol" (i.e.,

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the bottle), failing in the patriotic work of
ridding the country of a nuisance, he resolves
to "extinguish his chunk" by feeding his
carcass to the fishes of Bear Creek, while friend
and foe are wrapt in sleep. Fearing, however,
that he may get out of his depth, he sounds the
stream with his walking-stick.10

There is little here which is reminiscent of the Self-
controlled Gentleman, but it is a fine example of the art
of lampooning a rival editor in print, fully equal to the
journalistic insults which were later to be satirized by
Mark Twain in "Journalism in Tennessee."

At the beginning of June, 1853, Sam Clemens left
Missouri and his close association with the purely South-
western variety of humor. In the years between his departure
from Missouri in 1853 and his arrival in Nevada Territory
in 1861, he was primarily occupied as a compositor and,
later, as a steamboat pilot. The few pieces of newspaper
humor which Clemens wrote in this period exhibit a slight
lessening of Southwestern influence together with exper-
imentation with other varieties of journalistic humor
popular at the time. The three Thomas Jefferson Snodgrass
letters, for instance, written for the Keokuk, Iowa, Post
in 1856-57 reveal in their fictitious author a character
that Kenneth Lynn finds "remarkably like Simon Suggs" of
the Southwestern tradition.11 Bernhard DeVoto declares

11. Lynn, p. 141.
that the letters "are nearest, perhaps, to Thompson's sketches about Major Jones..." 12 Actually, however, in spite of these traces of Southwestern influence, the letters of Thomas Jefferson Snodgrass reveal Sam Clemens's attempts to incorporate the devices of various types of popular newspaper humor. As Edgar Branch points out:

They show a determined merging of features often found in popular humorous writing of the time: that overworked type, the illiterate countryman; the semi-autobiographical travel sketch, a form in which Mark Twain was to excel; and the dialect letter, an accepted medium for double-edged satire and realistic portrayal. 13

An excerpt from the last of the three letters, printed in the Keokuk Post on April 10, 1857, will serve to indicate the qualities of Sam Clemens's humorous writing at the age of twenty-one:

Mister Editors:—It mought be, that some people thinks your umble sarvent has "shuffled off this mortal quile" and bid a eternal adoo to the subloony atmoosphere—n-a-r-y time!" He ain't dead, but sleepeth. That expresshun are figerative and go to signerfy that he's pooty much quit scribblin.

It's been cold here, Mister Editors. And when I asserts that fact, people can take it for granted I mean its been almighty, nasty partickler cold—a considerable sight: coldern'n coffee at the seckend table. Fust, it snowed, and snowed, and snowed, tell you actilly couldn't see the mud in the streets; next it kivered up and blotted out the sines; and continued on tell all the brick

13. Branch, p. 43.
housers looked like the frame ones, and visy
versy--and at last, when it did stop, you couldn't
a told Cincinnati from the Rocky Mountings in
January. The Ohio river was friz to the bottom--
which warn't no great shakes in the freezing line,
considerin' that krick aint never got more'n forty
barls of water in it, no how--and the steamboats
was friz to the airth, and the Dutch was friz to
the sour-kroat kags, and the preachers was friz
to thor parsenages, and somehow, I kinder think
the Devil hisself got ketched and has to winter in
the burned uncomfortable town.14

Snodgrass is a country bumpkin writing home to
Keokuk about his adventures in the "big city" of Cincinnati.
Although his character may have been influenced by types
from Southwestern humor -- Simon Suggs or, possibly, Sut
Lovingood -- in both his origin and his dialect he is
represented as a Midwesterner. Certain of his comic devices,
such as the exaggeration in the statement that the Ohio
"was friz to the bottom," may be regarded as typical of
Southwestern humor, but others, such as the literary
burlesque in "shuffled off this mortal quile," reflect
influences of a less regional nature. As for the quality
of the humor in the Snodgrass letters, critical opinion
seems to be divided. In Mark Twain's Humor, Pascal Covici
suggests that the characterization in the series represents
an improvement over the earlier attempt in "The Dandy
Frightening the Squatter."

Snodgrass thinks highly of himself, and it takes no subtle imagination to relish the gap between his own self-appraisal and Twain's characterization of him. The first-person narrative, while by no means as supple a technique as it will become, enables Twain to communicate an attitude more complex and interesting than that in "The Dandy." 15

DeLancey Ferguson's appraisal of the Snodgrass letters is far less enthusiastic, but probably comes closer to the truth: "All that can be said of Snodgrass is that he was no worse than most of the newspaper humor of the day -- but to be worse than that would have been, for anyone with Sam Clemens' native intelligence, impossible." 16

Between 1853 and 1861, then, Sam Clemens's writing retained some of the characteristics of the humor of his native Southwest but began to include devices of "the newspaper humor of the day" from other regions as well. During the years of his sojourn in Nevada and California, 1861 through 1866, his style underwent further change and development under the influence of the humorous tradition which flourished in the newspapers of the Far West. Insofar as it is valid to make regional distinctions, which must always be at least in part artificially imposed, it may be said that Far Western journalistic humor in the 1860's existed as a distinct "school." Although, as a variety of

15. Pascal Covici, Mark Twain's Humor (Dallas, 1962), p. 43.

16. Ferguson, p. 47.
frontier humor, newspaper writing on the Pacific Slope was in a sense a continuation of the Southwestern tradition, it developed certain characteristics peculiar to itself.

Typical were "the elaborate hoaxes," which, as Ferguson points out, "were a branch of journalism which had reached its finest flowering on the Pacific Coast, though Edgar Allan Poe and others of less note had tried their hands at them in the '40's." Ferguson gives some of the background concerning the newspaper hoaxes practiced in the Far West:

... in the dozen years between '49 and '62 the West Coast had developed a folklore of its own in such matters. The archetype of the large-scale public leg-pull was the work of Ferdinand Cartwright Ewer, editor of the Pioneer, San Francisco's first literary magazine. In 1854 Ewer had published in the Pioneer an elaborate burlesque of spiritualism, which at the time was attracting hosts of credulous people.

Another predecessor of Mark Twain, "the Wild Humorist of the Pacific Slope," was George Horatio Derby, who wrote under the pseudonyms "Squibob" and "John Phoenix." In the 1850's Derby had published, in the San Francisco Herald, a mock-scientific report supposedly written by a "Dr. Herman Ellenbogen" concerning the discovery, in Washington Territory, of living specimens of the "Gyascutus" and the "Frock."
A far more important immediate influence, however, was William Wright — "Dan DeQuille" — who, in such pieces as the "solar armor" hoax clearly prefigured "The Petrified Man" and "The Dutch Nick Massacre" of Mark Twain. Wright's background contained none of the elements of the Southwest that had shaped Twain: he was born in Ohio and learned his journalistic craft in Iowa before moving to California in 1857. Several critics testify to the importance of Dan DeQuille in shaping the future form of Mark Twain's humor. Edgar Branch says, "If anyone is to be credited with influencing Mark Twain's Washoe writing, it is Dan DeQuille." Bernard DeVoto states that "Dan taught Mark more than a little. His 'solar armor' hoax probably produced the Petrified Man; it was only an item in Dan's endless succession of fantasies." Ferguson calls DeQuille "Mark's first real instructor in his chosen art."

Far Western journalism did more than cause Mark Twain to add the hoax to his comic repertoire. Effects on Twain's style were equally pronounced and were to prove equally enduring. Branch points out that "His Nevada writing reflected the divergence of the Sagebrush school of

22. Ferguson, p. 84.
humor from some older native traditions. Along with other western humorists, Nevada writers had discovered, for example, that illiteracy was not needed for comedy, and in this respect Mark Twain followed their practice."23 It was at this point in his career that Twain abandoned the labored illiterate style which had characterized the Thomas Jefferson Snodgrass letters. The overall effect of Sagebrush journalism on Mark Twain is summed up by Lynn when he points out the great variety of new devices which Twain was prompted to try at this time: "Twain experimented in his Western period with a variety of humorous devices. Caricatures, puns, burlesques, hoaxes, and editorial badinage were the stock-in-trade of Washoe journalism at the time, and Mark Twain of the Enterprise tried them all."24

But Sagebrush journalism was not the only important influence on Mark Twain's humor during his stay in Nevada. In December of 1863 a second major influence appeared in Virginia City in the form of Artemus Ward, who was touring the West Coast as a comic lecturer. He was immediately seized upon by the staff of the **Territorial Enterprise** as a kindred spirit. Constance Rourke describes his memorable sojourn in Virginia City: "Artemus Ward came to stay three days, and remained three weeks that were a continuous


holiday, ending in a lurching procession over the iron roofs of the town, and with Ward making a gibbering speech in blackface at one of the melodeons." The member of the Enterprise staff most impressed by these three weeks of close association with Ward was Mark Twain. So impressed was he by Ward's humorous manner, both on and off the lecture platform, that he was able to recall it perfectly more than thirty years later when he wrote "How to Tell a Story," even though he had never seen Artemus since those glorious three weeks in 1863. In "How to Tell a Story" (1895) Mark Twain acknowledged his indebtedness to Ward in the art of storytelling, outlining certain features of the characteristically American manner, as developed by Ward and others: the stringing together of "incongruities and absurdities," "the slurring of the point," "the dropping of a studied remark apparently without knowing it," and, most important of all, "the pause." All of these features were employed by Ward as tricks of the lecture platform. Mark Twain would make them his own and improve upon them in his own lecture technique; but also he would employ them -- especially the pause -- in all of his subsequent writings, in short stories, sketches,


and novels, to add to the humor of most of his works, and also -- with certain adaptations -- to add to the satirical effectiveness of such a serious work as Huckleberry Finn.

The third major influence of Mark Twain's Western years came after he had left Nevada for California, while staying in the cabin of Jim Gillis on Jackass Hill during the winter of 1864-65, following a rather unfruitful period of working for several California newspapers. Listening to the long yarns of Jim Gillis in the isolated cabin and to those of Ben Coon, another story-teller at nearby Angels Camp, Twain absorbed much of the colloquial flavor which was to become so characteristic of his subsequent works, both humorous and serious. As Edgar Branch puts it, "Jim Gillis and Ben Coon were catalytic agents who brought about the transformation in his writing." 27

From Jim Gillis, Twain was to get the material for the Bluejay story which would later appear in A Tramp Abroad. A more immediate result came when, after listening to one of the seemingly interminable yarns of Ben Coon, Mark made the following entry in his notebook: "Coleman with his jumping frog -- bet a stranger $50. -- Stranger had no frog and C. got him one: -- In the

27. Branch, p. 122.
meantime stranger filled C's frog full of shot and he couldn't jump. The stranger's frog won."

It was the germ of "The Celebrated Jumping Frog," a story which, with variations, had already appeared at least twice in California newspapers. But Mark Twain was able to transform the traditional material into a work of art which had a new life of its own. The colloquial style of Simon Wheeler's narration, as Branch points out, is largely responsible for the transformation: "Something in the voices of Jim Gillis and Ben Coon -- the approach, the emphasis, the rhythms -- entered into it, and continued to appear in his best humor." 

"The Celebrated Jumping Frog" also exhibits two of the devices which Twain had learned from Artemus Ward: Simon Wheeler's whole discourse consists of stringing "incongruities and absurdities together in a wandering and sometimes pointless way," while Wheeler himself is "innocently unaware that they are absurdities." Also "the slurring of the point" is accomplished when Wheeler delivers the punch-line, the stranger's parting comment, "I don't see no p'ints about that frog that's any better'n any other frog," and then continues his narrative.

28. Ferguson, p. 103.
29. Blair, Native American Humor, p. 156.
with no pause, no apparent awareness that the logical end of the story has been reached.

In "The Story of the Bad Little Boy," also published in 1865, the other two of Ward's devices appear. The pause, followed by a "nub" or "snapper," is accomplished in the following passage:

He ran off and went to sea at last, and didn't come back and find himself sad and alone in the world, his loved ones sleeping in the quiet churchyard, and the vine-embowered home of his boyhood tumbled down and gone to decay. Ah, no; he came home drunk as a piper, and got into the station-house the first thing. 31

The long introductory sentence piles up details until the reader is prepared for a climax. Then the period and beginning of a new sentence mark what on the lecture platform would be a well-timed pause, with the parenthetical "Ah, no," and the "snapper" follows in two brief independent clauses. The pattern is a vital one; it would appear in all of Mark Twain's writing from that time on.

The last of the four devices outlined in "How to Tell A Story" also occurs in "The Bad Little Boy." This is "the dropping of a studied remark apparently without knowing it," as in this paragraph:

And he grew up and married, and raised a large family, and brainsed them all with an ax one night, and got wealthy by all manner of cheating and rascality; and now he is the infernalest wickedest scoundrel in his native village, and is universally respected, and belongs to the legislature.32

The studied remark that "he is universally respected, and belongs to the legislature" is dropped in casually at the end of the long summary of the man's crimes, with no apparent awareness on Twain's part that it is a studied remark and that it is an unexpected conclusion to the sentence.

In March of 1866 Mark Twain sailed for the Sandwich Islands as a travel correspondent for the Sacramento Union. Thus ended the period of direct Western influence on his humorous writing, but the pose as a Westerner was to continue for awhile. Writing from the Sandwich Islands, with a West Coast audience in mind, Twain naturally continued to use many of the devices of Western humor, as well as local references such as "I had rather smell Honolulu at sunset than the old Police Courtroom in San Francisco."33

The letters written from the Sandwich Islands were in several ways important in the shaping of the career of...

32. Ibid.

the young journalist Mark Twain. Through their publication he became known as an authority on the Islands, and shortly after his return to California he was asked to deliver a lecture on the subject of his travels, thus inaugurating a life-long career on the lecture platform. As a humorous lecturer, Twain had the opportunity to perfect the techniques described in "How to Tell A Story," which, as has been seen, had already begun to appear in his writings. A review of his first lecture, in the *Golden Era*, October 7, 1866, reveals that Twain as a comic lecturer early surpassed the skill of even Artemus Ward, the man whom he himself acknowledged as his mentor:

"Quote Artemus Ward no more; our Pacific sloper can discount him. . . . In original humor and the way of putting it, Artemus can hide his diminished Luminary under several bushels; he is as a penn'orth of tallow to a mammoth-circus chandelier."

As a result of the combined popularity of his travel letters and lectures, Twain was signed as a roving correspondent by the *Alta California*, his assignment being to travel first to New York by way of the Isthmus, and then, on board the *Quaker City*, to Europe and the Holy Land.

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34. Branch, p. 187.
In the *Alta* letters and the resultant book, *Innocents Abroad*, Mark Twain continued to be "the Wild Humorist of the Pacific Slope." As in the Sandwich Island letters, comparisons with Western scenes and institutions served as natural measuring sticks for Europe. Thus Lake Como is compared, unfavorably, to Tahoe. Excavated Pompeii is "all clean-scraped and neat, and suggesting nothing of the nature of a silver-mine away down in the bowels of the earth." And the way to the Acropolis is "a little rougher piece of country than exists anywhere else outside of the state of Nevada, perhaps." Western slang appears as a humorous mode of expression in European contexts, with such phrases as "what they term in California 'a square meal,'" "keep the hang of," and "vamose." Finally it is worthy of note that Twain is making increased use of the pause in *The Innocents Abroad*, sometimes, as in the following example, with a satiric as well as a humorous effect:

In this chapel is a marble chest, in which, they told us, were the ashes of St. John; and around

it was wound a chain, which, they said, had confined him when he was in prison. We did not desire to disbelieve these statements, and yet we could not feel certain that they were correct--partly because we could have broken that chain, and so could St. John, and partly because we had seen St. John's ashes before, in another church. 39

Here is what may be termed a compound pause, the major break in thought occurring at the dash, followed by a partial "nub," with a brief pause at the second comma, followed by the rest of the "nub," the completely demolishing evidence.

Mark Twain's apprenticeship as a humorist may be said to have ended with the publication of The Innocents Abroad in 1869. Both the Southwestern and Far Western phases of influence were then behind him, and he began to develop his own unique style. Also he began to write novels and serious essays, but as Bernard DeVoto has commented: "He began as a humorist. He continued as one so long as he wrote." 40 Humor continued to play a part in even the most serious of his later works; the reader could always expect the long build-up, the pause, and the "snapper," the pattern which became increasingly characteristic of the humorous passages in Mark Twain's works.

39. Ibid., I, p. 162.

But, even as the pattern of comic delivery which Twain had learned during his Western sojourn became an established habit, a return to the materials of the Southwestern humor of his boyhood also became evident. The resurgence of Southwestern influence in Twain's humor is parallel with his renewed interest in the themes of boyhood and the South, as seen in the first chapter of this thesis. In *Tom Sawyer*, Twain's first large-scale fictional return to Hannibal, there occurs a scene which, as several critics have suggested, closely parallels "Georgia Theatrics," a Southwestern comic tale in which a boy like Tom Sawyer engages in a vicious fight with an imaginary opponent. Instances of the use of Southwestern humor in *Huckleberry Finn* are numerous. The "Raftsmen Passage," published in *Life on the Mississippi* but originally intended for *Huck Finn*, is an epitome of Southwestern tall talk and river manners. The Fokeville camp meeting is reminiscent of the adventure of Johnson J. Hooper's Simon Suggs at Sunday Creek. Huck's visit to the circus echoes tales by W. T. Thompson, G. W. Harris, and Richard Malcolm Johnston. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is important

41. Lynn, p. 69.
42. Blair, *Mark Twain and Huck Finn*, pp. 115-17.
43. DeVoto, p. 255; and Lynn, p. 225.
as an example of Mark Twain's use of the humor of the South, but it is even more important as an example of his satirical treatment of the South itself. As such, it deserves to be examined in a chapter of its own.
CHAPTER III

THE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN

Mark Twain's satire on Southern society is not immediately obvious in Huckleberry Finn, for the opening chapters, that portion of the novel written in 1876, are largely a continuation of the Hannibal idyll as it appeared in Tom Sawyer. Huck goes along with the boyish adventures of Tom Sawyer's gang, and life in the village goes on in its usual tranquil fashion. Again, there is nothing particularly Southern about St. Petersburg, and the people -- as opposed to the vicious and hypocritical characters Huck meets later on in the novel -- are basically good and are presented sympathetically. As Kenneth Lynn notes:

Without a single exception, the respectable inhabitants of the Happy Valley whom Huck encounters in the first sixteen chapters of the novel--the Widow Douglas, Judge Thatcher, Tom Sawyer, Miss Watson, Judith Loftus, the night watchman, even Mr. Parker, the slave-hunter--are fundamentally decent people.¹

The setting in the opening chapters, also, conveys a continuation of the peaceful mood of the sleepy village of Tom Sawyer. Huck's nocturnal view of the village and river from the top of Cardiff Hill is also similar in its

¹. Lynn, pp. 218-19.
mellow mood to Mark Twain's daylight observation from Holliday's Hill in *Life on the Mississippi*:

Well, when Tom and me got to the edge of the hill-top, we looked away down into the village and could see three or four lights twinkling, where there was sick folks, may be; and the stars was sparkling ever so fine; and down by the village was the river, a whole mile broad, and awful still and grand.  

Just as in *Tom Sawyer*, such lyric moods are punctuated in the opening portion of *Huck Finn* by passages of suspense and danger. In the earlier novel, Injun Joe was the villain who threatened the peace and security of Tom and Huck; in his own novel, Huck fears an equally villainous character, Pap. But in both novels, the danger is finally left behind and peace reigns once more.

Among the lyric passages in the two novels, the most striking similarities, perhaps, occur in the description of the tranquil life on Jackson's Island. The first passage opens as Tom Sawyer awakens on the island:

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,

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and a thin blue breath of smoke rose straight into the air.³

In Huckleberry Finn it is Huck who similarly awakens:

The sun was up so high when I waked, that I judged it was after eight o'clock. I laid there in the grass and the cool shade, thinking about things and feeling rested and ruther comfortable and satisfied. I could see the sun out at one or two holes, but mostly it was big trees all about, and gloomy in there amongst them. There was freckled places on the ground where the light sifted down through the leaves, and the freckled places swapped about a little, showing there was a little breeze up there. A couple of squirrels set on a limb and jabbered at me very friendly.⁴

The friendly squirrels, like the little green worm that appears to Tom after the quoted part of the passage above, embody the benevolent attitude of nature on Jackson's Island, in both books a haven, a friendly port amid the storms of more violent adventure.

In the opening chapters of Huckleberry Finn, as in all of Tom Sawyer, slavery is kept in the background, and when it does appear in Chapter VIII of Huck Finn, when Jim is discovered on the island, Twain makes clear the distinction between slavery as practiced in St. Petersburg and "the brutal plantation article" of the Deep South;

³ Clemens, Tom Sawyer, p. 111.
⁴ Clemens, Huckleberry Finn, p. 61.
Jim explains to Huck that he has run away because he was afraid of being sold down the river, "down to Orleans."5

But if the institution of chattel slavery is not made the object of satire while Huck remains in the enchanted surroundings of Mark Twain's idyllic Hannibal, it does create the issue which becomes an increasingly important satirical device as Huck journeys down the river. The repeated struggles of Huck's finer instincts, in the books later chapters, against his socially imposed "conscience," are the basis of some of Twain's finest ironic comments on Southern hypocrisy. Twain apparently had made the discovery of the device which would allow such indirect, double-edged criticism of the Southerner's attitudes in the twenty-eighth chapter of Tom Sawyer. There, Tom had asked Huck where he would sleep while they took turns watching for Injun Joe, and Huck had replied:

"In Ben Rogers' hayloft. He lets me, and so does his Pap's niggerman, Uncle Jake. I tote water for Uncle Jake whenever he wants me to, and any time I ask him he gives me a little something to eat if he can spare it. That's a mighty good nigger, Tom. He likes me, becuz I don't ever act as if I was above him. Sometimes, I've set right down and eat with him. But you needn't tell that. A body's got to do things when he's awful hungry he wouldn't want to do as a steady thing."6

5. Ibid., p. 69.
Huck's natural humanity, his outstanding characteristic in his own novel, clearly enabled him to treat a slave as a fellow human being and not act as if he were "above him," but his "conscience" caused him to feel the necessity of justifying such actions to Tom as being forced upon him by hunger; the fear of social stigma is clear in the remark, "But you needn't tell that."

The satiric possibilities offered by Huck's point of view must have been obvious to Twain when he wrote this passage, but apparently he felt that Tom Sawyer was not the proper place to develop such possibilities any further. Evidently, the opening portion of Huck Finn he considered equally unsuitable, for the device is not employed to any great extent until after Huck and Jim leave the region of St. Petersburg. The reason for Twain's hesitation becomes clear when we remember the Hannibal myth: in the mind of Samuel Clemens, the Hannibal of his boyhood was a sacred place; nowhere in his writings was the sanctity of Hannibal violated by strong satire; the village retained even in fiction the innocence which Sam Clemens had seen in it as a boy. But once the raft carries Huck and Jim down the river and away from St. Petersburg, Mark Twain's satiric genius begins to work, presenting and analyzing one by one the weaknesses of Southern society.
father, a "poor-white" laborer of the lowest order, who
by such belief? In part they may have come from his
father, whose contact with society is rather tenuous, come
a debased and degraded monster. How we may ask, did Huck
able -- in fact despicable -- and that an abhorrent act
sam Clemens, he believes that slavery is morally just.
Southern society as a whole. Like Tom Sawyer and the young
Huckleberry Finn, "conscientious moral commitments" are those of

"come into contact with." But at the same time he is outside of any social group, he
so far as his conscientious moral commitments are concerned, for Pascal a
Pascal. Covert puts it, "Huck is part of society, code. As Pascal covert puts it, "Huck is part of society, to think and act in ways which oppose the prevailing societal
sufficiency detached from society, at times, to be able within the art of the humane goodness of heart, he can be
which is actually outside of respectable society. Thus, as the son of the town drunkard, he occupies a position
have absorbed many of its prejudices, but at the same time, he is enough a part of the society around him to
Huckleberry Finn. Huck is the ideal character for such a
possible the devastating satire in The Adventures of
which, as the passage in Tom Sawyer indicates, makes
It is the dramatic irony of Huck's point of view
makes his opinions abundantly clear in Chapter VI of *Huck Finn* when he vehemently asserts his own superiority to an educated free Negro and rages against "a goyment that can't sell a free nigger till he's been in the State six months." But Huck's contact with Pap was kept to a minimum by Huck himself, who makes clear his lack of respect for his father, so that Pap Finn probably does not represent an important source of Huck's moral opinions. Huck's association with other adults, before his brief stay with the Widow Douglas, was certainly negligible, and he had never been obliged to attend school or church before the Widow's abortive attempts at reform were begun. Neither of these offers a substantial source for Huck's attitudes. We are left with the conclusion that Huck must have absorbed most of his social prejudices from other boys his own age. Thus Huck's opinions come to him second-hand and are not as firmly inculcated as those of his companions, who have been thoroughly brainwashed in school, in church, and in their daily contact with respectable adult society. Huck's lack of "moral" training makes possible his decision to help a runaway slave, a decision which for Tom Sawyer, whose upbringing had included all the "advantages," would have been impossible; Tom does

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agree to help free Jim from the Phelps plantation -- but he does so only because he knows from the beginning of the episode that Jim is actually a free man already. Tom Sawyer is no more capable of opposing the moral code of his society than Sam Clemens had been at Tom's age, but Huck Finn is different, and consequently he is faced with a moral dilemma. During his journey down the river, as his creator described it in an unpublished notebook now among the Mark Twain Papers, "a sound heart collides with a distorted conscience and gains the victory."\(^9\)

In addition to his sound heart and his position outside of Southern society, Huck makes the ideal vehicle for Twain's satire because of his method of reporting the people and events he sees during his journey down the Mississippi. As John Gerber has observed:

Huck is a serious boy. From the very first, Twain makes him the straight, almost solemn reporter, with little or no sense of humor. Fog on the river, Pap's drunkenness, Miss Watson's piety, and the Royal Nonesuch, these are all solemn facts of life to Huck, no one of them to be regarded as less serious or more trivial than another.\(^10\)

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In other words, Twain has made Huck, for satirical rather than comic purposes, a variation of the comic narrator described in "How to Tell a Story." Huck's basically serious approach to life, and his inability to distinguish between the trivial and the momentous, allow Twain to slur the point in each of Huck's numerous adventures and to drop "studied remarks," which Huck is unaware are potently satirical. A comic manner of the lecture platform thus becomes in *Huck Finn* the vehicle of social criticism, for Twain achieves what may be termed a moral dramatic irony whereby the author and the reader share a perspective which is not open to the honest but naive Huck, who reports everything as he sees it, without making distinctions which Twain and the reader are surely making in their own minds. Consequently, the satire in such passages as Huck's decision to "go to hell," his description of the Grangerford home, and many others throughout the book, is rendered immeasurably more effective than any straightforward denunciation by Twain himself could be.

As has been seen, the opening portion of *Huck Finn*, written in 1876, presents no strong criticism of Southern society, but the way is prepared for what is to follow during the southward journey. Huck's character as narrator is established, and he escapes successively from Tom Sawyer's false romanticism, the Widow's stifling
"civilizing," and Pap's brutalities. During his stay on Jackson's Island he undergoes, under the influence of the uncontaminated woods and river, a kind of symbolic purification which will sustain him in the ordeal ahead. It is on Jackson's Island also that Huck's moral dilemma is established, in potential form, when he meets Jim. Huck is fully aware of what he is doing by not turning Jim in, but he has completely divorced himself from society at this point, by his "murder," and consequently his conscience does not trouble him as it will later, after he has associated with Southern society through his numerous shore excursions. He says to Jim at this point, "People would call me a low down Abolitionist and despise me for keeping mum-- but that don't make no difference. I ain't going to tell, and I ain't going back there anyways."11

According to the analysis of Richard Adams, Huck makes the decision to help Jim on three separate occasions, each decision representing a more meaningful commitment to the idea of freedom and opposition to society's code.12

The first decision is made hastily in the excitement of the moment he returns from his trip ashore with the news

11. Clemens, Huckleberry Finn, p. 69.

that Jim is being hunted. As Leo Marx has observed, Huck's speech at this point reveals his unconscious humanitarianism:

"Git up and hump yourself, Jim!" he cries. "There ain't a minute to lose... They're after us!" What particularly counts here is the us. No one is after Huck; no one but Jim knows he is alive. In that small word Clemens compresses the exhilarating power of Huck's instinctive humanity.13

Huck's second decision concerning Jim comes, as Adams has pointed out, after the raft has passed Cairo in the fog.14 Huck does not know that their chance of escaping up the Ohio has been destroyed; while listening to Jim tell of his plans to steal his children out of slavery if he gets the opportunity, Huck suddenly realizes the full significance of what he has been doing by helping Jim: "Here was this nigger which I had as good as helped to run away, coming right out flat-footed and saying he would steal his children--children that belonged to a man I didn't even know; a man that hadn't ever done me no harm."

15 His socially imposed "conscience" here causes him to think of slaves as property -- "children that belonged to a man I didn't even know" -- even though in the previous chapter he had clearly recognized Jim's right to


15. Clemens, Huckleberry Finn, p. 124.
be treated as a human being when he apologized to him for having played a Tom-Sawyerish trick on him. Momentarily carried away by his "conscience," Huck decides to turn Jim in. His basic humanity reasserts itself, however, when the two men arrive on the scene in a skiff and Huck saves Jim by letting on that he has a father with the smallpox aboard the raft. "When he repudiates his own conscience in this way," Adams declares, "Huck takes a long step farther in his repudiation of Southern society, which has formed his conscience." 16

Shortly after this point in the narrative, the raft is rammed by a steamboat, and it was here, at the end of Chapter XVI, that Mark Twain concluded the 1876 portion of the manuscript, laying it aside for more than three years. Kenneth Lynn has suggested that Twain could not decide on a reasonable solution to Jim's problem of escape, and that this uncertainty accounts for his putting the manuscript aside for so long.

Perhaps in some way the boy's dilemma was the author's as well; perhaps Mark Twain no more than Huck Finn could decide what Huck should do about Nigger Jim. To a de-Southernized Twain, it was of course unthinkable that the boy should return the Negro to slavery. On the other hand, once Huck committed the "sin" of helping Jim to freedom he would place himself forever beyond the pale of heavenly St.

Petersburg; he would be carrying his irresolute rebellion against the Happy Valley to the point of no return; he would be electing to become an outcast and a renegade, like his vile Pap. Twain’s Huck eventually does make such an irrevocable decision and thus "gains the victory" over his "distorted conscience," but in 1876 Twain was apparently not ready to go so far in his repudiation of Southern society. He laid his manuscript aside until the period between October, 1879, and June, 1880, when he wrote Chapters XVII and XVIII. And in these chapters Twain concentrates, not on the slavery issue, but on the foibles of Southern aristocracy, with the culminating folly, feuding. The satire in the Grangerford chapters is not as bitter as that in the portion of the novel written after Twain’s 1882 visit to the South, but the satire is none the less effective for the lack of venom in Huck’s "dead-pan" reporting of the pretentiousness of the Grangerfords’ manners and the furnishings of their house, their hypocrisy in attending church with loaded guns, and the utter senselessness and cruelty of their bloody feud with the Shepherdson clan.

Huck’s description of the Grangerford home offers a perfect example of the satiric effect produced by Huck’s

17. Lynn, p. 218.

18. Blair, Mark Twain and Huck Finn, p. 199.
role as a narrator in the manner described in "How to Tell a Story." He strings "incongruities and absurdities together in a wandering and sometimes pointless way," but Huck himself is "innocently unaware that they are absurdities." Thus he admires the "style" inherent in such decorative items as chipped plaster of Paris fruit, a tablecloth "made out of beautiful oil-cloth, with a red and blue spread-eagle painted on it," and a clock that "would start in and strike a hundred and fifty before she got tuckerred out." After the appropriate pause, he remarks of the clock, "They wouldn't took any money for her." 19

In the same passage, Huck lists the books which form the Grangerford library: a family Bible, "Pilgrim's Progress," "Friendship's Offering," Henry Clay's Speeches, Dr. Gunn's Family Medicine, a Hymn Book, "and a lot of other books." Although he does not say so, Twain undoubtedly included among the "other books" the romances of Sir Walter Scott, the subject of an entire chapter in Life on the Mississippi. "Sir Walter Scott with his enchantments," Twain declared in that book, "sets the world in love with dreams and phantoms . . . with the sillinesses and emptinesses, sham grandeurs, sham gauds,

19. Clemens, Huckleberry Finn, p. 137.
and sham chivalries of a brainless and worthless long-
vanished society." So profound was Scott's effect on
Southern society, in Twain's opinion, that he was even
responsible for the honorary military titles of men like
Colonel Grangerford and Colonel Sherburn:

It was Sir Walter that made every gentleman in
the South a major or a colonel, or a general or
a judge, before the war; and it was he, also,
that made these gentlemen value these bogus
decorations. For it was he that created rank
and caste down there, and also reverence for
rank and caste, and pride and pleasure in them.

Thus, in a sense, Sir Walter Scott, with his romantic ideals
of chivalry, is responsible for the Grangerford-Shepherdson
feud and for the shooting of old Boggs by Colonel Sherburn
later in Twain's novel. But in Life on the Mississippi,
Twain fixes an even greater responsibility on Sir Walter,
declaring that he "had so large a hand in making Southern
character, as it existed before the war, that he is in
great measure responsible for the war." Twain's views
on the relationship between romantic novels and the
character of the South -- unfounded as they may be -- are
essential in the proper understanding of the segments of
Huck Finn which deal with the Grangerfords and with Colonel
Sherburn. Similarly, as will be seen, these views bear an

21. Ibid., pp. 219-20.
22. Ibid., p. 220.
important relationship to that later, much-discussed section of the novel, the "Evasion Sequence."

The portion of the *Huck Finn* manuscript which concerns the Grangerfords ends with Huck's reunion with Jim and return to life on the raft at the conclusion of Chapter XVIII. In the chapters which follow, Twain's satirical intent becomes more evident. One of the devices of this satire which has been commented on by various critics is the use of alternating episodes which, in one way or another, form ironic comments on each other. Thus in Chapter XIX the "King" and "Duke," with their false aristocratic pretensions, serve to point up the similar pretentiousness of the feuding families in the preceding chapters. Richard Adams observes that "the Grangerfords and Shepherdsons, by their more serious imitation of aristocratic ways, are only presenting a more pernicious version of something which is at best a sham and a fraud."23

It was after writing Chapters XIX and XX, which introduce the King and Duke, that Mark Twain made the 1882 visit to the South, the importance of which has been indicated in the first chapter of this thesis. The remainder of the novel was written in the burst of inspiration which followed Twain's first-hand view of the South, beginning

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in the spring of 1883, one year after the visit, with Chapter XXI. 24 "Twain's altered view of the Valley society," Kenneth Lynn observes "is immediately estab-
lished in two sets of interrelated and successive 
chapters, XXI-XXII and XXIII-XXIV, the first four chapters 
written subsequent to the 1882 trip." 25 The same sort of 
ironic interrelationship as that noted by Adams in 
Chapters XVIII and XIX is at work here. In Chapter XXI, 
the drunken Boggs is shot down by Colonel Sherburn, and 
the degraded townspeople crowd around to watch his dying 
moments and then applaud a re-enactment of the shooting 
by one of their number who has a theatrical flair; in 
Chapter XXII, the same people go into ecstacies over the 
plight of a supposedly drunken rider at the circus. The 
implication, as Lynn points out, is clear: Southern 
society "regards suffering as a circus." 26 Chapters XXIII 
and XXIV have a similarly ironic connection in their con-
cluding episodes. At the end of the former chapter, Jim 
relates the moving story of his deaf-and-dumb daughter. 
At the end of the latter, the King and the Duke impersonate 
the lost kinsmen of the Wilks family, the Duke playing the

part of a deaf mute. Again, as Lynn makes clear, Twain is using ironic juxtaposition: "When viewed beside Jim's sorrow and compassion for his deaf-and-dumb daughter, the spectacle of the two frauds talking on their hands is sickening--'It was enough,' says Huck, 'to make a body ashamed of the human race.'"27

There is another important aspect of the Wilks episode as concerns Twain's satire of the South, for it is here that he begins to focus his satire once more on the issue of slavery, the most important theme in the remainder of the novel. "The most painful aspect of the affair," comments Richard Adams, "applies directly to the theme of slavery, being the inhumanity of the fake aristocrats in the sale of the Wilks family slaves. . . ."28 Huck's ideas about the injustice of slavery, a subject which had not troubled his conscience in some time, are reawakened when the two frauds sell the slaves, "the two sons up the river to Memphis, and their mother down the river to Orleans." We recall that it was Jim's fear of being sold downriver "to Orleans" that caused him to run away. Huck, too, may remember the terrors of "the brutal plantation article,"

27. Ibid., p. 240.
for he remarks, "it most made me down sick to see it." 29

The conduct of the King and Duke in the Wilks affair fully prepares us for their subsequent inhumanity in turning Jim in, as Huck learns in Chapter XXXI, "for forty dirty dollars." 30 It is this occurrence which forces Huck to struggle with his conscience for the third and most important of the three decisions which, in the analysis of Richard Adams, he makes in the course of the novel. 31 The memorable conclusion of this final moral struggle comes when Huck decides to go to hell for Jim's sake. He will try to free Jim from captivity. Lionel Trilling comments on this scene: "The intensity of his struggle over the act suggests how deeply he is involved in the society which he rejects. The satiric brilliance of the episode lies, of course, in Huck's solving his problem not by doing 'right' but by doing 'wrong.'" 32 Eric Solomon states that Huck's decision at this point is his most significant moral commitment, because "for the first

29. Clemens, Huckleberry Finn, p. 234.
30. Ibid., p. 269.
32. Lionel Trilling, Introduction to The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (New York, 1948), xii.
time Huck acts positively to free Jim, actually stealing him from slavery instead of going along with a *fait accompli*. The decision which Tom Sawyer makes to help Huck, thus initiating the long Evasion Sequence, is less admirable, however, for, as we have already seen, Tom's position within society would make his action impossible if he had not known that Jim was actually a free man. Moreover, Tom Sawyer obviously lacks Huck's respect for Jim as a human being: in the Evasion Sequence, just as in the second chapter of the novel, Tom looks upon Jim as merely human property, the fitting object for any sort of tricks or degrading activities which imagination can devise.

But if Huck's decision -- in contrast to Tom's -- is a meaningful moral commitment, why should he go along with Tom Sawyer's romantic, Walter-Scott absurdities instead of going about the freeing of Jim in the most direct manner? This and other questions relating to the apparent loss of dignity and the breaking up of the warm human relationship between Huck and Jim have been raised by numerous critics. Also puzzling is Huck's apparently inconsistent reply to Aunt Sally's question about the imaginary steamboat catastrophe: after making his most decisive commitment to the human rights of the Negro Jim,

he answers Aunt Sally's question with, "No'm. Killed a nigger." The explanation for all these seeming inconsistencies in Huck's character and in his relationship with Jim lies in Huck's background as a social outcast. He has learned the hard way that life offers no quarter for those who must rely solely upon their own wits: constant adaptation to his surroundings, Huck has found, offers his best chance for survival in a harsh world. First for his own sake, and later for Jim's, Huck has constantly adopted a chameleon nature. As part of this chameleon nature, Huck had developed the ability to assume different identities on a moment's notice. Eric Solomon notes "six major deceptions" of this sort in the course of the novel. But more important than the mere changes of identity is Huck's capacity to change the outward aspect of his very character to best fit the exigencies of the various situations in which he finds himself. Thus he adopts the aristocratic manner and drinks to the health of the Grangerfords while staying with that family. When the King and Duke demand treatment appropriate to their royal rank, Huck goes along with them: "If they wanted us to call them kings and dukes, I hadn't no objections, 'long as it

a deed that makes the authorities think about it further." "Sorry, it's done. What I want is my necklace... and I don't give
my necklace... I want no way to partake how it's done so
perhaps in the outlook, when I start to steal a
perhaps he expresses his dissatisfaction repeatedly; most notably
often important with Tom's elaborate imaginary adventures.
numerous serious, real-life adventures on the river, he is
the importance of those schemes, the surly Tom's
Tom's frequent schemes, Huck at least is not cooled by
but, even though they are willing to cooperate with
the Duke's direction.

For the sake of survival, to become a "stick around" under
along with Tom's shenanigans, just as he was willing,
which is his primary concern. Similarly, this is still the
practical result, it will still be the release of Jim,
shenanigans because it will please Tom if he does so, and
her own preoccupations, and that he goes along with Tom's
replies to Aunt Sally's question in a manner which reflects
It should come as no surprise, therefore, that he
less trouble and allows him to survive.
do not because he lacks character, but because it causes
says and does what people around him want him to say and
would keep peace in the family." "36. In short, Huck
Tom's insistence upon going by the "authorities" constitutes, of course, another of Mark Twain's attacks on Southern society's infatuation with the romances of Sir Walter Scott and others. As Richard Adams points out, "It furthers and completes the satire on sentimental literature" which Twain had begun in earlier episodes in the novel. 38 To put it another way, the Evasion Sequence is a stringing together of incongruities and absurdities in the manner outlined in "How to Tell a Story."

Twain's essay on "How to Tell a Story" offers a final clue to the understanding of the ending of Huck Finn, for the whole book may be viewed as an attempt on Twain's part to write a novel on the pattern -- so ubiquitous, on a smaller scale, in all of Twain's writings -- of the mounting climax, the pause, and the all-important "snapper" at the end. The building up of tension in Huck's three moral decisions concerning Jim reaches a climax with the decision to go to hell and defy the Southern code. The Evasion Sequence represents an easing of the tension, a light comic pause in the real action of the novel. The "snapper" at the end, the line which Twain emphasizes by the pause which has preceded it, is Huck's decision to leave Southern society, with its

cruel institution of slavery, its hypocrisy, its sadism and chicanery -- all the evils that Huck has witnessed in his downriver journey -- and, equally important, the false romanticism that he has seen in Tom Sawyer throughout the Long Evasion Sequence. When Huck decides "to light out for the Territory," he expresses his complete rejection of Southern society, a society to which he never really belonged and which he was therefore able to criticize more freely than Tom Sawyer, and he escapes from the world of unreality, in which Tom is doomed to remain, to a new world of reality on the frontier. In repeating the decision of Sam Clemens to leave the South and go west, Huck is not, as some critics maintain, rejecting civilization in favor of a Rousseauistic primitivism. He is rather leaving a corrupt and unrealistic society for another, very different society in the West, a society which Mark Twain knew well and which he turned to when he wished to escape his own Tom-Sawyerish involvement in the Civil War. It is thus that Huck's sound heart gains its moral victory over a distorted conscience.
CHAPTER IV

THE TRAGEDY OF PUDD'NHEAD WILSON

Considered as mordant and telling satire of the institutions and mores of the Old South, The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson is in many ways the equal -- and in some ways the superior -- of even Huckleberry Finn. Published in 1894, nearly ten years after Huckleberry Finn, Pudd'nhead Wilson lacks the finish and ease of style which characterize the greater part of Mark Twain's masterpiece, but by the same token it also lacks the mellow, lyrical passages which in Huckleberry Finn tend to soften the violent satirical effects of such passages as the Boggs-Sherburn episode. Twain began the later novel, with only mildly satirical intent, as a burlesque which would involve the risible reactions of a small Southern village to an Italian version of Siamese twins. This farcical sketch may still be read, by those with enough curiosity to tackle it, in "Those Extraordinary Twins," which Twain preserved by way of contrast to his finished novel; but, as often happened when Mark's genius took the reins, the tale in the fashioning soon lost all resemblance to its original pattern and became a serious novel. Still working from a "double" motif, in which an aristocratic white baby is exchanged in the cradle with a
legal slave, who looks white because he is in reality only one-thirty-second part Negro, the final version of Pudd'nhead Wilson has as its central themes the problems of racial prejudice, slavery, and miscegenation, thus striking even more boldly than had Huckleberry Finn at the most sensitive raw nerve-endings of Southern society.

Strangely enough, critics -- in the North at least -- were slow to recognize or comment upon this aspect of The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson. Whereas Huckleberry Finn has attracted volumes of critical commentary, from the time of its publication to the present, Pudd'nhead Wilson has, almost until the last decade, been either entirely ignored, or else discussed with offhand generalizations and then dismissed, by the majority of critics. Thus the long first portion of the chronicle of this novel's treatment at the hands of literary critics presents itself as a series of brief and often repetitious comments.

Although it was to be considerable time before Northerners would perceive the full bitterness with which Twain had attacked Southern mores in Pudd'nhead Wilson, at least one more sensitive Southerner immediately saw through the book's thin veil of humor. In the very year of its publication (1894), a reviewer in the Southern Magazine declared that Pudd'nhead Wilson ought justly to be entitled "The Decline and Fall of Mark Twain," for in it, the author
was "substituting circus posters for accurate photographs of life and people in the South."¹ This vehement denial of the accuracy of Twain's social commentary was to mark the only instance in print of the recognition of the book's satirical content until the re-discovery of this aspect, many years later.

Northern critical opinion of the novel was, for roughly the next forty years, favorable but without any noticeable trace of excitement: the satire on Southern society went, apparently, unnoticed. Albert Bigelow Paine, for instance, characterized Pudd'nhead Wilson as "not one of Mark Twain's great books, but only one of his good books." He went on to say, "From the first to last it is interesting, and there are strong situations and chapters finely written. The character of Roxy is thoroughly alive, and her weird relationship with her half-breed (sic) son is startling enough."² Paine made no comment, however, about the society which made possible the "weird relationship" between Roxy and Tom.

Similarly, we find Theodore Dreiser, as late as 1935, ranking Pudd'nhead Wilson alongside Tom Sawyer and "The American Claimant" as innocuously humorous writing --

¹. As quoted by Philip S. Foner, in Mark Twain, Social Critic (New York, 1958), pp. 215-16.
². Paine, p. 999.
in contrast to such works as *The Mysterious Stranger* and *What Is Man?*, which Dreiser regarded as representative of the philosophical and satirical side of Twain.3

A slight variation on the general critical theme regarding *Pudd'nhead Wilson* was offered in 1920 by Van Wyck Brooks in *The Ordeal of Mark Twain*. Brooks of course, with his particular psychological-biographical hypothesis to support, insisted that Twain had revealed "the true history of his life" through the preoccupation with the Jekyll-and-Hyde theme of dual personalities in this and other works. Moreover, Brooks declared, in the aphorisms of *Pudd'nhead* which served as chapter headings, Twain was expressing "the opinions of the cynic he had become owing to the suppression and the constant curdling as it were of the poet in him."4

Having exploited certain salient features of the novel in the furtherance of his thesis, Brooks had no interest in examining this particular work in more detail. Such refusal to come to grips with the novel through any sort of detailed analysis is easily understandable in a work such as *The Ordeal*, but it would be much more difficult


to account for the similarly superficial treatment given to *Pudd'nhead Wilson* by virtually all critics prior to 1950. Whatever the reason, the fact remains that, even during the years in which numerous critical battles were being waged over *Huck Finn* and other works, it was the convention to discuss *Pudd'nhead Wilson* -- if at all -- in general and usually laudatory terms, in brief comments sandwiched between lengthier discussions of Twain's other works. The one improvement over the criticisms of Paine and Dreiser lay in an increasing awareness of the significance of *The Tragedy* as a criticism of Southern life. Quite naturally, such discussions focused first upon the outstanding facet of Twain's treatment of the Negro. Edward Wagenknecht, in *Mark Twain: The Man and His Work*, states:

Twain loved the negro, and probably no white man ever dealt more justly with that race than Mark Twain did in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, where all its faults are so mercilessly revealed, yet so tenderly and understandingly, so utterly without any sense of racial superiority.5

Going beyond merely the treatment of the Negro, to Twain's portrayal of slaveocracy as a whole -- and of miscegenation as a particular manifestation of its evils -- D. L. Ferguson writes:

The foundation of *Pudd'nhead Wilson* . . . is the moral overhead of slavery, the relations of white masters with slave women, and the degradation to slave status of children with only a minute fraction of Negro blood. If any other American author in the nineteenth century handled that ticklish theme of miscegenation, and handled it without preaching, I have yet to find the book in which it was done.6

By the time Dixon Wecter wrote his article on Twain for *Literary History of the U. S.* (1946), such a generalization had become a commonplace: "The novel is a daring, though inconclusive, study of miscegenation."7

In *Turn West, Turn East* (1951), Henry Seidel Canby made two original contributions to the growing number of critical evaluations, one that Roxy is "the only completely real woman in Twain's books,"8 and the other that Pudd'nhead was "cast for the role of a grown-up Tom Sawyer";9 both remarks have been frequently echoed by subsequent critics.

In another original contribution two years later, Guy A. Cardwell, examining the biographical incidents which might have led to Twain's unusually frank treatment of sex and miscegenation, hazarded the guess that, during his association with George Washington Cable on their lecture tour of

1884-85, Twain may have been influenced by the other Southern writer's "frank recognition of sex as a human and literary motive."¹⁰

The view of Pudd'nhead Wilson as a novel of social criticism grew even stronger in the late 1950's, and with increased interest came a trend toward more detailed treatment of the novel. Philip S. Foner, in Mark Twain, Social Critic, cites specific passages to back up his interpretation that Twain "boldly asserts that the Negro slaves were fully justified in stealing from their masters."¹¹

Expanding from this point, Foner declares:

Thus Twain rejected the concepts of literary figures in post-Civil War America—headed by Thomas Nelson Page—who glorified the plantation tradition, provided their readers with nostalgic pictures of "happy and faithful slaves," "kind and considerate masters," and "wretched and disillusioned freedmen" who longed to return to the "care-free happiness" of slavery.¹²

Lewis Leary goes on to make the connection between Pudd'nhead Wilson and subsequent American writings:

The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson is filled with familiar failings, false starts, and rambling excursions. The title makes us wonder why it is Pudd'nhead's tragedy. But it contains excellencies also, of a kind which Sherwood Anderson was to use in writing about village people, and which have

¹¹ Foner, p. 199.
¹² Ibid.
earned for it a reputation as "the most extraordinary book in American literature," filled with intolerable insights into evil. Even distorted by drollery, it penetrates toward recognition of social ills not unlike those which William Faulkner was later to probe.13

With these views of Foner and Leary, we have at last come a full circle, and can understand -- at least partially -- the outraged tone of that early reviewer in the Southern Magazine in 1894.

The somewhat ambivalent character of Mark Twain as social commentator is pointed out by Louis J. Budd, who takes Twain to task for what he considers the pre-judicial remark that "the colored deacon himself could not resist a ham" in an unguarded smokehouse.14 Budd further comments on Twain's portrayal of the viciousness of Tom Driscoll, which caused his own mother, Roxy, to say about the one-thirty-second of him which was Negro, "'taint wuth savin'; 'taint wuth totin' out on a 'shovel en throwin' in de gutter,"15 and then compares this out-of-context passage with the interpretation which he ascribes to Twain's attitude toward Judge Driscoll and Pembroke Howard, who "got a much better press than Huck would have given them, especially for their stiff-necked loyalty to

13. Lewis Leary, Mark Twain (Minneapolis, 1960), p. 36.


15. Ibid.
the code duello." On the positive side, Budd concludes by applauding Twain's treatment of the miscegenation theme:

... Twain had been aware for some while that more than one slaveowner took his female property to bed. Roxy's history made its point loud and clear -- without a dulling veil of sentimentality for these scenes, it holds a spotlight on her illicit union with an F. F. V. and even rubs the truth in several times, as when she scolds her son for disgracing his father's high bloodline.

Two recent studies of Pudd' nhead Wilson, one by Leslie Fiedler and one by Henry Nash Smith, make some outstanding contributions to the general understanding of Twain's satirical intentions in the novel. Both studies contain detailed discussions of the text, as well as drawing upon relevant outside material, but the two approaches are quite different, as are some of the conclusions reached by these two critics.

In a two-article series which appeared in The New Republic in 1955, Leslie Fiedler applied his own unique approach to the novel. The weakness in this study -- considered as literary criticism -- stems from the fact that Fiedler is not working from the basis of a sound understanding of the corpus of Twain's writing, and that he is not, in fact, even looking directly at this particular novel as Twain wrote it, but attempting rather to see,

16. Ibid.
17. Ibid., p. 155.
beyond or behind it, manifestations of his own particular socio-psychological theories; nevertheless, Fiedler does raise many provocative questions. We have already seen two of his pronouncements, in the phrases, "the most extraordinary book in American literature" and "intolerable insights into evil," as quoted by Lewis Leary in 1960, five years after they were coined by Fiedler. Another of Fiedler's assertions which seems worthy of notice is that Pudd'nhead Wilson is "one of the most honest books in our literature, superior in this one respect to Huckleberry Finn."18 Compared with Huck Finn, Fiedler continues, "the lyricism and the euphoria are gone; we have fallen to a world of prose, and there are no triumphs of Twain's rhetoric to preserve us from the revealed failures of our own humanity."19

Concerning the setting of Pudd'nhead Wilson, Fiedler shrewdly observes that "we see Twain's mythicized Hannibal for the first time from the outside," as contrasted with Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn, in which "we are already inside of it when the action begins, and there is no opportunity to step back and survey it."20 In Pudd'nhead Wilson, moreover,

19. Ibid.
Hannibal is felt from the beginning not as a Western but as a Southern town. The river is no longer presented as the defining edge of the natural world, what America touches and crosses on its way West: but as a passageway into the darkness of the deep South. "Down the river" is the phrase which gives a kind of musical unity to the work—a motif repeated with variation from Roxana's first jesting taunt to a fellow Negro, "If you b'longed to me I'd sell you down the river 'fo' you git too fur gone . . ." to the bleak irony of the novel's final sentence, "the Governor . . . pardoned Tom at once, and the creditors sold him down the river."²¹

Turning from the slavery issue as a Southern characteristic of Dawson's Landing to the equally Southern concern with the chivalric "code of honor," Fiedler declares that everyone in the society which Twain pictured subscribes to the "code":

Patrician and Negro, American and foreigner, free-thinker and churchgoer, all accept the notion that an insult can only be wiped out in blood, and that the ultimate proof of manhood is the willingness to risk death in such an attempt. The real demonstration of the unworthiness of the false Tom is his running to the courts for redress in preference to facing a duel. Ironically enough, this very duel was to have been in the book as originally planned a howling travesty of the values of the gentleman; for one of the parties was to have been half of a Siamese twin—and one can see what mad complications would have ensued.²²

Even the skeptical Pudd'nhead, Fiedler asserts, "longs not for bare survival but for style and success — and so he

²¹, Ibid.
²², Ibid.
must pay his Tom Sawyerish respects to chivalry." 23

Although Wilson appears in the beginning of the novel as "a pariah, the sage whose wisdom is taken for folly: an outsider in a closed society," he longs for success -- like Mark Twain himself, says Fiedler, agreeing at this point with the hypothesis of Van Wyck Brooks; Pudd'nhead, then, unconsciously adopts the values of the society in which he lives "even before it accepts him, adjusting to its code of honor, its definition of a Negro -- while writing down in private or reading before a two man Free Thinkers' Society his dangerous thoughts." 24

Thus Fiedler sees in the novel two conflicting themes: the tragic racial theme, with Tom Driscoll as its central figure, and the melodramatic mystery theme, in which Pudd'nhead Wilson is the central figure.

The tragedy of Tom requires that he expose and destroy himself; the melodrama of Pudd'nhead Wilson requires that he reveal and bring to justice the Negro who has passed as white; and Twain decided finally that it was Pudd'nhead's book--a success story. 25

This dual view of Pudd'nhead Wilson is essentially echoed by Henry Nash Smith as part of his careful critical analysis of the novel in Mark Twain: The Development of a

23. Ibid.
25. Ibid., p. 17.
Smith, however, points out that the two aspects of the plot both function in the novel's expression of a single theme:

... the central theme of Pudd'nhead Wilson is still the corrupt state of the official culture of Dawson's Landing—that is, Hannibal—and the plot of the novel is focused around two acts which, in quite different ways, call attention to evils beneath the apparently placid surface of it. The first act, the slave Roxana's desperate effort to free her son by exchanging him with her master's son in the cradle, is frustrated by the second, which consists in Wilson's detection of Roxy's stratagem more than twenty years later.  

Having somewhat developed and clarified the view expressed by Fiedler, Smith goes on to develop the idea that "the corrupt state of the official culture of Dawson's Landing" was intended by Twain to be the object of serious social satire. He emphasizes the ironic picture of Southern aristocracy, as represented in the novel chiefly by Judge Driscoll and his younger brother, Percy Northumberland Driscoll, the descendents of one of the First Families of Virginia.

Further details are added to the portrait of the complete Dawson's Landing gentleman by the military title of Colonel Essex and his sexual interest in handsome slave women. The fourth member of the dominant clique, Pembroke Howard, is the leading local authority on the etiquette of dueling. The names borrowed from Tudor nobility

that are given to Judge Driscoll and his con-
geners, and to Tom (who was christened Thomas
a Becket Driscoll), establish an ironic link
between the rather paltry elite of Dawson's
Landing and the English aristocracy Hank Morgan
had annihilated at the end of A Connecticut
Yankee. 27

Like Fiedler, however, Smith feels that "the reader is
expected to feel contempt for Tom because he is too cowardly
to challenge the Count." 28 This, I feel, constitutes a
contradiction in Smith's view of the novel -- and it is
an unnecessary contradiction, for he immediately goes on
to point out, but not ironically as Fiedler had done,
Twain's original intentions concerning the duel in the
burlesque version of the story. He goes on to cite a
passage in Life on the Mississippi as proof of Twain's
satirical attitude. 29 (He might equally well have cited
the Sherburn-Boggs incident in Huckleberry Finn as addi-
tional proof.)

Turning to the figure of Tom Driscoll as the
embodiment of some of the novel's principal themes, Smith
emphasizes Twain's concern with the effects of environment,
"the notion of training -- the shaping of the personality

27. Ibid., p. 175.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
by society."30 Thus he is speaking not of racial heredity, but rather of "the perversions resulting from generations of the bad training imposed by slavery,"31 when he declares that Tom Driscoll "exhibits the worst traits ascribed to both races in this fictive world--the lax morals and cowardice of the Negro . . . the indolence and affectation of white aristocrats . . ."32

Finally, Smith comments upon Pudd'inhead Wilson as a character, placing him -- along with Colonel Sherburn, Hank Morgan, and Satan in The Mysterious Stranger -- in that group of characters in Mark Twain's later work known as "transcendent figures."33 Pudd'inhead, as Smith views him, however, is not a full-fledged transcendent figure. He does not, like Twain's later invention, Satan, possess omniscience. Also, instead of being completely immune to the demands of society, "Wilson suffers from his twenty years' isolation and wishes to be accepted as a member of the community, even to the point of being gratified by his popularity after his triumph in the trial scene."34 Smith concludes, however, that Pudd'inhead is

30. Ibid., p. 172.
31. Ibid., p. 179.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid., p. 136.
34. Ibid., p. 181.
acting in the capacity of a transcendent figure when he singlehandedly brings about the denouement of the complex story and, at the same time, demonstrates his transcendent insight into the true condition of the society in which he finds himself:

When Wilson reveals in the courtroom that the supposed Tom Driscoll is a bastard, a thief, a murderer, and worst of all a Negro, he demonstrates that the official culture, with its vaunted ideals of honor and chivalry and ancient lineage, is merely a facade for deceit, avarice, and illegitimacy.35

Having presented, as the culmination of the critical history of *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, the very thorough analyses of Fiedler and Smith, it only remains for me to point out what I consider to be a few additions and corrections. I would agree, as is no doubt obvious from the emphasis of my presentation, with all that has been said by all the critics concerning the novel as a satire on Southern mores. But I would like to accentuate this aspect of Twain's work even more strongly, if possible, by pointing out some details which have been overlooked.

First of all, we have seen that many critics -- Wagenknecht and Budd among them -- have been troubled by Twain's portrayal of the viciousness of Tom Driscoll. Critics who have been thus offended have apparently

accepted at face value Roxy's view that the evil part of
Tom's character is the result of his Negro blood. A more
likely interpretation, however, is that Twain intended
Roxy's comments to be taken as a double irony, showing
how completely she has accepted the prevailing definition
of a slave, which includes anyone with even the minutest
trace of Negro blood -- she herself is only one-sixteenth
Negro -- as well as her acquiescence in the stereotyped
notions about Negro worthlessness and depravity. When
we stop to consider the truth about Tom's heritage, we
are reminded that he has only a ridiculously small pro-
portion of Negro blood, and we are led to the conclusion
that the viciousness of Tom Driscoll is much more
logically the result of the predominant portion of his
heredity, his connection with the First Families of
Virginia, through his father, Colonel Essex. He is
logically, though not legally, an aristocrat by both
heredity and environment; the picture Twain gives us of
this young aristocrat speaks for itself.

As a second point, I would like to add to Fiedler's
remarks about the "Southernness" of Dawson's Landing by
calling attention to a small but significant fact which has
apparently gone unnoticed by the critics. Twain, in
locating the setting of his most sustained satire on the
South, carefully points out in the opening paragraph of
the novel that Dawson's Landing is "half a day's journey, per steamboat, below St. Louis." He has thus removed the village from the actual site of Hannibal -- and the fictional site of St. Petersburg -- to a point which, although still in Missouri, is a considerable distance "down the river." By thus freeing himself from the environs of the Hannibal idyll, and its attendant non-Southern qualities, Twain found the additional freedom which he needed in order to exercise the full extent of his satire. The move down river is similar to that in Huck's raft journey: Twain's satire is more bitter when he is writing about regions south of Hannibal. Dawson's Landing, as Fiedler has pointed out, is unlike St. Petersburg in being a truly Southern town, rather than a frontier town. Being still a Missouri village, it is portrayed by Twain with the master strokes of authenticity. It is not, on the other hand, another St. Petersburg. Aided by a considerable influx of aristocracy from the Old Dominion, as well as by its more Southerly location, Dawson's Landing is typically Southern in its definitions of such terms as "gentleman," "honor," and "nigger." It remains, however, far enough north to allow for the

all-important contrast with the Deep South, which makes its appearance in the thematic repetition of the phrase "down the river." Twain has struck the perfect balance for his satirical purposes.

My final point concerns the novel's title, The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson. Many critics have wondered, along with Lewis Leary, "why it is Pudd'nhead's tragedy," but no one appears to have found a satisfactory answer. I would like to suggest that, if we take the novel's primary concern as satirical, there is a very real sense in which the story is Pudd'nhead's tragedy. The moment of glory in the courtroom is also, by a double-edged irony, the occasion of Pudd'nhead's fall -- for, although he has exposed the hidden corruption of society, he has done so only by accepting, tacitly, the values of that society: cheap courtroom thrills, the code of honor, the definition of a slave. He has achieved success certainly enough -- but it is the petty glory defined as success by the very villagers of whom he has up to this point been contemptuous. As Henry Nash Smith has pointed out, Pudd'nhead Wilson is potentially a transcendent figure; this is clear from his relation to society throughout most of the novel. It is this potential which gives him tragic stature, even though he is a relatively underdeveloped character compared to Roxy or Tom Driscoll. But Pudd'nhead fails to emerge a
transcendent figure in the end -- his story is not, as Fiedler as well as Smith would have it, "a success story," at least in terms of the values with which Twain has clearly underscored his novel -- and herein lies the tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson.

Two passages from Twain's other works may help to clarify the nature of Pudd'nhead's tragic fall. The first passage, from Roughing It, reveals Mark Twain's contempt for the jury system as a means of attaining justice. Similar views are presented in other works, but this passage is representative:

... Alfred the Great, when he invented trial by jury, and knew that he had admirably framed it to secure justice in his age of the world, was not aware that in the nineteenth century the condition of things would be so entirely changed that unless he rose from the grave and altered the jury plan to meet the emergency, it would prove the most ingenious and infallible agency for defeating justice that human wisdom could contrive. For how could he imagine that we simpletons would go on using his jury plan after circumstances had stripped it of its usefulness, any more than he could imagine that we would go on using his candle clock after we had invented chronometers?37

In view of these opinions of Twain's, it is clear that the melodramatic trial scene in Pudd'nhead Wilson must be regarded as primarily a farce, and most farcical of all is Pudd'nhead's sensational, Tom-Sawyerish courtroom manner.

When he makes his final, histrionic speech -- "Valet de Chambre, negro and slave -- falsely called Thomas a Becket Driscoll--make upon the window the finger-prints that will hang you!" -- he makes himself the most prominent participant in the farce which involves the entire village. The scene has overtones similar to those in Tom Sawyer's return to participate in his own funeral and that great satirical scene, the public hearing in "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg."

Further light is shed on Pudd'nhead's character in another of Twain's works, "A Scrap of Curious History." Here Mark Twain relates a true episode from his boyhood, the story of Robert Hardy, a man who, curiously enough, bears a strong resemblance to Pudd'nhead Wilson, and who clearly demonstrates what Pudd'nhead might have been as a "transcendent figure."

Robert Hardy was our first abolitionist--awful name! He was a journeyman cooper, and worked in the big cooper-shop belonging to the great pork-packing establishment which was Marion City's chief pride and sole source of prosperity. He was a New-Englander, a stranger, and, being a stranger, he was of course regarded as an inferior person . . . and of course, also, he was made to feel unwelcome . . . . Hardy was thirty years old, and a bachelor; pale, given to reverie and reading. He was reserved, and seemed to prefer the isolation which had fallen to his lot. He was treated to many side remarks by his fellows, but as he did not resent them it was decided that he was a coward.
All of a sudden he proclaimed himself an abolitionist—straight out and publicly! He said that negro slavery was a crime, an infamy. For a moment the town was paralyzed with astonishment; then it broke into a fury of rage and swarmed toward the cooper-shop to lynch Hardy. But the Methodist minister made a powerful speech to them and stayed their hands. He proved to them that Hardy was insane and not responsible for his words; that no man could be sane and utter such words.  

Hardy, in trying to help an escaped slave, killed the town constable, was jailed and tried in the midst of a great public furor—"... people came from all the farms around, and from Hannibal, and Quincy, and even from Keokuk..."—and finally he was convicted and hanged. Viewed beside the saga of Robert Hardy, a man who possessed the courage to truly transcend the opinions of his environment, Pudd'nhead Wilson's melodramatic manner of seeking after public acclaim appears tragic indeed.

The chapter headings taken from Pudd'nhead's "Calendar" furnish throughout the novel an unmistakable testimony of the earlier transcendent insight of our tragic hero, but by the end of the tragedy he has collaborated with the enemy to the extent that he has accepted not only the popular definition of success, but also—as Fiedler pointed out—the prevailing code of honor, and the

39. Ibid., p. 519.
definition of a Negro. Since the excerpts from the "Calendar" continue to function as chapter headings even in those chapters in which Pudd'nhead undergoes his fall, we see that he has provided his own ironic comments on his actions. At the head of the chapter which relates the trial scene, we find this observation: "April 1. This is the day upon which we are reminded of what we are on the other three hundred and sixty-four." 40 It was with extraordinary insight that Pudd'nhead had penned this aphorism--for he had used the first person plural, thus placing himself within the society he satirized, a position which the truly transcendent figure--Satan, for instance--could never occupy. Finally, at the head of the Conclusion of Pudd'nhead's tragedy, there appears this ironic comment: "October 12, the Discovery. It was wonderful to find America, but it would have been more wonderful to miss it." 41 This sentiment applies equally well to the discovery by which Pudd'nhead Wilson solved the mystery, attained popular success for himself, broke Roxy's heart, converted Chambers into a pathetic misfit, and transported Tom down the river into slavery. It was indeed a wonderful discovery, one which proved that Pudd'nhead was after all a

40. Clemens, Pudd'nhead Wilson, p. 131.
41. Ibid., p. 142.
human being instead of a permanently transcendent skeptic -- and it would have been more "wonderful" if the discovery had not been made.

When Mark Twain set out to write something with a satirical intent, he had two inkwells into which he dipped his pen -- one containing vitriol, and the other containing disappearing vitriol, which, like disappearing ink, might contain a message in latent form for many years before appearing with any clarity to the eyes of readers. The portions of The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson which owe their origin to the latter source are none the less effective today for their long period of obscurity.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Mark Twain's vitriolic satire on the South and Southerners in Huckleberry Finn and Pudd'nhead Wilson marked the culmination, in his literary works, of a long process of change from the typically Southern attitudes of his boyhood to a violently anti-Southern position. William Dean Howells, who was a close friend of Twain's during the years of his greatest literary activity, called him "the most desouthernized Southerner I ever knew," and went on to justify this strong statement:

No man more perfectly sensed and more entirely abhorred slavery, and no one has ever poured such scorn upon the second-hand, Walter-Scotticized, pseudo-chivalry of the Southern ideal. He held himself responsible for the wrong which the white race had done the black race in slavery, and he explained, in paying the way of a negro student through Yale, that he was doing it as his part of the reparation due from every white to every black man.¹

Walter Blair has pointed out that during the years when he was writing Huckleberry Finn, Twain was actually financing college educations for two Negroes.² The fact that Howells was

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¹ William Dean Howells, My Mark Twain (New York, 1910), p. 35.
² Blair, Mark Twain and Huckleberry Finn, p. 323.
unaware of the second object of Twain's philanthropy probably indicates that he carried out anonymously more projects of "reparation" than anyone then knew or will ever know. Mark Twain's private actions are an eloquent comment upon the sincerity of his sympathetic literary portrayals of such memorable Negro characters as Aunt Rachel, Jim, and Roxy.

Another private testimony to the de-Southernized nature of the mature Mark Twain is found in a letter which he wrote in 1876 to J. H. Burrough, of Cape Girardeau, Missouri. In the letter he comments about the youth, Sam Clemens, whom Burrough had known years before: "Ignorance, intolerance, egotism, self-assertion, opaque perception, dense and pitiful chuckleheadedness—and an almost pathetic unconsciousness of it all. That is what I was at 19-20, and that is what the average Southerner is at 60 today."\(^3\) Clearly Mark Twain had come a long way: not only was he able, in 1876, to analyze and point out basic flaws in the character of a narrow-minded Southerner -- he was also capable of realizing that, as a youth, he had himself been an epitome of such narrow-mindedness.

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Obviously, many and powerful influences must have been brought to bear upon Mark Twain over the years to bring about such a profound change in his character. Some of these influences, perhaps, cannot now be discerned, but a survey of the more notable of them is in order.

The climax of Mark Twain's dedication to Southern principles came when he volunteered for service in the Confederate Army in 1861; when he resigned his commission and lit out for the territories, he deliberately left the South, never again to return except for brief visits. Mark Twain's residence in the Far West undoubtedly had an important liberalizing effect upon his thinking, as Kenneth Lynn and others have insisted. Another, less frequently noted influence was undoubtedly exerted during Mark Twain's Western years by his brother Orion, a close companion, whose idealism was greatly respected by Twain even though he sometimes ridiculed the impracticality of the elder Clemens. Orion had grown up amid the same Southern surroundings as Twain himself, but his residence in Iowa had converted him into an ardent Unionist and abolitionist; it was Orion's active support of Abraham Lincoln during his campaign that won for him the office of Secretary of Nevada Territory after the election. 4

The effect of Orion's liberal views on his secessionist brother ought not to be underestimated.

When Mark Twain left the West it was as a roving newspaper correspondent. Seeing first-hand the peoples and institutions of other parts of the world is one of the best possible antidotes to provincialism. As Twain himself remarked in *The Innocents Abroad*: "Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness..."\(^5\)

The effects of travel on the process of de-Southernization were no doubt enhanced by his marriage to Olivia Langdon and subsequent residence in Hartford, Connecticut. Livy's parents were ardent abolitionists; during her childhood, the Langdon home had served as a way station for runaway slaves en route to Canada on the Underground Railroad.\(^6\) Livy's effect on Mark Twain's writing, as well as on his private opinions, has been the object of many critical discussions. Whatever we may think of the esthetic results of her influence in Twain's fiction, it must be conceded that her liberal racial views had a beneficial effect on her husband's thinking. A less prominent but still important influence is to be found in Twain's association with such men as Howells, Warner, and Twichell, and with New England society in general. In the


\(^6\) Meltzer, p. 125.
letter to J. H. Burrough, already quoted in this chapter, Twain comments on his choice of Hartford as his home:
"Fortunately a good deal of experience . . . enabled me to choose my residence wisely. I live in the freest corner of the country." 7

Once the de-Southernization of Mark Twain had been effected, it was necessary that he reorient his thinking in relation to the South of his nativity before he could write effective satire. Much private pondering on the subject no doubt prepared Twain for the writing of his masterful satires, Huckleberry Finn and Pudd'nhead Wilson, but also important in the process was mental stimulation from outside sources. One such source was his association with another thoughtful de-Southernized Southerner, George Washington Cable. 8 Another important source of outside stimulation was Twain's 1882 trip on the Mississippi, which enabled him to crystalize his theories by actual contact with the South which he had not seen for many years.

Thus the influences which brought about the de-Southernization of Mark Twain were many and varied, but most important of all was that internal quality with which

7. Clemens, The Portable Mark Twain, p. 150.
8. For an excellent and thorough discussion of this phase of Mark Twain's life see Guy A. Cardwell's Twins of Genius.
he endowed his greatest fictional creation, Huck Finn -- "a sound heart."

The pattern of Mark Twain's relationship with the South, in life and letters, is characterized, first by uncritical acceptance of Southern values, then, by rejection of them, and finally, by active hostility. This steady progression, however, is not without its contradictory elements -- such as Twain's remark to Howells at a time when he had supposedly rejected the Southern point of view, "When I read that review of yours, I felt like the woman who was so glad her baby had come white."8 Thus, the pattern of Mark Twain as Southerner, valid when viewed as a whole, must remain imperfect in many of its smaller details, for Mark Twain was a man who, above all, refused to fit into patterns of any sort during his lifetime and who has continued to be the nemesis of theorists to this day. As Twain himself once remarked, "There is no way of accounting for people. You have to take them as they are."9

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