

MARK TWAIN'S FINAL PHASE

There are two basic reasons for treating the last twenty years of Mark Twain's life, after the completion of *A Connecticut Yankee* in 1889, as a separate critical problem: though the period constitutes a distinct phase of his literary development, it has been relatively neglected; and it may have been largely misunderstood.

I

The main chronological phases of Twain's career as a writer are five: his early journalistic work (1851-1871); his early books, largely travel writings and miscellaneous sketches, but including his first attempt, with C. D. Warner, at novel (1867-1875); his forties, bounded by *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn* (1876-1885); his fifties, wielding the *Yankee*, *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, and *Jean of Arc* (1886-1896); and his last years (1897-1910). The first three of these phases have been rather closely studied and criticized: the miscellaneous early, western, and other journalistic writings have been well edited, on the whole, though these too might repay more thorough study and analysis; the early books have been lovingly and critically read; and the great period has received a great deal of well-deserved and reasonably adequate attention.¹

But when one goes beyond *Huck Finn*, the picture gets more complex and confusing. There have been interesting and

1. Including WALTER BLAIR'S industrious *Mark Twain and Huck Finn* (1960); and see the bibliographies in *Eight American Authors* (MLA, 1956), as reprinted with Bibliographical Supplement by J. C. MATHEWS (New York, 1963). Characteristically, F. R. ROGERS' *Mark Twain's Burlesque Patterns* (1960), ends its useful analysis with *Huck Finn*.

useful essays on various aspects of those later years, and about some of the books then published (notably, *A Connecticut Yankee*, *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, and the posthumous *The Mysterious Stranger*); but no one has as yet attempted to see the last third of Twain's life in its entirety. For most of our facts, we must still turn to Volumes III and IV of Albert Bigelow Paine's somewhat unreliable biography. Critically speaking, it has been difficult to see the forest for the trees: we have been too easily diverted from the literary developments by the spectacular episodes of the Paige typesetting machine, Twain's bankruptcy and financial recovery after his world lecture tour, the personal tragedies he suffered in his family—and by the legendary figure of the « jolly joker », dressed in white, being used by journalists for headlines, like the aging Shaw. Yet Twain continued to write and publish prolifically during these years, and the results are far from negligible. Of course, Van Wyck Brooks and curiously enough his critical opponent Bernard DeVoto as well (most clearly in « The Symbols of Despair ») have fixed in our minds the idea of Twain as an aging pessimist, cynic—and literary failure. But we probably tend to assume too easily that creative artists, especially Americans, cannot do their best work in old age. The time has come to reconsider this familiar thesis, and to attempt a fresh look at the works of Twain's final phase.

One source of confusion about Twain's last years has been the fact that much of the evidence is not yet in—or at best available only to scholars, and in widely scattered collections. If this were true only of unpublished letters and notebooks, it might concern chiefly would-be biographers. But there still seem to be many valuable literary fragments in unpublished manuscripts. Our appetites have been whetted by such sporadic publications as some appendices in A. B. Paine's biography; Bernard DeVoto's *Mark Twain in Eruption* (1940), *Mark Twain at Work* (1942), and *Letters from the Earth* (1962); and Charles Neider's editing of the *Autobiography* (1959) and of Twain's « Reflections on God » (*The Hudson Review*, Autumn, 1963). Further, we have been with increasing frequency

teased by references in recent studies (often accompanied by sizeable quotations) to large numbers of unedited manuscript fragments. The final proof of all this pudding will be in the eating; but so far only a privileged few² have been admitted to the feast, and the general reader has the feeling of being allowed only to nibble at the edges of a large, tasty dish. It is significant for our present discussion, however, that most scholars who have looked into these unpublished treasures have found themselves paying more than the usual amount of attention to the writings of Twain's last years. The mystery of those years seems to be not only fascinating and complex, then, but also a rewarding subject of study.

But even if, for the present, we rest content with the material readily available to us in print, there still seems to be a disproportion between the quantity and quality of these later writings, and the amount of attention they have received. Honorable exceptions to the general neglect are those studies in which the principles of organization have been not chronological but by literary types or some other problems or ideas, such as G. C. Bellamy's *Mark Twain as a Literary Artist* (1950) and F. Baldanza's *Mark Twain: An Introduction and Interpretation* (1961). Bernard DeVoto's *Mark Twain at Work* took a clue from Van Wyck Brooks' early attack on « Mark Twain's Despair » (in *The Ordeal of Mark Twain*, 1920) and presented some of the additional evidence, but gave it an excessively « dark » and pseudo-Freudian interpretation.³ The first book on Twain as a writer which began to give a reasonable amount of dispassionate attention (as against Brooks' tendentiousness) to the works of his final phase was Bellamy's, with its separate treatments of his sketches and tales, his travel books, his reminiscences, and his novels—an approach which led her to treat

2. As against the wider potential reading public; the Trustees and Literary Editor of the Mark Twain Papers have been generous in allowing use of unpublished manuscripts by qualified scholars.

3. On the limitations of Brooks' Freudianism, see Chapter V in Louis FRAIBERG, *Psychoanalysis and American Literary Criticism* (Wayne State University, 1960).

in some detail *Following the Equator* (1897), and the posthumous *Autobiography* and *The Mysterious Stranger*, as well as many of the shorter late pieces.

In such a recent chronological study as H. N. Smith's *Mark Twain: The Development of a Writer* (1962), two out of eight chapters are devoted to *A Connecticut Yankee* and after, which seems at first like a just proportion. However, since almost all of Chapter VII is devoted to the *Yankee*, the final chapter of eighteen pages is all one gets for « Pudd'nhead Wilson and After ».⁴ And the title used for this chapter in the book — « This Pathetic Drift between the Eternities » — is one indication that, on the whole, Smith has not deviated from the familiar Brooks-DeVoto line about Twain's « despairing » final phase.

Everyone is agreed that the writing of the *Yankee* book was an important turning-point in Twain's career, but the question of why this was so needs further exploration. Something of a *succès de scandale*, it has been a bone of contention ever since its publication in Twain's fifty-fourth year. It was written in anguish of spirit, with great imaginative verve and a pen at times dipped in vitriol; and when it was done, Twain wrote to Howells: « It's my swan-song, my retirement from literature permanently... » (24 August 1889). His feeling of release, and pleasure in his first critic's understanding of his achievement, may be compared to the mood in which Melville wrote to Hawthorne after completing *Moby-Dick*: « You did not care a penny for the book. But, now and then as you read, you understood the pervading thought that impelled the book — and that you praised. Was it not so? You were archangel enough to despise the imperfect body, and embrace the soul » (Melville to Hawthorne, 17 [?] November, 1851). So Twain to Howells: « Well, my book is written — let it go. But if it were only to write over again there wouldn't be so many things left out. They burn in me; and they keep multiplying and

4. The title given to this chapter when it was published separately as an essay in *The Massachusetts Review*, Vol. III, No. 2 (Winter, 1962).

multiplying; but now they can't ever be said. And besides, they would require a library — and a pen warmed-up in hell » (22 September 1889).

On the one hand, Twain was grateful for the « official » Howells-Stedman verdict of « titanic »; but his sense, one that even the greatest of artists must share, of the inevitable gap between his inspiration and the imperfect execution, is here painfully evident. And the « things left out » — despite Twain's weary feeling that he had composed his swan-song — kept « multiplying and multiplying » further during the final two decades of his life, in ways that require more careful study than they have yet received. In fact, then, the *Yankee* did not close his writing career, but marked a new beginning.

II

The blind spots of critics may have many causes: lack of interest, preconceptions of all sorts, the distorted emphases brought about by changing fashions, and the like. *Huck Finn* has rightly engrossed so much of our attention and affection that there has been a tendency to treat everything thereafter as anti-climactic — until this or that critic focusses attention on the *Yankee*, *Pudd'nhead*, *Hadleyburg*, or the *Stranger*! We intend in this essay no ambitious attempt to set all the crooked straight, or to awaken all the sleepers, but merely to point out a few basic facts, and to sketch the main lines of development, in such a way as to put the period in question into a somewhat truer perspective. We are concerned here less with conclusions, and more with the statement of problems.

One must beware of imposing a uniform developmental pattern on the lives of writers generally, or of American writers as a group, or even those of a particular period and cultural milieu. If we glance at the convenient chronology prepared by F. O. Matthiessen of the five writers he treated in *American Renaissance*, for what it can tell us on the question of maturation and creativity in old age, a tendency to a falling off after

a high point in middle age may seem to appear characteristic. For Emerson, if *English Traits* (1856) ends his important period, there follows a quarter of a century of relative decline. For Thoreau, after *Walden* (1854), we have eight more years of scattered writings. For Hawthorne, after the *Blithedale Romance* (1852), we have twelve empty years, relieved chiefly by *The Marble Faun* (1860), as well as a number of uncompleted projects: he developed slowly, and the flowering was brief.

For Whitman, however, after the first three great editions of *Leaves of Grass* (1855, 1856, 1860), we have thirty-two more years, divided between a decade of interesting developments and important creations, and two decades of semi-paralysis and creative decline. And for Melville, after *Pierre* (1852), we have thirty-nine years, with no more great novels to show. But Melville's staying-powers were underestimated by such early critics as Raymond Weaver, who assumed a long « quietus » after 1857. Of late, increasing attention has been paid to such works as *The Confidence Man*, *The Piazza Tales*, and *Billy Budd*, not to mention the *Battle-Pieces* and later poems; and the importance of *Clarel* has been recognized, though no one has yet progressed beyond W. E. Bezanson's pioneering studies.

The fact of maturation before the Civil War did play an important role, then, and Whitman and Melville are instances of creative responses to the upheaval and to subsequent developments. Emerson, Lowell, and others, for the most part, lived on into the changed America, without much growth as artists, though good work of the second order, with an antebellum flavor, continued to be produced. If we turn to the two giants of post-Civil-War fiction, however, the sense of drastic change is as strong as ever, but their staying-powers seem greater. Henry James reached an early peak with *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), but in the thirty odd years that remained to him, he went through a number of further metamorphoses, producing finally the great trilogy of his « major phase ». And returning now to Twain, whose *Huckleberry Finn* was published in 1884, his remaining twenty-six years were

not spent in idleness or decline — unless one means that he failed to write another *Huck Finn*. But why should he have? That he continued to change and develop is one sign of his personal and artistic maturity.

Of course, such critics as Brooks and DeVoto, who were troubled by evidences of Twain's « despair » and « failure » in his last years, have not applied primarily quantitative criteria; they have been concerned rather with certain qualitative changes, difficult to isolate and define. They have paid Twain the sincere compliment of applying to his achievement the very highest standards — of asking why he failed, in their view, to become the American Rabelais, Cervantes, Swift, Sterne, or Shakespeare — and this after various earlier enthusiastic critics had ventured to make such comparisons. One may see this, in part, as an instance of the general reaction of a critical generation against the merely impressionistic and appreciative evaluations of their predecessors, as well as a necessary corrective to provincial self-praise: if Twain was really a great writer, they have said, we want to formulate more precisely than has been done what the nature and causes of that greatness may have been.

The uniqueness of the major artist always presents this difficulty: he belongs to a company of immortals, his peers on the literary olympus, but his inevitable novelty — what makes him not Swiftian, for example, but Twainian — is usually not understood and assimilated without the help of much careful scholarship and criticism, definition and discrimination. The study of Twain has moved into this necessary phase, and needs now to ask, not only about his essential qualities as a writer, but also how they developed, and what sustained (or failed to sustain) them in his last, difficult years.

III

Instructive comparisons may be made with the case of Hawthorne, ably studied by Edward H. Davidson (*Hawthorne's*

Last Phase, 1949) and more profoundly by Rudolph Von Abele (*The Death of the Artist: A Study of Hawthorne's Disintegration*, 1955). Certain contrasts are obvious: Hawthorne's 60 years, as against Twain's 75; Hawthorne's death in 1864, as against Twain's survival into the twentieth century; the New Englander, as against the product of Mississippi Valley culture; the tragic sense of life, as against the sense of adventure and the humor. But these two writers meet at more points than one might imagine at first, on the grounds chiefly of their American situation. Hawthorne was not incapable of lightness, satire, and humor; and it is partly the dark, despairing, almost tragic note in Twain that has troubled the critics. Using a minimum of psychological jargon, and displaying much literary sensitivity and penetration, Von Abele tried to find the roots of what he considered to have been Hawthorne's « interesting failure », and emerged with a double thesis, « that Hawthorne was crippled in the development of his artistic powers by a pseudo-platonism » (resulting in excess of allegory) and « that he was inhibited as well by a profound unease with respect to his position as a coterie artist in a blatantly democratic culture ».⁵ Inasmuch as this takes into account the inevitable duality of all human experience, its inner and outer relations, it may be seen as paralleling any similar concern with the inner and outer « weather » of Twain's imagination.

The language of « crippled... powers » and inhibition reveals Von Abele's psychological orientation. He noted Hawthorne's « obsession with his inner life », but cautioned us: « The role of neurosis in the artist's fate cannot be generalized... to some it is a goddess, to some a demon ». Important for our purpose is the fact that such an orientation implies a general pattern of personality which may be detected in all the various phases of an artist's career. For Von Abele, Hawthorne's full successes (represented by « Young Goodman Brown » and *The Scarlet Letter*) were very few: « By and large..., especially in the romances, Hawthorne gives one the impression of evading

5. *Op. cit.*, p. 101.

the world » — an extreme judgment, probably, but one shared in essence by such a sympathetic student of Hawthorne as Mark Van Doren.

Melville too had his inner problems, but Von Abele thought he was sufficiently aware of them, and managed to solve them somehow in his writings. Hawthorne, however, « was blocked from such a consummation », except in the major instance of *The Scarlet Letter*, where he is « involved in the psychological texture of the tale to such a degree that this becomes the immediate focus of any reader... ». The complex pattern of neurotic conflict in Hawthorne involved the problem of the artist (Matthiessen's « Problem of the Artist as New Englander » in *American Renaissance*), his feelings of personal and social isolation, and a « disrelish » of sex; and « The nature of these conflicts is such that, for any work to be a successful piece of art, they must be either altogether absent, or in some way transformed into positive, abetting influences... ».⁶

Without going into the details of either « case », we may note that Twain, like Hawthorne, was also troubled, if not necessarily crippled, by a philosophy — determinism; that he endured the difficulties of an artist's life in America, though (where Hawthorne complained of isolation) Twain's problem was one of an excessive popularity and financial success, on which he may have been too dependent; that Twain was very much more the social animal than Hawthorne, participating fully in the experiences of his contemporaries, and enjoying the company of both sexes, in the rough and ready style of the west; and that concerning Twain's « sexuality » and the treatment of sex in his writings there has been much dispute. On the whole, Twain seems to have exhibited a reasonably normal mixture of responses, and to have played down « the facts of life » in print chiefly out of deference to his wife, who represented both the New England mores and the unofficial censorship exercised by his « genteel » reading public. But there

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 20, 30, 45.

does remain also an impression of a certain pruriency and delicacy which may go deeper than mere conformity to conventions.

On the point of Hawthorne's fondness for privacy (a familiar New England trait); Von Abele cited a letter to Margaret Fuller, in which Hawthorne rejected a suggestion that the Hawthornes take Mr. and Mrs. Ellery Channing in as boarders: « Had it been proposed to Adam and Eve to receive two angels into their Paradise... I doubt whether they would have been altogether pleased... ». By way of contrast, one thinks of the Clemens household, when they were in good health, as frequented by guests; and in old age, after the death of his wife, while enjoying with A. B. Paine the lovely country peace of Dublin, New Hampshire, Twain's chief complaint was of loneliness: « The Garden of Eden », Paine quoted him as saying, « I now know was an unendurable solitude... anything for society ».⁷

H. S. Canby once made a biographical comparison, chiefly of contrasts, between Mark Twain and Henry James (*Turn West, Turn East*, 1951); and a similar exercise devoted to Twain and Hawthorne might be equally instructive. They shared, among other themes and problems: a sense of history, in which the facts of necessity struggled against a « romantic » desire for freedom; a complex set of involvements with religious doctrines and experiences, biblical motifs, and so forth; ambivalent relations to Europe, which help to account for the « disintegration » of Hawthorne's art when he took up the position of consul at Liverpool in 1853 — whereas Twain, who shared many of these ambivalences, was more of a world citizen, as his three non-American travel books testify; ambivalent relations to the world of practical affairs, so much the measure of « success » and « failure » in the States; a fascination with the world of dreams, and psychology more generally, both in their personal self-explorations and in a significant body of their writings; and so forth. Such comparisons help to sharpen

7. *Ibid.*, p. 17, note 12; and A. B. PAINE, *Mark Twain: A Biography*, 4 vols. (1912), p. 1315.

one's sense of Twain's distinctive traits, but also point to more general American problems, to which Hawthorne and Twain, each in his generation and after his fashion, gave expression.

Returning, again, from such broad comparative considerations to the problem of Twain himself: it would be premature to attempt to reduce the change he underwent, with the *Yankee* and after, to a single formula — beyond stating that these had to do with the relations between his outer and inner circumstances. Biographical considerations, of course, cannot be ignored: family, finances, travel, health, advancing years, historical changes in the States and abroad, and so forth. But the literary historian and critic must be concerned primarily with the artistic qualities and worth of the writings which resulted. These are at once the justification of, and the best key to, any serious study of Twain's last years.

IV

It will help to recall first a few basic facts about Twain's writings after *A Connecticut Yankee*. As we have said, he did not fall into idleness or decline, but continued to write and publish steadily, and this in all the veins which had characterized his work hitherto. Autobiography came strongly to the fore again from 1897, but especially after 1904, and produced some of his best writing. *Following the Equator* is far from negligible as a travel book, a worthy companion to the three others which preceded it. *Joan of Arc*, with all its faults, takes its place as the culmination of Twain's historical novels; in *The American Claimant*, *Pudd'nhead*, and *Hadleyburg*, especially, we have noteworthy contributions to American fiction; and however sad the falling off, Twain carried on the Tom Sawyer idea, not altogether unsuccessfully in *Tom Sawyer Abroad*. Such a strong vein of fantasy as found expression in *Extracts from Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven*, *The Mysterious Stranger*, and some of the pieces in *Letters from the Earth* (with some of the same sort not yet published) was also a development out of the past: the *Stormfield* pieces, we know,

were begun as early as 1868. And of course Twain continued to write many excellent short tales and sketches. This is not the picture, surely, of an artist who has written himself out, or in process of disintegration.

Some of the developments, indeed, are in the direction of the sort of writings one should expect of an artist in his ripe maturity. Thus, Twain began, often in polemic, to sum up his literary opinions and creed, beginning with *How to Tell a Story and Other Essays* (1897); the volume incorporating *In Defense of Harriet Shelley* (1899) was dignified with the subtitle of « Literary Essays ». And, as John S. Tuckey has put it, Twain now assumed « the role of the detached, ironic observer looking down upon the follies and depravities of the human race and making his sardonic comments ».⁸ But the literary form of the maxim or epigram, for example, which he used increasingly for this purpose — best known from this period as it reached its sardonic heights in « Pudd'nhead Wilson's Calendar » — was one which Twain had long used as a humorist. True, he was now « pessimistically » turning the « virtuous » tradition of Franklin's *Poor Richard* on its head; but this animosity to the Early-to-bed-and-early-to-rise point of view had been expressed in an early piece (« The Late Benjamin Franklin » — « Written about 1870 ») included in his first collection of *Sketches* (1875). What the « Calendar » maxims revealed was that a mature writer would naturally produce maxims, not only of vastly superior polish, but also appropriate to his advancing age. Thus: « Consider well the proportions of things. It is better to be a young June-bug than an old bird of paradise ». In brief, always something of an amateur moralist and philosopher, Twain seems now to be trying to sum up his views on man, religion, literature, and similar topics, in a wide variety of forms.

After the *Yankee*, the chief turning-point came in 1897 with the completion of the *Equator*, the final sacrifice Twain

8. *Mark Twain and Little Satan: The Writing of «The Mysterious Stranger»* (Purdue University, 1963), p. 36.

had made on the altar of his financial obligations. In Tuckey's words: « For the first time in a very long while, he was about to be free to undertake, without preoccupation, whatever writing might be of the greatest personal interest to him. It is understandable that he would have sought to renew his recollections of Hannibal... »⁹—and indeed we witness a resurgence of his creative powers during the subsequent Vienna period. His position was made financially secure after his return to the States in 1900, with the beginning of publication of his first collected edition in 1901 and the signing of a Harper's contract in 1903. The realization of how he could most happily and freely go about the writing of his *Autobiography* came to him the next year in Florence, where the family had gone in search of a better climate for Mrs. Clemens, who died in June 1904; and it was for this reason that he was so ready to welcome the help and companionship of A. B. Paine as biographer, when these became available in 1906.

V

More than two decades ago, in *Mark Twain at Work* (1942), Bernard DeVoto made the point that *The Mysterious Stranger* was an « important key to Mark Twain's book », but its significances were confused because the facts of its composition were misinterpreted, and the nature of the text distorted, by the editors who prepared it for posthumous publication in 1916. Now that the elementary basic facts have been unravelled by John S. Tuckey, in *Mark Twain and Little Satan*, we are at last in a position, as H. N. Smith has written, to make « a fresh start in the investigation of Twain's later work ».

DeVoto posited a pattern which might be summed up in the phrase: « escape from guilt ». It began with the perhaps shocking idea of Twain's bringing Satan to Hannibal—though

9. *Op. cit.*, p. 33.

why this should have seemed so terrible to DeVoto, after the familiar passage where Huck Finn says: « All right, then, I'll go to hell », is difficult to understand. It included a great many abortive projects, of which *The Mysterious Stranger* was merely the most interesting, filled with « The Symbols of Despair ». And the direction of the DeVoto pattern was away from these troubled waters towards the presumed calm and dubious release of *nihilism*; this was the considered conclusion Twain was assumed to have reached, and stated eloquently in the notorious chapter which Paine decided was an appropriate ending to the *Stranger*: « ... there is no God, no universe, no human race, no earthly life, no heaven, no hell, It is all a dream—a grotesque and foolish dream. Nothing exists but you ». The basic themes of anguish and apocalyptic nihilism which DeVoto found expressed in the group of writings which may be related to the *Stranger*, especially, are well represented by the following sentences from his Introduction to *The Portable Mark Twain*:

There are fables, dialogues, diatribes—sometimes cold, sometimes passionate, derisive, withering, savage. Mark sees the American republic perishing, like republics before it, through the incredible cowardice, corruption, and mere baseness of mankind. He elaborates theories, which he embodies in imaginary histories of the world (and sometimes of extramundane societies) to support his prophecy, and yet he cannot be much troubled by the going-down of this western land, for year by year he is writing a general apocalypse. The Old Testament fables had always served him for humorous derision of man's gullibility, but now he uses them as missiles in a ferocious attack on human stupidity and cruelty. Man is compact of malignity, cowardice, weakness, and absurdity, a diseased organism, a parasite on nature, a foolish but murderous animal much lower than the swine. (p. 24)

It is not necessary to deny the existence of such elements in Twain's later writings if we contend that the pattern is more complex, more interesting, and less pessimistic and nihilistic. For one thing, the actual development in the writing of the *Stranger* was not away from Hannibal to far-off Austria,

but rather a steady alternation of these two possible settings for his theme. The evidence of the manuscripts seems to be that, while in Vienna, he began to write a Hannibal version; shifted to an Eseldorf version; then to a more extended try with Hannibal; and he finally went back to the Eseldorf version which was never completed—but which, after considerable editing by Paine, including the merging of characters and changes in Twain's text, was used for the book we know.¹⁰

The final attempt, some years later, might be thought of as a fusion of these two approaches, with a *Connecticut Yankee* twist. This unpublished «Print Shop» version, to judge from Tuckey's summary, used memories of Twain's first work experiences as a printer's devil in Hannibal, but transplanted them to sixteenth-century Austria, where the printed word could be thought of as bringing «enlightenment» to a benighted world of feudal tyranny and superstition, as the Yankee had done by means of his machine-shop know-how to the England of King Arthur. The so-called «nihilistic» dream chapter¹¹ was probably not intended for use as a general statement, but was to have special reference to a preceding passage (added later, however, in 1908) in which the miracle-working stranger (*not* clearly identified in that version as an angel) acts as follows, in Tuckey's summary: «Then, for a final grand review, he summons a spectral procession of the illustrious dead; just at the last, he waves away the vision he has conjured, and he and August [the narrator] stand alone in a vacant and silent world». In other words, the setting seems to suggest an empty theater after the show, rather than a cosmic nihilism.

Add to this the probable fact that the dream chapter was part of the considerable body of manuscript written at the Villa di Quarto, in Florence, between January and June 20,

10. *Ibid.*, p. 76

11. That it is actually not completely nihilistic is evident, I think, from two sentences spoken by the angel: «But I, your poor servant, have revealed you to yourself and set you free. Dream other dreams and better!».

1904¹² — and that Mrs. Clemens died on June 5, 1904 — and one can well understand Twain's indulgence in something like a nihilistic or solipsistic mood. But this has very little to do with the themes of the Eseldorf version, which seems to have been more or less « completed » (as much as we have of it — how this earlier version might have ended is another problem) before Twain returned to the States in 1900.

We cannot begin to generalize about the literary values of the « Print Shop » version until we have read it all. Clearly, such a passage as the following (and there are others like it, published and unpublished, it seems) was written in anger and anguish:

Strange, indeed, that you should not have suspected that your universe and its contents were only dreams, visions, fiction! Strange, because they are so frankly and hysterically insane—like all dreams: a God who could make good children as easily as bad, yet preferred to make bad ones; who could have made every one of them happy, yet never made a single happy one...

We cannot — nor should we wish to — conjure these words (written with « a pen warmed-up in hell ») away: Twain thought them, and obviously felt them very deeply. That they expressed more than a transient mood is evident from his emphasis on the same idea in « Letters from the Earth », which may have been among his last writings (they have not been precisely dated), and in which the keynote struck by their « author » (Satan) is that « the earth is insane »; and also in the « Papers of the Adam Family » (around 1906), in which he began to transcribe the ideas of a fictional Mad Prophet and Mad Philosopher.¹³

But the artist does more than express his changing moods; he may be thought of also as mastering them by giving them voice and form. The problem of evil had concerned Twain all his life, and had many complex dimensions for him. In

12. *Op. cit.*, pp. 56, 59-60.

13. *Letter from the Earth*, ed. BERNARD DE VOTO (1962), pp. 7, 93 ff.

the background at this time, for example, were his criticisms of Christian Science, with its equally « insane » denial of the existence of pain and human suffering. The *Christian Science* volume was published in 1907, but Book I (« written at the beginning of 1903 »), begins with a dateline: « Vienna, 1899 », though Twain's very first writings on the subject go back to 1898. His 1907 Preface says that Book I (« not hitherto published in book form », but published in periodicals) had then « contained errors of judgment and of fact ... now corrected ... to the best of my ability and later knowledge ». Was the writing of the dream chapter in 1904, for example, part of this « later knowledge », and what were the corrections made? We have not yet begun to answer such elementary questions as these.

VI

All the indications seem to point back to the years in Vienna as especially interesting and productive — a curious fact, replete with ironies, since Twain was completely unaware of the existence in that city during those years of an obscure physician, Sigmund Freud, whose revolutionary contributions to psychology would eventually be applied, with however mixed success, to attempts at illuminating Twain's career. Tuckey makes the suggestion that his interest in dreams may be linked to readings in 1896 of material relating to the Society for Psychical Research, and of William James's *The Principles of Psychology* (1890);¹⁴ and the fact that he called a long fragment on Mary Baker Eddy's gospel « Eddypus » is an amusing, if not necessarily a significant, coincidence.

We thus emerge with a four-part chronological outline of our subject:

14. *Op. cit.*, pp. 26-27. The « Mental Telegraphy » essay traces this interest back to 1878.

a) *A Connecticut Yankee*, seen as a major turning-point.

b) The work done from 1889 to 1897, through the publication of *Following the Equator* and *How to Tell a Story* — a sufficiently rich period, worthy of a book to itself.

c) The Vienna period, 1897-1899, which appeared as a virtual blank in the DeVoto chronology, but now seems of great importance, producing as it did *The Mysterious Stranger*, *Hadleyburg*, first drafts of *What is Man?*, new beginnings of autobiography, the germs of *Christian Science*, and some interesting fantasies.

d) The work of Twain's last decade, published as well as unpublished and uncompleted. The death of Mrs. Clemens in 1904, and the completion of the Underwood Edition in 1907, are significant biographical facts; but they will have to be related to the difficult question of what Twain was about as a writer during these years.

In this last decade, the *Autobiography*, that puzzling creation, seems to bulk largest, suggesting a desire to remember, recreate, and sum up the past. And the many uncompleted fragments tease our imaginations, of course. Why did he not take the trouble to complete them? Was he merely indulging himself, as suggested by his dictation of November 8, 1906? « I shall never finish my five or six unfinished books, for the reason that by forty years of slavery to the pen I have earned my freedom. I detest the pen and wouldn't use it again to sign the death warrant of my dearest enemy ».¹⁵ It seems significant that this statement was not kept private, but was included among the pieces published in the *North American Review* (2 August 1907): at last, Twain could make his Declaration of Independence from that public he had served on the lecture platform and with his pen, which he must have both dearly loved and at times bitterly hated. But perhaps the reasons for incompleteness are to be sought in the nature of the works themselves?

15. *Ibid.*, p. 70.

It should be especially illuminating, then, to attempt a more careful analysis than we have had of the major themes, images, and problems which recur in these later writings, partly for their own sake as literature, and partly for what such study may tell us about the biographical and psychological meanings of those last years. These writings cannot be separated wholly from Twain's earlier work, of course, yet they stand apart. One central area of his concern, which led DeVoto to his theory of Twain's « despair », was the vanity of man and the « insanity » of man's behavior. But this may have been more an intellectual conviction than a neurotic symptom; at least, in however fragmentary a fashion, it found powerful imaginative expression. Another area was a fascinated exploration of dreams, both actual and imaginary, which resulted in some curious fantasies. Still another was a brooding on various religious-theological questions, which sometimes took the form of imaginative play with biblical themes and figures (God, Adam and Eve, Satan and other angels, Noah, Methusaleh) and with problems of history, implicit in the idea of God's Providence. Running through all these, in various forms and connections, was a deep conviction that man's actions were determined. (And yet he was held guilty of the consequences of his weaknesses! To Twain, this was the maddest fact of all). We have yet to put these miscellaneous interests and writings of the aging Twain into a critical perspective.

In the very contrast between the creations of such a remarkable artist as Twain working under the pressure of need, before 1897 — and that same artist working under conditions of relative freedom, we may find instruction. The problem of old age, in life and literature, which such a study would illuminate, is surely not without its own importance. And the reactions of our archetypal middle-westerner to the « big changes » which began to come in with the twentieth century (« Give her soap and towel, but hide the looking glass ») are of more than merely historical importance; his ideas about European and other civilizations seem increasingly significant as our world becomes smaller, and the relations between the

continents more intimate and more dangerous. But most important of all, for lovers of literature, is the likelihood that we should be deepening our exploration of a rich personality and vivid imagination, a master story-teller and magician of words. We should probably find much, from all indications, to sustain and delight us.

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