CHAPTER VI

THE WIDE NET

An Idea, to be suggestive, must come to the individual with the force of a revelation.

--William James: The Varieties of Religious Experience

I

THE STORY STRUCTURE

Ernest Hemingway's famous remark that "all modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*," may not be literally true but it states a good deal of truth. It illustrates that Mark Twain was making a new approach to literature along with writers like Bret Harte, Nelson Page, Washington Cable, and Joe Chandler Harris. In the works of these writers one gets fresh air to breathe and feels free from the restraints of tradition. Spontaneity takes the place of artificiality and the inner causal connection is maintained beneath extemporaneousness in writing.

Spelling out his methods of work, Mark Twain replied to the questions of a journalist during his visit to India. He said that in the beginning he took the help of his memory and his notes for the preparation of his books but
he soon found them inadequate:

Having discovered the defect, I have mended my ways a good deal in this respect, but still my notes are inadequate. However, there may be some advantage to the reader in this, since in the absence of notes imagination has often to supply the place of facts.

Thus Mark Twain stresses the importance of the role of imagination along with conscious effort in a piece of writing. In a letter to a clergyman, Twain dwelt upon the unconscious effort. He said: "Doubtless I have methods, but they beget themselves; in which case I am only their proprietor not their father." Twain clarifies that in the case of every author the resultant effort is the outcome of an unconscious or perhaps halfconscious assimilation. He rejects the idea that conscious training has much to do with the author's craft. While bringing forth the idea of the semi-conscious contriving, he lays the foundations of the modern approach to literature.

It is a fact that like other branches of Modern literature, the technique of the modern short story has also undergone changes. The technique, starting with Mark Twain in America, is not on the lines of Poe and Brander Matthews. The story, according to them, was supposed to have the traditional elements of structure. It was to have a well-Knit plot based on a conflict resulting in action. The action was of proper sequence, measured progress,
and evoked suspense which was finally resolved by giving the story a sting in its tail. In short, it was based on ratiocination. The modern short story is charged with a lack of structure in its narrative. It is said that it is either static or rambling; detached and uncrystallized. It is looked upon as a mere skit, sometimes with even the story element absent from it.

Yet on a closer view it seems that the present-day short story has a structure of its own. It is having a general design and a basic framework. The structure in its spirit is more or less the same as in the traditional story. Only some changes of presentation have been introduced which give the illusion that the modern short story lacks structure. A.L. Bader has pointed out how even in the traditional story, plot, though an essential element, "is not necessarily a strait jacket, as in the formula story, and it is only one of the elements of complete short-story form." Bader says that the traditional quality story had also considerable flexibility. Plot could be both a dominant and a subordinate element in a story. Plot may play an important part in the structure and outcome of the story but it may be of minor importance in producing the effect. The short story involves two chief factors - an outcome and an impression. The outcome mainly comes from the plot. The impression is the result of plot combined with various
other elements and these other elements, may, in their importance as impression-producers, quite overshadow the plot. Even in such an early American story as "Nine Assists and Two Errors" by Charles Van Loan, (published in Saturday Evening Post, May 31, 1913), the theme is how a winning personality overcomes prejudice and commands respect. The theme is so general that it can suit any number of varying plots. In a quality story the plot is not so rigid as in a formula story.

Plot depends upon creating the conflict—the clash of opposing influences that threaten to change and attempt to thwart the threatened change in the state of things as in the exposition they were shown to be. The conflict may be internal or external. "In some stories the conflict is single, clear-cut, and easily identifiable. In others it is multiple, various, and subtle." Out of the conflict springs the action, and in the end, the action brings the outcome. In the modern short story conflict is generally internal and subtle.

The modern short story shows a drift from the traditional plot only when the plot becomes artificial. Sherwood Anderson says in A Storyteller's Story:

"The Poison Plot," I called it in conversation with my friends as the plot notion did seem to me to poison all story-telling. . . . In the construction
of these stories there was endless variation but in all of them human beings, the lives of human beings, were altogether disregarded. . . . It was certain there were no plot short stories in any life I had known anything about. 5

The emphasis is again on plausibility. It should be essential in every part of the plot. Inconsistency in the plot or conflict is fatal; it falsifies the basic conception and thereby misrepresents the story as a whole. In the introduction to one of his annual anthologies of short stories, Edward O'Brien wrote, "The first test of a short story . . . is to report upon how vitally compelling the writer makes his selected facts or incidents." 6 It was with a view to making the events of the story interesting that the writer of the short story had to discard the rigidity of the plot. Elaborating this reaction, Overstreet said that the modern storyteller saw "that life was not made up of neatly parcelled collection of incidents." 7 The plot in the modern short story is something more than a narrative of events arranged in their time sequence. It allows the events to stem naturally from the characters involved. If the readers or the listeners sense that the characters' reality is weakened because they have to behave in an unnatural manner to suit the dictates of the plot, the plot will fail to produce the desired effect.

The statements referred to above are not so much in
denunciation of the plot itself as against its abuse. The protest is against the superimposition of plots by the author on the characters and also on the readers. Perrine brings out the reality of the situation thus:

There is nothing wrong with any of these characteristics as story elements. Significant fiction has been written with them all. The error lies in elevating these characteristics into a set of rigid requirements which a story must meet to be enjoyed. Such limitations restrict drastically one's opportunity for expanding his experience or broadening his insights. They reduce one's demands on literature to a formula.8

By 'characteristics,' Perrine means, a systematic hero, or heroine, a suspenseful and exciting plot, a happy outcome, and a conformative theme.

This tradition of short story writing in America was initiated by Washington Irving, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Edgar Allan Poe. But since the times of Mark Twain, literature in America has shown increasingly local and provincial affinities. Mark Twain's stories, depict the typical setting in a small town, the repressions of the middle class, and Midwestern pieties, and win a general appeal. Critics have seen the drift away from the rigidity in plot not only through America but all over the world. Wallace and Mary Stegner elucidate:

In its whole course of development, and not simply in America, the short story as a distinctive form has turned away from
plot, and has tended to become less a complication resolved than what Henry James was to call a "situation revealed." This kind of story, necessarily more static, has greater possibilities for character development and analysis of motives, for attention to atmosphere, setting, and theme. . . . Form becomes less contrivance than discovery, and the end of the story less an "effect" than an illumination. 9

The intended meaning is that the form of the short story should be so handled that its effect would be human, not artificial, and its tone, be warm and not freezing.

There are, of course, a few radicals among critics, in favour of the cult of modernism. They want to praise modern writers like Stephen Crane, Sherwood Anderson, Sinclair Lewis, Faulkner, Theodore Dreiser, and Hemingway. They praise them at the cost of those authors who paved the way for them. They charge O'Henry, and perhaps, by implication, Mark Twain, of mechanical approach, "They employed tricks of plot and were not free and natural in their art." This extreme view cannot be subscribed to. Modern short story is certainly not plotless. A short story is an artistic, organic, and living form. It may change its appearances but it must live and to live it must have form and being. A short story is not merely "a slice of life," a "chunk of experience." 10

At the same time the story should not also entirely rely on the plot. It should have the added attractions of character, style, and humour, holding its readers less by
The main changes in the modern short story are aimed at bringing the effect of revelation in the story and also the method of indirection. Through revelation, the skilled story teller makes the interest of the story worth enjoying. The story, then, provides humour and innocent fun and also enables the readers and hearers to have an intrinsic enjoyment by providing an insight into life. The modern short story-writer also lays stress upon the manner of telling. Elaborating the desire of the modern story-teller to view the story in its wider perspectives, W.H. Hudson convincingly sets forth, "A story may be little more than an anecdote worked up into literary form, and its success may depend entirely upon the skill shown in the telling." The story-teller to-day would like to steer the reader carefully, though not consciously, to the point of the story through suggestions and hints, so subtle as to be missed through slightest inattention. L.A.G. Strong comments upon this method and says that the modern short story writer "may give us only the key-piece of a mosaic, around which if sufficiently perceptive, we can see in shadowy outline the completed pattern." The reader or the listener should be attentive enough to perceive and to catch the point of the story which need not be very obvious.
II
THE GROUNDWORK OF TWAIN

The modern technique of making the story structure revealing through indirectness of expression had its roots in Mark Twain's humorous oral tale. A survey of his various writings reveals that Mark Twain had definite views on the form and spirit of the tale. He was fully aware that it is a distinction of the short story to integrate realistic portrayal with the romantic spirit. His observations show that Twain was a "realist in the matters of technique," though in his point of view he was often romantic. He wants the tale to have a definite purpose and effect, "A tale shall accomplish something and arrive somewhere." He also wants different elements of the tale to contribute to the central purpose, "the episodes of a tale shall be necessary parts of the tale, and shall help to develop it" (79). Perrine states the same idea when he says: "In a good story every element works with every other element for the accomplishment of this central purpose."15

Twain emphasizes the qualities of lucidity, brevity, and clarity in the matters of form. He advises the author of a tale to "say what he is proposing to say, and not merely come near it" (81). The choice of words in the tale should be judicious. The author should "use the right word, not its second cousin" (Ibid). All "surplusages" should be
eschewed though no necessary details are to be avoided (Ibid). The form should be without any "slovenliness"; grammar should be good and the style should be "simple and straightforward" (Ibid). When these views of Mark Twain's are studied with reference to his short stories it is revealed that he preferred conformity to plausibility, liveliness, and the portrayal of necessary details. His views on plot construction and the law of propriety are to be viewed in the light of the modern spirit of realism which he was initiating as Hemingway perceived it.16

Mark Twain's views about the proper synthesis of the realistic structure and romantic spirit of the tale find an echo in modern criticism. Discussing the fictional world, Ira Konigsberg has this to say about the good short stories:

Successful short stories, however, depend on more than an illusion of reality; they depend on the author's ability to mold his reality, to structure and shape it, much more rigidly and compactly than the novelist. The story then presents a design, a pattern, a meaning—not necessarily a meaning in the sense of philosophy or morality, but meaning in the sense that the work presents an interpretation of human experience. A viewpoint is presented, an attitude, and an insight into human behavior. With all the consciousness of its form, the short story seems constantly threatening to explode into significance; ...17

The explosion into significance, Ira says, occurs either through the realization of a character within the story or within the minds of the readers when they are forced to
realize the significance of what they have read. The critic stresses the due proportion in design and meaning—the interpretation of human experience.

Mark Twain attached great importance to human experience and observation as the basis for fiction. He believed that the writer of fiction should present the truth of life as he sees it. The result was a new realism in his stories that looked closely at human beings and presented them without social masks. Human experience was the raw material for his stories and it is always new and unique. Life is so complex an affair that every look into it reveals a new aspect. The short stories of Twain provide a rapid and intense look at a situation that may pass away any moment; they make the acquaintance of a character whose singularities and eccentricities may perhaps have a permanent, haunting effect on the minds of the readers. That is why, Howells called him a man who had "the heart of a boy with the head of a sage." He combined the youthful vigour with the serenity of experience.

Closely allied to his fancy for human experience is his insistence on the theory of probability which contributes to a realistic characterization. As shown in the preceding chapter, Mark Twain's interest in human nature was very keen. In the matter of delineation of character, he stresses the importance of experience and observation. He also believed that the author should be allowed to project his
own self into his personages, provided that, by so doing he is able to bring to light common human traits. The characters in his short stories have a distinct personality of their own. This step of Mark Twain's gave a fresh zest to the short story in the nineteenth century and continues to be the moving spirit of the modern short story. Northrop Frye points out that in the short story, as opposed to the tale, the author depicts characters having "personality." The "fictive world" of the short story writer, "tends to be an imitation of the actual world of men." The realistic portrayal of characters gives the readers an opportunity to know the representations of life far more intimately, than one can know the majority of real people around oneself. While Mark Twain criticized Cooper for portraying "corpses", he commended Israel Zangwill's work, "Master" where "the characters are real; they are flesh and blood, they are definite." The graphic characterization of Mark Twain gave a new turn to the structure of the story. The emphasis was shifted from the plot to character.

The novel in its wider range gives a broad view of life. The short story, however, gives a glimpse into life. It stimulates the imagination to weave out a variety of suggested details. The short story writer must have an exquisite command of language to select just the one word that conveys the meaning and defines his thought. To Mark
Twain, "the difference between the almost - right word & the right word," is "the difference between the lightning-bug & the lightning." This is especially noticeable in his short stories where he realizes that the single word and the right incident are of greatest importance because the short story writer cannot be euphuistic.

Mark Twain's expectation that a writer of the tale should make use of all the essential details and keep away from wide generalizations has its basis in his journalistic training. Bernard Shaw and Mark Twain, "both entered literature through the gateway of journalism." The journalistic training, apart from bringing directness, lucidity, and a viable vocabulary in their writings also brought a keen sense of detail.

Mark Twain was unhappy with the writer, who, through lethargy and ignorance, cultivated "the fashion of whizzing by vast and renowned historical events with the remark, the "details of this tremendous episode are too familiar to the reader to need repeating here." Twain always favoured the need for the necessary elucidation. He advised Howells that his story about a runaway horse would be better in effect with "the little details of names and places and things left out which are the true life of all narrative." By giving these details the writer is able to achieve the immediacy of atmosphere in his story. The quality of
immediacy makes the reader live in the story. The effect is gained by giving details as though the events are happening at the moment and not simply as a thing of the past. That is why Mark Twain observes that "moon talk by a poet who has not seen the moon is likely to be dull." Such a poet will not be able to give a first hand account of the moon. Twain does not approve of an author who is all green and ignorant with a vague distorted knowledge of men and world. Mark Twain's stories are instinct with the details of the pre-industrial society. The detailed description of life in his stories shows that he not only records his observations of life but also makes one see through it and even beyond it.

His insistence on the development of details goes beyond character and setting to dialogue. It was his ambition to bring the effect of speech into words. He wanted his characters to renounce the social community which binds them to a false language of romance and morality and exist in the freedom of open territory. He wanted to give the dialogue the colour and tone of everyday speech. John Macy shows that Twain was successful in achieving the oral effect in his style through "sentences amazingly finished and constructed." Mark Twain was fully conscious of the arduous task involved in giving the effect of vernacular speech in print. He wrote to Edward Bok, "The moment 'talk'
is put into print you recognize that it is not what it was when you heard it, ... "29 His writing reflects the pains he took to introduce colloquial speech as a means to achieve realism. Public language is a formal language and for Twain this limited language distorts moral perception. The individual should take recourse to his natural, unsophisticated language to represent personal experience. Formal language works against this by telling the individual what he should see and feel. It is therefore necessary that the individual should break the bonds of conventionalities and discover his personal language. Realizing the subtleties involved, Twain said that "a man can't handle glibly and easily and comfortably and successfully the argot of a trade at which he has not personally served."30 Bret Harte, for example, failed to use the miner's jargon in a natural manner.

In his final writings, Mark Twain specially lays stress on the need for a personal language. In The Mysterious Stranger he discovered the dream-self. The dream-self suggestively pointed out that the individual should leave the world of formal language and thus create, through a natural and unsophisticated expression, a self-identity through the inner expression from the dream-self. In his essay "on Speech Making Reform," Twain enumerated the limitations of the "set speech." Mark Twain, was, however, not altogether blind to the stateliness of the literary language. The
written words of European languages like French, German, and Italian had considerable influence on the writing of Mark Twain but, as Howells has pointed out, it was the vernacular word, "the word with the bark on it" (as Mark Twain calls it) that brought spontaneity in the dialogue of the characters of his stories. He could secure the dialogue of the common man through his lifelong contact with the people of his own country and those of others.

Twain had his own views on plot construction. They were a little at variance with the traditional conception of a neat plot. He said in his autobiography that "the law of narrative, . . . has no law." Earlier he said, "... the narrative should flow as flows the brook down through the hills and leafy woodlands, its course changed by every boulder. . . ."31 About the traditional narrative, Mark Twain said that it was like a canal:

... it moves slowly, smoothly, decorously, sleepily, it has no blemish except that it is all blemish. It is too literary, too prim, too nice; the gait and style and movement are not suited to narrative.32

Twain opposes mere mechanical skill in plot construction. In his seemingly artless tales, profoundity consists in simplicity. He believed that complexity and intricacy of design defeat their own end by emmeshing the attention into their mazes. His own method is to let the tale draw
itself out. The author has only to supply the characters, incident, and setting and then listen to the story as it rambles along, "spreading itself into a book." He admits that for building a story in this manner skill is needed but he maintains that story writing is not for the unskilled person. Critics have pointed out that Twain's novels are marred by their looseness in plot. Delancey Ferguson states that Twain realized his "weakness in plot construction" and accepted the proposal to collaborate with Bret Harte (who was "technically adept") to help him in writing a play for Parsloe. Later Bret Harte wrote a scenario and Mark supplied the character and the dialogue.

However, his flexible plots become a virtue in his short stories. Tracing the evolution of Twain's temperament, Pattee says that it suited well to the domains of the story. "Mark Twain's training as a lecturer, after-dinner speaker, and general raconteur had developed his technique along the lines if the story and the sketch." According to him if the effort of the writer is in the right direction then it would "make the thing slide effortless from the pen--the one right way, the sole form for you. . . ." Thus the "right way" of the storyteller was more important than the careful plot construction.

Mark Twain has virtually challenged the traditional concept of the sanctity of the story structure. The early
American story writers like Irving, Poe, and Hawthorne continued the classical tradition. In their stories there was the main action developed through "a beginning, a middle and an end." They were having a protagonist, a complication, and a climax. Mark Twain was very easygoing about such external features. He was against dogmatism in literature. He says that the world "grows tired of solid forms in all the arts." He was in favour of compendium and variety in his stories. Feinstein says that his stories like "The Jumping Frog," "Adam's Diary," and the MacWilliamses stories are "not plots but rather situations." Feinstein goes on to say:

These stories are rambling and amorphous, vitalized chiefly by their mass of human quirks and small incident--they illustrate their author's conviction that execution transcends design.

In this context it has to be noted that Twain's objections to the laxity of design in Cooper's Deerslayer are there because he fails to perceive the inner unity among the episodes of the tale. They do not point simply to the external unity of the tale.

Twain's stories show that the features of external unity in a story are not to be rigidly observed. They are not entirely without design. Mark Twain only opposes rigidity in structure. He was a product of the Frontier
tradition producing the famous tall tales. This humorous tale emerged out of the American folklore finding expression in minstrel shows and popular songs. It was characterized by comic exaggeration and absurdity. At the same time it was homely exhibiting common realism of the work-a-day world and giving the cadence of the American Vernacular. The humorous story was the chief contribution of Mark Twain. Such a tale is meandering and non-climactic. But Mark Twain was conscious of the inner spirit of discipline in the short story. Bernard DeVoto agrees that Twain was not a conscious artist and at the same time maintains that he was not entirely unconscious of his art:

... Mark himself raised its native tale-telling to a fine art, which surely establishes a discipline ... he was not a fully self-conscious artist. But when he wrote greatly he was writing from an inner harmony of desire and will.39

Henry James compared the short-story to a sonnet. Both convey within a limited range the truth of human experience. It is imperative that the short story should have the same intrinsic coherence that a sonnet has. Twain is not against this discipline. He only insists that the discipline should be intrinsic and not merely of a form having the dogmatic features of brevity and precision.

Some critics regard Mark Twain as a conscious artist. Jastin Kaplin for example believes that he was an "entirely
deliberate and conscious craftsman." He, however, modifies his view immediately and agrees that "his large structural methods are often inspirational and intuitive and sometimes purely accidental." Kaplan agrees with the general view that the looseness of his texture accords him ease and flexibility though it gave him difficulty in his novels.

George Feinstein shows Mark Twain's "indifference to arbitrary canons governing story structure," and ultimately concludes that Twain had "a method apparently of methodlessness." It is just this unconventionality of Twain that makes him so enduring to his admirers.

Sydney J. Krause points out that on many occasions, Twain emphasized the values of "precision and compression." He once said:

To get the right word in the right place is a rare achievement. To condense the diffused light of a page of thought into the luminous flash of a single sentence is worthy to rank as a prize composition just by itself.

However, in the Twainian story, economy of words is also not that rigid as it is in the French story where there is not even the least verbiage of description, exposition, or conversation. Mark Twain is against tautological repetition but has no objection to the repetition of an important word a few times in the interest of the clarity of meaning. He likes precision and good grammar but excuses foibles:
I suppose we all have our foibles. I like the exact word, and clarity of statement, and here and there a touch of good grammar for picturesqueness; ... It establishes that Twain likes neatness of form and grammar, though he is not a pedant.

In the light of the stated facts it becomes difficult to accept the views of a critic like Danforth Ross who says that Mark Twain was:

too much of an individualistic westerner to give serious attention to the problem of form, too respectful of eastern culture to trust the western language he used so well. 44

In fact Mark Twain combines the native narrative technique of the West with the aesthetic effects of refinement of the East. He used the "great and fertile literature" of the West and spearheaded a rebellion in the realm of "literature and the arts." His aim was to scare away the "ghost of Europe" hovering "over the East." 45 He reiterated the fact that the short story has its beginnings in folklore, myths and legends. In this framework Mark Twain evolved his own structural devices which are peculiarly his own. These structural patterns can be better understood by going into the analysis of the structure of a few of his short stories.
III
TWAIN'S STRUCTURAL PATTERNS

Jim Baker's Bluejay Yarn

The oldest kind of fiction perhaps is the "beast story." This remained as a part of the cultural heritage the Americans received from the continent. It was very much revitalized in America by the animal stories having their origin in the Negro folklore. It ultimately emerged as one of the strains of "local color." In this tradition are included stories like Harris's Uncle Remus, and Mark Twain's "Bluejay Yarn" in A Tramp Abroad (1879). They are superb in their own kind. They have contributed to the development of the short story with their spontaneity of movement, wisdom, and humour. The "Jumping Frog" and the "Bluejays" always amused H.H. Rogers and he liked "to read them in perfect quiet and simply chuckle over them." In the animal stories like the Bluejays Mark Twain "through the craft of words," gives his readers "a mixture of scientific accuracy, caricature, pathos, and humor."

Mark Twain heard this story from Jim Gillis who was a pocket miner in Jackass Hill, California. He says that Gillis "reeled this tale off, just as it appears here, because he was an untaught genius." But there are reasons to believe that Mark Twain's version of Jim Gillis' tale is his own.
The story is narrated from the "limited omniscient point of view." The author is telling it from the viewpoint of the Bluejay. The humour of the story arises from fantasy, from folklore, and from the imaginative myth-making of the slaves of the Frontier. In the story fantasy has been used to convey an important insight. Through animal lore, Mark Twain humorously satirizes the conceit of human beings just as Swift did in *Gulliver's Travels*. Fantasy has not been used merely for its own sake. It is not meant simply to produce surprise and laughter. It exists to illumine the normal world of our experience.

With the help of perceptive language, Mark Twain helps us see reality. Its technique is to wound man's pride and to reduce his arrogance. Hamlet tells us:

"... What is a man,  
If his chief good and market of his time  
Be but to sleep and feed? a beast, no more.  
Sure, he that made us with such large discourse,  
Looking before and after, gave us not  
That capability and god-like reason  
To last in us unused (Act IV, Sc. IV, 32-49)."

Browning would make the same point in "Rabbi Ben Ezra,":

"Irks Care the Crop-full bird? Frets doubt the man-crammed beast? (St. IV, Ll. 6-7)."

As Maurice Le Breton has revealed, there are two trends traceable in the humour of Mark Twain. One is that of pure and spontaneous fantasy; the other is more sedate and
In a recent publication, *The Art of Mark Twain* (1976), W.H. Gibson paid attention to the relatively neglected works of Mark Twain's short fiction. He has pointed out that one of the aims of Mark Twain in "Bluejay Yarn" is to burlesque German tale by presenting a Western American tall tale with the native character and setting. The problem was surmounted by establishing a suitable bond between them with the help of the delicate touches of Twain's art.

In *A Tramp Abroad*, Mark Twain brought in an atmosphere of German legends and fairy tales in the manner of Washington Irving. He first says how in the twilight of Nekar woods he "fell into a train of dreamy thought about animals which talk." Then he shows how ravens gather around him and croak in a language he is not able to understand. Thus Mark Twain builds up the exposition and passes on from the forests of Germany to the hills of California. Mark Twain now introduces Baker as his persona and switches over from formal English to the frontier vernacular.

Jim Baker's character is revealed in a few light and swift touches. He is introduced as a middle-aged miner who has closely watched birds and beasts--his only neighbours, so closely that he fully believes he knows their tongues. Baker describes in detail the conversation and conduct of the Bluejays. He sees many similarities between the
behaviour of men and that of bluejays.

You may call a jay a bird. Well, so he is, in a measure—because he's got feathers on him, and don't belong to no church, perhaps; but otherwise he is just as much a human as you be (160).

The development of the plot takes place in a natural manner. The reader becomes so engrossed that he does not feel the passage from Clemens to Jim Baker, and then to bluejays and lastly to a particular jay. Gibson concludes:

'Baker's Bluejay Yarn' is a triumph because of its seamless narrative development, its easy passage through formal opening into a vernacular tale of real elegance, and its transmuting the atmosphere of German legend into the air of Western myth.50

The story is a good example of Mark Twain's combining of folklore and elegance of structure. Emphasizing the same point Ferguson said:

And were one asked to choose from all Mark Twain's work the most perfect example of the genuine Western tall story, patiently and skillfully built up from a matter-of-fact prelude to a sustained climax, the choice would probably come down at last to Jim Baker's bluejay yarn.

The story is also praised by Walter Blair who regards it as another Masterpiece of Twain after "Jumping Frog."51 Tall tales can be found in the literature of almost any country. They form one of the foundations of American folklore. Mark Twain's stories, like the one under discussion, show
the classic example of the initiation of the American tall tale into literature. They show the robust frontier life within the dynamic framework of the form of the short story. It is there that one can find, along with comic exaggeration and caterwauling, common homely realism and one of the first attempts at the conscious exploitation of American vernacular speech patterns.

A True Story

At the other end stands Mark Twain's "A True Story." According to Howells the story "is extremely good and touching with the best and realest kind of black talk in it." The story is at the other end of "Jumping Frog" and the "Bluejays" because it is not a tall tale. In fact the readers were amazed by the seriousness and had suspected "a lurking joke in it." Mark Twain wrote to Howells: "I enclose also a 'True Story' which has no humor in it. You can pay as lightly as you choose for that, . . . for it is rather out of my line." The story is an ensample of a tale of genuine pathos written in Negro vernacular and elevated to artistic heights.

The story springs from Clemens's personal life. In April 1874, the Clemens family went to Quary Farm in Elmira. There, in June of the same year, his daughter Clara was born. The servants at the farm were Negroes. There were John Lewis and his wife, the tenants who worked on the farm,
and Auntie Cord, the cook. Auntie Cord had been a slave in the South before the Civil War. She herself had been sold twice and her children were sold away from her. One evening she recounted her history to Mark Twain and the result was the sketch entitled, "A True Story," Mark Twain told Howells:

I have not altered the old colored woman's story except to begin at the beginning, instead of the middle, as she did—& (worked) traveled both ways.54

The title serves to give a touch of history to the narrative and also to indicate that no humour need be expected.

As in "Bluejay Yarn," there is transformation of the main character. Auntie Cord is transformed into Aunt Rachel. Though pathetic, she never loses her individuality. The choice of name for her is also significant. The name Rachel has more than one association. It may refer to the Biblical Rachel, wife of Jacob, who had a life of struggle and who died soon after giving birth to her child Benjamin. It also brings to mind, Rachel (Elisa Felix, 1820-58), one of the greatest actresses of France. After an unhappy childhood, she totally committed herself to the tragic world. She died young at the age of thirty-eight. She has become a legend in the tradition of tragic acting. Her art in this field has never been excelled.55 Her brave experience of an unhappy childhood and her heroic representation of tragedy on the stage give an added stature to Aunt Rachel in
"A True Story." The name Rachel was also used by Melville in *Moby Dick* (ch.28). Rachel was portrayed as a woman "weeping for her children." Thus the renaming of Auntie Cord as Aunt Rachel brings in the romantic and adventurous touch to the Negro Cook with her endurance, indomitable, and sportive nature.

Mark Twain does not portray her as a sentimental heroine. Her distinctive features and frailties are plainly depicted. She has inherited from her mother the sense of family pride. She regards herself as "one O'de Ole Blue Hen's chickens" (98). She is proudly conscious that her ancestors came from Maryland. She looks down upon the slaves who according to her were "bawn in de mash" (98) that is a livestock fodder storage in the barn. She is also portrayed as a realistic mother with her own naive motherly love for her children. She never realizes that after thirteen years of separation, her youngest son Henry would have grown up. To her he was still "very little" (97). When occasion demands, however, she plucks courage to protect her children. She beat the auctioneer's men over their heads with her chain while they were taking her little Henry away. She is conscious of her dignity as a cook, when the Union officers asked her whether she would cook for them, she said, "dat's what I's for," (96). Thus Mark Twain creates a fictive-realistic figure in Aunt Rachel.
This story is written in Negro vernacular speech through which Twain seeks to articulate the unarticulated thoughts of the plain people. He uses the typical techniques of the Frontier humorists - grotesque misspellings, and liberties with grammar and usage. Commenting upon the language and structure of the story, Frank Baldanza says:

Clemens has transcribed the narration simply and directly in a dialect that hits a golden mean between realism and literary invention. It demonstrates his greatest mastery of the technique of colloquial anecdote rendered at a plane of high artistic quality.

Mark Twain's achievement lies in the elevation of the American vernacular speech to literary domains. Though the literary language enriches the stately side of his style, it was his grasp of the American vernacular that enabled Twain to give unique shades to the meanings of his words. He had an alert ear for the dialect and it helped him well in transcribing the Negro speech.

"A True Story" is written from a partial omniscient point of view. The author has also framed the story as in "Bluejay Yarn" and uses his persona. Mark Twain persona is best understood as a composite figure made up of several roles or poses. W.M. Gibson elaborates:

Through the Mark Twain mask, Samuel L. Clemens found that he could project his voice as genial humorist, controlled ironist, savage satirist, avowed moralist.
But his great discovery was that he might then assume the role of an abused Chinaman in California, garrulous Simon Wheeler; drunken Jim Blaine, 'Aunt Rachel'. 57

The various poses of Twain operate as a means to humour, satire, or straightforward rendering of subjects from the mode either of burlesque or of conventionality.

John C. Gerber extends the range of Twain's comic pose to even a dog and a horse (Cf. "A Dog's Tale" and "A Horse's Tale"). 58 Once Twain is able to mingle himself with his vernacular characters, the effect is far-reaching and overwhelming. His handling of pathos is highly successful in the story. A deep vein of melancholy runs through everyman's life and the humorist becomes more conscious of it than any one else. He compensates for it actively and positively by delving deep into it. His comprehensive use of persona helped him in treating of pathos, irony, and satire in his later writings.

**The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg**

This story is an example of the pattern produced by the relative arrangement of pathos and comedy. The story has been much misunderstood. Danforth Ross compared it to Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Browne" in its treatment of the theme of tested virtue. But Ross differentiates between the two:

... unlike Hawthorne, Twain fails to dramatize his theme successfully. For one
thing, the handling of point of view is too loose. He lacks a character, like Goodman Brown, to let the action come through. As a result the story fails in form. It sprawls. Finally the story fails in language. The language is that of Samuel Clemens, a kind of purified western. It is not bad in itself, but lacks a sense of feel for the occasion. It is hybrid.

Though the story has its limitations, yet the sweeping criticism of Danforth Ross is not tenable.

The story is written from an omniscient point of view which is the most flexible one. The author has generally used the third person. Whenever necessary, he peers inside the hearts and minds of his characters and interprets their behaviour. He also comments implicitly upon the significance of the story at the end by showing the change from the former motto of the town from "Lead us not into temptations," to the new one, "Lead us into temptations." He achieves the result through suggestion and not didactically. All this is permissible in stories written from the omniscient point of view. The author does not stand between the reader and the tale, nor is the viewpoint shifted too frequently so as to cause rupture in coherence. The point of view has been used skilfully and gives simultaneously breadth and depth.

Ross forgets that The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg portrays the whole village as a character. The village is shown in conflict with the evil which takes it unawares.
In an interpretive story it is not necessary that the main individual character should be distinctly labelled. The author shows the whole village in action. The reader is free to infer the thoughts of the village principals and commoners through their actions and reactions to the working of the stranger who is Satan in the opinion of some critics. Thus the events of Hadleyburg are dramatized. The people are shown speaking and acting as in a drama. As a successful story-writer, Mark Twain presents indirectly the village of Hadleyburg as a character just as he has introduced the river as a character in *Huckleberry Finn*.

While 'meandering', is a characteristic of Twain's storytelling, it is wrong on the part of Danforth Ross to maintain that the story fails in form. The unity of structure is very much there in the story. D.S. Bertolotti, Jr., has shown that Mark Twain used a new way to maintain structural harmony in the story. The "technical device" used by Twain in this story is the introduction of a series of letters. These letters come from the "mysterious big stranger" (Howard L. Stephenson). Each letter serves as a means for giving a new turn to the action of the story. "The letters are the links which bring the episodes together..." The main themes of the story are the false pride in its honesty and the self-centered nature of its nineteen principal citizens. The letters from the stranger contain
an ironic praise of their weaknesses and at the same time act as instruments to expose the complacency of the town. Even a critic like Delancey Ferguson who is not prepared to grant that the short story as an art form is Twain's "metier" concedes that in *The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg*, "he came near to perfection."61

As for the hybridness of the language it has to be borne in mind that the story exhibits persons of different strata, vocations, and background. The language has to be made to suit the person using it. In a story portraying a whole village, language is bound to be mixed if it does not become artificial. As has been pointed out above, in his later writings, Twain was all the more conscious about the personal character of the language.

The serio-comic tale became the characteristic feature of Twain. Mark Twain's comments on *Which Was the Dream?* can be applied to the Hadleyburg story:

> All of the first half of the story--and I hope three fourths--will be comedy ... I think I can carry the reader a long way before he can suspect that I am laying a tragedy-trap.62

Mark Twain has indeed laid a tragedy-trap for the reader. He is attracted by the animated world of Hadleyburg and opts for it as it is a place where he finds, in God's plenty, the sinful human race. Gibson says that Mark Twain, in this
story, shows the power of unqualified "Grace in laughter." The story through its actions and deeds vivifies life. It conveys the effect that the brief span between birth and death is to be enjoyed. This invigorating effect is created through the suggestive sense embedded in the story.

It is not to deny that The Man that Corrupted Hadleyburg is having some shortcomings. It is a story of more than two thousand words and is bound to have some "soft spots." The character of Rev. Mr. Burgess, for example, has not been given sufficient attention. It is not known what the action attributed to him that had invited the wrath of the town was. It is left to the imagination of the readers. The principle of plausibility is a little impaired when the same Rev. Mr. Burgess, who has lost the confidence of the town, is allowed to preside over the town-meeting even if the anonymous benefactor had so requested. While, as the President of the crucial meeting in the town-hall, Rev. Mr. Burgess was reading letters of the principal citizens of Hadleyburg, he was asked as to how many envelopes he had. The chairman counted the letters and announced, "Together with those that have been already examined, there are nineteen" (377). Later, Rev. Mr. Burgess, after reading eighteen letters, declared, "I find I have read them all" (379). It is hard to believe how no one in the hall questioned him about the nineteenth letter. Thus
Rev. Mr. Burgess is allowed to conceal Richard's letter at the cost of credibility.

In spite of these flaws, the fact remains that the structure of *The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg* is inherently coherent. The seeming laxity of relationships is deliberate. The emphasis is not on the plot and the interrelationship of the episodes, but on the meaning of the story. Each incident contributes to the perception of meaning. The suggestions and implications are fairly well calculated and the reader must be careful to get the desired pattern of meaning.

The Mysterious Stranger

The Mysterious Stranger was started by Mark Twain as a statement of his dilemma about the responsible yet unjustly damned human race, but the work could not be completed. What is presumed to be the final chapter was found in Mark Twain's papers and was appended to the unfinished story by Albert Bigelow Paine and Frederick A. Duneka, who edited the story when it was finally published in 1916. In the absence of any final evidence of the formal completion of the tale it is not possible to evaluate fully the achievements of Twain in this story; still, though probably unfinished, it is one of Mark Twain's significant works. The Mysterious Stranger manuscripts, although incomplete and somewhat disjointed,
are moving testaments of philosophical, ethical, and religious problems that led Mark Twain to take a sombre view of life in his final phase.

In *The Mysterious Stranger*, Twain reaches lyrical heights. The story conveys its themes through images rather than through realistic episodes. It is an expression of Mark Twain's final vision of the nature of man which is based on his belief that imagination is the source of man's self-awareness. The *Mysterious Stranger* is a special instance of the story of awareness.

The story poses some problems from the structural point of view. There are inconsistencies in the delineation of the character, the Mysterious Stranger. He exhibits anti-God, involuntary cruelties, thus becoming a symbol of wickedness and at the same time he is represented as a wholesome creator. "He made birds out of clay and set them free, and they flew away, singing" (605). Satan is free of man's corrupting Moral Sense and yet can identify man's perversions of it. Satan can foresee future but he cannot alter a person's life except to an undesirable outcome. He becomes a reliable satiric agent only when he has to convince Theodor about the misery, unreality, and worthlessness of life and man. Satan can bring happiness to an innocently suffering man but only after depriving him of his reason.
He differs from Milton's Satan who declared in the Paradise Lost, Book I:

The mind is its own place, and in it self Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n (Ll. 254-55).

Twain's Satan (Philip Traum) reminds one, of the words of Goethe's Young Werther who exclaimed "... God in heaven! is this the destiny of man? To be happy only before he has acquired reason and again after he has lost it." The two points of view in the story i.e., Satan's contempt for human race and Theodor Fischer's empathy for human suffering have not been sufficiently reconciled.

Mark Twain demonstrates the philosophical vision of man in The Mysterious Stranger through the lyrical design of the narrative.

The structural unity in the story has, however, been maintained through Theodor. John R. May shows that the structural unity in The Mysterious Stranger rises out of Philip Traum's mission of salvation to Theodor Fischer which ultimately establishes identification between them. In what amounts to a spiritual autobiography, Theodor transmutes his world of sensible encounters into a pattern of images through which he constructs a symbolic self-portrait. There are two distinct angles of vision in the narrative. Young Theodor embarks on a journey to awareness, but under the
control of the reflecting, mature self, selects significant details. Since the journey to awareness is a mental and emotional one, the recounting of the quest ultimately becomes a pattern of images which describes the narrator's understanding of his own being. Satan is a symbolic figure representing the imaginative ideal, and at the end of the story, Theodor assimilates Satan into his expanded consciousness. By establishing a fictional world in which Theodor discovers himself with the help of a creature of his own imagination, Mark Twain goes beyond the views of What Is Man?, to suggest that imagination may be more powerful than external reality in the individual's quest for self.

By concentrating on the hero's intuitive purposes rather than on the faithful representation of objective reality; and by employing lyrical techniques which lead to the hero's writing of past-present-future in self portraiture, Mark Twain juxtaposes the history of mankind with the nineteenth century assumptions about moral and social evolution.

The Mysterious Stranger points towards the modern short story writer's concerns for the machine-age-man's preoccupation with things and the "dissolution of sensibility," which results in Mark Twain's intuitive understanding of the importance of depicting the alien protagonist adrift in the chaos of nominalistic universe. This seems to have prompted his selection of a narrative form which freed him from the
role of a realistic reporter, and allowed him to represent his vision of the human conditions symbolically. Notwithstanding some of the structural weaknesses and philosophical inconsistencies, the story wins the interest of the reader by showing Theodor's progress from innocence to awareness, through his reactions to Satan's revelations.

IV

SUMMATION

The analysis of the four stories given above will show how Mark Twain and his contemporaries were the precursors of the modern short story. Mark Twain radiated a charming drollery and humour. His success was achieved by his humorous touch. A Twain without humour would be rather dull. Though humour is a salient American characteristic, yet one discerns the touch of imagination and humour with an emphasis on small themes specially in the American short story. Mark Twain's ideas of story writing have influenced some of America's most highly admired and critically acclaimed contemporary writers—Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, John Doss Passos, and others. Mark Twain's insistence in "Fennimore Cooper's Literary Offences" on "the right word" and not on its "second cousin," on the beauty and efficacy of "compact sentence" that avoids surplusage (that has no "barnacles on it"), and on the "undulating rhythms" that he found in the prose of his friend Howells, stands as a
landmark of American realistic writing to-day (81).

Mark Twain combined the manner of the backland story-tellers with the modern art. The backwoods story-teller simply went on spinning a tale without being bothered by the consideration of form. The modern reader is attracted by the manner of the Frontier story-teller and yet wants an underlying pattern of art. Mark Twain was the first to realize this. He gives in his stories a sprawling touch with an unconscious or semi-conscious art:

One is forced to conclude that Clemens did not in his own day appear to be a 'man of letters' in the sense that James and Howells and Eliot were men of letters and that he exercised his art less consciously than they did, and with less interest in theory.68

The conclusion of Gibson is confirmed by Mark Twain in his letter to a clergyman, where he admits that he has methods but they come of their own accord without any conscious effort on his part.

I think it unlikely that deliberate & consciously methodical training is usual with the craft. I think it likely that the training most in use is of this unconscious sort & is guided & governed & made by & by unconsciously systematic by an automatically working taste. ... 69

Mark Twain, through the unconscious acquirement of literary taste, was able to achieve concealment of art in his stories.
The structure of Mark Twain's short stories is basically not different from that of the traditional concept, but the structural elements are subordinated to the spirit of delight, naturalness, and manner of telling. In other words, Mark Twain's short story is different from the conventional type of story not in structure but in technique. The difference in technique is sometimes misunderstood and critics complain about the lack of structure in his stories. Twain's technique in a way has been adopted by the modern short story-writers who also face the fallacious charge of the absence of structure.
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2. Samuel L. Clemens, "My Methods of Writing," Mark Twain Quarterly, 8, No. 3 (Winter-Spring 1949), 1; this letter was written to an unknown clergyman. The original dated October 15, '88 is in Mark Twain Library. Hereafter the title of the journal is cited as MTQ.


8. Perrine; p.6; Rust Hills also says "Plot or incident in a short story then, is never there for its own sake. . . ." See his, Writing in General and Short Story in Particular (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1977), p. 84.

9. Wallace & Mary Stegner, eds., "Introduction" to Great American Short Stories (New York: Dell, 1967), pp.1-28; John Angus Burnell and Bennett Cerf also state that due to over emphasis upon plot, "it is difficult to find stories after Mark Twain and until comparatively some recent years that have the ring of truth. See "Introduction" to their edition An Anthology of Famous American Short Stories (New York: The Modern Library, 1936), pp. xiii-xvii.


14 Mark Twain, "Fennimore Cooper's Literary Offences," in Literary Essays, The Writings of Mark Twain, Author's National Edition (New York: Harper & Bros., 1899), XXII, p. 79. All subsequent quotes are taken from this edition and are indicated by page number in parentheses.

15 Perrine, p. 364.


22 Samuel L. Clemens, "My Methods of Writing," MTQ, 8, No. 3 (Winter-Spring, 1949), 1.


24 Mark Twain, Following the Equator, II, Writings of Mark Twain, Author's National Edition (New York: Harper & Bros., 1899), VI, p.259. In Subsequent citations from this series the title is abbreviated as WMT.


26 Mark Twain, Life on the Mississippi, WMT, IX, p. 338.

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41 George Feinstein, 160-63.

44 Danforth Ross, The American Short Story, University of Minnesota Pamphlets, No. 14 (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1961), i. 17.

45 Charles Neider, ed., "Introduction" to The Complete Short Stories of Mark Twain (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday), pp. xiii-xxiv. All future references to the text of the stories are from this edition indicated by page number in parentheses.


53 Ibid., p. 22.

54 Ibid., pp. 22-23.


57 Gibson, The Art of Mark Twain, p. 29.
62. Ibid.
63. Gibbon, p. 94.
64. Ibid.
68. Gibbon, p. 4.
CHAPTER VII
THE BEST OF TWO WORLDS

To rest upon a formula is a slumber
That, prolonged, means death -

--Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., Wit and Wisdom

I
THE TWO STREAMS

The short story, though it originated probably around primitive camp fires, found its more formal expression in classical fables and in some of the tales of the Old Testament and Apocrypha. Gradually, like all other branches of literature, the short story also flowed in two channels of realism and romanticism. The romantic short story evolved out of the spoken apologue and passed through the stages of Jatakas, myths, and fairy-tales and remains to-day as a story from the folk literature narrated in a sort of animated speech. Both the traditional and the romantic short stories have their roots in reality. Elaborating the difference, Martha Foley says:

The difference between the realistic writer and the romantic is that the first tries for strict objectivity and the second adds imaginative wish-fulfillment to his impression of the objective. One tries to keep his feet on the ground, the other flies off into wild blue Yonder.