CHAPTER IV

THE TROUBLED AIR

If to look at truth in the face
and not to resent it when it's unpalatable
and take human nature as you find it,
. . . is to be cynical, then I suppose
I am a cynic. --

-- William Somerset Maugham: The Pack of
Beyond

I

MARK TWAIN AND CYNICISM

Cynicism is one of those words that have undergone
much of semantic deterioration. The history of Cynicism
as a movement is also rather irregular. The original sources
to the study of cynicism are almost extinct. Our knowledge
of it is limited to anecdotal accounts or doxographical
material. Originally, it was propounded as a way of life
by Antisthenes in ancient Greece, a disciple of Socrates.
Diogenes later carried forward the principles of cynicism.
The main postulate of this conception was that real happiness
could be gained only through "virtuous action." A cynic
looked upon extreme asceticism as an ideal state of life
reducing material needs to the minimum and that was often
fulfilled through charity. Many cynics were, however, more
devoted to their mission of purging the world of its follies and vices. They considered themselves as "scout and herald of God." They were the watchdogs of mankind to hound out pretensions. Their scathing was like the surgeon's knife slicing "the cancer of cant from the minds of others." Gradually, the negative, disparaging effect of cynicism dominated. The essentially noble spirit of voluntary renunciation, indifference to hardships, physical firmness, and personal integrity was forgotten. Cynics no longer (as in the days of Artisthenes and Antiphon) "took up the cudgels against the traditional code of morality and its laws." They rather withdrew within their own ivory tower and adopted more and more skeptical attitude towards every human value. In modern times a cynic has come to mean a person who is "disposed to deny and sneer at sincerity or goodness of human motives and actions. . . ." It is in this negative sense that Mark Twain has been charged with cynicism by a section of critics and also with equal enthusiasm absolved of it by other critics.

Appending a moral to his short story, "Fable", Mark Twain said through "The Cat":

You can find in a text whatever you bring, if you will stand between it and the mirror of your imagination. You may not see your ears, but they will be there.

Critics have likewise found in the text of Twain ma...
of their pre-conceived notions especially when they took a biographical approach in evaluation. The picture of various critical estimates provides an interesting ebb and flow.

In 1912, Albert Bigelow Paine published a three-volume biographical study of Mark Twain. In this work Twain received hagiographic treatment from Paine. In 1920, Gamaliel Bradford approved of the idolizing effort of Paine, though he was reluctant to class Twain among the first-rate comic writers of the world; as his thought was bitter due to, what he called, its shallowness. Even in his later years Mark Twain was widely known as the most towering of American humorists. Shortly after his death, another opinion began to gain currency—that of his being a pessimist or even a cynic. The charge was based particularly on the writings of the late 1890's and the first decade of 1900's, a number of which Twain had left incomplete or had withheld from publication during his lifetime. Critics have since been occupied in varying degrees with Mark Twain's pessimism or cynicism and there has been much speculation as to its source.

Brooks' Thesis

The post-war generation seemed to be increasingly disillusioned with Howell's judgment of Twain as "a comic force unique in the power of charming us out of our cares and troubles." The first critic to make a dent in the comic image of Twain was Van Wyck Brooks. In his book,
the Ordeal of Mark Twain, he states that Mark Twain became a humorist not of his own accord but to fulfil the demands of his age. He had to take upon himself the role of a humorist, "as a compromise," much against his will. Brooks disputed Paine's thesis that Twain's life was a glorious one and said that on the other hand it was an ordeal. Devoting a whole chapter to Mark Twain's despair, Brooks argues that he was a thwarted genius and his pessimism was not "by pre-meditation," as pre-supposed by Paine. Brooks believed that pessimism was inherent in Mark Twain and became a lifelong obsession with him. His old-age-cynicism was the result of his frustrated personality:

He had been balked, he had been divided, he had even been turned, as we shall see, against himself: the poet, the artist in him, consequently, had withered into the cynic and the whole man had become a spiritual Valetudinarian.?

Brooks attributed his cynicism to his family and the Frontier environment. He says that the development of his personality was marred due to the influence of his mother, his wife, and his daughter Clara. At the same time the false standards of the "Gilded Age" arrested the development of his creative faculties. They were wasted in the production of literature merely evoking laughter. Brooks recognized in Mark Twain the natural talent for satire which he had to suppress. According to him Twain's aptitude was in the direction of Voltaire, Swift, and Cervantes, but as
ill luck would have it, Mark Twain failed to summon up courage to resist the demands of his age.

Brooks had the reciprocity of ideas from another critic, Waldo Frank who published a volume entitled Our America in 1919. He looked upon Jack London and Mark Twain as two literary souls defeated by their age. Waldo Frank was the friend and follower of Brooks and was benefited by his ideas. Brooks also developed Frank's thesis. He went further to adopt a contemptuous view of even the humorous works of Twain like The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer. He laments that Twain was a good man fallen in bad company, "the swan born among geese," being obliged to act like a goose like the proverbial person in Rome doing as the Romans did.

Brooks' thesis pointed out the post-war reaction against Twain. The younger generation, shattered by the ravages of the global conflagration, was in revolt against Twain. There was evidence of debunking of the image of Paine's hero who was idealized as the personification of humour in the pre-war America. There was now a questioning attitude as to whether Mark Twain was at heart a pessimist and a cynic. Brook's interpretation gave rise to a literary controversy which continued for many years and was revived in 1933 when he published a second edition of the book.
C.E. Bechhoper, in a book published in 1923 supported Brooks and regarded his interpretation as the best way of explaining Mark Twain's pessimism, Carl Van Doren in *The Moving Critic* (1923) lent a cautious support to the argument. He thought Brooks' thesis to be "substantially accurate as well as brilliant," but too systematic and exhibiting instances of special pleading.  

The thesis received unqualified support from Henry O'Higgins and Edward H. Reede, who called Mark Twain "outside of his art,—as profound a biological failure as America has produced." In the same year Harris Frank severely criticized Mark Twain on the lines of Brooks. To him Twain's humour is "forced and unnatural" and a product of "his extraordinary shallowness of soul." Brooks got, in 1925, an enthusiastic supporter in Upton Sinclair who regarded Twain as an enemy of the newly emerging forces and one who became servile to the bourgeoisie of the time. The other Marxist critics attacking Mark Twain's pessimism, as the result of his bias towards wealth-magnets, were Newton Arvin, V.F. Calverton, and Granville Hicks.

In 1938, Edgar Lee Masters joined the socialist camp in supporting Van Wyck Brooks. He blamed Mark Twain for espousing the cause of the capitalists. He presented a caricature of the "Gilded Age" on the head of Mr. Clemens.
Strong Reactions

Unfortunately for Brooks, his thesis could not hold water for long. The charge of cynicism against Twain, so articulate in his work did not, of course, meet with approval in all intellectual quarters. If some young critics, influenced by the early Van Wyck Brooks, deplored cynicism in Mark Twain, many other critics were fascinated by the rich body of American folklore and humour in Twain. They explored Mark Twain the artist and the chivalrous champion of justice. Consequently there were strong reactions against Brooks' thesis in the literary circles.

The very first objection raised by the critics was that Brooks failed to appreciate Mark Twain's humour as he himself lacked it. Alvin Johnson, qualifying Brooks' argument sadly remarked that it was rather treacherous on the part of a critic not having the sense of humour to take the humourist too seriously to task. Hartley C. Gratton rejected his thesis. He refused to acknowledge that Mark Twain could have cut a narrow way through the jungle of the Gilded Age, even if he had utmost freedom imaginable. Gratton also pointed out the mistake of trying to split the personality of Mark Twain into two—partly humorist and partly pessimist. In fact he was both, owing to the ambivalent nature of his emotions.

The major attack on Brooks' thesis came from Bernard
DeVoto which sparked off the famous Van Wyck Brooks--Fernand DeVoto controversy. In *Mark Twain's America* (1932), DeVoto aggressively called Brook's thesis to question. He stated that Brooks charged Mark Twain with cynicism without knowing his background. DeVoto condemns his a-priori methods and rejects all his conclusions. He countered Brooks' interpretation, that Mark Twain was a thwarted genius, with his own that Twain was above all a Frontier humorist. "It is not only that Mark Twain never became anything but a humorist, realist, and satirist of the frontier; he never desired to be anything else."¹⁵ DeVoto tries to establish that Mark Twain was primarily a humorist.

Supporting DeVoto, many critics regretted the complete lack of humour in Brooks and his treatment of what Mark Twain would have been rather than what he was. His criticism was also not so much directed against Mark Twain as against the American Society of Mark Twain's time. Twain became a mere medium, the real target was his environment. Moreover, at the time of propounding his thesis, Brooks was also pre-occupied with the conditions prevailing in America of his own time. He thus mixes up America of his time with that of the "Gilded Age," and calls upon writers of America not to betray their vocation.

The criticism became so intense that Brooks was forced to make modifications in the second edition of the *Ordeal of
Mark Twain published in 1933. He toned down some of his more audacious statements made earlier. There was a significant change in describing Mark Twain as a "funnyman" instead of "humorist" as in the earlier edition. But it only goes to show that at the back of his mind, Brooks still thinks of a humorist as more or less a "funnyman."

Such temporizations were made by Brooks in the face of changing critical climate. In 1934, Minnie M. Brashear's book Mark Twain: the Son of Missouri, sought to reject the charge that Twain was arrested in his mental development by his environment. Brashear says that Mark Twain was much more deeply read than is commonly supposed. After studying his works, she concludes that Twain came to his own in the West. Brashear also sees the impact of the eighteenth century writers on Twain. H.H. Waggoner disagreed with Brashear on the point of the eighteenth century influence. He declared that it was the scientific spirit of his own time that shaped Mark Twain. According to Edgar Lee Masters the best books of Twain were the results of the native humour of the Western Frontier. Lorch F. Pattee takes up the cause of the East and says that the East did not thwart but thrive the genius of Mark Twain and made him the source of perennial pleasure for the world. Taking the same line, Max Eastman maintained that Elmira, the birthplace of Olivia Langton, was, contrary to Brooks' statement,
one of the most progressive communities, Kenneth R. Andrew's
work, *Nook Farm: Mark Twain's Hartford Circle* (1950),
shows the intellectual stimulation that Mark Twain received
from his Hartford friends.

DeVoto gave a surprise when in his other book, *Mark
Twain at Work* (1943), he gave clear signs of the unconscious
evidence of Brooks on him and realized that there was really
an ordeal. Commenting upon the concluding essay of the
book, "The Symbols of Despair," Walter Blair says:

This essay, in a sense the DeVoto version
of the Ordeal of *Mark Twain*, has at least
two advantages over the Brooks psychological
interpretation; it is based on much more
detailed (and less manipulated) evidence,
and it is interpreted on the basis of what
appear to be more complex and rather sounder
psychological methods.18

Inspite of DeVoto's bluster in the aforesaid book, it is
acknowledged that his judgment has deepened since *Mark
Twain's America* (1932), and he has given a meticulous study.
Gladys C. Bellamy in her book, *Mark Twain as a Literary Artist*,
has enumerated several points on which DeVoto and Brooks
agreed. This controversy has, however, served the purpose
of drawing attention to his late writings.

Inspite of the critical vicissitudes Mark Twain is
read more and more. He survives both as a writer and as a
legend.
The Modern View

In recent times the belief that during his last years of despair, Twain had turned a cynic has been questioned very convincingly. Scholarly research in the 1960's and 1970's has brought to light some new information which indicated the need for the reconsideration of the problem. In the ultimate analysis, both Van Wyck Brooks and Bernard DeVoto thought in one way or the other that his philosophy eventually emerged out of his despair. These two critics have been the major figures in establishing Mark Twain's reputation as a cynic. Each of them has, however, given only a part of the truth. Brooks emphasized his despair over his philosophy and DeVoto suggested that his philosophy had its roots in his despair. Even Brooks later accepted that he "had never been able to think anything out but rather felt things out in a cumbersome fashion, and, writing always intuitively, ..."19 critics to-day generally refuse to accept that Mark Twain was a baffled cynic. John S. Tuckey particularly debunked the claims of those critics who think that Twain was a frustrated cynic. Tuckey says that during his last phase Mark Twain was "not confirmed in despair, not barred from seeing and representing human life as having value and significance."20 Dean Morgan Schmitter has shown that although "pessimism ran deep" in Mark Twain, there was also "room for other currents to flow." He goes on to
elaborate: "His philosophy was pessimistic but his treatment was sanguine. And in his writing he displayed a gift for life as intense as his conviction of despair." Howard Mumford Jones treats of Mark Twain's pessimism but says that "in the matter of cosmic pessimism Mark Twain was not unique; he was, in some sense, representative of a whole tendency in religion and philosophy." Thomas Blues thought that the bitterness in Mark Twain was the result of an imbalance in the desired relationship between the individual and the community. In his opinion Twain was "deeply distrustful of the character and fearful for the fate of the individual who attempts to triumph over the community." Thomas Blues has, no doubt, taken a fresh approach to Mark Twain but his thoughts on community are not fully clear. As a result, his treatment is inadequate and vague. In his anxiety to reject old values and explore new ones, Blues goes astray. Yet he deserves gratitude for a new venture in the realm of Twainian studies. Commenting on Brook's thesis, (Mrs.) Mirmal Mukerji says that "Brooks is obsessed only with the negative and repressive factors in American life. The Ordeal of Mark Twain (1920), and The Pilgrimage of Henry James (1925), are the application of his thesis to particular instances." Louis J. Rudd has pointed out that Mark Twain could never be too serious for long. "A sense of integrity not only kept him from becoming a spoilsman in 1868 but also
prodded him into bursts of muckraking."  

Hamlin Hill in, *Mark Twain: God's Fool* (1973), has tried to invert Brooks' thesis by attempting to establish that it was Samuel Clemens, who, during the last ten years of his life repressed and in effect censored Olivia, "a warm, independent, and occasionally antagonistic wife." In a later article, "who killed Mark Twain?" (1974), Hill has drawn the attention of the scholars to the need for a penetrating study of Mark Twain, "beneath the palimpsest of comic legend--his rages, his gaucheries, obsequiousness before great wealth, all his various monstrosities." Hill arrives at these conclusion mainly on the basis of biographical studies of Mark Twain's last years and less by virtue of a critical estimate of his work. Moreover, Hill's conclusions have not yet been given final acceptance. Literary criticism remains reluctant to accept the theory that Mark Twain was a domestic tyrant during his last decade. Hill also gives evidence to show Olivia as an all-dominating mother, leaving Mark Twain scholarship to reconcile the two diagnoses. Moreover, even Hamlin Hill is forced to recognize the inherent humour and creative spirit in Twain. The concluding sentences of the preface to his book read:

In the circumstances, his ability to retain even a spark of humor and to write even unfinished fantasies was remarkable. God's
fool, like Jay Gatsby, managed to come out all right in the end, which was his triumph; but he sustained himself by a microscopic margin in the last ten years of his life.26

The intended exposure of discredit is thus drifting towards a bestowal of praise.

The later criticism has discussed Twain's deep concern for good and evil. These ideas of Twain find expression in his later writings. Apart from this, the writings of the modern critics suggested that a brief look at the temper of the times would be enlightening. If this is undertaken, it would be discovered that Twain was not unique in his response to the times.

The later half of the nineteenth century on the continent of Europe was a disturbing period for the sensitive mind. It was "a clamorous chorus of disenchantment, bitterness, and despair." There were more than one reason for this disenchantment. Politically it was the period of the rise of the common man with the advent of democracy. The age-old prerogatives of the blue-blood were losing ground. There was the see-saw in the political arena. Many personalities had meteoric rise and fall. The result was either flurry or frustration. Sociologically, it was an age of transition. The Industrial Revolution was devouring the pre-Industrial pastoral society. The population was
leaving the country. The old affinities of family and friendship which united the people in the past were now giving way. Not only did the old social and economic structure disintegrate, there was also the disintegration of ideas. New philosophical ideas were taking shape. The eighteenth century rationalism was being replaced by the romantic spirit of revolt against convention and conformity. With the publication of Darwin's *The Story of Evolution* the whole intellectual firmament was overcast with the cloud of doubt. People began to doubt the very basis of christianity. Intellectuals were tending to become more and more flexible and unorthodox. People like Matthew Arnold were in a dilemma. Arnold laments in *Dover Beach*:

And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight
Where ignorant armies clash by night (Ll. 35-37)

Tennyson complains in *In Memoriam* of the faithless coldness of the times. Carlyle and Ruskin urged their generation to make its life rich with human values. W.B. Yeats got disgusted with the conventional christianity and evolved his own church of poetic traditions. Pessimism was indwelling in the works of Fitzgerald, Thompson, and Hardy.

In America, however, the strain of pessimism was not so common. The early optimism of Walt Whitman had a protracted echo in the New World. There is some truth in DeVoto's
generalization that pessimism was so rare in the nineteenth century America that "its expression in Mark Twain had a kind of singularity."²⁸ Whereas George Eliot, R.L. Stevenson, and Tennyson were skeptical, Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson were optimistic about the progress of the railroad. But gradually the gloom spread across the Atlantic and was brought back by the American travellers to the continent. This happened in the second half of the nineteenth century. The members of the early "Lost Generation" found the old values tottering and life becoming less satisfying. The early twentieth century writing of despair, re-affirmed and emphasized the impression that the creation was disordered and aimless. Man was thought of as a puppet in the hands of a vague and probably undependable hand. Such were the occasional and probably untimely moans reflected among others, in the writings of Henry Adams and Mark Twain.

From the earliest times, Americans have shown a sort of mixed reaction towards Europe. During the Pre-Civil-War era, Irving and Longfellow represented the romantic devotees who sought to recapture the shadowy grandeur of the past while Cooper and Emerson were the type of objective onlookers who observed the European Society and compared it with the American World. In the best of Mark Twain's work one gets the fusion of the European and American traditions. He applied the Frontier humour to European scene. He also developed
the skill at reproducing the unfamiliar scene with a kind of total realization that characterizes the best of his later work. Mark Twain's comments on Europe after his early trip abroad were marked by intense and unqualified emotion, when he was defending America against such critics as Matthew Arnold and Paul Bourget, he was violently emotional. This type of emotionalism was also responsible for some violent outbursts in his later writings.

While in his view man deserved to be damned for his reprehensible conduct, Twain also held God, with his inscrutable ways, responsible for man's moral failings. Twain's mechanistic determinism, his political skepticism, his response to evolutionary science, and hostility towards the Christian conception of existence were brought into focus by the sudden death of his daughter Susy in August 1896. There were other personal tragedies. He also suffered from pecuniary disasters owing to miscalculated publishing enterprises and the failure of Craig's typesetting machine in which he had invested $200,000. Mrs. Clemens also left for her heavenly abode in 1904. There were also a series of conflicts like the Boer War, the Boxer uprising, and the Chinese opium war of 1856. His personal life and some political and social developments brought a spell of ambivalence in his mind and he began to wonder at one stage whether he and the rest of the mankind are indeed damned.
II
TWAIN'S AMBIVALENCE

Mark Twain's ambivalence on moral issues continuously divided both his narration and characters into polar opposites. The poles were the dark natural world on the one hand and the light, civilized man-made world on the other. Twain regarded himself as a man of the civilization and had a long period of fascination with the machine world. In the beginning, he accepted many of the most cherished American articles of faith; that democracy was a palladium, that civilization was always a sign of progress, that the common man was inherently good, and that technology was to be mankind's saviour. This was the public, the conscious position of Mark Twain throughout much of his life. His short fiction revealed quite another set of beliefs, however. Twain's faith in democracy declined markedly as he wrote of politics in Nevada and Washington D.C., and his common men such as Hank Morgan not only were wrong but were destructively wrong. Technology, though eulogized by the author in such works as Life On Mississippi, Connecticut Yankee, or Pudd'nhead Wilson, was a Frankenstein creation which destroyed the pastoral tranquillity both of Mississippi river valley and of Camelot. Underlying his conscious support of the more blatant of the blatant folk wisdom of the nineteenth century was a feeling of disillusionment that technological progress did not change
the fact that mankind was still the "damned human race."

In his fiction-world there developed characters who symbolized his lack of faith, characters like the Bad Boy who wished to escape civilization. His earliest narratives began to develop a dual narrative pattern from which developed the old timer/Innocent narrator, a successful channeling of his ambivalence. The innocent, however, inevitably outgrew his ambivalences and Twain in his short stories was left with a single narrator having double vision. His early adoption of the Bad Boy to satire was successful until he began to offer the Bad Boy wider moral choices. At this point Twain split the Bad Boy in two (Tom and Huck) and projected his own ambivalence on to the Bad Boy; making Tom a dual character. Twain next adopted twins to symbolize the ambiguity of morals and he found himself embroiled in his own duality which forced him into contradictory moral postures. Commenting on Mark Twain's ambivalence, Wandy A. Bie has said:

> Basically he found that the good/evil duality is caused by the disparity between man's 'low' impulses, drives, and instincts and his 'high' social and moral code. 29

Through a life-time of writing fiction which took morals more and more as its subject, Twain's duality prevented him from ever defining consistent moral position.
Apart from the ambivalence due to circumstantial causes, man's nature is such that it cannot be consistently at one stage. Mark Twain's observations regarding pessimism lend support to this view. In one of his letters he said:

Pessimists are born not made; optimists are born not made; but no man is born either pessimist wholly or optimist wholly, perhaps; he is pessimistic along certain lines and optimistic along certain others. This is my case.30

Expressing the above view in a nutshell, Mark Twain remarked elsewhere: "Pessimist : The optimist who didn't arrive."31 In one of his note book entries, Mark Twain stated the pessimism - Optimism duality in human nature more explicitly, "There is no sadder sight than a young pessimist, except an old optimist.32

These remarks of Mark Twain's point to the truth that every human being has his gay and sad moments. It would be wrong to condemn a person as a cynic only because of his serious phases of life. A humourist is also a human being. All humorists have therefore been serious at some periods during their life. In their humour there has been mingling of the serious and the comic.

III

THE SERIO-COMIC MANNER

Numerous examples of grim expressions in humorous
writings may be found from early Greeks to moderns, to Mark Twain and after. The dialogues of Lucian and the comedies of Aristophanes contain such examples from antiquity. Anglo-Saxon poetry, medieval drama, and the dance of death motif furnished major strains during the Middle Ages. Elizabethan drama and prose also offer many examples. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, men such as Jonathan Swift and Robert Burns spiced their humour with grimness. During the romantic period poets such as Southey, Fraed, Hood, and Byron and essayists such as Lamb and DeQuincey employed it.

In the East, even Omar Khayyam the noted epicurean poet shows his ashen undersides. But the hovering sad tone of some of Omar Khayyam's quatrains does not create a sad state of mind. They only echo a passing mood. It was on reading the Rubaiyat that Edwin Arlington Robinson came to the conclusion that the Rubaiyat was "rather grim philosophy of life but rather attractive," e.g.,

'Why,' said another, 'some there are who tell Of one who threatens he will toss to Hell The luckless Pots he marr'd in making — Pish! He's a Good Fellow, and 'twill all be well.'33

Mark Twain got much interest in Omar Khayyam. He loved the quatrain that Thomas Hardy wished to be read at his death-bed. This "Rubai," in the opinion of Twain, is the most far-reaching and grand thought ever expressed so briefly:
Oh Thou, who Man of baser Earth didst make,
And who with Paradise didst devise the snake:
For all sin wherewith the Face of Man
Is blacken'd — Man's forgiveness give-and take! 34

In early America, Puritanism, German Romanticism, and
the Frontier life contributed to a native type of grim
outlook even in humorous authors. The rude, boisterous
attitude of the frontier evolved tragic laughter.

Edgar Allan Poe was influenced chiefly by the European
and Gothic traditions. His grim outlook is part of a
satirical, anti-romantic tradition that characterizes most
of his comic material. His famous story the "Cask of
Amontillado" discusses the nature of the proper retribution
in the following words:

A wrong is unredressed when retribution
overtakes its redresser. It is equally
unredressed when avenger fails to make
himself felt as such to him who has done
the wrong. 35

The quotation illustrates the uncanny, Gothic way of
presentation.

The purely American influence is more noticeable in
Herman Melville, though most of his major work deals with
life at sea. The Folk-spirit and the expansive mood of
the mid-Century inspires his laughter and always lurks in
the background. His serio-comic material is extremely
diverse and covers a wide range of emotional significance.

The thoroughly American outlook of the Frontier and the West comes to the fore in Mark Twain. His humoristic mode reflects the tastes and customs of those regions. It is a technique that employs plain-spokenness and avoids euphemism. Emphasis is laid upon unpleasant details; death, and discomfort become prime material for tragic laughter. Schadenfreude or laughter at calamity is a sub-species of the grim mirth that he employs fairly often. Twain mirrored the American taste for a wild sort of humour that satirized, debunked, and poked fun at many of the things that convention ordinarily respected. It is a sad nature of life that any person not accepting the accepted norms is dubbed a cynic.

Great humorists all over the world have at times given expression to their dejection. Writing about seriousness in Mark Twain Times Literary Supplement said:

All humorists, we know, have their serious moments, every chaplin longs at times to burn his boots and show his Hamlet soul; but must we perform outdo even his own demands and take his jokes as soberly as his philosophizing?

There were other pessimists among Mark Twain's times notably Ambrose Bierce, Samuel Butler, and Edward Fitzgerald. Even writers like Whitman, Lowell, and Howells who are known for their optimism were disillusioned with the innate goodness
in man and the republic's efforts to rise to the occasion. All this goes to show that disappointment in itself does not mean that a person has gone a cynic.

IV

TWAIN'S CYNICISM IN HIS SHORT STORIES

In the works of his short fiction published between 1898 and 1916, there runs a strain of despair and pessimism. It has already been shown that during this period the author had been seriously afflicted and perhaps illness played its part. Even then these writings of short fiction do not establish that Twain had altogether lost his faith in human values. Critics, who, on the basis of his later writings, condemned Mark Twain as a cynic failed to see that many of the author's own comments confirm his faith in the intrinsic merit of manhood.

The Man that corrupted Hadleyburg (1899), exposes the conceit of "false honesty" resulting from secluded virtue cultivated in a sort of monastic life. Milton in Areopagitica (1643) attacked this sort of virtue:

He that can apprehend and consider vice with all her baits and seeming pleasures, and yet abstain, and yet distinguish, and yet prefer, that which is truly better, he is the true warfaring Christian. I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race,
where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat. Assuredly we bring not innocence into the world; we bring impurity much rather; that which purifies us is trial, and trial is by what is contrary. That virtue therefore is but a youngling in the contemplation of evil, and knows not the utmost that vice promises to her followers, and rejects it, is but a blank virtue, not a pure; her whiteness is but an excremental whiteness. . . .

This observation of Milton's is echoed in *The Man that Corrupted Hadleyburg* where virtue is shown in its own ivory tower.

From the beginning it is shown that the society of Hadleyburg is precariously proud of its image of honesty:

... throughout the formative years temptations were kept out of the way of young people, so that their honesty could have every chance to harden and solidify, and become a part of their very bone (350).

The natural result of this monastic life was the promotion of a conceited fancy. Virtue untested by temptation cannot be affirmed and can be treated as merely native.

"Hadleyburg was sufficient unto itself, and cared not a rap for strangers or their opinions" (350).

The complex of vanity has reached a precipice and is bound to fall.

The fall came through a stranger. "Hadleyburg had the
ill luck to offend a passing stranger" (350). The stranger "was a bitter man and revengeful" (ibid). Six months later, "the mysterious big stranger" (351), arrives in Hadleyburg and leaves a sack of gilded coins at the house of Mr. Richards, like the mythological apple of discord. As soon as Mrs. Richards reads the intruder's letter about the "goldcoins", she is startled; "Mercy on us, and the door not locked!" (351). She rushes about locking the door and pulling down the window blinds. Mrs. Richards unconsciously gives a glimpse into the so-called incorruptible honesty of Hadleyburg. It is merely the image of honesty and not honesty itself that the Hadleyburgians value and that too for commercial reasons:

... the mere fact that a young man hailed from Hadleyburg was all the recommendation he needed when he went forth from his natal town to seek for responsible employment (350).

The honest image of the town was thus being exploited for personal advancement, one trap laid by a stranger is sufficient to dispel this aura of honesty and exhibit the principal citizens of the town as the worshippers of Mammon. 38

When Mr. Richards reminds his wife, Mary, that honesty has become second nature for Hadleyburgians, she immediately protests;

Honesty shielded, from the very cradle, against every possible temptation, and so it's artificial honesty, and weak as water when
temptation comes, as we have seen this night. . . . I do believe that if ever the day comes that its honesty falls under great temptation, its grand reputation will go to ruin like a house of cards (358).

Mary gets relief after making the confession. She now realizes that she has been a humbug all her life and declares that she would not like any person calling her honest. Hers was only the artificial honesty.

When all the communications have been read by the chairman Mr. Burgess, he reads the remaining document from the stranger. In the postscript to the letter the stranger points at two human weaknesses. The first is "Vanity—the place where feeble and foolish people are most vulnerable." The other is that "the weakest of all weak things is a virtue which has not been tested in the fire (380). One is reminded of Milton's _Lycidas_ where he calls desire for fame as the (... last infirmity of noble mind.)" 39 At the end, Twain illustrates the Cathartic effect of humour. The people of Hadleyburg laugh down their "incorruptible" principal citizens and change their motto from the concept of "lead us not into temptations" to "lead us into temptations."

The story makes it clear that Mark Twain, far from being a cynic, is very much a man of the world. He calls upon people not to abjure the company of men but to live in the very midst of it, struggle with evil, and thereby fortify
their virtue. He says with Shakespeare:

The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together: our virtues would be proud, if our faults whipped them not, and our crimes would despair, if they were not cherished by our virtues.

Virtue is whetted by being constantly jostled against evil just as a rose becomes all the more appealing while surrounded by thorns. The question may arise as to how not even one among the nineteen leading citizens could rise to the occasion. It has to be borne in mind that Mark Twain has painted the society of Hadleyburg only as an illustration of the extreme effects of the sequestered virtue. An illustration naturally remains a case in itself.

"The Five Boons of Life" (1902), reveals Twain's longing for euthanasia. Like Keats in Ode To the Nightingale, Twain is "half in love with easeful Death." For Twain it is ever rich to die. This mood is the result of his unhappy phase of life. Critics may call him cynic on this account but what will they call the people debating in modern times to legalize in certain cases the painless termination of life? In fact the despair of his later years is not a despair of mere personal bereavement but of his country and ultimately of man. Even this despair is enlivened by frequent expressions of faith and hope.

"A Dog's Tale" (1903), and "A Horse's Tale" (1906),
contain Mark Twain's views against cruelty to animals especially in the form of vivisection and bull-fighting. It is perfectly normal for intellectuals to express disapproval in this direction. Even in modern times voices are raised in protest against vivisection and bull-fighting. Moreover, "A Horse's Tale" shows that Mark Twain was not hopelessly disappointed with humanity. The conversation between the two horses Mongrel and Sage-Brush, about the nature of man is interesting. Mongrel says that he has observed several human beings in his time. In his opinion men are by nature brutal. To him man is "most strange and unaccountable." He fails to understand maltreatment of mute, innocent animals at the hands of man. Sage-Brush comforts his friend; "Man is not always like that, Mongrel; he is kind enough when he is not excited by religion" (556). It is obvious that Twain believes that it is not man who is bad but it is the fanaticism of his creeds that sometimes (though not always) makes him bad. By religion here Twain means any practice that is fanatically observed. It may be even bull-fighting if it is punctiliously held like the religious service on a Sunday. This does not, however, shake Twain's firm belief in the general goodness of man.

"$20,000 Bequest" (1904) takes up once again the Madleburgian theme of the depraving influence of the sudden, unjustly gained wealth and also the resulting vanity.
Saladin Foster and his wife Electra, on the Chimerical promise of the $30,000 Bequest, go into a "dilirium of bliss" and become vain. They "walked upon air, with their heads in the clouds. . . Everybody was stunned and amazed and went about muttering 'what can be the matter with the Fosters?'" (519). The matter was simply the lure of wealth.

"Vast wealth, to the person unaccustomed to it, is a bane; it eats into the flesh and bone of his morals" (514). In the end the couple dies broken-hearted seeing that hopes were dupes. Mark Twain does not oppose wealth but warns against the snare of "Vast wealth acquired through sudden and unwholesome means. . ." (522).

"Extracts From Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven" (1907), is designed to "destroy traditional beliefs about the nature of heaven." The story also reveals the ambivalent nature of Mark Twain. Nevertheless, Captain Stormfield displays essential optimism. Apart from it, some other points invite the reader's attention. Mark Twain takes a new approach to heavenly life when he states that heaven is not an unmixed bliss and this is in human interest. Captain Stormfield explains:

You see, happiness ain't a thing in it self - it's only a contrast with something that ain't pleasant. . . . Well, there's plenty of pain and suffering in Heaven--consequently there's plenty of contrasts, and just no end of happiness (576).
Twain wants to convey that life will not be worth living even in heaven if there is only pleasure. One will become fed up with it. That is why pain is introduced to heighten the value of pleasure.

Secondly, man is by nature a creature given to action. He will lose all charm in life if he is allowed to remain idle. Therefore heaven is no place for idlers. All men have to labour in heaven. Persons in heaven also get heavenly justice. Mark Twain illustrates Browning's philosophy of the imperfect when he says, "The man who don't get his reward on earth, need'nt bother--he will get it here, sure" (587). Explaining heavenly justice he adds "they warn't rewarded according to their deserts on earth but here they get their rightful rank" (588). Nobody remains disappointed in heaven, as each one has his just share. Those persons who have done righteous actions on earth in a quiet and humble manner receive due honour in heaven. Sir Richard Duffer, Baronet, while on earth, ran a sausage shop. He led a frugal life as he gave away quietly all the spare meat to the poor. People considered him mean and stingy as nobody ever saw him giving anything in charity. After his death he was welcomed in heaven as "Sir Richard Duffer Baronet," in view of his sincerity (590).

Another striking feature of the story is Mark Twain's
liberal attitude towards the races of the world. In captain Stormfield's paradise the atmosphere is a cosmopolitan one having "people from everywhere--Esquimaux, Tartars, Negroes, Chinamen" etc. In fact white persons are dismayed to find themselves in negligible minority in captain Stormfield's heaven.

The story unfolds Mark Twain's generally skeptical attitude together with his sense of admiration reflected here and there. The textual citations given above will prove that though Mark Twain is skeptical in the story, resulting in satirical and ironical treatment of the traditional beliefs, he is by no means a cynic. He gives many positive points with regard to his own. His purpose is to bring down the Sunday school conception of the promised land. 42

The Mysterious Stranger (1916), although it contains some of the most fierce attacks on human race, is not the expression of Twain's downright cynicism. No doubt there is acrimonious expression but there is reason for this acrimony. Expressing the rationale of bitterness, Wendell Glick says:

It devolves, not so much from Twain's conviction that man is irrational as from Twain's impatience with man's presumption that he is not. 43

It is against man's presumption that Mark Twain makes an assault, not against man himself. The Mysterious Stranger
reiterates his faith in multitude being kind hearted. This is what Mark Twain means when he comments upon the people of Eseldorf:

In any community, big or little, there is always a fair proportion of people who are not malicious or unkind by nature, and who never do unkind things except when they are overmastered by fear, or when their self-interest is greatly in danger, or some such matter as that (633).

It is really an irony of fate that in human society evil-doers, though small in number, get the upper hand either by brow-beating good majority or by fulfilling some vested interests. Depicting the true nature of the multitude, satan in the *Mysterious Stranger* tells Theodor:

The vast majority of the race, whether savage or civilized, are secretly kind-hearted and shrink from inflicting pain, but in the presence of the aggressive and pitiless minority they don't dare to assert themselves (663).

Many persons in their heart of hearts are against indulging in acts of cruelty and torture but are not able to face the evil boldly and crush it. When groups of courageous persons challenge evil-mongers and defeat them, the plaudits from the populace come to them just as well. Thus Mark Twain laments that Man through his haughtiness has invited his ruin. His parting wish in *The Mysterious Stranger* is: "will a day come when the race will detect the funniness of these
juvenilities and laugh at them - and by laughing at them
destroy them?" (p. 671).

The panacea effect of laughter is reasserted at the
end of the story. According to him laughter is the only
effective weapon with human race. One would not think that
such remarks of Mark Twain are the outpourings of the heart
of a thoroughbred cynic. There is an element of hope and
faith at the end even of The Mysterious Stranger.

Veiled defence?

There is an indication that Mark Twain probably anticipated
that the expression of his strong likes and dislikes
in his later writings may provoke critics to call him a
cynic. That is why, he probably puts forth his own Veiled
defence in the character of the 'doctor' in the short story
"Was It Heaven? Or Hell?" (1902). This fact has so far escaped the notice of critics. Twain, while delineating
the character of 'the doctor', states:

He knew nothing about etiquette, and cared
nothing about it; in speech, manner, carriage,
and conduct he was the reverse of conventional.
He was frank, to the limit; he had opinions on
all subjects; they were always on tap and ready
for delivery, and he cared not a farthing
whether his listener liked them or didn't. Whom
he loved he loved, and manifested it; whom he
didn't love he hated, and published it from
the housetops. In his young days he had been
a sailor, and the salt-airs of all the seas blew from him yet. He was a sturdy and loyal
Christian, and believed he was the best one in
the land, and the only one whose Christianity was perfectly sound, healthy, full-charged with common sense, and had no decayed places in it. . . . whatever the doctor believed, he believed with all his heart, and would fight for it whenever he got the chance; and if the intervals between the chances grew to be irksomely wide, he would invent ways of shortening them himself. He was severely conscientious, according to his rather independent lights, and whatever he took to be a duty he performed, no matter whether the judgment of the professional moralists agreed with his own or not. . . .

Necessarily, such a man is impressionable, impulsive, emotional. This one was, and had no gift at hiding his feelings; or if he had it he took no trouble to exercise it. He carried his soul's prevailing weather in his face, and when he entered a room the parasoles or the umbrellas went up—figuratively speaking—according to the indications. When the soft light was in his eye it meant approval, and delivered a benediction; when he came with a frown he lowered the temperature ten degrees. He was a well-beloved man in the house of his friends, but sometimes a dreaded one (474-75).

This description of the doctor's personality and temperament can, to a great extent, be applied to Mark Twain's own during the later phase of his life. He had also become "severely conscientious." He was also "impressionable, impulsive, emotional." "Twain is full of curious habits, both personal and literary," says Charles Neider" and you either love him or you don't, regardless. I do."44

Many persons love Mark Twain inspite of his queer habits. It is his unconventional and independent approach that endears him to posterity. The frustrated generation after the war, took intense satisfaction in his posthumously
published pessimistic writings. The general sense of waste in the atmosphere presented Mark Twain's later writings as the personification of frustration and despair. The modern readers, however, cannot dismiss Twain as the cynic in the sense of a person habitually sneering at human race. He has his own reasons to bewail and bemoan in the writings of the later period of his life but he does not invariably take only negative prepositions. Mark Twain cannot be brushed aside as a human owl who never sees a good quality in a man and sees only the bad one. M.M.M.M. Khan shows how Mark Twain's humour redeems him everywhere:

"Even in the most satiric and sarcastic passages his humour sparkles and reminds the reader that he is not totally subject to the pressure of the circumstances and environment."  

His sardonic writings indicate that though he disliked some evils of human society yet he was not prepared to renounce the society in which he lived. He was, of course, a bitter critic of religious orthodoxy. His appeal was from Christian ritual to Christian idealism.

It is apparent that Mark Twain is not a cynic in the negative sense of the term. If at all he is a cynic he may be so in one of the original senses of cynicism—a surgeon wielding his knife to purge humanity of its ills. Mark Twain's letter to Will Bowen written during the last phase of his life illustrates his indomitable spirit:
... it is poison, rank poison to knuckle down to care & hardships. They must come to us all, albeit in different shapes - & we may not escape them--it is not possible--but we may swindle them out of half their puissance with a stiff upper lip.

He always seeks deeper realities beneath the surface. He rebels against all abuses, prerogatives, and high-handedness. He does not betake himself to a monastery because the environment is not congenial, because the amusements of the age are crude and cruel. He felt with Wordsworth:

And much it grieved my heart to think
What man has made of man.

But at the same time, Twain takes upon himself the difficult task of opening up the eyes of the society to its own weaknesses. The modern view of Mark Twain with his fears and despair as well as his humour and local colour has been given in a balanced manner by Noel Grove in a popular account published recently. Mark Twain's interest in humanity is further confirmed by his portrayal of versatile, warm and vibrating characters in his stories.
REFERENCES


19. Van Wyck Brooks, *Days of the Phoenix: The Nineteen-Twenties I Remember* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co. Inc., 1957), p. 189. Brooks refers to a conversation with Sherwood Anderson who tried to show him where he had fallen short in his *Ordeal of Mark Twain*. Brooks still stood by his book, conceding that it reveals "only half of Mark Twain, but certainly much, if not the whole. . ." (pp.170-74). Later a doctor disagreed with Brooks on whether "reason" or "emotion" had been more influential in his writing (pp.188-89). The revised edition of *The Ordeal of Mark Twain* (1933), came out after this period.


22. Howard Mumford Jones, "The Pessimism of Mark Twain," in his *Belief and Disbelief in American Literature* (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1967), pp. 94-115. Jones refuses to accept Mark Twain as a cynic. He says that in his works there are many instances of generosity, saintliness, self-sacrifice, and humility.


34. Ibid., p. 127. Also see Mukhtar Ali Isani, "The Vogue of Omar Khayyam in America" *Comparative Literature Studies*, 14 (1977), 256-73.


Cf. Ibid., pp. 130-31.


CHAPTER V
A WORLD TO WIN

The proper study of mankind is man
--Alexander Pope, An Essay on Man

I

THE BASIC PRINCIPLES & TWAIN'S VIEWS ON CHARACTERIZATION

Animation

The essence of a short story consists in portraying persons in action, each according to his own character. After all, it is human nature that interests the readers as well as the listeners (of oral stories); human nature as acted upon by this and that event, not events disconnected from their surroundings. "... it is usually character that makes a story great, a single character around which the other characters move." Occasionally there do appear a few stories in which the dominant character is that of someone not physically present as a person acting in the story (e.g. Barcy Goodson in The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg). For practical purposes, however, this person can be regarded as one of the characters in the tale. Thus primarily it is the personages that make the story.