

WHAT HATH GOD WROUGHT?:
THE RELIGIOUS DISILLUSIONMENT
OF MARK TWAIN AND HERMAN MELVILLE

511

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by
John Bruce Walsh
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Approved for the Major Department

Robert D. Reynolds

Approved for the Graduate Council

Freeman Hayes

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PREFACE

Although Mark Twain and Herman Melville are two of America's greatest authors, they have rarely been linked together in a study of this kind. Though Twain wrote some of his best works during Melville's lifetime, there is no evidence that either man was familiar with the other's literary achievements. Yet close inspection of Twain's religious beliefs, his ideas concerning God and man, reveals a great many similarities with his predecessor's ideas on these subjects. One begins to sense that Twain was a continuum of the despair and disillusionment that epitomized Melville's literary career.

The evolutionary process that Melville underwent in developing his philosophies and art was followed by Twain in a very similar fashion. From his first grumblings against a mysterious Deity, to damnation of the human race, on to profound depths of despair, Twain's progress paralleled that of Melville. In taking some of their major and minor works as proof of these authors' development, this study compares them in a point-by-point process. New questions, new discoveries, new damnations of God and man, and the universe, appear in each succeeding work they wrote as both men traveled on their lonely quest.

The initial idea for this study was a product of course

work on Mark Twain, and later Herman Melville, under the guidance of Dr. Green D. Wyrick. Since that time, Dr. Wyrick has been a ready source for suggestions and information of an invaluable nature. I would also like to express my appreciation to Dr. Brian Byrd for his assistance in organizing and launching the preliminary material. Finally, I am indebted to my wife for her understanding.

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J. B. W.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. DOUBT AND THE SEARCH FOR GOD	1
II. THE BITTER FRUITS OF THEIR SEARCH	27
III. MAN'S LOT	53
IV. PARTAKERS OF THE FRUIT	74
V. BIBLIOGRAPHY	99

To my father
Who could have,
My brother
Who may,
And to my mother
Who always will.

CHAPTER I

DOUBT AND THE SEARCH FOR GOD

There are only a few men who are not satisfied with things as they are and dream about things as they ought to be. Even fewer men actually try to make their dream come true by trying to influence others, in one way or another, to their dream's possibility of reality. But still fewer men stop and wonder, and think, and reason why things are wrong to begin with. They not only concern themselves with man, his environment, his psyche, and his world; but they prod far beyond and travel in the realms of the spiritual, the heavenly and the hellish. They search for what they believe is the ultimate source, although they are not necessarily prophets, or mystics, or clerics. They may merely be writers like Mark Twain and Herman Melville. In their works of fiction, they searched, questioned, doubted, cursed and attacked what they believed to be the creator of the universe.

The purpose of this thesis is to establish why Twain and Melville searched for, questioned, and doubted God; then to illustrate how they accomplished their search in their works of fiction, and most importantly, to reveal how they were strikingly similar in their ideas, questions, and conclusions on the subject of God and His relationship with man. The similarities between these two men is actually remarkable when one remembers that Twain was of another generation than Melville and there is no record of either

one reading the other's works. Twain wrote a generation after Melville; yet the man from Hannibal echos many of Melville's beliefs, ideas, and problems.

Bernard De Voto wrote: "Much more identity than has ever been noticed in print exists in the careers of Mark Twain and Herman Melville."¹ This "identity," or similarity, begins with these authors' basic adherence to high standards of moral idealism. This idealism may best be expressed in terms of the Medieval Church's traditional Seven Cardinal Virtues, the virtues expressed in such works as "Piers Plowman" and "The Faerie Queene". They are also the basis of belief in the works of Twain and Melville. The Seven Cardinal Virtues are Faith, Hope, Charity, [the Holy Virtues], Prudence, Justice, Temperance, and Fortitude. Twain's greatest literary achievement, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, presents a character who progressively becomes, often through trial and error, a true Christian. Huck Finn exhibits each of the aforementioned Virtues as a part of his character. For instance, when presented with opposing interpretations of heaven, the widow's beautiful paradise, Miss Watson's preaching and praying, Huck decides he does not care for either one. But he would prefer to go to the widow's and says, in a humble manner;

I thought it all out and reckoned I would belong to the widow's if he [God] wanted me, though I couldn't

¹Bernard De Voto, Mark Twain's America, pp. 312-313.

Make out how he was going to be any better off than than what he was before, seeing I was so ignorant and so kind of low-down and ornery.²

Although he appears to be nonchalant about his prospects for heavenly bliss, Huck illustrates a deep hope, faith, and respect in a Supreme Being that watches over all.

After running into Jim on the island, Huck swears never to turn Jim in even though it may mean public disapproval. Time and again Huck manages to keep Jim safe from various disreputable characters by any means that his quick mind can devise. In Chapter XVI, "The Rattlesnake Skin Does Its Work," Huck is confronted with a group of men hunting for five escaped slaves. Huck has just left Jim on the raft while he takes their canoe, ostensibly to make sure the town they are approaching is Cairo, which would mean freedom for Jim. However, Huck has been carefully considering the notion of turning Jim into the proper authorities, an act which Huck knows is required by the law of Church and state. But for a reason he cannot explain, Huck does not turn Jim over to the slave hunters. Instead, he scares them away by making them believe his father is on the raft and is very sick. Huck is seemingly apprehensive about telling the men what sickness his "father" has and the hunters become suspicious and assume the disease is smallpox. The men quickly depart leaving Huck forty dollars

²Samuel L. Clemens, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, pp. 205-206.

in gold to tide his "sick" family over till they reach a nearby town. This passage indicates the true nature of Huck because he does not even stop to think about trying to save Jim. He simply adopts a scheme instantaneously, allows it to develop, and fools the hunters. Fortitude and a sense of justice are revealed as part of Huck's nature.

One of the most repulsive scenes for Huck involves a plot by the Duke and the Dauphin to gain some quick money. They impersonate long lost relatives of a recently deceased man in the hopes of securing money left by the deceased in his will. The whole townspeople gather at the wake and cry and howl as the Duke and Dauphin give the performance of their careers. They pray, cry and pray a little more and the townspeople join in. Huck's opinions of the charade ranges from: "I never seen anything so disgusting," to "it was just sickening."³ He describes "the close friends" of the deceased as "a passel of sapheads."⁴ Huck makes it quite clear at this point in his relationship with the Duke and Dauphin that what may have been fun and daring has now turned into something wholly anathema to his character. His conscience would not allow them to rob and fool these people any longer and he works out a scheme to reverse the

³Samuel L. Clemens, Huckleberry Finn, p. 395.

⁴Ibid.

thievery. He takes the money that the Duke and Dauphin have falsely claimed and puts it in the dead man's coffin. Huck is sympathetic towards one of the girl's in the mourning family and comforts her. He tells her everything will be all right and to leave everything to him because if they reveal the true identity of the thieves to the law, he may not be jailed with them, but, he says: "there'd be another person that you don't know about [Jim] who's been in big trouble. Well, we got to save him, hain't we?"⁵ This sequence reveals Huck to be prudent, temperate, charitable, and, once again, just.

Huck actually never trusts anyone and knows how depraved man can become. Yet, he still shows compassion for the Duke and the Dauphin when they are finally caught, even though they used and abused him. Huck's nature is basically Christian in the truest sense.

Pudd'nhead Wilson illustrates Twain's moral standards in just as telling a manner as Huckleberry Finn. One of the major characters is Roxy, a Negro slave woman, who is sold down the river by her son to pay his debts. She manages to escape from her owners and returns to the North to find her son. After confronting him, she is angry and vengeful and vows to repay him for his despicable act. But in the

⁵Ibid., p. 421.

end, she does all she can to save her son from the fate he decreed for her, and reveals a true loving nature. Roxy forgives her son and in this way represents Twain's desire to affirm the moral responsibility in man, a responsibility which he believed was sorely lacking.⁶ Her son throughout Pudd'nhead Wilson proves to be a repulsive, grotesque character and always treats his mother as property unless he believes he can gain something from her by doing otherwise. Roxy's ultimate forgiveness and desperate attempts to save her son indicate nothing less than true Christian virtues of hope for a better life and a love of infinite depth.

The Seven Cardinal Virtues are as inherent a part of Herman Melville's works as they are in those of Mark Twain. In "The Lightning-Rod Man," one finds the individual man, with his own personal conception of God and religion, confronted by the prototype characterization of one of Melville's greatest creations, the confidence-man. During a severe thunderstorm in a mountainous area, a man welcomes into his home, a soaking wet stranger who holds in his hand "a polished copper rod, four feet long ... ringed with copper bands. The metal rod terminated at the top tripodwise, in three keen tines, brightly gilt."⁷ This stranger claims

⁶Robert A. Wiggins, Mark Twain Jackleg Novelist, p. 107.

⁷Richard Chase (ed.), Herman Melville, Selected Tales and Poems, p. 151.

to be a lightening rod salesman. He tells the owner of the house that he is not safe without one of his rods to protect against the danger of lightening. Although the owner insists that he needs no protection, the salesman repeatedly advises him on where to stand in the house, and cautions him that the only sure protection is in the lightening rod. The salesman eventually becomes more than insistent and attacks the owner with the rod. The owner fends him off and shouts:

Who has empowered you . . . to peddle round your indulgence from divine ordinations? The hairs of our heads are numbered and the days of our lives. In thunder as in sunshine, I stand at ease in the hands of my God. False negotiator, away!

The owner will have no bargain with such a man and indicates his belief in God rather than in false symbols of any sort. He is certainly idealistic in his decision to reject the salesman's "protection," but Melville reveals that he has few illusions as his home owner says:

But spite of my treatment, and spite of my dissuasive talk of him to my neighbors, the Lightning-rod man still dwells in the land; still travels in storm time, and drives a brave trade with the fears of man.⁹

The home owner's virtuous attributes include faith, prudence, and fortitude. He has faith in his God, is reasonable and cautious with the salesman, and illustrates a great inner strength in refusing to purchase a product of false philosophy.

⁸Ibid., p. 158.

⁹Ibid.

In 1849, Melville wrote a novel entitled White-Jacket which, more often than not, concerned itself with the inhumane treatment of sailors in the United States Navy. The book is akin to a propagandistic tract in its defense of the sailors and its attacks against the barbaric life they were subjected to on a man-of-war: "He [Melville] felt impelled to expose and indict the world in a man-of-war."¹⁰ Melville certainly intended for his book to arouse attention and action for he believed in the possibility of correcting these injustices once the general public and the Navy Department were made fully aware of the circumstances. To illustrate his belief in the morality of Americans he ends his most angry chapter in the book, entitled "Flogging Not Necessary," with great praise for the American people:

There are occasions when it is for America to make precedents, not to obey them. We should, if possible, prove a teacher to posterity, instead of being the pupil of bygone generations. . . . And we Americans are the peculiar, chosen people-- the Israel of our time; we bear the ark of the liberties of the world. . . . God has predestinated, mankind expects, great things from our race; and great things we feel in our souls.¹¹

In some ways, this last quote is not unlike Walt Whitman's constant praising of America. Melville showed evidences of strong faith that moral good and right would prevail if the truth were known. He believed that justice would

¹⁰William Plomer (ed.), White-Jacket, p. v.

¹¹Herman Melville, White-Jacket, p. 151.

triumph and he had a hope that the American people would rise to the occasion.

Both men, as it will be shown later, knew their Bible well. Both were reared in a strictly religious background. But neither regarded Christianity as particularly unique. Because of this fact, both men indicated respect for various other religions in several of their works.

In Letters From the Earth, Twain gives no preference to any religion and, in a sense, finds them all to be presumptuous. Twain has God simply deciding to create a universe and a world of animals, the most complex of which is the human being, seemingly for want of something better to do. God creates only one law, the law of nature, but man immediately begins inventing religions in order to glorify himself more than God. "Satan's Letter" is a severe piece of satire in which satan, definitely not a "fallen angel" visits Earth and describes the activities of God's "masterpiece," man, for Gabriel and Michael. Satan writes:

He [man] believes the Creator is proud of him; he even believes the Creator loves him; has a passion for him; sits up nights to admire him. He prays to Him, and thinks He listens. Isn't it a quaint idea?¹²

Satan continues to deride man and his foolish ideas and notions, and his great capacity for pomposity. Obviously, Twain can not regard Christianity as unique if he negates

¹²Samuel L. Clemens, Letters From the Earth, p. 7.

all religion in the first place. Edward Wagenknecht in his book Mark Twain, the Man writes: "he [Twain] recognizes and respects all religious beliefs, not merely that which he shares. . . . He did not regard Christianity as unique revelation."¹³ In Huckleberry Finn Twain illustrates a belief in true Christian teachings of brotherhood and love but no belief in any orthodox, strict interpretations of a specific religious practice. As was mentioned earlier, Huck had the attributes of a true Christian and could not accept the divergent orthodox teachings expressed by Miss Watson and the Widow Douglas.

Twain was always the champion of the underdog and saw no reason for the Western Christian Church to feel superior to any other religious practice. Eventually, as in Letters From the Earth, all religions were similar, if not the same, to him. Twain did not believe in any miracles or messages from God and did not believe in the Bible as anything more than words written by men.¹⁴

Melville's great interest in, and acknowledgement of other religions is probably best exemplified by his epic, Moby-Dick. Anything dealing with religions of any kind

¹³Edward Wagenknecht, Mark Twain, the Man and His Work, p. 196.

¹⁴Frank Baldanza, Mark Twain, An Introduction and Interpretation, p. 17.

became a part of his personal library. *Moby-Dick* is filled with allusions to religions ranging from Christianity to Egyptian cults. The critic H. Bruce Franklin links most of Melville's major works with the thread of religious teachings.¹⁵ Melville, in his reading, saw the basic tenets of Christianity in many other religions and saw no reason to believe that one was any better than the others. Franklin writes, "They are all, [for Melville] no matter whether they are modeled on Polynesian, Egyptian, Greek, Hindu, Buddhist, or Druidic Myths, similar to and different from Christ."¹⁶ Moby-Dick's characters represent various religious beliefs. The three harpooners are Queequeg, Tashtego, and Daggoo. Queequeg worships Polynesian gods; Tashtego is an American Indian; and Daggoo is an African. Captain Ahab has the same name as King Ahab of the Bible who vexed God by disobeying Him and worshipping Baal and Astarte. Fedallah, Ahab's dark companion, is a Parsee, fireworshipping Zoroastrian.

In Mardi, Melville presents an allegorical world populated with various types of people living on numerous islands. Each island has its own unique customs and part of each island's uniqueness is its religious practices. One island, called Serenia, practices true Christian faith

¹⁵H. Bruce Franklin, The Wake of the Gods: Melville's Mythology, p. 205.

¹⁶Franklin, op. cit.

based on reason. On Odo, the king is considered demi-divine and so are the travelers Taji and Yillah, upon arrival. The ruler of Valapee is a boy ten years old named Peepi. Melville describes him this way:

Along with the royal dignity, and superadded to the soul possessed in his own proper person, the infant monarch was supposed to have inherited the valiant spirits of some twenty heroes, sages, simpletons, and demi-gods, previously lodged in his sire.¹⁷

At times, one of these spirits will control him and then another, but not simultaneously. Peepi has no control over these spirits and therefore he "was plainly denuded of all moral obligation to virtue."¹⁸ The local parliament proclaimed that Peepi had no conscience and could do no wrong!

Though Twain and Melville recognized other religions and doubted the ultimate authorship of the Bible, they were not infidels or atheists. Their moral code could not allow anything but a final faith in life beyond the physical death and a belief in a good force in the universe. In Huckleberry Finn, Twain was perusing the question of the true relationship between God and man, and he was not yet ready to leave social criticism in the background and begin to actually search out God. The mighty Mississippi River is presented as a God-like entity, everflowing, possessed with great

¹⁷Herman Melville, Mardi, I, 184.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 186.

strength and subtlety, and never to be understood by man. At times, it is a friend to Huck and Jim and they return to it periodically to escape from "sivilization." Yet the river can cause floods, bring storms, flounder the raft, and nearly drown its occupants. But it is in the background and is not defined by Twain as being good or evil, or even a combination of the two. It is merely capricious and unknowable beyond a certain point. Wagenknecht concludes: "Twain never really doubted God, and he remained a seeker and a searcher all his life."¹⁹

As Huckleberry Finn was the starting point for Twain in his search, so Mardi was to Melville. As previously stated, Melville presented various forms of religious beliefs in Mardi and presented Serenia as his ideal. But, as with Twain, Melville was questioning the world in Mardi and mankind's usage of that world. A real attack on, or serious questioning of, God is not evident. In White-Jacket, written one year after Mardi, there is evidence of Melville's growing doubt. Melville does put faith in the final victory of God over evil; yet he asks why God allows the depravity of the world, but gives no answer.²⁰ In both men, from the writing of these works on, doubt leads to a search, and the search reveals horror to them; emotions are let loose

¹⁹Wagenknecht, op. cit., p. 279

²⁰William Braswell, Melville's Religious Thought, p. 25.

in a furious torrent that would not abate.

The search for God had now begun and neither writer ever really stopped searching. After Huckleberry Finn, there came what Twain thought would be his last major work, A Connecticut Yankee in King Authur's Court. He wanted this book to be filled with all he had to say and be done with it all. Here, in 1889, his bitterness flowered.²¹ He vented his wrath on numerous topics, such as injustice in mankind's social institutions, in individual prejudices and scores of evils man seemingly cultivates. Hank Morgan has nothing but contempt for monarchies and serfdom and the entire feudal system. In a typically angry episode Hank discusses the freedom of noblemen to kill:

A gentleman could kill a free commoner and pay for him--cash or garden truck. A noble could kill a noble without expense. . . Anybody could kill somebody, except the commoner and the slave; these had no privileges.²²

There are many passages similar to this one but this will suffice, for after filling his book with angry invectives about social evils and the stupidity of man, something is left behind, for Hank Morgan is no great emancipator or supreme individual. He is, indeed, just as evil and destructive as those who populate his nightmare world. If man

²¹Richard D. Altick, "Mark Twain's Despair: an Explanation in terms of His Humanity," SAQ, XXXIV (October, 1935), p. 360.

²²Samuel L. Clemens, A Connecticut Yankee in King Authur's Court, p. 102.

is so inevitably stupid and corrupt, where does the responsibility lie? Hank Morgan does not succeed in destroying the old evil system. He merely creates a new one and machine guns and electrocutes thousands of knights with the help of his special youth corps. There may not be a way to eradicate the evils of the world, for Morgan, in trying, brings more of the same. If there is no solution for man, the reason for this apparent fact cannot go unknown. Twain does not let the question of ultimate responsibility rest.

Herman Melville launched his most concerted effort to discover the nature of God in Moby-Dick. The quest is simple but the depths are as deep as the white whale's soundings in the dark fathoms of the oceans of the world. Armed with layer upon layer of symbols, Melville sends Captain Ahab, a man so much of an individual that he cannot properly communicate with other men, so much of an individual that he turns nihilistic and becomes a raving madman, on a search for the Christian God supported by sailors representing all nations, on a ship symbolizing the world. Ahab explains his designs to Starbuck, a puritan, who is renowned in the whaling industry for his courage and keen marksmanship with a harpoon.

Hark ye yet again,-- the little lower layer. All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks. But in each event-- in the living act, the undoubted deed-- there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the moulding of its feature from behind the unreasoning mask. If man will strike, strike

through the mask!²³

Ahab goes on to explain how he sees the white whale. He must break through the barrier wall:

To me, the white whale is that wall, shoved near to me. Sometimes I think there's nought beyond. But 'tis enough. He tasks me; he heaps me; I see in him outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing it. That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate; and be the white whale agent, or be the white whale principal, I will wreak that hate upon him.²⁴

Starbuck protests but Ahab discards his criticism and proclaims:

"Who's over me? Truth hath no confines."²⁵ Ahab will find that white whale and do all in his power to kill it. His vengeance was born a year before this voyage when he lost his leg in an attempt to kill Moby-Dick and his life is now dedicated to the whale's destruction. But if a mere mortal is going to attack the power of the Almighty, he must be prepared for defeat. Certainly Ahab is so prepared for he continues to curse the whale even as he is being dragged to the depths of the sea by him. While writing Moby-Dick, Melville vigorously read works by Shakespeare, Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy, Hume, Bayle, and Hawthorne. All were writers who possessed knowledge on evil.²⁶ What Melville surmised in Moby-Dick concerning the nature of God will be

²³Herman Melville, Moby-Dick, p. 139.

²⁴Melville, Moby-Dick, p. 139.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Braswell, op. cit., p. 67.

discussed in a later chapter. For him, there was no turning back now as he continued to question, evaluate, and re-evaluate God.

For any proper questioning of the nature of God, Twain and Melville realized the teachings of His son could not be ignored. Sent to free men from ages of sin and to give mankind a fresh start, a new beginning and a way of life to guide him, Christ's life had to be studied and evaluated. After A Connecticut Yankee, Twain found he had left a great deal out of his "final work" and he had much more to discover and decide upon. Pudd'nhead Wilson contains the key character in Twain's study of a Christ-like life. Roxy, a Negro slave woman, is, by definition, an outcast in America's society. Although she knows there is no escape for her, she devises a plan to save her son from the life of a slave. She gives birth to a son whose father is her white master and exchanges this light-skinned son with her master's other infant son, a product of his marriage. The true heir to her master is treated like a Negro slave child while the illegitimate son, Tom, is reared as the white master's son. Roxy sacrifices for Tom, rears him as a master and believes her plan has succeeded. Although Tom grows up to be a liar, a cheat, a murderer, and a man with no moral scruples, Roxy protects him, loves him, and forgives him for everything, even after he sells her "down the river" to pay his debts. It was actually Roxy's idea

to be sold for the money as she explains: "It's with six hund'd dollahs. Take en sell me, en pay off dese gamblers." 27

Tom is not sure he heard her right and he questions her.

She explains in an important section of the book:

"Ain't you my chile? En does you know anything dat a mother won't do fur her child? Dey ain't nothin' a white mother won't do for her chile. Who made 'em so? De Lord done it. En who made de niggers? De good Lord made 'em. In de inside, mothers is all de same. De good Lord he made 'em so. I's gwyne to be sole into slavery, en in a year you's gwyne to buy yo' ole mommy free ag'in. I'll show you how. Dat's de plan." 28

Tom certainly sells her all right. Into the heart of Arkansas she goes and Tom has no intention of buying her back. But she escapes and comes back for vengeance. However, she cannot hate her son and her love takes over as she tries to keep Tom from being sold himself because of the murder he commits. She fails and Tom is sold. She fails even though her capacity for love was boundless. The reason she fails is indicated in the above quoted paragraph for God did indeed make "niggers" as well as whites and this fact is unavoidable for Twain. Even with as much love as a mortal could possess, Roxy has faults and does wrong and she fails. The reason had to lie beyond man's ills or society's evils. Roxy's failure is inevitable and she is powerless to do otherwise.

Melville's Pierre is a young man who forsakes his

27 Samuel L. Clemens, Pudd'nhead Wilson, p. 160.

28 Clemens, Pudd'nhead Wilson, p. 160.

estate, his fiancée, his memory of his god-like father, and his sister-like mother to help a girl named Isabel who claims, but never is proven, to be his illegitimate sister. He turns from a life of ease and comfort, of care-free existence in the country, to live with, protect, and support Isabel and Delly, a local girl who has just had an illegitimate baby, in the city of New York. The title of the book is Pierre or, the Ambiguities and no book has ever had a more appropriate, concise title. The reader is bombarded with half-truths, possible truths, and ambiguities. The one truth is that Pierre receives help from no one as he tries to support his adopted family; as a result, he fails miserably. Everyone becomes his enemy when he expects friends and the return of his fiancée, Lucy, only complicates matters: Tyrus Hillway writes that, "Pierre, emulating the saints, consciously stakes everything upon what he conceives to be the Christ-like way of life."²⁹ He sacrifices his dignity, his honor, his very life in a belief that his actions are correct. His mother disowns him, gives their estate to his cousin Glen, and dies; Lucy collapses when he leaves her and nearly succumbs; her mother hates Pierre, and Pierre's cousin Glen refuses to even recognize him. When Lucy comes to live with Pierre, her brother, her mother,

²⁹Tyrus Hillway, "Pierre, the Fool of Virtue", AL, XXI (1949), p. 203.

and Glen accuse Pierre of kidnapping her. Pierre's publisher refuses to print his book because his prose is reminiscent of "that atheist," Voltaire. Like Christ, Pierre has been subjected to degrading circumstances. He has lived in poverty protecting the outcast and helpless. He is condemned by his publishers although he writes the truth. He seeks assistance from friends and relatives and is betrayed and despised. In an attempt to emulate Christ, Pierre fails, becomes a murderer, and commits suicide during imprisonment. Melville shows in Pierre that virtue cannot exist because good and evil cannot be defined due to their own ambiguity.³⁰ A benevolent, loving man cannot exist in a non-benevolent world. Henry A. Murray writes:

Pierre's reaction to Isabel is . . . the supreme religious experience . . . this is the sole instance in which he (Melville) unequivocally associates his self-image with the incarnation of Love (rather than as the Man of Sorrows or the Crucified One).³¹

Pierre is discussing the entire situation with Isabel as he decides to make his decision to believe her and protect her. He says: "Is Love a harm? Can Truth betray to pain? Sweet, Isabel, how can hurt come in the path of God?"³² Most, if not all of the Melville critics, believe Pierre to be

³⁰Tyrus Hillway, "Pierre, the Fool of Virtue", p. 203.

³¹Henry A. Murray (ed.), Pierre or, the Ambiguities, p. lix.

³²Herman Melville, Pierre or, the Ambiguities, p. 178.

autobiographical in nature. As one reads it, one can sense the great feeling and sensitivity in the words as Melville relates this ironic, terrifying story.

There are two extensions of this part of Twain's Melville's search. Twain seemed not quite satisfied with the character of Roxy and what had become of her; and thus in 1896, two years after Pudd'nhead Wilson, he finished Joan of Arc. She is even more of a Christ-like figure than Roxy and does no wrong to anyone, never kills anyone, as she attempts to free France from English domination. Naturally, the English see her as evil but she is merely righting the wrongs of the English and even Christ forced the money-lenders out of the temple. Joan is counselled by God, is devout in her faith, has unbelievable moral strength and courage, and is finally tricked into confessing to her "crimes," which she later recants. After breaking the back of the English armies in France with her over-powering presence on the battlefield, the French leaders, both lay and clerical court for the charges of heresy and witchcraft. Her faith in God never fails; yet she is burned at the stake. A strange paradox for Twain to reconcile.

The short story "Bartleby the Scrivener" served much the same purpose for Herman Melville as Joan of Arc did for Mark Twain. Melville went slightly beyond Pierre in creating a character called Bartleby. Bartleby appears one day at

the Master of Chancery's office on Wall Street. This office concerns itself with the workings of the law and Bartleby is hired as a law-copyist. However, he turns out to be a man who possesses no friends, no home, an aversion to work, and a limited vocabulary. When asked to do something he says simply, "I'd prefer not" in a very mild, matter-of-fact tone. Eventually, the boss of the office, the narrator of the story, becomes angry and tries to fire Bartleby. But Bartleby refuses to leave and turns up sitting on the steps of the boss's apartment house. He tries to convince Bartleby to leave but cannot budge him and Bartleby is taken to jail. Despite constant pleadings on his boss's part, Bartleby will not eat or exercise and finally dies inside the walls. Bartleby is a man who simply wants to be left alone and takes on the characteristics of a monk, a person who rejects the worldly life. If a Christ-like figure cannot make it in the world, such as Pierre, then possibly Bartleby, one who practices monasticism, can. Naturally, Bartleby cannot, and Melville has come to another dead end, literally, as did Twain.

The first place one must look if one is trying to find the nature of God is logically in one's own religion. The basis for Christianity can be found in the Bible. Twain and Melville studied the Bible and knew it well. But what they read in the Bible they did not like and they used the

Bible over and over again. They either directly attacked it or used its contents as symbols for parody and satire.

Twain's Letters From the Earth begins with an attack on the idea of a Garden of Eden, an Adam and Eve, a Noah's Ark, and a Jesus Christ, as pure fiction. Twain wrote a short story entitled "Eve's Diary" which makes a laughing stock of the whole book of Genesis and directly attacks God. He also wrote an essay, "Eve Speaks" which again attacks the God of the Old Testament. The God of the Old Testament particularly vexed Twain because everything that went wrong in the world is blamed on man though he had no part in the actual Creation. Coleman O. Parsons writes: "The fables and myths contradicted reason, besides playing up a tribal God who was irascible, vindictive, and fickle."³³ Satan, in one of his letters to heaven, writes about the God man has created:

It is God! This race's God, I mean. He sits on his throne, attended by his four and twenty elders and some other dignitaries pertaining to his court, and looks out over miles and miles of tempestuous worshippers, and smiles, and purrs, and nods his satisfaction northward, eastward, southward; as quaint and naive a spectacle as has yet been imagined in this universe, I take it.³⁴

In "Eve's Diary," Twain depicts Eve as completely innocent and carefree who could not knowingly do wrong. She and

³³Coleman O. Parson, "The Devil and Samuel Clemens," VQR, XXIII (Autumn, 1947), p. 584.

³⁴Samuel L. Clemens, Letters From the Earth, p. 11.

Adam lead an idyllic life chasing each other around the Garden and finally getting to know each other. Blame cannot be placed on people such as these and Twain parodies the whole idea of two people wandering around, knowing nothing until one day they eat the fruit of a tree that really should not have been there in the first place.

Stanley T. Williams believes Melville was so greatly affected by the Bible that it reached deep into his consciousness and his imagination constantly transformed it.³⁵

Melville was indeed greatly aware of the Bible as useful to his works. There are some 430 references to the Old Testament and 200 to the New Testament in his works.³⁶

Although Melville used Biblical allusion in Moby-Dick, his usage did not indicate any dislike for the Bible's contents. However, in The Confidence-Man, Melville used the Sermon on the Mount and I Corinthians, 13, as masks for the confidence-man. Faith, hope, and charity are used as guises to dupe the passengers of a steamboat plowing on the Mississippi.³⁷ The Confidence-Man takes eight guises in order to swindle the travelers on this ship who represent, as in

³⁵Floyd Stovall (ed.), Eight American Authors, pp. 231-232.

³⁶Nathalia Wright, "Biblical Allusion in Melville's Prose", AL, XII, (1940), 185.

³⁷Elizabeth S. Foster. (ed.), The Confidence-Man, p. lvi.

Moby-Dick, the peoples of the world. One of the disguises is a man with a big book who proclaims "trust God." Another, an herb-doctor, proclaims "trust Nature" while a third, the cosmopolitan, advises "trust Man." Part of the book gives a choice for life styles. Man can choose between faith and love as in I Corinthians, or the egotistic, individualistic system epitomised by the ship's barber's sign, "No trust."³⁸ Unfortunately, those who believe in the Christian ideals are fooled by those who believe in "No trust." The confidence-man himself may very well be the devil but, as R.W.B. Lewis points out, it really does not matter who he is because he only brings out the evil in man; he does not carry it with him. In short, Melville doubts the benevolence of God, doubts that charitable love is a reality, and R.W.B. Lewis, in his Afterword to The Confidence-Man calls this nothing less than "mental and moral sabotage."³⁹ Faith, hope, charity, the teachings of Christ mean nothing in this world and those who believe in these principals are bound to be taken.

The search was now in earnest. God was the target and He would be found out. Both men's lives were tormented by personal problems as they grew older and these contributed

³⁸Ibid., p. lxviii.

³⁹R.W.B. Lewis (ed.), The Confidence-Man, p. 265.

greatly to their pessimism as each one looked for answers and did not like what they exposed. The question now became more specific than what is the nature of God. It became: how could an all-loving, all-knowing, all-merciful God make such a world and allow it to continue? In Twain's and Melville's view, God made a stupendous bungle. More had to be learned. So they set out to sail in the dark depths of their souls.

CHAPTER II

THE BITTER FRUITS OF THEIR SEARCH

Organized religion, especially Christianity, which purports to reveal the true word of God, to be a guide to all people towards righteousness, to protect and to defend the weak as well as the strong, and to be the path leading to eternal life in heaven, among other things, was logically the initial subject for scrutiny by anyone attempting to discover the nature of God. Mark Twain's evaluations of organized religion were set down in numerous works. But the first real concerted effort at such an evaluation can be found in A Connecticut Yankee in King Authur's Court. Charles Neider, in his introduction to the American Century Series edition of A Connecticut Yankee, quotes a line from Twain's Autobiography in which Twain said he wanted to compare the "conditions of the poor" with the life of the "Civil and ecclesiastical pets" of Medieval England in A Connecticut Yankee. To Twain, "the Church was no more than an institution dedicated to fostering superstition while living off the proceeds of oppression."⁴⁰ Twain certainly took an extremely dim view of the Church, and he devoted two chapters to the subject of miracles, pilgrimages, and the holiness of it all in The Holy Fountain and, Restoration of the Fountain, Chapters 22 and 23.

⁴⁰Wiggins, op. cit., p. 78.

After traveling many miles, and after calmly watching a whipping take place, a large group of "pilgrims" are informed that the Holy Fountain for which they have suffered so long to visit, has unaccountably stopped flowing. For nine days it has remained dry and no one can explain the reason. Hank Morgan sends a knight to Camelot with a note asking for "two trained assistants" and several numbered articles to be sent to the Valley of Holiness where the Fountain lies. The holy Father, superior to the monks in the abbey by the Fountain, is overjoyed to see Sir Boss. However, the Father warns Hank about restoring the Fountain's water.

. . . see thou do it with enchantments that be holy, for the Church will not endure that work in her cause done by devil's magic.⁴¹

Hank pledges only good magic but insists that Merlin have his fair chance at performing a miracle and making the Holy Fountain flow again. "Merlin has the contract," says Hank; "no other magician can touch it till he throws it up."

The Father vigorously protests and says:

But I will take it from him; it is a terrible emergency and the act is thereby justified. And if it were not so, who will give law to the Church? The Church giveth law to all; and what she wills to do, that she may do, hurt whom it may.⁴²

⁴¹Samuel L. Clemens, A Connecticut Yankee, p. 131.

⁴²Ibid.

The Father seemed quite willing to force Merlin to stop in the name of the Church but Hank refuses to work that way. In the evening, all the monks are in good cheer, eat well, get drunk, sing "questionable songs" and tell "questionable stories." Next morning, Hank visits the Fountain and finds nothing miraculous about it. He cites:

pictures historically commemorative of curative miracles which had been achieved by the waters when nobody was looking. That is, nobody but angels; they are always on deck when there is a miracle to the fore-- so as to get put in the picture, perhaps, Angels are as fond as that as a fire company; look at the old masters.

Hank goes down into the well of the Fountain and realizes a slight repair job with brick and mortar will be all the miracle this Fountain would need. Hank is quite sure that none of the pilgrims would have thought of going into the well to take a look and probably "would have prayed, and processioned, and tolled their bells for heavenly succor till they all dried up and blew away."⁴³ Hank knew how to replenish the water supply but in order to make it a miraculous accomplishment, he told the Father it would take all the occult powers he could muster, and then some. While waiting for his assistants and the material he sent for from Camelot, Hank and Sandy stroll around the abbey studying the hermits. "The chief emulation among them seemed to be," says Hank,

⁴³Clemens, A Connecticut Yankee, p. 135.

"to see which could manage to be the uncleanest and most prosperous with vermin. Their manner and attitudes were the last expression of complacent self-righteousness."⁴⁴ One of the hermits was famed throughout Christendom for he stood on top of a sixty foot pillar bowing in prayer "twelve hundred and forty-four revolutions in twenty-four minutes and forty-six seconds."⁴⁵ Hank, showing his lack of reverence, decided to hook some cords to him and attach them to a sewing machine so the hermit's motions could be put to good use. Later Merlin gives up and Hank, with his assistants, patch up the leak and set up explosives and fireworks in a rush because, "a miracle worked for the Church on a weekday is worth a good deal, it is worth six times as much if you get it in on a Sunday."⁴⁶ Like an advertising campaign for a new product, Hank arranged for suspense, tension, pomp and ceremony, with flares and rockets and smoke bombs of red, green, blue, and purple. When the water came the people, now numbering in the thousands, threw themselves into the water and glorified it. And Hank basked in the congratulations and reverence shown him for he knew he was "some kind of a superior being" for he had created a miracle.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 133.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 142.

A Connecticut Yankee, with all its satirical attacks upon organized religion, was not enough for Twain. After studying and creating the loving character of Roxy, Twain no longer using satire, comedy, and burlesque as his major weapons, wrote Joan of Arc (1896). Based on historical fact, Joan of Arc heightened the sense of tragedy in a story that with only the meagerest facts mentioned, would make anyone stand aghast at the injustices done by Church and State alike to the Maid of Orleans. Touched deeply by the historical accounts of Joan, Twain forsook the comic pose and the theme of parody that were his trademark. The prose in Joan of Arc is possessed with sympathy, compassion, bitterness, and anger. He writes:

"A child of seventeen--a girl--country-bred-untaught-ignorant of war, the use of arms, and the conduct of battles. . . fights her way through a hundred and fifty leagues of hostile territory, never losing heart or hope, and never showing fear, and comes--she to whom a king must be a dread and awful presence-- and will stand up before such a one and say, Be not afraid, God has sent me to save you! Ah, whence could come a courage and conviction so sublime as this but from very God Himself!"⁴⁷

In relating the story of Joan of Arc Twain continually returns to her professions of faith in God, in hearing the voices of saints and in being without sin. When hearing that she is to be burned at the stake, Joan cries out "Oh, I appeal to God the Great Judge, against the injustice which

⁴⁷Samuel L. Clemens, Joan of Arc, I, p. 152.

has been done me."⁴⁸ But no answer was given and she was executed. Ironically, a quarter of a century later, the Roman Catholic Church reviewed the entire proceedings of the trials and her battle exploits and decided to reverse the original ecclesiastical court's decision and found her innocent of heresy and witchcraft. Twain was well aware of the injustice done Joan of Arc and reconciliation with a God that permitted such a calamity was impossible.

In Pierre, Melville becomes a critic of Christianity as did Twain in A Connecticut Yankee.⁴⁹ The Reverend Falsgrave is the only minister in the book and arrives on the scene as Pierre's mind is in a state of utter confusion and fear. The girl Isabel may be his illegitimate sister and then again she may not. If she is, then his opinion of his father, mother, and the society he has been raised in will be shattered. The Rev. Falsgrave is described as being in a "scenically favourable bodily posture" and his "Better Angel" is on display as he faces Mrs. Glendinning, "the generous foundress and the untiring patroness of the beautiful little marble church, consecrated by the good Bishops."⁵⁰ The Rev. Falsgrave also knows his salary is paid, in large part, by

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 301.

⁴⁹Braswell, op. cit., p. 77.

⁵⁰Herman Melville, Pierre, p. 136.

Pierre's mother. The Rev. Falsgrave is described as a perfect gentleman and the narrator mentions that Pierre's mother often held the reverend "as a splendid example of the polishing and gentleman--ising influences of christianity upon the mind and manners."⁵¹ Pierre, his mother, and the Rev. Falsgrave, now referred to by Melville as mister, sit down for breakfast and a conversation begins concerning a girl, Delly, who has had an illegitimate child from a married man called Ned. Mrs. Glendinning is scornful about the situation and condemns the child, the mother and the father. Mr. Falsgrave more or less agrees but takes no firm stand, though cautious is he in nodding approval after Mrs. Glendinning makes her pronouncements. Pierre, formerly silent, now asks what should the legitimate child of Ned and his wife feel concerning the illegitimate child of Delly's when they grow up? Pierre is really asking what he should do, for his situation is similar. His mother tells him to "ask the world--and ask your own heart."⁵² Pierre accepts this but then asks Mr. Falsgrave what he thinks. Falsgrave's face turns colors, he squirms in his chair and looks from Pierre to Mrs. Glendinning and back. Falsgrave begins by explaining how clergymen are at a disadvantage because

⁵¹Ibid., p. 142.

⁵²Ibid.

everything they say is taken for absolute gospel. He claims that his word is certainly not authoritative. His final answer is:

"It is not every question, however direct, Mr. Glendinning which can be conscientiously answered with a yes or no. Millions of circumstances modify all moral questions; so that though conscience may possibly dictate freely in any known special case; yet by one universal maxim, to embrace all moral contingencies,--this is not only impossible but the attempt, to me, seems foolish."⁵³

Pierre agrees and bows realizing he has been given no answer at all. But he tries again, this time asking if a son should honor his father, as the Bible states, even though the son knows his father is a seducer. Leaving Mr. Falsgrave a way out, however, Pierre asks that if his "former objection does not apply here," he would like an answer.

"There you are again, Mr. Glendinning," said the clergyman, thankful for Pierre's hint; "that is another question in morals absolutely incapable of a definite answer, which shall be universally applicable."⁵⁴

Again the clergyman gives no answer, no advice, no counsel and Pierre leaves immediately. Trapped by the economics of the situation, afraid to take a stand twice because of the ever-present jeopardy Mrs. Glendinning could bring if displeased, the Reverend Mr. Falsgrave denies Pierre the assistance he so desperately is seeking. A representative of the

⁵³Melville, Pierre, p. 143.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 144.

Christian Church becomes a bitter disappointment. Melville had made a complete turnabout of opinion in relation to ministers in Pierre. The ministers in White-Jacket were praised highly by Melville because they were the only people in the U. S. Navy who treated the sailors with any decency. Now, two years after White-Jacket, with Moby-Dick in between, Pierre is decidedly against organized religion.

Since the christian version of organized religion did not offer any solutions for Twain and Melville, they now turned to the mystic East and the occult. The mysteries of ancient Egyptian and Middle Eastern rites fascinated both men. Melville read a variety of historical narratives and guidebooks to obtain a sweeping knowledge of religions that flourished before Christ was born. Twain was greatly interested in the variety of beliefs the twentieth century now combines under the title extra-sensory-perception, or E.S.P. Twain's final position on solipsism can be traced back to his interest in mental telepathy, spiritualism, and dreams.⁵⁵ Coleman O. Parsons calls Twain's study of the occult a "need to understand." Twain needed to understand "why each individual's earthly paradise is lost, why life becomes sullied. This lead Twain from his own baffling experiences to mythology,

⁵⁵Edwin S. Fussell, "The Structural Problems of The Mysterious Stranger, Studies in Philology, XLIX (Jan. 1952) p. 76.

philosophy, and religion.⁵⁶ In his later years, Twain showed a great interest in the Society for Psychical Research and a familiarity with William James' classic Principles of Psychology. Twain admitted that he believed in spiritualism but could find no reasonable explanation for it. The Mysterious Stranger is a culmination of Twain's philosophy concerning the occult and the bitterness and frustration that plagued him.

In The Mysterious Stranger, a visitor to the sleepy town of Eseldorf, Austria, claims to be an angel called Little Satan, a nephew of the infamous Fallen Angel who dared to question God. What he becomes is really a miracle working spirit who denies the existence of everything supposedly real. He practices mental telepathy as illustrated below. Little Satan and the narrator Theodor are discussing the future of certain individuals in Eseldorf. Theodor thinks about where the evil astrologer is now after causing the local priest, Father Peter, a great deal of trouble.

Next my mind wondered to the astrologer, and I wondered where he might be. "In the moon," said Satan, with a fleeting sound which I believed was a chuckle.⁵⁷

Satan, known to the town as Phillip Traum, (or Phillip Dream), can tell the future, can see through anything, practices

⁵⁶Coleman O. Parsons, "The Devil and Samuel Clemens," VQR, XXIII (Autumn, 1947) p. 155.

⁵⁷Samuel L. Clemens, The Mysterious Stranger, p. 699.

teleportation to various lands with Theodor and his friends, and can possess the body of another human being at will. And he is definitely not the Christian ideal of an angel. Besides his total dislike for mankind, there is something sinister in some of his activities which resemble rites of the Black Arts. Satan decides to help the girl Margret whose uncle is locked in jail. His directions to her concerning forbidden visits interest Theodor.

He said he would give the guards a little present, and she must always go in the evening after dark and say nothing "but just show this paper and pass in, and show it again when you come out"--and he scribbled some queer marks on the paper and gave it to her.⁵⁸

John S. Tuckey hints that Little Satan, or Phillip Traum, was founded on what Twain believed to be his other self or dream self. Tuckey believes the creative power of the artist's unconscious mind is embodied in Satan and his actions throughout the story. These are depths not fully investigated yet, but certainly Twain's long thought out concept of life as a dream culminated in The Mysterious Stranger. Satan tells Theodor that all is a dream: man, life, the universe. And Theodor believes it all to be true. Satan becomes the ultimate of magicians, the supreme representation of the spirit world as he knows all, sees all, hears all, and does all. The only real escape for man from this horrifying

⁵⁸Clemens, The Mysterious Stranger, p. 666.

existence is death or insanity. Satan arranges for one of Theodor's friends, Nickolaus, to die because Satan knew his later life would be one of misery. When Father Peter is finally released from jail, Satan makes him insane so that such a good man would not be tortured by the horrors of life. "The only solace lies in escape from life into cosmic innocence."⁵⁹ Twain's system of thought concerning the reality of life is generally psychological, because it explains man's nature according to the faculties of his mind.⁶⁰ More detail on man's lot, as seen by Twain, will be given later. For now, the thoughts provoked by the study of organized religion and then the mysteries of spiritualism and the like brought Twain to a number of bitter and black conclusions, and they were presented in several works, one being The Mysterious Stranger, which will be discussed further.

Herman Melville's use of symbols in Moby-Dick was discussed earlier but here this fact is significant because of his great interest in the occult. One of the books Melville read during the writing of his epic was Plutarch's Morals which contained the section entitled "Isis and Osiris", the Egyptian gods.⁶¹ Dorothee Finkelstein, in her book Melville's Orienda, lists the major works concerning occult

⁵⁹John S. Tuckey, Mark Twain and Little Satan, p. 126.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 129.

⁶¹Franklin, op. cit., p. 72.

sciences and Oriental religions that Melville read. She also mentions several of Melville's literary characters from not only Moby-Dick but other books as well, and traces them back to mythical characters or extinct religious rites and cults of the Orient and Middle East. Symbols of Zoroastrianism surround Fedallah, described as a fire-worshipper, the leader of Ahab's "dark phantoms" who become his personal boat crew. Melville writes that "Whence he [Fedallah] came in a mannerly world like this, by what sort of unaccountable tie he soon evinced himself to be linked with Ahab's peculiar fortunes. . . , Heaven knows."⁶² The reader is told that those who live in the "civilized, temperate zone" see the likes of Fedallah only in vague dreams. However, his type are a bit more common in "unchanging Asiatic communities, especially the Oriental isles. . . which even in these modern days still preserve much of the ghostly aboriginalness of earth's primal generations."⁶³

The Quarter-Deck, Chapter 36, includes the first time Ahab confronts the crew with his mission to seek and kill Moby-Dick. In this chapter, Ahab goes through a ritual very reminiscent of a Black Mass for witches. He captivates the crew and they listen silently as Ahab exhorts them to have courage and do his bidding not because they are forced

⁶²Melville, Moby-Dick, p. 189.

⁶³Ibid.

by him but because they will it themselves. The three harpooners break the sockets of their lances at Ahab's command and he pours a mysterious brew into their broken sockets.

"Now, three to three, yet stand. Commend the murderous chalices! Bestow them, ye who are now made parties to this indissoluble league."⁶⁴

They drink and swear to kill Moby-Dick and the crew passes the pewter round and they become excited as each waits his turn. All are now "parties to this indissoluble league."⁶⁵

In The Try-Works, Chapter 96, Melville projects a scene straight from the black regions of hell as Ishmael stands at the helm of the Pequod while the crew, in the dead of night, melts down whale blubber. The hatches are removed and, from the bowls of the ship issue the consuming fires that light the ship's rigging and the darkness of the midnight hour. Ishmael is transfixed by the terrifying scene he relates:

Here [the windlass] lounged the watch, when not otherwise employed, looking into the red heat of the fire, till their eyes felt scorched in their heads. Their tawny features, now all begrimed with smoke and sweat, their matted beards, and the contrasting barbaric brilliancy of their teeth. All these were strangely revealed in the capricious emblazonings of the works. As they narrated to each other their unholy adventures, their tales of terror told in words of mirth; as their uncivilized laughter forked upwards out of them, like the flames from the furnace; as to and fro, in their front, the harpooners wildly

⁶⁴Melville, Moby-Dick, p. 141.

⁶⁵Ibid.

gesticulated with their huge pronged forks and dippers; as the wind howled on, and the sea leaped, and the ship groaned and dived, and yet steadfastly shot her red hell further and further into the blackness of the sea and the night, and scornfully champed the white bone in her mouth, and viscerously spat round her on all sides; then the rushing Pequod, freighted with savages, and laden with fire, and burning a corpse, and plunging into that blackness of darkness, seemed the material counterpart of her monomaniac commander's soul.⁶⁶

This scene is the turning-point for Ishmael who realizes what the Pequod's mission is really about. He, like the rest of the crew, was part of Ahab's quest and did not react any differently than the others to any occurrence on board. But now, this evil vision brings the light of full knowledge and he finds himself completely turned around, looking back at the wake of the ship while the tiller is left guideless. Ishmael sees that the Pequod is not bound for any port, but escaping from all ports towards destruction.

Coupled with their study of the occult, there came evaluations of God and man's relationship to him that could not be denied by Twain and Melville. Their tortured souls, their visions of bitterness and horror were too much for either man to cast off or reconcile. Their minds turned rebellious and spewed forth often uncamouflaged attacks on God. For them, the conclusions concerning the nature of God were obvious and two-fold. The first conclusion was that God had no real interest in man, although at times Twain's and

⁶⁶Melville, Moby-Dick, p. 327.

Melville's convictions on this subject were not quite sufficient. The second conclusion was that God held the ultimate responsibility for this depraved world and was to blame for all that occurred.

Twain wrote that God was not interested in man's welfare or well-being and he cited life's pitfalls. What humanity considered pity and morality could not be known to God.⁶⁷ For Twain, the universe was essentially evil because ultimately it was controlled by what he regarded to be an "indifferent, if not actually malignant, spirit."⁶⁸ Reaching great depths of despair, Twain saw things as they are and imagined them as they could be and felt someone, something was to blame. As Gladys Bellamy so aptly describes, "Mark Twain's is a mind in rebellion, a mind that flinches from what it sees and cannot accept it."

Letters From the Earth concerns the creation of the universe and Twain's version bears no likeness to the Bible's Genesis. The Divine One simply thinks about creating something and it appears. After creating man and the earth, Satan asks God what it all might mean. God answers:

"Man is an experiment, the other animals are another experiment. Time will show whether they were worth

⁶⁷Wagenknecht, op. cit., p. 190.

⁶⁸Wiggins, op. cit., p. 94.

the trouble."⁶⁹

Satan travels to earth, observes man and reports back to Michael and Gabriel through letters. Time after time he satirizes the stupidity, gullibility, and depravity of man and one comes to realize God is completely uninterested in man. He is an experiment that will be left alone and not helped or hindered after the initial Moral Qualities are instilled in him. The God of the Old Testament is shown to be a savage, evil spirit as Satan relates the destruction of the Midianites carried out by the Israelites. Later, Satan writes of the worship that man persists in practicing towards this God:

You would not suppose that this kind of Being gets many compliments. Undeceive yourself; the world calls him the All-Just, the All-Righteous, the All-Good, the All-Merciful, the All-Forgiving, the All-Truthful, the All-Loving, the Source of All Morality. These sarcasms are uttered daily but not as conscious sarcasms. No, they are meant seriously: they are uttered without a smile.⁷⁰

The real God, the true Divine One, hints Satan repeatedly, could care less for man or anything else He has created.

In The Mysterious Stranger, Twain goes one step further and lays the blame squarely on God's mighty shoulders. Little Satan is indeed a nephew of the original and as he makes his final appearance to Theodor his supposedly angelic

⁶⁹Samuel L. Clemens, Letters From the Earth, p. 6.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 20.

position changes. The first act of infancy determines a man's whole life, according to Little Satan, and this is an overt attack on God because He creates all.⁷¹ Satan tells Theodor that to believe in this God of man's "frankly and hysterically insane."

a God who could make good children as well as bad, yet preferred to make bad ones; who could have made every one of them happy, yet never made a single happy one; . . . who mouths justice and invented hell-mouths mercy and invented hell; . . . who mouths morals to other people and has none himself; who frowns upon crimes and commits them all; who created man without invitation, then tries to shuffle responsibility for man's acts upon man, instead of honorably placing it where it belongs, upon himself; and finally, with altogether divine obtuseness, invites this poor, abused slave to worship him! . . .⁷²

In his moment of dissolution, Little Satan launches his attack. His speech indicates the eternal presence of "the rebellious impulse against God."⁷³ God rapidly became more than disinterested in man but became the instigator of man's burdens, and troubles, and evils.

As it was cited earlier, many critics, if not all, interpret Moby-Dick as being some sort of God or agent of God. The white whale is mysterious, powerful, huge in size, and is legendary among the men of the whaling industry.

⁷¹James Melville Cox, Mark Twain, The Fate of Humor, p. 281.

⁷²Clemens, The Mysterious Stranger, p. 743.

⁷³Cox, op. cit., p. 281.

Some sailors claim he saved the life of a man once and believe the whale to be essentially good. Others, like Ahab, see him as a malignant spirit. Still, others, like Flask, see him as simply a bigger than average whale that happens to be white. But if the whale is God, the great Judaeo-Christian God, with Ahab, backed by the great pagan religions of the world, hunting him, then this God is totally disinterested in the affairs of men. Moby-Dick swims the seas of the world, sometimes sighted in two places at the same time, and is oblivious to all around him unless provoked by a violent attack. Moby-Dick is capable of wreaking great destruction upon those who try to attack him but otherwise remains oblivious to his surroundings. This fact seems to irk Ahab the most for he detests that great power, lording over all the seas and impervious to the individual man who must be subservient to him. Ahab will not surrender, neither did the home owner in "The Lightning-Rod Man," when subservience would be a way to appease the great power. In order to find the truth, Ahab, the individual man, must hunt God down, must seek Him out and find Him because of the very fact that He is disinterested. But Ahab, of course, goes beyond the point of seeking true knowledge and wants to destroy the God that made this world and has allowed it to travel its immoral, depraved path. Although there was a presence of evil in Ahab, his argument was sheer logic to Melville. If God has infinite power, evil could not exist unless God willed it

and creating man to suffer and die was to Melville, an extremely questionable act of a benevolent Deity.⁷⁴ Because Melville could not account for evil, he concluded that the "Christian conception of a wholly benevolent Deity was wrong, and he arrived at the point where he could give full artistic expression to his heretical views. . . ."75 Melville found a good deal of solace in the story of Job for he too blamed God for all the evils in the world.⁷⁶ But his solace was not enough because he was still puzzled and still struggling and now ready, as William Braswell states, to express his views, "without a pang of conscience."

In all of the Christian religions, evil is embodied in a being called Satan, the opposite of God. Satan tempted Adam and Eve and caused man's downfall. Milton characterized Satan as being a rebel that God punished by making him ruler of the spirit world of the damned, hell. But since neither Twain nor Melville could accept the doctrines of Christianity, they speculated on Satan as not necessarily evil incarnate, especially since God was all-powerful, and therefore must have willed Satan to instigate the Original Sin. They experimented with Satan as a literary character and never

⁷⁴Braswell, op. cit., p. 68.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 73.

⁷⁶Lawrence R. Thompson, Melville's Quarrel With God, p. 147.

defined that character as evil or good.

Twain uses Satan as a literary character in at least three prominent works. Each is more refined than the other and becomes more ambiguous in his true meaning. Letters From the Earth has Satan as a rebel but he is never condemned for any great length of time by God. Satan is simply sent away by himself to do what he wants, but alone and not in Heaven. This banishment allows Satan the opportunity to visit earth where he sarcastically derides and scoffs at mankind and its actions. He points out the stupidity, ignorance, grotesqueness, and depravity of man in his letters to Heaven. Actually, Satan never changes in this role of enlightener to evil rather than bringer of evil. In a sense, Satan is a literary tool used by Twain to regularly criticize man.⁷⁷ The great tragedy in Twain's use of Satan is Satan's apparent indifference towards mankind.⁷⁸ In The Mysterious Stranger, Little Satan shows no emotional feelings and particularly despises the human race. He tries to teach Theodor how to view life as he does, detached and unconcerned.⁷⁹ Again, however, Satan becomes a rebel, as illustrated earlier, and condemns God as he disappears. "The Man that Corrupted

⁷⁷Gladys Bellamy, Mark Twain as a Literary Artist, p. 329.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 352.

⁷⁹Tuckey, op. cit., p. 126.

Hadleyburg" was written shortly after The Mysterious Stranger and, basically, uses a Satanic figure similar to that of Little Satan. He is a stranger who was treated poorly by citizens of a renowned town called Hadleyburg. The citizens of Hadleyburg prided themselves in their honesty, integrity, and incorruptability which even jealous neighboring towns were willing to admit was true. This stranger did not forget his ill treatment and arranged to dupe the citizens of Hadleyburg by playing on that inevitable human foible, greed. The trap, a sack supposedly containing a fortune in gold, is delivered by the stranger to the house of the cashier of the local bank. A note states that he was a bankrupt gambler who was given money to sustain him by an unknown citizen of Hadleyburg. With this small amount of money he returned to gambling and won a great deal of gold. He wants to share the spoils of his now bygone gambling days with the generous citizen. His note proposes that finding the right man will be simplified if the local newspaper prints his story and suggests that those who believe they are the right man, print what he said to the stranger when they met, on a piece of paper, seal it in an envelope and congregate in the town hall. There, all the envelopes will be opened, then the sack will be opened and the stranger's envelope's contents, purportedly having the correct saying inside, will be compared with the others until one is found that matches. The one that wrote the matching statement will receive the gold.

The stranger's plan is perfect for he knows man has no will of his own, no way to protect himself from his greed.⁸⁰ To a man, all of the town's leading citizens fall into the trap; no one escapes as each claims he is the rightful owner of the sack and they bid to see who gets the sack's contents. They call one another cheats and liars and the common folk see it all as a grotesque joke. The man and wife who first had possession of the sack hold themselves responsible and they die of broken hearts, grief stricken over the awful truth. The stranger has his revenge and he shows man for what he really is, once stripped of all pretensions and superficial honesty. Twain seemed to favor the character of Satan as someone to be pitied and accepted as part of the same horrible nightmare of life. In "Eve Speaks," Eve considers God unjust for punishing herself, Adam, and Satan. Adam and Eve were innocent and Satan appears not as an enemy but as a common victim of impulses and compulsions beyond his control.⁸¹

When a discussion of Satan as a literary character occurs, Melville's The Confidence-Man must be included. However, one cannot be sure that the confidence-man is Satan in the diabolical sense, because of one of Melville's favorite ploys, ambiguity. In Pierre, Melville's certainly reached

⁸⁰Wiggins, op. cit., p. 96.

⁸¹Parsons, op. cit., p. 159.

supreme heights of ambiguity but The Confidence-Man has its share. Yet the reader does know, and critics agree, that the confidence-man is more than a mortal because he takes numerous, physically distinct forms, while carrying out his scheme of deception and beguilement. As was the practice of Twain, Melville presented Satan-like characters as the revealer of darkness, not the bringer. Such is the character of the confidence-man. And whether this is the act of a devil or angel, like Little Satan, really does not matter in the end. R.W.B. Lewis reminds the reader that The Confidence-Man is indeed the "awe-inspiring ancestor of several subsequent works of fiction in America: Mark Twain's "The Man that Corrupted Hadleyburg" and The Mysterious Stranger, for example;"⁸² His first appearance immediately tells the reader he is no ordinary man:

At sunrise on a first of April, there appeared, suddenly as Manco Capac at the lake Titicaca, a man in cream-colors, at the water-side in the city of St. Louis. . . He was, in the extremest sense of the word, a stranger.⁸³

This stranger carries a slate board on which he prints the slogans of charity. "Charity thinketh no evil," "Charity suffereth long and is kind," He is regarded as a nuisance and an idiot by the large crowd waiting to board

⁸²R.W.B. Lewis (ed.), The Confidence-Man, p. 276.

⁸³Herman Melville, The Confidence-Man, p. 9.

the steamboat Fidele for a trip down the Mississippi to New Orleans so he stops writing his signs and goes to sleep. The succeeding disguises of the confidence-man lend themselves to characterizations of people in need of charity. Repeatedly, in his masquerades, he dupes people from various walks of life by preaching charity, love thy neighbor, and brotherhood, the teachings of Christ. Whether he obtains money from them or makes them liars, the travelers fall into his traps. The confidence-man is clever, subtle, and always ready with an answer to any argument he may encounter. Some of the people he dupes are fools and some are really lesser confidence-men, of a sort, like merchant men or bankers. Melville, in this period of his life, felt that the world was put together wrong and that God was to blame. Only the self-profiting authoritarians claimed otherwise, to better victimize the stupid.⁸⁴ So Melville made sure to show up the authoritarians for the knaves they were. Not a one of the passengers on the Fidole believes in man's moral progress, especially not the confidence-man, and he merely brings this lack of faith out of them after often making them swear they have faith.⁸⁵ As R.W.B. Lewis points out, the confidence-man may be a type of devil like Milton's rather than essentially the diabolical

⁸⁴Thompson, op. cit., p. 332.

⁸⁵Lewis, op. cit., p. 262.

spirit incarnate as in Catholicism. The question remains, then, is revealing evil moral or immoral? Is using the words of Christ to dupe the stupid human race diabolical?

CHAPTER III

MAN'S LOT

Now, after studying the Bible, Christ and his teachings, various religions of the world--the spiritual, mystical, and occult--Mark Twain and Herman Melville came to the point where they could and did place man in this maelstrom of acquired knowledge and analyze his position among the world of animals and the realm of the divine. Both found man's relationship to God a unique and bitter one. Man's hope, faith, and beliefs, the actions of mankind, the position man held in relationship to God now become a part of Twain's and Melville's philosophies on a major scale and was now a subject for their literary talents.

Though Twain was often less sophisticated and less subtle in his treatment of mankind than Melville, both expressed several similar opinions concerning man. First, both authors viewed man as essentially an animal motivated by purely selfish desires. Considered by Charles Neider to be the illumination of Twain's "least attractive side," "What Is Man?" is nevertheless the work Twain called his "gospel."⁸⁶ This essay is filled with bitterness and despair, so much so that Twain actually feared its publication.⁸⁷

The reader finds a young man and an old man discussing the

⁸⁶ Charles Neider (ed.), The Complete Essays of Mark Twain, p. xxiii.

⁸⁷ Cox, op. cit., p. 289.

topic of mankind in general. Naturally, the young man is an optimist and truly believes in the ultimate goodness and divinity of man. The old man, seemingly wise, and often condescending towards the youth, takes the pessimists' viewpoint and through this persona, Twain illustrates repeatedly that man is a coward, a petty being, and essentially evil.⁸⁸

At one point, the two extremes argue the point of man's "self-sacrifice" for his fellow man. The youth defines self-sacrifice as, "The doing good to another person where no shadow nor suggestion of benefit to one's self can result from it."⁸⁹ The youth insists that there are many instances of self-sacrifice in man's glorious history. The old man tells him that each individual man thinks first for himself, then others. He claims there is a law that is the source of all of man's impulses. The law as stated is: "From his cradle to his grave a man never does a single thing which has any FIRST AND FOREMOST object but one--to secure peace of mind, spiritual comfort, for HIMSELF."⁹⁰ The young man claims he can easily refute that opinion and cites patriotism as an example of self-sacrifice:

"A man who loves peace and dreads pain, leaves his

⁸⁸ DeVot, op. cit., p. 147.

⁸⁹ Charles Neider (ed.), The Complete Essays of Mark Twain, p. 342.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 344.

pleasant home and his weeping family and marches out to manfully expose himself to hunger, cold, wounds, and death. Is that seeking spiritual comfort?⁹¹

The old man believes it is a way of "seeking spiritual comfort" because "there is something that he loves more than he loves peace--the approval of his neighbors and the public."⁹² Because of "approval," the old man claims a man will do anything, anything to attain it. Man's selfish desire for approval will force him to commit any act, no matter how unspeakable or no matter how much that act appears to go against his very nature.

As has been already mentioned, "The Man that Corrupted Hadleyburg" involves the selfish desire for wealth, or greed and this desire reveals the corruptibility of a supposedly incorruptible town. In Joan of Arc, Twain painstakingly illustrates the sacrifices of the Maid that only serve to enhance the prestige of the French nobles who forsake her and exemplify complete ingratitude towards their savior. In Letters From the Earth, Satan writes about man's creation of a false god merely to satisfy man's desire to be praised, and coveted, and to enhance what man likes to believe is his utter dominance over the other animals. And in "Letter From the Recording Angel", Twain envisions a letter sent

⁹¹Neider, op. cit., p. 344.

⁹²Ibid.

from heaven to one Andrew Langdon, a coal dealer, a mineral Melville links with hell, in The Confidence-Man, that praises Mr. Langdon for his "act of benevolence and self-sacrifice."⁹³ This "act" was the culmination of several previous gifts given to relatives in need by Mr. Langdon. At one time he was worth almost a quarter of a million dollars and sent two to an impoverished, widowed cousin. He sent four dollars to another poor girl a few years later, and six more a little later. But the really stupendous act which soaked all the hankies in heaven came when:

. . .the widow wrote and said she could get a school in a far village to teach if she had \$50 to get herself and her two surviving children over the long journey; and you counted up last month clear profit from your three coal mines--\$22,230--and added to it the certain profit for the current month--\$45,00 and a possible fifty. . . and mailed her fifteen whole dollars!⁹⁴

Writes Twain: "all heaven boomed, and was glad you were going there. And so was hell."⁹⁵ Because of Langdon's generosity the Recording Angel informed him that certain of his prayers will be answered. They are:

1. For weather to advance hard coal 15 cents a ton.
Granted.
2. For influx of laborers to reduce wages 10 per cent.
Granted.

⁹³Weider, op. cit., p. 685.

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 689.

⁹⁵Weider, op. cit., p. 689.

3. For a break in rival soft-coal prices. Granted.
4. For a visitation upon the man, or upon the family of the man, who has set up a competing retail coal-yard in Rochester. Granted, as follows: diphtheria, 2, 1 fatal; scarlet fever, 1, to result in deafness and imbecility.⁹⁶

The selfish Andrew Langdon is even given recognition in heaven. Such was Twain's view of man as an egotistical, savage, brutal, unthinking thief who always took care of number one first.

Twain often uses the comic, the satiric, the humorous, and in a sense, Melville uses humor, but definitely blacker than night, in The Confidence-Man. Melville was at his blackest and probably bitterest when he described mankind as divided up into knaves and fools. But the differentiation between these two categories was ambiguous. Like a hazy middle ground of separation, the individual man will move back and forth and often become one and the same. The confidence-man convinces one man to buy stock in a non-existent coal company and then convinces another to invest in a town called New Jerusalem. Then each is told that their holdings are worthless and to seek the other's stock. So both men con one another into buying their worthless stock at a profit and they have been duped again. In their attempts to outwit one another and sell worthless stock to a supposedly

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 685.

unsuspecting buyer, they become knaves and fools. William Braswell believes The Confidence-Man is Melville's, "most cynical view of man. He deliberately uncovers the meanness and stupidity of man."⁹⁷ It is interesting to note that Melville was familiar with Hobbes' theory that all human actions are motivated by selfish impulses.⁹⁸ Melville had also read Thucydides' and Tacitas' accounts of man's wickedness and made reference to these ancients in The Confidence-Man. Melville portrays man as either contemptible, or ridiculous, or both.

In Pierre, Melville shows Rev. Falsgrave to be a careful man with words when near his benefactress, Mrs. Glendinning. She, in turn, wants her son Pierre to marry his genteel fiancée Lucy because Lucy is of the right breed and station in society and because Lucy is easy to manipulate. When Pierre's cousin Glen is willed the Glendinning fortune and estate, he will not even admit to recognizing Pierre when first meeting him in New York. Isabel, who claims to be Pierre's sister, clings to him because of selfish motives and becomes jealous when Lucy is taken into the covey of outcasts. Pierre, in attempting to be unselfish cannot survive in a world of self-worshippers.

⁹⁷Braswell, op. cit., p. 115.

⁹⁸Ibid.

If man is indeed a selfish, convincing, greedy, betraying, hypocritical beast, the reason must be illuminated. Both Twain and Melville pinpointed that reason as man's "gift" called a conscience. It supposedly separates man from the lower animals and Twain and Melville agreed, only the word "lower" had to be omitted. Conscience, or the Moral Sense, was a gift for the damned and dictated man's future actions at all times. To be able to distinguish right from wrong was a curse because man always would choose to do wrong. Inevitably, man would choose what is best for him first. In "The Facts Concerning the Recent Carnival of Crime in Connecticut," Twain has a full scale, fight to the finish, battle with conscience. In it the reader discovers a man meeting his conscience in the form of a rather ugly dwarf. This creature tells the man all about various consciences and how each man is a slave to his own. If a man is happy, his conscience will make him unhappy. The conscience controls all and whether a man is as pious as a saint or as evil as Satan, the conscience will make that man miserable. Only one possible escape can be taken. The man can kill his conscience but only if he is heavy-hearted and full of remorse. The man tries to kill his conscience but because he is so "cheerfully anxious" to kill his conscience, he cannot catch up with it. His conscience is pleased that he is visible to the man because:

Now I can look you straight in the eyes, and call you names, and leer at you, jeer at you, sheer at you; and you know what eloquence there is in visible expression, more especially when the effect is heightened by audible speech. I shall always address you henceforth in you o-w-n- s-n-i-v-e-l-i-n-g- d-r-a-w-l--baby!⁹⁹

Despairing, the man desperately tries to question his conscience to see if there is some way to stop the constant remorse, sorrow, guilt, and pain that a conscience brings. The conscience laughs and leaves no hope until the man's old aunt enters the house and rebukes the man for breaking his promise to give money to the alms-house. She scolds him for smoking tobacco and begs him to stop the filthy habit. The man becomes heavy-hearted and sorrowful and his conscience begins to reel and tumbles to the floor from the weight of the man's remorse. The man sees his chance, throttles his conscience, tears it to pieces and burns the remains in his fire-place. He exclaims: "I . . . drew into my nostrils the grateful incense of my burnt-offering. At last, and forever, my Conscience was dead!"¹⁰⁰ Now that he is free, he goes on a muderous rampage:

I killed thirty-eight persons during the first two weeks--all of them on account of ancient grudges. I burned a dwelling that interrupted my view. I swindled a widow and some orphans out of their last cow. . . . I have also committed scores of crimes, of various kinds, and have enjoyed my work exceedingly, whereas it would formerly have broken my heart and turned my

⁹⁹Samuel L. Clemens, Tom Sawyer Abroad, and Other Stories, p. 315.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 324.

hair gray, I have no doubt.¹⁰¹

Hank Morgan, in A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court, attacks the conscience in a reverie concerning his own conscience. He is pained by it after seeing a dungeon filled with instruments of torture. He states:

If I had the remaking of man, he wouldn't have any conscience. It is one of the most disagreeable things connected with a person; and although it certainly does a great deal of good, it cannot be said to pay in the long run; it would be much better to have less good and more comfort. . . . I have noticed my conscience for many years, and I know it is more trouble and bother to me than anything else I started with.¹⁰²

Twain's most bitter attack against man's conscience, or what he termed the Moral Sense, can be found in The Mysterious Stranger. In this work, Twain presents man as essentially a slave, a victim of the Moral Sense.¹⁰³ After watching executioners in a jail drive splinters under a suspected heretic's finger nails to obtain a confession, Theodor, the narrator of the story, is revolted and claims the act was brutal. Little Satan rebukes Theodor for implying that brutes would do such a thing. Little Satan says:

"No brute ever does a cruel thing--that is the monopoly of those with the Moral Sense. When a brute inflicts pain he does it innocently; . . . for him there is no such thing as wrong. And he does not inflict pain for the pleasure of inflicting it--

¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 325.

¹⁰²Clemens, A Connecticut Yankee, pp. 102-103.

¹⁰³Cox, op. cit., p. 277.

only man does that. Inspired by that mongrel Moral Sense of his! A sense whose function is to distinguish right from wrong, with liberty to choose which of them he will do He is always choosing, and in nine cases out of ten he prefers the wrong."¹⁰⁴

The possibility given to every man of knowing right from wrong, of having a choice, is a subject studied by Melville in The Confidence-Man. As was the case with Twain, Melville found this great dividing line between man and the animals to be a damned gift. In each of his guises, the confidence-man tries to dupe those he meets through protestations of hope, faith, and charity. The fools claim time after time that they do have faith, they do have hope, they do believe in charity and are willing to have confidence. Thus they indicate the knowledge of what is right and wrong. But each time they prove to be hypocrites as they are gulled into selling their very souls to the confidence-man. Even with the admission that they know right from wrong, they choose wrong every time. Their selfishness and greed demands that the Moral Sense become a curse. During the time that Melville wrote this most pessimistic work, Harry Levin believes Melville was a man of revenge who, "cast a vote of non-confidence in those material forces," forces that made the Moral Sense evil that "seemed the agents of a favoring destiny."¹⁰⁵ Although Melville does not speculate on man's life style if

¹⁰⁴Clemens, The Mysterious Stranger, pp. 669-670.

the Moral Sense were absent, it would appear that he certainly saw no choice in the matter at all.

With seemingly no pangs of conscience of their own, Twain and Melville pronounced the human race damned. Twain felt all mankind should be hanged. In Moby-Dick, Melville said mankind is "a mob of unnecessary duplicates."¹⁰⁶ In Israel Potter, he said, "Man attains not to the nobility of a brick unless taken in the aggregate,"¹⁰⁷ which has the ring of some of Twain's bitter humor. By now it seems that both authors felt that not only was mankind damned, but that it would undoubtedly stay that way for a good long time to come. Man was damned beyond hope of redemption and the tone of Twain's "What Is Man?" appears not only reconciled to this fact but rather amusedly so.

Twain comes to several conclusions which add up to a damned state for man. Man is a machine, selfish, ignorant, depraved. The most damnable however is mankind's complete unawareness of the situation. The Old Man explains in the end of Twain's essay:

"Am I stating facts? You know I am. Is the human race cheerful? You know it is. Considering what it can stand and be happy, you do me too much honor

¹⁰⁶Braswell, op. cit., p. 115.

¹⁰⁷Ibid.

when you think that I can place before it a system of plain cold facts that can take the cheerfulness out of it. Nothing can do that. Everything has been tried. Without success, I beg you not to be troubled.¹⁰⁸

Blissfully unaware travels man down the hellish path and nothing can be done. Hank Morgan tried, through Yankee brains and ingenuity, to eradicate the feudal system and make men equal. In the end, he became a violent proponent of what is really fascism. He failed miserably. Hadleyburg was supposedly a town of incorruptible individuals that became as corrupt as any on earth. In Letters From the Earth, Satan describes the utter stupidity and conceit of man as a clear sign of the failure of God's "experiment", if eventual goodness was the expected results. In Twain's mind, Joan of Arc was as saintly as a person could possibly be, so man burned her at the stake. Huck's great burning ambition is to escape from "sivilization." Certainly, again and again, Twain could not get over the utter senselessness of man's depravity and the only pronouncement he could make was "be damned." He believed environment decides all and that there are no original ideas.¹⁰⁹ With this in mind, he contemplated the thought that man might be trained properly, like an animal and somehow escape his dilemma. As

¹⁰⁸Weider, op. cit., p. 399.

¹⁰⁹Baldanza, op. cit., p. 18.

mentioned above, Hank Morgan made his attempt, and failed. Twain persisted in the idea in "What Is Man?" that training could help, but this merely was another indication that man was damned.

In Melville's "The Paradise of Bachelors and The Tartarus of Maids" one finds two stories combined into one that on the surface, may seem to have nothing in common. However, the theme that links the two together concerns the apparent hopelessness of mankind in reversing its damnation. In this combination of stories the reader finds human values substituted by technology.¹¹⁰ Human action is lost, replaced by machines created originally to assist man but which now dominate him. The narrator of "Paradise" describes his trip to the haven of the once renowned Knights-Templars, now filled with old, confirmed bachelors, as an idyllic one. Far removed from the noises and activity of London, the Temple is like a hidden city complete with everything a man needs, if he is a confirmed bachelor. With a subtle satirical bent, Melville gives a brief account of how the Temple is arranged:

Indeed the place is all a honey-comb of offices and domiciles. Like any cheese, it is quite perforated through and through in all directions with the snug cells of bachelors. Dear, delightful spot! Ah! when I bethink me of the sweet hours there passed, enjoying such genial hospitality beneath those time-honored roofs, my heart only finds due utterance

¹¹⁰W.R. Thompson, "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids: a Reinterpretation," AQ, IX (1957), p. 35.

through poetry; and, with a sigh, I softly sing,
 "Carry me back to old Virginny!"¹¹¹

"Virginny" indeed since all are "Brethren of Celibacy."

The narrator is treated to a huge dinner and many varied wines and desserts and thoroughly enjoys the good conversation. Then the narrator tells the reader that these men of the world have no families to cause trouble, no consciences to give them pain:

Pain! Trouble! As well talk of Catholic miracles.
 No such thing.--Pass the sherry, sir.--Pooh, pooh!
 Can't be!--The port, sir, if you please. Nonsense;
 don't tell me so.--The decanter stops with you sir,
 I believe.¹¹²

These Templars are all lawyers, living in the past, removed from the world, horrifying in their lack of life. As W.R. Thompson states, "The original Templars were men of action, makers of history, who assessed their past but did not live in it."¹¹³ Entrusted with civilization's welfare, these men blithely eat and talk and go home only to return to their "Paradise" which makes a hell of earth.

"The Tartarus of Maids" is a paper mill in New England that hires only virgin girls as workers. In the depths of winter a seedsman travels ever downward through gorges called Black Notch, near hollows called the Devil's Dungeon, and

¹¹¹Chase, op. cit., p. 209.

¹¹²Ibid., p. 214.

¹¹³Thompson, op. cit., p. 37.

past torrents named Blood River, to buy some paper from the mill. As a seedsman, entering this ominous valley, into this freezing, white hell, he represents fertility, life, action, growth, and social responsibility.¹¹⁴ Inside the factory, managed by a bachelor nicknamed Old Bach, the seedsman finds row upon row of girls, all pale, working at huge machines. A boy, named Cupid, a symbol of perverted love here, takes the seedsman on a tour of the factory and describes the work of the machines. The most expensive machine produces finished paper in nine minutes. This paper, the type the factory has the most call for, is labeled "foolscap". Richard Fogle speculates that the mill is indeed hell and contains "a system of perverted values, in which the machines, threatened with dismissal if they become pregnant, the girls work on and on, saying nothing, doing nothing except feeding rags into the machine's bins or separating sheets of paper. The seedsman leaves Black Notch but pauses at the pass and launches one small, but important arrow, at the one who is responsible for all this:

Then shooting through the pass, all alone with inscrutable nature, I exclaimed-- Oh! Paradise of Bachelors! and oh! Tartarus of Maids!¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴Thompson, op. cit., p. 42.

¹¹⁵Richard Fogle, Melville's Shorter Tales, p. 49.

¹¹⁶Chase, op. cit., p. 229.

The forces of nature, all powerfull, all knowing, can never be defeated. For all their damning of man, Twain and Melville admitted that man cannot be blamed.

There were two major reasons why these authors could not finally blame man. How could a person complain about man when, at heart, he believed human freedom was an illusion? How could a person blame man for the condition of his world when man was absolutely helpless against the forces of the universe? In the same works that Twain blasted man and damned him, Twain admitted, revealed, these conclusions. Melville too, less forcefully perhaps, but more subtly, tragically, sorrowfully, admitted the same. Every scholar who has studied these men has said, at least once, that during this period in their careers, despair, disillusionment, bitterness, sorrow, held the major portion of their minds captive. William Braswell calls Melville the "strangest and most pathetic case in his century. None of the English men of letters affected by the skepticism of the time. . .were hit quite so hard by their disillusionment."¹¹⁷ Bernard DeVoto said, "the force that was impelling him [Twain] to write, between 1870-1900, was, clearly, both desperate and remorseless. Only a man who was hell ridden could write so much."¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷Braswell, op. cit., p. 3.

¹¹⁸DeVoto, op. cit., p. 145.

"What Is Man?" so filled with damnations on man became a sorrowful path leading to remorse as Twain renounces human freedom and replaces it with man as a machine, capable of training like an animal. Free will is rejected because man's environment, his first act of infancy, also outlined in The Mysterious Stranger, made man a victim of circumstances he could not change. In Bernard DeVoto's words, "What Is Man?" became a plea for pardon. Man cannot be blamed, man is not responsible; he is enslaved and dominated by inexorable circumstances.¹¹⁹ Man is helpless against the forces of the universe. That is why he appears as such a petty creature because indeed he is compared to the Creator. Robert Wiggins suggests that Twain may have believed man could become good, through practice, and training, and by casting aside any belief in a totally disinterested, if not malignant spirit.¹²⁰ But the man who is a master at fooling others would soon realize he was fooling himself. The prosecutor's evidence may have been enormous and the ultimate defendant may have been pronounced guilty, but the judge and defendant were one and the same. What punishment could be enforced? What vengeance could be wrought against the All-Powerful? The malevolent intelligence which created the universe, controls

¹¹⁹Ibid., p. 148.

¹²⁰Wiggins, op. cit., p. 118.

man's actions.¹²¹

In The Mysterious Stranger, Little Satan, in one of his numerous attacks upon man, has a discussion with Theodor about reality and illusion. Theodor says:

Satan was accustomed to say that our race lived a life of continuous and uninterrupted self-deception. It duped itself from cradle to grave with shams and delusions which it mistook for realities, and this made its life an entire sham. Of the score of fine qualities which it imagined it had and was vain of, it really possessed hardly one.¹²²

Little Satan takes Theodor and Seppi on a voyage through time to man's past. In the past they witness the first murderer and victim, Cain and Abel, and continue to see murder, bloodshed, wars, slaughter right on into the future in an endless procession of horror. Such is man's past. Such is man's future. Little Satan is asked to stop the misery of an old woman in the town. Theodor begs him to change her life for the better. Satan explains how man's life is predestined by powers beyond his control and then, in an instant changes the old woman's life for the better. She is accused of witchcraft, and burned at the stake. One break in an individual's chain of life, one link misplaced, broken, or replaced, and all the future life of that individual will be changed. Worst of all, that individual has no power to

¹²¹Bellamy, op. cit., p. 331.

¹²²Bernard DeVoto (ed.), The Portable Mark Twain, p. 736.

control his own destiny. History, then, was empty of any redemptive value.¹²³ Man could not learn anything if he had no free will to change.

Melville's "The Bell Tower" depicts a mechanician named Bannadonna attempting to build an enormous tower. In the tower lies a huge bell and next to the bell stands an almost human robot, Talus, that is designed to strike the bell with a hammer at the appropriate, hourly intervals. Richard Fogle describes the tower as symbolic of "man's aspirations to power and freedom through science (not the heart)."¹²⁴ Bannadonna is accidentally killed by the great robot though there is a hint of murder possible. Bannadonna fails and his tower is destroyed by an earthquake because he makes an attempt to not only rival nature, but to go beyond her.¹²⁵ He knows nothing of art, merely science, and uses it, rather than, as Fogle states, the heart, to assert himself. Man, in this way is not free.

Pierre studies reality and truth and concludes that the mind is the only true reality and reality is destruction.¹²⁶

¹²³Roger B. Solomon, Twain and the Image of History, pp. 174-175.

¹²⁴Fogle, op. cit., p. 64.

¹²⁵Ibid., p. 63.

¹²⁶William Elleny Sedgwick, Herman Melville, The Tragedy of Mind, p. 172.

As the title informs the reader, Pierre, or the Ambiguities, reality cannot be determined. All is ambiguous. The hero, Pierre, tries to live his life, Christ-like in principle, but the society of man will not allow him. It is a tragedy of Fate, of circumstances beyond Pierre's control.¹²⁷

Pierre cannot act without danger confronting him. He is not free to choose because his choice is destructive.

Finally, in "The Tartarus of Maids", one finds the virgins slaves to the machines of hell, run by the devil, Old Bach. To Newton Arvin, this story expresses Melville's, "appalled contemplation of what seems to lie beyond human control in the whole inexorable process of human reproduction."¹²⁸ The machine is filled with rags, raw material, and furnishes in nine minutes, foolscap paper. Apparently, it will never break down. "The rags," claims W.R. Thompson, "signify human raw material pouring into America's industrial regions and the mill represents America itself, taking raw material and pressing it into molds of uncompromising conformity."¹²⁹ Melville stood aghast as he realized what path industrialization was taking mankind. The devil himself was behind it all and mankind was caught in his grasp. Escape, through the pass,

¹²⁷Henry A. Murray (ed.), Pierre, or the Ambiguities, p. xcvi.

¹²⁸Newton Arvin, Herman Melville, p. 238.

¹²⁹Thompson, op. cit., p. 41.

was possible for the seedsman, but he was alone with the forces of "inscrutable nature." Once the initial action took place in the universe, man was caught up and dragged along without any hope of stopping it. With no real power to employ, with the infant's first act determining all, with human freedom an awful joke and helplessness against the forces of the eternal opposite him, man was lost. Most horrifying of all must have been the realization that Twain and Melville were men also. No thrusts, no attacks seemed left. Now was the time for some possible escape, some philosophy to organize for protection. Now was the time for seemingly near frantic grasping for a permanent position.

CHAPTER IV

PARTAKERS OF THE FRUIT

After searching for the nature of God, using undoubtedly what Twain and Melville considered a step-by-step, logical process, and then after analysing man's position in reference to God, certain conclusions must have seemed inevitable and inescapable. Along with the condemnations and damnations of the human race, pointing out man's stupidity, depravity, and general folly, came the realization that when all was considered, man was in an untenable position. The bitterness and despair was complete and one fact must have made Twain and Melville realize the necessity for two important developments in their art. This fact was that Twain and Melville were men. They too were members of the human race which they had analysed and damned and they too were subject to the whims of the inexorable forces of the universe. Because of this realization, sympathy for man's lot had to be forthcoming from their pens, and a philosophy had to be developed which would, in a sense, isolate these authors in their special worlds and explain everything they had discovered. If successful in these attempts, reconciliation might be the product, or at least peace might come to what must obviously be observed as two tortured minds.

Mark Twain's general opinion of man and civilization in Huckleberry Finn is one of neither acceptance nor total rejection. As was mentioned before, Twain's masterpiece was really the starting point for his long quest. It is indeed

a one-sided examination of a society and the theme is surely one of rejection as Huck and Jim make a valiant attempt to escape the horrors of civilization.¹³⁰ But Huck never truly condemns anyone and there is a hope that one might escape "sivilization" in the end.

"What Is Man?," however, indicates at once two seemingly opposite conclusions. Now Twain does consider man stupid and damned yet man cannot be blamed for malevolent powers control whatever man does.¹³¹ In a half humourous, half-despairing tone, Twain admits that man can be trained properly like some dumb brute. The absolute absurdity of it all lended itself well to a sympathetic view of the black joke called life.

In Pudd'nhead Wilson, Twain gives the reader a stark look at the worst in human nature as well as the best (Tom and Roxy) but he does not judge in any overt manner the human actions he presents.¹³²

In short, though Twain repeatedly damned man in The Mysterious Stranger, and "What Is Man?", he will ultimately forgive him as Twain recalls his knowledge of the malignant spirit that is all-powerful. The final argument between the Old Man and the Young Man in "What Is Man?" presents Twain's

¹³⁰Wiggins, op. cit., p. 122.

¹³¹Bellamy, op. cit., p. 331.

¹³²F.R. Leavis (ed.), Pudd'nhead Wilson, p. 30.

view of what are essentially the Seven Cardinal Virtues as found in man. The Old Man asks the Young Man where such moral qualities as charity, courage, benevolence, truthfulness, magnanimity, holiness, and the like come from. The Young Man claims they are born in each man like seeds. The Old Man claims this is true but that each person has a different blend of these virtues. Their conversation now abruptly shifts and the Old Man asks about the origin of these virtues:

- O.M. "Who manufactures them then?"
 Y.M. "God."
 O.M. "Where does the credit of it belong?"
 Y.M. "To God."
 O.M. "And the glory of which you spoke; and the applause?"
 Y.M. "To God."
 O.M. "Then it is you who degrade man. You make him claim glory, praise, flattery, for every valuable thing he possesses--borrowed finery, the whole of it; no rag of it earned by himself, not a detail of it produced by his own labor. You make him a humbug; have I done worse by him?"
 Y.M. "You have made a machine of him."
 O.M. "Who devised that cunning and beautiful mechanism, a man's hand?"
 Y.M. "God."
 O.M. "Who devised the law by which it automatically hammers out of a piano an elaborate piece of music, without error, while the man is thinking about something else, or talking to a friend?"
 Y.M. "God."
 O.M. "Who devised the blood? . . . Who devised the man's mind, whose machinery works automatically, interests itself in what it pleases, regardless of his will or desire, labors all night when it likes, deaf to his appeals for mercy? God devised all these things. I have not made man a machine, God made man a machine. I am merely calling attention to the fact, nothing more."¹³³

¹³³Neider, op. cit., pp. 396-397.

James T. Farrell writes of Huckleberry Finn: "He [Twain] envisioned the individual man alone in a dreary waste of empty waste."¹³⁴ Now Twain envisions man as a mere machine, with no real sense of pride or virtuousness because man is a machine. God experimented, tinkered, with each individual man before birth and endowed each individual with a certain blend of virtues that He desired. The greatest of bunglers will take the responsibility not Twain or any man. Lost in time and space, disenfranchised from all powers, and rights, and accomplishments, man is a being to be pitied, no longer condemned. Man cannot help what he is.

The great similarity between Twain and Melville on the point of sympathy for man is best stated by William Braswell. He writes:

"The idea that Melville's sympathy for man was due partly to the belief that we are all suffering here together largely through no fault of our own but because in the nature of things decreed by God it is impossible for us not to suffer, reappears throughout his writing career."¹³⁵

In Pierre or, The Ambiguities one finds that perfect example of a man trying desperately to live as his conscience dictates, as his heart guides him, as Christianity has taught him. After living as close to true Christian standards as is humanly possible, Pierre is destroyed by the forces of

¹³⁴James T. Farrell, The League of Frightened Philistines, p. 322.

¹³⁵Braswell, op. cit., p. 117.

evil around him. Melville's greatest indication of sympathy for Pierre is Pierre's death in the end for only then is man freed. Only then can man escape the suffering. One of the precipitating influences in forcing Pierre to commit murder is his dream, or rather nightmare, in which he compares himself to Enceladus. Near Pierre's country home lies a giant rock jutting from the earth like a half-submerged giant. The rock has certain human features and appears to face a great mountain in the near distance. The true statue of Enceladus, created by Marsy, is compared with this rock:

. . . this American Enceladus, wrought by the vigorous hand of Nature's self, it did go further than compose; -- it did far surpass that fine figure moulded by the inferior skill of man. Marsy gave arms to the eternally defenceless; but Nature, more truthful, performed an amputation, and left the important Titan without one serviceable ball-and-socket above the thigh.¹³⁶

In myth, Enceladus was the son and grandson of incest so, through no fault of his own, Enceladus was condemned to earth rather than given a place in heaven. Pierre, in his nightmare, imagines himself to be Enceladus, defenseless against the forces of heaven, yet continuously striving to reach his goal, no matter what the odds. But Enceladus fiercely attacks the heavens while Pierre, until now, has been gentle and Christ-like. Pierre's inner feelings undergo a metamorphosis and he now decides to attack, violently, the earthly

¹³⁶Melville, Pierre, p. 482.

representation of the inscrutable evils of the universe. His cousin Glen becomes the agent of heaven in Pierre's mind and Pierre shoots him dead. Pierre tried in vain to make a place in the world for himself and his adopted family but success was not to be his. Benevolence, once, again, cannot exist in a non-benevolent world. It is a tale of great tragedy and sorrow and one can only have sympathy for the principals involved. Melville is careful not to give Glen any characterization because Glen is not a man but a symbol that must be destroyed. But in destroying that symbol of evil force, the man who performs the justice becomes the judged. In combating evil, one becomes evil. The true individual man is a pawn like all the rest and only one escape seem possible.

The escape is death, whether by natural causes, homicide, or suicide. Twain's and Melville's opinions on this subject are quite clear and leave no room for argument. In numerous works, each shows death to be a viable alternative to life on earth among the human race. Edward Wagenknecht says; "When his loved ones died, he (Twain) claimed he cried not for them, but for himself because he had to remain while they were fortunate to die."¹³⁷ In The Mysterious Stranger Twain indicates a decidedly deterministic philosophy which man can only overcome by death.¹³⁸ One of Theodor's

¹³⁷Wagenknecht, op. cit., pp. 203-204.

¹³⁸Cox, op. cit., 280.

young friends is given the freedom of death by Little Satan. Theodor is told that his friend Nickalaus will live a life of misery because it was predestined. Theodor asks Little Satan if he can save him. Little Satan agrees to "save" Nickalaus by allowing him to die while attempting to save a drowning girl. Theodor protests but Little Satan explains:

"But for my intervention he would do his brave deed twelve days from now--a deed begun and ended in six minutes--and get for all reward those forty-six years of sorrow and suffering."¹³⁹

Later on, Little Satan decides to be kind and help the good Father Peter who has been locked in jail, falsely accused. So when Father Peter is finally absolved of guilt and freed, he is found to be incurably insane. Again, Little Satan explains that he is far better off now because he is too good a man to stand the horror of life. Echoing Sophocles, Twain repeatedly indicates a belief that next to not being born at all, early death is a blessing.¹⁴⁰ As John S. Tuckey states, "Satan teaches Theodor to view life as an imprisonment and death as release. The only solace lies in escape from life into cosmic innocence."¹⁴¹

In similar fashion, Melville indicated a belief that death was the only escape. From the symbolic death of

¹³⁹Clemens, The Mysterious Stranger, p. 699.

¹⁴⁰Wiggins, op. cit., p. 90.

¹⁴¹John S. Tuckey, Mark Twain and Little Satan, p.

the protagonist in White-Jacket to the suicides of Pierre and "Bartleby the Scrivener", Melville defends death.

Mardi was published a year before White-Jacket and here the hero Taji, unable to find his love Yillah, sets out for the open, uncharted sea. He is told that no one returns from the endless sea but Taji replies:

"And why put back? Is a life of dying worth living o'er again? Let me, then be the unreturning wanderer. The helm! By Oro! I will steer my own fate. . . ."142

The only escape from an unChristian world for Pierre is suicide. Bartleby, emulating a monastic life, is a misfit in a hustling, "productive", waste-making world and he ends his life in prison, refusing to eat, refusing to communicate. He wastes away in the yard, kept away from common prisoners, surrounded by thick cement walls that remind the narrator of an Egyptian tomb.

The aforementioned idea that good battling evil becomes evil is an essential outgrowth of a philosophy that both Twain and Melville adopted periodically. They probably were first introduced to this philosophy during the periods in their development when oriental mysticism charged their interest. Manichaeism, or Manicheism, began in Persia during the third century A. D. The Manichaens were followers of a persian sage called Mani and from the fourth to the twelfth centuries, his teachings rivaled Christianity as the

142Melville, Mardi, I., p. 298.

dominant influence in Europe and the Middle East. Even St. Augustine was a member of the Manichaeans for nine years before becoming Christian.¹⁴³ Basically, the teachings of Mani stated that the universe was governed by good and evil. Practice good and good and evil were separate. Practice evil and evil and good will become as one and, therefore, irreconcilable. More often than not, Twain and Melville adopted this philosophy and it proved to be anything but a solace for their troubled minds. Unfortunately, the belief that there is a distinctively good force and an equal and opposite evil force in the universe can lead to seeing things as either black or white. This tendency would become a hindrance since one could become a moralizer. As Gladys Bellamy describes: "His [Twain's] moralism is itself an indication of his failure to see life as a whole. The moralizer tends to over simplify--to see life only in terms of black and white."¹⁴⁴ Manicheistic philosophy brought Melville to the point where he saw two possible values for every concept. Any new value Melville found could only be given a possibility of reality or illusion, never a definitive statement.¹⁴⁵

When he wrote The Mysterious Stranger, Twain was,

¹⁴³Anon., Encyclopedia Americana, 18, 218c.

¹⁴⁴Bellamy, op. cit., p. 328.

¹⁴⁵Thompson, op. cit., p. 149.

in the words of William Spengemann, "rigidly Manicheistic in his view of good and evil."¹⁴⁶ Evil becomes a representative of the material world whereas innocence is left of the spiritual. Little Satan claims that nothing is real. Because Twain had a sympathy for man and at the same time logically viewed man as worthless, his Manicheism could not save him. Man must be good in order for good to separate from evil. But man could not be good if he had no control of his actions. Obviously, the negation of reality was Twain's only alternative for his state of mind. Robert A. Wiggins accuses Twain of having, "a primitive mind which is color blind; it sees no hue or tint, only black and white."¹⁴⁷ For Twain's philosophy, no middle ground exists. Possibly this steadfast opinion stems from Twain's original search for God which began some time ago. Again, if God is all-powerful, all-merciful, and all-knowing, how could He make such a world? Things must be, should be, all black or all white and apparently, Twain came to believe that everything was all-black. This opinion naturally afforded Twain a great deal of room for condemnation. If everything was all-black, the Twain could moralize quite easily and damn everyone for being so depraved. But again, after moralizing in what would appear to be an attempt to save the world, wake it up, the ultimate

¹⁴⁷Wiggins, op. cit., p. 78.

truth negated such actions. After all, how could a man overcome the power of the universe?

From Pierre on, Melville also used his Manicheistic beliefs in his fiction. Interestingly enough, like Robert Wiggins on Twain, Lawrence Thompson believes Melville's philosophy was based on " an immature and childish notion that because an object is not white it must be black. . . ."148

As early as White-Jacket, Melville moralized, with great verbosity, on the evils of the world. He chastised the United States Navy, the officers, the American public, for allowing the degradation of sailors to continue. Melville preached so much that often White-Jacket is reduced to a propaganda tract for humanitarian principles. But his Manicheistic tendencies probably did not flower until Pierre. In it one finds Melville unable to account for evil and therefore presenting Pierre as a model of Christian virtues facing a totally ambiguous and hostile set of circumstances. Pierre never really trusts anyone after arriving in New York City and, in fact, never can believe in anyone except himself. Henry A. Murray writes, concerning Melville's state of mind during the writing of Pierre, "The majority of good men who call themselves Christians are behaviorally convinced of an un-Christian doctrine. The world is soaking in lies."149

148 Thompson, op. cit., p. 422.

149 Murray, op. cit., p. lxxiv.

Beyond the world of Pierre, a benevolent man in a non-benevolent world, one encounters The Confidence-Man. In this world-in-a-steamboat, Melville presents only bad, no good at all. One can never decide whether the confidence-man is devil or angel but certainly, the people on board the Fidele are either knaves or fools. As stated earlier, all those who the confidence-man contacts, are fooled, in one way or another. If there is a man who represents Melville's conception of a good man, critics cannot agree who the character might be. In fact, for this argument, it does not matter whether there is a good character or not since the populace has been divided by Melville into knaves and fools. This is undoubtedly the ultimate extension of Manichaeism for Melville cannot differentiate between the good and evil forces in the universe. The evil pervades all.

Manichaeism would not suffice as a panacea for Twain and Melville. Apparently, the adoption of this philosophy merely served to heighten their sense of frustration, their sensibilities, and finally their confusion. Critics agree that both men during their later lives came dangerously close to a real mental breakdown. Their personal lives were in varying degrees of turmoil and their artistic expression reflects their overwhelming disillusionment. Their last major works indicate a despair over the definitions of truth and falsehood, reality and illusion.

Little Satan in The Mysterious Stranger claims, at

first, that he is an angel. He derides and degrades man. He performs miracles, changes peoples lives in an instant and lectures Theodor, the narrator, on the folly of mankind. Finally, after presenting the world and its human population as intolerably corrupt, Little Satan tells Theodor, "Nothing exists; all is a dream."¹⁵⁰ Little Satan then launches an attack on the God of man and denounces Him as dishonorable, hypocritical, evil. Little Satan continues:

"You perceive, now, that these things are all impossible except in a dream. You perceive that they are pure and puerile insanities, the silly creations of an imagination that is not conscious of its freaks-- in a wordk that they are a dream, and you the maker of it. . . . Nothing exists but you. And you are but a thought--a vagrant thought, a useless thought, a homeless thought, wandering forlorn among the empty eternities!"¹⁵¹

All then, is but a dream, useless, alone. If one cannot recognize the real from the imaginary, if all things present two sides, two extremes at once, only a dream will allow escape. Death cannot really suffice for no one knows what is beyond death. The utter illogic, irrationality, unreasonableness, of life, man, the world, cannot be faced except in fantasy.

In exactly the same manner, Melville presents Pierre as faced with a nightmare world. Melville's savage bitterness cannot go unnoticed. When Pierre is attempting to write

¹⁵⁰Clemens, The Mysterious Stranger, p. 742.

¹⁵¹Ibid., p. 744.

his book, he rarely sleeps or eats, receives little warmth in his tiny room, because he is hell-ridden to write what he considers the truth. The narrator proclaims:

Oh, I hear the leap of the Texan Comanche, as at this moment he goes crashing like a wild deer through the green underbrush; I hear his glorious whoop of savage and untameable health; and then I look at Pierre. If physical, practical unreason make the savage, which is he? Civilization, Philosophy, Ideal Virtue! behold your victim!¹⁵²

Slowly but surely Pierre begins to doubt, becomes confused and angry, and expresses his fears of what is real and what is false. In a discussion with Isabel, the girl who claims to be his illegitimate sister, Pierre describes for her his opinions on vice and virtue. Pierre says:

"Look: a nothing is the substance, it casts one shadow one way, and another the other way; and these two shadows cast from one nothing; these, seem to me, are Virtue and Vice."

"Then why torment thyself so, dearest Pierre?"

"It is the law."

"What?"

"That a nothing should torment a nothing; for I am nothing. It is all a dream--we dream that we dreamed we dream."¹⁵³

Pierre later continues and asks, "From nothing proceeds nothing, Isabel! How can one sin in a dream?"¹⁵⁴ This is precisely the same attitude Twain took in The Mysterious Stranger. Relegating all to a dream was a relatively simple

¹⁵²Melville, Pierre, p. 421.

¹⁵³Ibid., p. 382.

¹⁵⁴Ibid.

step for Twain and Melville to take. Of course, neither one of these ideas has any connection with reality.¹⁵⁵ But since, for them, reality was undefineable, the dream could be accepted. Bernard DeVoto states:

"Twain could end his contention with the vengeful God and put away remorse forever by reducing all contention, vengeance, pain, degradation, guilt, sin, and panic to a lonely dream."¹⁵⁶

However, simply because Twain and Melville had those high standards of moral idealism, as mentioned earlier, their final statements cannot be found in The Mysterious Stranger or in The Confidence-Man, Melville's last novel length work. "The Man that Corrupted Hadleyburg" was written by Twain after The Mysterious Stranger and would seem to adhere to reality a good deal more than the tale of Little Satan. Published posthumously, written years after The Confidence-Man, one finds Melville's Billy Budd a final statement. These two works culminate their long, bitter, disillusioned search for God as well as any others. Equipped with minds that were as truly Christian as any, they made a concerted effort to uncover the meaning of life. After Huckleberry Finn and Moby-Dick their search began in earnest. They were aroused by the teachings of the Old Testament, interested in analyzing the teachings of Christ. They chose a path

¹⁵⁵Spengemans, op. cit., p. 120.

¹⁵⁶Bernard DeVoto, Mark Twain's America, p. 157.

of discovery through organized religion and the occult but were only antagonized more by what they revealed. They began to blame God for man's problems, saw Him as the repository of responsibility. Their minds turned rebellious and saw Satan as a member of the weak who forced to commit his unpardonable acts. Logically, both turned their literary weapons on mankind showing man to be damned and stupid. But the knowledge that man was helpless against supreme forces of fate forced Twain and Melville to sympathize with man's lot. Finally, the knowledge that they too were men, doomed like all the rest, forced Twain and Melville to grope for escape, search for a philosophical exit that would free them from the torture. Until now, it would appear that no escape, no reconciliation was found but these men went beyond the "life as a dream" concept. If any solution is to be found, if either author ultimately achieved peace, the best of their last works may hold the answer. In a concise, succinct manner, Robert A. Wiggins describes what process has occurred through these authors' careers to this point. He writes:

"Twain's is a more elemental manifestation of the same artistic progress made by such writers as Melville. It is characteristic of these writers, that they found their art upon their first hand experience and tried to cope with it in symbolic terms. Success came to them early, before they had fully perfected their art. They refined their techniques from novel to novel. And this technical development parallels a course of spiritual trial, of resisting the compromises required by success, posing large questions, and tearing the answers out from the flesh of one's own experience.

The only help in this lonely quest is the example of the masters--those writers who have gone before."¹⁵⁷

There is still a great deal of Twain criticism to be written and the "elemental manifestation" Twain represents, as compared to Melville, is becoming less and less apparent. Yet it is obvious that Twain used all the knowledge he possessed to cultivate his art and continue his "quest." Today, in terms of symbolism, allegory, majesty and depth of prose, Twain remains in the shadow of Melville and perhaps always will. But his contributions to his art are enormous and his personal search was no less agonizing, no less tortuous than Melville's. In "The Man that Corrupted Hadleyburg", one finds a relative to Melville's confidence-man and Twain said more positively and more clearly the same thing he said in The Mysterious Stranger, minus the dream philosophy. A stranger corrupts an incorruptible town by using his knowledge of mankind. His plan to wreak vengeance on a populace that once treated him poorly revolves around the premise that man is essentially selfish and greedy and will stop at nothing to fulfill this greed. However, no blame is placed on the townspeople by Twain as he knows now, man is not responsible, has no control over his actions. If Hadleyburg is a town of selfish people, it is, ultimately, beyond their power to change. Each man falls into the stranger's trap, illustrating

¹⁵⁷Wiggins, op. cit., p. 119.

that they have no moral control. But Twain had to feel a sense of remorse over the logical outcome of his story because of his conscious faith in the dignity of man. Suffering to the point of pure nihilism, Twain still remained faithful to the individual, independent man; a man he undoubtedly hoped he had become. At the conclusion of his story Twain writes: "It is an honest town once more, and the man will have to rise early that catches it napping again."¹⁵⁸ A note of hope is inscribed as the town learned its mistake. This statement recalls one of Twain's persistent comments in "What Is Man?" and A Connecticut Yankee which is that training can mean the difference. Learning through training, through experience many be enough to save mankind. Unable to see the glory and innate grandeur of life, Twain's bitterness was almost too much for him to accept. And, he never really accepted, for this one way out, this chance of training, hopefully not reducing man to a brute animal, left some consolation. The same struggle in this story raged in The Mysterious Stranger. Man's dignity and moral responsibility against man's utter worthlessness. But no lonely dream faces the individual. In "Hadleyburg", the people learned and hopefully profited as Twain hints in his final line. Then a solution, of sorts, was established, although it was based on

¹⁵⁸ Charles Neider (ed.), The Complete Short Stories of Mark Twain, p. 393.

a belief that Twain had always held, discarded and regained throughout his literary career. The possibility of gaining, through experience, training, that moral responsibility, that dignity, which man should never have lost in the first place.

If in-depth, concentrated criticism is lacking in Twain's "Hadleyburg," Melville's Billy Budd has been the eye of a critical hurricane. If one solution, or any solution at all, is found in Twain's story, a myriad of solutions has been presented for Melville. The three main characters in this sea story are, an American sailor, Billy Budd, apparently a model sailor, innocent, ignorant, hard working, and friendly, Captain Vere, commander of a British man-'o-war, likened in many respects to Lord Nelson, and Claggart, Master-at-arms, a tough-minded individual who immediately begins to subject Billy to harassment when Billy is impressed off a merchant ship, the Rights-of-Man, and onto Vere's Indomitable. Billy is liked by all the men and he performs his duties well. But Claggart persists in needling Billy every chance he gets. Captain Vere also takes to Billy and all would seem well. However, Claggart accuses Billy of inciting the crew to mutiny, this during a time proceeding a famous mutiny in Her Majesty's Navy, and Billy is asked by Vere if the accusation is true. Vere is ready to side with Billy in this matter but Billy is dumbfounded for two reasons. First, he never expected Claggart to accuse him, although sailors warned Billy of

Claggart's intentions, because the Master-at-arms always spoke kindly to Billy. Second, to be accused of mutiny, something Melville has indicated Billy is incapable of doing in the first place, makes him speechless. Captain Vere quietly urges Billy to say something, and Melville describes the scene as follows:

"Contrary to the effect intended, these words so fatherly in tone, doubtless touching Billy's heart to the quick, prompted yet more violent efforts at utterance-- efforts soon ending for the time in confirming the paralysis, and bringing to his face an expression which was as a crucifixion to behold. The next instant, quick as the flame from a discharged cannon at night, his right arm shot out and Claggart dropped to the deck."¹⁵⁹

Claggart is struck dead, a court of officers behind closed doors is called and Billy is tried for murder. Vere believes Billy must hang for his crime although he loves Billy like a son. Several officers disagree with this harsh punishment but Vere cites the previous mutiny in the British Navy as proof that it could happen again. The letter of the law dictates the just act. Billy is condemned to die but he and Vere have one final meeting together and no one knows what was said. But Billy emerges from the cabin and is sent up the mast and before being hanged, he shouts, "God Bless Captain Vere!"¹⁶⁰ In a sea battle with the French, the

¹⁵⁹Melville, Billy Budd, p. 43.

¹⁶⁰Ibid., p. 59.

Indomitable defeats the Atheiste but Vere is mortally wounded and whispers Billy's name as he dies. Billy is worshipped by other sailors and becomes a martyr, but is damned by the naval chronicle News from the Mediterranean.

There are at least five or six basic interpretations of this, Melville's final work, and each takes a different view than the other. Critic Phil Withim calls Billy Budd Melville's "Testament of Resistance". He sees Claggart as evil, Billy Budd as innocence, and Captain Vere as over-cautious. Phil Withim writes, "Vere does not act on reason but on fear. His intelligence is a perverted instrument. He should have jailed Billy till land was reached."¹⁶¹ So Vere is to blame and Melville's philosophy appears to be the same as it was during the writing of The Confidence-Man. William Braswell's critique of Billy Budd would appear to be in general agreement. However, after agreeing Claggart is evil, Braswell claims; "Here, Melville is concerned not with the question of why evil exists, but of how man should accept its intricate and desolating effect."¹⁶² Therefore, according to Braswell, Melville found peace through acceptance of the inscrutable laws of the universe. Similarly, F.O. Matthiessen believes Melville has ended his protest

¹⁶¹Phil Withim, "Billy Budd: Testament of Resistance," MLQ, XX (June, 1959), 115-127.

¹⁶²Braswell, op. cit., p. 122.

against God for Melville has come to "respect necessity."¹⁶³ Newton Arvin believes Melville's answer is love. Arvin writes, "Melville's solution; love, given and received, between Vere and Billy, father and son is the answer. Goodness exists and its essential reality is love."¹⁶⁴ An unusual position is taken by H. Bruce Franklin who sees Billy as a man-created god. Man makes him and destroys him. "His religion," says Franklin, "is a myth which saves man from himself."¹⁶⁵ William Ellery Sedgewick sees Melville indicating that fate, or necessity, rules the world and not natural laws, so man must accept. Another critic who believes Melville was accepting the world's condition is James E. Miller Jr.. He considers Captain Vere the balanced man, a composite of Jack Chase, Israel Potter, and Rolfe, earlier Melville characters who managed to survive. Miller states: ". . . Captain Vere must be defined as Melville's full, affirmative, and realistic answer to the question of existence posed by life's apparent cunning and hostility."¹⁶⁶

Taking the somewhat opposite viewpoint, there are some critics who believe Melville was merely continuing his

¹⁶³F.O. Matthiessen, American Renaissance, p. 510.

¹⁶⁴Arvin, op. cit., p. 298.

¹⁶⁵Franklin, op. cit., p. 206.

¹⁶⁶James E. Miller, Jr., A Readers Guide to Herman Melville, p. 239.

struggle. Joseph Schiffman boldly states, "Billy Budd shows no radical change in thought. Change lies in his style. A tale of irony, he turned to irony for his final attack upon evil."¹⁶⁷ Because Melville is apparently uninterested, diffident in his style, the reader does not see the irony. Claggart, depravity, subdues but does not silence Billy, or virtue. Billy is made a martyr by the sailors and they sing songs about him. So even though Schiffman believes Melville is still attacking, the fact that Billy is not destroyed by Claggart leaves some hope. Lawrence Thompson views Billy Budd as in the same family with Moby-Dick, Pierre, and The Confidence-Man. Melville was still blaming God for the world. Thompson cites the fact that Melville, during his writing of Billy Budd, read seven volumes of Schopenhauer. Like Melville, Schopenhauer condemned organized religion on the ground that its dogmas proclaimed God as merciful and good. Schopenhauer thought otherwise. The one point of agreement between this man and Christianity was that both considered the world corrupt and that the devil was the ruler. Thompson writes, "Melville's Billy Budd is a bitter comedy, in the satiric and sarcastic tradition of Lucian and Voltaire and Tom Paine."¹⁶⁸ Billy is Adam to Thompson,

¹⁶⁷ Joseph Schiffman, "Melville's Final Stage-Irony: A Reexamination of Billy Budd Criticism," AL, XXII (1950), 128.

¹⁶⁸ Thompson, op. cit., p. 355-356.

and Vere is God-like. Thompson continues:

" . . . Vere now explains to the Adam-like Billy the full nature of his sin, describes the penalty, teaches him how to accept the penalty, and then comforts him!"¹⁶⁹

This is a rewriting of Genesis as Claggart, lying on the deck after being hit, is lifted by Billy and Vere.

The spare form flexibly acquiesced, but inertly. It was like handling a dead snake. They lowered it back.¹⁷⁰

Man's original sin was caused by God, and as Billy meekly submits, so did man.¹⁷¹ Melville did not stop fighting against the forces he could not defeat.

Which solution is the correct one, and Thompson's critique is no solution at all for Billy Budd is merely a continuation to him, cannot be judged-ever. It would appear that between Twain and Melville, the man from Hannibal died a little more content than the New Englander. George C. Homans says, ". . . the Melville tragedy is Melville's dramatization of the failure of his attempt--the literary attempt--to find an answer to the question put by the universe."¹⁷² One could assume that Twain's and Melville's parallel quests,

¹⁶⁹Ibid., p. 399.

¹⁷⁰Melville, Billy Budd, p. 43.

¹⁷¹Thompson, op. cit., p. 400.

¹⁷²George C. Homans, "The Dark Angel: The Tragedy of Herman Melville," NEQ, V (Oct. 1932), 707.

each an immediate success, then struggling, building their art book by book, developing themes of God and man, analysing the meaning of life and death, never really ended. When posing unanswerable questions to an all-knowing Being, what solutions could be understood by mortals like Mark Twain and Herman Melville?

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