THE ROMANCE-PARODY:
A STUDY IN MELVILLE, TWAIN, PURDY, AND HELLER

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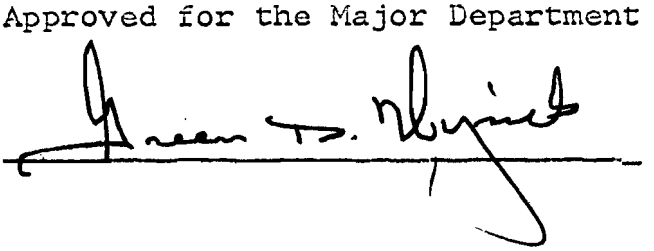

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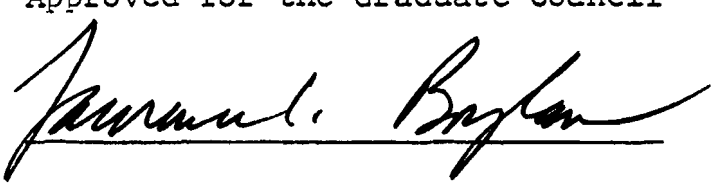

PREFACE

To criticize one genre according to the standards of another genre serves to confuse more than to clarify. It will be shown that the four prose fictions examined in this work belong to the genre of romance-parody, but are often criticized because they do not conform to the genre of the novel or the genre of the romance.

Many contemporary critics, especially Richard Chase and Northrop Frye, refuse to relegate all long prose fiction to one category, the novel. They make a distinction between the novel and the romance, much as Hawthorne had done earlier. According to this distinction, the novel presents the everyday experiences of ordinary people, whereas the romance presents extraordinary experiences of character types from myths and legends and has a tendency to be allegorical.

The four prose fictions examined in this work have much in common with romance, in light of the above distinctions. However, it will be shown that these fictions use the structure, conventions, and subjects of the romance ironically and satirically. Melville's The Confidence Man is a parody of religion. Twain's Pudd'nhead Wilson parodies human justice. James Purdy's Malcolm is a parody of love, and Joseph Heller's Catch-22 is a parody of war.

This work is especially indebted to Northrop Frye for his detailed and enlightening description of the structure of the romance-parody in his book, Anatomy of Criticism.

I am indebted to Dr. Green Wyrick for his patience and many helpful suggestions and to Dr. Charles Walton for his knowledge and understanding of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.

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C. E. D.

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CHAPTER I

THE STRUCTURE OF THE AMERICAN ROMANCE-PARODY

Parody of the romance is not usually recognized in the American novel. Northrop Frye in Anatomy of Criticism (1957), was the first critic to deal with the parody of romance as a separate genre.[1] Perhaps parody as a long piece of fiction is not recognized because it so often appears as a shorter form, a poem, a short story, or an essay, and is not expected to appear in a novel-length form. Another difficulty in recognizing parody lies in the fact that the form often parodies itself, and subsequently it is difficult to know where the serious writing ends and parody begins.[2] A third reason that parody is not recognized in the romance form concerns the fact that the American parodies imitate a type of romance rather than the work of a specific writer, and unless a reader recognizes the conventions of the romance and sees its structure, he is not likely to know a parody of it.

Many critics classify all long prose fiction into one genre, the novel, and do not distinguish between the principles governing the romance and those governing a novel. If a romance is judged according to the rules of novel writing, it

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[1]Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, pp. 231-39.

[2]William Van O'Connor, "Parody as Criticism," College English, XXV (January, 1964), 246-247.

will appear too unrealistic to be a first rate novel, and its characters will seem to lack development. But it is bad critical taste to judge one genre according to the traits of another.[3] In order to understand the romance form, it is necessary for one to recognize the differences between this form and the novel form. The romance can, then, be judged in accordance with conventions and traits indigenous to its form.

The romance does not present human action in the context of the everyday life of ordinary people. Hawthorne recognized the difference between the two forms and felt the need to explain their traits in his Preface to The House of the Seven Gables, since he was writing a romance and wished to show the difference between his work and the novel. Hawthorne writes:

> When a writer calls his work a romance, it need hardly be observed that he wishes to claim a certain latitude, both as to fashion and material, which he would not have felt himself entitled to assume, had he professed to be writing a novel. The latter form of composition is presumed to aim at a very minute fidelity, not merely to the possible, but to the probable and ordinary course of man's experience. The former--while, as a work of art, it must rigidly subject itself to laws, and while it sins unpardonably so far as it may swerve aside from the truth of the human heart--has fairly a right to

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[3]Frye, op. cit., pp. 305-306.

> present that truth under circumstances, to a great extent, of a writer's own choosing or creation.[4]

Edwin Muir notes that if a piece of fiction makes use of flat, generalized characters, it will use a complicated plot, but if the characters are highly individualized, the plot tends to be general and simple.[5] The former describes the romance; the latter, the novel. The characters of the romance tend to be idealized types rather than specific individuals. The tendency of the novel is to show character in varying shades of grey, while the tendency of the romance is to show character in terms of black and white or good and evil. Each age shows its aspirations to the ideal through the romance; the heroes represent the ideal and the villains, threats to that ideal.[6] These characters do not depend for their vitality upon their similarity to ordinary people. Instead, they receive their vitality from their similarity to ancient heroes who are conceived of as being much above the stature of ordinary men.[7] The characters of a romance, therefore, expand into archetypes.[8]

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[4]Nathaniel Hawthorne, The House of the Seven Gables, p.iii.

[5]Edwin Muir, "Novels of Action and Character," reprinted in Approaches to the Novel, pp. 171-179.

[6]Frye, op. cit., p. 186.

[7]Hawthorne, op. cit., p. v.

[8]Frye, op. cit., p. 304.

On the other hand, characters of the novel have a sociological, biological existence, whereas those of the romance are inscrutable and mysterious and have a legendary existence.[9]

The plot of the romance is also more complex than that of the novel. The romance has numerous events, and often an event will be repeated. Furthermore, these events seem to have a processional, linear movement as seen, for example, in the use of pagent wagons of the Middle Ages.[10] In other words, Gothic space seems unfocused so that it appears to be more interested in action than in pictorial effects.[11] Moby Dick is a modern example of the linear accents of the romance, in which Ahab and his crew meet a variety of ships and have numerous confrontations with the white whale. Each encountered ship brings more news of the whale or reveals a deeper conflict in the story. Thus, the suspense and significance of the voyage heightens with each new encounter. The novel, on the other hand, tends to utilize a minimum of plot. The action will focus upon a few events and, sometimes, upon a single event. Henry Jame's The Ambassadors is an example of this kind of plot unity, for there is little action,

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[9]Richard Chase, The American Novel and Its Tradition, pp. 12-13.

[10]Wylie Sypher, Four Stages of Renaissance Style, p. 51.

[11]Loc. cit.

and most of the novel is focused upon the hero, Lambert Strether, while he waits for Chad Newsome to make up his mind to come home. James concentrates in his novel upon the mental attitudes of Lambert Strether.

The novel is also more coherent than the romance.[12] Typical features of the romance are numerous events, conflicts, enchantments, and masked identities. These events are improbable, rather than ordinary. Characters therein are types of prominent stature. The romance is, therefore, more symbolic than naturalistic, more legendary than factual.[13] The medieval romance, especially, is more concerned with the symbolism within an event than with the historicity of an event.[14]

The structure of a romance takes the form of a quest, which has three stages. The first stage takes the hero on a search, and he undergoes a series of minor trials. The climax, the second stage, brings the hero to his major encounter in which he tries to overcome his enemy. The third stage involves the elevation of the hero.[15]

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[12]Chase, op. cit., p. 22.

[13]Ibid., pp. 12-13.

[14]R. W. Barber, Arthur of Albion, p. 130.

[15]Frye, op. cit., p. 186.

Furthermore, this elevation takes place, regardless of whether the hero has been victorious or defeated in his conflict with the enemy.[16] A cursory review of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, a medieval romance, will reflect these three stages in the structure of its plot.

King Arthur is awaiting a good omen before he begins the New Year's feast. Instead of a good sign, a fearsome, gigantic knight appears, green from head to foot, and challenges one of Arthur's knights to strike him so that he may return the blow. All stand in fear while the Green Knight chides them for their display of cowardice. As Arthur is about to step forward, Gawain intercedes and cuts off the Green Knight's head. The Green Knight, unmoved by this, picks up his head, challenges Gawain to come to the Green Chapel in a year's time to receive a similar blow from him, and rides away triumphantly. Gawain goes in search of the green chapel and stops along the way at the castle of a lord. The lord and lady of the castle subject Gawain to three days of temptation. While the lord hunts, the lady stays at home to tempt Gawain. The lord and Gawain agree to a bargain: the lord will bring the spoils of his hunt to Gawain, and Gawain, similarly, will return any favors he has received from the lord's wife at the end of each day. On the first two days, Gawain returns the

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[16] Ibid., p. 186.

kisses he has received from the lady, but on the third day, he fails to give up the girdle the lady has given him for protection against the blow he must receive from the Green Knight. The lord, then, takes Gawain to the green chapel, where he meets the Green Knight. The Green Knight strikes Gawain three times. Gawain flinches twice, but stands courageously still on the third time and receives a small cut. The Green Knight unmasks to reveal himself as the lord of the castle, the same man who had brought Gawain to the green chapel. The lord tells Gawain that he received the small cut on the neck because he did not keep his bargain and had concealed the lady's girdle. Gawain returns home feeling quite ashamed, but is received in high honor for withstanding such great trials. All the court does homage to Gawain by wearing green girdles to commemorate his valor.

The three stages of the romance plot are evident, here. In the first stage, Gawain must go upon a quest for the Green Knight and be subjected to the minor trials of the journey and three days' temptation at the castle. The second stage is manifest in Gawain's major encounter: he must receive a blow from the Green Knight. The third stage concerns Gawain's return and the ensuing courtly celebration of his heroism.

Most of the conventions of the romance are present in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. The story itself has mythic proportions. Chase has suggested that all myths deal with the death and rebirth of a god-like hero.[17] Thus, Gawain has a symbolic death when he breaks his bargain with the lord and flinches from the first two blows of the Green Knight. But he is expiated when he receives the third blow without flinching. He is reborn a hero, and his rebirth has its elevating effect upon the members of Arthur's kingdom when all fears of the Green Knight are calmed, and order is restored. Gawain is clearly no ordinary man. He is, rather, extraordinary in valor, purity, and fortitude. The small cut which Gawain receives is symbolic of human imperfection, but the slightness of his fall and the magnitude of his valor show Gawain's god-like quality.[18] The plot itself is also symbolic rather than naturalistic and proceeds in a linear pattern of minor adventures leading to a major event. Magic and masked identity are important ingredients of the story.

The conventions of the romance form lend themselves readily to the contradictions of American experience. Richard Chase in concluding his book, The American Novel and

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[17]Chase, op. cit., p. 244.

[18]Barber, op. cit., p. 104.

Its Tradition, says that American literature shows life in the context of unresolved tensions and irreconcilable conflicts.[19] The violent parodoxes of American experience can best be accommodated by the romance, as its form is not obliged to render factual detail or sociological data.[20] The old novel of manners, so capable of rendering social classes, was inefficient in the business of explaining the absurdities in American life. On the other hand, the romance, the more symbolic form, is more appropriate, because it handles absurdity as a matter of convention. The Green Knight, after he is beheaded, can pick up his head and continue to speak with no apparent loss of composure. The masquerade, another convention of the romance, is a device which lends itself to the parodox; things are not what they seem on the surface. Another face lies hidden.[21] The Green Knight unmasks and reveals his true identity--he is the lord of the castle.

The masquerade deals with secrecy, detection, and, finally, revealed identity. The Green Knight is shrouded in mystery. Sir Gawain must seek out the Green Knight and discover his nature. The detective game is also applied to

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[19]Chase, op. cit., p. 244.

[20]Ihab Habib Hassan, Radical Innocence, pp. 110-111.

[21]Daniel G. Hoffman, Form and Fable in American Fiction, p. 355.

Sir Gawain: the lady is a spy for the lord and reports that Gawain has accepted the green girdle and has not turned it over to the lord. Sir Gawain's quest not only leads him to the identity of the Green Knight, but also he finds his own identity as well. That is to say, he comes to self-knowledge, to a symbolic rebirth, when he realizes that he is a sinner. Similarly, the American romance is held together by the hero's dilemma which ends in his coming to knowledge of his identity, and it takes on mythic proportions of a god-like life over death.[22]

The isolation of the hero from society is the basic assumption of much modern fiction, and the pattern of the romance fits this assumption.[23] The hero in the convention of the romance is isolated from society in two ways. First, because the hero is above ordinary human beings in stature, he is automatically isolated from common men.[24] Secondly, the hero's quest takes him upon a search during the course of which he must leave home (Sir Gawain must meet the Green Knight alone).

The isolation of the hero from society, his search for identity, and the parodoxical situations in which he finds himself, all are ideas which lend themselves more

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[22]Ibid., p. 355.

[23]Hassan, op. cit., p. 104.

[24]Ibid., p. 113.

readily to the romance than to the novel of manners. They find their way into American literature and are used so often by critics to describe American fiction that they have tended to become cliches. Chase even shows that the use of the romance form in American fiction has prevailed from Hawthorne to the present.[25]

While Ihab Hassan admires the completeness with which Chase deals with the romance in American fiction, he also notes that Chase does not deal at all with the parody of the romance.[26] Hassan believes that many American romances have the quality of self-parody. Americans sometimes write legends and tales of god-like heroes, treating them ironically or satirically.[27] To say that American fiction uses the elements of the romance is not a total picture of romance fiction, because some fictions are satiric imitations of the romance, and make use of the conventions and the structure of the romance; but irony and satire are at work. Frye describes this structure as a romance-parody.

Frye defines the romance-parody as a structure which subjects the mythic proportions of the romance to everyday experience. When these two opposing forces, the mythic and

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[25]Chase, op. cit., p. 20.

[26]Hassan, op. cit., pp. 109-111.

[27]Hoffman, op. cit., pp. 16-23.

the mundane meet, their differences result in alarming contradictions and ironies. The romance disintegrates to a certain extent when presented in the context of everyday experience.[28] The parody uses both satire and irony to diminish the ideals of the romance. Satire measures the humane against the grotesque.[29] To describe a man in terms of a pig is satire. Irony is much more difficult to recognize, for when irony is heaviest, the reader is not certain what his attitude should be or what the author intends.[30] Masks are ironic because the wearer appears to be one thing, but underneath the façade he is another. Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal" is ironic because Swift seems to be saying that the English should eat the Irish children, while he means something that is quite the opposite view, of course. In instances like these, when appearances deceive, there is irony.

Frye describes parody in six phases. The first two phases are more satiric and near to comedy. The last phase is more ironic and near to tragedy.[31]

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[28]Frye, op. cit., p. 223.

[29]Ibid., p. 233.

[30]Ibid., p. 224.

[31]Ibid., pp. 224-238.

The sixth phase is most essential to the description of American parodies. According to Frye, this phase, presents life in the context of permanent bondage, only to be released by death, for social tyranny is inescapable. The enslaved characters are often parodies of romantic roles. Characters that are usually saintly in the romance become demonic in the parody. The female is a malicious femme fatale, the Christ is an antichrist, and the parent, an evil guardian.[32] Tormented characters feel that they are being observed by an unfriendly critic.

When romantic roles are parodied, comic heroes lose their stature to become sickly weaklings. American frontier humor is mixed with suffering.[33] Walter Blair, who has made a study of the heroes of American legends, notes that the heroes therin are unrefined and self-reliant. There are two major types, the Yankee, a crafty opportunist, who usually appears as a ubiquitous pedlar, and the woodsman, a simple man of great physical strength. These two heroes represent an American's comic view of himself.[34] In the American parody, the strong self-reliant hero is diminished in size until he is below the stature of an ordinary man. He is too naive to be

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[32] Ibid., p. 238.

[33] Loc. cit.

[34] Hassan, op. cit., p. 119

comic and too perverse to be tragic; the comic element recedes to the demonic, the tragic to the ironic.[35] This hero is a weakling, a cripple of sorts, and if a cripple is the hero of a comedy, that comedy is mixed with tragedy. While it it comic to see a man of high social position slip on a banana peel and fall, it is not comic to see a cripple in the same predicament. When a great man is caught unawares and falls, it is comic, but when a cripple falls, he suffers pain, and only a demonic observer would laugh.[36]

The weak hero cannot be comic, but neither can he be tragic. Only a strong figure, above the stature of ordinary men, can be tragic. Christ and Prometheus are the heroes of the tragic myth, because they are extraordinary in virtue and are sacrificial figures.[37] Job is the figure of the parody because he suffers without being tragic. He is merely diminished, not victimized. His predicament is ironic, not tragic.[38] He does not fall from a high place to a low place; he falls from an already low station of life.

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[35] Ibid., p. 119.

[36] W. H. Augen, "Notes on the Comic," Thought, XXVII (Spring, 1952), 60.

[37] Frye, op. cit., p. 42

[38] Loc. cit.

Parody has a way of turning everything upside-down, and the romance-parody is no exception. Not only has the hero become unheroic; all other conventions of the romance are also used to achieve an opposite effect through the use of irony. The conventional isolation of the hero in the romance, shows the hero's ability to stand alone. He is alone by choice and is not at odds with his society.[39] In the parody, the hero is not self-contained. He is isolated because he is a misfit of one kind or another and is not strong enough to stand alone.[40] The convention of the masquerade in the romance reveals identity through the act of unmasking, usually at the climax of a story. In the parody, the unmasking does not reveal identity, for when one mask is taken off, it reveals another mask more bewildering than the first. The conventional search of the romance leads the hero into the light, but in the parody, the hero's search ends in confusion and darkness. Even if the hero believes that he has become enlightened, the enlightenment is fake, and he has been duped. The quest, then, leads to rebirth or redemption in the romance, but in the parody, there is no redemption for the hero. The gods have deserted man, and a demon rules. The conventional use of absurdity in

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[39]Hassan, op. cit., p. 113.

[40]Ibid., p. 114.

the romance signifies the supernatural. For example, the Green Knight can speak, although his head is cut off, because he has been given supernatural abilities.[41] Absurdities in the parody, on the other hand, signify only that life is illogical or diseased.[42] The romance shows life to be more glorious and meaningful than the experiences of ordinary men; whereas, parody of the romance shows life to be more hideous and less meaningful than the experiences of ordinary men.

The romance-parody essentially follows the three successive stages of the romance mentioned by Frye: namely, a series of minor trials, the major conflict, and the elevation of the hero. In the parody, however, the final stage is reversed: the hero is not elevated. Here, his quest has brought no light to the hero or no order to his society. In some parodies, there is a false elevation of the hero, a mock celebration, and because the hero is naive, he thinks his defeat, a success. The ideals of the romance often concern religion, justice, love and war. Cervantes took these four elements to be conventions of the romance when he wrote his Don Quixote. His hero, Don

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[41]J. R. R. Tolkien and E. V. Gordon (eds.), Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, p. xi.

[42]Hassan, op. cit., p. 119.

Quixote, reads all the books about romances in order to know how to be a knight:

> He filled his mind with all that he read in them, with enchantments, quarrels, battles, challenges, wounds, wooings, loves, torments and other impossible nonsense....[43]

Moreover, Don Quixote dedicates himself to the "redressing of all manner of wrongs."[44] Cervantes' work uses these conventions of the romance. Cervantes recognized that it takes the supernatural element to make a romance. Don Quixote's world of the imagination is filled with god-like heroes and demons. Justice, love, and war are his everyday concern.

The author of this present study proposes to examine a parody of each of these conventions of the romance in selections from American literature: Melville's The Confidence Man as a parody of religion; Twain's Pudd'nhead Wilson as a parody of justice; James Purdy's Malcolm as a love-parody; and Joseph Heller's Catch-22, as a parody of war. These works possess the qualities and structure of the romance, but each parodies the romance. Conventions of the romance are used ironically and in an opposite context from the way in which they are used in the romance. These four works are satiric imitations of the romance.

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[43]Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, The Adventures of Don Quixote, p. 32.

[44]Ibid., p. 33.

These four romance-parodies have received much adverse criticism. They are often judged according to the principles of the sociological novel. When this criticism occurs, they are judged as too unrealistic or ridiculous to be first rate. When they are judged as romances, they are thought to be defective structurally because the last stage, the elevation of the hero, seems to be false. The ironic ending confuses some critics, because, as Frye has pointed out, when the irony is the heaviest, it is difficult to know what the author is doing and what he intends. If the critic does not recognize the form as a parody, he is apt to be bewildered and shift the blame to the author, accusing the author of being confused by his own story.

This work will attempt to show that these four fictions are structured according to the principles of the romance-parody. In the context of this structure, a suggested reading of these works will be offered, and adverse criticism of the works will be taken into account.

CHAPTER II

THE CONFIDENCE-MAN: A PARODY OF RELIGION

The Confidence-Man, Herman Melville's last novel, was published in 1857 and went almost unnoticed by serious critics for nearly one hundred years.[45] Before the last ten years, critics who wrote about The Confidence-Man agreed that this book was a failure because its structure was not coherent, a theory which some more recent critics have accepted. Matthiessen sees the book as a "distended fragment."[46] Mumford says that the book is a series of wierd stories that do not occur in any logical sequence.[47] According to Mumford, the events are repetitious and tedious and do not build to a climax.[48] Hoffman, a recent critic, similarly feels that The Confidence-Man has a faulty structure. He believes that the episodes are disconnected because there is no belief or consistent view by which to measure good and evil.[49]

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[45]Elizabeth S. Foster (ed.), The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade, p. xiii.

[46]F. O. Matthiessen, American Renaissance, p. 412.

[47]Lewis Mumford, Herman Melville, p. 247.

[48]Ibid., pp. 252-253.

[49]Hoffman, op. cit., p. 310.

Lawrence Thompson and Leslie Fiedler agree that Melville had no faith and consequently was attacking those who do. Fiedler explains that Melville's book illustrates that salvation can be achieved only by a Faustian skepticism.[50] Lawrence Thompson finds no irony at all in the book and sees the characterization of the confidence-man as Melville's picture of God. According to this extreme interpretation, Melville hates God and believes God to be the greatest sinner of all.[51]

Other critics give less stringent reasons for what they believe to be Melville's failure. Richard Chase feels that Melville's rational and esthetic powers were not co-ordinated; his mind was not organized enough to deal with the complex problems he presented in his book.[52] Leon Howard attributes the structural failure of The Confidence-Man to Melville's hard life, poor health, and money worries.[53] Lewis Mumford believes that Melville wrote his book incoherently because of the pathological character of his mind.[54] The structure of Melville's

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[50]Leslie Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel, p. 437.

[51]Lawrence Thompson, Melville's Quarrell with God, pp. 326-328.

[52]Chase, op. cit., pp. 247-248.

[53]Leon Howard, Herman Melville, pp. 229-230.

[54]Mumford, op. cit., pp. 247-248.

story is that of the romance-parody and is not a faulty structure as is generally thought. This book is the work of a coherent mind, a mind that registers a plea for mental agility rather than skepticism or hatred.

Melville's The Confidence-Man is a religious allegory. The book contains symbolic rather than everyday experience, and its characters are representative types rather than specific individuals with a psychological identity.[55] It is a romance. All action is encompassed on the steamer, Fidele. The ship is a microcosm, and life is represented in terms of a voyage down the Mississippi River. The crew is made up of people from all walks of life representing a group of pilgrims on a quest.[56] The action of the story takes place on a single day, All Fool's Day, symbolic of the sort of characters and events to ensue. The events have a linear pattern that follow a downward circular motion. The repetition of episodes serves to deepen the tone and further complicate the action.[57] The story begins at dawn with the arrival of the confidence-man and ends at night with his departure into darkness. Upon his first appearance, he is

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[55]Foster, op. cit., p. xciii.

[56]Loc. cit.

[57]Walter Dubler, "Theme and Structure in Melville's The Confidence-Man," AL, XXXLII (November, 1961), 307.

bringing the message of faith, hope, and charity to the world, and at the end of the story, he is smudging out the last flicker of light.

The confidence-man is an emblematic character suggesting Christ.[58] He first appears as a lamb. His origin is uncertain, but it is established that he has come from a great distance and is a prophet from the East. He suffers rejection from the mob aboard the Fidele and, in the first scene, is surrounded by thieves.[59] He plays a Christ-like role of savior. He is a protean character appearing in a series of disguises as he searches for men's souls. When he is Mr. Truman, the man with the book, he preaches faith. As the herb-doctor, he preaches hope, and as the man with the brass plate, he advises men to have charity.[60] In the last half of the book, the confidence-man uses only one disguise, that of the cosmopolitan. He is dressed in a costume that suggests certain features of every country. As the universal man, he advocates brotherly love. He plays the role of god-like man, the hero of the romance.

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[58]Thompson, op. cit., pp. 303-304.

[59]Hoffman, op. cit., p. 131.

[60]Foster, op. cit., p. lviii.

The Confidence-Man has the features of the romance, but its symbolic world is subjected to the mundane experiences of ordinary life, which are not the province of the romance. The startling contrasts and sudden reversals of experience result in surprising ironies. Daniel Hoffman notes that there is an attempt to integrate methods and materials that are not ordinarily used together; the materials of romance seem to be used ironically.[61] The words and actions of the characters are inconsistent with the types they represent.[62] Typical of the romance is the polarity of good and evil, but in The Confidence-Man these poles are ambiguous and frequently exchange places.[63] One critic feels that even at the end of this book, it is impossible to tell whether the confidence-man is Christ or the devil.[64] The ironies are so heavy that even some critics do not know what their attitude should be or what Melville is saying. The book presents a series of reversals. The skeptical become confiding and then retreat into skepticism. The truth is thought to be a lie, charity is a business venture filled with treachery, and the misanthrope proves himself to be a greater lover of mankind than the

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[61]Hoffman, op. cit., p. 282.

[62]Foster, op. cit., p. xciii.

[63]Marius Bewley, The Eccentric Design, p. 191.

[64]Fiedler, op. cit., p. 437.

avowed humanist.[65] All resemblances become inverted.[66] The cardinal virtues of faith, hope and charity are parodied.[67]

It is evident that the sixth phase of parody, as described by Northrop Frye, is present. The heroic roles of the romance are reversed to demonic roles, and humanity is reduced to a state of bondage. The confidence-man is a parody of three heroic roles. In the role of Christ, the confidence-man uses Christian beliefs to dupe mankind. In the role of the fire-bringing Prometheus, he puts out the last light, and in the comic role of the legendary Yankee, the confidence-man proves too demonic to be humorous.[68] The Yankee, according to the legend, is a pedlar who deals in bad bargains, but these bargains are of insignificant proportions, and his tricks are humorous, but the confidence-man is a demon bargaining for souls.[69] The role of wife and mother is a demonic role in the parable of the unfortunate man. Goneril is a malicious _femme fatale_, who accuses her

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[65]John G. Cawelti, "Some Notes on the Structure of _The Confidence-Man_, AL, XXIX (November, 1957), 284.

[66]Hoffman, _op. cit._, p. 286.

[67]Howard, _op. cit._, p. 232.

[68]Hoffman, _op. cit._, p. 283.

[69]_Ibid._, p. 310.

husband of insanity to conceal her leachery and tyrannizes her young daughter into a state of bondage. Treacherous gods appear in person to possess men.[70] Pitch, a figure who becomes enslaved, is a parody of the role of the Frontiersman from American legends. According to legend, the Frontiersman's chief virtues are his strength and independence, but Pitch's independence means isolation from his fellowman.[71] Pitch shows his desire to be free of humanity when he says, "All boys are rascals, and so are all men."[72] His strength is not great enough to resist the soft voice of the confidence-man. Pitch is duped into hiring a boy to work for him. Pitch, the extreme skeptic, is not immune from optimism, but almost immediately after he has hired the boy, he realizes that the boy cannot be reformed and that he has made a mistake. A cold chill comes over him, and he feels that he has been led by a demon against his will and is bewildered by the fact that he was so easily defeated. He is left with the feeling that a hostile power hovers near. The role of the self-sufficient Frontiersman is reversed. Pitch is in bondage.

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[70]Foster, op. cit., p. xc.

[71]Hoffman, op. cit., p. 283.

[72]Herman Melville, The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade, p. 143.

The characters who deal with the confidence-man are duped by him, regardless of whether they have faith in him or are skeptical of him.[73] All go away, unrewarded by this savior of mankind. The characters have no development and are slaves in the bondage of moral paradoxes.[74] Their lack of mental agility registers them incapable of differentiating truth from falsehood, a savior from a destroyer. The victims of the confidence-man do not fall from high positions as do the comic or tragic figures of the romance. The characters of Melville's book are of low stature. They are not victimized by outrageous fortune, but rather, they are belittled into a state of bewilderment.[75] The Confidence-Man is a book that concerns itself with the inevitable failures of small men.[76] These figures are doomed because of their ignorance of themselves and their destinies.[77] In the last chapter of the book, an old man prepares for his salvation by reading the Bible. He says that he trusts in Providence, but when a devil-child enters, the old man buys a counterfeit

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[73]Fiedler, op. cit., p. 437.

[74]Bewley, op. cit., p. 191.

[75]Foster, op. cit., p. xc.

[76]Loc. cit.

[77]Cawelti, op. cit., p. 279.

detector, a money belt, and a life preserver from him. The old man suddenly exchanges his trust in Providence for trust in gimmicks. His feeble attempt to ward off evil fails. He is too naive to find salvation and must ask the demonic confidence-man to show him to his resting place.

The victims of the confidence-man are naive, but the confidence-man, who dupes mankind, is equally naive. Melville uses irony upon irony. The role of Christ is parodied and becomes the antichrist. But the role of the antichrist is also parodied. It has been shown that the confidence-man plays the role of Christ, but his role is far more complex and is triple-sided. While assuming the role of Christ, the confidence-man is hypocritical and is the antichrist, but as the antichrist, he is an exceedingly weak villain. He is more vacant than evil. He is no dragon. He is only a small lizard.

The role of Christ is ironic. The confidence-man first appears as a lamb and is like "the sugar snow in March."[78] He writes on a slate and holds up the inscriptions written there, the last two of which read: "Charity believeth all things," and "Charity never faileth."[79] Later the confidence-man uses these teachings to dupe the people he

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[78]Melville, op. cit., p. 5.

[79]Ibid., p. 3.

meets and the inscription, "Charity believeth all things," comes to mean that the man of charity will believe falsehoods. As the man with the book, the confidence-man sells shares in the New Jerusalem and The Black Rapids Coal Company. Symbolically, he sells shares in heaven and hell.[80] He tells the college student that a share in the coal company is worth two of those in the New Jerusalem, and the student is duped into buying a share in hell. The confidence-man claims to be the president of the Black Rapids Coal Company, or symbolically, the president of hell. After repeated episodes illustrating the confidence-man's ability to take money while pretending to preach the cardinal virtues, it becomes clear that he is an antichrist.

As an antichrist, he lacks strength and is a weak, bungling devil. He plays his role poorly. On the other hand, the antichrist of the romance must be strong in order to act as a worthy opponent for the hero. St. George would not be heroic if he had killed only a small, sickly dragon. The floundering confidence-man is a parody of the antichrist of the romance. He is not strong enough to possess men. After he dupes a subject, he must run and hide in a new disguise. The tricks he plays on man are rather insignificant. He merely dupes them out of small amounts of money.

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[80]Foster, op. cit., p. lviii.

He never succeeds in converting Pitch; he only upsets the Frontiersman. In the first scene, he is being shoved around by the crowd. At one point, the Dusk Giant strikes him so hard that he looses his balance. The role of anti-christ is parodied and is reversed to the role of the sickly weakling.

Absurdity is a convention of the romance that signifies the supernatural, but in The Confidence-Man, it signifies that life is illogical and diseased. The confidence-man is too weak to face life on earth. When evil is presented to him, he must find a way to rationalize it or make it seem good before he can accept it. He must protect his frail eyes by looking in the other direction when faced with the aspect that there is suffering and evil in life. After hearing the parable of how the wicked Goneril put her good husband out of the house to roam the world, the confidence-man remarks, "In brief, there were probably small faults on both sides, more than balanced by large virtues, and one should not be hasty in judging."[81] A merchant listens to his rationalization while drinking with the confidence-man. In a sudden burst of energy, the merchant says that the truth will not be washed down the drain by wine. Then, the confidence-man, again, rationalizes the merchant's remark, saying that the wine has made his brain dull, while the merchant insists that it has brightened his wits. But the confidence-man again

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[81]Melville, op. cit., p. 71.

covers the truth by saying that the merchant could not mean the brightness of light, and that instead, he must mean the brightness of black. The confidence-man is unable to face the experiences of the world, and is, therefore, automatically isolated from society. He is not isolated because of his stature as is the hero of the romance. He is isolated because he is a misfit. His ambition, above all, is to be accepted by men, but his refusal to admit that there is evil in the world causes men to shy away from him.

The convention of the masquerade, which reveals identity in the romance, does not lead to identity in the parody of the romance. When one mask is thrown off, another equally as bewildering takes its place. The confidence-man first appears as a lamb in cream colors. His second disguise is black, and the fourth is gray and white. In his last disguise, he appears in a multi-colored costume. The cosmopolitan in a multihued costume preaches the doctrine of brotherhood and tries to be everything to everybody, and so lacks any identity of his own; beneath all the masks, lies vacancy.[82] His inability to comprehend evil is the ailment that keeps him from knowing himself. At the end of the parody, he is still groping in the dark. Throughout the

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[82]Bewley, op. cit., p. 217.

book, the confidence-man shelters himself from the light of wisdom, and his last act is to put out the light, symbolically shunning the truth.

The quest of the confidence-man takes place in three stages. The first stage takes the hero on a search for men's souls, and he undergoes a series of trials assuming a series of disguises. The second stage or major conflict begins with Chapter XXVI. At this point the confidence-man meets another demonic character much like himself. To play this role, the confidence-man masquerades as the cosmopolitan. The ironic elevation of the confidence-man begins with Chapter LXII, as the hero enters the barber shop with a blessing for the barber. The false elevation is the third stage of the quest.

In the first stage, the confidence-man scores a series of minor victories, but not without a few setbacks. In each role, he dupes one or more of his fellow travelers.[83] He appears in seven of his eight manisfestations, the man in cream colors, the Black Guinea, the man with the weed, the man with a gray coat and white tie, the man with the book, the herb-doctor, and the man from the Philosophical Intelligence Office. For all his pains, the confidence-man receives at the most, only a few dollars and sometimes is rebuffed

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[83]Cawelti, op. cit., p. 283.

rather harshly by his traveling mates. When he appears as the herb-doctor, he sells a medicine called the Samaritan Pain Dissuader. He is telling the Dusk Giant that his medicine will take away pain without numbing sensitivity. The Dusk Giant retorts, "You lie! Some pains cannot be eased but by producing insensibility, and cannot be cured but by producing death."[84] Later, the Dusk Giant strikes the confidence-man and calls him names: "Profane fiddler of heart strings! Snake!"[85] Similarly, Pitch, the Missourian, attacks the optimism of the confidence-man, who proclaims the value of herbs and the benevolence of nature. Pitch points out that nature has caused him the loss of one thousand dollars in a flood. But this loss does not dampen the spirit of the confidence-man. He exchanges the costume of the herb doctor for the costume of a representative of the Philosophical Intelligence Office and persuades Pitch to hire a boy. Pitch realizes that he has been tricked into a bad bargain and speculates upon the motives of the confidence-man; "Was the man a trickster, it must be more for the love than the lucre. Two or three dirty dollars the motive of so many nice wiles?"[86] It becomes clear, at this point, that

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[84]Melville, op. cit., p. 99.

[85]Ibid., p. 100.

[86]Ibid., p. 148.

the confidence-man wants friendship and an alliance, as well as money. In the following chapter the confidence-man tries to convert Pitch to his optimistic philosophy. The confidence-man plays the philanthropist in this chapter entitled "A Philanthropist Undertakes to Convert a Misanthrope, but Does Not Get Beyond Confuting Him." The confidence-man contends that he loves humanity in all respects and that no one is a stranger to him. He argues that good men are gregarious men, while Pitch assumes the role of the unsociable man in order to rid himself of his tormentor. The confidence-man says, "Say what you will, I for one must have my fellow-creatures round me. Thick, too--I must have them thick."[87] Pitch answers, "The pick-pocket, too, loves to have his fellow creatures round him."[88] The confidence-man argues that ". . .it is as much according to natural law that men are social as sheep are gregarious."[89] This idea seems right to Pitch, and he agrees to be a brother to the confidence-man. At this point, the confidence-man turns the argument another way and accuses Pitch of wearing his friendliness as a disguise to hide the fact that he is a misanthrope. The confidence-man will not befriend Pitch

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[87] Ibid., p. 151.

[88] Ibid., p. 156.

[89] Loc. cit.

unless Pitch agrees to his optimistic philosophy. Pitch retorts, "You are Diogenes masquerading as a cosmopolitan."[90] This event ends the first stage. The confidence-man has succeeded in securing a few dollars on false pretenses, but has failed to convert any one.

Chapter XXV begins the second stage or major conflict of the confidence-man who now masquerades as the cosmopolitan. It is in this chapter that the cosmopolitan meets his worthy opponent, Charles Arnold Noble. Ironically, both are preaching optimistic philosophies, and the cosmopolitan believes that, at last, he has found a bosom friend. Charlie believes in confidence in one's self, and the cosmopolitan believes in confidence in one's fellow man. The cosmopolitan delights in Charlie's confidence:

> "You are a man after my own heart," responded the cosmopolitan, with a candor that lost nothing by its calmness. "Indeed," he added, "our sentiments agree so, that were they written in a book, whose was whose, few but the nicest critics might determine."[91]

The confidence-man's optimism reaches a higher pitch, and the ante is raised to fifty dollars in the major conflict. But there is one thing the cosmopolitan confidence-man does not know. He has met his equal, and he will not be

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[90] Ibid., p. 157.

[91] Ibid., p. 179.

able to dupe this opponent because Charlie can assume different disguises as quickly and as easily as the cosmopolitan himself. When the latter confides in Charlie the fact that he needs fifty dollars, Charlie suddenly undergoes a transformation and tells the cosmopolitan to "go to the devil."[92] Charlie has changed his attitude toward his boon companion and ". . .out of old materials sprang a new creature. Cadmus glided into a snake."[93] The cosmopolitan stands in amazement, but strikes back. He casts a spell over his friend and brings him back to his original identity. The cosmopolitan, then, tries a more subtle approach and tells his friend the story of Charlemont, who went through much suffering because he became bankrupt and did not receive financial aid from his friends. But Charlie is not moved to pity for pity provides no profit. This tricky Yankee type next appears as Mark Winsom, ". . .a kind of cross between a Yankee peddler and a Tartar priest, though it seemed as if, at a pinch, the first would not in all probability play second fiddle to the last."[94] He enters disguised as the mystic, approaches the cosmopolitan, and compliments him on his

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[92] Ibid., p. 203.

[93] Ibid., p. 204.

[94] Ibid., p. 212.

beauty, adding that his soul, too, must be beautiful, for, he reasons, where there is beauty, there is truth. The cosmopolitan, flattered by the remark, carries the idea to extreme proportions. He says that he is ". . .so eccentric as to have confidence in the latent benignity of that beautiful creature, the rattlesnake. . ."[95] Mark Winsome then asks, "When charmed by the beauty of that viper, did it never occur to you to change personalities with him?"[96] The tables are turned, and now it is the cosmopolitan who is accused of changing identities and becoming the snake. The cosmopolitan is unnerved by the accusation and quickly rationalizes that he would not like to be a snake because such an appearance would cause men to avoid him. The mystic is now the agressor and proclaims the transcendental philosophy. He speaks of metempsychosis, and he recalls a life previous to the one he lives now. He also says that the poor are more praiseworthy than the wealthy and that death is more majestic than life. At this point, a haggard beggar approaches to receive alms. Mark Winsome, in order to avoid the poor beggar, undergoes another change. He ". . .sat more like a cold prism than ever, while an expression of keen Yankee cuteness, now replaced his former mystical one,

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[95] Ibid., p. 213.

[96] Loc. cit.

and lent added icicles to his whole aspect."[97] He cleverly refuses to give the beggar anything, saying that he believes him to be a Mississippi operator and a fake. When the cosmopolitan realizes that his philosophy affords no charity, he asks Mark Winsome to cease being himself and to begin playing the role of Charlie. The transcendental philosopher agrees. When the cosmopolitan asks Charlie for a loan, however, he refuses, saying, "In brief a true friend should have nothing to do with loans."[98] Charlie, to defend his point, tells the story of China Aster, who died in poverty because he accepted the loan of a friend. The cosmopolitan, then, changes his approach again and says that he no longer wants a loan, but explains that he will accept the money as a gift. Charlie, then, shows that he is as changeable as his friend. He says, "If you turn beggar, then for the honor of noble friendship, I turn stranger."[99] The cosmopolitan is unsuccessful in getting a loan or a gift from Charlie, and his only friend, who, like himself, pretends to believe in confidence, has turned stranger. His major conflict ends unsuccessfully.

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[97] Ibid., p. 219.

[98] Ibid., p. 227.

[99] Ibid., p. 232.

The third stage of the quest, Chapters LXII to LXV, shows the ironic elevation of the confidence-man. He appears to be at the point of receiving an enlightenment, but his apparent victory is false. After being defeated by one who believes in confidence, the cosmopolitan attacks the man of no confidence. He enters the barber shop that has the sign, "No Trust," in the window, the same shop which appears in the first chapter of the book wherein the confidence-man carried his sign, "Charity believeth all things." The cosmopolitan enters bearing a blessing for the barber, and through the means of a subsequent play on words, dupes the barber, talking him into an agreement: if the barber trusts his customers, the cosmopolitan will insure him against any loss which he might suffer because of his trust in mankind. When the cosmopolitan is shaved, the barber demands payment. The confidence-man says that the demand shows a lack of confidence, and that he will not pay, because it is the barber who first broke the agreement by not trusting him.

The cosmopolitan, then, leaves the shop in a state of elation and approaches an old man who sits under a lamp which lit ". . .the figure of a robed man, his head encircled by a halo."[100] At this point, the cosmopolitan appears elevated to

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[100] Ibid., p. 272.

the stature of the heroic figure of the romance. He enters ". . .as any bridegroom tripping to the bridal chamber might come, and by his look of cheeriness seeming to dispense a sort of morning through the night."[101] He sees the old man reading the Bible and comments, "And so you have good news there-- the very best of good news."[102] The white-haired old man is compared to Simeon, who awaited the advent of Christ into the world.[103] The cosmopolitan seems on the verge of receiving enlightenment, but the good news reveals the truth concerning himself, and the truth is exceedingly bad news for him. The old man reads, "Believe not his words-- an enemy speaketh sweetly with his lips. . ."[104] A voice from the darkness asks who it is that is describing the confidence-man, and the confidence-man finds these words from the Bible quite disturbing, saying, "What an ugly thing wisdom must be! Give me the folly that dimples the cheek, say I, rather than the wisdom that curdles the blood."[105] However,

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[101] Ibid., p. 273.

[102] Loc. cit.

[103] Hennig Cohen (ed.), The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade, p. xxii.

[104] Melville, op. cit., p. 274.

[105] Ibid., p. 275.

his countenance darkens as he utters his last benediction to himself: "But, bless me, we are being left in the dark here. Pah! what a smell too."[106] The elevation of the hero as a bridegroom carrying light is false. The authority of the Bible that the confidence-man professes in the first chapter has turned against him. At the height of his success, he meets his darkest hour and must extinguish the last light in order to have enough air to breathe. Whereas the confidence-man once saw life as "a picnic en costume,"[107] now, he is indifferent to life. His last statement, as he agrees to show the old man to his state-room, is: "I have indifferent eyes, and will show you; but, for the good of all lungs, let me extinguish this lamp."[108] A robed saint depicted upon the lampshade disappears, leaving all in darkness. The third stage of the quest in the romance where order is restored is reversed. Instead of restored order, there is only confusion. The story ends on the same ambiguous note as is seen in the first chapter. Having finished his story, Melville pretends that his story is unfinished. Ironically, his last sentence suggests that "Something further may follow of this Masquerade."[109]

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[106] Ibid., p. 285.

[107] Ibid., p. 152.

[108] Ibid., p. 286.

[109] Loc. cit.

Hennig Cohen points out that Melville's story ends where it began, and argues that when the third stage of the romance is reversed, the hero remains in essentially the same position as he was when his quest began.[110] The society of the hero also remains in the same state of chaos as that it began with. In parody, as described by Northrop Frye, humanity is in a state of bondage. There is no spiritual progress, no enlightenment, or no restoration of order.

The circular structure of the parody also is used in the parables which are interspersed throughout The Confidence-Man. Indeed, one discovers that there are five parables which fall almost at evenly spaced intervals. The parables are embodied in Chapters XII, XIX, XXVI, XXXIV, and LX. Each of these parables furthermore emphasizes the fact there is evil in the world and works as a dramatic device to counteract the view of the confidence-man, who, in turn, denies this existence of evil. These five parables complete a circle, the first parable resembling the last. In the first, a demon defeats a good man. In the second, a man of the stature of ordinary men is defeated by environmental circumstances. In the third, there is presented a man of a higher stature than ordinary men, who fights heroically to overcome evil, who does not succeed, but who nevertheless,

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[110]Cohen, op. cit., pp. xxii-xxiii.

survives. The fourth parable is the story of an heroic, god-like man, who overcomes evil through suffering. The fifth parable reflects the first, with demonic figure again victorious over the good man.

The first parable is the story of the wicked Goneril. "When she saw frankness and innocence tyrannized under her spell, according to the same authority, inly she chewed her blue clay, and you could mark that she chuckled."[111] She maligns her only daughter in jealousy for the child. When her husband attempts to divorce her and obtain custody of this child, Goneril causes all of his truthful statements concerning her to seem to be malicious lies. With the support of a women's-rights group, she obtains custody of her child and turns out her husband into the world, penniless. He (the good husband) is defeated, by his demonic wife, and evil is victorious over good.

The second parable is the story of an unfortunate soldier, unjustly accused and jailed for the crimes of another man. By the time that his innocence is established in the courts, he has lost his health from having been imprisoned in the cold, damp jail. Thereafter, in order to live, he must beg, so that he pretends that his ruined, twisted body is the result of his having fought in past famous

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[111]Melville, op. cit., p. 66.

battles. Ironically, if he does tell the truth, people will shy away from him and refuse him alms. He is neither demonic nor heroic. He has the stature of ordinary men, and because human nature is not saintly, he must lie in order to solicit pity. He is a victim of circumstances.

The hero of the third parable is above the stature of ordinary men. He is Colonel Moredock. His family has been killed by Indians. Thus, the Indian in this parable is symbolic of treachery, one who masquerades as a noble, innocent savage for the purposes of his treachery.[112] Colonel Moredock strikes back at the Indians and is determined to annihilate them. Melville compares him to a priest who builds his spiritual strength through suffering and abstinence, and in this way is able to devote his entire energy toward overcoming what he considers to be primordial evil, the Indian.[113] He is also, described as an ardent family man possessed of a loving heart. He succeeds in overcoming some of the evil that exists in the world and is intelligent enough to escape death at the hands of the evil Indian.

The hero of the fourth parable is a Christ-like figure, Charlemont, a wealthy man who spends all of his money upon his friends and, consequently, is bankrupt. When

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[112]Foster, op. cit., p. lxvii.

[113]Dubler, op. cit., p. 315.

he has no money, he disappears, so that his old friends will not have to forsake him and show themselves as fair-weather fr[illegible]ds. Years later, he returns to them with restored wealth and resumes his old position as a much-loved spender. His experience follows the life-death-ressurection pattern of the Christ figure. When one of his friends asks about the reason for his disappearance, Charlemont explains that, if a man should fall upon bad days and become afraid for his pride, and fears that he should lose all his friends because of his poverty, he should do as he himself did. He advises his friend to forgive the world and ". . .to save it from sin by prospectively taking that sin to [himself]."[114] Charlemont is a Christ figure who takes the responsibility for other men's sins and does succeed in overcoming evil.

The last parable, the story of China Aster, shows a good man defeated by his demonic friend. China Aster is a candle-maker, who accepts a loan from his friend, Orchis, in order to finance his candle business. When Orchis leaves the country, his business agent demands an outrageous amount of interest from China Aster. Because of the high rate of interest and the fact that his friends will not pay their bills, China Aster fails in his venture. Without warning, Orchis returns to demand full payment of the loan. China Aster is so overwhelmed by this

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[114]Melville, op. cit., p. 210.

unfortunate turn of events that he falls, strikes his head on a rock, and dies. Orchis, then, takes over the candle business in payment for the loan, and China Aster's widow and children are left penniless. Because of his charity and honesty in business dealings, China Aster is doomed to failure. Melville points out that he was ". . .the son of Old Honesty, who, as everyone knew, had never shown much business-talent, so little, in fact, that many said of him that he had no business to be in business."[115]

All of these parables concern the problem of evil, and they are an affront to the confidence-man who does not choose to recognize evil. After hearing the story of Goneril, the confidence-man protests that Goneril is not as evil as she seems. If she were evil, the confidence-man says, the story only goes to show that everything works out for the best, and that the husband was indeed fortunate to be rid of his wife. He does not mention that the husband's loss of his child or the misfortune of the child who is possessed by an evil mother without the love and support of her good father. After hearing the second parable, the confidence-man concludes that it is a good thing to lie in order to receive charity. However, he believes the third parable to be false because, according to his logic, Colonel Moredock could not love his family and hate Indians at the same

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[115] Ibid., p. 241.

time. He does not believe that Colonel Moredock really hated Indians. The confidence-man, himself, tells the story of the Christ-like Charlemont, but protests that the story is not true and admits that he told it only for the sake of amusement. The last parable, the story of China Aster, is told by Charles Arnold Noble, so that he can find a reason for not lending the confidence-man any money. The confidence-man does not believe the story, however, because he cannot believe that disaster could result from confidence in a friend. These five parables are used not only as dramatic devices to counteract the optimism of the confidence-man; they are also consistent with the ironic, circular structure of Melville's work itself. This circular structure is still further developed in the three digressive chapters of the book, in which Melville speaks directly to the reader in defense of his work. The first digression, Chapter XIV, defends the fact the characters of the book do not act in a consistent manner. Melville, in his own voice, defends his characters by saying that in real life, people do not act consistently, and he uses this attitude of inconsistency to give credence to his story.[116] In his second philosophical digression, Chapter XXIII, Melville takes an opposite point of view, and defends the fact that his story seems unreal, saying that a good author does not present life as it is, but for the sake of

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[116]Cawelti, op. cit., pp. 279-280.

amusement, is allowed to be fanciful.[117] Chapter LXIV contains Melville's third digression and is a synthesis of the two previously opposing ones. Here, Melville defends his work, saying, "It is with fiction as with religion: it should present another world, and yet one to which we feel the tie."[118] Thus, he returns to his two original digressions, pointing out that, though they present opposing positions, both have some validity, and stresses that the significance of each depends upon the other. In these three chapters, then, Melville states the theme of his book, namely, that it is only by holding two opposing views in mind at once that man can find life to be meaningful. The opposing views, therefore, result in ironies.

Irony shows the discrepencies between the two opposing worlds, the world of appearances and the conflicting one of reality. The Confidence-Man deals with a series of character fakes, and through Melville's use of irony, the fakes are revealed. Here, appearances are never realities; the crippled Black Guinea is only pretending to be crippled.

The reader, who takes appearances to be the real thing, will be shocked when he finds that they are only a series of masks, and his confidence in appearances eventually will be replaced with doubts. Critics who think that appearances should

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[117] Ibid., pp. 280-281.

[118] Ibid., p. 207.

be realities are filled with doubts, not only concerning the appearances presented in the book, but about the book itself. They mistake Melville's irony for double-talk. Melville says that appearances are the fog that hides the truth, but some critics see only the fog. Walter Dubler says that the book ends on a doubtful, faultering note.[119] Mumford says that it is difficult to see what the book is about, because all actions which seem charitable are treacherous.[120] Bewley says that the book has no form, because it seems to be a negation of everything.[121] Obviously, the book does negate appearances. The irony shows appearances to be fraudulent, but there is nothing unclear about Melville's idea. His irony is poignantly accurate.

It seems that most of the mistakes that critics make in interpreting The Confidence-Man are a result of their inability to recognize Melville's irony. When they do not comprehend the irony, they misinterpret the book. For example, Elizabeth Foster believes that the crippled custom-house officer, who appears in the second chapter, has a one-sided view of life because he has only one leg and gives the appearance of being one-sided.[122] She mistakes appearance for reality. The cripple is one-sided

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[119]Dubler, op. cit., p. 319.

[120]Mumford, op. cit., p. 242.

[121]Bewley, op. cit., p. 192.

[122]Foster, op. cit., p. liii.

in appearance only. He has an agile mind that sees both appearances and the realities beneath the mask of appearances. He says, "Looks are one thing, facts another."[123] He also says, ". . .all horses ain't virtuous, no more than all men kind. . .," and "Charity is one thing, and truth is another . . ."[124] This cripple does not have a one-sided view of life. The one-sided cripple sees two sides to everything.

In this chapter, the real cripple meets the fake cripple. The fake cripple is the confidence-man in the mask of the Black Guinea. A Methodist minister appears in this scene. He loves the fake cripple and hates the real one. He likes the optimism of the black cripple and will not accept the honesty of the real one. He accepts appearances for reality, and it is his view that many critics accept as the true one. He says of the real cripple, "There he shambles off on his one lone leg, emblematic of his one-sided view of humanity."[125] But the custom-house cripple has an answer for the Methodist. He says, "But trust your painted decoy [the black cripple]. . .and I have my revenge."[126] As it happens, Melville says that the custom-house cripple is right, and the Methodist is wrong. In the next scene, a country merchant trusts the black cripple and is duped.

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[123]Melville, op. cit., p. 14.

[124]Ibid., pp. 13-14

[125]Ibid., p. 15.

[126]Loc. cit.

The real cripple recognizes the fake one. He heeds what experience has taught him and is one of the few characters who is not duped by the confidence-man. Thus, he seems to be Melville's spokesman. He sees the significance of the All Fool's Day voyage, and exclaims, ". . .you flock of fools, under this captain of fools, in this ship of fools!" And the follies of man are what Melville's book presents.

The victims of the confidence-man are duped, not because he is too powerful for human beings to stand up against, but, rather, because they have flaws of their own that cause their downfall.[127] Their chief flaw is that they take appearances at face value and do not heed what experience has taught them. The old man in the last chapter of the book feels that he must trust appearances, for he reasons that to distrust a creature of God (the confidence-man) is to distrust God. He is compared to Simeon who recognized the child Jesus as the Christ, but, ironically, the child who appears is a demon child with flame-like clothes and coal black eyes.[128] He trusts the child and is led astray, because he does not see that the child who pretends to be helping him is actually destroying him. Pitch is similarly duped when he sets aside what experience has taught him and decides to trust the rosy appearance and views of the

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[127]Dubler, op. cit., p. 311.

[128]Hoffman, op. cit., p. 308.

confidence-man. As a result, he hires another worthless boy.

Pitch, however, unlike most of the characters, is quick to learn, and thereafter, he is not fooled by appearances. He recognizes that the seemingly charitable confidence-man is demonic. On the symbolic level, the parable of Colonel Moredock demonstrates Pitch's philosophy, experience is the best teacher. Colonel Moredock loved his family and will not trust the Indian who has murdered his wife and children. Experience has taught him that the seemingly noble savage is treacherous and that life has a dark as well as a bright side.

It is the confidence-man himself, who is least able to see that life has a dark side. The bright side he presents is a shallow one, because he must hide from life itself to ignore the dark side. The confidence-man realizes that irony will show that his appearances are masks behind which he must hide, because he is too weak to face men openly. He says, ". . . .irony is so unjust; never could abide irony; something Satanic about irony. God defend me from Irony, and Satire, his bosom friend."[129] Of course, irony and satire always point out that what seems bright is actually dark.

The Confidence-Man is Melville's plea for mental agility. Experience should be heeded, because it teaches that appearances

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[129]Melville, op. cit., p. 155.

and reality are not necessarily one and the same thing. The marker on China Aster's grave gives his message:

> Here lie the remains of China Aster the candle-maker whose career was an example of the truth of scripture, as found in the sober philosophy of Solomon the wise; for he was ruined by allowing himself to be persuaded, against his better sense, into free indulgence of confidence, and an ardently bright view of life, to the exclusion of that counsel which comes by heeding the opposite view.[130]

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[130] Ibid., p. 248.

CHAPTER III

PUDD'NHEAD WILSON: A PARODY OF JUSTICE

Twain, in his preface to Pudd'nhead Wilson, begins his parody of legal justice by pretending to know nothing about law. But, ironically, he assures the reader that he has been guided by an authority of the legal profession, William Hicks, who studied law for ". . .part of a while in Southwest Missouri thirty-five years ago."[131] Hicks has never practiced law and has spent the last thirty-five years in Italy working in a horse-feed shed for his room and board. Twain says, "He was a little rusty on his law, but he rubbed up for this book, and those two or three legal chapters are right and straight now. He told me so himself."[132] Twain's pose as the naive storyteller forecasts the ironic pattern of his fiction.

This pattern has the elements of the romance. The plot is episodic, and the events are contrived. Twain's characters are types representing various positions in society, such as the landowner, the foreign aristocrat, the detective, the judge, and the slave. His story makes use of absurdities and masked identities, all of which are typical of the romance.

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[131]Mark Twain, Pudd'nhead Wilson, p. xv.

[132]Ibid., p. xvi.

Unlike the romance, however, the plot of Pudd'nhead Wilson is structured so as to produce ironies rather than to show the ideal. Twain uses a double plot, with one plot in sharp contrast to the other. One plot concerns Pudd'nhead Wilson, and the other concerns a Negress, Roxy, and her son. Pudd'nhead is the hunter, and Roxy is the hunted. Pudd'nhead's story ends with his reinstatement into society after being for many years an outcast. Roxy's story ends as her son is cast out of a society in which he had grown up as an aristocrat. Pudd'nhead lives in a world of the mechanics of facts and figures, while Roxy's world is concerned with freedom and human dignity.

Roxy's story makes an ironic comment upon Pudd'nhead's story. Pudd'nhead, playing the roles of soothsayer, detective, and lawyer, intends to bring justice to Dawson's Landing, but his justice instead brings chaos and tragedy to Roxy's life. Pudd'nhead, the lawyer in the murder case, symbollically kills both the guilty and the guiltless. The story of Roxy makes Pudd'nhead's detective work look like the game of a demonic child even though it wins him the respect of his society.

As the story opens, Roxy, a slave with only one-sixteenth of Negro blood in her veins, bears a child, Valet de Chambers, to a member of the aristocracy of Dawson's Landing. On the same day, Mrs. Driscol, also bears a son and subsequently dies, and Roxy is left to care for both infants. When Roxy's master

threatens to sell his slaves down the river, she decides to jump into the river with her son rather than to face a fate, ". . .equivalent to condemning them to hell."[133] But it suddenly occurs to Roxy to exchange the babies in their cradles, since no one can tell them apart except herself. Roxy then rationalizes her act of exchanging the identities of the two babies. She remembers that a Negro preacher has said that no man can save his own soul; God saves men by his gift of "free grace."[134] Therefore, Roxy believes that it is not in her power to save or damn her soul, and that the act of passing her child off as white child will have no effect upon her salvation.

However, a more important change takes place in Roxy's thought. She begins to think of herself as free and white, since now, symbolically, she is mother to a white child. She feels free to do anything the white people do. After switching babies, she says, "'Taint no sin--white folks has done it."[135] She has played a god-like role in changing the birth rights of her child, and her initial success causes her to believe that she is a free agent.[136] She, like those of the white race,

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[133] Ibid., p. 12.

[134] Ibid., p. 16.

[135] Loc. cit.

[136] Langston Hughes (ed.), Pudd'nhead Wilson, p. viii.

has taken upon herself the power to free a slave. She has bestowed "free grace" upon her son. Her illusion of freedom grows to even greater proportions when her master frees her on his death bed.

Roxy is a figure of mythic proportions.[137] She plays the roles of both mother and femme fatale, the archetype of the dark mother of the human race who bears children out of wedlock.[138] With her strength, beauty, and courage, she receives the passion of white men which they have denied their wives.[139] She is at once dangerous and desirable.[140] When she attempts to play the part of the free, white citizen, however, she must also assume at this time the guilt of the white man for his crimes against the black race. Roxy makes her first appearance in the book, playfully assuming the role of white master. She refuses the advances of a young Negro and, jokingly, tells him she will have him sold down the river. She feels that her one-sixteenth part of Negro blood is a blight upon her, and when her son eventually proves to be a coward, she blames his failing on the minute portion of Negro blood which he has inherited from her.

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[137]Kenneth S. Lynn, Mark Twain and Southwestern Humor, p. 266.

[138]Fiedler, Love and Death, op. cit., p. 240.

[139]James M. Cox, "Pudd'nhead Wilson: The End of Mark Twain's American Dream," SAQ, LVIII (Summer, 1959), 351-363.

[140]Lynn, op. cit., p. 266.

On the other hand, she is proud of her white blood, because, to be white is to be powerful, proud, and free. Her illusion of freedom disintegrates, however, as Pudd'nhead reveals the true identity of her son, and creditors "sell him down the river" to pay for the white man's debts. He, therefore, is the sacrificial object, and Roxy assumes the guilt. When her son's identity is established, she drops to her knees, sobbing, and says, "De Lord have mercy on me, po' misable sinner dat I is."[141] Thus, she is symbolic of all the guilt and fears of the antebellum white South.[142]

Roxy, her son, and the true Tom Driscol are figures of bondage. Roxy has the illusion that she is a free agent, only later to discover that all her manuevering of fate has been useless, because her son is sold into bondage, and her spirit is broken. The true Tom Driscol is freed when his identity is discovered, but he has the manners of a slave and feels the hostility of the white race toward him to such an extent that he cannot endure living among the white citizens of his community. Yet, his home among the Negroes is no longer open to him. Thus, his release from bondage alienates him from his home and places him in an even greater state of bondage. Twain shows that the laws of the white aristocracy are unalterable and

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[141]Twain, op. cit., p. 141.

[142]Lynn, op. cit., p. 266.

that there is no escape for these three characters. They are bewildered and live in a state of terror. When Roxy tells her son that he is part Negro, Twain gives an account of the false Tom's reaction to the threat of bondage: "He presently came to have a hunted sense and a hunted look, and then he fled away to the hilltops and the solitudes. He said to himself that the curse of Ham was upon him."[143] When the true Tom Driscol is brought out of bondage and forced to play the role of the white man, Twain explains, "The poor fellow could not endure the terrors of the white man's parlor."[144] Similarly, Roxy feels that she is under the survailance of powerful and hostile critics. When Percy Driscol threatens to sell his slaves down the river, the color leaves Roxy's face, and Twain points out, "A profound terror had taken possession of her."[145] At the conclusion of the story, Roxy realizes that her son's bondage is permanent, and Twain says, ". . .the spirit in her eye was quenched, her martial bearing departed with it, and the voice of her laughter ceased in the land."[146]

Twain's plot concerning Roxy's fate is circular. Roxy and her son are in bondage in the beginning and at the end

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[143]Twain, op. cit., p. 54.

[144]Ibid., p. 143.

[145]Ibid., p. 13.

[146]Ibid., p. 142.

of the story. Similarly, the true Tom Driscol is free at his birth and is given the status of a free man at the close of the story.

Twain's plot concerning Pudd'nhead's success story is a parody of the detective romance. The archetypal detective romance presents the success of the hero as he brings the criminal to justice and restores order to society, but Pudd'nhead's discovery of the criminal and the justice administered to the criminal bring about chaos, and society is left with a false sense of security.[147] The dubious nature of Pudd'nhead's calendar appears at the beginning of the last chapter: "October 12, The Discovery. It was wonderful to find America, but it would have been more wonderful to miss it."[148] Twain adds to the irony of Pudd'nhead's role by allowing the reader to know more about the murder case than the hero does. The murder mystery is no mystery at all to the reader who is allowed to witness Pudd'nhead's stumbling efforts and accidental discovery of the murderer.[149] However, the hero and villains of this romance-parody do not have the great stature that those of a romance must possess. Pudd'nhead is an anti-hero with the stature of ordinary men, while Roxy and her son are not as evil

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[147]Fiedler, Love and Death, op. cit., p. 392.

[148]Twain, op. cit., p. 142.

[149]Hughes, op. cit., p. vii.

as the villains of the romance. They are more desperate than evil; they are victims of circumstance.[150] Pudd'nhead, the anti-hero, is a parody of the self-reliant, tricky Yankee of American legend.[151] His self-reliance is blind and his trickiness is a menace to society.

Pudd'nhead's struggle for success follows the three stages of the quest of the romance. In the first stage, Pudd'nhead undergoes a series of minor trials and failures. Upon reaching Dawson's landing, he attempts to make a good impression upon its citizens in order to guarantee the success of his law practice which he will establish there. During his conversation with the citizens, an invisible dog begins to yelp, causing a disturbance. Pudd'nhead says that he wishes that he owned half of the dog so that he could kill his half. The citizens take his remark at face value, consider him a fool, and name him Pudd'nhead. As a result, no one in the town will trust him with a law case. This is Pudd'nhead's first mistake in judgment, because he has over-estimated the understanding of his society. When Pudd'nhead cannot practice law, he takes up detective work and attempts, without success, to solve the robberies in Dawson's Landing. Ironically enough, all of the clues necessary to solving the robberies are in Pudd'nhead's

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[150] Cox, op. cit., p. 353.

[151] Ibid., p. 361.

possession, but he fails to see that all the clues point to the false Tom Driscol. Pudd'nhead actually watches the window of the false Tom's room, and sees him wearing women's clothes and practicing the attitudes and poses of a woman. Pudd'nhead, however, thinks he is seeing a woman in Tom's room. Pudd'nhead also notices the guilty look on Tom's face when he later reads his palm, but he never suspects him of any crime. As a detective, Pudd'nhead is a failure.

Pudd'nhead's third minor failure is his first law case. A pair of Italian twins visit Dawson's landing and befriend Pudd'nhead. At a meeting of the Son's of Liberty when one of the twins, Luigi, is insulted by the false Tom, he kicks him across the footlights. The false Tom then sues Luigi, and Luigi asks Pudd'nhead to defend him, but Pudd'nhead loses the case. At this point, the first stage of Pudd'nhead's quest ends in his failure as a detective and as a lawyer.

The second stage of the quest, the major conflict, involves the murder case of Judge Driscol. When stabbing the judge, Tom had used the knife stolen from Luigi, and Luigi is accused of the murder. Pudd'nhead is his defense attorney. Tom is too anxious to find out whether Pudd'nhead knows who the murderer is and cannot resist visiting Pudd'nhead the night before the trial. He accidentally leaves his fingerprints on one of Pudd'nhead's records, solving the case for Pudd'nhead, who was completely baffled by the case up to this point.

Pudd'nhead compares the false Tom's prints with those of the true Tom Driscol taken when he was a baby and discovers that they are not the same. Through his scientific method of detection, Pudd'nhead is able to see through the disguises that concealed the birth rights of Tom Driscol and Roxy's son. Pudd'nhead believes that he has found the true identity of the two boys, but, ironically, the births of the true Tom Driscol and Roxy's son only obscures the present identity of the two boys, the fact that one is a murderer and the other a slave.

It is in the courtroom drama, a parody of legal procedure, that Pudd'nhead wins his major trial and, ironically, becomes a fool.[152] Twain begins this chapter with Pudd'nhead's comment on April Fool's Day: "April 1. This is the day upon which we are reminded of what we are on the other three hundred and sixty-four."[153] In court, Pudd'nhead reveals the fact that Roxy's son was born a slave and is now the murderer of Judge Driscol. Pudd'nhead regards himself a god-like figure as he self-righteously points the finger of doom at his victim. He orders the false Tom, who is at the point of fainting, "Valet de Chambre, negro and slave--falsely called Thomas a Becket Driscol--make upon the window the finger-prints that will hang you."[154]

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[152]Gladys Carmen Bellemy, Mark Twain as a Literary Artist, p. 322.

[153]Twain, op. cit., p. 131.

[154]Ibid., p. 141.

Pudd'nhead wins his major conflict. After Pudd'nhead wins the case, the third stage of the romance takes place, and Pudd'nhead is elevated as the hero:

> Troop after troop of citizens came to serenade Wilson, and require a speech, and shout themselves hoarse over every sentence that fell from his lips --for all his sentences were golden, now, all were marvelous. His long fight against hard luck and prejudice was ended; he was a made man for good.[155]

As far as Pudd'nhead realizes, he has scored a major triumph. He believes that he has liberated himself from prejudice, but instead, he has become the exponent of prejudice by upholding the laws that treat Negroes like dogs. He joins the ranks of an ignorant society and the elevation of the hero is the celebration of moral blindness. Pudd'nhead's supposed victory brings a false sense of security to society.[156] The happy ending is reversed as Roxy pleads for mercy.[157] Pudd'nhead's justice is not tempered with mercy. His solution is purely a mechanical one, and he upholds laws that result in the alienation and enslavement of man rather than in the establishment of order. The neatness of Pudd'nhead's solution to the murder case only serves to point up the fact that the underlying problem of slavery is not solved.[158] Pudd'nhead's quest takes a circular

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[155] Ibid., p. 142.

[156] Lynn, op. cit., p. 269.

[157] Cox, op. cit., pp. 362-363.

[158] Ibid., p. 353.

direction, and society is in the same state of chaos as it was at the beginning of the story.

The world presented in Pudd'nhead Wilson is an absurd world. Life is illogical and diseased. Civilization is no more than a series of masks worn by the aristocracy to cover the cruelty of their actions.[159] Percy Driscol thinks himself a saint because he has forgiven his slaves for petty thievery instead of having sold them down the river. Twain remarks ironically, "He was a fairly humane man toward slaves and other animals. . ."[160] When Pudd'nhead makes his ironic remark about killing his half of a dog, the citizens think him a fool, but when Pudd'nhead puts on his ridiculously melodramatic performance in the courtroom, they think him the wisest man in the town. Dawson's Landing is a town in which ignorance rules, and Pudd'nhead's wit isolates him from society, but his ignorance reinstates him.

Pudd'nhead is a figure of bondage. He is enslaved by corrupt laws, and it never occurs to him to question their value. In his naivete, he believes that respectability is desirable, not realizing that to be respectable in Dawson's Landing is to be corrupt. He finally achieves his desire, but while doing so, he loses his wit and plays the fool at the trial.

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[159]Roger B. Salomon, Twain and the Image of History, p. 49.

[160]Twain, op. cit., p. 10.

Death itself is the only release from bondage offered in Pudd'nhead Wilson, and Pudd'nhead's drive for respectability is a drive toward death. His cynical remarks on his calendar show a strong desire for death.[161] Pudd'nhead's calendar reads: "Whoever has lived long enough to know what life is knows how deep a debt of gratitude we owe to Adam, the first great benefactor of our race. He brought death into the world."[162] Another apothegm from the calendar reads: "All say, 'How hard it is to die'--a strange complaint from the mouths of people who have had to live."[163] A third is: "Why is it we rejoice at a birth and grieve at a funeral? Is it because we are not the person involved."[164]

Pudd'nhead's life seems to be one long cry of pain. But he does not suffer because he is the victim of outrageous fortune. Like the ironic hero of parody, he suffers for a rather pointless cause, the misunderstanding of a joke.

There is a close relationship between the two plots of the story. The detective plot is an ironic success story that foreshadows the outcome of the events of the tragic plot.

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[161]Leslie Fiedler, "As Free as Any Cretur," reprinted in Mark Twain, Henry Nash Smith (ed.), p. 132.

[162]Twain, op. cit., p. 13.

[163]Ibid., p. 53.

[164]Ibid., p. 48.

Pudd'nhead is successful in shaping the destiny of his victims, whereas Roxy is unsuccessful in shaping the destinies of Tom Driscol and her son. The Italian twins serve the same function in the detective story as do the true and false Tom in the tragic story. For example, Luigi and Angelo have opposing personalities; Angelo, like the true Tom Driscol, is sober and mild-tempered, while Luigi is as hot-tempered and hard-drinking as the false Tom.[165] When Tom first talks with the twins, Luigi reveals that he has killed a man, but explains that it was a necessary evil, because, by doing so, he had saved his brother's life. Then, he explains that he actually murdered to save himself, because, if his brother should have died, he could not have lived without him and would have died, too. The tragic plot results in a symbolic death for the false Tom Driscol, and as a consequence, the true Tom undergoes a similar experience. The evil one of the twins is a murderer, and the false Tom will become a murderer. Luigi kicks Tom out of the meeting of the Son's of Liberty, and at the end of the story, Tom is deprived of his liberty. The twins are falsely accused of a crime, the murder of Judge Driscol, and are the scapegoats of the detective plot.[166]

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[165]Anne P. Wigger, "The Composition of Mark Twain's Pudd'nhead Wilson and Those Extraordinary Twins: Chronology and Development," MP, LV (November, 1957), 101.

[166]Ibid., p. 101.

The two Tom Driscol's are also scapegoats in the tragic plot. The false Tom is a product of the betrayal and bestiality between the black and white race and is sacrificed to pay the white man's debt.[167] The true Tom must also sacrifice his life as a result of the discovery of the false Tom's identity. The twins, however, are scapegoats of the success story, and they go free.

Twain's Pudd'nhead Wilson is a parody of the romance, the romance as subjected to every day experience.[168] It is, therefore, a mixture of two genres, the romance and the novel. The conflict of these two forms results in startling ironies. Critics who speak disparagingly of this book do so because they disapprove of this mixture of genres. John Wain, Frank Baldanza, and Richard Chase believe that the book fails because Twain has used character types of the romance instead of the round characters typical of a novel. Baldanza thinks that the book seems to have a symbolic reality, but feels that the characters are overdrawn.[169] Wain feels that the events are too preposterous to be realistic and that the characters are not individual enough to be credible.[170] Chase believes that the

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[167]Fiedler, "As Free as Any Cretur," op. cit., p. 137.

[168]Cox, op. cit., p. 36.

[169]Frank Baldanza, Mark Twain, pp. 95-96.

[170]John Wain, "Pudd'nhead Wilson," Spectator, CXCLV (May 20, 1955), 652.

characters are too flimsy.[171] Robert Wiggins agrees with Chase and feels that Twain was a careless writer.[172] These critics, therefore, disapprove of Twain's book on the grounds that it does not conform to the principles of novel-writing. But Pudd'nhead Wilson is not a novel and cannot be expected to have the characteristics of one. Twain's use of representative types of characters and unlikely events is in keeping with the genre of romance-parody.

The ironic structure of the book is evident by the fact that characters are never what they seem to be.[173] When Pudd'nhead appears to be a fool, he speaks as a wise man, but when he appears to be wise, he is most foolish. Pudd'nhead is a free-thinker, who is finally no thinker at all, for he sinks back into the ways of a narrow-minded community. The true Tom Driscol, free by birth, becomes a slave, is freed, but is unable to free himself from the habit of being a slave. The false Tom Driscol, born a slave, lives as a free man and, then, is condemned to slavery. Roxy is a slave, who then is freed by her master, and is sold again into slavery by her own son. Then, her son gives her money, and she is sold to herself. The characters appear to be one thing at one moment, only to reverse roles

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[171]Chase, op. cit., pp. 154-156.

[172]Robert A. Wiggins, "Pudd'nhead Wilson," College English, XXV (December, 1963), 182-84.

[173]Solomon, op. cit., p. 49.

at the next moment.[174] What appears to be true and what is true are in conflict, and appearances, in all cases, are false.

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[174]Wigger, op. cit., p. 100.

CHAPTER IV

MALCOLM: A PARODY OF LOVE

When James Purdy's Malcolm was first published, critics described this book as a fantasy, but many saw little or no significance in its inventiveness. Maurice Richardson believed the book was too ridiculous to be considered first-rate.[175] Granville Hicks thought the book masterful in style, but obscure in meaning.[176] Whitney Balliet considered the book superficial and dull and felt that it was a strange genre that seemed to parody myth.[177] Richardson considered the book a failure because its mixture of comedy, fantasy, and realism did not blend.[178] These comments are rather typical of the initial critics who saw no coherent meaning in Purdy's book.

The meaning and structure of the book, however, become clear when one treats it as a parody of the romance. The plot of Malcolm fits the pattern of the romance-parody. Malcolm, the hero, goes upon a quest which is presented in three stages. In

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[175]Maurice Richardson, "New Novels," New Statesman, LIX (May 7, 1960), 688.

[176]Granville Hicks, "Literary Horizons," SR, XLII (September 26, 1959), 15.

[177]Whitney Balliet, "Underseas with Purdy and Humes," New Yorker, XXXV (December 19, 1959), 138.

[178]Richardson, op. cit., p. 688.

the first stage, the hero withstands a series of minor trials, followed by a major trial, or the second stage of the romance-parody. The third stage is the false elevation of the hero. The characterizations in Malcolm are also flat like those of the romance-parody, and Purdy's hero is the ironic or unheroic hero so typical of this genre.

The plot of Malcolm is circular in motion. Malcolm, a teen-age youth, first appears, sitting on a bench outside his hotel, awaiting his father, who will never return. He receives four addresses from an astrologer, Mr. Cox, who intends to acquaint the boy with the world. In this way, Malcolm is introduced to a series of love affairs between couples whom he views as an innocent bystander. In each male lover, Malcolm seeks to find a replacement for his lost father, but fails. In the last episode, Malcolm is isolated from the world of Mr. Cox and accepts a proposal of marriage from a narcissistic, teen-age singer. He is the object of his wife's lust and, consequently, dies of overindulgence in sex and liquor. In the beginning, of the work, the waiting boy is described as one with an empty stare who has become part of his bench, a useless ornament that not even old ladies will sit upon. This state of death in which Malcolm first appears becomes a fact at the end of the book, and Malcolm is found to be in essentially the same position in relation to the world about him in the end as he is in his first appearance.

The characters of Purdy's book are representative types rather than specific individuals. They represent various types of psychotic lovers. Madame Girard's love for Malcolm is idolatrous. Jerome is a sadistic lover, and Melba, Malcolm's wife, is narcissistic. Perverted forms of paternal and maternal lovers are also represented. Each character, in his own way, is a parody of the ideal lover.

Each of Mr. Cox's addresses presents a couple involved in some diseased form of love. The first address is that of Cora Naldi and Etzel Blanc, a dark-skinned, forty-year-old, retired mortician. Etzel Blanc admits that he keeps Cora Naldi and pays her a salary to entertain guests by singing and dancing, because she was faithful to sing for him at funerals in the days when he was a mortician. His love for Cora Naldi is, however, a selfish, sentimental love that lets him play the part of the noble master. He reveals his hypocrisy when he finds fault with the way in which Cora Naldi behaves and asks her to sing only in order that Malcolm might hear the lyrics he has written.

Kermit and Laureen Raphaelson live at the second address. Their marriage represents another form of diseased love. Kermit is a quarrelsome midget who treats his wife like a child. He orders her about and punishes her when she is disobedient. He punishes her by sending her into a room of fifteen cats, some of which are malicious. When she gets scratched, he takes pity.

upon her and pats her on the head in a fatherly way. Kermit's paternal love for his wife is domineering and possessive. Finally, his wife leaves him, because she prefers to be treated like a mature woman.

A wealthy financier, Girard Girard, and Madame Girard belong to the third address on Malcolm's list. Madame Girard's love for Girard, is a malicious form of maternal love. She commands him and aggressively counts her victories over him. He, on the other hand, is immature and has love affairs with servant girls. He idolizes Madame Girard, but when he finally sees that she is not the god-like woman he believed her to be, his love for her suddenly disintegrates, and he leaves her to marry Laureen Raphaelson. He tells Madame Girard that he is unhappy with her because she is sterile and can bear no children to inherit his huge fortune. She is upset by his leaving, because it seems to her that her husband may have scored a victory over her. But she soon changes her defeat into victory by keeping her title, Madame Girard, which is far more important to her than keeping her husband. In their marriage, Madame Girard loves her husband as a domineering mother loves her naughty uncontrollable son, and Girard's love for her is idolatrous.

The fourth address on Malcolm's list is to a married couple who represent a masochistic and a sadistic lover. Jerome Brace, recently released from imprisonment for burglary, is proud of his past crimes and receives pleasure from making his wife

suffer. His wife, Eloisa, has divorced her first husband to marry Jerome, because her first husband was rich and kind. She tells Malcolm that she loves the poverty, chaos, and misery that Jerome has provided for her and that their marriage is especially satisfactory to Jerome because it is similar to his life in prison. Jerome and Eloisa are handcuffed to each other by reason of mutual dependence: he enjoys inflicting pain, and she loves to receive it.

Malcolm's marriage to Melba, America's sex symbol, is perhaps the most degrading of all the pictures of married love. There is no communication between Malcolm and Melba. Melba uses Malcolm to satisfy her own selfish desires, and Malcolm is a sacrificial object in the marriage. Melba is too selfish to love, while Malcolm is too naive to love. Both believe their marriage to be excellent, because Melba enjoys using Malcolm, and Malcolm enjoys being treated as an object. Their marriage is not unlike animal existence.

Purdy's love-parody takes the form of a quest, presented in three stages. In the first stage, the hero's minor conflicts consist of a series of addresses which he visits at the request of a demonic astrologer. The second stage is the hero's marriage, and the third is the mock elevation of the hero to a god-like position, and the order he brings to his society is superficial.

Malcolm's quest is a search for a father who will love and protect him. He first appears on a bench earnestly awaiting the return of his lost father. Before this time, his father has provided him with an obviously over-protective love because Malcolm, although he is approximately fifteen, is essentially a baby not yet taken from the paternal womb. Symbolically, the book begins with the task of giving birth to Malcolm.[179]

In the first stage of the quest, Malcolm, at the insistance of an astrologer, Mr. Cox, goes upon a journey involving a series of addresses. Mr. Cox serves as a father image to Malcolm, who, in turn, plays the role of the obedient son. At the first address, the Blanc Empire Murtuary, Malcolm meets a retired mortician, Etzel Blanc, and his singer, Cora Naldi. The black skinned mortician conducts a somber ritual and seems to be introducing Malcolm to the fact of death, but Malcolm falls asleep. The mortician is astounded by Malcolm's unreceptive attitude and tells him that he is, perhaps, too young to comprehend the significance of the ritual. He tells Malcolm not to come back for at least twenty years, at which time he may be old enough to appreciate the entertainment afforded at the mortuary.

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[179]Donald Cook, "By the World Possessed," The New Republic, CXLI (November 9, 1959), 26-27.

At the second address, Malcolm is only slightly more impressed by his visit. Here, he is entertained by Kermit Raphaelson, a midget with a talent for painting, and his wife, Laureen. The midget and his wife are having a quarrel. Kermit is bemoaning the fact that Laureen will not prostitute herself to support him, since it is a known fact that she was not virginal when he married her, and Mr. Cox, the astrologer, has recommended that she become a whore. When she rejects her husband's proposition, he sends her into a room with malicious cats. Malcolm does not understand the implications of the argument and sees nothing wrong with Kermit's view of Laureen.

The third address given to Malcolm is that of Girard Girard and Madame Girard, who both wish to possess Malcolm and take him as their son. But when they try to take him to the country, he weeps, because Kermit is not there. The Girards try to persuade Kermit to accompany them, but Kermit hides, saying that he cannot bear to look upon the wealthy Girards. Consequently, Malcolm, disheartened, returns to his bench. The wealth of the Girards does not impress him in one way or the other.

The astrologer soon returns to Malcolm with a fourth address, which mission takes Malcolm to the hotel where Jerome and Eloisa Brace are staying. Soon after his arrival, Jerome gives him liquor and attempts to make love to him, but Malcolm falls to the floor, asleep.

Life at the hotel is chaotic, but Malcolm endures the trials here with disinterest. People come and go, and Malcolm is shifted from bed to bed, sometimes forced to move two or three times in a night and to share his bed with several other people. He comments that it reminds him of travel with his father in Czeckoslovakia during the war. The hotel is a meeting place for the Cox compound, and Malcolm is at the center of bitter quarrels. Kermit, the Girards, and Jerome and Eloisa Brace all wish to have Malcolm, but Malcolm is immune to their quarrels, making innocent remarks or falling asleep at the height of a melodramatic conflict.

At last, Girard Girard, makes arrangements to have Malcolm come live with him and his new wife, Laureen. Girard promises to return to the horticultural gardens where he leaves Malcolm waiting, but Girard, like Malcolm's first father, never returns.

This event ends the first stage of Malcolm's quest for a father. The search has been a failure, and Malcolm has not grown as a result of his visits to the addresses which Mr. Cox has given him. The experiences have not registered with him, and he remains naive. For instance, when Malcolm hears others refer to Mr. Cox as a pederast, Malcolm also refers to the astrologer by that name, but he takes the term simply to mean "a man of the world." At this point, Malcolm is still unable to exert his own will and looks for a father to guide him.

The second stage or major conflict of the quest is embodied in Malcolm's marriage. While waiting for Girard at the horticultural gardens, Malcolm meets Gus, a teen-ager on a motorcycle. Gus takes him to a night club where Melba, Gus's ex-wife, is singing. Melba says that she recognizes Malcolm as one of her category because he is in her age group. This explanation seems to Malcolm to be reason enough to fall in love, and within a few minutes after their meeting, Melba announces her engagement to Malcolm. The marriage is a perfect one, as far as Malcolm and Melba are concerned. Malcolm, having no will of his own, happily takes orders from his wife, namely "to drink more and have more frequent conjugal duties with her."[180] Malcolm has no sense of pain or restraint and becomes addicted to both alchohol and sex and, as a result, loses weight, grows weak, and dies. He sacrifices himself, not out of love, but out of his inability to do anything else. He looks to Melba for direction, but she is immature and unknowingly directs him to his own destruction.

The third stage of the quest, the mock elevation of the hero, begins with Malcolm on his death bed. This episode is a parody of the death and ressurection of Christ. As he is dying, Malcolm has a vision of a father image that is coming

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[180]James Purdy, Malcolm, p. 153.

for him. In a coma, he shouts, "Etzel Blanc on a white mare!"[181] He shouts for joy several times as though his quest is at last successful. After his death, his body receives a lavish funeral, arranged, paid for, and attended by Madame Girard alone. The circumstances surrounding the funeral are shrouded in mystery. The coroner and undertaker insist that there was no body in the casket and that no one was buried in the ceremony. Malcolm's body seems miraculously to have escaped decay. A year after Malcolm's death, rumor spreads among Mr. Cox's circle of friends that Malcolm is alive again. The similarity between Christ and Malcolm is ironic. Malcolm's death is meaningless. He is unaware that he is a sacrificial object, and instead of returning to the father image of the Creator, Malcolm returns to a father image that symbolizes death. He cries out for Etzel Blanc, the mortician, and of course, the name, Blanc, only serves to emphasize the meaninglessness of Malcolm's death. Malcolm's ressurection is equally pointless, assuming only the significance of idle gossip that is soon forgotten.

As Christ's death brought salvation to the world, so Malcolm's death also seems to have wrought changes upon his friends in the form of a mock rebirth. All achieve their worldly goals, shallow and ridiculous as they are. Mr. Cox finds a new

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[181] Ibid., p. 155.

student who withstands visits to twenty-five of his addresses and surpasses his master in astrology. Girard Girard and Laureen have six male children to inherit their fortune. Etzel Blanc becomes an entrepeneur of an opera company, and Cora Naldi has a permanent job as his guest star. Madame Girard becomes attached to a young Italian biochemist, and Kermit marries a rich movie star who will support him. Eloisa Brace loses her talent for art, but she and Jerome take up social work. Melba breaks her previous records by staying married for more than five years, to her valet and is almost happy even though her singing voice has left her.

Obviously, the third stage of the romance is parodied in Malcolm. The elevation of the hero and the restoration of order are both superficial. The deep-rooted sickness, the failure to love, reaches a high point at the end of Purdy's book.

Northrop Frye's sixth phase of parody is also evident in Malcolm. This phase presents malicious parental figures and figures of bondage. Mr. Cox, symbolically, a coxswain guiding the lives of those in his address book, tyrannizes all his subjects. Within the Cox circle, Etzel Blanc, Kermit Raphaelson, Madame Girard, and Jerome Brace demand submission from their mates. Their mates are figures of bondage, not free to act according to their will.

Purdy's book is structured upon intentional ambiguities.[182] The most domineering characters are the weakest. Madame Girard needs a title in order to be sure of her own existence. Kermit must be supported financially. Jerome Brace needs to inflict pain in order to feel alive. The civilized mannerliness of Purdy's characters is ambiguous, for it is only a mask for the cruel, the fearful, or the naive.[183] The hero is an ambiguous figure. He seeks maturity, but remains a child. He is the desire of everyone's eye, but is left homeless and forgotten. Even on his death bed, his wife is planning to elope with her valet. Madame Girard clings to him after death by reading a diary he wrote while feverish and in a delirium, but the record Malcolm leaves to the world is that of hopeless gibberish.

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[182]Webster Schott, "James Purdy: American Dreams," Nation, CXCVIII (March 23, 1964), 300-303.

[183]Cook, op. cit., p. 26.

CHAPTER V

CATCH-22: A PARODY OF WAR

Joseph Heller's Catch-22 was published in 1962, and the adverse criticism it has received is strikingly similar to that received by the other three works dealt with in this paper. One critic feels that the characters of Heller's book are not drawn with enough individuality.[184] Another critic thinks that there are simply too many characters so as to deal with any one in depth and concludes that, in general, the book is too complicated to be comprehended.[185] The book reviewer of Time feels that, because of its episodic structure, Catch-22 is a formless piece of fiction.[186] A number of critics believe that Heller's chief weakness is his inability to write humor. They believe that Heller intended to write a comic book, but failed because he repeated and elaborated upon his jokes to the extent that they are more grim than funny.[187]

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[184]Spencer Klaw, "Airman's Wacky War," New York Herald Tribune, XXXVIII (Sunday, October 15, 1961), 8.

[185]Granville Hicks, "Medals for Madness," SR, XLIV (October 14, 1961), 32-33.

[186]"Good Soldier Yossarian," Time, LXXVIII (October 27, 1961), 97.

[187]Klaw, op. cit., p. 8. Time, op. cit., p. 98. William Barrett, "Two Newcomers," Atlantic, CCIX (January, 1962), 98.

The objections to Catch-22 stem from the fact that the book does not fit the category of the novel, but rather, seems to be a mixture of genres. Though the book has some of the characteristics of the novel, many of its characteristics are those of the romance, such as the flatness of character, the repetition of events, and the linear accents of the structure inherent in its make up, and it is these elements of the romance that some critics find objectionable. They seem to demand that a work of fiction be either a novel or a romance, a symbolic literature or a naturalistic one, a tragedy or a comedy, but never a mixture of these.

The romance-parody is a mixture of genres, and the structure of Catch-22 is such a mixture. Heller, by using opposing elements within the structure of his book, wrote a fiction with startling clashes. The comic and tragic elements are mixed to produce ironies. Heller used a mixed genre quite intentionally. He says of Catch-22:

> I tried consciously for a comic effect juxtaposed with the tragic, working the frivolous in with the catastrophic. I wanted people to laugh and then look back with horror at what they were laughing at.[188]

The entire structure of the book consists of the juxtaposition of two groups of characters and two plots. The ideals of the war romance are shown in reverse, and the comic element recedes

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[188]"So They Say: Guest Editors Interview Six Creative People," Madamoiselle, LVII (August, 1963), 234-335.

to irony. A study of the mixture of the opposing elements of Heller's work will show that Catch-22 is typical of the romance-parody.

Catch-22 has more than three dozen characters, and all but the hero are of nearly equal importance. The huge cast of characters presents a cross-section of life, and the great variety of characters can only be supported by the romance form which deals with only flat characterizations.

The character types of this work are parodies of those found in the American romances. In the up-side down world of Catch-22, the characters fall into two categories, the aggressors and the victims. The aggressors are Yankee types who express their American know-how and individuality in a will to power. These naive and arrogant Yankees succeed by bullying those they cannot deceive. Heller's description of the farmer is a typical example of his satire on the Yankee type:

> Major Major's father was a sober, God-fearing man whose idea of a good joke was to lie about his age. He was a long-limbed, freedom-loving, law-abiding rugged individualist who held that federal aid to anyone but farmers was creeping socialism. He advocated thrift and hard work and disapproved of loose women who turned him down. His specialty was alfalfa, and he made a good thing of not growing any. The government paid him well for every bushel of alfalfa he did not grow. The more alfalfa he did not grow, the more money the government gave him, and he spent every penny he didn't earn on new land to increase the amount of alfalfa he did not produce.[189]

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[189]Joseph Heller, Catch-22, p. 85.

The officers who run the machinery of the war are examples of Yankee selfishness and maliciousness; they desire to advance themselves at the expense of the lives of men they command. Heller says of one officer: "Colonel Cathcart had courage and never hesitated to volunteer his men for any target available."[190] One enlisted man who is foolish enough to beat Major _____ de Coverly at a game of horseshoes is stricken with a severe disease as a result.[191] Milo Minderbinder is the officer in charge of buying for the mess hall, and he uses his office to make quick profits. He believes that war should be run as a business and says, ". . .what's good for the syndicate is good for the country."[192] As boss of the syndicate, Milo is responsible for directing a bombing raid against his own squadron in order to make a profit. General Peckam is described as a man who believes only in himself. He says, "My only fault. . .is that I have no faults."[193] American officers are as dangerous to the American enlisted men as the Germans are. The Germans can be defeated, but the American commanders are too powerful to be undermined, and their evil power will not subside when the war with Germans comes to an end.

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[190] Ibid., p. 57.

[191] Ibid., p. 94. The blank in the major's name is written here as it appears in Catch-22.

[192] Ibid., p. 238.

[193] Ibid., p. 328.

Yossarian and his friends are victims. They are sensitive to the brutalities in the world. They are cheated and maligned and are helpless to do anything about it. They are not agressive and are, therefore, misfits in a world where only power has value. Doc Daneeka, Hungry Joe, Chief Halfoat, and Orr are a few examples of the long list of misfits who are among Yossarian's friends. Doc Daneeka is "a neat, clean man whose idea of a good time was to sulk."[194] Hungry Joe has "a desolate, cratered face, sooty with care like an abandoned mining town."[195] Chief Halfoat is "a glowering, disillusioned, vengeful Indian."[196] Orr is "an eccentric midget, a freakish, likable dwarf with a smutty mind and a thousand valuable skills that would keep him in the lower income group all his life."[197] The victims are aware of the fact that they are in immediate danger of a violent and meaningless death.

Catch-22 has a double plot, one concerning the aggressors in their struggle to gain power, the other concerning the hero, Yossarian, in his struggle to live. In the plot concerning the aggressors, one American general declares war on another. General Peckam is head of Special Services, and while at that

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[194] Ibid., p. 33.

[195] Ibid., p. 53.

[196] Ibid., p. 44.

[197] Ibid., p. 321.

post, he gives Special Services authority over all other branches of the service. Later, General Peckam leaves Special Services and declares war on General Dreedle and obtains the top post as wing commander. Lieutenant Scheisskopf is left to command Special Services when General Peckam transfers out of that branch, but Peckam forgets to void his memorandum giving Special Services the highest command. Peckam defeats Dreedle, only to find that he is under Scheisskopf, who has been promoted to Lieutenant General. Scheisskopf is described as a man who wants war because he loves to wear a uniform and direct parades. When he becomes the top commander, he orders the divisions to line up for a parade. The plot concerning the agressors ends in complete absurdity.

The plot concerning the victims centers around the quest of the hero, Yossarian. The three stages of the romance are evident in the hero's quest, and the third stage is reversed. The celebration of Yossarian as hero is a mockery, and the mock celebration of the hero at the end of Catch-22 is typical of the pattern of the romance-parody.

Yossarian's quest is a basic one. He wants to stay alive. He will accept death as an eventual necessity, but is unwilling to allow others to kill him or to die as a victim of circumstances.[198] After moving the bomb line on the map

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[198]Robert Brustein, "The Logic of Survival in a Lunatic World," New Republic, CXLV (November 13, 1963), 11.

so that his company will not have to fly a bombing mission over Balogna, Yossarian explains that he is unwilling to fly the mission just because "a colonel wants to be a general."[199] The mission over Balogna is a volunteer mission, and Colonel Cathcart, in order to gain prestige, volunteers Yossarian's company for extra missions.

The first thirty-eight chapters of Catch-22 present the first stage of the hero's quest. The first stage is a series of episodes in which Yossarian avoids death through deceit, caution, cleverness or outward defiance.[200] At the beginning of the story, Yossarian has completed his quota of missions, but this does not put him out of danger, because each time the airmen complete one quota of missions, a higher quota is demanded. The hero's normal temperature is several degrees above normal, and he makes a habit of running to the hospital with feigned illnesses when he is threatened with another mission. But even the hospital does not provide security, because there he is sometimes in danger of death at the hands of doctors who write prescriptions in a mechanical fashion. During one mission, Yossarian's uniform becomes splattered with blood and guts, and afterwards he defiantly refuses to wear his uniform. He embarrasses his commanding

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[199]Heller, op. cit., p. 126.

[200]Brustein, op. cit., p. 11.

officer by appearing in the nude to receive a medal. The hero's role is an acrobatic one. Each method he devises with which to stay alive is only a stopgap measure, and with each new episode the threat of death is more acute. One by one, his friends disappear or are killed. Some disappear under mysterious circumstances after disagreements with those higher in command, and others do not come back from missions. Some are killed before his eyes. At the end of the first stage in Chapter XXXVIII, he is terror striken and defiant:

> Yossarian marched backward with his gun on his hip and refused to fly any more missions. He marched backward because he was continuously spinning around as he walked to make certain no one was sneaking up on him from behind. Every sound to his rear was a warning, every person he passed a potential assassin.[201]

At this point, the commanders feel that Yossarian's attitude is due to the fact that his friend, McWatt, has just been killed, and they decide to give him a leave. Yossarian goes on leave to Rome to tell Nately's whore of Nately's death. Nately's whore and her kid sister have always been Yossarian's friends, but when he brings the news of Nately's death, they try to kill him, and he leaves deeply disillusioned. When he gets back to the base, Captain Black smugly tells him that the M.P.s have torn up the apartment of Nately's whore and have pushed the whores out into the streets. Yossarian is alarmed

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[201]Heller, op. cit., pp. 400-401.

over the news and is deeply concerned for Nately's whore's young sister. At the end of the first stage, the hero is alive, but at the point of despair.

The second stage of the hero's quest, the major conflict, takes place in Chapter XXXIX, "The Eternal City." Yossarian goes absent without leave to Rome to try to save Nately's whore's young sister. He soon realizes that to find the girl is a hopeless task. He is surrounded by devastation and is a helpless bystander in an inferno of hate and destruction. In Rome, he has a vision of transcendent evil.[202] The hero sees a sick world:

> The night was filled with horrors, and he thought he knew how Christ must have felt as he walked through the world, like a psychiatrist through a ward full of nuts, like a victim through a prison of thieves.[203]

In the first stage of his quest, Yossarian could stay alive by walking backwards, but in the climactic chapter, the matter of survival is not so simple. A refusal to fight does not make for safety. In this chapter, Yossarian sees a man beating to death a small boy while a sinister crowd looks on. A short time later Yossarian sees the police beating a man, his blood and teeth splattering on the street, while the man himself, as a matter of form, desperately calls for the police

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[202]Brustein, op. cit., p. 13.

[203]Heller, op. cit., p. 424.

to help him. Yossarian goes to the officers' apartment only to find that his friend Aarfy has raped and killed the maid, and she is lying dead on the pavement below the window. As the sound of sirens draws near, Yossarian tries to explain to Aarfy that rape and murder are terrible crimes and that the police are coming to arrest him. But when the M.P.s arrive, they ignore the dead body, arrest Yossarian for being absent without leave, apologize to Aarfy for intruding, and put Yossarian in jail.

In this climactic chapter, Yossarian learns that there is no justice in the world; the good are victims in the hands of malicious forces which exist in overpowering numbers. In his major trial, in his attempt to save the innocent from being victimized, the hero fails.

The third stage of the romance-parody begins with Chapter XL. This stage presents the mock celebration of the protagonist as hero. Yossarian is brought before Colonel Cathcart and Colonel Korn because he has been absent without leave. The two colonels are anxious to be rid of Yossarian, a constant source of irritation and embarrassment to them, and they offer him a bargain. Yossarian agrees to their terms, namely, that when they send him home, he will speak well of them. As Yossarian leaves, Nately's whore tries to knife him, but the two colonels frighten her away. In order to keep Yossarian on their side, Colonel Cathcart and Colonel Korn report the incident in such a way as to make Yossarian a hero. According to the report, Yossarian has

stopped a Nazi spy from stabbing them. The knife of Nately's whore and a grim recollection of the macabre details of the death of his friend, Snowden, remind him of his own mutability, and he realizes that his bargain with the colonels is just another form of death. Under the circumstances, Yossarian decides that it is better to be free than to be a hero in the hands of his superiors. He breaks his bargain and gleefully decides to flee to Sweden where he can govern himself. He knows that the risk of being shot is great and that the journey is long. As he leaves, the hero's emotions are a mixture of jubilation and fear. On the first step of his journey, Yossarian jumps aside, and Nately's whore, knife in hand, misses her mark.

The book ends with the beginning of Yossarian's journey, and the plot has a circular motion. The story opens with Yossarian's pretending to be sick to escape death at the hands of malicious tyrants, and ends with his flight to Sweden so that he may be free of tyranny. He is like a man forever standing in a sea on melting chunks of ice, forced to jump to a larger piece of ice as it melts.

Yossarian's predicament is therefore, typical of the ironic hero in bondage described by Northrop Frye. In this state, the victims are too weak to overthrow the tyrants, and in the case of Yossarian, his decision to run away does not make his life any more secure. He is typical of the unheroic hero of ironic fiction.

The hero seeks a goal that is unattainable; Sweden, a symbolic Eden, cannot be found in a world of meaningless cruelty and violence. Yossarian will never be free from those who seek to destroy him, and death itself will be his only release from the fears he suffers.

The title of Heller's book, Catch-22, is taken from an army regulation that is symbolic of inescapable bondage. This regulation is a Fascistic rule which does not let men do what they want to do, but which forces them to do what they do not want to do. Catch-22 states that if a man wants to fly missions, he is crazy and must be grounded, but if he does not want to fly missions and asks to be grounded, he is sane and must continue to fly missions. The catch-22 regulation also states that no one has a right to examine it or question its validity. Near the end of the book, the military police push the whores out into the street and consficate their home. The police obtain the authority for this action from the catch-22 regulation. The old woman who is left to tell Yossarian of the fate of the whores says, "Catch-22 says they the military have a right to do anything we can't stop them from doing."[204] Yossarian tells her that she should have asked to see the regulation, but she says, "They don't have to show us Catch-22. . . .The law says they don't have to."[205]

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[204] Ibid., p. 416.

[205] Loc. cit.

In the last chapter of the book, the hero takes an existential attitude toward life. Once he assumes full responsibility for himself and disowns military life, his struggle to stay alive becomes a joyful persuit. This decision is an important change in the attitude of the hero, because, up to this point, he had considered himself a part of a huge military force, and the fact that he had to be nimble to stay alive was nauseous to him. At the end of the novel, the hero celebrates life and decides to fight for it outside the framework of military ranks. When he decides to stand as an individual, he has courage in the face of darkness. Even when Major Danby warns Yossarian that it is impossible to get to Sweden, Yossarian replies, "Hell Danby, I know that. But at least I'll be trying."[206] The major also tells Yossarian that his journey will not be a happy one, but the hero replies with exuberance, "Yes it will."[207] Thus, the book ends upon an ironic note: the hero filled with conviction begins a journey that is perhaps futile, but he has reached the existentialistic point on the other side of despair, a point of self-fulfillment. He is fulfilling his own convictions, not those of military tyrants, and, for the first time, the hero has true courage.

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[206] Ibid., p. 462.

[207] Ibid., p. 463.

War is the central symbol of Heller's book, and Catch-22 is a parody of the war romance. The war is symbolic of all life.[208] Heller uses the war romance to point up the hypocrisy of man and the absurdity of life. The war romance celebrates the ideals of patriotism and heroism in the face of death. These ideals are evident in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. Sir Gawain fights the Green Knight to save the honor of Arthur's court out of patriotism for his country. He proves himself heroic in battle and brings stability to his country. In Catch-22, the ideals of patriotism, love, and heroism are pretensions.

Patriotism in Catch-22 is an absurdity. The high-ranking officials of the American army, fighting for self-interests, are at war with each other. In their struggle for power, the squadron commanders victimize those whom they command by demanding extra missions or by killing those who stand in the way of their progress. Patriotism can only exist when a country has a degree of unity. In Catch-22, the idea that war should be a unified effort, that Americans should fight for other Americans, does not seem to occur to the commanders.

Even the subject of death that traditionally belongs to the tragic modes of literature especially in the case of the war romance, is parodied in Catch-22. In all cases, death is

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[208] Brustein, op. cit., p. 12.

presented as being absurd and unheroic. In the opening chapter of the book, a soldier, covered in a white, plaster cast, is in the hospital ward with Yossarian. The soldier's arms and legs are useless, and his senses are gone. He is fed through the arm from one jar, and the waste from his kidneys are drained into a jar on the floor. When the jar attached to his arm is emptied, it is switched with the one on the floor in a continuing process. The attempt to save life, when carried to this extreme, is shown to be absurd because, for all practical purposes, the man in the cast is dead. At another point in the story, an Italian family from New York arrive at the hospital to see their son die. Their son is not there, so a doctor, who has a great sympathy for old people, asks Yossarian to play the role of their son, Guissepe, and pretend to be dying in order to please the couple and their other son who has accompanied them. Yossarian does, and the scene is doubly ironic. Guissepe's father, mother, and brother not only do not recognize that Yossarian is not their son; they also think that they understand life after death. Guissepe's father advises Yossarian, ". . .it ain't right for people to die when they're young. . . .I don't think He knows it ain't right, because it's been going on for a long, long time."[209]

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[209]Heller, op. cit., p. 191.

Guissepe's brother adds, "And don't let anybody up there push you around. . . .You're just as good as anybody else in heaven, even though you are Italian."[210] Guissepe's mother says, "Dress warm."[211] Guissepe's family seem to be enjoying his death because they believe their son has control over God. Heller satirizes the easy solution to the problem of death. His parody is most brutal in the episode of Kid Sampson's death. Kid Sampson is spending a pleasant day at the beach with other bathers, when McWatt, who is a practical joker, playfully flies low over the bathers and accidentally hits Kid Sampson. The plane's propellers cut off Kid Sampson's body at the top of his legs. The description of this macabre incident is told through a grotesque technique of slap-stick method. Kid Sampson's legs stand alone for a minute, then fall back into the water and turn upside down, revealing the white underside of his feet, while the rest of his body, cut into the size of rain-drops, falls in a shower over the rest of the bathers. The incongruity of the comic technique with the tragic subject emphasizes the irony of death. Heller, then, follows up the accidental death with a suicide and a fake death. McWatt, realizing that his playfulness has resulted in death, crashes his plane into a mountain, committing suicide. Sergeant Knight refers to his

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[210] Loc. cit.

[211] Ibid., p. 191.

list of men that are supposed to be on McWatt's plane and, finding Doc Daneeka's name there, subsequently reports him dead. Doc Daneeka, however, is standing beside the sergeant and keeps protesting that he is alive. The army pays no attention to Doc Daneeka's plight because, as far as they are concerned, he is a name that is crossed off their list. The army sends a form letter to Mrs. Daneeka, announcing the death of her husband. The letter, designed to fit every case, points up the absurdity of efficiency that does not consider the personal implications of death. The letter sent to Mrs. Daneeka reads:

> Dear Mrs., Mr., Miss, or Mr. and Mrs. Daneeka:
> Words cannot express the deep personal grief
> I experienced when your husband, son, father,
> or brother was killed, wounded or reported
> missing in action.[212]

Before Mrs. Daneeka receives the form letter, she is overcome by grief because of an unofficial report of her husband's death. But when she receives large sums of money from insurance policies and her husband's friends flirt with her, she is so overjoyed that she has her hair dyed. Doc Daneeka writes her letters and pleads with her to consider him alive, but when the form letter arrives, stating that her husband's death is official, Mrs. Daneeka is so bewildered by the conflicting evidence that she decides to move to Lansing, Michigan, leaving no

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[212] Ibid., p. 345.

forwarding address. Mrs. Daneeka's solution again points up her inability to deal with the problem. Doc Daneeka's fake death is reminiscent of situation comedy with the exception that the problem is never solved. It remains as unsolvable as the problem of death itself.

In Catch-22, death is unheroic and meaningless. The episode of the soldier in white presents a living death. The dying Guissepe is merely a role played by a healthy man for the benefit of those who love death. Kid Sampson's death is as needless as McWatt's death is futile. In Doc Daneeka's case, death is an imposter.

CONCLUSION

The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade, Pudd'nhead Wilson, Malcolm, and Catch-22 have received much adverse criticism of a strikingly similar nature. These stories are considered by many critics to be unrealistic, because they show only a dark side of life, and formless, because they have episodic plots.

These works, however, do have a strict form unrecognized by many critics. They utilize the pattern and conventions of the romance, and parody them. Those critics who expect all fiction to imitate life in accordance with the standards of the novel are disappointed in these books because they do not imitate life. They imitate a literary form, the romance.

The masked identity, a convention of the romance, is used ironically in the romance-parody. The masks of the romance are stripped away at the end of the story, and the face underlying the mask reveals the true identity of a character. In the parody, identities are masked, but the ambiguity of the mask remains. The confidence-man wears the mask of Christ which covers the face of the anti-christ, but, ironically, he is ignorant of both good and evil. Pudd'nhead Wilson is a foolish, wise man. He has a logical, alert mind, but he is, at the same time, naive. Malcolm is a love object, but is indifferent to love. Yossarian, in Catch-22, is a

courageous coward. He receives his strength from fear. The identities of the figures of the romance-parody always remain ambiguous.

Like the romance, the romance-parody is structured around the quest of the hero, but in the parody, the third stage of the quest is reversed. The third stage of the romance shows the hero elevated to a god-like position, and he brings stability and order to his society. In the romance-parody, however, the elevation of the hero is a mockery, and he brings a false sense of security to his society.

At his elevation, the confidence-man brings light in the darkness and is compared to a bridegroom, but the lamp he carries burns up the oxygen until he is forced to blow out its light in order to breathe comfortably. Instead of bringing order to man, he leads him off into darkness. When Pudd'nhead Wilson is honored as a hero for bringing justice to Dawson's Landing, he is unaware of the fact that the justice he proclaims is inhuman, and that by it, he has destroyed the life of an innocent man as well as that of a guilty one. Malcolm's death is a parody of the death and resurrection of Christ. Malcolm's sacrifice is pointless, and his death brings the members of his society into a state of bliss, but the state of bliss is a result of selfish, worldly successes. Yossarian, in Catch-22, is declared a hero because

of a false story circulated by his commanding officers. The officers make Yossarian a hero so that he will feel obligated to do as they tell him. Yossarian, however, decides not to accept the hero position which makes the military life appear orderly. He leaves the army, realizing that he will have to run for the rest of his life.

The romance presents ideals, while the parody shatters those ideals. The vigorous hero of the romance is an unheroic hero in the parody. Order is restored in the romance, but in the parody, life remains absurd and diseased.

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