Mark Twain’s Transformation from a Humorist to a Pessimist
Told by The Mysterious Stranger

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Besides colorful, irreverent, romantic, skeptical, a master of comic, a bittersweet humorist, and an unflinching critic of human pretensions, Mark Twain speaks to us across time with verve and wisdom. In all his richness and complexity, and his ability to inspire, entertain, instruct, and delight, Samuel Langhorne Clemens, who wrote under the pseudonym of Mark Twain, leaves a deep impression on our mind as a humorist bringing hearty laughter to all the people in every corner of the world. However, shocks come with a glimpse at his later days’ works in which a changed attitude toward the human race and human life darkens the bright remarks and comments. This paper portrays into the change in Mark Twain from a humorist to a pessimist by analyzing the tranquil narration of The Mysterious Stranger.

Keywords: humorist, pessimist, dignity, faith, envy and malice, selfishness and suppression, cruelty and coldness, ignorance and indifference, dishonesty and deception, no value and no consequence, helplessness and hopelessness.

才色豊かで、不遜であり、浪漫的で、懷疑的であり、喜劇の大家であることは定り、甘苦の滑稽本作家であり、人間欺瞞に屈しない批評家であるマーク・トウェインは時間を超え熱情と寂知を以て私たち人間に語りかけてくれる。彼はあらん限りの豊満と迷惑の狭間にあっても、激励し、享楽させ、教示し、そして歓喜を与え得たサミュエル・ラングホーン・クレメンズ、彼はマーク・トウェインという筆名で諸本を書き、世界の隅々に住む全ての人間に心底の爆笑をもたらす滑稽本作家として私たちの心に深く感銘を残してくれる。しかしながら、人間や人間の生活に対する彼の態度が変わり明快な敍述や論述が暗いものになっている彼の晩年の作品をみると歎嘆してしまう。本稿は「不思議な少年」の冷静沈着な語りを解析してマーク・トウェインが喜劇作家から悲劇作家に変貌したことを記述する。
Introduction

In succession to my previous paper, *Mark Twain's Transformation from a Humorist to a Pessimist: What Made Him Lose Faith in the Dignity of Man and the Value of Human Life?* \(^{(1)}\), this essay is to study the descriptions of the Transformation from a Humorist to a Pessimist in Mark Twain's work, *The Mysterious Stranger*, by searching for the nature of human race written by Mark Twain in the book: Envy and Malice, Selfishness and Suppression, Cruelty and Coldness, Ignorance and Indifference, Dishonesty and Deception, No Value and No Consequence, and Helplessness and Hopelessness.

The Transformation in Twain from a Humorist to a Pessimist

In the novel *The Mysterious Stranger*, Twain employs an outsider from a normal but mysterious world and instills his thoughts into this outsider who has a wisdom that human society does not possess. However, to our surprise, this outsider is none other than SATAN! What is more, Twain calls him an ANGEL! He borrows Satan's tongue to utter his disappointment and disdain towards human society.

This essay concerns some typical episodes in the novel *The Mysterious Stranger* in which the mysterious stranger Satan observes what is happening in the human world and has conversation on those events with three boys. He expresses his view on the human race and human life. His attitude towards the human race and human life is very low and pessimistic. He thinks that the human race is a mass of paltry, slavish, cruel, malicious and foolish creatures beneath the dignity of other animals; that human life is suffering; and that only death can liberate human soul.

By choosing some typical episodes, we can see Twain's attitude toward the nature of the human race.

Envy and Malice

Three boys, Nikolaus Bauman, Seppi Wohlmeyer and Theodor Fischer, are just finishing their talk with the mysterious stranger Satan when Father Peter comes to find his lost wallet. They find it is lying where Satan melted away. When Father Peter opens it they find it is full of gold coins --- approximately eleven hundred ducats! Father Peter says only four ducats are his. But they persuade him to take all as his own. By using this sum of money poor Father Peter pays debts and makes a pleasant change in his life; cool old friends become kind and friendly again; and best of all Marget, his niece, is invited to a party.

Father Peter tells the whole story just as it happened. But on the fourth day comes his enemy the astrologer who makes a false claim that the money was stolen from him. Father Peter is arrested and put into prison.

"Marget's new happiness died a quick death." \(^{(1)}\)

The astrologer throws them into bitterness only out of his malice towards Father Peter.
and his envy at that big sum of money.

"Malice resides in no animal but one — Man. Envy is found in no animal but one — Man."2) Satan gives poor Marget a cat that can magically produce money, a fact she is oblivious of. But when astrologer and Father Adolf learn that Marget has plenty of money, he says:

"This must be looked into... ."3) tells the villagers to resume relations with Marget and Ursula in a private and unostentatious way, and keep both eyes open, as is written in the book: "envy and malice made the baser sort even eager to go."4) Twain uses very vivid words to describe the spies:

"... All felt mean, eating and drinking Marget’s fine things along with those companies of spies, ... and seeing with self-reproach how foolishly happy she was, and never saying a word to put her on her guard ... these people were watching with all their eyes and reporting ... to Father Adolf.”5)

Money has bought their soul and there is not a single merciful thought in their hearts towards the poor girl who treats them with all friendship and love from the bottom of her heart because they have filled them with envy and greed. As Satan says: “The love of it (money) is the root of all evil.”6) At last it is Satan who saves the poor ignorant girl by magic.

**Selfishness and Suppression**

Satan brings one of the three children — I — to a French village. They walk through a great factory of some sort:

"where men and women and little children were toiling in heat and dirt and a fog of dust; and... they were worn and half starved, and weak and drowsy.”7)

Here Twain gives a long lecture through Satan on human selfishness and how cruel the suppression people inflict on fellow humans. In order to achieve their own profits, they enslave their fellow members, squeeze the oil from the bones of the slaves, without mercy, without knowing the slaves are also human beings!!

Satan says:

"It is some more Moral Sense. The proprietors are rich, ... but the wage they pay to these brothers and sisters of theirs is only enough to keep them from dropping dead with hunger. The work-hours are fourteen per day --- little children and all. They walk to and from ... through mud and slush, rain, snow, sleet, and storm, daily, year in and year out... .
they die off like flies. ... These poor slaves here... . You are such an illogical, unreasoning race! And paltry...!"8)

He derides "our pride in our warlike deeds, our great heroes, ... our mighty kings. Our ancient aristocracies, our venerable history"9)

All the members of human race are included.
And then Twain melts into Satan to satirize the progress of our history. He said:

"Cain did his murder with javelins and swords; the Greeks and Romans added protective armor and the fine arts of military organization and generalship; the Christian has added guns and gunpowder..."10)

The people rush into a murder or a war out of their selfish interests.

"... He will have so greatly improved the deadly effectiveness of his weapons of slaughter... . During the process of human civilization, ...to kill being the chiefest ambition of the human race and the earliest incident in its history..."11)

The process of human civilization is also the process of suppression in which they suppress others under their selfish will to pursue their own benefits.
Satan continues to say:

"Who gets a profit out of it? Nobody... but who despise you; ... who address you in the language of master to slave, and are answered in the language of slave to master;..."12)

Paul also says: "man was the sole animal that robs, persecutes, oppresses, and kills members of his own immediate tribe, the sole animal that steals and enslaves the members of any tribe."13)

Cruelty and Coldness

Seppi Wohlmeyer comes to tell Satan and "I" that Hans treats his dog brutally.

The dog "is a good dog, and his only friend, and is faithful, and loves him, and does no one any harm;"14)

But Hans always bites it just for pleasure no matter how the dog howls and begs. This time he kicks one of its eyes out. But Satan says the word "brutal" is misused because "Brutes do not act like that, but only men."15) "Well, it was inhuman, anyway."16) says Seppi.
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“No, ... it was human — quite distinctly human... . None of the higher animals is tainted with the disease called the Moral Sense... .”17)

Twain holds a belief that only human race can commit such cruelty with coldness to an innocent and helpless animal.

However, when Hans is dying only the dog wants to save him. It begs help from villagers but they drive it away and do not listen to it.

“Can your race add anything to this dog’s stock of morals and magnanimities?”18) asks Satan.

Yes, Hans’ cruelty and the villagers coldness disappoint Twain very much.

Ignorance and Indifference

Three boys tell Satan a story about how they try to extirpate the witches in the village. In a school for girls a student who is red and inflamed is to be possessed by a witch. The girl begs and says it is only fleas. There is a pun in phrase “flea bites” that means “small trouble.” But these small bites give the girls big trouble because of the ignorance of the teachers and villagers:

“All the girls were examined, ... shut up...and all had conducted themselves in a scandalous way... .”19)

Then they were burned at the stake.

“A bonny, sweet girl ...her mother crying over her and devouring her with kisses ... and saying, `Oh, my God! oh, my God!’”20)

None of the on-lookers shed a tear for those eleven girls and their heart-broken mothers. They are so benighted that they do not use their brain to think if there is really such a thing as a witch. The coldness, indifference occupy their hearts.

Satan talks of a bullock:

“There — he wouldn’t drive children mad ... and he would not insult them in their death-agony. For he is not besmirched with the Moral Sense.”21)

Dishonesty and Deception

When Satan and “I” stop at a little city in India, they see a juggler playing his tricks. Satan changes himself into a native and shows his magic by planting a miraculous tree that can bear fruits of many kinds and colors — oranges, grapes, bananas, peaches, and so on. But a foreigner in white linen and sun-helmet arrives, and exclaims that the tree is his property.

His shameless dishonesty causes a punishment from Satan. The fruits rot on the
branches, and the leaves wither and fell. He is told to water its roots once every hour every
night.

The foreigner was proud and wouldn’t beg, but he looked as if he would like to. Satan
says this foreigner will not trust that secret with anyone, that he won’t tell why he can’t leave
that place to his wife, who is coming to him from her native land, Portugal and has not long to
live. He also will fetch a priest to cast out the tree’s devil, with his watering pot ready.

What a bitter life of dishonesty and self-deception for this foreigner which shows the
weakness of the whole human race.

Satan shows the boys a hundred wonders, most of them reflecting in some way the
weakness and triviality of human race.

The episodes above show the changed attitude of Twain to human race. He is pessimistic
on the bad nature man possesses compared with the opinions he held in Huckleberry and Tom
who are good lads struggling for freedom and sunshine.

Twain compares the dog and horse and bullock with human race, and he thinks animals will
never behave like human beings. When the boys use the word like “brutal” or “inhuman”
Satan just correct them by saying these words are misused, because it is a human thing and it
will insult the brutes by such a misuse of that word. Twain holds that man is even inferior
to the race of animals. This attitude shows a clear change in Twain from an optimist to a
pessimist.

Why human race is even inferior to the race of animals? That is because human race has
“Moral Sense.” It is the Moral Sense that teaches the human race the difference between
right and wrong. But people always prefer the wrong.

Satan says:

“No brute ever does a cruel thing... nine cases out of ten.”22)

Man follows the wrong and if he did not have this sense there should not be any wrong.
It is the Moral Sense that degrades him to the bottom layer of animated beings.

So we can say Twain holds that:

“Man’s intellect was a brutal addition to him and degraded him to a rank far below the
plane of the other animals, and that there was never a man who did not use his intellect daily
all his life to advantage himself at other people’s expense.”23)

Twain thinks that the human race is inferior to the animals; he also has a very low opinion
of human life. He thinks human life is suffering and only death can relieve people from pain.

No Value and No Consequence

Satan makes men and women as big as human finger, who are busy with building a castle.
When two women are quarreling, Satan crushes the life out of them with his fingers, wipes the red from his fingers on his handkerchief. A pitiful scene is under Satan and boys' eyes: crushed and shapeless bodies, sobbing and lamenting people. Satan mashes all the people into the earth just as if they had been flies.

Satan thinks that they were of no value.

Human life is of no consequence. There is no significance in human life. Satan speaks of people, he does so just as one speaks of bricks.

He thinks that the difference between man and himself is just like that between a mortal and immortal, a cloud and a spirit. "Man is made of dirt ... he comes to-day and is gone to-morrow; he begins as dirt and departs as stench...." 24)

What Satan says shows that human life has no value: it begins with dirt and ends into dirt, and between birth and death, there is nothing important and significant, it is of no meaning.

Helplessness and Hopelessness

When Satan settles down a small storm upon the mini-people, they have no way to save themselves. The lightning, the thunder, wind, rain, the earthquake, all these are disaster to the little people. They are so small and paltry, and there is no shelter, they can't escape but can only wait for the massacre.

The relative contrast between human being and the universe is so evident. The human being is so "paltry" and "small," while the universe is so vast and endless. Facing all the hardship and difficulties, people can do nothing. They throw themselves at the mercy of the merciless universe.

Such being the lives of human being, they are only helpless and hopeless. Can those Christian people find help from God? Twain shows us the cry from Lisa's mother:

"... I have groveled in the dirt before Him praying Him to have pity on my innocent child and save it from harm — and here is His answer!" 25)

She loses her ability to worship God. It is the same with Twain. Man cannot even turn to God for help. On the contrary, Twain praises Satan who is the opposite party to the almighty God. He uses adjectives like "fresh and cheery and beautiful" to describe Satan, who is considered as The Devil. But he loses all his faith in God who is worshipped as The Almighty.

And what is the happiness in life?

Satan says:

"... No sane man can be happy, for to him life is real, and he sees what a fearful thing it is. Only the mad can be happy... " 26)
And what is the solution or relief for this bitter and dark life? Lisa’s mother wants a quick death by saying:

"Pronounce your sentence and let me go; I am tired of your society."27)

And also the change for Nikolaus is for the same reason: if he did not die when saving Lisa, for forty-six years he would lie in his bed a paralytic log, deaf, dumb, blind, and praying night and day for the blessed relief of death. As Satan says none of his one billion possible careers was worth living.

In this sense, death is a kind of relief for the dark life.

Twain finds that the human life is so bitter and painful that there are no such things like happiness or gladness. Sunshine is gone out of human life. This change is a contrast to the life he describes in his other novels in which life is worthy of paying energy and struggle because people are longing for a bright and free life. This change is so evident that we can see the once humorous Twain changed into a pessimist, out of disappointment and despair.

Conclusion

From the episodes examined, we see Twain denies the dignity of human race and loses his faith in human life. Told by the mysterious stranger Satan, we find a dramatic change in Mark Twain from a humorist to a pessimist. This change is uttered by Twain’s own voice.

Notes

3) Twain, p.63.
4) Ibid., p.63.
5) Ibid., p.63.
6) Ibid., p.126.
7) Ibid., p.52.
8) Ibid., p.53.
9) Ibid., p.53.
10) Ibid., p.111.
11) Ibid., p.111.
12) Ibid., p.112.
13) Fishkin, p.119.
14) Twain, p.54.
15) Ibid., p.54.
16) Ibid., p.54.
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17) Ibid., p.55.
18) Ibid., p.56.
19) Ibid., p.59.
20) Ibid., p.60.
21) Ibid., p.62.
22) Ibid., p.51.
23) Fishkin, p.119.
26) Ibid., p.130.
27) Ibid., p.103.

Bibliography