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"DREAM OTHER DREAMS AND BETTER": MARK TWAIN'S DEVELOPING NARRATIVE STRATEGIES

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Despite the canonical status of *Huckleberry Finn*, it is easy to overlook Mark Twain's claim to serious artistry. His entrance into literature via journalism, his enormous popular appeal in his own day, and the ongoing children's story reputation of *Tom Sawyer*, *A Connecticut Yankee*, even *Huckleberry Finn*, tend to obscure for us Twain's development as a serious writer. But setting aside our current prejudice against popular fiction, Twain's major novels reveal not merely a scribbler writing for immediate gain; they also show the evolution of an artist. In particular, the changes observable in Twain's handling of narrative energies—in the way he generates, sustains, and closes his plots—highlight his struggle to embody an increasingly sophisticated sense of how narrative may shape its materials. His novels move from an imaginative freedom with apparently infinite possibilities for continuation to tight narrative control and manipulation toward preconceived goals. Twain's last work, *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger*, returns to openendedness. But unlike *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*, which generate their plots through spontaneous response to experience, *No. 44* exploits the sheer arbitrariness of artistic manipulation. In doing so, it reveals Twain's ongoing quest for new possibilities in fiction-making.

In Twain's first fictional world—that of *Tom Sawyer*—the narrative mechanism seems capable of sustaining itself *ad infinitum*. What generates the story is Tom's lust for adventure. His restlessness with conventional life in St. Petersburg appears almost immediately, as he steals sugar when no one is looking, plays hookey from school, and hides when his aunt calls to him. In short, he takes every opportunity to break rules and regulations intruding upon his native freedom. It is important to note, however, that Tom does not desire absolute or pure freedom. As his homesickness on Jackson Island and his boredom during the summer vacation demonstrate, freedom is valuable for him only while the exultation at having just escaped or transcended some particular confinement remains fresh in his mind. Hence the narrative of Tom's adventures reflects a pattern of perpetual escape from and return to society.

The boundlessness of the narrative—the sense that Tom's adventures could go on indefinitely—is reinforced by the fact that Tom has several means of escape available to him. He often casts himself in

Martha A. Turner

149

the role of the romantic individualist, successively imagining himself as a chivalric lover, a war hero, an Indian, a pirate, and an outlaw. Moreover, he invests his life with mystery and horror by creeping out of his bedroom to go on midnight quests with Huck and by forming secret clubs with special signs and oaths. In short, through the exercise of his imagination, Tom fictionalizes his life; he makes it richer, more varied, and more individually satisfying than it would be in the every day world of St. Petersburg.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of Tom's story-making possibilities has to do with the fact that in *Tom Sawyer*, the distinction between make-believe and reality frequently becomes blurred. Tom turns work into play when he convinces his friends that painting a fence is fun. When he decides to stay home from school by pretending to be sick, he almost persuades himself that he is sick in actuality. The narrator notes: "Tom was suffering in reality, now, so handsomely was his imagination working, and so his groans had gathered quite a genuine tone."¹ This conversion of fiction into reality occurs in connection with Tom's adventures as well. His midnight wart-removing expedition with Huck turns into a real-life murder adventure. Or even more obviously, his make-believe treasure hunt leads to the discovery of actual treasure. As Virginia Wexman has noted, real events in *Tom Sawyer* are in some sense secondary to make-believe ones, insofar as they represent "the raw material out of which delightful and harmless fantasies are created."² Thus Tom, possessed of energy and imagination, and placed in a world where make-believe can become real, can provide practically endless variations to his story so long as he continues to desire freedom.

The other side of the dialectic, the return to society, also contributes to Tom's narratability. Tom craves social recognition almost as much as he craves freedom. This desire does not keep him from alienating prominent members of the community by his antics, but it does prompt him to choose his moments of reintegration carefully. His appearance at his own funeral is, of course, the most famous example of this, but his return from the cave and his revealing of the treasure follow a similar pattern. Tom transforms himself into a "glittering hero" in the eyes of the community, thus making the return to society as much of an adventure as the escape.

This dialectic which has generated the narrative is sustained in the novel's ending. Tom's oscillating desires for freedom and for public glory that have led him repeatedly to escape from and return to common life both remain intact. When the excitement of the treasure discovery dies down and Huck tries to run away from the stifling respectability of the Widow Douglas's house, Tom seeks him out to persuade him to go back. A spokesman for conventional propriety, Tom tells Huck he will

150 TWAIN'S NARRATIVE STRATEGIES

eventually learn to like being civilized. But at the same time, Tom makes it clear that he does not intend to change his own lifestyle. Huck complains, "Blame it all! just as we'd got guns, and a cave, and all just fixed to rob, here this dern foolishness has got to come up and spile it all!" Tom quickly responds, "Lookyhere, Huck, being rich ain't going to keep me back from turning robber."³ In short, though Tom rejects Huck's suggestions of leaving St. Petersburg society altogether, he also rejects the notion of wholeheartedly adopting it. His enthusiastic description of the gang's secret initiation rites shows that his imagination is as active and as adventure hungry as ever. The tensions that had generated the story remain intact.

Twain's refusal to dispel these tensions would seem to indicate a fairly optimistic approach to this process of story-making. The encounter between the individual and society, between freedom and convention can be painful or frustrating. But in *Tom Sawyer*, Tom's imagination and real life work together to ensure that his desires are not betrayed. Granted, there are dangers on both sides of the dialectic. The conformist pressures of St. Petersburg could stifle Tom's individuality, as Huck feels they do his own. On the other hand, pure freedom has its drawbacks as well. Jackson's Island teaches Tom the evils of loneliness, and his nightmares about Injun Joe show him the dangers of unchecked imagination. But invariably in *Tom Sawyer*, the benefits of the opposing forces cancel out the drawbacks. Stifling conventionality initiates rebellion, imaginative retreat, and quest for adventure, while isolation and danger lead back to a comfortable home. Thus the end of the story seems still poised in a condition of narratability, ready to take off on another series of adventures, because this possibility of continuation seems preferable to attaining circumstances—such as absolute freedom or absolute conformity—that would eliminate the tensions giving rise to the story.

Huckleberry Finn, like *Tom Sawyer*, rests on a tension between freedom and conformity. The narrative is initiated by Huck's rebellion against the social conventions of St. Petersburg. But as the novel quickly demonstrates, the means by which Tom Sawyer had pursued his desire for freedom are not viable for Huck. In particular, the make-believe world appropriated from Tom's books is no longer satisfactory. For example, Huck notes that all the boys resigned from Tom's gang of robbers after about a month because, "We hadn't robbed nobody, we hadn't killed any people, but only just pretended." He goes on to describe their escapades:

We used to hop out of the woods and go charging down on hog-drivers and women in carts taking garden stuff to market, but we never hived any of them. Tom Sawyer

Martha A. Turner

151

called the hogs "ingots," and he called the turnips and stuff "julery" and we would go to the cave and pow-wow over what we had killed and marked. But I couldn't see no profit in it.⁴

Clearly for Huck, the imagination is not free to transform one's surroundings into something more satisfying to the self.

Not only is the freedom of make-believe associated with Tom Sawyer unavailable to Huck; it also at times seems undesirable. Insofar as Tom rigidly insists on imitating the patterns found in his books, his make-believe represents not freedom at all, but simply another sort of conformity. When Ben Rogers expresses skepticism regarding the value of ransoms, Tom exclaims, "Now Ben Rogers, do you want to do things *regular*, or don't you?—that's the idea. Don't you reckon that the people that made the books knows what's the *correct* thing to do?" [my emphasis].⁵ In short, despite the initial similarity of motivation between their protagonists' desires, *Huckleberry Finn* quickly declares its independence from its predecessor. Tom's world of make-believe, which could in *Tom Sawyer* effectively mediate between freedom and society, becomes in *Huckleberry Finn* simply another agent for repression.

One of the reasons for this change is that Huck, unlike Tom, seeks absolute freedom. He does not grow bored and restless when separated from civilization for too long. On the contrary, the less he is bothered, the happier he seems to be. He claims, for example, that except for the "cowhide part" he was perfectly content to be off in the woods with his Pap. And once he escapes, he finds his ideal mode of existence in floating down the river on a raft. As he remarked after his stay with the Grangerfords, "there warn't no home like a raft, after all. Other places do seem so cramped up and smothery, but a raft don't. You feel mighty free and easy and comfortable on a raft."⁶

Huck's need for absolute freedom has been pointed out in a variety of contexts. Henry Nash Smith suggests that the notion of freedom provides the novel with a basic thematic unity. This notion includes not only the fairly localized issue of freedom versus slavery, but also the more abstract freedom associated with the individual's desire to break away from imprisoning society.⁷ From another angle, Michael Oriard distinguishes between Huck's and Tom's approaches to make-believe by pointing to Huck's spontaneity. Unlike Tom's fictions appropriated from books, Huck's imaginative activity—represented by the lies and tales he liberally spreads around—is unmediated.⁸ This spontaneous ficitonalizing constitutes a sort of freedom in itself, in that it avoids the danger of hardening into conventionality; but it is also significant as a means by which Huck protects his own physical

152 TWAIN'S NARRATIVE STRATEGIES

freedom. He fakes his own death to keep people from searching for him. Moreover, he automatically lies when asked about his name and circumstances so that he will not be turned over to the local authorities. Whereas a young runaway would probably be apprenticed out or shipped home, George Jackson who fell out of the steamboat is invited in and treated with courtesy, thus retaining for him the option of slipping away whenever he wants.

The absolute freedom that Huck desires would seem to be non-narratable. His ideal state is a state of quietude, in which he remains undisturbed by the violence, ugliness, and repressiveness of the world at large. But the narrative prolongs itself because Huck cannot maintain this state. His freedom is constantly threatened by forces from the world outside. A steamboat runs over his raft and he ends up with the Grangerfords. He eventually leaves them and gets back to the raft, only to encounter the King and the Duke. Thus *Huckleberry Finn* provides a mechanism for endlessly generating narrative just as *Tom Sawyer* does.

Huckleberry Finn, however, evinces less optimism about this process. In *Tom Sawyer*, continuation was portrayed as preferable to attaining the absolutes of either freedom or social integration. But in *Huckleberry Finn*, Huck does seek an absolute state; hence, in the prolongation of the narrative, there runs an undercurrent of frustration. Huck's spontaneous fictionalizing also contributes to the darker undercurrent. As Henry Nash Smith, among others, has pointed out, Huck's tales tend to be "uniformly somber."⁹ Moreover, because they are intended to preserve his freedom from immediate threats, they seem to possess a greater urgency than Tom's fantasies. In short, the engagement between fiction and "real life" is adversarial rather than complementary in *Huckleberry Finn*. Because of this conflict, fictionmaking loses some of its privileged power, since Huck cannot arbitrarily convert life into pleasant make-believe; on the other hand, the novel gains in moral depth, since the dangers and frustrations that threaten Huck seem far more real than Tom's wish-fulfillment.

Despite the undercurrents of frustration, *Huckleberry Finn* also possesses a certain comic exuberance. Huck has a zest for life that counterbalances the repeated thwarting of his attempt to find quietude. In this context, it is significant to note that not all his fictions manifest a self-preserving urgency. And even with those that are urgent, he often enters into them with the imaginative energy and attention to detail that he associates with Tom Sawyer. When he engineers his escape from Pap, for example, he wishes Tom were there to help "throw in the fancy touches."¹⁰ And after concocting an elaborate story to account for Mary Jane Wilks's absence from home, Huck remarks, "I felt very good; I judged I had done pretty neat—I reckoned Tom Sawyer couldn't

a done it no neater himself."¹¹ Furthermore, Huck sometimes seeks out adventure potentially dangerous to himself—as when he boards the *Walter Scott*—simply because Tom Sawyer would have done it. In short, at various intervals in the novel, Huck participates in an unmotivated (in the sense that it is not necessary for his freedom) embroidering of his life that implies a confidence in the power of fiction over reality.

The most extended example of this fictionalizing tendency is, of course, the evasion episode. In these chapters, Huck's admiration for Tom gets the better of his skeptical, literalist turn of mind. Hence he participates in the extravagant plans to free Jim with genuine (though sometimes qualified) approval. Whatever the aesthetic merit of the way they are presented, these chapters reflect an approach to narrative different from the one presented by Huck's quest for quietude. These chapters, like the earlier episodes in which Huck invokes Tom, affirm the possibility of converting ordinary experience into high adventure. This affirmation releases Huck to some extent from his literalist viewpoint, and it frees the narrative from relying exclusively on threats to Huck's independence as a perpetuating device.

The conclusion of *Huckleberry Finn* confirms neither the aesthetic (embroidering life for the fun of it) nor the moral (seeking quietude in a hostile world) approach to narrative. Huck's plan to "light out for the Territory" suggests a continuation of the narrative energies, but it is unclear whether lighting out signifies pursuit of fantasy—like Tom's "howling adventures amongst the Injuns"—or whether it represents Huck's ongoing quest for absolute freedom, a quest which will, as Roy Harvey Pearce reminds us, be frustrated in Oklahoma just as it has been elsewhere.¹² In short, part of the richness of *Huckleberry Finn* is that it refuses to commit itself to a single attitude toward art. On the one hand, its comic exuberance and unmotivated fictionalizing celebrate the creative process for its own sake. Yet on the other hand, there runs a current which will not separate itself from the concerns of real life—suggesting that the very ongoingness of narrative and of life involves a certain degree of frustration, and that fictions may spring from necessity as well as from pleasure.

With *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, Twain makes some significant departures from the narrative patterns of *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*. One of the most obvious of these changes is that the conditions which generate the narrative are destroyed at the end of the novel. Hank returns to the nineteenth century, and then dies, thus doubly terminating the possibility of further adventures in sixth-century England. But there are other differences as well. Hank's adventures seem far more end-oriented than those of his predecessors. Whereas Tom's and Huck's stories spring from their innate desire for

154 TWAIN'S NARRATIVE STRATEGIES

freedom and have no purpose other than satisfying that desire whenever opportunity arises, Hank's actions tend to be consciously aimed at the specific goals of civilizing the Britons and maintaining his own supremacy. He becomes to a certain extent a deliberate manipulator of his environment, directing his own and others' destinies. This end-orientedness exists at a thematic level also, for here, far more than in the previous novels, Twain uses the narrative to convey certain truths concerning society and human nature. As Robert A. Wiggins puts it, the novel does not "unfold [itself] to the reader as does *Huckleberry Finn*, but rather marshalls [itself] as evidence to prove a point."¹³ In general, the changes noticeable in *A Connecticut Yankee* represent a shift in value from art as process to art as product, from narrative freedom to narrative control.

The plot is initiated by Hank Morgan's abrupt transmigration from the nineteenth century into the sixth. As an outsider, an alien, Hank must make a place for himself in his new setting if he is to survive. Making a place for himself entails not only spontaneously reacting to pressures placed upon him (the way Huck does), but also ensuring his own security by manipulating the conditions that threaten him. Hence the narrative moves toward control over the environment from the outset. For example, before he has even fully gauged his situation, Hank decides that if "it was really the sixth century, all right . . . I would boss the whole country inside of three months."¹⁴ Hank has no taste for the "take things as they come" lifestyle of Huck Finn. He conceives of his life not as a more or less continuous process of adjusting to his environment, but in terms of certain fixed goals that he sets for himself.

Hank's dislike for openendedness is clearly apparent. The custom of going off in quest of adventure without any notion of where one is going completely baffles him. Questioning Alisande la Carteloise about how to find their prospective destination, he is exasperated by her ignorance and unconcern. He cannot comprehend a country that has no need for maps. Hank is equally exasperated by Sandy's penchant for long, rambling stories. His attention often wanders during her account of their captured knights and he intersperses the narrative with trenchant comments about her inability to get to the point. As a practical-minded Yankee, Hank deprecates everything that resembles Sandy's meandering narratives and "horizonless transcontinental sentences."¹⁵

As I have already suggested, the ends toward which Hank directs his actions have to do with securing his survival in an alien environment. First, he tries to make the world of sixth-century England more like his own by introducing nineteenth-century ideas and technology into it. He brings electricity, railroads, the telephone, and the telegraph and starts

factories, Sunday schools, and a military academy. Moreover, he attempts to restructure the economic and political system through such means as standardizing currency and singlehandedly routing the institution of chivalry. With activities such as these, he tries to give direction and purpose to the naive, "horizonless" Britons.

The second way Hank secures his survival is by fostering his reputation as an all-powerful magician. It is to this end that he creates his fabulous "effects." Even when his miracles are more or less unpremeditated and out of his control, as with the eclipse, he carefully adds flourishes to deepen the impact on his viewers. His grand pointing gesture, he suggests, is as significant as the blacking out of the sun. His later "magical" acts, such as blowing up Merlin's tower, or repairing the well in the Valley of Holiness, are, of course, even more deliberately calculated to consolidate his power.

These two sorts of activity, though both aim at making Hank secure, are to some extent contradictory. His supposed "magic," while augmenting his own reputation, also serves to reinforce the illusion and superstition that his civilizing efforts would drive away. Or, from the other perspective, were he to succeed in making a nineteenth-century industrial society out of Arthurian Britain, he must necessarily lose his special position of power, since his special knowledge would presumably become commonplace. Already Clarence, who initially cowered in fear of Hank's supernatural abilities, had by the end of the novel become almost his equal.

In addition to these contradictions, there are more abstract conflicts among the ideas Twain uses the narrative to reveal. His satire ridicules not only the conservative hierarchy of Arthurian Britain, but also Hank Morgan's progressive liberalism. This double-edged satire provides a built-in ambiguity, making it unclear what end Twain is ultimately trying to achieve. His presentation of a deterministic view of human nature further complicates matters. Hank complains about the "inherited prejudice" of the Arthurians. But as is demonstrated by his narrow-minded adherence to the ideas of his own century, he too responds to historical forces beyond his control. Indeed, if we extend the logical consequences of this belief, then Twain himself must be subject to the same accusation, and any attempt to control the narrative for the sake of certain personal ends must be illusory.

The ending of *A Connecticut Yankee* reflects the frustration rather than the attainment of the goals toward which the narrative has pushed. Though Hank appears to have succeeded in industrializing the country after his victory over the knights at the tournament, his changes make only superficial headway against "inherited prejudice." The people quickly turn against him after an interdict from Rome, and fittingly enough, his loyal remnant is destroyed by the carnage that his own

156 TWAIN'S NARRATIVE STRATEGIES

technology created. Hank's attempt to control his own destiny is similarly thwarted. He is exiled from the sixth century by Merlin, whom he had, till this point, out-magicked at every turn. By putting Hank to sleep, Merlin nullifies Hank's quest for personal power and resumes the position of preeminence he had held until the American's arrival. Finally, there is death to balk Hank's efforts to control his life. Not only does he fail to achieve his ends in sixth-century England, he is also barred from completing his own story. The final events of his life are narrated by Clarence in the sixth century, and then by Twain (as frame-story narrator) in the nineteenth.

The difference in approach to narrative between *A Connecticut Yankee* and the earlier novels constitutes a shift from art as process to art as product. It is the *effect* that interests Hank, rather than the means of getting there, as when he feels compelled to use blasting powder on the well in the Valley of Holiness even though the problem is only an easily-repaired leak. But although this sort of narrative places positive value on control, on the achievement of certain ends, *A Connecticut Yankee* seems to express pessimism regarding the possibility for attaining these ends. Hank, the would-be manipulator of his own destiny, gets bogged down by irreconcilable conflicts among his goals. Moreover, Twain decenters his own social commentary by setting aspects of his satire and of his philosophy at odds with one another. The narrative comes to a resolution, in that the conditions which generated the story are eliminated, but it is a closure that undermines rather than reaffirms the possibility of end-oriented narrative.

Pudd'nhead Wilson, like *A Connecticut Yankee*, is end-oriented; it values product over process. But unlike *A Connecticut Yankee*, *Pudd'nhead Wilson* actually achieves its goal. This makes it (in terms of plot) a more mechanical, more predictable work than its predecessor; but insofar as the ending represents the successful completion toward which the narrative has been driving, it seems to evince more confidence in its own narrative approach.

Two different sorts of disequilibrium contribute to generating the narrative. One is, of course, Roxy's switching of the babies, while the other is David Wilson's isolation as a result of town prejudice. The subsequent career of the bogus Tom Driscoll—with his gambling, theft, and finally murder—adds complications to the plot; but from the moment Wilson takes up fingerprinting as a hobby, its resolution appears inevitable. Thus the expectation of an unravelling—of restoring the state of harmony that existed before Roxy disrupted things, and of doing so in a manner that will also vindicate David Wilson in the eyes of the town—is implicit in the narrative.

The fulfillment of these expectations takes place at the trial. It is by far the most fully dramatized scene in the novel. Wilson carefully

Martha A. Turner

157

orchestrates and presents his material so as to produce the greatest effect on his hearers. Moreover, the reactions of Driscoll and the audience, the pauses, the gestures, and the general emotional atmosphere in the courtroom are carefully recorded. After Wilson explains the notion of fingerprinting and verifies the accuracy of his pantographs, he continues presenting his case:

He turned to the jury: "Compare the finger-prints of the accused with the finger prints left by the assassin—and report."

The comparison began. As it proceeded, all movement and all sound ceased, and the deep silence of an absorbed and waiting suspense settled upon the house; and when at last the words came—

"They do not even resemble," a thunder-crash of applause followed and the house sprang quickly to its feet¹⁶

By presenting the scene in such detail, Twain confirms its central importance to the narrative structure as a whole.

The way in which the novel was composed further confirms its end-orientation. The published novel was taken from a huge mass of manuscripts, and the trial scene—the only ending Twain wrote for this mass—was composed fairly early. Twain then went back and rewrote earlier portions, greatly expanding the roles of Roxy and Tom Driscoll, in order to lead up to this ending.¹⁷ Twain himself refers to this end-oriented approach. He wrote to his publisher in July, 1893:

The whole story is centered on the murder and trial; from the first chapter the movement is straight ahead without divergence or side play to the murder and the trial; everything that is done or said or that happens is a preparation for those events.¹⁸

In short, not only is Pudd'nhead Wilson end-oriented; it is self-consciously so. Twain appears to have deliberately rejected the freedom of a narrative capable of endless sustainment in favor of a narrative with a telos. Furthermore, by limiting his goals to the level of plot progression, he creates a narrative capable of successful resolution. Ironically, however, Twain's self-conscious construction of an end-oriented narrative by means of the fingerprinting plot and trial scene may be merely an evasion of the deeper, more disturbing issues implicit in the novel. As Hershel Parker and others have noted, the trial scene does not adequately resolve the problems Twain raises regarding miscegenation and racial conditioning—problems he probably did not want to address directly.¹⁹ Parker also points out Twain's carelessness

158 TWAIN'S NARRATIVE STRATEGIES

at revision, both when he rewrote the early sections to correspond to the ending and when he took the novel out of the larger manuscript. This sloppiness—and the novel's resultant lapses from unity—suggests that despite the superficial success of *Pudd'nhead Wilson's* resolution, Twain's genius was basically unsuited to making fictions concurrent with preconceived ends.²⁰

Twain returns to the end-oriented plot and to the trial scene as a closural device in "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg" and perhaps "The Chronicle of Young Satan" as well. These works reveal more clearly what is implicit in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*—that directing a narrative toward preconceived ends is, for Twain, an arbitrary imposition. In both cases the character who unravels the plot is also the one who caused the complications.

In "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg" it is the stranger Stephenson who generates and completes the plot. The story records the carrying out of his premeditated plan to corrupt and expose the town leaders. Acting on his knowledge of innate human selfishness and the town's lack of acquired moral checks, the stranger sets up a step-by-step plan for its downfall. The townsmen respond just as anticipated, and the scheme culminates with the great unmasking at a public meeting. This ending toward which the narrative has driven not only demonstrates the stranger's truth regarding the relationship between temptation and moral resilience; it also reveals Twain's ideas about the mechanistic determinants of behavior. But the completeness of Stephenson's control over the narrative's progress undermines the validity of the truths he reveals, for it makes his conclusions seem arbitrary. Moreover, the narrative suggests that Stephenson is to a certain extent outside of the determined chain of events he plays upon. Twain gives a sort of excuse for the stranger's action by noting that someone in Hadleyburg had once offended him. But the revenge seems to far exceed the initial cause. Furthermore, once his story begins, he is completely unaffected by the events he initiates (in contrast to Hank Morgan, for example). In short, because he can stand outside of the story, beginning it and ending it, his plan works too easily; and neither the problems nor the resolution seems authentic. Frank Kermode has suggested that people turn to fictions to find a greater sense of completeness than life itself can generally offer.²¹ But when a completed fiction shows its artificiality too openly, it loses its power to say anything meaningful about life.

In the final version of *The Mysterious Stranger*, Twain converts the movement toward arbitrariness from a negative into a positive value. He makes it a sort of freedom by breaking the connection between control of the environment and motive for manipulation; and once again he celebrates the endless possibilities of the human

imagination. But the return to narrative freedom is not entirely optimistic; for despite its exuberance, it admits a failure to say anything meaningful about life or truth outside the self.

The narrative is initiated by No. 44's appearance in a sixteenth-century Austrian print-shop. All of the printers except the narrator, August, dislike him immediately and try to drive him away. Right from the start, he shows a mysterious power to resist their hostilities. He fulfills their most outrageous commands without the least difficulty or complaint. Because of this supernatural strength, the inmates of the castle believe 44 to be a pawn of the local magician. But the magician, like Merlin in *A Connecticut Yankee* is clearly a fake. He accepts credit for 44's miracles simply because he is afraid of exposing his own hypocrisy. Hence it is soon apparent to the reader that 44, not the magician, is responsible for the superhuman feats.

The account of 44's conflicts with the printers bears a certain resemblance to *A Connecticut Yankee*, in that 44 is a likeable alien, seeking to make a place for himself in a hostile environment. But unlike Hank Morgan, 44 is not defeated by contradictions among his own approaches; rather it is the inappropriateness of his approach that makes for his difficulties. The more he shows himself willing and able to meet the printers' demands, the more they hate him. They envy him for his miraculous powers and despise him for his eagerness to please. Hence the story is one of an energetic but bumbling young stranger, well-meaning but hurting himself by his lack of shrewdness. Until his sudden supposed death at the hands of the magician, the narrative would appear to be leading toward comic reconciliation or pathetic defeat.

As Bruce Michelson has pointed out, the tone of the narrative changes abruptly when 44 returns from the dead, twanging on a Jew's harp.²² Since he reveals his identity only to August, the previously established pattern of quest for integration is shattered. 44's subsequent antics appear to be motivated simply by the pleasure of making splendid effects. In his blithe disregard for consequences, 44 is much like the Tom Sawyer at the end of *Huckleberry Finn*, adventuring for the sake of adventure. But 44's adventures are even more unfettered than Tom's, since he is not tied to the constraints of time and space. Thus, the carnival-like mayhem of the No. 44 version disrupts all the typically controllable aspects of narrative, "boggling all our expectations and logical plot developments, confounding our sense of individual characters, our sense of place and time, and upsetting any effort by anybody in the story to be logical and serious."²³

As the narrative progresses, 44's antics become increasingly outrageous and absurd. He lets himself get thrown in prison (disguised as the magician) only so he can disappear again. He terrifies the populace by causing an eclipse and making time run backward. His

160 TWAIN'S NARRATIVE STRATEGIES

sole announced motive for these bizarre actions is to increase the magician's reputation. Finally, as the ultimate demonstration of arbitrary control over his effects, he banishes the procession of the dead. As August remarks, "Then all of a sudden 44 waved his hand and we stood in an empty and soundless world."²⁴ By making and destroying his effects at random, 44 demonstrates the absolute freedom of all creative activity.

The famous dream ending confirms this notion. If reality, including the impossible antics of 44, is only a figment of August's imagination, then all events and objects must be arbitrary, unmotivated, existing only because he wants them to. It has been suggested that the process of freeing August's imagination from the narrow constraints of the Workaday self constitutes the unifying theme of *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger*.²⁵ Certainly, the idea that 44's revelation liberates August and that this liberation represents a positive achievement is affirmed in the conclusion. 44 claims, "But I your poor servant have revealed you to yourself and set you free. Dream other dreams, and better!"²⁶ But self-conscious imaginative freedom has its darker side as well. As August realizes, there is something horrifying about being alone with the self, "a homeless Thought, wandering forlorn among the empty eternities!"²⁷ He is free to imagine whatever he wants, but he cannot transcend his own imagination, for nothing else exists. Thus for all the playful exuberance that 44 imparts to the narrative, there remains a certain edge of urgency and desperation to the process of peopling the empty void.

With its disrupted patterns, its transcendence of all logic and order, and finally, its solipsistic conclusion, *No. 44* is by far the most self-conscious of Twain's works regarding the relationship of the creative imagination to the process of fiction-making. It brings together the issues of freedom and control and lays bare their artifice and meaninglessness. But besides parodying Twain's own narrative conventions, *No. 44* also affirms the value of fictions as fictions, hence pointing the way to a new horizon for his art, despite the darkness implicit in the novel's conclusion and in Twain's other writings of the time.

As he grew older, Twain changed ideologically from an exuberant, racy humorist to a pessimistic philosopher. Parallel to this change in his social outlook is the development of his attitudes toward art. His grapplings with the issues of freedom, truth, and reality deeply influenced the forms of his narratives—from the precarious openendedness of *Huckleberry Finn* to the boundless arbitrary control of *No. 44*. In other words, Twain's narrative technique—his way of carrying forward his plots—responded to ideological pressures; he

Martha A. Turner

161

repeatedly sought new forms to express new ideas. This influencing suggests that Twain himself responded to the ideas and problems he encountered not merely as a thinker but as an artist.

NOTES

¹Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, foreward, John C. Gerber (Berkeley, 1982), pp. 45-46.

²Virginia Wexman, "The Role of Structure in *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*," *ALR*, 6 (1973), 6.

³*Tom Sawyer*, p. 258.

⁴Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, ed. Henry Nash Smith (Boston, 1958), p. 12.

⁵*Huckleberry Finn*, p. 10.

⁶*Huckleberry Finn*, p. 99.

⁷Henry Nash Smith, intro. *Huckleberry Finn*.

⁸Michael Oriard, "From Tom Sawyer to Huckleberry Finn: Toward Godly Play," *SAF*, 8 (1980), 181.

⁹Smith, p. xix.

¹⁰*Huckleberry Finn*, p. 29.

¹¹*Huckleberry Finn*, p. 113.

¹²Roy Harvey Pearce, "'The End. Yours Truly, Huck Finn': Postscript," *MLQ*, 24 (1963), 253-56.

¹³Robert A. Wiggins, *Mark Twain Jackleg Novelist* (Seattle, 1964), p. 73.

¹⁴Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, ed. Bernard L. Stein (Berkeley, 1979), p. 63.

¹⁵*A Connecticut Yankee*, p. 259.

¹⁶Mark Twain, *Pudd'nhead Wilson and Those Extraordinary Twins* (New York, 1899), p. 219.

¹⁷Hershel Parker and Henry Binder, "Exigencies of Composition and Publication: *Billy Budd*, *Sailor* and *Pudd'nhead Wilson*," *NCF*, 33 (1978/79), 131-143.

¹⁸Rpt. in Gladys Carmen Bellamy, *Mark Twain as Literary Artist* (Norman, OK., 1950), p. 318.

¹⁹For a discussion of the unarticulated tensions imbedded in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, see George T. Toles, "Mark Twain and *Pudd'nhead Wilson*: A House Divided," *Novel* 16 (1982/83), 55-75.

²⁰Hershel Parker, "The Lowdown on *Pudd'nhead Wilson*: Jack-Leg Novelist, Unreadable Text, Sense Making Critics, and Basic Issues in Aesthetics," *Resources for American Literary Study*, 9 (1981), especially pp. 224-28.

²¹Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968).

²²Bruce Michelson, "Deus Ludens: The Shaping of Mark Twain's Mysterious Stranger," *Novel* 14 (1980/81), 48.

²³Michelson, p. 59.

²⁴Mark Twain, *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger*, foreword, John S. Tuckey (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1982), p. 185.

²⁵Robert E. Lowrey, "Imagination and Redemption: 44 in the Third Version of *The Mysterious Stranger*," *Southern Review* 18 (1982), 102.

²⁶*No. 44*, p. 186.

²⁷*No. 44*, p. 187.