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Butchered to Make an Austrian Holiday: Individual Morality, the Group, and how Never the Twain Shall Meet

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By the time he wrote *The Mysterious Stranger*, Mark Twain had endured several devastating losses that had irrevocably altered his world view. His literary successes peaked in the 1880s, several decades before his death, and were followed by bankruptcy from disastrous investments and the death of his daughter Suzy and wife Livy. Embittered by the setbacks and tragedies he had endured and no longer obligated to protect Livy's religious sensibilities, Twain's later works take aim at organized religion, the nature of God, and the inherent flaws of humanity. The boyish mischief of convincing others to whitewash a fence and the jubilant frontier optimism from his mining days in California and Nevada are replaced with a cynical and almost nihilistic view of existence.

Twain's "What is Man?" *Letters from the Earth*, and *The Mysterious Stranger*—what some scholars have named his "Diabolical Trilogy"—criticize the Moral Sense, the distinction held by religious orders as our greatest asset. Twain holds the contrarian opinion that this ability to discern between right and wrong is what endows us with the capacity for evil. This Moral Sense is absent in animals, and they are thus incapable of committing the crimes Twain accuses as being all too common in humanity. As another burden to the minority that chooses to do good, they must then contend with the greater community. Twain habitually places his protagonist amidst a corrupt population where the character either succumbs to corruption, or attempts to alter the greater community for good, but late in life, Twain sadly surrenders hope of a human possessing the moral conviction to stand up to the crowd.

There is a pattern that appears in many of Twain's works where he gives us a glimpse of his idea of perfection, and they all involve embracing an individualistic lifestyle and shunning the community. In *Life on the Mississippi*, he recalls the exalted and privileged existence of his days as a steamboat pilot once he had finished his exhaustive apprenticeship:

a pilot, in those days, was the only unfettered and entirely independent human being that lived in the earth. Kings are but the hampered servants of parliament and people; parliaments sit in chains forged by their constituency [...] In truth, every man and woman and child has a master, and worries and frets in servitude; but in the day I write of, the Mississippi pilot had none. His movements were entirely free; he consulted no one, he received commands from nobody (313).

The ideal existence to him was a connection to the perfection and freedom of nature, and a separation from the flaws and corruptions that he saw as inherent in society. In *Roughing It*, he trades the steamboat pilot wheel for a westward traveling stagecoach and revels in the "fresh breezes, vast expanses of level greensward" and most importantly, the "impressive solitude utterly without visible human beings or human habitations" (48). He recalls the native Hawaiians, exiled in their own fashion from the rest of the world and describes the missionaries that traveled to the island to spread "civilization" and with withering sarcasm, mourns the "multitudes who have gone to their graves in this beautiful island and never knew there was a hell!" (463).

Twain's early life experiences as the outsider shaped his literary style, and many of his works can be seen as cloistral fiction, where a stranger approaches a community and either alters

the fundamental nature of it, or is destroyed by it. Examples range from 19th century Hank Parker in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* traveling back to sixth century England, to the prophet in "The War Prayer" who delivers an admonitory sermon to a congregation eager to send its sons to battle, and finally to *The Mysterious Stranger*, where the outsider is not human, but an unfallen angel with the infamous surname of Satan. In this work, Satan reveals himself to a young boy named Theodor and his friends in 16th century Austria in the fictional town of Eseldorf ("Assville"). After Satan gains their trust with a display of miracles, he lectures them on the inherent weaknesses of humanity.

Satan's main criticism of our species is the possession of what he calls the Moral Sense, which is described by the kindly Father Peter as "the faculty which enables us to distinguish good from evil" and a virtue that Theodor has been taught to be proud of, for it separates humanity from the animals. Satan agrees with this sentiment, but with one ironic exception: it is the animals that are perfect while the humans are flawed (616). Free will and the ability to know right from wrong do not count for much in any of Twain's fiction, and especially so in Eseldorf. In several instances, Satan disparages the feeble human morality and champions the superior and effortless ethics of animals. During one of Satan's mystical excursions with Theodor, they visit a prison cell where a man suspected of heresy is being tortured. Satan is apathetic to the suffering of the innocent man, while Theodor, unable to endure the scene, is whisked outside where he calls the act "brutal." Satan admonishes Theodor, claiming that he "should not insult the brutes by such a misuse of that word" and that "No brute ever does a cruel thing—that is the monopoly of those with the Moral Sense (625).

Theodor and his friends silently accuse Satan of cruelties, but since he does not possess the Moral Sense, he insists upon his innocence. Early in the work, Satan creates miniature squirrels, dogs, and birds out of clay and they chase each other and act appropriately to their natural counterparts. Satan then creates a small community of clay humans that start building a castle, and in no time, they began to fight:

and in buzzing little bumblebee voices they were cursing and swearing at each other; now came blows and blood; then they locked themselves together in a life-and-death struggle. Satan reached out his hand and crushed the life out of them with his fingers, threw them away, wiped the red from his fingers on his handkerchief, and went on talking where he had left off: "We cannot do wrong; neither have we any disposition to do it, for we do not know what it is" (606-607).

The boys are horrified by this act and are shocked by Satan claiming an inability to sin, but are quickly lulled back into their previous worship of him. This is perhaps Twain's comment on the nature of God, for despite his devastation at the loss of his wife and daughter, he never seems to lose his belief in the existence of a God, but rather is filled with a crippling depression or rage over his losses.

Later, Theodor and his friends are discussing the disappearance of Hans the town loafer. Theodor had witnessed him beating his dog and spoke out against it, which only warranted a further beating that popped the dog's eye from its socket. Hans had disappeared, and as the boys discuss the event, the dog appears before them. A remarkable scene transpires when Satan, who up to now reacts to human suffering only with indifference, takes a special interest in the wounded dog. The dog approaches him and "began to moan and mutter brokenly, and Satan

began to answer in the same way” (627) and after Satan fixes the dog’s eye back in place and heals him, he informs the boys that Hans had fallen into a ravine and is dying, and instructs them to call for a priest to administer the last rites.

The reason the dog and the prisoner scenes are so important is that it shows that the boys are not incapable of compassion and morality, despite Satan’s numerous criticisms claiming otherwise, but that the overwhelming flaw of human morality in this work is that it seems to only be intact when the characters are in an individual setting. Theodor and Satan were magically transported to the prison where they remained invisible, and Hans held no official power and was held in disdain by the townspeople, and therefore in both circumstances the boys acted with the morality innate within them. When the boys are in proximity of authority figures and are part of a crowd, their will to be moral and compassionate disappears and they take part in the lynch mobs and witch burnings alongside their elders.

Twain scholar Ronald Gervais levels a damning accusation against the boys, where he claims that had Twain written this work earlier, Satan would have only approached the older residents of Eseldorf, but that now he “can no longer depend upon his boys for the saving grace, and now they too share the curse of the Moral Sense” (26). For instance, Theodor explains the witch-terror that had seized the village of late, and that in previous generations, the accused were only old women, but now, there were witches of all ages, and the more that were burned, the more sprang up to take their place. Theodor recalls a scene where a group of young schoolgirls were convicted of witchcraft and were sentenced to be burned alive. He acknowledged that it

was “just and right” (630) and he goes to see the burning where he recognizes a former playmate tied to the stake and then he is finally struck with pity and has to leave.

There are two further scenes regarding the stifling of the individual’s conscience by the overwhelming resolve of the crowd. First, six months prior, an old woman who had used home remedies to heal minor ailments was also accused of witchcraft and sentenced to burn. Theodor arrives early to the scene and while no one is around, gives her an apple before the executioners return with another victim and carry out the sentence. Second, a lynch mob, impatient with the official tribunal, found their own victim in a friendless old woman and Theodor finds himself unwittingly swept up into the mob. He admits to “feeling sorry for her” as she is being chased by the overzealous crowd, and being moved by seeing the woman’s daughter crying out to her, but still he “threw a stone at her” because “all were throwing stones and each was watching his neighbor” and notice would have been made had Theodor not taken part in the violence (631). Gervais, seemingly with Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer on his mind, laments that “this oft-recurring episode of Twain’s fiction, that of a boy helping others in defiance of the community, comes to its sad conclusion here – such a boy no longer exists” (26).

Satan’s numerous examples of the shortcomings of our Moral Sense are not sufficient to fully prove his point to Theodor, for also in the work he points out the superiority of the animals present in the story. Concerning Hans’ dog, Satan admonishes the human race by comparison to the animal when he says “He only wanted help for the man who had misused him, and he thought only of that... He has watched by his master two nights. What do you think of your race? Is heaven reserved for it, and this dog ruled out, as your teachers tell you?” (628). After

Theodor's recollection of the accused schoolgirls, Satan calls over a bullock from a nearby pasture and compares it with humanity, saying that the animal "wouldn't drive children mad with hunger and fright and loneliness, and then burn them for confessing to things invented for them which had never happened [...] for he is not besmirched with the Moral Sense, but is as the angels are, and knows no wrong, and never does it" (631).

In addition to his philosophical lessons to the boys of Eseldorf, Satan takes it upon himself to improve the condition of several of the residents, but his efforts result in nothing short of a more merciful death than their previous destiny had dictated. The one exception to this is the fate of Father Peter who, after Satan drives him to madness, believes himself to be the Emperor of Austria and is seen marching and shouting orders to imagined servants. This act is proof of Satan's disdain of the Moral Sense, for what it says is that with this flaw intact within us, we are incapable of happiness, and the only hope of a fulfilling life is the forced extraction of our sanity, along with our free will and Moral Sense, making us as the unfallen angels and the beasts of Creation. The raving lunatic is seen as a harmless entity, incapable of the persecution and torture of his fellow beings and this extreme measure is the only chance Twain offers our flawed species of attaining a true morality.

There are several patterns similar to Twain's previous works present in *The Mysterious Stranger*, with the morally flawed community perhaps being the dominant one. The royal subjects of Camelot in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* possess no empathy for anyone beneath their social class and were blind to blatant acts of violence and cruelty. Huck's adopted town of St. Petersburg professed Christian morals, but willfully held other human beings

in bondage. Similarly in *Eseldorf*, the citizens are intentionally held in ignorance and superstition, and will unquestioningly follow any order issued by someone of the religious class, no matter how repugnant. Scholar Daniel Wright points out that in Twain's fiction, he often studies the actions of the larger group that "reveal the difficulty of an individual's achieving or maintaining moral integrity" inside the group, and the individual is usually "plied into conformity" by a "habit of unthinking acquiescence" (88). Theodor is easily drawn into the episode early in the work where the young girls were burned after their forced confession until he finally realized the cruelty of the scene only after recognizing one of the girls. This allowed the objective reality of the situation to strike home and for him to realize the massive flaw in his previous belief.

The circumstances regarding *Huckleberry Finn* and *Theodor Fisher* beg to be compared. Their moral makeup is similar, but the critical difference between them is their respective standings they hold within their communities. Huck's identity is the son of a dysfunctional outsider, and he bristles at every attempt made by established citizens at his inclusion into society. His encounters with the members of St. Petersburg, the feuding Grangerford/Shepherdson families, and the townspeople during the Colonel Sherburn debacle, Huck the outsider is never able to as Wright describes "penetrate the community deeply enough to matter or represent any meaningful threat to the value system" (90). Conversely, Theodor is a member of a corrupt community where "the faulty moral code is never questioned from within" (Wright 90). In both works, the community is where true morals are incapable of being realized,

but Huck Finn is the only character to be given the freedom to explore and protect his innate morality.

Huck's morality comes from the real experience of spending time with Jim, the subject of his moral dilemma. Scholar Alan Goldman writes that Huck's "guiding emotion is sympathy for his friend Jim," and that "his trip on the river and away from the corrupt society he flees constitutes and in the novel symbolizes a moral transformation" (4). Throughout their lives, both Huck and Theodor have inherited corrupt morals from their societies. Living on the fringe of St. Petersburg, Huck further separates himself from his inherited society through necessity and ends up traveling up the river with Jim. Goldman claims that Huck's initial moral obligation to return Jim is eventually eliminated when Huck decides to forego morality altogether and "risk an eternity in Hell" and from then on, he "has no remaining motivation to do what he believes morality requires" (2). This is a step Huck is able to take due to his separation from the community, and his connection to nature, and Satan would no doubt applaud Huck's action in forsaking his Moral Sense. Theodor is able to notice the immoral acts of Eseldorf, but due to his acceptance as an insider in the community, he is too influenced by its nature and therefore is unable to summon the will to actively act in opposition to the prevailing mores.

On a final note regarding Huck Finn, Twain scholar Patrick K. Dooley writes that "despite his lack of education," Huck is able to develop a "genuine friendship" with Jim and that his sympathy "overrides an imperative of conscience sanctioned by the official morality of slave-owning Missouri" (88). On the contrary, because of his lack of education, or rather the countless hours spent exposed to the indoctrination of the schoolhouse or pro-slavery pulpit, that Huck

could find the morally correct path within himself. Had he been a “respectable” member of society like Theodor and his friends (the sons of judges and tax collectors), he would have had the proper “education” and training to know that you are supposed to turn in runaway slaves and would never be guilty of the crime of helping one escape. In his last point of evidence for Huck’s morality, Dooley fittingly describes Twain as a “modified transcendentalist” (89). He compares Huck to Henry David Thoreau, responding to a “genuine moral prompting from deep within his conscience,” the kind we are more in tune with “away from society” (89). This accounts for the “beautiful and lyrical descriptions” of the “languid and peaceful days and nights” that Huck and Jim share on the river (89). Theodor does speak early on of his love of nature where he spent time playing with his friends, and knew “the hills and the woods as well as the birds knew them; for we were always roaming them when we had leisure—at least, when we were not swimming or boating or fishing, or playing on the ice or sliding down hill” (602), but unlike Huck’s, his time spent in Nature’s perfection was always interrupted by his return to society.

Alas, for Theodor there was no escaping down the Danube to meditate upon the immoral practice of witch burning or torturing heretics. In Eseldorf during the stoning, lynching, burnings, and torture, Theodor’s sympathy is always stirred, but he is too entrenched inside his society to take a stand against the injustice. When he is alone or with Satan, he is able to preserve his compassion and speak against the cruelties for what they are. Theodor’s natural state is compassionate. He does not seek out to harm others, but when confronted by official power and influence, he quickly submits instead of facing the consequences of his disobedience.

In this flawed society, evil triumphs either through active participation or the inaction of the good.

The majority of the population is capable and willing to choose good over evil, if there are no adverse consequences. If there are consequences to moral action, all but the suicidally just will comply. After witnessing the lynch mob, Satan explains to Theodor that he had read the mind of the crowd and the vast majority did not wish to be there, and then shares his opinion on the state of humanity:

I know your race. It is made up of sheep. It is governed by minorities, seldom or never by majorities. It suppresses its feelings and its beliefs and follows the handful that makes the most noise. Sometimes the noisy handful is right, sometimes wrong; but no matter, the crowd follows it. The vast majority of the race, whether savage or civilized, are secretly kind-hearted and shrink from inflicting pain, but in the presence of the aggressive and pitiless minority they don't dare to assert themselves (663).

The kind-heartedness Satan describes is a desired trait in the populace of any community, but it can often mean a lack of assertiveness which may be preyed upon by the ambitious. Satan's comparison of humans and sheep bears reflection, for it shares a trait with his previously held idea of the Moral Sense. No doubt Father Peter has assured Theodor throughout his life to regard the Church and its leaders as shepherds, as Christ taught his own followers. Here, Satan confronts that idea with the same vehemence as he did the Moral Sense, another highly regarded trait of the human race. After weighing human virtue against the bullock, the dog, and elsewhere

in the text, a horse and finding it wanting, here Satan finds one animal that we are compatible with: the sheep. No matter if it is to the pasture or the abattoir, if anyone displays a sense of superiority or disdain for us, we will follow them and willfully silence our own self-interest or morality.

Along with this inherent weakness, through Satan, Twain is really attacking our possession of conscience. This sounds extreme, because the natural assumption is that with the absence of our conscience or Moral Sense, humanity would deteriorate into a state of debauchery or cruelty where dishonesty and violence would run rampant. Satan, however, carefully explains to Theodor the benefits of an existence free from

...a sense whose function is to distinguish between right and wrong, with liberty to choose which of them he will do. Now what advantage can he get out of that? He is always choosing, and in nine cases out of ten he prefers the wrong. There shouldn't be any wrong; and without the Moral Sense there couldn't be any. And yet he is such an unreasoning creature that he is not able to perceive that the Moral Sense degrades him to the bottom layer of animated beings and is a shameful possession (625).

He is not saying that the natural world is free of violence or cruelty, but that the harm done by the animals in nature is of a wholly different kind than that found in humanity. A lion or a wolf may be seen as cruel when it kills, but it is done out of necessity for survival. When Theodor's friend Liza drowns, and the carpenter that built her coffin seizes the body of the dead girl and refuses to return it to the mother out of spite over a previous outstanding debt, Seppi (one of the boys Satan regularly appears to) begs Satan to interfere in the matter. Satan simply remarks that

the carpenter is “acting quite neatly for that species of animal” and that he would “interfere if he found a horse acting in such a way” (654). This is intentionally ridiculous, for though the horse is capable of throwing or kicking a rider, it holds no capacity for prejudice, torture, or any other human construct of the like.

How does the corrupt crowd have the power to make individuals lose their inherent goodness and conform to the baser motives of the group? Satan claims that our shortcoming as humans is our possession of the Moral Sense. Theodor and his friends have moments of ethical behavior and have shown their capacity for empathy and kindness when alone. Though they wholly lack any desire to harm, they betray their innate goodness when even covert pressure is applied to them from their corrupt society. They become guilty of violence and are unthinkingly swept up into the crowd’s enthusiasm. As mentioned earlier, Theodor admits to throwing a stone at the woman hanged by the townspeople, though he did not wish to, but feared the crowd’s retaliation. No overt order was given, but all present in the mob knew exactly what was expected of them, and that the woman’s fate would be shared with anyone accused of mere neutrality. If noncompliance was so threatening to the crowd and the individual could so easily be swayed to violence, active resistance would be suicidal.

Literature can show the patterns of the corrupt crowd, but for a more thorough explanation of the inner workings of its behavior, I will defer to psychological research. Studying Freud’s theory on group psychology, historian and psychoanalyst Daniel Pick writes of the underlying motives inside the crowd and sheds light on the destructive actions of the mobs of Eseldorf. Pick finds that the crowd is under a hypnosis of sorts, where the individual members of

the crowd view “an early relation to parents and perhaps echoes the primal horde’s attitude towards the primal father” (41). Certainly, hypnosis is a troublesome concept to scientifically explain, though it can be used here as a metaphorical concept. The individual seems to shed his unique persona and take on the larger identity of the crowd, which in turn acts as a singular entity instead of a collection of distinct members. This certainly explains the influence the crowd holds over its members, and the seeming impossibility of individual contrarian action. The mob leader takes the place of the head controlling the limbs of the body, and no member of the body is able to rebel against its will.

Combining Pick’s Freudian analysis with Satan’s stance on our Moral Sense, there is a logical and neat frame of events that explain the actions of the crowd. The individual for the most part is content to refrain from violence and wishes to live in peace. The group leader (hypnotist) however, enjoys an influence over the mass of individuals, and wishes to prosecute and burn to death a witch. When the group gathers, due to the “animal magnetism” of the primal father, he “asserts that he is in possession of a power that robs the subject of his own will” (41). The group’s if not benevolent, then neutral Moral Sense therefore is now replaced with the group leader’s, and finds itself unable to act upon the previous moral convention of nonviolence, and become a homogenous entity wholly under the control of the charismatic leader.

Identification is also an important concept in the group dynamic, and Freud states that it is ambivalent from the outset of the relationship. The group members are held together by “an emotional investment in the leader” and also with “the others who are led” (45). The nature of

this hypnotic identification is difficult to separate from that of a romantic relationship, where present is the “same humble subjection, the same compliance, the same absence of criticism” and most importantly, “the same sapping of the subject’s own initiative” (47). The group leader asserts himself as the ego ideal, meaning the “narcissistic idealization of the ego” (47) that places the leader in an unrealistically perfect role. This group/leader dynamic is a relationship of two, tied together by the simulation of a pseudo-romantic nature, and the targeted individual is therefore excluded from the love of and protection of the group and treated accordingly.

The group, being under the hypnotic trance of a charismatic primal father figure, and having relinquished its free will and sensibilities is therefore reduced to an infantile sense of awareness. It regresses into an “impulsive, changeable and irritable” entity, incapable of premeditation or perseverance, and “cannot tolerate any delay between its desire and the fulfillment of what it desires” (8). It is “credulous and open to influence,” possesses “no critical faculty,” and works only in extremes, and the only persuasion it is capable of heeding are those of “excessive stimulus” (8). It will not listen to reason, but is only capable of understanding “the most forcible colors” and incessant repetition (8). Thus we see the mob as the manifestation of an insatiable and relentless id in its purest form.

No matter how reasonable Freud’s analysis seems, it still remains in the realm of the hypothetical and further proof is needed in order to satisfy a scientific explanation. Professor Stanley Milgram set up an experiment in the early 1970s where a diverse collection of the population were told to supervise a simple memory game, and to push a button that would shock

the subject when a wrong answer was given. It was all a ruse and the subject was an actor, but the tester was given a sample of the lowest setting shock, and told the voltage would increase for every incorrect answer. Milgram polled his colleagues and graduate students as to the maximum voltage the subjects would inflict upon their supposed test partner before calling an end to the experiment, and the majority guessed that most subjects would stop at 150 volts when the victim “explicitly demanded release,” that a mere four percent would reach 300 volts and only a “pathological fringe” would reach the full 400 volts (258). Milgram, familiar with psychological experiments and influenced by his research of obedience in Nazi Germany, asserted that the majority of the test subjects would call off the experiment early. The results surprised all involved, where 65% of the subjects reached the 400 volt maximum on their test partner.

Why were so many average people capable of inflicting this amount of pain upon others? Psychologist Neera Badhwar allows for a few of the subjects to be “psychopathically indifferent to others’ suffering” but for the most part, the majority felt it was “difficult, even excruciating to ‘have’ to continue shocking the ‘learners,’ and continually implored the experimenter to ‘let them’ stop” (259). The subjects had no concrete reason to continue inflicting suffering upon their test partners, and yet they continued and felt deprived of their sense of free will. This echoes Satan’s admonition of our sheep-like nature, and Freud’s theory of the group leader’s will being forced upon the individual. The individual person in the experiment would not approach a stranger and shock them with an electrical device, but in this controlled laboratory setting, was seemingly under a hypnotic trance to obey orders that were contrary to their personal morality.

Milgram conducted several experiments with different variations, which demonstrated that certain factors brought about higher percentages of obedience. For instance, the authority figure's physical absence in the room decreased the subject's likelihood for obedience by 43.5%, suggesting that the individual is able to withhold an innate morality separate from the corrupt authority. However, with the authority figure present, Milgram instructed the "victim" to "pound on the walls at 300 volts," or to "demand to be released starting at 150 volts" and to remind the subject of "a slight heart condition" at 150, 195, and 330 volts. Chillingly, none of these factors made any difference to the results. Still, 65% of the subjects increased the electricity to 400 volts, all while they "protest, plead, sweat" yet still obeyed (262).

Citing "Aristotelian virtue" as the standard, Badhwar posits that only a "small minority do the right thing" for the right reasons and with the right emotions. For the rest of humanity, Badhwar accuses "the vast majority of people are disposed to be...weak-willed" so that they will "abdicate their own better judgement in favor of the judgement of a trusted authority-figure, or of a group" so far as that they would lose their sense of responsibility for their individual actions, and need "neither temptation nor fear to be induced to do evil" (261).

Comparing the results of the Milgram experiments with the wave of violence perpetrated by the Khmer Rouge, psychologist Miguel Pena e Cunha provides a step-by-step guide how to create a wholly obedient populace. First, as a way of confronting Milgram's critics that claim his results came from a controlled environment and were thus incompatible with real-world scenarios Cunha describes the nature of Cambodia during the Khmer Rouge's reign of terror. He points out that Pol Pot had Cambodia "so extremely closed that even the entry of outside

reporters was denied” even though it would have benefitted his cause for the world to see the results of Vietnamese aggression (294). Theodor describes Eseldorf as “far from the world, and asleep” and was in “woodsy solitude where news from the world hardly ever came to disturb its dreams” (599). Secondly, the only constant authority figure Eseldorf knew was that of the established Church, an entity with absolute power over its subjects. The Cambodians under the Democratic Kampuchea regime had the *Angkar*, a centrally controlled organization that oversaw the judicially sanctioned extermination camps. Finally, Pol Pot sought out to “locate and eliminate” those accused of counter-revolutionary actions, whether real or imagined. This fever pitch of paranoia guaranteed that “enemies were located everywhere,” from the topmost levels of the party to the prison guards at the extermination camps (295). Cambodians were placed under an extreme suspicion of their neighbor and were urged to “kill ten friends rather than keep one enemy alive” (295). In Eseldorf, the hysteria regarding the persecution of witches serves as a less extreme parallel to create their own atmosphere of paranoia and fear. Theodor claims that, regarding the family of an accused witch, “when that kind of malady is in the blood it does not always come out with just one burning,” and that Eseldorf was in the grips of an unprecedented “witch-terror” that had “surpassed the memory of the oldest villagers” and that the “mere mention of a witch was almost enough to frighten us out of our wits” (629). All of these factors; a singular source of authority in a closed off society and a paranoid and fearful population are the perfect conditions for a “total institution” to “socialize their members to make them obedient” (293).

In the work's philosophical climax, Satan's revelation that the entire universe is but an illusion dreamed up by Theodor places us in an unsatisfying gridlock. Theodor is stuck in a corrupt society where he faces a moral code opposed to his own, and must either make a suicidal stand contrary to the status quo, assimilate, or somehow divorce himself from his community to live in isolation. This solitary life would allow him to preserve his morality, but at the cost of his identity and perhaps even his sanity. Scholar Joseph Doherty warns about the inherent dangers of absolute separation from community, and the inevitable solipsism that naturally follows such an extreme stance. He cautions against the 19th century pattern in American literature of the single-minded individual succumbing to extreme solitude and isolation such as Melville's Captain Ahab or Hawthorne's Goodman Brown, where each character is "fascinated by the destruction visited upon consciousness when it is wholly self-enclosed" (66). Should Theodor truly follow Satan's solipsistic conclusion, he would inevitably enclose himself within the maze of self-perception and thus wander aimlessly throughout his existence. To fully appreciate Twain's existential crisis, the only alternative to the two options of assimilation into the corrupt community and the lonely, solitary existence is to be like Father Peter, and have the Moral Sense removed, and live life as a madman.

Notes

There lies a dilemma when choosing *The Mysterious Stranger* for scholarship, for it was revealed by the scholar John S. Tuckey in 1963 that Mark Twain's literary executor Albert Bigelow Paine had taken liberties with the "Eseldorf" version of the work. The solipsistic ending was tacked on from the "Print shop" version, and the character of the astrologer was wholly invented and placed in the "Eseldorf" version. I have excluded any mention of the astrologer, and included the solipsistic ending, for it was in Twain's words, but admittedly for a different version of the same story.

Had there been a complete blacklist of scholarship after 1963, I would have chosen not to write about this version of the work, but there are several scholars, much more suited to the task than I, that have continued to research themes found in the Eseldorf version. Ronald Gervais, in his addendum to his "The Fall as Salvation," states emphatically that "if any study is to be made of the tale, this is the version we must study," despite the revealed editing perpetrated by Paine.

Scholar Ryan Simmons also weighs in on the side of Eseldorf by pointing out that neither John S. Tuckey, the man credited with discovering Paine's edits, nor prominent Twain scholar William M. Gibson believed that the 1916 Eseldorf version should be "removed from critical consideration" (127). The Eseldorf version is the one included in Twain's short story compilations being sold in bookstores now. There seems to be a consensus to accept this version of the story, complete with its edits and checkered past.

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