



Mark Twain's Mysterious Stranger Manuscripts (Mark Twain Papers)

Mark Twain

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Six, years after Mark Twain's death, Albert Bigelow Paine, the author's literary executor, brought out a bowdlerized edition of *The Mysterious Stranger*, silently cut and cobbled from three unfinished manuscripts. This volume presents those manuscripts for the first time, exactly as mark Twain wrote them.

Paine's disingenuous account of the history of his edition has, until recently, misled critics into believing that Mark Twain's creative abilities deserted him for a time, only to be recovered in the composition of *The Mysterious Stranger*. By writing this tale, said Bernard DeVoto, Mark Twain "saved himself in the end, and came back from the edge of insanity, and found as much peace as any man may find in his last years, and brought his talent into fruition and made it whole again." Although most critics have praised the work as the finest fiction of Mark Twain's later years, Paine and his collaborator, Frederick A. Duneka, so changed many of the book's essentials that it does not fully or accurately reflect the author's mood and thought.

Paine's edition of the book was based, for the most part, on the earliest of the three versions, written during the time of Mark Twain's supposed creative paralysis. He and Duneka suppressed a quarter of the text of this manuscript and grafted onto it the last chapter of the latest version. Mark Twain began the first manuscript, "The Chronicle of Young Satan," in 1897; late in 1898, he tried to recast the story in a Hannibal setting, then returned to his first version, only to abandon it permanently in 1900. Between 1902 and 1908, he worked on the third and longest version, the only one the author called "The Mysterious Stranger."

The publication of these texts therefore offers an opportunity to observe Mark Twain's sustained literary struggle with a central theme and to reevaluate the tantalizing question of the author's late work.

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