

## Moral Growth Through Gain and Loss of Power in Mark Twain's *The Prince and the Pauper*\*<sup>1</sup>

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In his four major novels—*The Gilded Age* (1873), *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876), *The Prince and the Pauper* (1882), and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), Mark Twain reveals an awareness that self-realization at the expense of the community's stability causes moral as well as physical isolation from it. This is especially apparent in *The Prince and the Pauper*.

The two primary characters in *The Prince and the Pauper*, Tom Canty and Edward Tudor, though placed at vastly opposite poles of society, entertain similar dreams and fantasies: they both desire to escape from what they consider the oppressiveness of daily life. Tom Canty—who poses as a prince and almost usurps the English throne—is a pauper with fantasies of power. However, once he switches places with the Prince, he discovers that power is not simply a matter of position. As prince, Tom has power but cannot control it. In the end, he no longer rules with power but instead is ruled by it. On the other hand is Edward Tudor—the true prince cast into the streets as a pauper. Edward loses his power upon assuming the role of a pauper. At that time, he discovers that power without moral guidance (such as the rule of his father, King Henry VIII) is power misused. Consequently, Tom and Edward are allowed to become aware of the responsibilities that inevitably come with power and learn that falsely gained power is a betrayal of society paid for with disillusionment and moral dissolution.

The central characters of four of Mark Twain's novels—*The Gilded Age* (1873), *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876), *The Prince and the Pauper* (1882), and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885)—struggle to transcend the limits placed upon them by society and in the process endanger not only its welfare but their own as well. It is significant to notice that in each of these novels, Mark Twain reveals an awareness that self-realization at the expense of the community's stability causes

moral as well as physical isolation from it. This seems especially apparent in *The Prince and the Pauper*—a novel which Mark Twain himself considered “grave and stately” and even considered “publishing anonymously lest his reputation as a mere humorist obscure its profundity” (Towers 193). A crucial fact of this novel is that the central characters learn about themselves through gain and loss of power. Twain accomplishes this growth in self-awareness by permitting the physical

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realization of Tom and Edward's dreams and fantasies. Tom and Edward are allowed to become aware of the responsibilities that inevitably come with power and learn that falsely gained power is a betrayal of society paid for with disillusionment and moral dissolution.

## I

Early in *The Prince and the Pauper* we see that Tom Canty, a pauper living in Offal Court, dreams not only of a better life but also of power. Every night Tom dreams himself to sleep with fantasies of life "in the company of jeweled and gilded princelings who lived in vast palaces and had servants salaaming before them" (19). But "when he awoke in the morning and looked upon the wretchedness about him, his dream had its usual effect: it had intensified the sordidness of his surroundings a thousand fold. Then came bitterness, and heartbreak, and tears" (20). Tom wishes to escape the restraints of his oppressive situation. In the beginning, his form of escape is fantasy, "delicious picturings to himself of the charmed life of a petted prince in a regal palace" (18). However, the fantasy has such control over him that he begins imitating the courtly gestures and speech of royalty in the presence of his Offal Court neighbors. We see that:

By and by Tom's reading and dreaming about princely life wrought such a strong effect upon him that he began to act the prince, unconsciously. His speech and manners became curiously ceremonious and courtly, to the vast admiration and amusement of his intimates. But Tom's influence among these young people began to grow now day by day, and in time he came to be looked up to by them, with a sort of

wondering awe, as a superior being. He seemed to know so much! And he could do and say such marvelous things! And withal, he was so deep and wise! (18)

However, Tom's primary reward for his "greatness" is mockery from the inhabitants of Offal Court. This mockery makes his life even more miserable, until suddenly his dreams become reality. One day, in his wanderings, Tom finds himself outside the royal palace. Through several serendipitous actions, Tom is invited inside the palace by Prince Edward. At this time, the reader is made aware of the fact that although Edward possesses all that Tom dreams of, he too dreams of a different life. He laments to Tom, "If that I could but once clothe me in raiment like to thine, and strip my feet, and revel in the mud once, with no one to rebuke me or forbid, meseemeth I could forgo the crown" (25). An obvious common element to the boy's dreams is a sense of imprisonment and spiritual deprivation, the denial of selfhood that neither has realized in life. Tom and the Prince exchange clothing and discover that they are exact doubles. This eventually leads to the guards mistaking Edward for Tom and throwing him into the streets as a pauper. From this point on, the dreams and fantasies of the two boys are reality.

As an aspect of Mark Twain's realism, we see that his characters often dream of fame and power more than of justice. In *The Prince and the Pauper*, Twain makes clear that it is Tom's sense of impotence and isolation that inspires his visions of wealth, respect, and authority. In his make-believe realm enacted by the urchins of Offal Court

he was a prince, his special comrades were guards, chamberlains, equerries, lords- and ladies-in-waiting, and the royal family.

Daily the mock prince was received with elaborate ceremonials borrowed by Tom from his romantic readings; daily the great affairs of the mimic kingdom were discussed in royal council; and daily his mimic highness issued decrees to his imaginary armies, navies, and viceroalties. (19)

In his play as in his dreams, Tom acts out a merely poetic justice or reversed roles, exchanging misery for might. He goes to the royal palace only because his fantasies demand reinforcement by the sight of a real prince. And when he is befriended by Edward and the boys change costume, Tom parades before a glass, "admiring his finery." He draws his, that is Edward's, sword and kisses the blade in imitation of the knights he has seen conveying noble prisoners to the Tower; he fondles a dagger, and luxuriates in the splendor of the prince's apartments. In such scenes the emphasis upon weapons and costume suggests that Tom understands power much as Henry Tudor and John Canty do: not as responsibility, but as self-indulgence.

We see that Tom quickly becomes addicted to power even while he is attempting to establish a Tudor court based on humanity. By the third day of his brief reign, "he felt less uncomfortable than at first; he was getting a little used to his circumstances and surroundings; his chains still galled, but not all the time; he found that the presence and homage of the great affected and embarrassed him less and less sharply with every hour that drifted over his head" (93). Later we see that Tom is less impressed with the good he has done than by the sudden efficacy of his will.<sup>1</sup> Tom realizes that he is truly living his fantasies and thinks, "'Truly it is like what I used to feel when I read the old priest's tales and did imagine mine own self a prince, giving law and command to all'" (95). As the time of his

coronation drew near, "he lost his fears; his misgivings faded out and died; his embarrassments departed and gave place to an easy and confident bearing" (177).

Unfortunately, Tom's adaptation to his new situation comes at the expense of his earlier goodness. As the story progresses, it becomes clear that Tom has allowed power to corrupt him; he no longer rules with power but is instead ruled by power. The most significant area in which we see this is in the fact that Tom ceases to be concerned with the fate of the true prince, Edward, and thus his guilt becomes *fait accompli*. "As time wore on, and the prince did not come, Tom's mind became more and more occupied with his new and enchanting experiences, and by little and little the vanished monarch faded almost out of his thoughts; and finally, when he did intrude upon them at intervals, he was an unwelcome specter, for he made Tom feel guilty and ashamed" (177). This decline in Tom's values becomes even clearer in his increasing indifference to his own mother and sisters, who, in his earlier fantasies, were to be the chief beneficiaries of his rise. "At first he pined for them, sorrowed for them, longed to see them, but later the thought of their coming some day in their rags and dirt, and betraying him with their kisses, and pulling him down from his lofty place, and dragging him back to penury and degradation and the slums made him shudder" (177-78). Tom hits bottom in his decline in the coronation process itself. Just when he is feeling that "the one thing worth living for in this world was to be king, and a nation's idol" (180), Tom's mother recognizes him and breaks through the crowd towards him. Although he has also recognized her, Tom unthinkingly cries out, "'I do not know you woman'" (182). Tom's denial of his mother, like Henry's earlier failure to identify his own son, is also a repudiation of his

intrinsic humanity. It ensures that his new grandeur will not in the end relieve his old sense of powerless alienation. His rise, then, can hardly be understood as a vindication of the people or democracy as against kingship. Ironically, Tom at last becomes the proper heir of the unhappy Henry as he rejects his mother for the sake of the throne. In Tom Canty's England, as in Henry's, power has been divorced from humanity and from moral responsibility. Merely transferring that power from the coddled Edward to the street-wise Tom will make little difference either for England or for the usurper himself.

## II

Obviously the abatement of England's troubles does not lie in the placement of a pauper on the throne. Instead, the solution must be found in the moral and political re-education and eventual accession of the true prince, Edward. Early in the novel, the two boys' daydreams provided a means to judge crucial differences in their characters. Both boys are fully aware of the fact that they are not free; however, while Tom defines freedom by social power, Edward seeks freedom in nature and identification with his people. He dreams of living as a commoner and "revel [ing] in the mud." However, Edward will not be transformed merely by yearning for the mud. He must also undergo something akin to Thoreau's 'abrasive simplification.' That is, he must rid himself of his father's perverse idea of kingship, and in the process he must shed his own royally conditioned character. Then he must be reborn in the traditional ethic which Henry VIII and modern England have rejected.

After Edward achieves his fantasy and is demoted from future King of England to a penniless pauper, we see that he, like Tom

Canty, also undergoes radical changes in his perspective on life. Edward is first influenced by his association with the orphans, beggars, outlaws, and master-less men who are both the victims and the products of Tudor society. When John Canty abused him or the violent mob outside the guildhall ridiculed him, Edward is both confused and resentful. He takes the offensive and unjust treatment personally; he does not comprehend that this injustice is inherent to the very system his father has created and which he hopes to inherit; he does not realize that the common citizens of London have learned brutality from their rulers.

Edward is forced to take refuge among a band of outlaws once John Canty murders Father Andrew and flees London. Shortly after becoming acquainted with this level of society, Edward realizes that there are two classes of criminals. Most, like Canty and his confederate Hugo, are products of the city, conditioned to degradation from youth. Although this type of criminal preys upon the system, they also perfectly represent its predatory values. The other class of criminal that Edward encounters is made up of ruined peasants who were forced into their present state of lawlessness by society itself. They have been "'turned shiftless and helpless upon the world because their farms were taken from them to be changed to sheep ranges. They begged and were whipped at the cart's tail, naked from the girdle up, till the blood ran, then set upon the stocks to be pelted; they begged again, were whipped again, and deprived of an ear; they begged a third time—poor devils, what else could they do?—and were branded on the cheek with a red-hot iron, then sold for slaves'"(111).

Edward is affected by these stories in a beneficial way; he denounces the system which reduces upright subjects to slaves and outlaws, and proclaims, "'This day the end of that law

is come'" (113). This scene is significant in that it is the first instance in which Edward uses his royal identity to assert justice; formerly he had used his authority only in an attempt to save himself from his tormentors or to release his frustrations upon them. His proclamation is even more important in that it shows Edward's recognition that his father's law opposes freedom and enforces powerlessness on the common citizens.

Edward's introduction into the outlaw's society is the first stage of his re-education. This phase allows him to perceive the true source of his and England's troubles—the degenerate monarchy and the bloody reign of his father, Henry VIII. From this point on all that remains is Edward's instruction in the positive older values<sup>2</sup> of society which will all enable him to liberate the people and realize his own selfhood. Edward's mentor through the next stage of his development is Miles Hendon—a boyish, good-hearted soldier who is in a predicament similar to Edward's. Hendon's very appearance speaks for the downfall of England's standards. "His doublet and trunks were of rich material, but faded and threadbare, and their gold-laced adornments were sadly tarnished; his ruff was rumpled and damaged; the plume of his slouched hat was broken and had a bedraggled and disreputable look; at his side he wore a long rapier in a rusty iron sheath . . . ." Due to his appearance, the guildhall mob treated Hendon as "another prince in disguise" (65). We see that the kindness and generosity with which Miles treats Edward contrasts greatly with the meanness and hostility of the modern-day mob. He tells Edward, "'Though thou be prince or no prince, 'tis all one; thou be'st a gallant lad, and not friendless either'" (65). Like Edward, Miles must reinstate his identity to reclaim his rightful inheritance.

Hendon's influence allows Edward's develop-

ment of a concept of kingship which is entirely different from his father's. As Towers points out:

Whether he is despoiling the church, vengefully lusting after the head of his old ally Norfolk, or imposing a presumably insane prince upon the already suffering realm, Henry uses his power only reflexively, to reassert and perpetuate an authority divorced from humane or moral ends. (200)

In contrast to Henry's use of power, we see that Edward has come to the realization that a king's authority is derived from and must serve a higher good—God and the people he rules. When Edward names Hendon Earl of Kent, he says "'Kings cannot ennoble thee, thou good, great soul, for One who is higher than kings hath done that for thee; but a king can confirm thy nobility to men'" (172).

### III

In the climactic scene of the novel, Tom's coronation, Prince Edward emerges at the crucial moment from behind the tomb of Edward the Confessor and is crowned rightful King of England. The Edward who was the son and heir of Henry VIII has died, and the new King Edward, struck from the mold of a glorious English past, has been reborn, rising from the grave of the last great English ruler before the Conquest. Finally, we see that Tom's rejection of his mother, John Canty's wrongful identification of Prince Edward, and King Henry's willful misidentification of his son have been negated by the affirmation of Prince Edward's true ancestry. It seems that this affirmation resolves both the personal and public themes of the novel, for while the old Edward had felt trapped in the palace and

isolated from the people he would eventually rule—and therefore isolated from his true strength and his true self—the new Edward is defined by his association with his subjects. He asks his courtiers, “‘What doest thou know of suffering and oppression? I and my people know, but not thou’” (205).

Fortunately for Tom Canty, Edward’s ascension to the throne also saves him (Tom) from spiritual damnation. For although Tom accomplished much good in the course of his brief reign, his misunderstanding and misuse of power ultimately promised only to continue King Henry’s reign of blood and terror. We see that Tom’s succession had not redefined power but had merely relocated it. As king, Tom Canty had no means of escape or source of refuge and inevitably had no option but submission to the expectations of his office. Tom’s moral failure clearly indicates that life in the court can corrupt even the purest, the most innocent will. Tom’s realization that power does not solve all problems and neither brings happiness nor leads to freedom finally allows him to relinquish his fantasy world and come to terms with reality. Therefore, Tom’s true fulfillment in *The Prince and the Pauper* is not in abandoning the throne but instead is in reestablishing the old social order by accepting his position as “king’s ward.”

From the skillfull manner in which he enables Tom and Edward to achieve both moral and social stability, it is obvious that Mark Twain was not a cruel or uncaring “father” to his characters. In *The Prince and the Pauper*, Twain provided his heroes with a resolution that permitted moral growth and awareness. Through the physical realization of their dreams and fantasies, Tom and Edward are permitted growth and development. They are allowed to become aware of the responsibilities that inevitably come with power and learn that falsely gained power is a betrayal of society

paid for with disillusionment and moral dissolution.

### Notes

1. Before assuming the role of prince, in his daydreams and make-believe court, Tom portrayed himself as a fair and just monarch. Indeed, early in his “reign” we see that Tom uses his new-found power to revoke the “law of blood” that existed under the rule of Henry VIII. As royal judge, Tom frees an accused witch when the woman fails to produce a magical storm in order to save her daughter’s life. With great wisdom and compassion, Tom concludes, “‘I think the woman hath said true. An’ my mother were in her place and gifted with the devil’s functions, she had not stayed a moment to call her storms and lay the whole land to ruins if the saving of my forfeit life were the price she got! It is argument that other mothers are made in like mold’” (102). However, although Tom’s early rule appears wise and fair, it is obvious that in the end neither his wisdom nor his virtue can withstand the influence and demands of society.
2. By “older values of society,” I am referring to the societal values which existed prior to King Henry VIII’s reign. Specifically, Twain felt that England should return to the values of King Alfred’s reign and he manipulates events in *The Prince and the Pauper* so that this occurs at the conclusion of the novel.

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Mark Twainの『王子と乞食』における  
権力の獲得と喪失を通じての道徳的成長

Greg Stinnett

Mark Twainは、4つの代表的な作品である *The Gilded Age* (1873)、*The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876)、*The Prince and the Pauper* (1882)、*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885)において、コミュニティの安定を犠牲とすることにより成り立つような自己実現は、物理的にも道徳的にもコミュニティからの孤立を生じさせることになるのではないかという危惧を表している。Twainのこのような危惧は特に *The Prince and the Pauper*に明らかである。

*The Prince and the Pauper*の2人の中心人物である Tom Canty と Edward Tudor は、社会的地位において両極端に位置しているものの、同じような夢と空想を抱いている。すなわち、2人ともに、日常の生活において自分たちを抑圧しているものから逃れたいと望んでいるのである。王子のふりをしてイギリスの王位をまさに剽奪せんとする Tom Canty は権力を夢想する乞食である。しかしながら、彼は王子と立場を取り替えたとたんに、権力が単に地位の問題ではないことを発見する。Tom は王子として権力を握るが、それを制御することができない。結局、彼は権力を持った支配者になるのではなく、逆に権力によって支配される羽目になるのである。そんな彼に対するのが Edward Tudor、すなわち、乞食として街に投げ出されることになる本物の王子である。Edward は乞食の役割を担ったときに権力を失う。そのとき初めて彼は、道徳的な指針を持たない権力は、彼自身の父親 Henry 8 世の支配に見られるように、権力の悪用であるということを見出す。最終的に、Tom と Edward は権力には必然的に責任が付随すること、また、不正な手段で獲得した権力は社会に対する裏切りであり、それに対しては幻滅と道徳的墮落という報いがあることを悟る。