

The Prince and the Pauper: Mark Twain's Once and Future King.

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

THE PRINCE AND THE PAUPER: MARK TWAIN'S ONCE AND FUTURE KING Tom H. Towers* Unlike many later readers, Mark Twain thought *The Prince and the Pauper* a "grave and stately" work, and even considered publishing it anonymously lest his reputation as a mere humorist obscure its profundity. William Dean Howells reviewed the novel enthusiastically, partly because he hoped the book would establish his friend's credentials as a moralist; and the literary establishment of the Gilded Age likewise approved. Finally, *The Prince and the Pauper* was famously preferred by the Clemens women.¹ History, of course, breeds distrust of the genteel tastes of the 1880s—including most emphatically Twain's own—and today Twain's romance of Tudor England remains on the children's shelves long after the liberation of Huck Finn, or, at most, it is accorded a minor

place in its author's canon. Even sympathetic modern readers might agree with Walter Blair's succinct judgment that "this book was intended to appeal to children. Such are its manner and matter that it no longer has much appeal for American adults."² Critics of Twain, for the most part, have isolated social and political comments in *The Prince and the Pauper* to make the book a democratic critique of monarchy,³ or, noting that it was one of the works whose composition interrupted the writing of *Huckleberry Finn*, they have regarded it as a kind of proving ground for Twain's masterpiece, an occasion for trying out patterns of character or action.⁴ The relatively small number of critics who have systematically analyzed the novel have approached it most frequently as yet another of Twain's treatments of divine innocence opposed by depraved society.⁵ Thus, most criticism has studied the novel extrinsically, that is, as the book develops ideas and attitudes stated more memorably elsewhere, or as it anticipates in various ways later, more important works. Although it would be claiming too much for *The Prince and the Pauper* to place it beside *Huck Finn* or *Connecticut Yankee*, or even *Tom Sawyer*, it

Tom H. Towers is an Associate Professor of English at the University of Rhode Island and coordinator of the extension programs in English. He has published articles on American Literature in *Modern Fiction Studies*, *American Literature*, *Western American Literature*, *College English*, and elsewhere. He is currently at work on a book on Twain's major fiction.

194 Tom H. Towers distorts the limited but real achievement of the novel to read it too much in the light of those works. Further, in very important ways *The Prince and the Pauper* differs from Twain's more familiar books more than it resembles them. It is, of course, probably the most carefully plotted and formally unified of his novels, but, more significantly, it is, with *The Gilded Age*, a major and forthright expression of a cultural and political conservatism which is a minor note in Twain's writing from *Innocents Abroad* to *The Mysterious Stranger* and which is the obverse of his more frequent despairing contempt for civilized man and his institutions. As in Twain generally, in *The Prince and the Pauper* there is a direct connection between the character of society and the moral and psychological conditions of its members. Tudor London resembles most of Twain's other repressive communities, from the St. Petersburg or Dawson's Landing of the river novels to Hank Morgan's Camelot or the Eseldorf of *The Mysterious Stranger*. On one side are the oppressors, here the king and the nobility, on the other the generality of men who are their victims. And, as in the other works, the excesses of the powerful and the brutishness of the powerless mirror each other. Henry Tudor is as insensitive to the frustrations of Prince Edward as the drunken pauper, John Canty, is to the needs of his son, Tom. Similarly, the king has unjustly usurped the lands and money of the church, and John Canty gratuitously murders the saintly Father Andrew. Tom's father is the obvious precursor of Pap Finn. He and Tom's grandmother "were a couple of fiends. They got drunk whenever they could; then they fought each other...

THE PRINCE AND THE PAUPER: MARK TWAIN'S ONCE AND FUTURE KING

Tom H. Towers*

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