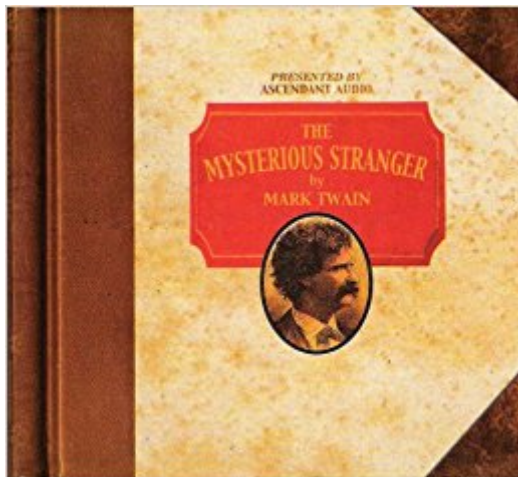


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The Mysterious Stranger



Synopsis

Considered one of Twain's most important short works, *The Mysterious Stranger* tells the story of the devil coming to a medieval village in the persona of a beautiful, lovable, yet exasperatingly amoral young man. Befriending a small group of boys, Satan exhibits strange charm, compassion and indifference as the tale comes to a surprising conclusion.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In 1590 three Austrian boys - Nikolaus, Seppi, and Theodor (the narrator) - meet a mysterious stranger in the countryside near their small village. This stranger possesses strange powers, and delights the boys not only with his magic tricks (such as lighting their pipe with a breath or creating a miniature civilization from dust), but with his stories and observations regarding the human race. Though he identifies himself as an angel by the name of Satan he assures the boy that he is merely the nephew of the more famous figure, and gains their trust and their friendship. The boys continue a strange and often taxing relationship with the supernatural individual, and though they are unnaturally sedated by his physical presence his influence on their thoughts and morality creates a kind of lasting damage to their individual psyches. Mark Twain's narrative views on religion, faith, and humanity can be found in any number of his works, though I myself am only familiar with those presented in *The Diaries of Adam and Eve*, *Helpful Hints for Good Living*, and *Letters from Earth*. However, his critical presentation in *The Mysterious Stranger* is much darker than any I have read by him before. Although the story is told by Theodor, the narrative itself revolves around Satan and Satan's view of humanity. Much of the narrative itself is occupied with the sermons he delivers to

the boys, which are aggressive and critical towards humanity, and often towards the morality the boys themselves are taught to respect. The kinds of ideas presented can leave readers wondering whether the character of Satan is really the nephew or the dominant figure, and allows them to question the motives of the foremost character in the novel. Is he truly a benevolent spiritual figure?

this volume spans the length of Mark Twain's career, and contains some of his most famous shorter works, which all centre on the subject of Money. 'The Celebrated jumping frog of Calaveras County' is the most perfect tall tale in the English language, three flawless pages about Jim Smiley and the bizarre sidelines he would investigate to win a bet, any bet, written in a miraculous mid-19th century California vernacular. If that isn't enough, Twain tops it with the best closing paragraph of any work I have ever read ever. 'The \$1,000,000 Bank note' is almost surreal, or Marxist, the story of a derelict made an unwitting guinea pig by two elderly millionaires, curious to see what would happen to an honest but poor man in the possession of such an impracticable note. The frightening fetishistic power of currency structures a somewhat creepily benevolent narrative, and the opening paragraphs audaciously cram a novel's worth of misfortune. 'The Man who corrupted Hadleyburg' is the masterpiece here, at once an unforgiving morality tale about the temptation of money on an incorruptible town, and a satire on the crippling effect of bogus social respectability. Twain's irony is at its most relentless here, mixing anger at elite hypocrisy with distaste for the savage mob mentality. The scenes of public justice are hilarious but terrifying; the unnamed man taking monstrous revenge on a whole town for a personal slight, exposing its shams by an experiment, could well be Twain himself. The same could be said of the hero of his novella 'The Mysterious Stranger', Twain's last, posthumously published work.

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