

"the mysterious
stranger" by mark
twain essay sample



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The Mysterious Stranger seems to be Twain's attempt to get us to look beyond ourselves and our immediate surroundings. He outlines the potential for human potential if we use our imaginations and open our minds to the possibilities.

In *The Mysterious Stranger*, Mark Twain uses magic to illustrate the possibilities of our imagination or our dream world. In our imagination or in our dreams, Twain believed we can do or accomplish anything. *The Mysterious Stranger* is filled with numerous magical occurrences. Some are directly associated with the dream world.

The Mysterious Stranger is narrated by August Feldner. August is the apprentice to Number 44. Twain introduces Number 44, a young man who appears at the castle needing nourishment, as a way to open the minds of the others, a way to show them new ways to think and new ways to dream. The master hires 44 to work around the castle and then finally to work in the print shop. Number 44 seems to illustrate the principal that you can do anything if you want to. Number 44 performs many magical tasks, mind-reading, flying, time travel. His magical powers are demonstrative of the possibilities of the human imagination.

When August meets Number 44, he becomes aware of reality as 44 sees it. August begins to see things that he had never imagined. Number 44 states that everything in the universe is a dream, a creation of the human imagination: " Nothing exists; all is a dream. God—man—the world, —the sun, the moon, the wilderness of stars: a dream, all a dream." Number 44 expands August's knowledge and understanding of the world. Number 44

frequently talks of the future, and offers food to August that he doesn't recognize. Number 44 also takes August back in time, teaching him about human history. August's newly acquired knowledge on the world helps to expand his mind and understand the world beyond his village

The reader should be aware that all of the events of the story are told from August's point of view. Toward the end, Number 44 states that everything in August's universe is a creation of his own imagination. Perhaps August has imagined these people, places, and events, or even that the entire story is a dream from which he will soon awaken.

The other workers were not accepting of Number 44. They saw him as evil and tried to convince their master to make him leave. If 44 represented all that is possible with the imagination and/or change, it would be natural for them to fight against him. The men go on strike until the master will make 44 leave. Doangivadam comes to help, answering the prayers of August. Doangivadam is immediately accepting of 44 and they are able to complete the work even with the other men on strike. This character's name speaks volumes of what Twain is trying to convey.

After the men go on strike, The Duplicates, appear in the castle one night. They appear to be the embodiment of the Dream-Selves of the men they resemble. August's Duplicate, who calls himself Emil Schwarz, explains that he is August's Dream-Self, and that he comes from the Dream-World. Emil further explains that the Dream-Self comes alive only when the Waking-Self is asleep. The Dream-Self normally has no physical existence, and so is free to do or be anything. The Dream-Self has ties to the Waking Self that are

dependent on the physical existence of the Waking-Self. He demonstrates the Waking-Self, as the person that goes to work each day and the Dream-Self, which emerges when we are sleeping. The Dream-Self appears to be free from the constraints of physical existence, the limits that control what we are able to do.

The print shop, where the story takes place, is small but represents something much larger. Printing is still considered an art and the printing business represents knowledge. It has the ability to bring knowledge to people that they might not have had otherwise. Number 44 tells August that he is nothing more than pure Thought, and that Thought is the true essence of human existence. (Brent, 2005)

Number 44 then tries to explain to August who and what he is. He asserts that time and space, as well as life and death, mean nothing to him, and that he is capable of traveling throughout the universe and throughout history at his whim. Number 44 states that his existence is beyond the bounds of what any human being could conceive of. He explains that " Life itself is only a vision, a dream," and that his existence is " pure Thought," without physical matter. Number 44's parting words to August are:

" It is true, that which I have revealed to you: there is no God, no universe, no human race, no earthly life, no heaven, no hell. It is all a Dream, a grotesque and foolish dream. Nothing exists but You. And you are but a Thought . . . wandering forlorn among the empty eternities."

The Mysterious Stranger was an unfinished work by Twain. He worked on it periodically from approximately 1890 until his death in 1910. This work is <https://assignbuster.com/the-mysterious-stranger-by-mark-twain-essay-sample/>

very much a social commentary on his ideas of the moral sense and the human race which he perceived as damned. Twain wrote multiple versions of this story, all were unfinished and all involved a character that some believe represented Satan. This third version, called " No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger," is set in Middle Age Austria, and features No. 44's mysterious appearance at the door of a print shop and his use of " magical" powers. Twain examines a duality of the " self," one being the Waking Self and the other being the " Dream Self." Twain uses the Duplicates to illustrate this point. (Sholom, 196)

Number 44 could have represented Satan and the Duplicates could have represented the Originals selling their souls to Satan so that the Duplicates would continue to work and they would not have to. Twain may have been trying to illustrate how human's can halt their own progress and be their own undoing if they refuse to see the possibilities. Twain may have been trying to identify the constraints that humans live within in their Awake Self and the freedom they could and should find in their Dream Self.

" Local color" fiction was a new development in American literature when much of Twain's writing was published. Local color fiction is characterized by its focus on small communities existing within the United States. It identifies exhibiting habits, customs, and cultural practices specific to that area.

Twain's fiction often takes place in the American South, among small communities along the Mississippi River. Although *The Mysterious Stranger* takes place in Austria, it demonstrates some of the characteristics of local color fiction. It is set in a small, remote village community in which the residents share many superstitions and many qualities of regional areas.
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Many critics have noted that Twain based his fictional town of Eseldorf, Austria, on his own experiences growing up in the small town of Hannibal, Missouri

Twain's life, near the end, most likely influenced his writing. Towards the end of his life, Twain met with personal tragedy and financial ruin. Despite his international success as one of America's preeminent authors, Twain went bankrupt during the early 1890s. He worked diligently giving lecture tours throughout Europe, Africa, and Asia, in order to pay off his debts. During this period, the eldest of his three daughters died of meningitis. In 1904 his wife died, and a few years later another one of his daughters died as a result of an epileptic seizure. Not long after, his one remaining daughter became mentally ill. Twain died in Connecticut, on April 21, 1910.

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