

*Racial and Religious Hypocrisy in
Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

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Introduction

Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain) was a social critic as well as a novelist. He observed a society filled with arrogant racial hypocrisy. Even years after the abolition of slavery the American society had changed little. In the period 1876–1883, during which Twain wrote *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*¹ there were two seemingly separate and contradictory belief systems: one official and one unofficial. (Pierre Van the Bergh, 1978). The official system preached freedom and equality between men, the unofficial, the opposite. This was a dichotomy which divided humanity into two social subgroups: the so-called ‘civilized’ and the ‘savages’. (Race and Racism a comparative perspective, p.26). This arrogant and hypocritical belief system was something that Twain vigorously opposed. This is also one of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*’s many themes: social hypocrisy. The novel features two major forms of social hypocrisy: racial hypocrisy and religious hypocrisy. The two are closely connected as one of the supporters of slavery was the church. Social hypocrisy is a recurrent theme in the book but is not immediately obvious. It is through Huck’s experiences with Jim that the reader and Huck discover the extent and consequences of social hypocrisy. As the world Huck believes in starts to contradict itself he starts to see certain phenomena which he has previously taken for granted in a new light. One of these phenomena is the discriminatory treatment by adult authoritarian figures such as Miss Watson who discriminates clearly between African Americans and non-African Americans. These authoritarian figures are a representation of the established belief system prevailing in Huck’s society and their racial and religious hypocrisy have an enormous impact on Huck’s transformation. As the book draws to a close, Huck becomes acutely aware of the hypocritical nature of the system.

This essay argues that there are two major forms of hypocrisy represented in the novel: racial and religious. The two appear to be different but, as this essay demonstrates, they are intimately related. Using an old historical approach, the essay draws on historical material from the 1830s to show how the world depicted by Twain closely resembles the period of the novel, a period some 30 years before its date of publication. Hypocrisy shows the inconsistency of human motivation and behaviour. The characters in the novel represent all the classes found in society at the time, and demonstrate the two sides of human

¹ The correct title of Twain’s novel is according to the original manuscript and the first published edition: *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. The determiner ‘the’ is something that has been added later by other publishers. http://www.americanheritage.com/articles/magazine/ah/1984/4/1984_4_81.shtml

motivation and behaviour: the good and the bad. Almost all Twain's characters are deceived by society and are victims of self deception. The novel is an important contribution to American awareness of racial and religious hypocrisy.

Mark Twain

Mark Twain (Samuel Longhorne Clemens) was born in Halet, Missouri, in 1835. At the age of four he and his family moved to the town of Hanibal, Missouri, close to the Mississippi River. This was the town that would later become the model for the town of St.Petersburg in *The Adventure of Tom Sawyer* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. It was here while working on the Mississippi River as a steamboat pilot that Twain first came in contact and got the idea for his famous pseudonym Mark Twain. To the naked eye the name Mark Twain might seem like a name like any other but it carries a double message. For river pilots it was a term used to describe a river that was at least “two fathoms deep” and thereby safe to travel on; for a writer it told of stories with hidden depths and meaning. The period 1876–1883, during which *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* was created, was about forty years after the abolition of slavery had begun. Why did Twain decide to write a book that took place four decades before the novel was published?

Racial hypocrisy and the Superiority of the Whole Men

During the chronological period of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* evolution was used as a means to justify doctrines of racial purity, and more particularly, the idea that one race may claim superiority over another. Black people at this time were defined as a “subhuman”(Race and Racism, p.79) and “inferior”(Polygenesis and the defence of slavery, p.400). The stereotypical black person was generally considered as a large child who was “immature, irresponsible, unintelligent, physically strong..”(Race and Racism, p.82). Many blacks were also often looked down upon as ignorant because of their superstitious belief in witchcraft. This is also how they appear to be depicted by Twain in the novel. In a “constitutional compromise”(Race and Racism, p.79) between the Northern and Southern states, black people were “assessed”(Race and Racism, p.79) and found not to be whole men but “three fifths” men. Twain satires this kind of reasoning in his novel by exposing the hypocrisy and flaws of these so-called “whole” men.

The definition of hypocrisy that is used in this essay is the definition that can be found at *Dictionary.com*. *Hypocrisy is defined as* “a pretense of having a virtuous

character, moral or religious beliefs or principles, etc., that one does not really possess.”(Dictionary.com).

Huck’s father is the most prominent example of the hypocrisy of the whole man in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. He is an abusive, racist, drunk old man devoted of most virtues. At the end of chapter 5, after having been arrested for drunk, yet again, and disorderly behaviour, he is taken into care by the same judge who awarded him custody of his son in an effort to make a “man of him”(*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p.38). This endeavour fails miserably and the judge’s final judgement on Huck’s father is that the only way he will ever reform is by means of a “shotgun”(*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p.39). Another example of Huck’s father’s alleged superiority in the novel is in chapter 6 when he observes his father in one of his numerous drunken racist rants. He starts off by raving about the inferiority of a black college professor before proceeding with a murder attempt on Huck. The hypocrisy that such a fundamentally flawed person as Huck’s father, because of the colour of his skin, be considered superior to a well-meaning, kind-hearted person black person like Jim, demonstrates the flaws of the reasoning about the “whole” man’s claimed superiority. Out of all the adult characters in the novel Jim the slave is the most genuinely “whole” of them all. Twain satirises this in the novel by drawing parallels between Jim and other adult characters like Huck’s father. In chapter 9, Jim symbolically replaces Huck senior as Huck’s father figure. When Jim and Huck stumble upon the dead body of Huck’s father, Jim shields Huck from this fact by telling him not to look at the dead man’s face because it looks “too gashly” (*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p.86). He does this to protect Huck from the pain of having to see his murdered father. In doing this, Jim shows Huck more kindness and affection than his real father ever did. This act of Jim’s causes him to symbolically replace Huck senior as Huck’s father figure. Throughout the novel Jim also demonstrates his fatherly qualities by, among other things, giving Huck “fatherly” advices, instilling him with his wisdom.

Another example of the hypocrisy of the whole man is the cold-blooded murder of the drunkard Boggs by the aristocrat Colonel Sherburn. Boggs is an old man who, once a month, and when drunk, rides down to town and delivers empty threats to anyone and everyone he meets. However, while he may seem mean-spirited he is, as the townspeople observe: “the best natured-est old fool in Arkansaw”(*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p.239), and a person who would “never hurt nobody, drunk nor sober.”(*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p.239) When Boggs rides into the small town and starts hurling insults at Sherburn, who he feels has swindled him, he is issued a final, deadly ultimatum by the

colonel: “If you open your mouth against me only once after that time[one o’clock] you can’t travel so far but I will find you.”(*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p.239). Boggs fails to heed this ultimatum and is subsequently shot dead by the Colonel. The example demonstrates how people of the higher classes looked down upon the masses, at the same time it reveals the cowardliness of society. The colonel’s confrontation with society ends with its defeat because he knows he that society lacks the courage to stand up for what is right. This murder by an aristocrat demonstrates that the flawed concept of the whole men is not a phenomenon exclusive to people from the lower classes alone, such as Huck’s father.

Black people in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* are often accused of and associated with immoral actions. Huck’s father’s comment that blacks are a “thieving” race is one example of parallels that are drawn between blacks and immoral actions. In chapter 26, when the Huck is spying on the Duke and the King in an effort to ascertain the whereabouts of their stolen money, the two conmen demonstrate the same kind of racial prejudice as Huck’s father. They have decided to change the location of the hidden stolen money because they feel that it is not safe anymore and that there is a considerable risk that it might be taken by the slaves who clean their room. This conclusion appears to be based solely on racial prejudice, i.e. that black people cannot come across money and “not borrow”(*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p.299) it.

As already stated, Twain draws parallels between the similar conditions of black people and children. Like Jim, Huck is a slave who is subject to the whim of the novel’s white adults. When in chapter 2 Huck and Jim are putting up showbills for one of the Duke’s and the King’s many cons the following can be read at the bottom of bills: “Admission 25 cents; children and servants, 10 cents.”(*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p.233). Black people are consistently in the novel treated as children. This is only an illusion, though, as black people were as much the subjects to the whims of white children as to the adults. The most apparent example of this in the novel is how Jim lives under constant threat of being turned in by Huck.

While it may appear, from many of the examples in this chapter, that racial hypocrisy was mostly a lower class phenomenon it was not, it transcended the boundaries between all social classes. When the great American president Abraham Lincoln was accused of abolitionism he became offended and declared: “I will say in addition to this that there is a physical difference between the white and black races which I believe will forbid the two races living together in terms of social and political equality...” (Race and

Racism, p.79). This was the declaration made by the man who in 1863 issued his Emancipation Proclamation and in 1865 promoted the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution, the amendment which in effect ended slavery. Even though the 13th Amendment officially ended slavery, this did not mean equality for black men and women either. This was something Twain despised and is the reason why *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is set thirty years prior to actual publication, a time when slavery was still practiced. By depicting a system which no longer existed, Twain sought to reveal to the unsympathetic contemporary readers who claimed that things was better now that they were wrong. Following the years of the Civil War race relations seemed to have been heading in a positive direction, but some new laws and ideologies gave the oppression of blacks a new and firm foothold. Slavery was tough to justify; but white Southerners managed to circumvent enacted racist laws or policies under a professed motive of self-defence against newlyfreed blacks. Since many white people lived in fear that the black people would revolt, fewer people than before, Northern as well as Southern, saw the act as immoral.

The Birth of an Ideology

The abolition of slavery may have meant the end of one aspect of racism but it was also, according to Christopher Luse (2007), the birth of another: the transformation of racism into an ideology. This transformation was looked upon by the federal authority as the answer to the radical demands of emancipation in the 1830s. The federal authority considered itself duty bound to defend slavery. The authorities needed a new way to legitimise racism. The solution came in the form of the science of ethnology, a sub-branch of anthropology. With the use of ethnology the authorities sought to use to establish their beliefs in “the inferiority of nonwhite people“. Racial science was not a new phenomenon but it was not until the outbreak of the Civil War that it developed into a major factor on the political and science scene. This development was the result of medical experiments on dead black soldiers during the war. This was morbidly ironic since these dead black soldiers had fought and died to preserve slavery. Even though ethnology was not used much in defence of slavery during the period in which *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is set, Twain includes it in the novel. He uses it to draw a parallel between the warped mindset and morals of contemporary society and that of the pre-bullum apologetics found at the time the novel is set.

When in chapter 14 Huck and Jim argue about if a Frenchman is equal to a cat or a cow it is an ethnological discussion they are involved in. Huck argues that if it is perfectly “..natural and right for a cat and a cow..”(*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p.136) to speak differently from us why would the same rules not apply to a “..FRENCHMAN..”(*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p.136) . Equating a man with an animal is unacceptable to Jim, and he passionately retaliates by asking Huck if either of these two kinds of animals are “..a man..”(*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p.136). This argument seems to take the fight out of Huck and he ends the argument on the defensive by arguing that “you can't learn a nigger to argue”(*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p.136). This is clearly a false conclusion, since it is Huck who cannot argue. Jim's consistent use of the word “man” appears to voice Twain's own thoughts on the subject: a Frenchman is a man, not an animal. According to Christopher Luse (2007) ethnology constituted for the southern Christians a platform or a justification for their racial beliefs. The ethnologists believed that they had “discovered” nature's racial laws, which were akin to Newton's laws of physics. These new laws were given vigorous support in many leading publications as well as by many prominent politicians. The laws were considered a necessary step for the southern Christians to validate and protect their beliefs from the abolitionists' attacks.

The abolitionists argued that slavery was a sin, that it contradicted the Bible, which claims that all men are equal and that there is only one type of human being. In Acts 17:26 Saint Paul in the Bible tells that "God hath made from one blood all nation which dwell upon the earth". The Southern Christians, however, saw themselves as modern men who embraced science. Many of the leaders of Southern Christianity accepted “that a limited as opposed to a universal flood did not undermine Christian faith”(*Polygenesis and the Defense of slavery*, p.390). In many instances the southern clergymen displayed unrecorded flexibility and tolerance in their acceptance of different scientific discoveries. They made sure, however, to criticise anything that strayed too far from their interpretation of the Bible. Ethnology also gave pre-bellum apologetics a powerful argument against one of the Abolitionists favourite attacks “that slavery destroyed black families”(*Polygenesis and the Defense of slavery*, p.390). A number of pre-bellum Christians used ethnology to claim that blacks had different “moral natures” than white people, and that this led to a lack of capacity to “emotionally bond”. This alleged flaw would cause black families not feel the same amount of misery over the separation from a family member as a white family.

The theory is touched upon by Twain in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* as Jim's sadness of being separated from his family is one of the story's central themes.

Throughout the novel Jim's "persistent devotion to his lost wife and children"(Twain and the Endangered Family, p.391), and his relentless pursuit of them is what drives the story forward down the Mississippi river. Jim's passion to rebuild his lost family also the basis for Huck's growing respect for him and his transformation throughout the novel. (Twain and the Endangered Family, p.391). In the novel Twain often puts black people's desire for family harmony into contrast with white people lack of the same. The most important, apparent example of this being Huck's desire to escape his family, his father and his adopted family the Watts, and Jim's search for his. Twain also though white and black people as emotionally equal, that both felt an equal amount of pain facing the loss of someone dear to them. In chapter 27, after Duke and the King have auctioned off the Wilks girls' slaves Huck observe the "poor miserable girls and niggers hanging around each other's necks and crying." (*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p.309).

Here the color of one's skin is of little consequence as both slaves and owners feel the same amount of misery over the separation of someone dear to them.

The Moral Confusion

The 1830s of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is a period of moral confusion. "Good" white people in the novel such as Aunt Sally, the widow, have little or no interest in the injustice and cruelty of slaves but are otherwise shown to be both caring and kind. The hypocrisy of slavery seems to distort and corrupt not only the oppressed but also the oppressors. This corruption is best demonstrated in the novel through the narrative description of Huck's character. He is the perfect example of a distorted oppressor who has subconsciously been corrupted by his father's, the Watsons' and society's influence on him. At the beginning of the novel Huck is a racist and his initial description of black people is that of men who believe that magic exists and can be performed with the use of a "hair-ball as big as your fist"(*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p.30). He also thinks that they would go anywhere and give anything for a sight of a cursed " five- center piece" (*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p.13). Huck appears to see black people as ignorant, child-like and gullible.

Like all other white people in the novel, Huck also refers to black people as objects and property. Even after he has broken free from society's corrupted morals at the end of the novel, can he completely shake its powerful indoctrination. In chapter 36, as Huck and Tom try to facilitate the escape of Jim, Huck still cannot help but compare the "theft" of Jim with that of property like a "Sunday-school book"(*Adventures of*

Huckleberry Finn, p.416) or a “watermelon”(Adventures of *Huckleberry Finn*, p.416). However, at the end of the novel, Huck’s awareness of the deception has increased.

Huck does not want anyone to own him, but thinks that it is perfectly natural for other people to be owned. In chapter 16 he refers to Miss Watson as Jim’s “rightful owner”(Adventures of *Huckleberry Finn*, p.150) and he is “her nigger”(Adventures of *Huckleberry Finn*, p.150). However, in chapter 6, he laments his own similar relationship with the Watsons: “I didn’t want to go back to the widow’s anymore and be so cramped up and sivilized”(Adventures of *Huckleberry Finn*, p.43). Huck’s relationship with his own father is also similar to that of a master and his slave.

Another example of society’s power to corrupt and cause selfdeception in “good” white people is demonstrated in Huck’s meeting with the Phelps. In chapter 32, when Jim is their prisoner, both Uncle Silas and Aunt Sally are described by Twain as “kind as they could be”(Adventures of *Huckleberry Finn*, p.420). Aunt Sally demonstrates care and compassion when she ensures that Jim is both “comfortable” (Adventures of *Huckleberry Finn*, p.420) and well-fed. Earlier in the same chapter, however, Aunt Sally demonstrates her utter indifference to the wellbeing of blacks when she reveals to Huck that she considers it “lucky”(Adventures of *Huckleberry Finn*, p.379) that no “people”(Adventures of *Huckleberry Finn*, p.379) died. When Aunt Sally shortly afterwards bemoans the similar fate of a white man, it demonstrates the hypocrisy of her previous kindness towards Jim. To the Phelps, slaves are little more than property that can be stolen, borrowed or locked away.

Religious hypocrisy

Religious hypocrisy and its portrayal in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* constitute Twain’s greatest indictment of American society in the 1830s. This was a society which for Twain was shrouded in a veil of self-deception and where its practitioners preached hypocritical and absurd religious values. These traits, which are exemplified in characters such as the Widow Douglas, Miss Watson and Silas Phelps are satirically exposed throughout the novel. These people are all well-intentioned Christians, but their religion has deceived them into thinking that slavery is perfectly acceptable, and that slaves are something less than people.

The Watson sisters are one of the most prominent examples of this type of hypocrisy in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Early in the novel (chapter 3) Huck observes

that the sisters represent two different versions of heaven “..I could see that there was two Providences..” (*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p.21). The fact that Huck observes and notes this indicates that his awareness of the religious hypocrisy around him is increasing. It is not long before he realizes that both places seem dull and undesirable. The Widow Douglas’s version of heaven, Huck observes, can make a “body’s mouth water” (*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p.21). Of the two versions of Providence, hers has the greater appeal for Huck; and in chapter 3, he admits that he would prefer to belong to the Widow’s providence “if he[God] wanted” (*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p.21) him. There is, however, a certain hypocrisy and moral emptiness in the widow's religion. In chapter 1, when she chastises Huck for his “mean practice”(*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p.6) of smoking, he observes that she applies double standards. It is perfectly acceptable for her to use snuff but only “because she done it herself.”(*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p. 6). Her hypocritical nature is also revealed when, in the name of her religious beliefs, she urges Huck to “help other people”(*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p.21) and to do everything he can “for other people”(*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p.21); at the same time she has no qualms about owning people. The enslavement of Huck by his father is also interesting since it further reveals the hypocrisy of the widow Watson. She is the slave-owner who vigorously fights to set a white slave free. The widow partially redeems herself at the end of the novel when it is revealed that she has released Jim from his slavery.

Miss Watson’s version of Heaven is a place where the inhabitants spend their days walking around with a harp in their hands, singing. The entry requirements to her heaven are however, as Huck observes in chapter 3, extremely selective. It is not a place for “a poor chap”(*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p.21) and if Miss Watson “got him there warn’t no help for him” (*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p.21). This last comment is contradictory since it uses the combination of the word “there”(*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p.21), a reference to heaven, and “warn’t no help for him any more”(*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p.21), which implies something bad. Poor people are punished in Miss Watson’s heaven, and Huck’s “there”(*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p.21) is her version of hell. The total moral emptiness of Miss Watson's religion is best demonstrated, however, in chapter 1, when she “fetched the niggers in”(*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p.7) for a evening prayer. Like the widow, Miss Watson, as a good Christian, honors religious customs, yet at the same time she sees nothing wrong with owning slaves. According to Christopher Luse (2007), Miss Watson’s evening prayers with the slaves was not just a

philanthropic act but a means of controlling the summoned. During these prayers the slaves are deceived and led to believe that it is the will of God that they subject themselves to their masters. Titus 2:9-10 was one of many biblical excerpts that were used for this purpose.

"Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them, and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive."
(Bible, *Titus 2:9-10*)

When in chapter 2 Huck states his preference to go to hell rather than heaven, (the latter appearing to be a boring place), Miss Watson responds as follows: "She said it was wicked to say what I said; said she wouldn't say it for the whole world; she was going to live so as to go to the good place."(*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p.7). Huck emphasizes the use of the word "she" in to demonstrate her adamant, almost desperate, belief and desire that she is a "good" person and that she will to go "to the good place"(*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p.7).

In chapter 16 Huck is confronted by slaver traders searching for runaway slaves he struggles between turning Jim in and saving him. When he is unable to bring himself to turn Jim in he rescues him by fooling the slave traders that by boarding his vessel they might contract small-pox. As the slave-traders rush to escape the lethal disease one of them says "my Kingdom"(*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p.155) before leaving Huck with two "twenty- dollar gold piece[s]"(*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p.155). The slave traders symbolize the members of the church who try to solve any problems they have by giving the church money believing that will solve the problem. In reality they are not actually solving anything and only deceiving themselves by running away from the problem. This demonstrates their religious hypocrisy.

In chapter 18, Twain uses the family feud between the Grangerfords and the Shepherdsons to demonstrate and question the fidelity of the local congregation. By accident Huck has come into contact with the aristocratic family of the Grangerfords and their rivals, the Shepherdsons. The two families are locked in a deadly feud which has claimed many lives on both sides. When the two families visit church and hear a sermon about "brotherly love"(*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p.184) Huck observes that "the men took their guns along.."(*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p.184) and "kept them between their knees" (*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p.185). The fact that the two

families brought weapons, which they seem eager to use, to a sermon about “brotherly love” demonstrates the absurd hypocrisy of the situation. The two families are hypocritical in the teachings of the gospels.

In chapter 24, when Huck and Jim are travelling with the two conmen the King and the Duke, they are forced to come up with a plan that will allow Jim (now on the wanted list) to move freely in one of the villages next to river. Duke hatches the idea of dressing Jim up as an Arab. He writes “Sick Arab -- but harmless when not out of his head.”(*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p.265) on Jim’s forehead and tells him to “fetch a howl or two”(*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p.265) to scare away anyone foolish enough to get too close. The Duke’s con reveals southern Christian church’s intolerance, while preaching tolerance, towards people from different countries and religions.

At the end of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (chapter 36) Huck is taken into the care of the Phelps, yet another deeply devoted family. This chapter marks Huck’s return to civilization after a long absence. Like the Watsons, the Phelps are a devoted Christian southern family who own slaves. They are not unlike the Watson family at the beginning of the novel. Mr. Phelps has bought Jim from the Duke to collect the reward money for him, and has locked him up in a shed. When Huck, Tom and Jim plot Jim’s escape Jim reveals to Tom that Mr Phelps “come in every day or two to pray with him.”(*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p.419). Mr Phelps is hypocritical since his reason to pray with Jim is that he has no one else to pray with; he does not really care about Jim. This act by Mr Phelps demonstrates the hypocritical nature of many of the deeply devoted slave owners.

The relationship between the slave and its owner was, according to Nudelman (2004) often portrayed by southern Christians as “humane, normal” and most importantly “divinely sanctioned”. The enslavement of black people was by many owners considered a humanitarian act done not for their own benefit but for the wellbeing of the slaves themselves. Tennessee Methodist Holand M’Tyeire noted that if not for the institution of slavery that polygenesis could lead to black’s being reduced to savage animals. However, there was a myriad of abuses of this so called “humane” relationship in both real life and in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. At the end of the novel, after Jim has been recaptured, he is both abused and closed to being hanged.

The Prominent Authority

In the early nineteenth century the Bible was the prominent authority on what was right and wrong in society. It was, as a reviewer of the *Southern Quarterly Review* wrote, “an immovable basis of Truth”(Polygenesis and the Defense of Slavery, p.392). Like most texts, the Bible is open for an array of different interpretations: a fact which pre-bellum apologetics abused. According to these Christians, the scriptures represented the most important legitimate defense of slavery: to oppose it was to oppose the Bible. The following was, in 1850, noted by a pre-bellum slavery Presbyterian priest named Smyth: the abolitionists “...undermines altogether the authority of the Bible as an inspired book”. Explicit links were drawn by pre-bellum Christians, like Smyth, between abolitionism and the enemies of Christian society. (Polygenesis and the Defense of Slavery). This is also something Twain addresses in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. He frequently equated abolitionism with morals and values that opposed to Christian society. Theft, which goes against the Bible’s seventh commandment “thou shall not steal”, is one of the things abolitionism is accused of supporting in *Twain’s novel*. “If their master wouldn't sell them, they'd get an Ab'litionist to go and steal them”(*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p.151). Here an abolitionist is equated with a common thief.

Simplicity was one of the sympathizers of slavery’s greatest strengths. With the aid of a biblical concordance, it was easy to find support for slavery. This support, though, was, at best, shallow since it often only was found in the literal meaning of the Biblical verses. The Bible is filled with metaphors, poetry, figures of speech, parables, similes, proverbs, and visions making such a “plain” interpretation impossible. These Concordances were an integral part of the Sunday school literature as a means to give moral instructions. They helped, along with other Sunday school literature, to foster children, such as Huck’s and Tom’s religious and racial hypocrisies and own idealizations. In chapter 31, Huck hints about what kind of values were fostered in Sunday school:

"There was the Sunday-school, you could a gone to it; and if you'd a done it they'd a learnt yohere that people that acts as I'd been acting about that nigger goes to everlasting fire." (*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p.359)

Tom Sawyer is the perfect example of a “product” of the Sunday school system and the hypocrisy of it. Unlike Huck, Tom thrives in it and believes in the stories he is fed about “A-rabs and the elephants”(*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p.26). Tom is in many ways a perfect foil to Huck, who exemplifies freedom from the same system. Huck’s

remark in chapter 3 - "I think different" (*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p.26) - demonstrates his lack of faith in the system. Since Sunday school religion is a product of civilization, Huck's doubts about it, after observing its innate hypocrisy of it, suggests he feels separate from civilization. When, in chapter 36, Tom tells us that he "wouldn't stand by and see the rules broke" (*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p.417), he reveals what a hypocrite he is. He demonstrates multiple times throughout the novel that he is happy to break all rules even his own, as long as it is to his benefit or amusement.

Twain consistently cites the Bible as the main defense of slavery throughout *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Huck's consciousness is most often the vessel of Huck's defense through his rationalization of slavery, but also of his criticism of it. He has a strong sense of right and wrong and often acts out of moral conviction. When he becomes a co-conspirator in Jim's bid for freedom, his conscience instantly locks into a struggle between the indoctrination of his religious upbringing and what he knows in his heart is right. In chapter 31 he laments his "mean" treatment of the "poor old woman"[s] (*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p.358) through the theft of her property. In chapter 31, Huck feels slapped by "the plain hand of Providence" (*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p.358) who was letting him know that his theft of Jim "was being watched all the time from up there in heaven.." (*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p.358).

Towards the end of the chapter 31, Huck finally decides to "tell" his conscious "All right, then, I'll GO to hell" (*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p.361). This is perhaps the most pivotal moment in the whole novel in terms of Huck's development as this is where he finally decides to cast off society's hypocritical values. He willingly risks eternal damnation as well as his own wellbeing to save Jim. Huck demonstrates for the contemporary reader that the life of a slave is worth every bit as much as that of a white person.

The Patriarchal Family

Family and the importance of family harmony are an important theme in *Adventure of Huckleberry Finn*. According to James Grove (1985) family harmony and the endangerment of it was a very important theme for Twain when he wrote novels. Most of his canon in fact is filled with and revolves around families in different difficult predicaments; *Huckleberry Finn* is not an exception.

The Bible tells us that "side by side with the relations of husband and wife, parents and children, the authority of inspiration [the Bible] puts master and

slave”(Slavery's Champions Stood at Odds, p.393). According to many of the defenders of slavery, the latter was necessary, and subordination was, and has always been a part of society for hundred of years. The idea of slaves as an extended part of the family was another religious argument pre-bullum apologetics often resorted to to provide moral justification for their exploitive system. The concept was called the “Patriarchal Family”. The slave-owners saw slaves with as an integral part of a well-regulated household and thus essential for a just and stable social order. The inspiration for this idea came from the patriarchs of the Old Testament, whose possession of divinely sanctioned slaves was wildly celebrated by slave-owners. These patriarchs were looked upon by slave-owners as the ideal masters. Such a development would, of course, take place under the careful supervision of benevolent masters.

Conclusion

This essay has demonstrated that both religious and racial hypocrisy are important features of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Twain used the novel as a tool to demonstrate to contemporary society how, years after the abolition of slavery, society was still filled with racial and religious hypocrisy.

Throughout the novel, Twain illustrates the white people’s enormous capacity for evil. He also reveals how the Bible was constantly used and manipulated by evil men to defend their inhuman practices. However, Twain also demonstrates that that not all white men were evil or that everything, necessarily, was completely black or white. There existed a moral confusion. Not all the southern slave-owners in the novel are depicted as innately evil: many of them, in fact, seem genuinely goodhearted people. Owners such as the Wilks, the widow Watson and the Phelps all demonstrate a large capacity for kindness and goodness. They have, however, been manipulated by society’s doctrines and religious dogma into thinking that slavery is justifiable. This was a universal deception which transcended the boundaries of social class, politics of religion. No one was spared.

Of the two forms of hypocrisy discerned here, religious hypocrisy is the more prevalent in Twain’s novel. There are more tangible examples and these examples are more important for the development of the protagonist. Throughout the novel, Huck’s conscience constantly struggles with the theft of Jim and the hypocritical religious values he has been indoctrinated with. While the examples of religious hypocrisy are more apparent, racial hypocrisy is mostly found below the surface through close reading and by reading between the lines. The two forms of hypocrisy are, however, intimately related, and it is sometimes

difficult to establish where one begins and the other ends. The pillar of Southern slavery was after all the divinely sanctioned superiority of one race over another.

The development of Huck from borderline racist to an individual free of self-deception and the influences of society is an ongoing process throughout the novel. In the final chapter, Huck is still evolving and unable to completely rid himself of society's hypocritical values. He has, however, come far. The culmination of his transformation is when he decides to save Jim and tell his conscience and religious teaching to "go to hell" (*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p.361). There is a certain irony in this: that by doing this he makes the perhaps most Christian gesture in the whole novel: he loves his neighbor - the slave and "three fifth" of a man - Jim.

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