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**MARK TWAIN'S SATIRICAL APPROACH TO
MID- 19TH CENTURY AMERICAN SOCIETY AS
DEPICTED IN
*THE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN***

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Dedication

*To my parents Charles Nkurunziza and Madeleine Mukagasana;
To my brothers François Muramira, Philippe Nyirubugabo, and Jean Valéry
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INTRODUCTION

Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is to be classified among protest novels. Its main aim was to protest against some evil practices that were frequent in mid-19th century America frontier society. To make it more attractive to the readers and more affective to change society, Mark Twain used satire, which is a literary manner of denouncing, criticizing and laughing at the foibles, crimes or vices of a person or society, with the aim of correcting them. Usually, humour plays a great role and makes people laugh, which makes it easier for satire to reach its targets.

The above definition exactly applies to *Huck Finn*, for it attacked the vices of the 19th Century American society, with the intention of correcting them. Many of those vices had been witnessed by the author, who was sometimes victim of them. His life and experience provided him with much material, which is estimated at four fifths of all his writings. This proves that Mark Twain dealt with a situation that really existed and which he knew very well. He had lived in many areas, in many conditions, bad and good, had chanced his luck in printing, steamboat piloting, the army, mining, journalism, novel and essay writing,...All this rich background and experience allowed him to scorn and ridicule his contemporaries' misdeeds.

Also, Mark Twain chose his characters according to what he wanted to denounce, and all contributed to the success of his work. His satire was so severe toward society that the latter considered it to be outrageous, rough, coarse, immoral and inelegant. It was banned from libraries for years. This proves how deeply *Huck Finn* had reached its targets, namely corrupt society and institutions.

The main theme of *Huck Finn* is "man's inhumanity toward man". Mark Twain depicted it under various forms, notably slavery and violence. These were the first targets of his satire, and the main cause of his pessimism and disappointment. Other minor targets were the frequent vices that had become part of frontier culture and life. These were swindling, drunkenness and materialism. Mark Twain confronted his here with all those evils one by one, and made him overcome them. Some of them were supported by social and religious institutions, and Huck's victory over them confirmed Twain's intention to change society.

In short, *Huck Finn* was aimed at pointing out the ugliness, falseness, dishonesty and hypocrisy of society. As his contemporary writers did, Mark Twain too used the image of the shore being an awful place, and the river a safer and freer one.

This essay will focus on the satirical aspect of *Huck Finn* and will throw more light on the author's opinions about his times. First, one will concentrate on Huck's character, then all the targeted evils, notably swindling, drunkenness and materialism will be analyzed one by one. Violence and its different forms – Pap

Finn's brutality, the killing between two aristocratic families and Lynch Law- will also be pointed out and studied. Finally, the slavery issue and religious hypocrisy will be tackled from different angles, namely the slave's non-human status, the relationship between Huck and Jim, religion's support for slavery and the contrast between conscience and instinct.

CHAPTER I HUCK FINN: A SATIRICAL WORK

Twain's goal while writing Huck Finn was to denounce some evils that existed in the then American society, especially on the frontier. To achieve this, he used satire which, by the way, has become the major quality of his work as Bernard De Voto states:

The worth of his work consists in the quality of literary satire and realism that frontier humorist managed to give it... [1]

The value of this satirical novel also resides in Huck Finn's intelligence, inventiveness, quickness or, to summarize it, in his smartness as the following section shows.

I.1. Huck's Smartness

It is not by accident that Mark Twain refused to continue his work with Tom Sawyer as the main character. He told his editor that Tom Sawyer would not be good for what he intended to write about. He rather needed a profane, less cultured, uneducated, powerless, natural and honest twelve-year-old boy to make him observe society and criticize it. Huck Finn's smartness can be studied under two main forms, namely his lies and his moral improvisation.

I.1.a. Huck's Lies

Most of the time, Huck's lies were aimed at saving not only his comrade Jim, but also his "enemies". To illustrate this, let us mention his lie in Chapter XVI, when the slave catchers asked him whether there was a nigger on the raft. After hesitation, he answered that the man on the raft was white and was suffering from small-pox. This wise answer earned him a forty-dollar gold piece. Also, in Chapter XX, when the swindlers asked him whether Jim was a runaway slave, he answered with a question saying: "Goodness sake, would a runaway nigger run south?" [2]

Furthermore, in Chapter XII, his lie to a ferry-boat captain was intended to rescue three gang men aboard the “Walter Scott”. He said his pap, his mam, his sis and Miss Hooker were in “an awful peck of trouble, and...if you’d take your ferry boat and go there...” [3]

However, Huck Finn never sacrificed his honesty, and the demonstration of it is how he denounced the swindlers who were stealing the Wilks’orphans’ heritage in Chapter XXVIII. Therefore, one may consider Huck’s lies as excusable for they were never intended to harm or to wrong anybody.

1.1.b. Huck’s Moral Improvisation

On moral grounds as well as on social ones, Huck is to be considered as a “law breaker”. By confronting his innocence with moral and social norms, Twain wanted to denounce the latter. He also wanted to emphasize a “sound heart” which is “a safer guide than an ill-trained conscience in a crucial moral emergency.” [4]

Huck’s volte-face in Chapter XVI, after having decided to denounce Jim as provided by the then norms, explains the above.

Moreover, before deciding to rescue Jim from bondage at the Phelps’, Huck was in a crucial moral crisis. He had either to rescue Jim and “go to hell”, or to denounce him and be an exemplary citizen and Christian. He decided to go to hell.

More paradoxically, in Chapter XXXII, while he was “violating” religious laws by attempting to rescue a slave, Huck claimed:

I went right along, not fixing up any particular plan, but just trusting to Providence to put the right words in my mouth when the time come; for I’d noticed that Providence always did put the right words in my mouth, if I left it alone. <[5]

This is really satirical and paradoxical, for God helps Huck violate the so-called religious and social norms.

From the above, one realizes that the whole novel concentrates on Huck’s smartness which Twain used to point out the evils of society. Moral improvisation will be considered in more detail in Chapter III. Twain’s comment on Huck that he was “a boy with a sound heart but with corrupt conscience” [6] provides us with a conclusion to this section, and leads us to other vices that Twain satirized, notably swindling, drunkenness and materialism. But before that let us have a glance at humour which Twain used to denounce the above mentioned vices.

I.2. Humour

Humour is among the most important ingredients that make satire interesting and attractive. According to Encyclopedia AMERICANA 14 humour refers to “the comic or laughable...But humour is certainly multifaceted. It may be aggressive and derisive,...it can be playful or intelligent, it can even be serious, as satire...; it cannot be false. Humor...cannot desert truth.” [7]Mark Twain, who was extremely gifted in humour used his talent in *Huck Finn*, which has become American humour’s “masterpiece as well as Mark Twain’s.” [8]

Twain started as a humorist in his brother Orion’s magazine, *The Journal*. He used to quarrel about the articles to publish with Orion who had no sense of humour. Eighteen year old Sam (Twain) told him: “We need a little humour, things that make people laugh...We need to give a little life to *The Journal*.” [9]Twain already had the sense of humour which he would develop first as a journalist, then as a lecturer and finally as a novelist and essayist.

As far as *Huck Finn* is concerned, it contains many humoristic passages. One may mention the misquotation of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet*, twelve-year-old Huck’s fear of being called “ab’litionist”, his multiplication table where six times seven is thirty five, Jim’s opinion that stars were laid by the moon,...However, the best example remains the biblical misinterpretation in Chapter XIV, where Jim condemns King Sollermun (Salomon) who wanted to chop a baby into two. He said:

En what us in half a chile? I would’n give a dern for a million un um...De’spute warn’t bout a half a chile, de’spute was bout a whole chile;...you take a man dat’s got on’y one er two chillen; is dat man gwyne to be wasefum o’chillen? ...He know how to value them. But you take a man dat’s got ‘bout five million chillen runnin’roun’ de house, en it’s diffunt. He as soon chop a chile in two as a cat. Dey’s plenty mo’. A chile or two, mo’er less, warn’t no consekens to Sollermun, dad fetch him. [10]

All the above leads to the conclusion that since his boyhood, Mark Twain was convinced that telling a story without humour is like offering a meal without salt. That story would not be tasty. Thus, humour made Mark Twain not a “simple fictionist but a humorous fictionist.” [11]

I.3. Swindling

Mid-19th century American frontier society had many vices including “swindling”. That is why Mark Twain ferociously attacked it using a twelve-year-old witness. Timothy Dwight threw more light on what the frontier was like when he wrote:

These men cannot live in regular society. They are too idle; too talkative;...All countries contain restless inhabitants;...men who will contact debts without intending to pay them; who had rather talk than work; whose vanity persuades them that they are wise, and prevents them from knowing that they are fools;...who feel that every change from good order and established society will be beneficial to themselves; who have nothing to lose, and therefore expect to be gainers by every scramble; and who, of course, spend life in disturbing others, with the hope of gaining some thing for themselves... [12]

Here is the situation that Mark Twain wanted to denounce by creating the characters of the King and the Duke. They represent all those worthless and unprincipled frontiersmen who spent their lifetime gaining money by dishonest means.

To illustrate the above, let us study the most spectacular swindling scene which is, doubtless, the stay at the Wilks' (Chapters XXIV-XXIX). The swindlers managed to disguise themselves as the Wilks' relatives and convinced the legal heirs to sell their heritage. All their plans would have worked smoothly if the smart Huck had not hidden the money and warned the Wilks. Here, Mark Twain gave Huck the task to observe, judge and opt for the right cause as it is always the case throughout the novel.

In addition to this, the episode in Chapter XX, in which the King addressed a camp-meeting asking for money, is very illustrative. Huck related:

He told them he was a pirate-been a pirate for thirty years, out in the Indian Ocean, and his crew thinned out considerable, last Spring, in a fight, and he was home now to take some freshmen, and thanks goodness he'd been robbed last night,...it was the blessedst thing that ever happened to him, because he was a changed man now...he was going to start right off and work his way back to the Indian Ocean and put in the rest of his life trying to turn the pirates into the true path... [13]

The King collected some eighty-seven dollars and seventy-five cents. His companion, the Duke, who had entered a printing office collected nine dollars and a half.

Even though those swindlers kept making victims as they moved southward, they could not continue doing so, for frontiersmen themselves were very vigilant. As Chapter XXI shows, after a series of successful operations, the two swindlers earned nothing any more but insults. Then further on, in Chapter XXXIII, Huck said that they had been arrested and about to be lynched.

To explain the above, Anthony Trollope quoted by Marcus Cunliffe, wrote:

Since everybody knew how to handle humbug, there could not be victims any more. A swindler could not con everybody every time, for each one did his best to con his neighbour... [14]

From the foregoing, it is clear that by confronting Huck with the two swindlers, Mark Twain manifested once more his intention to denounce that frequent and awful vice, which is “swindling”. Huck’s role in all that was to watch and then thwart the swindlers’ activities if possible. Swindling was not the only evil of those times, another one was “drunkenness”.

I.4.Drunkenness

Drunkenness was another evil that mark Twain intended to satirize in his *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. The reason is to be found in his early life in Hannibal, for almost all he denounced was part of his own experience.

There was a town drunkard in Hannibal named Jimmy Finn. This man was described as “a monument of rags and dirt” [15] and lived on John Quarles’ farm, where young San Clemens (Twain) himself was a “guest for two or three months every year” till he was “eleven or twelve years old.” [16] Thus, there is no doubt that Twain took this very name –Finn- to embody a typical drunkard in the character of Huck’s father. Describing his own father, Huck said: “He used to lay drunk with hogs in the tanyard...every time he got money he got drunk...” [17]

Furthermore, mark Twain denounced violence and murders resulting from drunkenness. The case of the King in Chapter XXXI, who, after selling Jim for forty dollars, got drunk and fought with the Duke, is a good example. But the most tragic example is in Chapter XXI, in which a town drunkard named Boggs, who harassed Colonel Sherburn with insults was shot dead by the latter. Huck Finn who witnessed the scene described it as follows:

He [Boggs] was drunk, and weaving about in his saddle; he was over fifty year old, and had a red face...he’d come to town to kill old colonel Sherburn...And so he went on calling Sherburn everything he could lay his tongue to...He [Sherburn] says to Boggs... “I’m tired of this; but I’ll endure it till one o’clock”...Boggs rode off blackguarding Sherburn as loud as he could yell, all down the street;...He cussed away, with all his might... [18]

One cannot mention Boggs’ murder without recalling that when he was nine, Mark Twain witnessed himself the murder of Old Smarr, a town drunkard, by a town merchant who was to be acquitted later. Therefore, one may deduce that Mark Twain had been concerned by drunkenness since his childhood, and that *Huck Finn* was an ideal way to denounce it. Let us remind ourselves that when he was a

journalist Mark Twain tried to satirize society in vain, for his editors would not allow him to do so.

To conclude this section, one notices how Twain depicted the different forms of drunkenness that frequently occurred in his early days. As usual, Huck was there to watch powerlessly and with disgust those awful scenes whose victim he sometimes was. One other vice denounced in *Huck Finn* is “materialism”.

I.5. Materialism

Materialism, as defined in *The Reader's Encyclopedia*, refers to “a system of values on the part of a period of history or a nation, class or individual, which emphasizes commerce, money, comfort, power and minimizes art, culture, ethics and religion...” [19] In other words, materialism consists in attaching much importance to objects, especially money, in being excessively desirous to earn and preserve money by all means. Materialism being defined, let us study how Twain satirized it in *Huck Finn*.

To start with, Chapter V contains the most striking case of materialism: Pap Finn, whose whereabouts had been unknown for long, reappeared because of his son's fortune. He told his son:

I've been in town two days, and I hain't heard nothing about you bein' rich. I heard about it away down the river, too. That's why I come. You git me that money tomorrow- I want it. [20]

Pap Finn saw in his son not a human being, but a source of wealth. He even filed a complaint so that the court might compel Judge Thatcher to surrender Huck's money.

Very surprisingly on the part of a parent, when Huck was believed murdered, Pap Finn obtained part of Huck's money under the pretext of suing the murderer. But there is no doubt that with that money, he did nothing but get drunk, and this most probably led to his being shot dead. Such cases occurred frequently on the frontier, where people were “incurably undermined by the fever of money.” [21]

More interestingly, in Chapter XXIX, the swindlers managed to escape because the mob scrambled on the bag of gold hidden in the coffin. Also, slavery itself was another barbarous form of materialism, but we will come to it in Chapter III.

All the above confirms what Mark Twain said that “money...is the rule of life today...” [22] and displayed once more his hatred against materialism. To close this chapter, it is essential to recall that the evils already pointed out are not the major

ones, the major ones being violence, slavery and religious hypocrisy as the following chapters will demonstrate.

CHAPTER II VIOLENCE, CRUELTY AND BRUTALITY

It is believed by many scholars and critics that the first thing that led Mark Twain to write *Huck Finn* was “man’s inhumanity towards man.” In *Huck Finn* one finds many scenes of inhumanity under various forms. Bernard De Voto tried to explain why Twain insisted on man’s inhumanity and wrote:

One of the reasons why Mark Twain’s books are full of melodramas is that Mark himself had witnessed them since his childhood... [23]

Thus, this chapter will focus on the different levels of human cruelty depicted in *Huck Finn*, notably Pap Finn’s brutality, the feud opposing the Grangerfords and the Shepherdsons that resulted in bloodshed and lynch law.

II.1. Pap Finn

In the beginning of the novel, Huck described his father as someone very rude and brutal toward him, and displayed his joy when his father was believed dead. Huck’s joy was justified, because, as he explained:

He used to always whale me when he was sober and could get his hands on me; though I used to take to the woods most of the time when he was around. [24]

One may assert with confidence that this role of a brutal and rude father that Twain created, was inspired by his own situation on the “*Pennsylvania*” in 1858. In fact, he and his brother Henry worked on the “*Pennsylvania*” and were ill-treated, beaten and abused by Mister Brown, the steamboat pilot. So, *Huck Finn* allowed Mark Twain to “exhume” and satirize those horrible scenes whose victims were, most of the time, innocent children.

It became more brutal in Chapter V, when Pap Finn threatened his own son and prevented him from going to school. Those threats were put into practice in Chapter VI, where Huck said:

He caught me a couple of times and thrashed me, but I went to school the same, and dodged him or out-run him most of the time. [25]

Very ironically, this sadistic father who had managed to kidnap his son was himself a victim of cruelty, because he was found shot dead in a cabin floating on the river (Chapter IX).

In short, Mark Twain managed to satirize this kind of brutality that was frequent in that time. He reproduced scenes similar to those he had witnessed himself in his childhood because, as he said, "...experiences are the kind of book material I want." [26]

II. 2. The Grangerfords and the Shepherdsons

This part of the novel clearly displayed Mark Twain's disgust vis-à-vis human cruelty. He reproduced the terrible bloody scenes that used to occur on the Quarles' farm and in Hannibal as well during his childhood. This episode depicted a typical feud that resulted in bloodshed, whereas it could be settled peacefully.

To start with, one may guess that with this episode of the Grangerfords and the Sheperdsons exterminating one another, the novel reached its climax. Through Huck, who was hidden in a tree, Twain used all his might to express his disgust and his bitterness toward that killing. His hatred against that kind of killing started early in his childhood, during which he witnessed at least a dozen cold-blooded murders. Justin Kaplan shed more light on those murders:

He witnessed other killings: a slave struck down with a lump of slag for some trivial offence...; a young California emigrant who was stabbed with a bowie knife by a drunken comrade- I saw the red life gush from his breast; a stranger from Illinois...who threatened a widow and was killed by her with a musket... [27]

With the above, one understands the meaning of that bloody episode, and the reason why Twain wrote it. Both in this episode and the above examples, innocent people died for nothing. For instance, Buck knew nothing or only a little about the feud that had opposed the two families for generations. The following extract between Huck and Buck after the latter had failed kill Harney Sherpherdson proves Buck's innocence in that affair. Huck said:

*Did you want to kill him Buck?
Well, I bet I did
What did he do to you?
Him? He never done nothing to me.
Well, what did you want to kill him for?
Why nothing - only it's on account of the feud. [28]*

Obviously, Mark Twain did his best to ridicule the aristocrats of those times, who allowed themselves to butcher one another. The fact that a Shepherdson fell in love with a Grangerford, which would seem to be ordinary, led to an unprecedented massacre. In addition, Buck said the same scenario had taken place many times in the past. To understand this part, let us consider the description of that horrible scene as related by Huck Finn:

...By-and-by I begin to hear guns a good way off...there were four or five men cavorting around on their horses...cussing and yelling...He [Buck] said his father and his two brothers was killed, and two or three of the enemy. Said the Shepherdsons laid for them in ambush. Buck said his father and brothers ought to wait for their relations- The Shepherdsons were too strong for them...All of a sudden, bang! bang! bang! goes three or fours guns...the boys jumped for the river –both hurt- and they swum down the current the men run along the bank shooting at them and singing out “kill them, kill them!” It made me so sick I most fell out of the tree... [29]

To end this section, let us mention that Mark Twain succeeded in his endeavour to denounce human cruelty and brutality. The southern aristocrats who relied on their rifles to settle and feud were the first targets of his satire. However, the aristocrats were not the only ones to be targeted. Simple people like Pap Finn and the three gang men of the “Walter Scott” living on the frontier, where “honour finds its expression nowhere but in cowardly ambushes and murders that result from bloody local feuds...” [30] were denounced too. This frontier society would not rely on laws to settle their conflicts, but, most of the time, on Lynch Law as the coming section demonstrates.

II. 3. Lynch Law

On the frontier, which is defined as “an imaginary line dividing civilization from wilderness” [31] or as “the meeting between savagery and civilization” people rarely submitted their conflicts to courts of justice. They usually relied on their own summary justice, which is, to take justice into one’s own hands and kill someone without any legal procedure. Mark Twain displayed this bitterness vis-à-vis that form of violence as this section will demonstrate.

First of all, for a better understanding of this part, the explanation of “Lynch Law” proves necessary. In his *A Tour on the Prairies* (1835), Washington Irving attempted to explain it and gave an example of a young Indian wrongly accused of stealing a white man’s horse. He was tied on a tree and beaten before the horse was found. Irving commented on this saying:

Such however, is too often the administration of law on the frontier, "Lynch Law" as it is technically termed, in which the plaintiff is apt to be witness, jury, judge and executioner, and the defendant to convicted and punished on mere presumption... [33]

As far as *Huck Finn* is concerned, the first scene of Lynch Law is in Chapter XXIX, in which the two swindlers were about to be discovered in the Wilks' village. On their way to late Wilks' grave, people were shouting:

We'll do it...and if we don't find them marks we'll lynch the whole gang! [34]

There is no doubt that if the Wilks corpse had been examined, the swindlers would have been proved wrong and lynched all at once. Moreover, in Chapter XXII, the two swindlers escaped another lynching after having conned and collected money from villagers who expected a great spectacle, as announced on the advertising bills.

However, later in Chapter XXXIII, the two swindlers were discovered and this time, were going to be lynched. Huck, who was very much concerned about that practice, related the scene with much sympathy for the unfortunate men. He said:

...here comes a raging rush of people, with torches, and an awful whooping and yelling, and banging tin pans and blowing horns; and we jumped to one side to let them go by;...I see they had the king and the duke, though they was all over tar and feathers, and didn't look like nothing in the world that was human...Well it made me so sick to see it; and I was sorry for them poor pitiful rascals,...Human beings can be awful cruel to one another. [35]

It is doubtless that the last part of this quotation expressed Twain's opinion about Lynch Law. It was not a form of justice, but an expression of man's cruelty.

In addition, Chapter XXI offers a more spectacular scene with almost a "double lynch". First, Old Boggs, a town drunkard, attacked Colonel Sherburn with insults and was shot dead by the latter without any legal procedure. In reaction, the horrified mob that was watching attempted to lynch Colonel Sherburn, but failed. As usual, Huck Finn, who was an eye-witness, described that furious mob and the scene as well:

Well by-and-by, somebody said Sherburn ought to be lynched. In about a minute everybody was saying it; so away they went, mad and yelling, and snatching down every clothes-line they come to, to do the hanging with...They swarmed up in front of Sherburn's palings...Just then, Sherburn steps out on the roof of his little front porch with a double barrel gun in his hand...Then he says... "the idea of you

lynching anybody!...The idea of you thinking you had pluck enough to lynch a man!..." [36]

With this, we come to the conclusion that Mark Twain vigorously attacked Lynch Law and satirically depicted it through *Huck Finn*. Mark Twain also denounced Lynch Law in his *The United States of Lyncherdom*. [37] Lastly, one notices Mark Twain's hatred against violence, whatever form it may take. This also makes us realise that when he was a boy, Twain had listened to her mother who had taught him "how to hate injustice and above all, how to reveal it." [38] This inhumanity appeared under another form – slavery – which was supported and justified with religious principles. This was among Twain's major concerns as the coming chapter shows.

CHAPTER III SLAVERY AND RELIGIOUS HYPOCRISY

Slavery was another concern on Mark Twain's mind. For that reason, he put it in the heart of his *Huck Finn*, depicting its different forms and condemning it as well as the religious norms that supported it. Even though Mark Twain enlisted in the pro-slavery army, he never supported either slavery or racism. He and his brother Orion, though sympathizing with opposing sides, "hated slavery as well as war." [39] To tackle this slavery issue, one will first analyse the subhuman status reserved for slaves, then the relationship between Jim and Huck, and finally the position of religion as well as Huck's judgement vis-à-vis it.

III.1. A Slave is not a Man

Mark Twain, who was born and had grown up in a slave-holding society, intended not only to reveal slaves' conditions, but also to denounce and condemn slavery. A slave was far from being a human being as many passages of *Huck Finn* show.

Surely, the most shocking scene is the slave auction in Chapter XXVII, where slaves were considered not as human beings, but as mere property to be sold any how. Huck described how it was:

...a couple of nigger traders come along, and the king sold them the niggers reasonable, for three day drafts as they called it, and away they went, the sons up the river to Memphis, and their mother down the river to Orleans. I thought them poor girls and them niggers would break their hearts for grief; they cried around

each other,...I can't ever get it out of my memory, the sight of them poor miserable girls and niggers hanging around each other's necks and crying... [40]

Mark Twain expressed his judgement through Huck Finn, and openly condemned that inhuman practice.

Moreover, Chapter XXXII confirmed with no ambiguity the non-human status reserved for slaves. Even though the story Huck Finn was telling Aunt Sally was not true, the latter reacted the way almost all her contemporaries would do. To illustrate it, an extract of the dialogue between Huck and Aunt Sally about the explosion of the steamboat cylinder will help. Aunt Sally exclaimed:

-Good Gracious! Anybody hurt?

-No'm. Killed a nigger.

-Well, it's lucky; because sometimes people do get hurt! [41]

The logical deduction from Aunt Sally's reaction is that a nigger was not a man, and his death was meaningless.

Furthermore, in his monologue in Chapter VI, Pap Finn confirmed the same racist perception, not of a slave, but of a free nigger. He said he had renounced voting because there was a nigger who had the right to vote too. According to him, the nigger had to be put up for auction. This proves that a nigger was nothing but a piece of property.

Also, Jim was cruelly ill-treated at the Phelps' where he was tied to his bed with chains, and, after he had failed to escape, had nothing to feed on but bread and water. What surprises more is that the two white boys who were responsible for his escape were not troubled at all.

III.2. Huck-Jim Relationship

The relationship between Huck and Jim evolved little by little as they moved southward. Their friendship resulted not only from their similar situation of fugitives, but above from the fact that Huck was discovering human qualities and sentiments in Jim.

When one goes deeply into Twain's early life, he finds that there was a certain Uncle Dan'l, "a slave on the Quarles' farm whom Sam worshiped." [42] With this man, Twain discovered that a slave was equally a man. Later, he was to describe this man in his autobiography saying:

We had a faithful and affectionate good friend, ally, and adviser in “Uncle Dan’l”, a middle aged slave,...whose heart was honest and simple and knew no guile...[I] have staged him in books under his own name and as “Jim”. [43]

Mark Twain transferred Uncle Dan’l from his early childhood into *Huck Finn* under the name of Jim whom he gave the opportunity to show his qualities, namely kindness, loyalty, patience, pity...Jim’s worth is proved in Chapter IX, when he was proud of providing Huck with a comfortable “home” in a cave on Jackson’s Island. Also, Jim had sentiments as white men did. About this Huck said:

I believe he cared just as much for his people as white folks does for their’n. [44]

More surprisingly, Huck, a white boy, knelt down before a slave and apologized for a lie that had “hurt” Jim. He regretted because he had discovered that “Jim was a man with feelings and not simply a runaway slave.” [45] From then, Huck resolved to consider him as such and affirmed:

...I didn’t do him no more mean tricks, and I wouldn’t done that one if I’d knowed it would make him feel that way. [46]

Also, Tom Sawyer’s gesture in Chapter XLIII, when he gave Jim forty dollars for compensation was very significant, for it is a white man who had to take from a slave and not the reverse.

Furthermore, one can assert that Huck found a new “father” in Jim whom he considered to be “white inside”. [47] On his side, Jim was very grateful, because he could not imagine a white boy betraying other whites to save a poor slave. He recognized it telling Huck:

You’s de bes’ fren’ Jim’s ever had; en you’s de only fren’ole Jim’s got now. [48]

One deduces that by siding with Jim, Huck did what only a few whites could do. One will remember that loyalty was reciprocal in their relationship as it appears in Chapter XLII, when Jim remained beside Tom Sawyer while he could have run away.

In short, the Huck-Jim relationship reveals Twain’s intention to “humanize” slaves. With Jim being kind to Huck while his father was not, he proved that a slave could be as good, or even better than a white man. Unfortunately, only a few people shared this opinion with Twain, because even religion supported slavery as the following section will show.

III.3. Religion and Slavery

Mark Twain could not have satirized slavery without attacking its main supporter which was religion. Hannibal claimed to be a Bible-attached community but continued holding niggers in bondage.

Under his father's influence in his early youth, Twain neglected religion. When he later realized that slavery was justified with biblical principles, he became more virulent especially through his writings. These led the readers to the "condemnation of the sort of Christianity that not only tolerated slavery, but also actively supported it..." [49]

In his autobiography, Mark Twain did not bite his words while displaying and describing religion's support for slavery. He wrote:

The local pulpit taught us that God approved it, that it was a holy thing, and that the doubter need only look in the Bible if he wished to settle his mind and then the texts were read aloud to us to make the matter sure; if the slaves themselves had an aversion to slavery, they were wise and said nothing... [50]

This is the situation that Twain wanted to scorn by making Huck violate religious norms.

The case of Miss Watson who was pious and who intended to sell a human being like her is illustrative. Also, Huck's reasoning about whether to betray Jim or not throws more light on the preaching of those times, which was based on threats. The threat number one as Huck pointed out was "going to hell". This is confirmed by Huck's statement Chapter XXX, that "people that acts as I'd been acting about that nigger goes to everlasting fire." [51]

In addition, Mark Twain used Huck Finn, especially in Chapter XXXI, to attack with all his might religion, which he accused of having corrupted Huck's innocent heart. By choosing the right side, which was wrong for religion, Huck mocked the latter and his contemporaries whom Mark twain "loathed...for their Puritanism, hypocrisy, stupidity and pretensions..." [52]

From the foregoing, Mark Twain's opinion vis-à-vis religion's support for slavery becomes clearer. One of Twain's goals was "putting religion on trial..." [53] He rather invited his contemporaries to act instinctively as Huck did, and never listen to their religion-moulded conscience.

III.4. Conscience versus Instinct

Mark Twain's *Huck Finn* conveyed many moral lessons, particularly when Twain made Huck act according to his instinct and not according to his conscience. The

latter is influenced by the society in which one grows up. If society is corrupt, conscience too will be corrupt, but instinct will remain the same as Huck proved.

In Chapter XVI, Huck was about to be “a slave” of his conscience by denouncing Jim. His conscience had been corrupted by the slave-holding society and its hypocritical religion. However, his instinct did not take long to win over conscience, for “Huck instinctively knows what is right,...but doing right violates the social norms to which he was accustomed.” [54]

The most spectacular “battle” opposing instinct and conscience inside Huck is to be found in Chapter XXXI, when Huck was wondering what to do between denouncing Jim and rescuing him. Huck said:

...I was trying to make my mouth say I would do the right thing and the clean thing, and go and write to that nigger's owner and tell where he was; but deep down in me I knowed it. You can't pray a lie – I found that out. So I was in trouble...and didn't know what to do...I was trembling because I'd got to decide, forever betwixt two things; ...I studied a minute...and then says to myself: “All right, then I'll go to hell...”. [55]

The victory of instinct over conscience is highly moral and makes religion appear ridiculous in the mind of the readers. It was also an overwhelming victory of Huck who stands for the right, over society and religion which supported that immoral practice – slavery. As far as morality is concerned, Brander Matthews said that some of the qualities of *Huck Finn* are “the morality of it, the essentially ethical doctrine, the natural sense that underlies it...” [56]

In short, the above section pointed out one of Mark Twain's goals notably inviting people to listen to their instinct, for conscience usually takes one away from the right. Huck's hesitations before choosing between wrong and right, the immoral and moral, are very rich in moral lessons. Lastly, let us also point out that Huck fulfilled well his mission which was “instinctively claiming the right to call a cat a cat, oppression oppression, and the liberation of a slave an absolute need.” [57]

CONCLUSION

Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is to be read and analysed as a satirical work. It targeted many social strata and their way of think as well as their way of acting. To achieve this with success, Mark Twain used a twelve-year-old hero, who laughed at the corrupt society denouncing swindling, drunkenness and materialism. That hero – Huck – used his inventiveness, his quickness, his morality,

his innocence and his love of adventure to ridicule not only the above mentioned vices, but also social, cultural and religious institutions.

Violence was one of the first evils Mark Twain satirized. He first presented the most frequent forms of it through Pap Finn's brutality, the bloodshed resulting from a feud opposing two aristocratic families and Lynch Law. Then he ridiculed them. This violence had been on Mark Twain's mind since his childhood, and its different forms in *Huck Finn* are strikingly similar to what he himself had witnessed. He found no other means to fight it but through satire, which is a much more efficient weapon than any other means in terms of ridding society of vices and other mischievous practices.

The other major evil that Mark Twain wanted to denounce with all his might was slavery. In the mid-19th century, life on the frontier was based on slavery. A slave was not a man, could be sold any how and at any time, and had no way to show his worth and claim his rights. Certainly, one of Twain's goals was proving to the entire universe that a slave too, was a man, that blacks were not different from whites since the latter too were subjects to the same follies as blacks. Besides, in some cases, Mark Twain presented a black as being kinder, more loyal and more moral than whites.

To reach his goal, he used various means among which one may cite allowing Jim to achieve positive things, allowing him to display his human sentiments as well as good-naturedness, his kind-heartedness and his loyalty. Satire and humour played a great role in Twain's success, because they served as a vehicle of his disgust and hatred against the frontier's evil practices.

Mark Twain also attacked religion which was the major supporter of slavery. In Huck's action and reflection, Twain ridiculed religious principles that encouraged immorality. He always made Huck choose the right and moral side and disobey religious norms. Through Huck's hesitations and choices, Twain encouraged people to listen to their instinct rather than to their conscience. He proved that the latter may easily be corrupted by society and religion.

From the above, *Huck Finn* appears to be simultaneously a literary, sociological and anthropological document. It dealt with a real situation, in a precise part of the world and during a determined period of time. Twain chose characters who exactly give a clear idea of mid-19th century frontiersmen and their way of living, thinking and acting. *Huck Finn* is a fictitious work which took inspiration from those times' day-to-day life, and which is not far from reality. One may even be tempted to assert that the only fictitious things in that novel are the characters' names.

Mark Twain's attitude vis-à-vis his contemporaries' evil practices which appeared in almost all his writings, earned him great fame throughout the world. His had

positions against those practices lead the readers of his works to classify him among the pioneers and defenders of the “black cause”, at the same level as Harriet Beecher Stowe and Abraham Lincoln.

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NOTES

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21. George McMichael et al., *Concise Anthology of American Literature*, 2nd ed., p. 1129
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23. Justin Kaplan, *Mark Twain and his World* (NY: Simon and Schuster, 1974), p. 22
24. Bernard De Voto, *L'Amérique de Mark Twain*, p. 319 « L'une des raisons pour lesquelles les livres de Mark Twain sont toujours pleins de mélodrames, c'est que Mark lui-même en avait été nourri depuis l'enfance. »

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27. Everett Emerson, *The Authentic Mark Twain*, p. 69
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