THE CRITICS AND HUCKLEBERRY FINN

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Huckleberry Finn, generally agreed upon as an American masterpiece as well as Mark Twain's greatest work, is a caustic satire on man's inhumanity and the decadence of Southern prewar society. It is a bitter indictment of the morality of a culture founded on the "inhuman" institution of slavery which Twain believed inevitably corrupted both man's soul and his society.

Robert Wiggins praises Huckleberry Finn as Mark Twain's greatest book. The episodes which Twain through Huck relates are, according to Wiggins, invested with a moral viewpoint which provides more than entertainment. Twain's style is based on assumptions largely moral and philosophical concerning the nature of man.

Lionel Trilling, in "The Greatness of Huckleberry Finn," compares Huckleberry Finn to Tom Sawyer. He finds the truth of Huckleberry Finn more intense and complex, possessing the truth of moral passion and dealing with the virtue and depravity of man's heart.

Huck's illiteracy and his disreputable and generally outrageous conduct, declares Van Wyck Brooks, "are so many shields behind which Mark Twain can let all the cats out of the bag with impunity." Brooks finds
evidence that Mark Twain was aware of his opportunity in the introductory note to the book:

Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot.

Henry Nash Smith, in a chapter "Sound Heart and Deformed Conscience", comments on the importance of Huck's character to Twain's purpose. He believes that Twain, by situating in Huck's mind both the perverted moral code of a society based on slavery and a native commitment to freedom, was able to represent the two contradictory codes of behavior in conflict within the same character. "The satire of a decadent slaveholding society," observes Smith, "gains immensely in force when Mark Twain demonstrates that even the outcast Huck has been in part perverted by it." Smith further explains that what Huck thinks is his conscience is in reality nothing more than the attitudes he has absorbed from his environment.

The satire of the towns along the Mississippi River, in Smith's view, insists that the dominant culture is decadent and perverted. The townspeople are at the mercy of scoundrels like the King and the Duke who know how to exploit their prejudices and delusions.
Leo Marx, in an article "Mr. Eliot, Mr. Trilling, and *Huckleberry Finn*" points up the juxtaposition of the "ideal" life Huck and Jim experience on the raft with the decadent society they meet when they leave the raft. Only on the raft are the escaped slave and the outcast white boy able to practice their code: "What you want, above all things, on a raft, is for everybody to be satisfied, and feel right and kind towards the others." 9 This human credo, asserts Marx, constitutes the paramount affirmation of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, obliquely aiming a devastating criticism at the prevailing society. 10 He continues:

The truly profound meanings of the novel are generated by the impingement of the actual world of slavery, feuds, lynching, murder, and a spurious Christian morality upon the ideal of the raft.

Certainly, in reading *Huckleberry Finn*, one is at all times aware of Twain's pessimistic view of man. With the exception of Huck, and possibly of Jim, Mark Twain seems to have little faith in society. The raft appears to be the only refuge from a degenerate world, and even the raft is invaded by the King and the Duke.

In *Mark Twain As A Literary Artist*, Gladys Carmen Bellamy tries to explain why Twain became a pessimist. In her opinion he recoiled from the "spiritual ugliness" that grew up in the years following the Civil War. 12
She finds that Twain was one of the first writers to sense what lay ahead for the United States. 13

Bellamy maintains that Twain was, paradoxically, both a "rabid reformer, eager to uplift, instruct, and purify mankind," and a "dogmatic determinist." 14 As a reformer, she observes, he had his own ways of administering reform. "He wraps it in a rollicking joke, sheathes it in bold burlesque, or clothes it in caustic satire." 15 And, she insists, from the first he realized the humorist's opportunity as an instrument of social reform. 16

T. S. Perry, who believes that a story is most effective when it is merely told, going to the reader "unaccompanied by sign-posts or directions how he shall understand it and profit by it," 17 feels that Twain aptly accomplished his purpose of criticizing society by having the uneducated Huck tell the story without intruding judgments or moralizing on the events. "Life teaches its lessons by implication, not by didactic preaching," asserts Perry, "and literature is at its best when it is an imitation of life and not an excuse for instruction." 18

Critics, although in continual disagreement over various aspects of Huckleberry Finn, nonetheless are
in general agreement that it is one of the greatest
works in American literature, not a few critics even
venturing to compare it with the best in world literature.

Surprisingly enough, Mark Twain liked his book,
planned as a sequel to Tom Sawyer, "only tolerably
well." Trilling finds that Twain began Huckleberry Finn
"more to be at work than anything else." 19 Twain, in
commenting on Huckleberry Finn to a friend, remarked,
"I like it only tolerably well as far as I have got and
may possibly pigeonhole or burn the MS when it is done." 20
The book begun in 1876 was put aside until 1882, when
Twain was "possessed by a charge of literary energy more
intense than any he had experienced for many years." 21

One of the themes of Huckleberry Finn is man's
depravity and inhumanity. Huck succinctly sums up this
theme at the end of Chapter 33 when he sees the King
and the Duke, tarred and feathered, being ridden out
of town on a rail.

Well, it made me sick to see it; and
I was sorry for them poor pitiful rascals,
it seemed like I couldn't ever feel any
hardness against them any more in the world.
It was a dreadful thing to see. Human
beings CAN be awful cruel to one another. 22

Mark Twain believed that man's cruelty and the
decadence of society were inevitable results of the
institution of slavery, firmly emeshed in the culture of the prewar South. He vigorously attacks slavery in an article entitled "My First Lie, and How I Got Out Of It" in the book Mark Twain on the Damned Human Race.

I am speaking of the lie of silent assertion; we can tell it without saying a word, and we all do it— we that know. In the magnitude of its territorial spread it is one of the most majestic lies that the civilizations make it their sacred and anxious care to guard and watch and propagate.

For instance. It would not be possible for a humane and intelligent person to invent a rational excuse for slavery; yet you will remember that in the early days of the emancipation agitation in the North the agitators got but small help or countenance from anyone. Argue and plead as they might, they could not break the universal stillness that reigned, from pulpit and press all the way down to the bottom of society— the clammy stillness created and maintained by the lie of silent assertion— the silent assertion that there wasn't anything going on in which humane and intelligent people were interested.

Many critics have addressed themselves to Twain's handling of the problem of slavery in Huckleberry Finn. The style of the book, which is the style of Huck, the impassive observer who does not judge, is, declares T. S. Eliot, "what makes it a far more convincing indictment of slavery than the sensationalist propaganda of Uncle Tom's Cabin." 24

According to James T. Farrell's "The League of Frightened Philistines", Twain is telling the reader,
in effect, through the role that superstition plays in the minds of Tom and Huck, that the institution of slavery will permeate out entire culture, becoming a formidable barrier to progress. 25 Inevitably, the backwardness of the slaves, treated as property, will affect the moral and intellectual development of the masters. 26

Farrell believes that the relationship between Huck and Jim is the focal point for Twain's "penetrating revelation of the moral and social consequences of slavery." 27 It is through intimate association with Jim that Huck learns that even a Negro can love his family and miss them as much as white folks do. 28

The following passage in which Huck observes with surprise Jim's concern for his family aims an obliquely devastating blow at the code of white supremacy.

I went to sleep, and Jim didn't call me when it was my turn. He often done that... He was thinking about his wife and children... and I do believe he cared just as much for his people as white folks does for their'n. It don't seem natural, but I reckon it's so... He was a mighty good nigger, Jim was.

*Huckleberry Finn* owes more of its greatness than we realize to the character of Jim, the runaway slave, maintains John Erskine. 30 Jim is the one true and
complete picture of the Negro slave before the war, in a society in which both slave and slave owner take the institution of slavery very much for granted. "There must have been thousands of families in which the issue [slavery] never suggested itself," and, asserts Erskine, Mark Twain has given us precisely that version of slavery—"the picture of good Christian homes in which the slaves were as natural an incident as any other human relation." 31

At one point in the trip down the Mississippi River, Huck is separated from Jim in a fog, followed by a storm. Jim was upset and grief-stricken, thinking that Huck had probably been killed. Huck, however, decided to play a practical joke on Jim by persuading him that there had been no storm and resultant separation. It had, instead, all been a dream. This led Jim into an excited interpretation of what such a dream meant. At this time Huck confronts Jim with the visible evidence of the storm, which, of course, had been real. Jim is humiliated and hurt that Huck could have been insensitive enough to deceive him so cruelly. In the following passage Jim poignantly expresses his feelings about Huck's trick.
"... my heart wuz mos' broke bekase you wuz los', en I didn' k'yer no mo' what become er me en de raf' ... . En all you wuz thinkin' 'bout wuz how you could make a fool uv ole Jim wid a lie." 32

Richard Adams, pointing out the significance of Jim's rebuke to Huck, finds that Huck is beginning to realize that Jim is a proud and sensitive human being, not merely the chattel goods or property he has been taught to believe. 33 The joke has been a cruel betrayal of a friend's feelings, but Huck, corrupted by the propaganda with which a slave society attempts to justify slavery, had never before considered that a slave might have feelings as worthy of respect as those of anyone else. 34

One of the passages most significant to the characterization of Huck is the one following in which he apologizes to Jim.

It was fifteen minutes before I could work myself up to go and humble myself to a nigger—but I done it, and I warn't ever sorry for it afterwards, neither. 35

Just as effective an attack on the code of white supremacy as Huck's decision to "humble himself to a nigger" is Pap Finn's raging monologue on a "free nigger and the govment."
There was a free nigger there from Ohio . . .
And what do you think? They said he was a
professor in a college, and could talk all
kinds of languages, and knowed everything.
And that ain't the wust. They said he could
VOTE, when he was at home . . . . I was just
about to go and vote, myself, if I warn't too
drunk to get there; but when they told me
there was a state in this country where
they'd let that nigger vote, I drawed out.
I says I'll never vote again . . . . And to
see the cool way of that nigger—why, he
wouldn't a give me the road if I hadn't
shoved him out o' the way . . . . They call
that a govment that can't sell a free nigger
till he's been in the State six months. Here's
a govment that calls itself a govment, and—
lets on to be a govment, and thinks it is a
govment, and yet's got to set stock-still
for six whole months before it can take ahold
of a prowling, thieving, infernal, white-
shirted free nigger, and—

Henry Nash Smith observes that Pap Finn is a
matchless example of the lowest level of poor whites
who are "fiercely jealous of their superiority to all
Negroes." 37 The monologue on the "govment" by Pap
Finn, in Smith's opinion, is "the essence of Southern
race prejudice." 38

Richard Adams finds the incident of the three
murderous robbers on a wrecked steamboat named the
Walter Scott neatly satirical. According to Adams,
Clemens is implying that the American function of
Scott and others like him is "to excuse and gloss
over the exploitation of slaves and poor whites, and
to glamorize the exploiters as Southern chivalry." 39
Adams believes that this episode echoes, although on a level of much greater seriousness, the earlier activities of Tom's gang, one of which was a raid on a Sunday-school picnic, "and only a primer class at that," which Tom insists, apparently in an effort to make the fiasco a glorious exploit, is a rich caravan. Adams asserts that according to Clemens double-edged suggestion the actual behavior of the slave-owning class is, on one hand as evil and wicked as a gang of thieves and murders, and on the other as silly and profitless as that of Tom's band. 40

Farrell, in "The League of Frightened Philistines," finds it significant to Huck's characterization that he is able to come to grips with the essential moral problems which slavery presents. Huck's respect for property rights is almost nil; he can steal watermelons, chickens, and other food, "borrow" someone else's canoe, and ignore conventional moral standards without trouble to his conscience, but when property rights involve another human being, he faces a difficult moral problem. 41 And, continues Farrell, when Huck resolves to help Jim, even at the risk of eternal damnation, he is affirming the value of a human being instead of an institution of the past. This conflict, believes Farrell, cuts into the heart of
pre-Civil War America. 42

Huck's moral growth, explains Adams, is indicated quite emphatically by the three independent but closely related decisions he makes to help Jim escape. A deed which was, he realized, an act of rebellion against society. 43

Ironically, Huck believed that helping a "nigger" escape was not only an act of rebellion against society, but a blatant act of immorality in the sight of God. Huck earnestly believed that the decision he made to help Jim would result in his eternal damnation. He did not, however, try to rationalize his decision. He decided what he would do and was willing to accept the consequences, as his affirmation, "All right, then, I'll go to hell," 44 illustrates.

Adams sees Huck's repudiation of what he thinks is morally right when he decides to help Jim as a long step further in his repudiation of Southern society, which has formed his conscience. 45 He quotes the passage in which Huck decides to ignore his conscience.

What's the use you learning to do right when it's troublesome to do right and ain't no trouble to do wrong, and the wages is just the same? . . . So I reckoned I wouldn't bother no more about it, but after this always do whichever come handiest at the time. 46
Adams explains that Huck's innocence "represents a remarkably keen perception into the difficult question of personal or individual morality in relation to social convention." The question involved, contends Adams, is not one of a simple conflict between an individual and society but, rather, the two interpenetrate, making the individual conscience an ally of social pressures and conventions.

As Trilling remarks, it is the paradox in Huck's own thinking, by the terms of which he does right by doing what he thoroughly believes, in his conscious mind, to be wrong, that makes his character heroic and Clemen's satire brilliant.

Huck's first decision to help Jim, remarks Adams, is one made casually in the process of his own flight. "People would call me a low-down Abolitionist and despise me for keeping mum," Huck admits to Jim, "but that don't make no difference. I ain't a-going to tell, and I ain't a-going back there, anyways." A qualm of conscience, however, observes Adams, necessitates Huck's second decision. The two think they are nearing Cairo, in which case Jim would be almost free. Huck is now having serious second thought about his part in aiding Jim's escape. Adams cites Huck's soul-searching thoughts on the problem.
It hadn't ever come home to me before, what this thing was that I was doing. But now it did; and it stayed with me, and scorched me more and more. It most froze me to hear such talk. Here was this nigger, which I had as good as helped to run away, coming right out flat-footed and saying he would steal his children—children that belonged to a man I didn't even know; a man that hadn't ever done me no harm."

Adams makes the very significant point that the juxtaposition of "his" and "belonged" in the sentence, although "carefully calculated to drive home the shocking injustice of property rights in human flesh, should not obscure the fact that there is a real moral issue." Because the great wrong of slavery does not make the lesser wrong of robbery right, Huck was in a moral dilemma, according to Adams. However, his human feelings for Jim triumphed over the conventional moral feelings he had absorbed from society.

Although Huck finally decides to "go to Hell" rather than return Jim to slavery, he does not at the end of the book appear to have radically changed his general opinion of slavery or the worth of Negroes. This is illustrated in a conversation Huck has with Tom's Aunt Sally. He tells her that the steamboat on which he was riding had an accident. Aunt Sally responds, "Good gracious! anybody hurt?" Huck very innocently answers, "No'm. Killed a nigger." And he does not see anything
amiss in Aunt Sally's response, "Well, it's lucky because sometimes people do get hurt." Furthermore, certain critics think that Huck shows a surprisingly callous attitude toward Jim in the final chapters, when he assists Tom's outrageous escapades in a matter as serious and important as Jim's freedom.

Again, Huck reflects the attitude of Southern society when he tells Tom about Jim, and Tom announces that he will help Jim escape.

It was the most astonishing speech I ever heard—and I'm bound to say Tom Sawyer fell considerable, in my estimation. Only I couldn't believe it. Tom Sawyer a NIGGER STEALER!

Although Huck has reconciled his own decision to help Jim, a scandalous deed in the eyes of society, he cannot understand Tom's willingness to take part in such a damning scheme. To the outcast Huck, Tom represents the respectable elements of society—Sunday-school attending, educated, law-abiding, conventionally moral. It is, therefore, unthinkable that he would be willing to help a "nigger" escape.

The typical white Southerner's disregard for a Negro as a human being is skillfully exemplified by Mark Twain in the following observation Huck makes when Jim has been recaptured.
some of them wanted to hang Jim for an example. But the others said, don't do it, it wouldn't answer at all, he ain't our nigger, and his owner would turn up and make us pay for him, sure. . . . the people that's always the most anxious for to hang a nigger—that hain't done just right, is always the very ones that ain't the most anxious to pay for him when they've got their satisfaction out of him.

The doctor, whom Jim had helped care for Tom, in defending him, can only say, "I tell you, gentlemen, a nigger like that is worth a thousand dollars—and kind treatment, too." The best praise that can be bestowed on Jim is that he is worth a thousand dollars. Not a word about his worth as a human being.

The fact that these men, all conventionally religious, look upon a man with dark skin as something less than a man, less a human being than themselves, is a significant comment on their religion. A religion that could condone slavery seems, in Twain's opinion, a little less than divine. In fact, Huckleberry Finn is as bitter an attack on conventional religion as on slavery.

Henry Nash Smith remarks that misguided or insincere piety, along with other "perversions of Christianity," head the list of indictments Twain makes against the prewar South. He feels that Twain's criticism of the religious life that he saw is particularly significant because religion is the basis on which all of society's values are built.
The following scene between Huck and Miss Watson, sister of the Widow Douglas, is a well-aimed jibe at the conventional idea of heaven, and the reader's sympathies are with Huck.

Then she told me all about the bad place, and I said I wished I was there. She got mad, then, but I didn't mean no harm. All I wanted was to go somewheres; all I wanted was a change, I warn't particular. She said it was wicked to say what I said; said she wouldn't say if for the whole world; SHE was going to live so as to go to the good place. Well, I couldn't see no advantage in going where she was going, so I made up my mind I wouldn't try for it. Now she had got a start, and she went on and told me all about the good place. She said all a body would have to do there was to go around all day long with a harp and sing, forever and ever. So I didn't think much of it.

Later, Huck reflects on the discrepancy between Miss Watson's religion and that of the Widow Douglas.

Sometimes the widow would take me one side and talk about Providence in a way to make a boy's mouth water; but maybe next day Miss Watson would take hold and knock it all down again. I judged I could see there were two Providences, and a poor chap would stand considerable show with the widow's Providence, but if Miss Watson's got him there warn's no help for him any more.

Mark Twain, like his illiterate, uneducated narrator, pondered religion and its assumption of a heaven and a hell as either reward or punishment for one's life on earth. Caroline Harnsberger, in Mark Twain's Views
of Religion, traces Twain's religious development. After considerable questioning Twain became, in his later years, an avowed agnostic. 63

The Grangerford-Shepherdson feud is an episode which Mark Twain utilizes to point up serious ills of Southern society, among which is religious hypocrisy. Huck astutely conveys his feelings on the occasion:

Next Sunday we all went to church, about three mile, everybody a-horseback. The men took their guns along, so did Huck, and kept them between their knees or stood them handy against the wall. The Shepherdsons done the same. It was pretty onery preaching—all about brotherly love, and such-like tiresomeness; but everybody said it was a good sermon, and they all talked it over going home, and had such a powerful lot to say about faith, and good works, and free grace, and preforeordination, and I don't know what all, that it did seem to me to be one of the roughest Sundays I had run across yet. 64

The implication of the Grangerfords and Shepherdsons attending the same church service and greatly appreciating a sermon on brotherly love, while their guns were between their knees or propped against the wall, ready to use at the slightest provocation, is obvious.

Later the same day, Miss Sophia Grangerford asks Huck to go back to church, ostensibly to get a Testament she had left there. At this point, Huck makes another observation about people and religion.
there warn't anybody at the church, except maybe a hog or two, for there warn't any lock on the door, and hogs likes a puncheon floor summer-time because it's cool. If you notice, most folks don't go to church only when they've got to; but a hog is different.

Huck, for all the religious hypocrisy with which he comes in contact, and despite his supposed lack of understanding of religious doctrine is able to comprehend the central problem of religion. Feeling that Providence has slapped him in the face for his wickedness in aiding Jim's escape, Huck reflects on the issue after the King and the Duke have sold Jim for "forty dirty dollars."

Well, I tried the best I could to kinder soften it up somehow for myself, by saying I was brung up wicked, and so I warn't so much to blame; but something inside of me kept saying, "There was the Sunday school, you could a gone to it; and if you'd a done it they'd a learnt you, there, that people that acts as I'd been acting about that nigger goes to everlasting fire.

It made me shiver. And I about made up my mind to pray; and see if I couldn't try to quit being the kind of a boy I was, and be better. So I knelled down. But the words wouldn't come. Why wouldn't they? It warn't no-use to try and hide it from Him. Nor from ME, neither. I knowed very well why they wouldn't come. It was because my heart warn't right; it was because I warn't square; it was because I was playing double. I was letting ON to give up sin, but away inside of me I was holding on to the biggest one of all . . . . I knowed it was a lie—and He knowed it. You can't pray a lie—I found that out.
Henry Nash Smith believes that Twain's revulsion for the insincere and hypocritical religion of society reaches its height in the Wilks episode with the King, pretending to be a minister, delivering his masterpiece of "soul-butter and hogwash" for the benefit of the townspeople of the late Peter Wilks. 67 Huck, thoroughly revolted by the King's sanctimonious sham, bitterly comments, "I never see anything so disgusting." 68

Richard Adams believes that the episodes and incidents in Huckleberry Finn are strategically placed to reveal what Twain considered the characteristic weaknesses, injustices, and follies of the prewar South. 69 The basically false and hypocritical gentility of the would-be aristocracy, the foolish and morally perverse sentimentalism of its favorite literature and, of course, the essential criminality of slavery are constantly brought home to Huck, and through him, to the reader. Huck's encounters with society, maintains Adams, are not haphazardly chosen and arranged. "Each has its revealing gleam to contribute to Huck's unconsciously dawning awareness of the true values of the civilization to which he is being asked to belong." 70

Each of the "sivilized" forms of life on shore with which Huck and Jim come in contact, explains Robert Wiggins, is a variation of the "niceness" or brutality they are fleeing. 71 Huck does not moralize
or pronounce judgment on the degradation he witnesses, but, asserts Wiggins, "the contrast with the life on the raft is obvious." Wiggins also observes that the society Huck flees, the "morally right" society, is chiefly characterized by man's depravity and inhumanity. The "morally wrong" society on the raft, ironically, illustrates man's nobility in the relationship between Huck and Jim.

Wiggins feels that the Walter Scott incident is an examination of the code of ethics of the South. The following rationalization is delivered by one of the robbers on the Walter Scott as he prepares to rid himself of an unreliable cohort by "allowing" him to drown.

He'll be drowned and won't have nobody to blame for it but his own self. I reckon that's a considerable sight better'n killin' of him. I'm unfavorable to killin' a man as long as you can git aroun' it, it ain't good sense, it ain't good morals.

The Duke and the King, continues Wiggins, are no better, and their pretensions to nobility make them and the institutions of aristocracy and monarchy look absurd. Adams, commenting on the Walter Scott episode, mentions that part of the loot which the robbers leave to Huck and Jim is a number of books "about kings and dukes and earls and such, and how guady they dressed, and how much style they put on, and called
each other your majesty, and your grace, and your lordship, and so on, 'stead of mister." 77 The incident, with all its ramifications, asserts Adams, contributes to the satire of the aristocratic ideal in the South. 78

Twain, in a conversation between Jim and Huck on the subject of royalty, skillfully ridicules the idea of monarchy and the nobility. Huck's observation that "all kings is mostly rapscallions, as fur as I can make out," 79 apparently echoes Twain's own opinion of nobility. An uproa riously funny description of Henry VIII follows, and then Huck, summing up his feelings on the matter, sagely comments, "All I say is, kings is kings, and you got to make allowances. Take hem all around, they're a mighty ornery lot. It's the way they're raised." 80

The ethical code of Huck and Jim, explains Wiggins, differs from society's because it is not taken from an alien social context and blindly, relentlessly adhered to. Rather, their moral ideals are based on firsthand observation of society and a common-sense analysis of what they see. 81

As Leo Marx, in the article "Mr. Eliot, Mr. Trilling, and Huckleberry Finn," points out, Huck and Jim follow a secular creed. 82 Their object is peace and harmony, as illustrated by Huck's remark,
"What you want, above all things, on a raft, is for everybody to be satisfied, and feel right and kind towards the others." 83

_Huckleberry Finn_, as seen by Lauriat Lane, Jr., is a novel of education. Huck's education, Lane contends, has been the school of life, and therefore more complete than any education derived from books. 84

Lane sees man's obsession with material wealth, his insatiable greed, as one theme of _Huckleberry Finn_. Twain, Lane believes, demonstrates that gold is the guiding force of most human action and usually the only remedy man can offer in return for the hurts he inflicts on his fellow man. 85 For example: The men who refuse to help Huck because they believe his family has smallpox, nevertheless, give him money—no doubt in an attempt to appease their consciences. The Duke and the King heartlessly sell Jim when they run out of money. Tom, at the end of the book, gives Jim forty dollars for being a good sport about the escape—as though money could gloss over all the trouble, cruelty, and humiliation he has caused Jim with his selfish thoughtlessness.

The reader finds the code of Southern gentility and chivalry coldly appraised by Mark Twain in Colonel Sherburn's murder of the drunken Boggs and in the horribly stupid feud of the Grangerfords and
the Shepherdsons.

Richard Adams finds in the Grangerfords the typical aristocratic virtues. The more Huck learns of them, however, the more uneasy he becomes about their real behavior and character. Through Huck's observations and comments, which basically are quite astute and shrewd, for all their seeming naivete, Twain undercuts the value of the aristocratic culture. Their better qualities are more than nullified by the violence at the end of the episode.

Buck's explanation of a feud to Huck, is, Wiggins believes, a deliberate parody of the romantic idea of feuding as honorable and chivalrous.

Well, says Buck, "a feud is this way; A man has a quarrel with another man, and kills him; then that other man's brother kills him; then the other brothers on both sides, goes for one another; then the cousins chip in--and by and by everybody's killed off, and there ain't no more feud. But it's kind of slow, and takes a long time.

The fact that no one could remember the cause of the feud heightens the sense of absurdity the reader receives from the episode. Even Huck, for all the ugliness of life he had witnessed, could not quite "stomach" it.

Adams finds the cold-blooded murder of old Boggs by Colonel Sherburn the most significant incident
exposing the ugly side of Southern chivalry. Boggs, although a noisy nuisance, is only a harmless fool. Sherburn is the epitome of aristocratic pride. But, more important to the meaning of the episode, is the character of the townspeople, who are, without a doubt, shiftless, decadent, and disgusting.

The following description of the town vividly expresses Twain's contempt for the lazy frontiersman and his ill-kept town:

All the street and lanes was just mud, they warn't nothing else BUT mud... There couldn't anything wake them the loafers up all over, and make them happy all over, like a dog fight—unless it might be putting turpentine on a stray dog and setting fire to him, or tying a tin pan to his tail and see him run himself to death.

Men, it appears, can be "awful cruel", not only to each other, but to animals as well.

In Adam's opinion, the Duke, the King, Colonel Sherburn, and Huck all see well enough that the people are gullible and cowardly, but they do not understand that the reason is the apparently opposite fact that an aristocracy is in control. Twain, however, believed that poverty of the spirit as well as of the flesh, is a result of aristocratic splendor, and that cruelty, one of the themes of the book, is characteristic of any society rigidly divided into hereditary social classes.
Twain bitterly attacks mobs, especially Southern lynching mobs, in the following speech, thunderously delivered by Colonel Sherburn to the crowd of townsmen who are threatening to lynch him for his murder of Boggs.

You didn't want to come . . . you're afraid to back down—afraid you'll be found out to be what you are—cowards—and so you raise a yell . . . and come raging up here, swearing what big things you're going to do. The pitifullest thing out is a mob . . . they don't fight with courage that's born in them, but— with courage that's borrowed from their mass . . . . If any real lynching's going to be done, it will be done in the dark, Southern fashion; and when they come they'll bring masks, and fetch a MAN along.

In Chapter XXII Huck goes to a circus and there witnesses a rather unusual incident. A man, supposedly drunk, demands to ride one of the show horses. The ringmaster finally allows the man to get on one of the horses. At first he is barely able to cling to the animal, and Huck is terribly distressed. The crowd, however, roars delightedly, finding the entire spectacle enormously amusing. "But," declares Kenneth S. Lyon, "it is not Huck's charming naivete in not recognizing that the drunkard is a clown that Twain condemns, it is the callousness of the crowd." 96

Lyons further explains that this circus scene depends upon the preceding chapter, involving a real drunk, old Boggs, who is shot by Colonel Sherburn. 97 After Sherburn has shot Boggs, a crowd excitedly
gathers around the wounded drunkard to watch him die. Everyone seems glad for the amusement, and one man repeatedly demonstrates how it happened, much to the crowd's delight and satisfaction. Everyone, that is, except for Huck and Bogg's daughter, both of whom are very greatly distressed by the murder. Lyon believes that by the juxtaposition of these two episodes, in each of which Huck's sympathetic concern is vividly contrasted with the gleeful amusement of the crowd, "Twain lays bare the moral callousness of a society that views life romantically—that regards suffering as a circus." 98

Twain offers another pessimistic view of man when the townspeople, after having been duped by the King and the Duke into seeing the Royal Nonesuch, agreed to help trick their fellow townsmen into seeing it. And earlier, when printing the handbills advertising their performance, the Duke offered a caustic comment on society. Having printed on the bottom of the bill, in the biggest letters, LADIES AND CHILDREN NOT ADMITTED, the Duke quite perceptively observed, "There, if that line don't fetch them, I don't know Arkansaw!" 99

Twain's pessimism perhaps reaches its zenith, however, with the Wilks episode, a savage condemnation of the baseness to which the King and the Duke would
stoop for money. Their attempted exploitation of a trusting, grief-stricken family is the height of gross immorality. Huck, familiar as he was with fraud and debasement, aptly realized that it was "enough to make a body ashamed of the human race." 100

Lyon makes an interesting point in regard to the Wilks incident. Earlier in the story, Jim told Huck how his daughter, after having recovered from scarlet fever, became strangely disobedient. Jim, unaware of the reason for her disobedience, punished her. Remorsefully, he explains to Huck:

De Lord God Almighty forgive po' old Jim, kaze he never gwyne to forgive hisself as long's he live! Oh, she was plumb deef en dumb, Huck, plumb deef en dumb—en I'd ben a-treat'n her so! 101

The King and the Duke, having arrived at the little Tennessee town where they plan to rob the Wilks girls of their inheritance, began playing the parts of a parson and deaf mute. The disgusting spectacle of the two frauds pretending to talk on their hands, when contrasted with Jim's sorrow and compassion, is sickening. 102 Indeed, "it is enough to make a body ashamed of the human race."

The last half of Huckleberry Finn in which Tom
gloriously engineers Jim's escape after the fashion of the romances he has read, has caused many critics a great deal of trouble. They find it a poor and weak ending to an otherwise masterfully written book. Other critics find the ending a summary of the book's themes and social criticism.

Wiggins, in "The Craft of Huckleberry Finn," defends the ending of Twain's book, contending that it is related to preceding events. Huck breathes cool common sense over Tom's hot, foolish romanticism, and Jim's dignity in caring for Tom after Tom was shot make Tom's ridiculous shenanigans all the more obviously morally irresponsible. 103 Tom's behavior, however, Wiggins declares, is actually no more childish and inhumane than the behavior Huck observed in the towns along the Mississippi. 104

In Adam's opinion, the ending of Huckleberry Finn completes Twain's satire on sentimental literature, from which Tom receives his "inspirations." 105 The ending also caps the ridicule of aristocratic pretensions, he believes, ironically identifying Jim, the slave, with the noble persons whose adventures serve as models for his own escape. 106 Furthermore, he continues, it is an expression of contempt for an adult society so easily hoodwinked by the plans of two children. 107
Thomas Arthur Gullason's "The 'Fatal' Ending of Huckleberry Finn" suggests that Mark Twain planned the final episode on repetitions and variations of themes presented earlier. His primary objective in the last chapter, according to Gullason, was to "ridicule, in the manner of Don Quixote, the romantic tradition," exemplified by Tom Sawyer, who lacks character and is full of purposeless fun, and to win final sympathy for the realistic tradition and its hero, Huck, who has achieved a sense of moral responsibility. Twain, he asserts, attempts to "kill" romanticism.

Tom's elaborate plan for freeing Jim gives rise to another moral problem, that of stealing and "borrowing". Here Huck is the realist and cannot understand, although Tom valiantly attempts to explain the distinction between stealing and borrowing.

It ain't no crime in a prisoner to steal the thing he needs to get away with, Tom said; it's his right . . . He said if we warn't prisoners it would be a very different thing, and nobody but a mean ornery person would steal when he warn't a prisoner . . . . So I let it go at that, though I couldn't see no advantage in my representing a prisoner, if I got to set down and chaw over a lot of gold-leaf distinctions like that, every time I see a chance to hog a watermelon.

This conversation echoes on earlier discussion between Huck and Jim on the same subject. Huck explains his view of the issue:
and sometimes I lifted a chicken that warn't roosting comfortable, and took him along. Pap always said, take a chicken when you get a chance, because if you don't want him yourself you can easy find somebody that does, and a good deed ain't never forgot. I never see Pap when he didn't want the chicken himself ... Pap always said it warn't no harm to borrow things, if you was meaning to pay them back, sometime; but the widow said it warn't anything but a soft name for stealing ... 

Robert Wiggins finds Huckleberry Finn "one of the most significant examinations in American literature of the codes by which men live." 113 Huck, Wiggins believes, keeps this fact clearly before the reader's mind in his last words of the book: "Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and civilize me, and I can't stand it. I been there before." 114

According to Bernard DeVoto, the portraiture beginning among the dregs with Pap Finn and ending with the Grangerfords includes every level of Southern society. 115 DeVoto explains that an artist's integrity seems to consist in refusing to color a perceived truth with an emotion of the artist's consequent to the truth. 116 He continues:

These scenes . . . are most notable for Mark Twain's detachment. There is no coloration, no resentment, no comment of any kind. The thing itself is rendered. If repudiation is complete, it exists implicitly in the thing. 117

Lionel Trilling relates that Huckleberry Finn was
once barred from certain libraries and schools for its "alleged subversion of morality." The authorities, he explains, had in mind the book's "endemic lying, the petty thefts, the denigrations of respectability and religion, the bad language and the bad grammar." Trilling elaborates on the morality of Huckleberry Finn:

We smiled at that excessive care, yet in point of fact, Huckleberry Finn is indeed a subversive book—no one who reads thoughtfully the dialectic of Huck's great moral crisis will ever again be wholly able to accept without some question and some irony the assumptions of the respectable morality by which he lives, nor will ever again be certain that what he considers the clear dictates of moral reason are not merely the engrained customary beliefs of his time and place.

Perhaps Trilling's perceptive observation is fundamental to what Mark Twain is really trying to teach in Huckleberry Finn.
FOOTNOTES

2. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid., p. 56.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.

18. Ibid.


20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.


26. Ibid.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.

29. Huckleberry Finn, p. 379.


31. Ibid.

32. Huckleberry Finn, p. 326.

34 Ibid.
35 *Huckleberry Finn*, p. 326.
36 Ibid., pp. 281-282.
37 Smith, p. 125.
38 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
42 Ibid., p. 323.
44 *Huckleberry Finn*, p. 423.
46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid., p. 348.
50 Ibid., p. 345.
51 Ibid., p. 346.
52 Ibid., p. 347.
53 Ibid.
54 Ibid.
55 *Huckleberry Finn*, p. 428.
56 *Huckleberry Finn*, p. 431.
59 Smith, p. 118.
61 *Huckleberry Finn*, p. 263.
64 *Huckleberry Finn*, p. 345.
67 Smith, p. 118.
71 Wiggins, p. 65.
Huckleberry Finn, p. 378.

Ibid., p. 379.

Wiggins, p. 71.


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Ibid.


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Wiggins, p. 66.

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Huckleberry Finn, p. 368.


Ibid.

Huckleberry Finn, p. 373.


Ibid., p. 403.

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Huckleberry Finn, p. 375.
100. *Huckleberry Finn*, p. 385.


102. Ibid.

103. Wiggins, p. 67.

104. Ibid.


106. Ibid.

107. Ibid.


109. Ibid.

110. Ibid.

111. *Huckleberry Finn*, p. 444.

112. Ibid., pp. 310-311.


114. Ibid.


116. Ibid.

117. Ibid.


119. Ibid.

120. Ibid.

SECONDARY SOURCES


