

In *Huckleberry Finn*, Mark Twain simply wrote about a boy and the river. In doing so Twain presents the reader with his personal view of mankind, whether he wants to or not:

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 will be shot. (2)

Possibly by giving us this warning Twain admits to the existence of a clear motive, morality, and a strong plot in his masterpiece. Nonetheless, *Huckleberry Finn*, through examples of hypocrisy, greed, violence, and racism, shows Twain's pessimistic view of society and corruption of the human race as a whole.

To understand the pessimism of the book, we must first understand Huck. Huck is a character though whose eyes we see the ugly truth about mankind. Huck is always on the run from people. In the beginning we see him living a prim and proper life with the widow. He is then abducted by his father, and for a time is relieved to get out of the moral trappings of the town, and live sloppily, doing whatever he wanted to do. "It was kind of lazy and jolly, laying off comfortable all day." (24) After some time, and being unable to endure the abuse of his father, he runs away. Huck is as dissatisfied by one extreme as he is by the next. Huck chooses not to take sides on any matter, but instead be indifferent towards it. Huck avoids moral decision making throughout the book as much as possible. In the end of the book Twain saves Huck's indifferent persona by bringing in Tom to make the decisions for him.

Some may argue that in saving Jim, Huck saves face for the human race, giving a sense of hope for the future. However, Huck must go about freeing Jim in an underhanded manner, lying and stealing his way down the river. Also, Twain himself cuts down the "salvation" of Jim by, in the last chapters, revealing that the entire adventure was useless, that the same ends could have been met by staying home.

Violence plays a large role in the unflattering portrayal of man. In the opening chapters we see young Huck joining Tom Sawyer's band of murderers and thieves. "We stop stages and carriages on the road, with masks on, and kill the people and take their watches and money." (10)

Although the reader realizes that the "gang" never does any physical harm to real people, the fact that this group of youngsters fantasizes about committing acts that were evil even to the most ignorant, shows the acceptance with which violence is perceived by man.

When Huck fakes his own murder, he employs a fantastic knowledge of graphic violence. He kills a pig so he can leave a trail of blood, marking the path the murderer took to dispose of Huck's body. He takes the ax and "smashes" the door in to make it seem as if some deranged maniac hacked through the door. It takes this seemingly horrendous act of violence to begin Huck's journey. In the Grangerford and Shepherdson scenes, violence is seen as a senseless act, committed by an inhuman instinct, rather than through intellect and will. As soon as the Grangerfords hear that their daughter ran off with a Shepherdson, their first instinct was to get the guns and bag some Shepherdsons. They did not stop to think that there might be an alternative solution.

The Grangerford and Shepherdson scene also shows the grandeur associated with violence. Constantly Buck is whining about how he never gets "roused" when they here a Shepherdson lurking around. Buck boasts about how one day he too will shoot down a Shepherdson, as if committing that mortal sin will propel him into manhood. Twain clearly displays his disgust with violence in these scenes.

Huck's naivete does not mask the hypocrisy of man shown in the book. In the scenes with the Grangerfords and the Shepherdsons, Huck fails to see the true gaudiness of the Grangerford household. In describing their home one could use the contemporary term, cheesy. Huck sees their furnishings, like the fake fruit, and marvels at how they look prettier than real fruit. In reality the chipped and cracked fruit is, as gaudy and fake as the Grangerfords.

The male Grangerfords jaunt around wearing startling white linen outfits and panama hats. Huck regards and admires both families, "They [the Shepherdsons] were as high-toned and well born and rich and grand as the tribe of Grangerfords." (103) We the reader see the "grand" Grangerfords and Shepherdsons going gun-toting to Sunday mass, praising peace and harmony. This scene clearly shows the hypocrisy with which Twain feels we are all immersed in.

The King and the Duke scene is in the book for two reasons. First Twain needed an excuse to keep Huck and Jim traveling deeper and deeper south. The second and more obvious reason is to show the element of greed that further corrupts society.

In the scenes with the King and the Duke Twain shows us the greediness of man. The King and the Duke pride themselves in cheating people out of money. They steal from whomever, however, and whenever they can. They have no sympathy for the Wilks girls. The King and the Duke double their take from the Wilks's by at first handing over their share of the bequeathed money and some of their own money earned from the Nonesuch, thus appearing to the town as "good souls." Before leaving the King and the Duke sell off every worldly possession of the Wilk's estate, as well as the slaves.

Racism runs throughout the book. Huck is faced with his own personal conflict with racism. He is faced with the dilemma whether or not to turn Jim in. Huck makes his decision when he says, "I'll go to Hell." (206) Huck decides that saving Jim is worth it, even if it means going to hell. As noble as it seems, it was only one isolated instance. Huck, and Huck's society was still decidedly racist. Huck fails to see Jim as a black who is human, but as a black who is almost white.

In the end Huck does the only thing he can do, he says he is going to escape:

But I reckon I got to light out for the territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Polly is going to adopt me and sivilize me, and I can't stand it. I been there before. (281)

It is the promise that Aunt Polly is going to "sivilize" him with the ideals of a civilization and society that is on the whole corrupt that forces Huck to light out for the territory. Twain also foreshadowed a grim future for society when he wrote, "But I reckon I got to light out for the territory ahead of the rest." (281) By saying "ahead of the rest" he acknowledges that wherever Huck goes, society, and subsequently the evil and corruption synonymous with it, must follow.

