

Historical analysis of the author mark twain essay

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This paper presents a historical analysis of the famous writer Samuel Clemens, better known under the name - Mark Twain and his works.

Mark Twain's famous novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* was the reflection of the personal life of the writer, revealing the connection between the imaginary world created by the author and his own life. Mark Twain (real name - Samuel Clemens) was born on November 30 in 1835 in Florida. Jane Lampton and John Marshall Clemens had six children. Four years later the whole family moved to Hill Street home. The place, where the house was situated, served in the future a good basis for the fictitious town - St. Petersburg in his novels.

His early years he spent in a wealthy family with several household slaves. The theme of slavery and racial confrontation were the main in some of his works and especially in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, where one of the key characters was exactly the runaway slave Jim. In 1847 the father of Mark Twain died and this caused a difficult financial situation for the family. The boy, who was at that moment eleven years old, had to give up school and take up his first job - newspaperman.

The main hero of *The Adventure of Huckleberry Finn* also remained very early without support of his father and had to take care of himself - "The Widow Douglas she took me for her son, and allowed she would civilize me; but it was rough living in the house all the time, considering how dismal regular and decent the widow was in all her ways". Mark Twain went to New York and Philadelphia and came back in 1857. Here he was fascinated by steamboats and received the license for 'cub' river pilot under Horace Bixby

in 1858 (Merriman, 2). This experience was later developed in his literature works, namely Huck and Jim were also traveling along this river : “ We caught fish and talked, and we took a swim now and then to keep off sleepiness. It was kind of solemn, drifting down the big, still river, laying on our backs looking up at the stars, and we didn’t ever feel like talking loud, and it warn’t often that we laughed—only a little kind of a low chuckle. We had mighty good weather as a general thing, and nothing ever happened to us at all—that night, nor the next, nor the next.

. ” Ch. 12 (Merriman, 115). During his trips from St. Louis to New Orleans Mark Twain fell in love with the river Mississippi, his memoirs were reflected in his work *Life on the Mississippi*: “ The face of the water, in time, became a wonderful book — a book that was a dead language to the uneducated passenger, but which told its mind to me without reserve, delivering its most cherished secrets as clearly as if it uttered them with a voice” (Richard, 155).

After the accident on the steamboat in 1858, during which his brother Henry died because of explosion, the connection between the river and the writer grew even stronger. In 1861 started the Civil War, and there was no more possibility to pass the Mississippi river and Mark Twain traveled to the desert valley of the mining town - Cason City. He and his friends formed a Confederate militia; they took part in the battle, where a man was killed. This impressed Mark Twain so much that he deserted. His hero - Huck - had also to witness a brutal murder of a Southern aristocrat, who killed a drunken man for the threats he was shouting. Mark Twain’s brother Orion got the post of Secretary of the Nevada Territory. The trip seemed very interesting for

Mark Twain, as he never left the state and all his impressions he described in the novel *Roughing It*. Mark Twain worked at mining of Jackass Hill in 1864 and prepared reports for such publications as *Territorial Enterprise*, *San Francisco Morning Call*, *The Alta Californian* and others ((Merriman, 10).

During his trips to other cities he had the chance to meet Harriet Beecher Stowe and Charles Dickens. At this time he produced a number of short stories including "Advice For Little Girls" and "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" (Merriman, 12). Mark Twain married Olivia Langdon in 1870 and they had four children. Three of them didn't live longer than till their twenties, only their fourth daughter - Clara died at the age of eighty eight. The writer built a home in Hartford, Connecticut, but he traveled often with his family.

He worked on the short stories, his novel about Tom Sawyer and also produced *The Gilded Age* (1873) together with Charles Dudley Warner. In America he gave some lectures and in 1888 was awarded an honorary Master of Art degree from Yale University (Merriman, 16). Mark Twain tried to earn money in mines and printing machines business - Charles L. Webster Publishing Co. , and *The Mark Twain Self-Pasting Scrap Book*, but in reality his ventures were not a success.

At this time he produced a number of literal works: *The American Claimant*, *The Tragedy of Pudd'Nhead Wilson*, *Tom Sawyer Abroad* was followed by *Tom Sawyer, Detective* in 1896. Horton Foote in his work "The Shape of the River: The Lost Teleplay about Mark Twain" compared the bankruptcy of Mark Twain due to his incorrect business deals, to the experience, he

received when working as a cub riverboat pilot on the river of Mississippi. He tried to learn the shape of the river, but it was extremely difficult as the river changed all the time. It became clear for the writer that this lesson was not only about river, he remarked: " Every time I get used to something, get comfortable in a way of living and I think I've learned all the things that I need to know," he says, " I have to start in learning all over again and figure out a new way to do and get along. " (Foote, 41). The works of Twain were very much under the impact of the unconventional West, the growth of his popularity thus coincided with the end of domination of New England writers in the literature of America.

Most critics and fellow writers agreed that Mark Twain played a significant role for the development of the American literature. In his works he referred to really American subjects, using humorous and poetic language manner. His appeal to purely American themes and language made him an outstanding writer and influenced the other novelists like Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner. The situation with debts was getting worse by the year 1895 and Mark Twain had to start his another tour of lectures in Australia, South Africa, Ceylon, New Zealand, India, and Canada.

Yale University bestowed upon him an honorary Doctor of Letters degree in 1901 and in 1907 he was awarded an honorary Doctor of Letters by Oxford University" (Merriman, 18). To his 70th birthday in 1905 Mark Twain came out with his famous birthday speech. He died in 1910 in Redding, Connecticut and was buried together with his wife and his children. The last phrase he wrote was: " Death, the only immortal who treats us all alike,

whose pity and whose peace and whose refuge are for all—the soiled and the pure, the rich and the poor, the loved and the unloved.

(Jehlen, 109). *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, which followed his *Tom Sawyer*, was said to be a masterpiece of Mark Twain. This novel was very famous, and at the same time caused disputes and controversy. It was banned in Southern States due to its deep criticism of slavery and the South of America. Some critics argued that the novel included racism itself as the word “nigger” was often used in the text. Due to bad connotation of the term, it was said to distort the antislavery themes of the novel and spoil the overall presentation of the novel.

Vitally important for the novel was in reality the context it was written in, but what makes it even more significant is the topicality of the novel at the present time, as the themes of racial and moral tensions remained of high actuality. As Toni Morrison has observed that it is necessary “to illustrate the impact of historical context, i. e. , the end of Reconstruction and Twain’s own disillusionment, during his 1882 trip down the Mississippi, upon observing the continuing vestiges of the slavery system, on the writing of his masterpiece.” (Morrison, 3). This was already mentioned, that Mark Twain wrote his novel expressing purely American features, Bernard DeVoto said: “the novel derives from the folk and embodies their mode of thought more purely and more completely than any other ever written.” (Jehlen, 107). There was no general agreement about the way the author defined American identity.

Some critics didn't accept the presentation of a poor uneducated boy as a typical American. Others, on the contrary, argued that the novel was an expression of the "folk", telling about low class people, trying to "make good" (Jehlen, 107). In reality, Mark Twain did his best in creating the atmosphere of folk culture in America using the specific way of communication, dialect.

In the opening notice of the book he informed the readers, that each of the characters used his dialect, which was normal for the people, who got different education. Some researches found in the way Mark Twain used language the proofs, that social situation formed the identity. This all depends on the interpretation of the language used by the characters; they could be seen as complex and exalted or uneducated and primitive. However, the way the author used the local speech, contributed to the development of the realism of the novel. On the other hand, some components of romance could also be found in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. First of all the author obtained it through the number of coincidences, like for example the fact the Tom Sawyer came on the same day when Huck arrived to the farm. The literary tradition Mark Twain used for his novel is called - "the picaresque — the comedy of the road, the traveling adventure" (Smith, 103). But he chose the river instead of the road - the Mississippi river became the place of various adventures.

The river is the symbol of natural power and the passing of time that can not be returned. The main heroes, during their trip down the river had the chance to meet different representatives of American society. "Huck gives

firsthand descriptions of feuding families, a camp-meeting religious revival, a lynch mob, and other complex social phenomena.

" (Smith, 104). Through the various adventures the author presented the various types of American citizens. The choice of the setting was not a fortuity, it was already said that the Mississippi river took an important place in the childhood memories of the author, for his literary presentation of it he used a lot of his experience he gain when he worked as a river man. By the way, his penname " mark twain" also came from his life on the river.

Mark Twain produced the novel twenty years later than the Emancipation Proclamation was issued and the Civil War ended. However America was still in the struggle against slavery and racism. During the time that he was working on the novel, the situation with slavery, that seemed to improve after the Civil war, got again rather tense, namely due to application of Jim Crow Laws, which restricted the rights and powers of black people in the South in different indirect ways. This new form of racism was even more sophisticated and more difficult to overcome. People from the South and from the North of the country could not understand each other's positions about slavery and these restrictions. In his novel mark Twain returned several decades back to the times when slavery was a part of real life.

It is very important to understand, that the author presented an allegory to the situation and conditions the black people found them in even after official abolition. The author underlined that slavery distorted both oppressing and oppressed people, using the bright examples of Miss Watson and Sally Phelps to present good white people, who however expressed little

interest and concern about slavery problems. A lot of critics referred to the way Mark Twain presented Jim. When studying the novel it is necessary to keep in mind, that the author used really a lot of irony in his novel, and that the ideas of Huck in reality didn't correspond to the ideas of Mark Twain. Jim is a very complex and controversial character. On the one hand he is very humane and this appeals to the readers. He was able to fulfill the role and the father for Huck, to become his teacher and his friend. But on the other hand the character of Jim was in a way very close to the general stereotype of "the "happy ducky" — an imaginary portrayal of the slave as simple, childlike, and contented" (Merriman, 37).

Jim didn't possess the rebellious nature and was not struggling for the rights of the slaves he just escaped. He was not angry because of the Tom Sawyer's trick at the end of the novel; instead he was satisfied with the money he received. Although Jim is formally free, he was not viewed as an equitable man by others. Toni Morrison stated, that the enslavement of Jim was necessary for the novel to contrast other characters as she said "freedom has no meaning to Huck or to the text without the specter of enslavement, the anodyne to individualism; the yardstick of absolute power over the life of another; the signed, marked, informing, and mutating presence of a black slave.

" (Morrison, 5). Overall, Mark Twain – American humorist, lecturer, essayist, and author, made a great contribution to development of American literature and anti-slavery ideas. His own life experience served a perfect basis for the created imaginary world of his novels in the future. His satire and deep

devotion to his views guaranteed not only gripping reading, but also profound presentation of the most controversial social issues.

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