

Huck finn society paper

Literature, American Literature



“ All modern American Literature comes from Huckleberry Finn. ” ~Ernest Hemingway. Mark Twain is quite possibly the father of the American novel. The books he wrote were and still are popular among the rich and the poor alike. He introduced the ‘ epic adventure’ style, (like the Iliad and the Odyssey) into American literature. Throughout his long and eventful life, Twain saw many flaws in his society and reflected upon them in his writing. His most popular and criticized novel, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, emulates these flaws. In the novel Twain criticizes the mind-set of the Gilded Age, shows the lack of compassion in the white society versus that shown in black society and ridicules human greediness. On one of Huck’s adventures he meets the Grangerfords, the wealthiest family he has ever encountered. They let Huck live with them and teach him their ways. While touring their house, Huck makes honest remarks about their possessions. From the outside, their house is luxurious and remarkable which allows Huck to say he “ hadn’t seen no house out in the country before that was so nice and has so much style”(99). It did not even have an iron latch on the front, but a brass knob to turn, the same as houses in town. Most of the decorations in the house look genuine on the outside but are actually fake on the inside, which demonstrates the attitude of the Gilded Age. For something to be gilded means to be covered in gold giving the appearance of being fully gold, yet only the outer layer is gold and the rest is not. After appreciating their clock, Huck notices fake parrots made of chalk and a cat and dog made out of crockery who “ squeak” “ when you [press] down of them” “ but [don’t] open their mouths nor look different or interested” (100). He also sees fruit that are “ much redder and yellower and prettier than the real ones” (100), but

they are all fake and made of chalk as well. Huck's simplicity in not understanding why the family keeps these fake possessions instead of real ones demonstrates the pointlessness of the pompous and artificial Gilded Age attitude. Another phoniness Huck notices is the big intellectual books that sit on the table. He can tell that these books do not get read and are there simply for show; to give the appearance of wealth and sophistication, just like the other decorations. All of the decorations inside the Grangerford house are fake and just for show, representing the pretentiousness that was so prevalent during the time. The Grangerfords give this appearance of being civil and sophisticated on the outside, but are actually morally depraved and compassionless on the inside, just like their belongings. They are feuding with another family, the Shepherdsons, in a battle where many innocent lives are lost including the young Henry Shepherdson. The complete idiocy of this situation is neither side can remember why they are fighting in the first place. When Huck asks Buck the reason for the violence, he tells him "it started thirty years ago, or som'ers along there. There was trouble 'bout something, and then a lawsuit to settle it; and the suit went agin one of the men, and so he up and shot the man that won the suit- which he would naturally do, of course. Anybody would" (108). The fact that it was "natural" to shoot someone after losing a law suit and "anybody would" means that it was customary to have this kind of senseless violence in Twain's white society. This lack of compassion displayed by the Grangerfords and Shepherdsons is foiled by the compassion shown by Jim to Huck after he thought he lost him in the fog. Huck is always playing jokes on 'poor Jim,' yet Jim still has deep sympathy for Huck: "When I got all wore out wid work,

en wid callin' for you, en went to sleep, my heart wuz mos' broke bekase you wuz los', en I didn' k'yer no' mo' what become er me en de raf'. En when I wake up en fine you back ag'in, all safe en soun', de tears come, en I could 'a' got down on my knees and kiss yo' foot... En all you wuz thinkin' bout wuz how you could make a fool uv ole Jim with a lie"(86). Jim is bigger and stronger than Huck, which means he could get physical revenge on him like the Grangerfords of Shepherdsons would have done, yet he does not because he is a compassionate human being and chooses to forgive him. Huck's Pap is another example Twain uses to display the lack of compassion he saw in his white society. Pap is always beating Huck and making him feel bad about himself. The old man does not even care about Huck and sometimes forgets that he locked him in the cabin while he is out drinking. This lack of compassion from Pap towards Huck is also foiled by Jim's fatherly love towards his children. Huck says " he [is] often moaning and mourning" that he would not get to see his " Po' little ' Lizabeth" and " Po' little Johnny"(154), again. Jim loves his children so much that when he becomes freed, he is going to save enough money to buy his children, and if they're not for sale then he is going to steal them. A very distinctive attribute about Jim that makes him a better father figure than Pap is he feels great remorse for the one time he acted " ornery" towards his deft daughter and smacked her, whereas Pap has abused Huck countless times and feels no regret for his actions. Jim, a black slave, showing compassion where whites do not further displays the backwardness of Twain's society. Whites were supposed to be civilized and blacks were supposed to be savages, yet it was the opposite. Jim is a caring, loving and compassionate man and the

Gangerfords, Shepherds, and Pap are all moral less savages. Not too far from a head of compassionless lies a heart of greediness. This ancient Akan proverb is true of the society in Huckleberry Finn. Not only did Twain's society lack compassion, they also were money hungry and greedy. The King and the Duke are symbolic representations of the human greediness Twain saw in his society. These men will do anything for money and are not afraid to con anyone. They will con a whole town of people; three times with the same con. They are not afraid to con mourning sisters, for their inheritance money. These two are so greedy that they cannot be content with just the will money, but decide to sell all the sister's rightful property as well: " What! And not sell out the rest o' the property? March off like a passel of fools and leave eight or nine thousand dollars worth o' property layin' around jess sufferen' to be scooped in? "(177). The worst of all, they con a benefactor¹ to them; they sell Jim in for a reward of just forty dollars after he has treated them like royalty for so long. The tarring and feathering of the King and the Duke in the end is Twain's way of saying ' what goes around, comes around' and these two men deserve it. The two men are great examples of the covetousness that Twain was so disgusted by. Mark Twain was an amazing author who had an immense skill of capturing what he saw. Living in the American South during the mid 19th century, Twain saw many flaws in his society. Twain felt it necessary to record these flaws and criticize them in his novel, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. Throughout the book he criticizes the mind-set of the Gilded Age, shows the lack of compassion in the white society versus that shown in black society and ridicules human greediness. One who reads this novel can walk away with knowing how flawed the south

was without needing a time machine. " Anger is an acid that can do more harm to the vessel in which it is stored than to anything on which it is poured. " —Mark Twain ¹ fraud against a benefactor constitutes the worst fraud of all, according to Dante, The inferno.