

An his handkerchief,
and went on talking



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An outstanding American novelist Mark Twain sheds light upon important problems of human society in his novel *The Mysterious Stranger*.

Viewing people with all their weaknesses and sins through the eyes of Satan, Devils' nephew, the author reevaluates the concepts of truth, moral sense and society norms for sending moral messages to his readers. Teaching the moral lessons of truth and purification in his novel *The Mysterious Stranger*, Mark Twain stimulates readers' soul-searching by using Satan's supernatural powers for demonstrating the negative implications of the moral sense from a new perspective. Depicted as a supernatural creature, a spirit or an angel, Satan despises humans and looks down upon them.

Satan's attitude towards people emphasizes his superiority over them and his separation from the physical world. Making Satan an independent observer who knows a lot about human nature, Twain criticizes people's weaknesses and imperfection. Showing humans through Satan's eyes is an original technique used by the author for viewing people and their way of life from a new perspective. This character criticizes people in a matter-of-fact manner without expressing any feelings or emotions. Pointing at particular human weaknesses, he just presents his observations without analyzing or evaluating them.

Speaking about a woman, Satan admits that “ she is an idiot to step backward like that and not notice what she is about” (Twain 436). In the same manner, Satan could speak about weather or architecture. Saying a few words about people, this character often skips to other topics, not waiting for the interlocutor's reaction. It means that his opinion has been

shaped within thousands of years of his observations and nothing can change it.

Showing how Satan rules the destinies of tiny figures of people, changing their disposition or even killing them, the author implies that this character considers humans to be only toys or insects and does not take them seriously. The scene in which Satan kills two small men with his fingers and continues his speech clearly represents his attitude towards people in general. “ Satan reached out his hand and crushed the life out of them [men] with his fingers, threw them away, wiped the red from his fingers on his handkerchief, and went on talking where he had left off” (Twain 436).

Human life is of little or no value to Satan, and he does not feel any remorse when he kills those little figures. It takes him only a few moments to commit a homicide and the fact that he can continue the interrupted monologue proves that the incident does not touch his feelings at all. “ His manner showed that to him they and their doings were of paltry poor consequence; often you would think he was talking about flies, if you didn’t know” (Twain 437). It is possible that developing the theme of Satan’s indifference, the author intended to criticize people’s attitude towards nature and animals. Most people do not feel any remorse after killing a fly or interfering into the world of nature but Satan’s murder of men raises readers’ indignation. Thus, using Satan as an example of a powerful creature who dares rule people’s destinies, Twain expresses his depreciation of humans’ attitude towards nature. At the same time, Satan’s friendship with boys demonstrates his interest in people.

Describing his position, Satan admits that “ our people down here were quite interesting to him, notwithstanding they were so dull and ignorant and trivial and conceited, and so diseased and rickety, and such a shabby, poor, worthless lot all around” (Twain 437). The narrator emphasizes that it is the most detailed definition given by Satan because as it has already been mentioned above, Satan even does not want to waste too many words on people. Analyzing this Satan’s phrase, it can be stated that “ interest” is the only word with positive meaning and the rest of modifiers are negative.

For this reason, even Satan’s interest in humans remains questionable. In general, Satan’s attitude towards people can be defined as contempt and superiority which can be explained with his supernatural power and transcendence. Along with his supernatural abilities, Satan explains his superiority with the lack of moral sense which he considers as the main reason for all the evil in the world of humans. As opposed to the accustomed positive but unclear meaning of the concept of moral sense, Satan proves that it cuts both ways, lifting humans above the beasts, on the one hand, and causing a lot of troubles to them, on the other hand. The narrator confesses that he has not got a definite idea of what the moral sense is and what role it plays in human life. Sharing his untraditional views concerning the meaning and functions of moral sense, Satan explains various negative social phenomena and even enables his listeners to travel in time and space so that to see the examples of disgusting social inequality and injustice. Explaining the main principle of the moral sense, Satan states that “ it is the faculty which enables us to distinguish good from evil” (Twain 442).

As opposed to the generally accepted positive perception of morality, the angel as he calls himself argues that after distinguishing between good and bad, most people cannot resist the temptation of choosing the evil side. Thus, it can be stated that it is the acknowledged choice of evil as a result of human moral sense that makes people sinners. Satan insists that creatures lacking the moral sense do not know how to do wrong and, consequently, cannot commit a sin.

“ He is always choosing, and in nine cases out of ten he prefers the wrong. There shouldn't be any wrong; and without the Moral Sense there couldn't be any” (Twain 449). Still, analyzing Satan's actions, it can be stated that he commits a lot of sins but does not recognize them as such. It is remarkable that in one of the episodes, this character kills a small human and immediately continues his argumentation concerning his own sinlessness. It shows that definition of sin and evil depends upon personal perception of reality and its phenomena. At the same time, Satan does not deny the positive effects of the moral sense upon human behavior and place in the universe.

Pointing at the value of the concept of the moral sense, Satan admits that “ it is the one thing that lifts man above the beasts that perish and makes him heir to immortality” (Twain 442). Thus, it can be concluded that viewing it from various perspectives and considering its various implications, this character aims at defining the moral sense in its complexity. Showing a fourteen hours working day of the poor in contrast to the life of the owners of the plant, Satan explains the social injustice with the moral sense. In some episodes, he defines it as a human disease, while in others emphasizes its

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value for developing spirituality and obtaining immortality. Anyway, Satan's interpretation of the moral sense cannot be defined as purely positive or purely negative.

Pointing at both positive and negative implications of the moral sense, Satan treats this category as the main influential factor distinguishing people from beasts and angels from people. Discussing the concepts of moral sense and sin and viewing the human society through the eyes of the Devil's nephew, innocent Satan, Twain criticizes the existing state of affairs and encodes a number of moral messages in the text of his novel. The author's main moral lessons include the lessons of sincerity, soul-searching and the importance of the personal perception of reality.

Speaking with the boys, Satan recommends one of them to choose the right words for expressing his thoughts. " Purify your language, Seppi; drop those lying phrases out of it" (Twain 450). Through Satan's words, Twain encourages the main human characters and his readers to face the truth concerning the true nature and weaknesses of humans. Instead of hiding the truth behind the lying concepts and false definitions, Satan suggests choosing the right words for describing the phenomena. Thus, as opposed to popular figures of speech, when a person does something wrong, Satan offers to call this behavior human instead of brutal. He insists that cruelty is a distinct human feature while brutes are not capable of it. Promoting the truth not only in language but also in actions and thoughts, Satan depreciates everything that is artificial and criticizes the current society norms. Criticizing the current society norms, Satan admits that " truth is good manners; manners are a fiction" (Twain 437).

Thus, the society norms, manners and moral sense were created by humans and distinguish them from beasts, on the one hand, and angels, on the other hand. These phenomena are characteristic of the human society and are used as artificial masks for hiding the truth and true thoughts and intentions behind them. Considering Satan's views for purifying language and thoughts can be considered as a significant element of soul-searching. Another important moral message which readers can decode while analyzing Twain's text and symbols is the significance of personal perception for defining the moral sense, distinguishing between good and evil, making the appropriate life choices and evaluating the events and people's actions. Thus, Satan himself can be only the fruit of boy's imagination because there is no proof of his physical existence which could be found in the text. On the contrary, Satan himself states: " It is as I told you – I am only a spirit" (Twain 439). These are only the three boys who can see him, enjoy his miracles and listen to his extraordinary philosophy.

Placing the setting of the novel between the real life and imaginary worlds, Twain emphasizes the importance of individual's perception of life which can have a significant impact upon the variety of available options. Thus, Twain's philosophical views on human existence and individual's perception can be found in Satan's words and interpreted as the author's moral messages of sincerity, purification and soul-searching. For communicating his moral messages to the readers, Twain provides Satan with supernatural abilities which allow this character to collect the weighty arguments and support his statements even by violating the physical laws of time and space. Thus, the episodes revealing the main moral lessons are associated with Satan's skills

of controlling time and changing the location by the force of his imagination. The first moral lesson concerning sincerity is most vividly represented in the episode with Hans beating his dog. Depreciating his behavior, boys define it as inhuman and brutal. However, Satan argues that brutes, on the contrary, are not capable of such cruelty and Hans' actions are typical of a human being.

Thus, analyzing the definition and the choice of the most appropriate modifier for defining the man's behavior, Satan introduces the concept of the moral sense as the most influential factor distinguishing people from beasts though in particular situations people act worse than brutes. Developing the idea of the negative impact of the moral sense upon human society and people's choices, Satan replaces his listeners to a plant for demonstrating them the living conditions of the poor workers in contrast to the prosperity of the owners of the plant. Another vivid example of the negative implication of the moral sense can be seen in the destiny of a woman who is accused of being a witch and chooses to be set to fire instead of continuing her hard work for earning her living and shame for the past accusation. The crowd of humans gathers to look at the fire and the woman's death in it, and after somebody throws an egg at her, the rest of the crowd laughs. Satan allows boys to see the bitterness of the woman and the ugliness of the crowd's behavior though but for him, youths could easily be in the middle of the crowd and share the public attitude and mood. According to Satan's interpretation, the moral sense is not only an instrument used for distinguishing between good and evil but also a mask used for hiding the truth and substituting the true words and intentions. Satan admits that moral

sense was a human part which was made of mud instead of clay, and the chosen situations representing the negative implications of this concept can prove it. However, another moral lesson which can be revealed from the above mentioned episodes is that the picture always depends upon the chosen perspective.

The same goes for the definition of good, evil and sin which depends upon the individual's perception of it. Thus, considering beating a dog or humiliating a woman as sins, Satan kills people or changes their destinies without any remorse and cannot see anything wrong in it. Explaining his position, Satan states that “ man is to me as the red spider is to the elephant” (Twain 460). In other words, Satan's attitude to people is explained with the peculiarities of his position, supernatural power and corresponding perspective on human society. The latter as well as the rest of moral messages are revealed in the episodes depicting the weaknesses of human race shown by Satan. Mark Twain chooses original technique of viewing the reality from Satan's perspective for criticizing the main society norms and human weakness in his novel *The Mysterious Stranger*. Satan's superior attitude to people and the extraordinary interpretation of the concept of the moral sense and its negative implications are used for shedding light upon ugliness of human society and its norms.

Satan's interpretation of the main episodes allows decoding Twain's moral messages, and enhances readers' soul-searching.

Works Cited

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