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**The Problem of Slavery and Race in *The Adventures of Huckleberry*
*Finn***

Vedoucí práce: PhDr. Mariana Machová, Ph.D.

Autor práce: Adéla Staňková

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Adéla Staňková

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Annotation

The thesis deals with the problem of race and slavery in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain. It shows Huck's ambivalent attitude towards the problem of slavery. It examines his struggle to free himself from the conventions and racial prejudice of the then society, by which he has been formed. Another important part of the thesis contains an indepth analysis of Jim as a literary character. In this section Jim is presented not as a caricature coming from the minstrel tradition but as a complex character.

Anotace

Tato práce zkoumá vyobrazení rasových problémů a otroctví v knize Marka Twaina *Dobrodružství Huckleberryho Finna*. Zobrazuje ambivalentní postoj Hucka, který je formován výchovou a obecnými názory tehdejší společnosti, k otázce otroctví. Zachycuje Huckovo postupné osvobození se od rasových předsudků. Důležitou součástí práce je také analýza Jima jako literární postavy. V této části je Jim představen jako komplexní postava, nikoliv jako karikatura minstrelské tradice, jak ho někteří kritikové označují.

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Introduction

This thesis discusses the problem of slavery and race in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain. The novel was published in 1884, twenty years after the end of the Civil War and even nowadays it is at the very centre of many heated debates among critics as far as the problem of slavery and race is concerned. Actually, this book is one of the most often banned books in the USA. The reason is obvious: it is Twain's ambivalent representation of the problem mentioned. Mark Twain himself remarked:

In my schoolboy days, I had no aversion to slavery. I was not aware that there was anything wrong about it. No one arraigned it in my hearing; the local papers said nothing against it; the local pulpit taught us that God approved it; if the slaves themselves had any aversion to slavery they were wise and said nothing (Bell 126).

This personal experience of Twain's is conspicuously similar to that of Huckleberry. The aim of the thesis is to show how Twain presents this problem in the book, and to capture this ambivalent attitude towards race and slavery. As the story is narrated by Huck, at the beginning it is necessary to deal with the narrative technique in the novel.

The second part of the thesis deals with Huck and Jim's relationship. I will attempt to describe the development of their relationship and Huck's gradual see the light as far as the slavery is concerned. The problem will be presented more or less in chronological order. Firstly, I will examine their relationship before they set off the journey on the raft. Then I will proceed to their coexistence on the raft. Last but not least, I will deal with Huck and Jim's separations and reunions which also proved to be very important for Huck's forming cognizance and the development of their relationship. Finally, I will discuss their relationship after Jim is captured and imprisoned at the Phelps Plantation. The overall discussion will be based on the analysis of the mutual interaction between Huck and Jim, and various situations and scenes which they are exposed to.

Jim as a literary character is a subject of the third part of the thesis. As there are many voices among critics who claim that Jim is a mere flat character coming from the minstrel tradition, the aim of this chapter is to show that the opposite is true. At the beginning I will draw a picture of the racial stereotypes of the then society and I will

briefly discuss other slave characters in the novel. Then I will point to different aspects of Jim's personality. In the end it is inevitable to comment on the character of Jim at the end of the novel, because it has also caught attention not only of many literary critics, but also of readers in general, and we can observe that it constantly causes considerable controversy.

1. Narrative Technique in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

As I have outlined in the introduction, in my thesis I will deal with Huck's changing attitude towards Jim and then I will proceed to the character of Jim. Therefore at the beginning it is crucial to touch upon the narrative technique in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* because it is important to realize that all that we can see is presented from Huck's point of view.

As we know, the story is narrated by the first-person narrator Huck, who is thirteen or fourteen years old. He is a son of a local drunkard, which is apparent from his manner of speech. It is interesting that we do not find any description of Huck's appearance in the book. All the more so, we realize how important his voice is. As Huck is basically a child, he is a shining example of an unreliable narrator. In Twain's times it was not very common to narrate the story from the child's point of view. Shelley Fisher Fishkin notes that "[b]efore Twain wrote *Huckleberry Finn*, no American author had entrusted his narrative to the voice of a simple untutored vernacular speaker – or, for that matter to a child" (*Was Huck Black?* 13).

In the same book Fishkin suggests the sources from which Twain constructed Huck's voice. According to her, he based it on an African American child named Jimmy. She quotes Twain's autobiography where he expresses admiration for the boy's manner of speech. Twain says that he took notes of what the child said in order to "preserve the memory of the most artless, sociable, and exhaustless talker [he] ever came across" (14). Twain adds:

He did not tell me a single remarkable thing, or one that was worth remembering; and yet he was himself so interested in his small marvels, and they flowed so naturally and comfortably from his lips, that his talk got the upper hand of my interest, too, and I listened as one who receives a revelation (14-15).

The easiness with which Huck narrates the story is really remarkable. It gives us the impression that we can really hear him speak aloud. One of the means Twain achieves it by is the use of colloquial language. It should be emphasized that Huck realizes that he is writing a book. At the end of the novel he points out: "[...] and so there ain't nothing more to write about, and I am rotten glad of it, because if I'd a

knowed what a trouble it was to make a book I wouldn't a tackled it and ain't agoing to no more" (281). Huck's manner of narrating reminds rather a spoken discourse because he does not neaten his style. It is as if he thinks aloud. Nevertheless, it is not only the spoken language that contributes to a nonchalant style of the narrative. It is also Huck's addressing "you", which moves him closer to the reader. His straightforward introduction is the best example to demonstrate it: "You don't know about me, without you have read a book by the name of The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, but that ain't no matter" (11).

As I have noted above, Huck is a naïve child narrator. As a consequence, he is to a large extent too innocent to realize the meaning of all he says. This enables Twain to accomplish a social satire. For example, when Huck stays at the Grangerfords he tells us that one Sunday they all went to church, which is not bad at all. But then he adds that "the men took their guns along" (112), which is quite striking because he also remarks that the Mass was "all about brotherly love." However, Huck does not comment on the mutual incompatibility between going to church and taking guns along. Unlike readers, he most likely does not realize it. At the same time the child perspective can also be a source of humour. Quite often Huck makes us laugh even if it is not his intention. The humour results from the difference between a child's and an adult's way of thinking, which, of course, differs a lot. We can, for instance, think of the scene where Tom with his friends found the band of robbers named Tom Sawyer's Gang. The oath of this gang says that if any boy reveals a secret of the gang, his family will be killed. The problem is that Huck does not have any family. Thus, according to child logic he should be excluded. The comic effect is intensified because from our point of view it is rather sad that Huck has no family so at first the children's attitude towards this issue staggers us. Fortunately, Huck works this out and his solution makes us laugh:

Well, nobody could think of anything to do – everybody was stumped, and set still. I was most ready to cry; but all at once I thought of a way, and so I offered them Miss Watson – they could kill her (17).

Another important element, as far as the narration is concerned, is Huck's austerity. Very often he describes purely and simply what is going on, but although he is involved (he is one of the characters) he seems to keep his distance. As an example we can take the fight between the Grangerfords and the Shepherdsons. We can assume that

this massacre would be a traumatic experience not only for a child who witnesses it, but for anyone involved. And actually, it is a traumatic experience for Huck because he says that as a consequence he had nightmares. On the other hand, we can imagine that the style of describing such a scene could be more dramatic and suspenseful. This gets me to the fact that Huck's narration is, of course, very subjective. Therefore it is he who has power over the story. Sometimes he presumes to withhold information; however, as a consequence of his naivety, he even informs us that he skips something. He says for example:

It made me so sick I most fell out of the tree. I ain't agoing to tell all that happened – it would make me sick again if I was to do that. I wished I hadn't ever come ashore that night, to see such things (117).

As we could see Huck had already witnessed some violent scenes, for example, Pap's treatment of him or the murder on the wreck. For this reason, it may sometimes seem that Huck's sensitivity is a little bit numb, and his straightforward comments support it. For example, when he describes the Mass already mentioned as being "pretty ornery preaching – all about brotherly love, and such tiresomeness" (112). However, the fact that he refuses to describe the fight, indicates that he actually is sensitive. It also suggests that the scene was abnormally brutal even for Huck. We can notice that in the course of time, Huck's sensitivity becomes more and more obvious.

The most important fact for us is that it is only through Huck's eyes that we can see Jim. Consequently, it is extremely important to keep it in mind all the time and to accept the fact that Huck's description of Jim is very subjective, and thus, very much influenced by Huck's personal experience of the world. In the book *A Historical Guide to Mark Twain* Shelley Fisher Fishkin quotes David Bradley who comments on this issue:

Twain's use of point of view gets him into trouble because you're seeing Jim as Huck sees him. In the course of the novel Huck learns to see Jim in a different way. And so what he tells you about Jim, what he observes about Jim, how he characterizes Jim at the beginning changes... (142).

For instance, when Huck meets Jim on Jackson's Island they are both starving. Then Huck takes his food supplies out and they have breakfast together. Huck remarks: "the

nigger was set back considerable, because he reckoned it was all done with witchcraft” (49). However, there is no hint that Jim told so. Huck only claims that Jim “reckoned”. The question then arises, how can Huck know what Jim thinks about? Therefore we should be aware that to some extent it is Huck’s point of view that distorts the image of Jim because he judges him on the basis of racial stereotypes.

2. Huck and Jim's Relationship

This chapter focuses on the relationship between Huck and Jim. It is evident that their relationship developed throughout the novel. The main goal of this chapter is to capture the constant change of Huck's attitude towards Jim, and his questioning of racial prejudice of the then society, so that their relationship transforms into a friendship. It should be noted that Jim plays an important role because we can consider him to be Huck's guide as far as the matter of slavery is concerned. Thanks to him Huck begins to reassess what he has been taught about slavery by adults and at school.

2.1 Huck and Jim before the Raft

Huck introduces Jim for the first time as "Miss Watson's big nigger" (14). Some ten pages later he again refers to him as "Miss Watson's nigger Jim". The possessive case indicates that at this point Huck considers Jim to be nothing more than Miss Watson's property. He does not think about him in terms of humanity, which is not surprising because he has been taught that slavery is sanctified by God. For him it is simply a social norm that slaves are the property of slaveholders. Moreover, for Huck Jim is not an authority (as a man and adult). He dares to play tricks on him. To be precise, Tom plays a trick on Jim and Huck only waits for Tom. We can notice that Huck even does not want to be involved. However, it is important to realize that his reasons for not playing a trick on Jim are purely practical. As he is supposed to be in bed, he does not want to be given away by Jim.

After Huck's feigns his murder, he hides on Jackson's Island, where he meets Jim. Jim ran off because Miss Watson wanted to sell him to the South. At this moment Huck does not suspect him and we can observe that he thinks about him in a friendly way because he points out: "I was ever so glad to see Jim. I warn't lonesome, now. I told him I warn't afraid of him telling the people where I was" (48). Obviously, even before they join each other on their way to freedom, Huck feels that he can trust him. Jim, on the other hand, is more cautious. When Huck asks him what he is doing on the Island he stays silent and then he adds hesitantly: "Maybe I better not tell" (50). To confess his secret he wants to hear Huck's assurance that he will not reveal it. Then he spills out: "I run off." Huck's reaction: "Jim!" is undoubtedly a manifestation of his

disapproval and Jim can feel it because he immediately objects: “But mind, you said you wouldn’t tell – you know you said you wouldn’t tell, Huck.”

Before they set off for the journey Huck disguises himself as a girl and goes to the Illinois shore to gain information. When he finds out that almost everybody hunts for Jim because they think he killed Huck he rushes to Jim and says: “Git up and hump yourself, Jim! There ain’t a minute to lose. They’re after us!” (68). It should be noticed that the perspective has changed from “I” to “we”. From this moment there is an invisible bond between them and they belong together. They are both runaways but each of them in a slightly different way. While Jim seeks for freedom in the primary sense of the word, Huck wants to free himself from the society because he does not want to be “civilised“. Nevertheless, there is a thing that connects them and it is a pursuit of freedom.

2.2 Huck and Jim on the Raft

The long journey begins and the raft becomes their private place. Separated from the society and therefore free from social conventions they feel comfortable and safe. From Huck’s description we have the impression that the life on the raft is very harmonious and calm:

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 (70).

The calm atmosphere is disrupted by Huck’s schoolboy pranks which are, however, very important for their relationship and for Huck’s realization. The most inconsiderate trick that Huck plays on Jim happens in the chapter with the “trash incident”. One day Huck and Jim are separated by a thick fog. When they reunite Jim is glad because he was afraid that something bad happened to Huck. However, Huck tries to persuade Jim that it was all just a dream and finally he makes Jim believe it. After a

while Jim takes notice of the leaves and smashed oar on the raft, and consequently he realizes that he has been deceived by Huck. Then Huck tells that Jim looked at him “steady, without ever smiling, and says”:

When I got all wore out wid work, en wid de 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 agin, all safe en soun’ de tears come en I could a got down on my knees en kiss’ yo’ foot I’s so thankful. En all you wuz thinkin’ ‘bout wuz how you could make a fool uv ole Jim wid a lie. Dat truck dah is trah; en trash is what people is dat puts dirt on de head er dey fren’s en makes ‘em ashamed (89-90).

Jim is justly angry with Huck because he has already confidence in him and considers him a friend. Little wonder that he calls Huck “trash.” He reacts quite resolutely because he knows how important it is to trust each another, and he wants Huck to realize it, too. Huck is astounded at Jim’s reaction that is uttered “without ever smiling.” Jim’s response makes a strong impression on Huck and it makes him feel bad. As a consequence he admits:

It was fifteen minute 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. I didn’t do him no more mean tricks, and I wouldn’t done that one if I’d a knowed it would make him feel that way (90).

He claims that if he had known that it would make Jim feel bad he would not have done it. Nevertheless, we may suppose that Huck knew what effect his prank would have. It is hard to believe that he was surprised that Jim felt humiliated. The thing that he was surprised at was rather Jim’s reaction. He does not expect that Jim would raise his voice against him. Little by little Huck begins to perceive Jim as a human being. At the same time the racial stereotypes are still deeply rooted in him. This ambivalence is evident when they are approaching Cairo.

While Jim is excited because he supposes that he is close to freedom, Huck is full of remorse. In his internal monologue we can observe that he is torn between social

conventions and stereotypes that have been instilled into him and his internal moral voice. He is confused and he does not know what is actually right:

I begun to get it through my head that he was most free – and who was to blame for it? Why, me. I couldn't get that out of my conscience, no how nor no way. It got to troubling me so I couldn't rest; I couldn't stay still in one place. It hadn't ever come home to me before, what this thing was that I was doing. But now it did; and it staid with me, and scorched me more and more (91).

While Huck suffers from internal struggle, Jim, not knowing that he nourishes Huck's doubts and remorse, reveals his intention to steal his wife and children. Huck is shocked by Jim's talk. He notes that "[Jim] wouldn't ever dared to talk such talk in his life before" (92). This puzzles him even more. He thinks about denouncing Jim as a runaway slave. Therefore there is a perceptible tension when two men stop the raft and ask Huck if there is another man on it. When Huck replies that there is another man they wonder whether he is black or white. At this moment we can almost hear a deathlike silence as Huck does not know whether he should tell the truth or not. Finally he says: "He's white." No wonder that after a considerably long pause the men want to verify it. At this point Huck has already made a decision. He lies to protect Jim. He claims that the other man on the raft is his sick father. Fearing the possible infection the men abandon them. Jim is extremely grateful for Huck's help and he realizes that he can truly rely on him.

After the episode with the feud between the Shepherdsons and the Grangerfords Huck and Jim continue on the raft. The atmosphere is calm again and they agree that "there warn't no home like a raft, after all" (118). Even though their idyll is interrupted by the king and the duke, their relationship seems to have moved onto another level. As an example we can take into consideration Jim's taking care of Huck. He does not wake him to change the guard and he takes it instead. In the course of time Huck gets to know about Jim's family. He can see how much he loves his children, which he admires a lot, as his father does not take care of him at all. He also realizes how important freedom is for him. Therefore, when Huck gets to know Jim not only as a slave but also as a human being it makes him revise his attitude, and consequently he admits: "I do believe he cared just as much for his people as white folks does for ther'n. It don't seem natural,

but I reckon it's so" (154). Thus, Twain denies one of the most brutal stereotypes, but he does so through the voice of 13 or 14 years old boy who has been formed by racial stereotypes.

2.3 Separations and Reunions

In the novel there are several moments when Huck and Jim are separated for some time. These separations are also extremely important. Not only because they demonstrate that Jim is able to survive even without Huck and vice versa, but also because their reunions show that their relationship strengthens step by step. The first separation takes place after the raft is smashed by a steamboat. Huck ends up at the Grangerfords and he does not know anything about Jim. It is interesting that all the time that Huck spent at the Grangerfords he does not even think about what has happened to Jim. He is finally reunited with Jim thanks to his slave servant who leads him to the swamp where Jim is hidden. Huck is very surprised but from his exclamation "it was my old Jim!" we can deduce that he is glad to see him. From Jim we get to know that he "heard [Huck] yell every time, but dasn't answer, because he didn't want nobody to pick him up, and take him into slavery again" (113). When he saw that Huck is in the Grangerford's house he hid himself in the wood where he was discovered and helped by slaves. While Huck is at the Grangerfords, Jim works on repairing their raft. After Huck witnesses the massacre between the Grangerfords and the Shepherdsons he runs after Jim. However, he could not find him. When he eventually hears Jim's voice he remarks: "nothing ever sounded so good before" (118). Huck really feels relieved, which suggests that he feels safe with Jim, who is also very happy to be with Huck again.

Their second separation is slightly different. In contrast to the first separation the second one is deliberate. It takes place in the episode where the king and the duke pass off as the relatives of Peter Wilks. They got to know that he had died, and they want to use of the opportunity for stealing a family inheritance. At this point Huck has already undergone a considerable change as far as his attitude towards slavery is concerned. He has begun to perceive Jim as a human being capable of emotions, therefore it is evident that he carries this lesson along even, despite not being with Jim at that moment. When the king and the duke sell the Wilks' slaves at an auction, Huck observes:

I thought them poor girls and them niggers would break their hearts for grief; they cried around each other, and took on so it most made me down sick to see it. [...] I can't ever get it out of my memory, the sight of them poor miserable girls and niggers hanging around each other's necks and crying; and I reckon I couldn't a stood it all but would a had to bust out and tell on our gang if I hadn't knowed the sale warn't no account and the niggers would be back home in a week or two (180).

Huck already knows that even slaves have feelings, and therefore he is deeply moved when he witnesses the moment of parting of the slaves, who are supposed to be separated and sold at the auction. Huck's sympathy with the slaves stands in a total contrast with the king's and the duke's attitude. They are certain that the slaves only pretended their emotions:

It does beat all, how neat the niggers played their hand. They let on to be sorry they was going out of this region! And I believed they was sorry. And so did you, and so did everybody. Don't ever tell me any more that a nigger ain't got any histrionic talent. Why, the way they played that thing, it would fool anybody (181).

For the last time Huck and Jim are separated when the king and the duke hand Jim over to the Phelps' plantation as a runaway slave. Huck's reaction after he finds out that Jim is gone is adequate to the fact that he considers Jim to be his friend:

I set up a shout – and then another – and the another one; and run this way and that in the woods, whooping and screeching; but it warn't no use – old Jim was gone. Then I set down and cried; I couldn't help it (205).

He is disgusted by the king's and the duke's cruelty and he cannot believe that they "make him a slave again all his life, and amongst strangers, too, for forty dirty dollars" (206). The passage that follows is one of the most famous and quoted. It shows Huck's moral struggle. He thinks about writing a letter to Miss Watson informing her about Jim. But in the end he changes his mind because he thinks of all the time he spent with Jim and he confesses:

I see Jim before me, all the time, in the day, and in the night-time, sometimes moonlight, sometimes storms, and we a –floating along,

talking, and singing, and laughing. But somehow I couldn't seem to strike no places to harden me against him, but only the other kind. I'd see him standing my watch on top of his'n, 'stead of calling me, so I could go on sleeping; and see him how glad he was when I come back out of the fog; and when I come to him again in the swamp, up there where the feud was; and such-like times; and would always call me honey, and pet me, and do everything he could think of for me, and how good he always was; and at last I struck the time I saved him by telling the men we had smallpox aboard, and he was so grateful, and said I was the best friend old Jim ever had in the world, and the only one he's got now; and then I happened to look around, and see that paper (208).

At this point we do not doubt what Huck's decision will be, and fortunately, he meets our expectations: "'All right, then, I'll go to hell' – and tore [the letter] up" (208). Thus, he follows his heart and decides to sacrifice himself to save Jim, which would be unthinkable for him at the beginning of the novel.

2.4 Huck and Jim at the Phelps' Plantation

When Huck gets to understand that there are distinctions between the common perception of slavery and his own, he can even make use of it. So when he explains to Aunt Sally that he is late because there were some problems with the boat, she asks him if anybody was hurt. Huck replies: "No'm. Killed a nigger" (215). He uses it consciously because he somehow feels that this is what Sally wants to hear and so she will not ask any more questions. Moreover, he comes to the Plantation with the intention of stealing Jim from slavery. It is, therefore, quite natural that it is advantageous for him not to stand out. By saying that nothing happened and only a nigger was killed, it is as if he said that he does not care about slaves, and therefore would never think of setting one free.

After Tom appears on the scene, Huck gains an ally in his attempt to free Jim. Or at least he thinks so. He truly admires Tom for his determination to help him and he is full of praise for him:

Here was a boy that was respectable, and well brung up; and had a character to lose; and folks at home that had characters; and he was bright and not leather-headed; and knowing and not ignorant; and not mean, but kind; and yet here he was, without any more pride, or rightness, or feeling, than to stoop to this business, and make himself a shame, and his family a shame, before everybody. I couldn't understand it, no way at all (226).

This is, of course, strikingly ironic because after reading the novel we are aware of the fact that at that point Tom knows that Jim has been set free. As he knows that Jim is already free, he takes no risk in losing his good reputation. As a consequence, he decides to make one big adventure of it. Finally, they succeed in freeing Jim but because of Tom's plan, full of difficulties and nonsense, everything becomes complicated. Tom is shot in his calf and Jim decides to wait for a doctor even at the cost of his freedom, because it is clear that he will be captured. Then Huck utters the famous sentence which is sometimes surprisingly seen as a proof of Huck's racism: "I knowed he was white inside" (265). However, he obviously wants to express admiration for Jim but he does so by means of racial stereotypes which are still to some extent a part of him. This does not change anything about his feeling towards Jim. If we come back to the point of Huck's moral struggle we can observe that he takes into consideration Jim's good. If he had written to Miss Watson, Jim would still have been a slave, but, at least, he would have been at home, close to his family. But then he is afraid that everybody will despise Jim for ingratitude. Only at the very end he mentions himself: "And then think of me! It would get all around that Huck Finn helped a nigger to get his freedom..." (206-207).

There is always this little part of Huck which was instilled into him by the common opinions. I would suggest that if we expect Huck to become an abolitionist we would aim too high. Bernard W. Bell points out:

Huck's psychological and moral struggle with slavery and racism, especially his ambivalent response to Jim's humanity, is a realistic dramatization of the tragicomic education of a poor young white boy of his time, place, and class (132).

Therefore without Huck's ambivalent attitude towards slavery the realistic aspect of the novel would disappear.

Even despite the fact that Huck is still influenced by racial prejudice, he showed great courage because he decided not to go with the flow. Instead, he is determined to help Jim, who has gained his sympathy. If we want to trace the problem of slavery and race in the novel, it is crucial to focus on the character of Jim because it is through his experience that Huck reappraises his attitude.

3 Jim as a Literary Character

“Miss Watson’s big nigger, named Jim, was setting in the kitchen door; we could see him pretty clear, because there was a light behind him” (Twain 14). This is the first time in the novel Huck mentions Jim. He claims that they [Huck and Tom] saw him clearly, which, in the figurative sense, is not the case of the critics and readers, as this black slave has often been the main object of many passionate debates since the publication of the novel. This part of the thesis focuses on the character of Jim and his portrayal. Some critics argue that he is more or less a flat character or caricature, rather than a complex character (e.g. F. Woodard, D. MacCann). The aim of this chapter is to disprove these opinions which label Jim as a product of the minstrel tradition, and to show the complexity of his character. However, the main concern of this chapter is not the racial controversies, although sometimes it overlaps because Twain’s characterization of Jim is at the very centre of criticism for his racial stereotypes. The purpose of this particular chapter is rather to read the novel while paying a special attention to Jim as a literary character. Once again, one should keep in mind that the perspective of the narration plays an important role. We should not forget that we can see Jim only from Huck’s point of view and, as was stated above, Huck’s attitude towards Jim changes throughout the novel. Therefore we can get a distorted picture of Jim.

Before analysing Jim, it is necessary to define the then stereotypes depicting American slaves. For this purpose, I would like to draw our attention to the minstrel tradition, and to complete the image of slaves’ condition we will take into account the authentic evidence of Frederick Douglass, a slave who succeeded in escaping slavery and wrote his famous autobiography. I will also touch upon other slave characters that occur in the novel and that are of peripheral importance.

3.1 Minstrelsy and Racial Stereotypes

Minstrel show was a popular form of entertainment in the 19th- century America. It was a performance performed by white people who were disguised as African Americans. It consisted of scenes, poems, songs, dances that were based partly on black dialect and folklore, partly on Anglo-Saxon American folklore. Even Mark Twain

revelled in the minstrel shows, according to his autobiography. In *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* we can also observe a hint concerning minstrel performances. When Joanna Wilks asks about the condition of servants in England Huck responds: “Why, Hare-I- why, Joanna, they never see a holiday from year’s end to year’s end; never go to the circus, nor theatre, nor nigger shows, nor nowhere” (171). Huck, of course, knows nothing about the situation in England. However, his statement implies that “nigger shows” were really popular at that time. These performances portrayed African Americans as being childish, superstitious, happy and dull, which makes minstrelsy a focus of many heated debates in current criticism. It is no wonder because, to a large extent, the shows had a great impact on society, as they formed a common idea of what African Americans were like. Consequently, the American society embraced the image of a stupid and careless black, who is actually content with being a slave. It should be noted that these performance did not form the public opinion only in the South but in North as well. Frederick Douglass points out: “I have often been utterly astonished, since I came to the north, to find persons who could speak of the singing, among slaves, as evidence of their contentment and happiness” (26).

The racist antebellum society simply considered slaves to be an inferior race. For the majority of Americans slaves were not even humans. Douglass writes in his autobiography:

We were all ranked together at the valuation. Men and women, old and young, married and single, were ranked with horses, sheep, and swine. There were horses and men, cattle and women, pigs and children, all holding the same rank in the scale of being, and were all subjected to the same narrow examination (49).

It is evident that slaves were lowered to the same level as animals. In addition, it was believed that slaves were not able to feel any affection, not even parental love.

Nevertheless, most of minstrel shows did not capture this. Richard L. Hughes remarks in his essay on minstrelsy:

The surviving images and lyrics from the thriving minstrel business reveal demeaning caricatures that reduced African Americans to childish (or inhuman) figures contented with slavery and an opportunity to, according to one song, "Sing for the White Folks, Sing!" Lyrics such as

"Oh happy are we Darkies so Gay, Come let us sing and laugh while we play," certainly did not capture the horrors of American slavery (29).

So generally speaking we can say that minstrel shows formed a public opinion concerning the character of African Americans, yet they did not show the terrible conditions in which slaves lived, which led to views based on misconception and prejudice. At the same time, it is quite logical because minstrel shows were not meant only for entertainment, but they also subconsciously advocated slavery. It is hard to imagine that people really believed the supposition that African Americans had no emotions. Therefore, to some extent, minstrelsy actually represents a set of stereotypes in which the society actually wanted to believe, in order to justify the naturalness of slavery. Eric Lott expresses aptly this aspect of minstrelsy:

From our vantage point, the minstrel show indeed seems a transparently racist curiosity, a form of leisure that, in inventing and ridiculing the slow-witted but irrepressible 'plantation darky' and the foppish "northern dandy negro," conveniently rationalized racial oppression (15).

We can imagine that for the majority of people it was really "convenient" and easier to believe that slaves were like this, rather than question it. It is basically their way of getting rid of guilt. It was as well convenient to believe that slaves have propensity for crime and immorality. As Douglass describes cruelty of slaveholders, he points out: "It is said, [a slave] has the devil in him, and it must be whipped out" (73). If we take into consideration the characters from *Huckleberry Finn*, this presupposition becomes strikingly paradoxical because if we trace immoral acts in the novel, they are always related to white people. The best example is the king, the duke, and even Huck. It demonstrates Twain's sense of irony, which is so typical for him.

Given these racial stereotypes, which were deeply rooted in the society at that time, it is no wonder that abolition was not a favourite word and being an abolitionist was not something that somebody should be proud of. Douglass observes: "If a slave ran away and succeeded in getting clear, or if a slave killed his master, set fire to a barn, or did any thing very wrong in the mind of a slaveholder, it was spoken of as the fruit of abolition" (46). After Jim admits that he ran off, we can observe Huck's spontaneous disapproval. Consequently, Jim is reluctant to reveal the whole story so Huck encourages him by saying:

Well I did. I said I wouldn't [tell anybody], and I'll stick to it. Honest injun I will. People would call me a low-down Abolitionist and despise me for keeping mum – but that don't make no difference. I ain't agoing to tell, and I ain't agoing back there anyways. So now, le's know all about it (50).

Evidently, abolitionism was not well received by the society in the South. It is not exaggerated to say that the then society was economically dependent on slave labour and therefore it was in its own interest to maintain slavery. In addition, the slaveholders must have feared possible revenge for their mistreatment of slaves. Briefly, at that time slavery was perceived as being right and natural.

3.2 Other Slaves in the Novel

Besides Jim, who is evidently the main slave character, other slave characters appear in the novel. Even though these are rather minor characters, we can observe in them several traits concerning the issue of slavery and race. It is again important to realize that all the happenings are reported by Huck, who either provides a commentary himself, or he tells us what he was told by somebody else (very often by Jim). At the very beginning, Huck mentions other slaves that come to listen to Jim's story telling. Huck remarks that “[n]iggers would come miles to hear Jim tell about it, and he was more looked up to than any nigger in that country” (16). As it has already been mentioned, the oral tradition was very popular among slaves. In reality, it was not unusual that slaves travelled and visited each other. There were various reasons for doing so. Frederick Douglass, for example, tells about his mother, who visited him because they were separated:

She was hired by a Mr. Stewart, who lived about twelve miles from my home. She made her journeys to see me in the night, travelling the whole distance on foot, after the performance of her day's work. She was a field hand, and a whipping is the penalty of not being in the field at sunrise, unless a slave has special permission from his or her master to the contrary – a permission which they seldom get, and one that gives to him that gives it the proud name of being a kind master (18).

The reaction of other slaves, who “would stand with their mouths open and look him all over, same as if he was a wonder” (16), and the fact that they were ready to travel such a long journey in order to listen to Jim’s story indicates that Jim was a gifted storyteller.

As far as the race is concerned, we should not forget that there is another interesting image of African Americans in Chapter 6. It concerns Pap’s passionate speech about a free African American professor from Ohio. His hateful and racist opinions are in strong opposition to our idea of the professor. Even though he is not present physically, we perceive him as being respectable as he “could talk all kinds of languages, and knowed everything” (35). In this scene we can see Pap, a violent alcoholic, who is not even able to take care of his own son, criticizing a social organization. This yawning chasm between Pap and the professor is so striking that the reader is even more aware of the absurdity of slavery and racial inequality. It is more than probable that Twain put these two characters next to each other intentionally, just to emphasize this absurdity.

When Huck and Jim talk about whether Jim is rich, Huck gets to know about the slaves’ handling of money and business. Jim explains that he invested his ten dollars in a cow that died anyway. From Jim’s narration we get the impression that slaves naturally created a sort of closed society. As Jim tells, one of the slaves even established a bank which, however, went soon bankrupt. As a consequence, Jim loses his money and only ten cents are left him. Huck wonders what Jim did with the money. He says:

...I had a dream, en de dream tole me to give it to a nigger name’ Balum – Balum’s Ass dey call him for short, he’s one er dem chuckle-heads, you know. But he’s lucky, dey say, en I see I warn’t lucky. De dream say let Balum inves’ de ten cents en he’d make a raise for me. Well, Balum he tuck de money, en when he wuz in church he hear de preacher say dat whoever give to de po’ len’ to de Lord, en boun’ to git his money back a hund’d times. So Balum he tuck and give de ten cents to de po’, en laid low to see what wuz gwyne to come of it.

From this excerpt we can observe two things. The first one concerns the superstitiousness of the slaves which has already been discussed. Then we can also notice Twain’s stinging satire on church and the mocking tone when talking about it. This satirical representation of church can also be seen when Huck prays to get a fish-

line because he was told by Miss Watson that if he pray every day he gets what he wants. The American Professor of English Harold K. Bush notes:

In particular, Twain's scepticism toward religion often revolved around his awareness of how closely it was intertwined with issues of wealth and its corrupting influence on human morality (60).

We should also take notice of the group of the Grangerfords' slaves as "[t]he old gentleman owned a lot of farms, and over a hundred niggers" (109). It seems that their slaves were used to working very hard. Huck remarks that "[e]ach person had their own nigger to wait on them." The reader is aware of their presence, yet they remain silent. When Huck's servant wants to lead him to the swamp to meet Jim, he does not say it directly. He is really prudent. He entices Huck to go there to see a "stack" of water-moccasins. Even Huck realizes his cleverness: "He ain't ever told me you was here; told me to come, and he'd show me a lot of water-moccasins. If anything happens, he ain't mixed up in it. He can say he never seen us together, and it'll be the truth" (115). What catches our attention is the slaves' sympathy and willingness to help Jim. They hide him in the swamp where he cannot be tracked by dogs and they bring him food. Therefore there is a strong sense of belonging among slaves.

The slaves belonging to the Wilks' sisters are not a major presence in the novel. The only important moment is when they are separated to be sold at auction, which is very emotional. Even though the sisters take the thought of separating slaves badly, it should be noted that in some regions it was quite a common practice to separate the slaves' families. Frederick Douglass, for example, was also separated from his mother. He comments on this issue:

It is a common custom, in the part of Maryland from which I ran away, to part children from their mothers at a very early age. Frequently, before the child has reached its twelfth month, its mother is taken from it, and hired out on some farm a considerable distance off, and the child is placed under the care of an old woman, too old for field labor (17).

Finally, at the Phelps' Plantation there are also slaves that work there. However, only one of them is noticeable in the narrative. It is the slave who feed Jim. He is described as being very superstitious and Huck with Tom take advantage of it. The

Phelps actually represent a classic example of southern slaveholding family. It seems that they do not treat their slaves violently and they give them enough food, however, to recognize their humanity is out of the question. We can see it clearly in the scene when Huck says that there was a slave killed, and Aunt Sally replies: “Well, it’s lucky; because sometimes people do get hurt” (215). On the basis of her words we can deduce that she does not consider a slave to be a human being. As far as food is concerned Douglass observes: “Not to give a slave enough to eat, is regarded as the most aggravated development of meanness even among slaveholders” (54). This corresponds with the Phelps’ treatment of Jim: “Uncle Silas come in every day or two to pray with him, and Aunt Sally come in to see if he was comfortable and had plenty to eat...” (240).

As we could see, besides Jim, there are other African Americans and slaves who, however, are not as important for the plot as Jim. On the other hand, it must be admitted that they also play a certain role. Sometimes Twain engages them in the story to sketch out their condition, other times they serve as a tool for a satirical picture of the society.

3.3 Jim, “Minstrel Darky” or “Stereotype Mask”?

On the whole, after reading *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* we usually think of Jim as a positive character. He somehow represents humanity, kindness and selflessness. It should be noted that the majority of critics did not bring this impression of Jim into question. However, this does not apply to the manner in which Twain builds Jim’s character, and in fact it is one of the most common things criticized not only by literary critics, but also by readers regardless of race. If we simplify, we can notice that there are two prominent views among the critics. The first one sees Jim only as a flat character, a caricature coming out of minstrel tradition, a symbol of racial inferiority and humiliation. This opinion is represented, for example, by Frederick Woodard and Donnaræ MacCann, who claim that

even the most sophisticated reading today does not remove the shackles of the white supremacy presumption[...], Twain’s use of the minstrel tradition undercuts serious consideration of Jim’s humanity beyond those

qualities stereotypically attributed to the noble savage; and Jim is forever frozen within the convention of the minstrel darky (141 - 142).

In the opposition to these opinions there are many critics (e.g. S. F. Fishkin, D. L. Smith, F. Robinson, J. Chadwick-Joshua, J. Miller etc.) who consider Jim to be a more complex character than it may seem at first sight, and who appreciate Twain for his ability to create different layers of Jim's character. This group can be represented, for example, by Ralph Ellison who noted:

Writing at a time when the blackface minstrel was still popular, and shortly after a war which left even the abolitionists weary of those problems associated with the Negro, Twain fitted Jim into the outlines of the minstrel tradition, and it is from behind this stereotype mask that we see Jim's dignity and human capacity – and Twain's complexity – emerge (50).

For us the most important piece of information is that Jim puts on a “stereotype mask”, which I would like to embrace and develop. It is also important to emphasize that one of the most prominent voices among the critics of the second group, Shelley Fisher Fishkin, supplies this idea by stating that “Twain was wise enough to understand the masks blacks had to wear to manipulate white people” (142). Therefore this opinion presupposes that it was Twain's intention to portray Jim in this way.

If we take into consideration the then social arrangements and conditions in which slaves lived, we can easily understand why Jim had to hide his face behind the mask. Actually, he was forced by society to put it on. It was definitely a key to survival. In the novel we can observe several instances of solidarity among slaves (when, for example, the Grangerfords' slaves hide Jim in a swamp and bring him food), however, in the world of whites Jim cannot trust anybody. Douglass points out:

[t]he slaveholders have been known to send in spies among their slaves, to ascertain their views and feelings in regard to their condition. The frequency of this has had the effect to establish among the slaves the maxim, that a still tongue makes a wise head” (30).

It is interesting that Huck has a similar strategy to avoid problems. He remarks: “If I never learnt nothing else out of pap, I learnt that the best way to get along with his kind

of people is to let them have their own way” (126). Obviously, there is little difference between Jim’s and Huck’s strategy.

In addition to that, from practical point of view, to capture a run-away slave was an opportunity to make money without work as there were rewards offered. Therefore, we can imagine that many people capitalized on it. Douglass notes that it was quite common that some whites encouraged slaves to escape so that they could capture them and get the reward (47). Even the woman who Huck visited at the beginning of the novel observes: “Does three hundred dollars lay round every day for people to pick up?” (63). As a consequence, it is most crucial for Jim to be vigilant and to play his role. Jocelyn Chadwick-Joshua, an African-American descendant of slaves and Twain scholar, notes that “[i]f his escape to freedom is to be successful, he must seem to acknowledge the slave-to-master relationship, even with a boy like Huck, and even more so with Tom later” (45).

As was noted above, minstrelsy depicted slaves as being content and submissive. Even though there are many passages when Jim acted submissively (which will be discussed later in this chapter), nobody can claim that he was content. Otherwise, the whole book would not exist. Douglass wrote that “to make a contented slave, it is necessary to make a thoughtless one” (87), it is evident that Jim is not thoughtless still less contented. Actually, the pursuit of freedom is clearly a manifestation of Jim’s discontent. Furthermore, we learn about Jim’s family and his desire to

[save] money and never spend a single cent, and when he got enough he would buy his wife, which was owned on a farm close to where Miss Watson lived; and they would both work to buy the two children, and if their master wouldn’t sell them, they’d get an Ab’litionist to go and steal them (92).

While at this point Huck is shocked and considers Jim’s talk daring, it changes later in the novel. In the second chapter of this thesis we could see that Huck’s attitude towards slavery and Jim constantly changes. Besides, this passage shows that Jim is not a representative of a submissive slave who accepts his faith and hopes for better life after death. Instead, he refuses to obey and he proves to be a man of action. However, to accomplish his goal he has to fit in the stereotyped image to meet the expectations of the society. The interaction between Huck and Jim is the best example to demonstrate

that he is a more dimensional character and that from time to time we can catch sight of his face behind the “stereotype mask.”

3.4 Assertive Jim

In the novel there are several cases which give us room for the interpretation of Jim as a “manipulator”. More precisely, sometimes it seems that he uses the minstrel stereotype consciously in order to control a situation and it should be noted that he does so in a very skilful way. In Chapter 9, for example, Huck does not want to settle in the cave they found on Jackson Island but

Jim said if we had the canoe hid in a good place, and had all the traps in the cavern, we could rush there if anybody was to come to the island, and they would never find us without dogs. And besides, he said them little birds had said it was going to rain, and did I want the things to get wet? So we went back and got the canoe and paddled up abreast the cavern, and lugged all the traps up there (54).

We can see that Jim is a master of persuasion. Jim’s strategy gives us the impression that the main decision lies on Huck. Therefore, at this point there is an evident inequality between them, which, of course, results from race. Jim is conscious of his position and he knows that he is not entitled to give any instructions. He only suggests and he provides good reasons for staying. As one of the reasons he uses the superstition about flying birds that predict rain. Consequently, he gets Huck inconspicuously where he wants to have him.

As Jim is a run-away slave, it is quite natural that he should be wary of the danger that the King and the Duke represent. Little wonder that he expresses concern about them. Nevertheless, just as in the previous example, Jim expresses his attitude in a gentle way. He does not impose himself. He just asks Huck if he thinks that they are going to meet any other kings. Jim then manifests his opinion quite directly but there is still a touch of euphemism: “Well, says he, dat’s all right, den. I doan’ mine one or two kings, but dat’s enough” (135). His hidden intention may be to make Huck think about the King and the Duke. The second time Jim is even more direct: “But, Huck, dese kings o’ ourn is reglar rapscallions; dat’s jist what dey is; dey’s reglar rapscallions” (152). This time it is obvious that Jim wants to alert Huck and maybe he hopes that Huck

decides to escape from them. However, Huck does not react and he continues to tolerate them. One wonders why Huck does not want to escape from them. I would suggest that it is a part of his strategy mentioned “to let them have their own way” to avoid a conflict.

On the other hand, sometimes Jim has to give up whether he wants or not. Nevertheless, it should be noted that even in these situations he is not purely submissive. He does not remain silent and he can manifest his disagreement. It is important to realize that despite the fact that he finally yields, we are aware of his disapproval and we perceive that he submits himself very reluctantly. For instance in the episode with the Wreck Huck comments that “Jim was dead against it, at first. He says: I doan’ want to go fool’n ’long er no wrack. We’s doin’ blame’ well, en we better let blame’ well alone, as de good book says. Like as not dey’s a watchman on dat wrack” (71). When Jim sees that Huck is determined to go there he “grumbles a little” but finally he gives up.

Another shred of evidence that Jim is not a prototype of a submissive black is the verbal battles with Huck. These interactions are very important as far as the character of Jim is concerned. We should not forget that the raft represents another world – the world of Huck and Jim and that there do not apply the conventions of the white society. At least not in its entirety. As we could see in the previous chapter the relationship of Jim and Huck has undergone an evolution and in the course of time they begun more or less equal (on the raft). As a result Jim dares not to tolerate all and from time to time he stands up for himself. This can be seen, for example, in their exchange concerning the king Solomon and French language. Jim does not know what “harem” is, so Huck explains it to him. However, Jim does not admit that he did not know it; instead he pretends that he just forgot it. Moreover, he adds another observation to keep up with Huck: “Why, yes, dat’s so; I – I’d done forgot it. A harem’s a bo’d’n-house, I reckon. Mos’ likely dey has rackety times in de nussery. En I reckon de wives quarrels considable; en dat ‘crease de racket” (81). Although Jim holds the opposite view of Solomon, Huck insists on what he has been taught: “Well, but he was the wisest man, anyway; because the widow she told me so her own self” (82). However, Jim maintains relentlessly his opinions and he does so in a very assertive way. He is convinced that Solomon was not wise at all and he wants to persuade Huck about it. In his argumentation he uses an illustrative example – he argues that if we split a banknote

into two pieces it becomes worthless and this is, according to Jim, what Solomon wanted to do with a child. When Huck objects that he “missed the point” he replies resolutely and maybe even belligerently:

Doan' talk to me 'bout yo' pints. I reck'n I knows sense when I sees it; en dey ain' no sense in sich doin's as dat. De 'spute warn't 'bout a half a childe, de 'spute was 'bout a whole chile; en de man dat think he kin settle a 'spute 'bout a whole chile wid a half a chile, doan' know enough to come in out'n de rain. Doan' talk to me 'bout Sollermun, Huck. I knows him by de back (82).

At this point, we feel that Jim triumphs over Huck as far as logic is concerned. It must be admitted that even though Jim's information base is incorrect, he masters the rules of logic quite passably. Jim's attitude also manifests his love of family and his own children. Throughout the novel we can notice that Huck takes every opportunity to lecture Jim. However, in this case he just says that Jim “missed the point”. We can suppose that if Huck would be able to explain it and correct Jim he would do so. Therefore Huck's remark is nothing more than his giving up:

I never see such a nigger. If he got a notion in his head once, there warn't no getting it out again. He was the most down on Solomon of any nigger I ever see. So I went to talking about other kings, and let Solomon slide (83).

When Huck instructs Jim about French kings, Jim wonders that the French speak a different language from English. Despite the fact that his knowledge of basic facts is quite poor and childish, we cannot deny his triumph over Huck. He defeats him in terms of argumentation. Therefore although he is not very learned, he is distinguished by common sense and he creates a convincing syllogism. Huck explains it patiently to Jim using a clear illustration:

Looky here, Jim; does a cat talk like we do?

No, a cat don't.

Well, does a cow?

No, a cow don't, nuther.

Does a cat talk like a cow, or a cow talk like a cat?

No, dey don't.

It's natural and right for 'em to talk different from each other, ain't it?

'Course.

And ain't it natural and right for a cat and a cow to talk different from us? You answer me that.

Huck believes that he has just created the argument which cannot be proved wrong so he is even more surprised by Jim's counter-argument:

Is a cat a man, Huck?

No.

Well, den, dey ain't no sense in a cat talkin' like a man. Is a cow a man? – er is a cow a cat?

No, she ain't either of them.

Well, den, she ain't got no business to talk like either one er the yuther of 'em. Is a Frenchman a man?

Yes.

Well, den! Dad blame it, why doan' he talk like a man? You answer me dat!

There is no doubt that Jim gains upper hand. We can see that Huck accepts defeat badly; and he even does not admit it. Instead, he uses a racial stereotype to maintain his position: "I see it warn't no use wasting words – you can't learn a nigger to argue. So I quit" (84). The only reason why Huck resorts to this remark is obvious – he has no other arguments. We should also notice that there is one instant when Jim's mask entirely slips. It is when Huck asks Jim what he would do if somebody asked him a question in French. Jim answers without thinking: "I wouldn't think nuff'n; I'd take en bust him over de head". Then he wakes from the heat of argumentation and he realizes that it was inappropriate to say such a thing. He is acutely aware of the fact that a slave who hit a

white could face the death penalty. Therefore he adds: “Dat is, if he warn’t white. I wouldn’ ’low no nigger to call me dat” (83). At the same time it demonstrates that Jim dares to act spontaneously in the presence of Huck.

Another moment worth noticing for realizing Jim’s complexity is the “trash argument” that was described in the previous chapter. In this scene we get to know another face of Jim’s and it is not only reader who is surprised at Jim’s reaction, it is mainly Huck. When Jim addresses Huck as equal by calling him “trash”, to a certain extent he strengthens his position. Thus, he again eludes the prejudice of white people who refused to recognize slave’s manhood. He reinforces his position not only as a man but also as a parent. His parental position can also be seen in Jim’s solicitude for Huck. As a shining example we can consider the situations when Jim does not wake Huck to be on guard and he takes it instead.

Another example which needs to be expanded is when Jim conceals Huck’s father death. There are division about Jim’s reasons for doing so. While the first group (e.g. Robert Sattelmeyer, Peaches Henry) considers it to be an exhibition of Jim’s parental care and his attempt to protect Huck, the second one inclines to believe that Jim’s motives are more or less practical and selfish. This reading of Jim as a “trickster” is very well expressed in the essay “The Characterization of Jim in *Huckleberry Finn*” by Forrest G. Robinson where he argues that

Jim’s seeming generosity, by veiling the truth about Pap’s death, artificially preserves Huck’s principal motive for flight. So long as Jim controls this information, he maintains the balance of power, and thus retains a substantial measure of control over Huck (369).

It should be emphasized that even though Robinson considers Jim to be a “self-interested deceiver” (370), he does not deny a close friendship between Huck and Jim that has been formed on their way to freedom. However, he accentuates the fact that “Huck and Jim need each other long before they learn to respect or love one another...” (368). Regardless of Jim’s motives we can deduce that he anticipates and responds to the present situation. If he had been so dull and gullible, he would not think it over and he would tell immediately that it was Huck’s father.

3.5 Superstitious Jim

From the very beginning we notice that Jim is very superstitious, which was a characteristic generally attributed to African Americans. Thus, he believes in ghosts and witches, he does magic with ox hair-ball, he doesn't count the thing he is going to cook for dinner, he doesn't shake the tablecloth after sundown, he is very sensitive to dreams, he doesn't speak about dead people, he doesn't touch the snake-skin with hands or look at the new moon over his left shoulder. These superstitions are in most cases a source of humour. However, it served many critics as an argument for Twain's racist portrayal of Jim. Nevertheless it is worth noticing that many situations in the novel depicting Jim's inclination to superstitions can actually be interpreted in his favour. For example, when Huck mocks Jim about the superstition of not touching the snake-skin with hand he remarks: "You said it was the worst bad luck in the world to touch a snake-skin with my hands. Well, here's your bad luck! We've raked in all this truck and eight dollars besides. I wish we could have some bad luck like this every day, Jim" (58). The series of disasters that follows causes that Jim gains the upper hand and Huck was forced whether he wanted or not to admit that Jim was right: "I made up my mind I wouldn't ever take ahold of a snake-skin again with my hands, now that I see what had come of it. Jim said he reckoned I would believe him next time" (59). Similarly, in the second chapter when Tom plays trick on Jim by hanging Jim's hat over his head, Jim subsequently makes up a story of being bewitched, and he becomes famous among slaves for his story telling so it is finally he who triumphs. David L. Smith asks an interesting question: "Is it likely that Jim has been deceived by his own creative prevarications [...] or has he cleverly exploited the conventions of 'Negro superstition' in order to turn a silly boy's prank to his own advantage?" (109).

It is interesting that Huck sometimes mocks Jim for his superstition but in fact he is also very much influenced by superstitions. He admits that he does not know many of them but he believes in them and what is more, he even pays Jim a compliment by stating that "Jim knowed all kinds of signs" (52). For example, in the Chapter one he hints at his belief in ghosts and after a spider crawled on his shoulder he notes to himself:

I didn't need anybody to tell me that that was an awful bad sign and would fetch me some bad luck, so I was scared and most shook the

clothes off of me. I got up and turned around in my tracks three times and crossed my breast every time; and then I tied up a little lock of my hair with a thread to keep witches away (13).

Each culture has its own superstitious beliefs and so has Huck as a representative of a white race. As an example we can take religion, which can be considered in some sense as the dominant superstition of whites. As we have noticed, Huck is a peculiar boy. He does not accept blindly what he is told or taught. Instead, he questions almost everything. This trait is quite natural for a boy as Huck. He is in the process of maturation and therefore he verifies truthfulness of the information he receives. From the beginning we notice that he does not verify only black superstitions (for example by touching the snake skin) but he also verifies religious beliefs. In the third chapter he remarks:

[Miss Watson] told me to pray every day, and whatever I asked for I would get it. But it warn't so. I tried it. Once I got a fish-line, but no hooks. It war'nt any good to me without hooks. I tried for the hooks three or four times, but somehow I couldn't make it work (20).

It is interesting that Huck verifies even the information provided by his friend Tom. In Chapter 3 Tom instructs Huck about genies. It is apparent that Huck doubts that Tom talks the truth and therefore he decides to check it. He comments:

I got an old tin lamp and an iron ring and went out in the woods and rubbed and rubbed till I sweat like an Injun, calculating to build a palace and sell it; but it warn't no use, none of the genies come. So then I judged that all that stuff was only just one of Tom Sawyer's lies (23).

In these cases Huck arrives at the conclusion that he was told a lie. However, as far as superstitions are concerned it is not so. As it was stated above, after Huck sees what came of his touching a snake skin he decides not to touch a snake skin anymore.

In addition, superstitions are inseparably linked with folklore and popular traditions. Daniel G. Hoffman points out the fact that

“[Twain] made Jim's superstitiousness a symbol of his difference, as a Negro, from the white folks in the book [...] Mark Twain attributes the

beliefs he himself had known since boyhood to his Negro character, but he does not make such judgments upon them as his recent critics have done” (48-49).

If we take into consideration that slaves were illiterate (it was unlawful to teach a slave to read) with notably rare exceptions (e.g. Frederick Douglass), it is natural that the oral tradition was more animated among them.

3.6 Jim at the End of the Novel

It is impossible to deal with the character of Jim without paying attention to the ending of the novel. First, because there are disagreements among critics, and second, because the Jim of the final scene seems to be diametrically different from the Jim that we got to know throughout the novel. Whereas the Jim of the central part of the novel gains a stature of the complex character, the Jim of the closing scene seems to be a mere caricature coming from the minstrel stereotype. This is the reason why it became the centre of many heated debates in contemporary critics. Even Ernest Hemingway, who praised *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, recommended skipping the ending (Lombardi). Thus, there are critics who consider the ending to be a failure (e.g. L. Marx, B. W. Bell, etc.)

Toni Morrison observes that “Jim permits his persecutors to torment him, humiliate him, and responds to the torment and humiliation with boundless love” (57). If we keep in mind Jim’s goal to escape from the bondage of slavery and his mask that he put on to accomplish his goal, this statement seems to be a little bit idolizing. I would suggest that there is still the same Jim but his difficult situation does not allow to him to be as assertive as he used to be when communicating with Huck at the raft. Woodard and Mac Canned, who have already been mentioned, argue that “infantile reactions on Jim’s part are multiplied and intensified in the last fifth of the novel when he acquiesces completely to Tom’s escape plan” (146). Nevertheless, it is not true that he “acquiesces completely” to Tom’s plan. Even at the end he does not lose his voice and it is evident that he shows his displeasure. When Tom explains his plan to Jim there is at least four times the expression “I doan’ want” (252-3). Huck then remarks that

Tom most lost all patience with him; and said he was just loadened down with more gaudier chances than a prisoner ever had in the world to make a name for himself, and yet he didn't know enough to appreciate them, and they was just about wasted on him. So Jim he was sorry, and said he wouldn't behave so no more (254).

There is no doubt that Jim is well aware of his position and he has no other choice. To be precise, he has two choices. Either he can surrender or he will play his role because the boys are his only hope for freedom. At the same time, he is also aware that Tom's plan is absurd. However, his situation is so desperate that everything is worth a try and he simply does what he must do. His remark that the boys are "the white folks and knowed better than him" (240) only illustrates his strategy. Little wonder that under given circumstances he apologizes to Tom and promises not to defy anymore. Jim does not remove his mask even after he is captured and he acts very submissively – exactly how he is expected to act. Moreover, he stays loyal to Huck because "[he] never said nothing, and he never let on to know [him]" (273).

Another important insight into the ending of the novel is given by several critics (e.g. J. S. Leonard, H. N. Smith, Ch. H. Nilon, M. K. Davis, etc.) who consider the ending to be an analogy to the post-Reconstruction era, which sound very reasonable. Indeed, people at the Phelps farm and their treatment of Jim remind us of the situation after the Civil War. To outline the condition of slaves in the post-Reconstruction period, it is important to make reference to two documents – *Black Codes* and *Jim Crow laws* which to a large extent limited freedom that African Americans gained. James S. Leonard writes in his essay:

The Black Codes included prohibition of interracial marriage, exclusion of blacks from certain occupations, and limitations on property ownership, the right to possess weapons, and the right to testify in legal proceedings. [...] Jim Crow laws succeeded the Black Codes after Reconstruction as the legal means for controlling the freed black population. They were established in southern states beginning in the late 1870s – about the time Twain began to write *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* – and remained in place until overthrown by the civil rights movement of the mid-twentieth century (58-59).

It is more than likely that in this reading of the ending Tom represents a southerner. Despite the fact that Tom knows that Jim has been set free by Widow Douglass, he tries to make Jim's escape as difficult as possible for his own profit (in Tom's case for fun). This is exactly what the Southerners made to ex-slaves – they made their way to freedom as complicated as possible. Even the response of people when Doctor spoke up for Jim draws a fitting parallel to the situation of the post-Reconstruction period: "Then they all agreed that Jim had acted very well, and was deserving to have some notice took of it, and reward. So every one of them promised, right out and hearty, that they wouldn't cuss him no more" (274). They do not think about taking off chains so Jim remains fettered. They just promise not to "cuss him", which was probably, from their point of view, a sufficient reward for a slave.

Another interesting view of the ending of the novel is provided by Hilton Obezinger, who suggests that the Phelps' Plantation can be interpreted as Hell. Therefore he observes a parallel between Huck's decision to go to Hell to save Jim and the Phelps Plantation. However, in his interpretation it does not concern Hell in its primary meaning. By labelling the Phelps' farm as "Hell" he means a kind of a social hell, which would correspond to satiric aspect of the novel (402). Actually, it is quite a fitting metaphor for the cruelties and inhumanity of slavery. As an example we can take into consideration that people at the Phelps farm wanted to hang Jim or at least lynch him. Even Frederick Douglass writes in his biography about "hell of slavery" (20).

These interpretations do not contradict themselves and I would suggest that they complement each other. Therefore we can observe Jim playing his role of a submissive slave and at the same time we keep in mind the parallel between the closing scene and post-Reconstruction era which to a large extent can truly be seen as a "social Hell". Despite the fact that Jim is set free after all, the people's treatment of him leaves a strong impression. Thus, it is extremely difficult to determine whether the closing scene of the novel can be described as a happy ending. Regardless of the answer to this question, I would like to end this chapter with the statement of Jocelyn Chadwick-Joshua who remarks that "Twain consciously leaves the wound of racism open at the conclusion of this novel, not to diminish Jim but to awaken Huck and the reader to the continuing injustice and contradictions of post-Reconstruction" (26).

Conclusion

As we could see *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is a book about an adolescent boy who is torn between his internal voice and social stereotypes and conventions. The aim of this thesis was to read the novel emphasizing the issue of race and slavery which is present all the time. We can observe this problem in relation to Huck and his attitude but we can also observe Jim and his condition and strategy to survive in the racist world.

The major subject of the first part of the thesis was to describe Huck's difficult struggle on the way to realization that slaves are also human beings capable of emotions. He discovers that all that he was taught at school and that was instilled into him is not always right and that the world is not black and white. This discovery finally leads him to scepticism about society. As we could see he had to cope with lots of difficulties and it caused him to begin a process of maturation. Obviously, the main impulse was his companion on the raft – a slave Jim. We observed different stages of their relationship. Initially, Huck perceived Jim to be nothing more than a property of a slaveholder. Later on when they start their pursuit of freedom Huck gets to know different aspects of Jim's character and he gradually realizes that racial stereotypes are complete nonsense. However, we pointed out that in this respect Twain is distinguished by considerable amount of realism. He does not exaggerate and so Huck does not mature from day to day. He manifests that the whole thing is more complicated than it may seem. Consequently, we, as readers, are never sure how Huck will react and we are glad about his final decision to go to hell to save Jim.

The second part of the thesis concentrated on the literary character of a runaway slave Jim. Even though he comes out as a positive character he became the centre of attention of many literary critics. On the ground of his portrayal of Jim Twain, was blamed for racism. They claim that Twain constructed the character in the tradition of minstrel stereotypes which portrayed slaves as being stupid, simple minded and gullible. For example Woodard and Donnarae who have already been quoted claim that "Jim is a character to laugh at and little more" (148). However, in my thesis I raised the possibility that this reading is too artificial, and we should look deeper into the matter. I argued that Jim made advantage of the racial stereotypes by putting on a stereotype mask as means of survival in the cruel world of whites. The evidence was based on the

analysis of Jim's behaviour in different situations and his communication with Huck. It was concluded that he does not lack profundity and he is a complex character. However, it requires reader's participation to understand it.

As it has been mentioned several times the book provoked many controversies not only among literary critics but also among readers. The primary goal of this thesis was not to determine whether *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is a racist book or whether Twain was a racist. It aimed to provide a sensitive reading of the novel paying a special attention to the issue mentioned. Nevertheless, it should be noted that it is impossible to deal with this problem without hinting a personal attitude. Therefore it is evident that I would not describe *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* as "the most grotesque example of racist trash ever written" (Wallace 16). As David Lionel Smith noted:

Whether one chooses to emphasize the persistence of racism or the struggle against it is a fundamental issue. One may be in sympathy with all of these positions, but practically speaking, one cannot give equal weight to all of them. One must choose, and the choice, we know, will be perceived as a gesture of self-declaration (The Cambridge Companion 123).

On the other, it is little wonder that this book still inflames public opinions and various debates because the problem of racism is very topical even nowadays.

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