Huck's Voice versus Herd Mentality: The Good, the Bad, and the Evil

Wisam Abughosh Chaleila[1]

[1] Al-Qasemi Academic College, Israel

Correspondence: Wisam Abughosh Chaleila, Al-Qasemi Academic College, Israel.

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Abstract

In Mark Twain's 1884 chef-d'œuvre, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (HF), the voice of innocence—personified by Huck Finn—evolves as a graphic reflection of his unique social and ethical standing, portraying him as a nonconforming, Adam-like wanderer seeking refuge in nature and searching for a distinct identity. Employing literary theory, this article goes beyond exposing the moral bankruptcy and hypocrisy in an allegedly 'civilized' white society that purports to uphold high moral standards. Drawing on Nietzsche's doctrine of good vs. bad and good vs. evil, along with the psychological phenomenon of herd mentality, the article demonstrates how Huck's voice challenges and destabilizes orthodox linguistic conventions, societal norms, ethical constructs, and long-standing beliefs in the antebellum American South during the nineteenth century. Key findings reveal that such a unique voice can be seen as a profound critique of the antebellum South's values, introducing a newfangled perspective on America's development of a distinctive identity and its quest to establish its own voice and literature after severing ties with Britain.

Keywords: Nineteenth Century, Nature, Herd Mentality, Innocence, Knowledge, Linguistic Conventions

1. Introduction

Despite being criticized, labeled as racist (Fishkin, 1993), facing concerns about its potential impact on language proliferation (Sullivan, 2022), and receiving negative comments about its illustrations (David, 1974), Twain's *HF* achieved remarkable popularity. In 1935, Ernest Hemingway renownedly declared that *HF* "All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*…But it's the best book we've had. All American writing comes from that. There was nothing before. There has been nothing as good since" (Hemingway, 1936, p. 29). These words align with the surge in recognition of *HF* nearly half a century after its initial publication, attributed to the novel's portrayal of defiance against societal norms and its theme of breaking free from constraints. Such defiance mirrors the historical context of the colonies' severance from the British Empire seeking their own identity that prevailed until the early twentieth century (Chaleila, 2020). In literary writing, this pursuit of identity has been reflected in the distinctiveness of American literature, which sought to be markedly different from its British counterpart. Embodying a spirit of independence and disqualifying conformity has contributed to the novel's perpetual appeal and cultural implication. The parallel between Huck's quest for freedom and the broader American narrative of self-determination following the American Revolution and preceding the Civil War enhances the novel's significance and relevance to American literary history.

Interestingly, the novel employs a child narrator's idiolect[1] that challenges conventional linguistic categorization. This is articulated in the author's "Explanatory," which introduces seven distinct dialects[2]: the Missouri negro dialect, extreme backwoods Southwestern dialect, ordinary Pike County dialect, and four modified Pike County dialects assigned to specific groups like thieves, the duke and the king, and Aunt Sally and Uncle Silas Phelps. What characterizes Huck's straightforward idiolect is its resistance to the convoluted reasoning found in groupthink and mob mentality, exposing the absurd and destructive nature of collective behavior. No wonder, then, that Twain emphasizes transforming written expressions into colloquial forms to capture authentic speech, stating that "written things… have to be limbered up, broken up, colloquialized, and turned into the common form of unpremeditated talk" (Twain, 1940, p. 216).

Twain's painstaking selection of words extends to his choice of character names, each burdened with symbolic meaning. The name Huckleberry Finn embodies the dual themes of innocence and experience: "Huckleberry" evokes a natural, untamed quality, while "Finn" derives from roots signifying "fair" or "wanderer." This nomenclature underscores the protagonist's journey and inherent connection to nature, contrasting sharply with the societal constraints he seeks to escape. Depicted as a white child and a wanderer, Huck often escapes to nature, rejecting civilization and demonstrating heroism by defying societal norms and aiding Jim, the fugitive slave. Huck's altruistic behavior is further highlighted by his language, particularly his voice of innocence. Nevertheless, underneath the facade of a heavenly childhood, Huck's world is marred by the ubiquitous corruption that surrounds him. He struggles with the harsh realities of life and

[1] Unlike dialect, which pertains to the speech patterns of a particular group, region, or community, an individual's idiolect is influenced by personal experiences, upbringing, education, and social interactions.

[2] Though Twain does not explicitly propose this term, coined only in 1948.

experiences the brutal loss of innocence. It should be noted that this study employs a qualitative approach, utilizing literary theory to analyze Huck's voice of innocence and its nuances**.** The following paragraphs deconstruct this analysis further by providing and detailing examples.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Huck's Innocent Voice

Despite the advent of American Realism in the mid-19th century, residues of the preceding Romantic period continued to exert influence, especially in the works of realist writers like Mark Twain who, by writing *HF*, breathed new life into Romanticism. Such residues are evident in Huck's first appearance as an innocent child in the first chapter when Widow Douglas describes him as "a poor lost lamb" (p. 2). This description draws parallels with the biblical parable of the lost sheep in Matthew (18:10–14), where Christians who have strayed from God's fellowship are likened to lost sheep that need to be brought back into the fold. It also reverberates the concept of the Perfect Lamb mentioned in Exodus (12:5-6), where the Hebrew term "Seh Tamim" signifies innocence and perfection. More, Peter (1:19), refers to the unblemished lamb is a symbol to Jesus Christ, innocence, and sacrifice. Such themes of innocence are also echoed in William Blake's Songs of Innocence and of Experience**,** published in 1794, almost a century before *HF*. Like *HF*, Blake's Songs decry institutions such as schools, government, church, and society's false morality, all of which collaborate to stifle the natural inclinations of individuals. Nevertheless, realism is evident in Huck's valuation of freedom, contrasted with Tom's willingness to compromise his freedom in favor of acceptance and security.

Notwithstanding this intriguing combination, it should be remembered that *HF* is celebrated primarily for its groundbreaking use of language. Maintaining the delicate balance between authenticity and emotional depth in a child's narrative voice is a challenge in itself. However, defying conventional language norms—such as switching letters ("sivilized") and adding others ("I says")—goes beyond merely depicting child language. It suggests that such language transcends conventional expectations and still, cannot bear significant consequences (pp. 11, 27). That is, while Huck's flawed yet innocent language might absolve him of literary judgment, it does not elicit praise; rather, it reinforces criticisms, as it might downplay the severity of issues like racism. Indeed, there is a risk of losing authenticity if the vocabulary and syntax become overly refined for a child character; but oversimplifying them can result in a lack of emotional depth. Simultaneously, alongside the narrator's individualized perspective, his voice of innocence strives to recapture the essence of his own childhood. This opens doors to a multitude of interpretations that disclose underlying themes and engage the reader's imagination, solidifying the impact of Huck's genuine, unpolished, and unrefined spoken words. In this context, Huck often describes things without fully comprehending their meaning (Rasmussen, 2014), resulting in a language that blends innocent colloquialisms with his crude upbringing (Arac, 1997).

Against all odds, sabotaging the language system becomes a blessing since Huck's voice introduces a discordant sound that resists the adult world, denounces orthodoxy, overturns conventions, and manifests a longing for lost innocence. This Huckian discordance ridicules white characters and the civilization they represent, evident in the protagonist's innocent depictions of white misconduct, against which he rebels. His idiolect denigrates the shortcomings of their education and competence, while his naive and earnest narration provides a limited perspective on the world, forming the crux of the story. Even more, Huck's narrative approach breaks the common image of the child, presenting a novel conception of childhood through a rebellious language that resists the standard one. Most importantly, this resistance parallels his rejection of herd mentality. Along with this, his unique language pattern provides a sense of immediacy and spontaneity, reflecting naivete and innocence, which reinforces his ability to see beyond traditional prejudices. Nevertheless, his straightforwardness and honesty contrast with the absurdity of the situations he encounters, unraveling the audacious comedy concealed in the narrative. Despite earning the status of a maltreated orphan and a docile anarchist who is gentle, frightened, and endearing, Huck is delineated as an embodiment of disrespect and an abomination of conformity. Behaving and communicating in a manner that ideal adults should, even in a world where many adults lack moral integrity, Huck conveys an inborn sense of good and evil. More, in contrary to the corruption and solipsism often found in adults, his voice is just, intelligent, and well-intentioned.

3. Methodology

The primary data informing this study come from an in-depth analysis of Mark Twain's 1884 novel**,** *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. This analysis is complemented by examining primary sources such as Twain's biography, letters, diaries, and historical records of his life and work. Moreover, secondary sources, including critiques, historical studies, and academic articles, are reviewed to contextualize the novel within its social, political, and cultural background.

The study focuses on Huck's idiolect as an antithesis of conformity, exploring themes and motifs related to herd mentality and Nietzschean doctrine of good, bad, and evil. These elements are examined within historical and cultural frameworks to uncover deeper interpretations. The study employs literary theory as its primary method, incorporating various critical perspectives such as psychoanalysis and deconstruction. It explores themes of identity, innocence, and herd mentality to uncover deeper interpretations within the text. By situating the novel within its 19th-century milieu, it provides perspectives on systemic issues of language and morality.

4. Biblical Adam: Innocence and Experience

Deriding the various man-made institutions alongside the long-standing societal beliefs, *HF* exposes the duplicity that often prevailed in

provincial nineteenth-century American South. One example is Twain's well-documented criticism of religion, exemplified by the paradox of "felix culpa," which literally means "happy fault," or the "Fortunate Fall" in Catholic liturgy (*Exultet*). This concept pertains to the casual relationship between the original sin and redemption (Rumrich & Fallon, 2021). The doctrine argues that Adam's sin ultimately brought more good to humanity than evil, as confirmed by the biblical passage: "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (*Genesis*, 3:5). In literature, the term communicates the idea that a sequence of unfortunate events can lead to a favorable outcome. Either way, Huck does learn by experience and aspires to return to his old ways of purity and innocence, and for him at least, this is a favorable outcome. This thematic exploration of the innocence-experience antithesis in the novel also resurrects Rousseauesque foundations. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, often regarded as the progenitor of Romanticism, championed a return to nature, arguing that the rapid development and sophistication of civilization led to corruption, hypocrisy, pretension, and mechanization. These themes were well articulated in his *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences* (1750) and *Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men* (1755).

Drawing additional parallels between Huck and biblical Adam indicates that both yearned for the simplicity of existence before the acquisition of knowledge. The notion of Eden in the earliest Genesis narrative stands for a realm of childhood innocence. Huck struggles with the institutions of civilization for fear of losing his autonomy and freedom, opting to act spontaneously based on natural inborn qualities rather than careful analysis and provision or calculated restraint of civilized individuals. His transition to the city can be likened to Adam's expulsion from the Garden of Eden, as both are subjected to new knowledge. However, unlike Adam who sinned and was subsequently condemned by the Fall, Huck's innocence remained untarnished, as he did not commit a real sin. His sin, which may amount to Adam's sin in slaveholders' standards, is that he unmasks the corruption and brutality of the civilized society by helping Jim. This brutality materializes through other atrocities Huck witnesses such as the cold-blooded murder of his friend, Buck Grangerford, his cousin, and several members of the Shepherdson family.

Huck's innocence is further highlighted in his ostensibly romanticized untroubled life, complementary with the natural world around him such as avoiding the meddling influence of adults who aim to "sivilize" him by reveling in cussing, **truancy**, and in the freedom of being barefoot and naked (Roberts & Twain, 2001). Again, his barefootedness and nakedness resonate with biblical Adam's status before the Fall: "Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame" (*Genesis* 2:25). More importantly, the state of nakedness brought comfort to Huck vis-à-vis the discomfort associated with man-made clothes: "was always naked…the new clothes Buck's folks made for me was too good to be comfortable" (Twain, p. 121).

The post-innocence experience is fraught not only with anguish and suppression but with an inwardly experienced shame. Like that of Adam, Huck's shame marks a passage from one place to another**,** signifying a departure from the sheltered sanctuary of God's custody, a departure from the childlike state of blissful ignorance and unwavering obedience (Bachelard, 1994). Yet, once knowledge has been acquired, Huck seeks to return to innocence. The sense of shame compels him to seek refuge in the untamed wilderness, returning to his former self and roots where he can regain his lost innocence, as implied by his name. In this respect, Huck's voice of innocence delegitimizes the perception of reality advocated by the entire civilized society, as it directly addresses them and unsettles their conservative thinking.

No matter how grave Huck's ill-treatment and dereliction, his innocence bypasses such shame through his renunciation of a lifestyle governed by social norms and frills and by recurrently reverting to nature, his real home. Although he tries to understand the logic of such frills, he fails to do so. One example is his adherence to Miss Watson's advice to help others and exercise altruism. Still, helping a runaway slave is deemed as a wrongdoing, which later he is reprimanded for. However, distinct from all the civilized others, he regards Jim as a person and as human, and by so doing he rebels against the corrupt principles of a slave owner culture. Being steered by such unreasonable hypocrite tenets and social rules, turns him into a slave just like Jim. They both run away from enslavement. The raft Huck and Jim take symbolizes not only their new home, but freedom for both. Particularly, Huck's freedom is further complemented by his unique idiolect, setting him apart from the herd mentality and collective herd language.

5. Herd Mentality and Collective (Herd) Language

Herd mentality involves a reluctance to change due to a strong attachment to traditional ways. Often referred to as mob mentality, the concept has garnered attention from scholars such as Wilfred Trotter in *Instincts of the Herd in Peace and War* (1916) and Sigmund Freud in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921). Almost two decades earlier, Thorstein Veblen examined this theme in *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), illustrating how individuals emulate the consumer choices of higher social status group members (Chaleila, 2019). Although not explicitly termed "herd mentality," the notion of "group thinking" or "herd behavior" was articulated in numerous pioneering works. Friedrich Nietzsche coined the term "herd mentality" in his 1886 work *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future.* However, the concept of herd behavior dates back further. Tracing its roots, herd mentality can be found in Hugo Grotius's *Annales et Historiae de Rebus Belgicis* (1657) (Rousseau, 1762).

Seeking to depict life as it was, without idealization or romanticism, Twain used the term "mob" twice in *Life on the Mississippi* (1883). Moreover, he harnessed the image of goatees alongside Adam to criticize the establishment. By so doing, he underscored his disapproval of societal decorum and the rigid conformity that often went unquestioned:

> This morning, struck into the region of full goatees-sometimes accompanied by a mustache …The goatee extends over a wide extent of country; and is accompanied by an iron-clad belief in Adam and the biblical history of creation, which

has not suffered from the assaults of the scientists (Twain, 1883, p. 164).

This excerpt echoes herd mentality conveying the metaphorical implication of the goatees and the 'iron-clad belief in Adam, likely referring to steadfast religious convictions, moving beyond their literal meanings to convey notions of obsolescence and renunciation of modernity including the surfeit of scientific advancements, and the unbending resistance to change (Bush, 2007). The illustration of the goatees as the oppressed, suffering from the challenges posed by "scientists" hints at a recognition of the vulnerability of such beliefs in the face of progress, and spotlights the dangers of collective, irrational corruptive behavior and its potential to lead to violence and chaos. The widespread presence of goatees, despite their being considered outdated and unattractive, suggests that individuals conform to a collective standard without questioning its relevance or appeal reflects how groups can cling to outdated beliefs or practices, rejecting new ideas or evidence.

Using language nuances and lexical choices, along with dialects, is a dominant literary device that enhances understanding and identification with specific characters (Devereaux & Palmer, 2019). These linguistic elements contribute to characterization by imparting astuteness to the character's social context and individual personality. Huck's voice of innocence underlines the divergence between his individuality and independent thinking on the one hand, and the artificiality and conformity of the herd mentality on the other. This pattern of conformity is evident in the herd's tendency to unite around causes like feuds and lynchings, often without comprehending the repercussions of their actions.

Such actions are driven by the complex, formal, and duplicitous language used by herd leaders. One instance are fake preachers who tend to use similar, conformist language and they "are everywhere overpowered by their endless capacity to live by rhetoric" (Twain, 2006, p. 215). Their flowery grandiose language is filled with verbiages, slogans, and herdthink, reflecting their willingness to convince the crowd to follow them without critical thought.

Without doubt, Huck's dialogue is replete with peculiar expressions that elude conventional understanding, as is palpable in his reaction to the story of Moses and the Bulrushers. His initial enthusiasm wanes upon learning of Moses' long-deceased status, leading Huck to candidly admit: "don't take no stock in dead people," upholding his belief that stories lack value unless they involve living, relatable individuals. His innocent recitation of morals he memorizes but has little interest in, grants him credit for attempting to save the killers he left trapped and stranded on the wreckage of the Walter Scott (Camfield, 2016). This innocence is underscored by Levi Bell's (the lawyer's) statement: "Set down, my boy; I wouldn't strain myself if I was you. I reckon you ain't used to lying, it don't seem to come handy" (p. 201). Nonetheless, the decisions he makes go against decorum of the time and foreground his individuality and distinctness: helping Jim escape, refusing to be "sivilized" by rejecting school, and critiquing long-standing establishments. His unique non-conformity and assertion of his own ethics outlines his innocence and simultaneously, establishes his resistance to societal pressures. The recurrent words "leave," "somewheres," "river," "island," and "woods" demonstrate such resistance. Note that all these words reflect Huck's desire for unspecified, open-ended exploration, free from the confines of structured society. Oddly, these words entail a broader scope of characterization.

Although the word "herd" is not mentioned, the term 'mob' appears five times in *HF*. In fact, there are numerous episodes in the novel that provide compelling evidence of the ludicrousness and perils of herd mentality and demonstrate how individuals can forsake critical thinking and morality when swept up by the frenzy of a collective group. A prominent indicator of herd mentality is the prolonged and prevalent feud between the Grangerfords and the Shepherdsons, notably emphasized by the word 'herd' embedded in the latter's name. The feud mirrors the irrationality of mob behavior, where both families are blind to the violence at their core due to the façade of culture and virtue they embrace as representations of their lifestyle. This cycle of retribution and unnecessary bloodshed, rooted in the actions of the churchgoers and clergy plotting violence inside the church, has persisted through generations. The families' adherence to these superficial ideals underlines the absurdity and deep-seated contradictions of their supposed moral and ethical values. The church scene ridicules the rigid adherence to religious zealotry and the unbending commitment to the letter of the law, implying that such sanctimony, illustrated as an outward display of piety, is at odds with morally questionable actions. One example is the language characterized by both the Shepherdsons' and the Grangerfords' preachers, reflecting a revivalist oratory style. The Grangerfords' preacher delivers eloquent and emotionally charged sermons about brotherly love and forgiveness, much like the Shepherdsons' preacher who engages in "pretty ornery preaching" about brotherly love. This demonstrates the pretense and insincerity through these ostensibly virtuous presentations of language, signaling the irony of their relentless and long-standing feud. Unlike Huck who belongs to the lower class, these churchgoers are from the upper and middle classes. Their moral failings and hypocrisy typify the deficiencies of the seemingly "good" society, and their behavior sharply contrasts with their professed faith, reducing them to mere adherents of the herd mentality. Contrariwise, Huck represents a better morality, embodying virtuous qualities at his core: his innocence, methodical approach to belief, intrinsic human nature, and moral uprightness, all of which are worthy of praise.

Considering the last names of these two families, it is obvious that they evoke connotations of "herd mentality." To analyze this further, the literal meaning of "granger" is a farmer and 'ford' is a stream, symbolizing going with the flow. Furthermore, "Shepherdson" means son of a Shepheard. The way sheep obediently follow a leader (a shepherd) without question mirrors the tendency of mob members to blindly conform to a collective cause. Ironically, in the novel these names refer to aristocratic lineages. Twain's choice of these specific names may be for the sheer sake of creating a burlesque, or it may be also related to their sound and the associations of affluence and respectability they carry, which contrast with the families' involvement in destructive and other morally questionable actions. Both families are linked to the theme of mob mentality through the families' social statuses, their fervent efforts to preserve their reputation,

their steadfast loyalty to family norms, and in the gradual loss of each member in the collective mindset of the feud.

Another indicator of herd mentality surfaces when a mob forms to lynch Sherburn, who in turn reproves them scornfully with an incendiary speech: "The pitifulest thing out is a mob; that's what an army is—a mob; they don't fight with courage that's born in them, but with courage that's borrowed from their mass, and from their officers. But a mob without any man at the head of it is beneath pitifulness." (pp. 149-150). He then uses a gun, which quickly disperses the mob. This scene climaxes the absurdity of senseless violence and language, especially the chaotic actions and words of unruly crowds during a period of instability shortly before the Civil War.

Similarly, we see how the duke and the king (the dauphin), two notorious con artists, employ such a language filled with empty clichés to exploit the local audience's naiveté, convincing them to attend a phony play. Likewise, the duke performs a fraudulent Shakespearean recitation, manipulating the language to create an illusion of culture and sophistication. This act not only indicates the duo's manipulation via pompous and insincere rhetoric, but also criticizes the gullibility of the masses. The fabricated soliloquy deliberately mixes lines from *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, aiming to deceive the audience. The fact that the crowds are easily swayed by the performance demonstrates how they are collectively misled or manipulated, determining the uncritical acceptance of cultural symbols and highbrow language. The crowd's inability to discern the authenticity of the performance enhances Twain's criticism of societal susceptibility to superficial displays: "To be, or not to be; that is the bare bodkin…till Birnam Wood do come to" (p. 119). The duke instructs the king on how to perform based on the perceived expectations of the audience, emphasizing the need to conform to surface-level qualities like softness and romanticism, rather than a genuine understanding or appreciation of the play: "you mustn't bellow out *Romeo!* that way, like a bull—you must say it soft and sick and languishy, so—R-o-o-meo! that is the idea" (p. 138). Again, this proves how a mob mentality can be driven by superficial and emotional appeals rather than substance or authenticity.

In another instance, the king delivers a theatrical speech full of tears and sentimental language about the loss of his "diseased" brother, manipulating the emotions of the crowd. This behavior aligns with the concept of herd or mob mentality, exposed through Huck's recounting of the king's deceptive speech: "by and by the king he gets up and comes forward a little, and works himself up and slobbers out a speech, all full of tears and flapdoodle about its being a sore trial for him and his poor brother to lose the diseased" (p. 137). The duo's attempt to sound noble and articulate, using overly ornate and expressive language, features the dishonesty and manipulative nature of their schemes and derides the easily enticed mob. Conversely, Colonel Sherburn's impassioned and somber tone as the mob assembles to lynch him carries a pessimistic criticism of humanity's inherent nature and the state of civilization. These fraudulent activities vividly illustrate how quickly a mob's sentiment can be incited and turned against those deemed wrongdoers.

Undoubtedly, Huck occasionally resorts to deception, but his actions are typically driven by noble and virtuous motives. For example, he feigns his own death to escape his abusive father, and he lies to protect Jim. Furthermore, he engages in theft, as seen when he takes the Wilks family's money from the duke and the king. Huck's independent thinking reflected by his innocent voice often questions the collective behavior and the prevailing beliefs and customs of society branded with hypocrisy (Fishkin, 1993). Moreover, this voice plays a crucial role in exposing the deceit of these imposters, who impersonate the English preacher Harvey Wilks and his mute-deaf brother, William. Huck's conduct suggests a distinct form of knowledge primarily acquired through life experiences. He relies on his resourcefulness to navigate a variety of situations. In addition, his self-referential use of "I says to myself," signifies his individuality and self-awareness, marking his transition from innocence to knowledge.

Moreover, unlike the others, Huck remains untainted by materialism and consumerism. This is evident in the way he approaches money, such as forfeiting all the money to Judge Thatcher, something he pays dearly for. Despite his lack of formal education and his irreverence toward conventional religious yardsticks, as well as his reluctance to conform to societal expectations of the "goatees," he forges his path and standards. Such "I" is what distinguishes him from other white characters represented in the collective "they." This pronoun heightens Huck's introspection and logical decision making, allowing him to break free from herd mentality and herdthink. It also underscores his skepticism regarding the schism between genuine moral standards and the deceitful behavior exhibited by society. Huck's self-identification as uneducated structures his idiolect, placing him outside the confines of a society governed by rigid norms and aligning him with the innocence associated with the natural world. Such natural world is often referred to as the "woods," that appears 69 times in the novel, highlighting its significance.

To further emphasize the contrast between Huck's voice and the collective mentality of the mob, the novel employs various elements of figurative language, including satirical tone, diction, imagery, and hyperbole. These elements accentuate the striking divergence between Huck's innocent voice and the behaviors of other characters. For instance, the satirical tone is exemplified in Huck's anecdote about bees not stinging idiots, which ridicules the prevalent superstitious social beliefs. The choice of diction, as evidenced in phrases like "They get down on a thing when they don't know nothing about it" (p. 2) articulates Twain's sardonic criticism of ignorance and prejudiced attitudes. Hyperbole is used to demonstrate the characters' extreme and irrational behaviors, such as joining mob for fear of being a coward (p. 149). Another example is the intense imagery, such as the moonlit scene, used to underlines Huck's innocence along with the startling contrast between his perspective and the flawed beliefs and behaviors of the adults around him. Employing these elements to denote the irrationality of the mob mentality and its consequences reveals Huck's evolving moral perception and individuality, which defy the deeply deep-seated prejudices of society.

Such moral growth is evidenced in the argument that evolves between Huck and Jim concerning the notion of speaking French. This argument offers a sarcastic criticism of both the institution of slavery and the prevailing societal norms. Initially, Huck's perspective is heavily

influenced by the local racist and prejudiced beliefs. This influence leads him to perceive Jim as inferior solely due to his enslaved status, a reflection of the established attitudes of the era. However, as the story unfolds and Huck spends more time in Jim's company, he undergoes a transformation in his perception of the enslaved man. He gradually comes to see Jim not as a mere piece of property, but as a fellow human characterized by emotions, intelligence, and moral worth.

Jim's desire to learn the French language is presented as a simple and universal human aspiration, emphasizing the fundamental shared humanity between individuals, regardless of their racial background. Conversely, Huck, who from the beginning embodies the deeply entrenched racism, mocks Jim's ambition and questions the rationale behind a black person learning French. This exchange emphasizes the irrationality and cruelty of the institution of slavery, a system in which even the pursuit of knowledge and personal growth is repressed and smothered.

Subsequently, the conversation between Huck and Jim takes a new direction, focusing on the concept of language. Jim initially struggles with the notion that the French language differs from English, leading Huck to draw a parallel by comparing this linguistic variance to the diverse ways in which animals communicate. He maintains that animals from various regions possess distinct languages of their own. However, Jim challenges this analogy by asserting that human beings are not as disparate from one another as the analogy implies. He contends that just as all cats and dogs can understand one another's languages, so too should humans. In response to Jim's perspective, Huck acquiesces and refrains from pursuing the topic further. Such obstructions associated with communicating and negotiating meaning transpire when individuals lack a shared basis for understanding. While Huck is eager to steer the conversation away from the topic of kings, Jim retains a lingering question. Jim draws a parallel between the variations in animal communication and the diverse linguistic expressions of individuals from different cultures. He astutely identifies a fundamental flaw in Huck's analogies by emphasizing that animals and humans are fundamentally different categories. Jim's response attests to his intellectual acumen and his capacity for critical thinking (Anderson, 2008). The argument itself illustrates the dehumanizing impact of slavery and the urgent need for moral enlightenment, drawing attention to the inherent injustice and immorality of slavery by presenting it through the eyes of a character who undergoes a profound moral awakening. It further illustrates the complexities characters face when attempting to discuss abstract ideas without a shared frame of reference, complexities that are further elevated by defining what is good, bad, right, wrong, or evil.

6. Innocence vs. Knowledge: The Good, the Bad, and the Evil

Mentioning the word "mob" overtly, alluding to herd mentality adds depth to the moral struggles faced by the novel's characters, who deal with the complexities of good versus bad, good versus evil, and right versus wrong in their society. Huck's interactions with Jim and other white characters not only resonate with Nietzschean doctrines of herd mentality but also with the dichotomies of good/bad and good/evil. Nietzsche delineated these origins through concepts of "master morality" and "slave morality" (p. 154). In societies with a master-slave dynamic, the ruling class initially defined "good" based on values like strength and nobility, deeming traits associated with the lower classes as "bad." However, the concept of "good" transformed into "evil" as the oppressed, the slaves, shaped their own moral values in opposition to the masters. Nietzsche advocated transcending these dichotomies, embracing an individualistic and life-affirming perspective beyond imposed values. Criticizing altruism's utility-driven explanation, he cautioned against self-denying motives, suggesting seemingly altruistic actions might stem from personal satisfaction. Huck's conduct controverts blind faith, incorporating slave morality, herd mentality, and religion.

Building upon this foundation, Huck's personal odyssey through religious perplexity can be viewed as a learning experience that contrasts with blind faith, characterized by herd mentality and simplistic interpretations of religion that permeate society. The "good/bad" dichotomy becomes evident in the endorsement and societal acceptance of slavery as "good," versus Huck's defiance of this longstanding convention as "bad." Jim is initially considered "bad" by societal standards because he represents disobedience to the established order. These standards dictate that attending church is good, handing over fugitive slaves is good, while not praying is bad, and aiding slaves in their escape is bad. However, Huck develops a bond with Jim that exceeds societal norms, challenging the dichotomy of good/bad. That is, Huck's extraordinary friendship with Jim is considered eccentric in broader society due to Jim's enslaved status. Therefore, his decision to help Jim escape slavery exemplifies the "right/wrong" dichotomy. Despite the prevailing societal view of Huck's actions as morally wrong, they reflect a rejection of traditional moral values in favor of a more individualistic perspective. While Huck is expected to follow societal ethos and return Jim to slavery, conforming to the conventional notion of "good," he does the opposite. In this case, the question arises: does "right" entail obeying societal norms, which often conflict with moral rectitude? Choosing to act in a way that goes against these expectations demonstrates a willingness to reject societal definitions of good, bad, and evil.

In other words, is running away with Jim the right thing to do? During the escape, Huck envisions a plan: to sell the raft, secure passage on a steamboat, and embark on a journey far up the Ohio River, leading them to the free states. The advent of steamboats revolutionized trade, enabling commerce to flow both downstream and upstream, with and against the river's current. Simultaneously, this invention facilitated mobility and was instrumental in the emancipation of slaves (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 18). In this sense, the Mississippi River and its tributaries acted as the main artery for the western United States in the early 1800s, flowing south from Canada through free states before entering the slave states of the South. New Orleans emerged as a crucial port for supplying slaves to plantations along the Mississippi River (Buchanan, 2007). Against all odds, the advocacy and promotion of slave emancipation were not solely emblematic of the free states. Although Illinois was a free state, the residents often displayed sympathy toward neighboring slave states and antipathy toward free blacks (Kiper, 2013). In contrast, the established morals and plantation system characteristic of the Deep South and slavery were not deeply rooted in Missouri, officially categorized as a slave state in 1820 (Hawley & Belcher, 2013). Even more, it was Missouri

that played a significant role in the landmark court case Dred Scott v. Sanford, hastening the outbreak of the Civil War (Davis et al., 1973).

Huck's journey down the river marks the commencement of his "felix cupla" and redemption. Nature becomes the stage against which he encounters individuals who reveal to him the harsh realities of human nature including hypocrisy, avarice, and moral contradictions. While Huck may lack formal societal training, a fact he becomes acutely aware of as he maneuvers through the religious dogma and societal expectations thrust upon him, he holds a set of moral values that seem more grounded in reality and bear deeper significance than the superficial moral rules embraced by others, only to be consistently breached. Throughout his adventures, Huck discerns the malevolent nature and uncovers the insincerity underlying the moral codes of figures such as the duke, the dauphin, the Grangerfords, the Shepherdsons, and others. These individuals advocate a counterfeit and delusive morality that proves detrimental. Concurrently, his journey allows him to recognize and respect the genuine humanity in Jim, a revelation that would have eluded him had he been entirely assimilated into the prevailing social conventions of his era. This awakening to the bitter realities of the world, where much of it fails to conform to the flawless and moral image projected by others, marks the first step towards true knowledge.

While the reliability of Huck as a child-narrator remains a subject of debate, it is unquestionable that Huck's idiolect and patterns of speech emphasize his innocence. In one example, the first-person narration comes to be the only outlet giving insight into the disparity between Huck's innate innocence and Miss Watson's society-driven decency. A disparity evident right from the first chapter, whereby she presents herself to Huck as the apotheosis of an honorable woman.

> Then she told me all about the **bad place**, and I said I wished I was there ... she was going to live so as to go to the **good place** … Now she had got a start, and she went on and told me all about the **good place** … Miss Watson she kept pecking at me, and it got tiresome and lonesome. By and by they fetched the niggers in and had prayers (Twain, 1884, p. 3).

As the story develops, Huck gradually begins to appreciate and define his own identity (as a rebel) and ethical code (freeing Jim), maturing beyond his childhood innocence. Deep down, Huck knows that assisting a slave to escape is unlawful and tantamount to committing theft, but he does it, nevertheless. Another example of the impact of Huck's innocence is his solemn inner conflict when he against all odds, decides to "go to hell" in order to save Jim (p.169). To escape the tentacles of such homogenizing civilization, Huck ingeniously and consciously chooses the path of "hell" rather than "heaven." This decision is a clear rejection of the Church and the Sunday school that led to the creation of slavery (Ishihara, 2005). Despite being influenced by newfound knowledge, Huck retains a crucial element of innocence that allows him to see through the hypocrisies of the world around him.

A critical moment evolves in the later part of the novel when Huck and Jim liberate themselves from grip of the duke and the king. Held captive at the Phelps' farm, Jim becomes the focal point of a life-threatening decision for Huck, who has been struggling with guilt over not relinquishing Jim. In a significant shift, Huck resolves to write a letter to Miss Watson urging her to come and reclaim her slave. Penning this letter, the weight of societal expectations lifts, and he no longer feels like a deviant committing a crime by aiding a runaway slave. However, a profound metamorphosis occurs as Huck reflects on the journey he shared with Jim - the deepening friendship. Unable to harshen himself against Jim, Huck begins to experience a moral awakening. At this moment, the novel's moral core is laid bare as soon as this conflict between Huck's emerging conscience and society values surfaces. In a decisive act, Huck rips up the letter, spurning the entire prevalent norms of a slave commodification culture:

> I felt good and all washed clean of sin for the first time I had ever felt so in my life… how near I come to being lost and going to **hell** … I'd got to decide, forever, betwixt two things, and I **knowed** it … then says to myself: 'All right, then, I'll go to hell'—and tore it up (pp. 216-217).

The shift in Huck's terminology demonstrates his transition from innocence to knowledge. At the beginning of the book (first quotation) he uses the words a "good place" and a "bad place" instead of "heaven" and "hell," but at the end of the book (the second quotation) he mentions them blatantly. The utilization of heaven and hell as personifications to good and bad, or vice versa echoes Twain's attitude towards both antithetical terms: *"*I don't believe in hell*"* (Smith, 2021, p. 25). In another account, Twain patently maintains that heaven is the last place one may find rest in, and that it is the same as the Territory (Twain, 2010). All these statements vibrantly reiterate Huck's sentiments and avowals. Above all, it should be noted that in the first quotation Huck mentions the slaves quite apathetically, dehumanizing their personhood, by commodifying them and depicting them as one entity: "By and by they fetched the niggers in and had prayers" (p. 3) whereas in the second quotation he humanizes, personalizes, and even romanticizes Jim the slave. This moment marks Huck's irrevocable withdrawal from the familiar, and resorting to the uncanny, solidifying his newfound ethical axis.

Huck's oscillation between the desire for heaven and hell impugns the religious establishment inherent in the "good/bad" paradigm, reminiscent of Twain's short story, "Was it Heaven? Or Hell?" (Twain, 1902). This conflict underscores the intrinsic futility of such dogma as Huck embarks on introspection, marked by the separation of "I" from "myself." This introspection accommodates with Freud's structural model of the psyche - where the *id* signifies innate desires, the *ego* adheres to reality, and the *super-ego* embodies moral aspects. In this context, the id represents Huck's innate desires and impulses, while the ego strives to align these with external constraints, and the super-ego functions as his conscience, embodying moral and ethical considerations. Denouncing material possessions, representing his desires (id), Huck suppresses his greedy impulses (ego) and acts altruistically, sacrificing his needs for others' well-being, as seen in the emancipation of Jim (superego).

7. Discussion

This article has illustrated how Huck Finn's innocent voice unearths the ethical failings and herd mentality alongside the dichotomies of the good, the bad, and the evil advocated by a purportedly refined society. It has further showed the way his voice is retained to disrupt traditional linguistic conventions, contributing to current discussions about prominent issues such as language and identity in American literature. The stark dichotomy between Huck's pure innocence and the herd mentality prevalent among other white characters signifies the use of satire to criticize entrenched racism. The novel emphasizes that individual ethical values hold greater significance and moral merit than the collective morality of the majority. In this sense, Huck's innocence features the dissonance between concepts such as right and wrong, good and evil, and the ongoing struggle between nature and nurture within the narrative.

Unveiling new perspectives on the child narrator, the voice of innocence becomes a disruptive force in the adult, cultured world, refusing to be 'sivilized,' and frequently articulating defiance and denunciation. Huck is portrayed not as an epitome of established moralities but as one who questions, challenges, and even rejects them. This portrayal empowers him to cast doubt on authority and unsettle conventional thinking, regardless of age. Presenting him as a non-conforming, Adam-like wanderer seeking refuge in nature, Huck's innocence mirrors that of Adam who committed a sin and was sent to Earth as a punishment. However, unlike Adam who faced his punishment, Huck relentlessly rejects civilization, viewing it as a form of punishment, and instead aspires to return to nature, seeking redemption. In this regard, his self-defined status sharply contrasts the moral decadence prevalent in the so-called refined society. Ultimately, we come to understand that irrespective of simplicity, lack of formal education, economic impoverishment, and societal disadvantage, a voice coupled with wisdom can command significant authority and remain unbeaten. The article leaves the question of who determines morals unanswered, acknowledging the current human endeavor to discern good from bad and right from wrong. In managing moral dilemmas, the article suggests that common sense, guided by a deeper understanding, remains a crucial axis.

8. Conclusion

This article makes several significant theoretical contributions to the study of Mark Twain's work. Firstly, it introduces the concept of 'narrative innocence' to explain how children's voices in literature can be employed to unsettle conventional storytelling and feature societal flaws. For example, Huck's naive perspective exposes the moral failings of the adult world. Secondly, by examining Huck's voice, the study provides a critical scrutiny of existing scholarship on Twain's use of dialect and refines literary realism, demonstrating how dialect can enhance character authenticity and social criticism, as portrayed in Huck's rudimentary speech **vis-à-vis** societal hypocrisy. Moreover, the research integrates psychoanalytic and postcolonial theories, particularly examining the power dynamics of a master-slave relationship, to explore how Huck's resistance to long-standing conventions reflects broader themes of identity and individuality, such as his rejection of "sivilization" in favor of personal freedom. Furthermore, through detailed textual analysis, the article methodically endorses Twain's unmatched authentic presentation of 19th-century American society, emphasizing his progressive views on race and identity, demonstrated by Huck's relationship with Jim. By applying the concept of 'herd mentality' to *HF*, the study offers **new perspectives** to Twain's portrayal of social conformity and individual rebellion.

Nevertheless, despite its comprehensive analysis, this study is limited as the conclusions drawn about Huck's voice and its implications might not be universally applicable to other works or contexts. More, the analysis primarily employs literary theory, which may overlook other critical perspectives, such as structuralism, feminist literary criticism, and narratology. Along these lines, future research could expand on this study by investigating themes and narrative techniques in a broader range of literary works. Comparative studies between Huck Finn and other novels featuring child narrators could provide a deeper understanding of the role of innocence and moral questioning in literature.

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