
Looking Through the American Ideal: The Politics of Violent Humor in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

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Abstract: *Huckleberry Finn* is the pinnacle of American humor and the violent humor of the novel criticizes the moral values of American society. Despite the laughter-induced surface, underneath the story lies a bitter humor which attacks and ruptures different value systems. Besides the extremely violent humor, the other strategies that aid humor in fulfilling its political mission are grotesquery, and narration. The collaboration of strategic violent humor with grotesquery and narration results in the liberation of the readers from static mind-sets. *Huck Finn* effectively reveals the spuriousness of the American ideal despite its claims of being genuine through juxtaposition of heterogeneous characters, worlds, and lives which reveal the crudity of everyday life. To this end, humor theories of the scholars like Plaza, Walker, Cox, and Camfield and violence theories of Zizek, Schinkel, and Galtung are drawn upon in order to clarify the interconnected mechanism of humor, violence, and grotesquery in assailing putrid value systems. Deployed violent humor aligned with focalization of the novel through Huck, a naïve narrator, highlights the disparity between the American ideal and realities of life that break the readers free from opiated visions of society and gives them a clear vision, free from biased value systems.

Keywords: focalization, grotesque, humor, Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, violence.

Resumo: *Huckleberry Finn* é o auge do humor americano e o humor violento do romance critica os valores morais da sociedade americana. Apesar do riso estar presente na superfície, por trás da história há um humor amargo que ataca e rompe diferentes sistemas de valores. Além do humor extremamente violento, o grotesco se apresenta como uma das outras estratégias que auxiliam o humor no cumprimento de sua missão política. A estratégica colaboração do humor violento com o grotesco e a narração resulta na libertação de uma mentalidade estática por parte dos leitores. *Huck Finn* efetivamente revela o caráter espúrio do ideal americano, apesar de suas alegações de ser genuíno através da justaposição de personagens, mundos e vidas heterogêneos que revelam a crueza da vida cotidiana. Para este fim, as teorias do humor de estudiosos como Plaza, Walker, Cox e Camfield e as teorias da violência de Zizek, Schinkel e Galtung são utilizadas para esclarecer o mecanismo interconectado do humor, da violência e do grotesco em atacar os sistemas de valores pútridos. O humor violento alinhado com a focalização do romance através de Huck, um narrador ingênuo, destaca a disparidade entre o ideal americano e as realidades da vida que libertam os leitores de visões opiáceas da sociedade e lhes dão uma visão clara, livre de sistemas de valores tendenciosos.

Palavras-chave: focalization, grotesque, humor, Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, violence.

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INTRODUCTION

Mark Twain (born 1835) is the preeminent novelist of nineteenth century America. Twain brings American humor to perfection with his masterpiece *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Huck is the uneducated teenager who also narrates the story as he travels down the Mississippi river with a runaway slave named Jim. *Huckleberry Finn* brims over with a violent humor which turns grotesque at times while the novel criticizes the mores and manners of the country and exposes the disparity between crude realities of life and the American ideal.

Leo Marx believes that “*Huckleberry Finn* is a masterpiece because it brings Western humor to perfection and yet transcends the narrow limits of its conventions” (95). Beneath the humorous surface of *Huck Finn* which induces laughter lies a bitter depth that attempts to invade and rupture some spurious social values. James M. Cox endorses the violence of *Huck Finn*’s humor when he says “The book shows that under the sign of the conscience, civilized man gains the self-approval to justify the atrocities of the adult civilization. And thus man’s cruelty is finally his pleasure. That disclosure nakedly seen would be no joke” (152). Twain dexterously blends humor with violence and grotesquery in his fiction, in order to lay bare socially normalized concepts for the readers.

Despite the fact that there are some scholarly articles and books which discuss humor in *Huck Finn*, almost none of them focus on the violent quality of its humor beside grotesquery. In regard to the destructiveness of *Huck Finn*’s humor, Alan Gribben remarks that “Twain’s nostalgic humor turned corrosive from *Tom Sawyer* to *Huckleberry Finn*. His bent for comic truth telling strengthened his animus against the standard wisdom and moral uplift of patriotic formulas mixed with entrepreneurial deceits” (55). There is a warped logic at work in the novel which juxtaposes the discordant characters, worlds, and attitudes next to each other to reveal their discrepancies and incongruities to open the readers’ eyes to truth, as bitter as it may be.

The more the readers are drowned in the world of the novel, the deeper and more pervasive its humor becomes. However, the book forces no meaning on the readers, but it allows them to come up with their own command of meaning. The story entangles everyone in its chaotic world from Huck to Jim and the readers, since humor of *Huck Finn* is all inclusive. In this line, Julius Lester states:

Twain’s failure is that he does not care until it hurts, and because he doesn’t, his contempt for humanity is disguised as satire, as humor. No matter how charming and appealing Huck is, Twain holds him in contempt. And here we come to the other paradox, the critical one that white Americans have so assiduously resisted: It is not possible to regard blacks with contempt without having first so regarded themselves. (348)

The violent humor of the novel blurs the borderlines which classify people based on social standards and allow them to commit inhumane actions under the name of civilization. “Mark Twain and William Faulkner, for example, often root their humor in their re-

cognition that we human beings are all in the same boat.” Michael Dunn continues, “Thus, most readers can easily recognize themselves in Twain’s characters and in Faulkner’s. Most of us, that is to say, can enter imaginatively into Huckleberry Finn’s discomfort when he goes to church with the Granger fords [. . .]” (14-15). The readers align themselves with Huck and in the moments that Huck blames himself, they know that he is doing the right deed and admire him for that. Cox posits:

In fact, Huck’s central mode of being is that of escape and evasion. He forgets much more than he remembers; he lies, steals, and in general participates in as many confidence tricks as the King and the Duke. But the two cardinal facts - that he is a boy and is involved in helping a runaway slave - serve endlessly to sustain the reader’s approval. It is precisely this approval which, putting the reader’s moral censor to sleep, provides the central good humor pervading the incongruities, absurdities, and cruelties through which the narrative beautifully makes its way. (Cox 308)

When Huck follows a morality of heart, he happens to be the best of himself although these actions are against his civilized conscience for which he constantly berates himself. In spite of the serious matters which *Huck Finn* deals with, it passes all of them under a humorous cover. “For quite clearly the book does powerfully touch upon ‘serious’ themes, yet just as clearly it remains a humorous narrative. Its being humorous does not mean that it has no sad moments or violent actions, but rather that all the sadness and killing and morality are contained within a humorous point of view” (Cox 157). As Cox mentions, there are a lot of violent and painful events going on, only that humor overshadows them. “Though the potential for danger and violence is just beneath the surface of each episode, tragedy is forever mitigated by, and coexistent with a humorous spin in each instance” (Bloom 17). Almost no article or book specifically deals with the function of violence in *Huck Finn* beside its interrelation with grotesquery and humor. It remains for the present article to consider violent humor of *Huck Finn* and its connection with violence and grotesquery in breaking the American ideal apart and exposing its shallow state to the readers.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Most theoreticians confirm that humor resists any limiting definition. In this regard, Nancy A. Walker states that “We begin with a paradox: humor – that is, the ability is nearly a universal human trait, and yet most people who attempt to write about humor acknowledge that that is difficult to define, grasp, and pin down” (3). On the same basis, John Lowe in his seminal essay “Theories of Ethnic Humor: How to Enter Laughing” also accentuates the complications in defining humor. Lowe believes that for defining ethnic humor first ethnicity and humor should be defined. However, he adds that “Defining ethnicity seems less difficult than defining humor, probably because until recently definitions had not emerged” (439-440). So there is no certain and fixed definition of humor.

“Thus humor is found both in and outside art, in both fictional and real contexts. This suggests, what is almost certainly true, that there can be no general, overarching ‘theory’ of humor, unless the theory is so general and probably vague as to be utterly uninformative” (Cohen 375). Thus, similar to Walker, Ted Cohen acknowledges the strains one faces in attempting to provide an obvious definition for humor. John Morreall believes that humor’s earliest definitions are different from the one used from seventeenth century onward. In his view, humor before the seventeenth century means nothing more than mere laughter. He remarks:

Philosophers have been writing about laughter and humor since the time of Plato, but humor did not mean funniness until the end of the seventeenth century, and only in the eighteenth century were amusing, funny, and comic used to mean humorous. So, through history, most discussions about what we now call humor have centered around laughter. (Morreall 28)

According to Morreall, definitions of humor vary from one timeline to another one and discussions on humor usually revolve around laughter rather than the qualities of humor itself. Apart from mixing humor and laughter, every theory on humor covers only one of its aspects while ignoring the others which are beyond its ability to cover (Hurley *et al.* 37). Moreover, humor is a very general term and thus introducing its different forms and subcategories is essential. Most of the theoreticians discuss humor in terms of three theories: Superiority, Incongruity, and Relief theories. In *Inside Jokes: Using Humor to Reverse-Engineer the Mind*, Matthew M. Hurley et al. observe:

Superiority theories are presided over by Thomas Hobbes’s definition of laughter as a ‘sudden glory’ or triumph that results from the recognition or sense that we have some level of superiority or eminency over some other target, the butt of the joke, as we say, or the protagonist in some humorous episode. Humor’s role is to point out problems and mistakes for the purpose of boosting one’s current view of oneself in comparison with the disparaged party. (40-41)

So the laughter concomitant with humor in a situation signals to one that s/he is superior to others for s/he lacks their flaws. The other important theory is the Incongruity theory which Morreall gives its dictionary definition. “The dictionary says that incongruous things are ‘Characterized by a lack of harmony, consistency, or compatibility with one another’” (10). Similar to Morreall, Plaza holds that humor can be born out of mismatch which is incongruous. In this regard, she declares:

[D]ifferent versions of the incongruity theory share the core idea that humor is born out of mismatch—and incongruity—between two or more components of an object, event, idea, social expectation, etc. This group, too, may be traced back to Aristotle, to a passage in the *Rhetoric* (3.2) where it is said that a speaker can raise a laugh by flouting certain expectations which he has built up in his audience. (10)

The third and last theory is the Relief theory about which Plaza assumes that “The relief theory, popular in the field of psychology, stresses the physiological and psychological aspects of laughter and humor” (Plaza 9). Likewise, Morreall refers to Lord Shaftesbury’s “The Freedom of Wit and Humor” as the first work which deals with humor in its modern state meaning funny and deals with Relief theory:

The natural free spirits of ingenious men, if imprisoned or controlled, will find out other ways of motion to relieve themselves in their constraint; and whether it be in burlesque, mimicry, or buffoonery, they will be glad at any rate to vent themselves, and be revenged upon their constrainers. Over the next two centuries, thinkers such as Herbert Spencer and Sigmund Freud revised the biology behind this theory and added new elements of their own. (16)

So humor provides the opportunity to get rid of the energy that can otherwise have destructive consequences, if it is released in other manners. “Another set of theories see laughter, jokes, witticisms, and humor, generally, as a mode of release of psychological tensions” (Götz 83). Humor leads the accumulated tensions and energies down a proper path and prevents disaster which may come about as a result of not being able to release one’s energy. Yet, in the domain of literature, the language turns into a tool in the hands of adroit writers using it to achieve different ends. Thus, “Language itself, though, is one of the primary sources of humor precisely because it is so thoroughly artificial, and anything artificial, anything constructed, is always open to deconstruction through its internal inconsistencies” (Camfield 158). After briefly considering humor in terms of three theories of Superiority, Incongruity, and Relief, this article also touches on American humor as it is one of the elements of discussion in *Huck Finn*.

AMERICAN HUMOR

Walker points out that America is a country comprised of different ethnic groups who have different accents, cultures, and values while the dominant groups can use humor to show their superiority, ethnic groups can also use it in defense of themselves (7). However, the qualities and components of American humor change by passage of time. American humor, especially the southwest kind of it, has some distinct characteristics which needs further discussion. On the specific condition of American society and humor, Rubin ponders:

The clash between the ideal and the real, between value and fact, is of course not an exclusively American motif. Cervantes rang the changes on it in *Don Quixote*, and Aristophanes before him. But a society based upon the equality of all men, yet made up of human beings very unequal in individual endowment, and containing within it many striking social, economic and racial differences, is more than ordinarily blessed with such problems in human and social definition, and the incongruities are likely to be especially observable. The very condition of frontier

society, with its absence of settled patterns and with its opportunities of freedom and individuality, are ideally suited for this kind of humor. (13)

The American motto of equality and its failure brings about a lot of observable incongruities in society which create great opportunities of humoring them. Humoring the incongruities shows the malfunction of the American motto and the discordance between American ideal and the real life. In addition, traces of puritan humor can be found in America's humorous writings throughout different centuries. Dunn particularly discusses Calvinist humor in *Calvinist Humor in American Literature*. Dunn categorizes Calvinist humor into two groups:

Calvinist humor consists in the perception of imperfection. When we perceive that only others are imperfect, we participate in the form of Calvinist humor preferred by William Bradford and Nathanael West. When we perceive that others are imperfect, as we all are, we participate in the form preferred by Mark Twain and William Faulkner, [...] (Dunn 2)

Twain who mocks the idea of equal but separate regarding African Americans after the emancipation act, therefore, highlights the shortcomings in American society through including himself and the rest of the white society in the humor of *Huck Finn*. "Mark Twain and William Faulkner, for example, often root their humor in their recognition that we human beings are all in the same boat. Thus, most readers can easily recognize themselves in Twain's characters and in Faulkner's" (Dunn 148). Apart from finding traces of Calvinist humor in American humorous literature, Cox in "Humor of the Old Southwest", numerates the features of southwestern humor: "First of all, they were determined to appear as gentlemen. Second, they tended to be professional men and political conservatives. Third, they were willing to be seen, just as they were willing to present themselves, as gentlemen first and writers second" (108). Against what Americans try to show themselves to be, "[...] the hallmark of American humor is its violence" (Walker 14). Southwest humorists put emphasis on the physical body in order to expose the inconsistency between the real life of the people and the ideal which is the American dream and the motto of equality of all people.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF HUMOR INTO GROTESQUE

In grotesque-likewise humor, the body and its incompleteness are underlined. "Life is shown in its twofold contradictory process; it is the epitome of incompleteness." Bakhtin notes, "And such is precisely the grotesque concept of the body" (26). Similar to Bakhtin, Bernard Mc Elroy also emphasizes the transformative function of the grotesque. He states:

The grotesque transforms the world from what we 'know' it to be to what we fear it might be. It distorts or exaggerates the surface of reality in order to tell a qualitative truth about it. The grotesque does not address the rationalist in us or

the scientist in us, but the vestigial primitive in us, the child in us, the potential psychotic in us. This magical, animistic quality prevails in the grotesque art of the most disparate periods and cultures. (Mc Elroy 5)

Nevertheless, incongruity stems out of the transgression of the norms which Noël Carroll offers to be an overlapping point between horror and humor. In “Horror and Humor” he states:

Thus, on the incongruity theory of humor, one explanation of the affinity of horror and humor might be that these two states, despite their differences, share an overlapping necessary condition insofar as an appropriate object of both states involves the transgression of a category, a concept, a norm, or a commonplace expectation. (Carroll 154)

Transgression can result in both humor or horror depending on its context and intensity. But transgression is one of the components of violence, too. Since when normal boundaries that human logic knows break, it is called violation. These violations can be either of the abstract concepts or of human body that is called violence.

FROM HUMOROUS TRANSGRESSIONS TO VIOLENT AGGRESSIONS: THEORIES OF VIOLENCE

Concepts like power and force which accompany violence most of the times have shadowed the studies of violence. It means that violence has been studied not as an end in itself but in relation to other concepts it is contingent on. For Willem Schinkel there is a close relationship between violence and power. In this regard, Schinkel observes that “as the contemporary use of ‘Gewalt’ not merely echoes connotations with power, but explicitly conveys them, the etymology equally shows a certain duality in the concept. This duality is indicative of the close connections that would seem to exist between violence and power” (20). Schinkel expresses that the current investigations in psychology are on matters which are rather external to violence. Hence, what they lack is study of violence itself. “That is, we have largely ignored the intrinsic aspects violence possesses” (Schinkel 109). Hannah Arendt in her book *On Violence* also points to the limited attention violence has received for its own sake, regardless of other concepts despite the important role violence has played in human affairs (8). Furthermore, Schinkel mentions the paradox in the researches done on violence since they all concentrate on means and ends relationship in committing violence, regardless of the fact that sometimes the agent has no reason other than pleasure of violence for committing it. Therefore, agent’s lack of autonomy and control in violent actions should be recognized (109).

Slavoj Žižek in *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* draws attention to existence of different types of violence. However, not all forms of violence are clearly noticed, only physical violence can be easily detected for its manifest status. Moreover, Žižek delineates the other unnoticed kinds of violence, “We’re talking here of the violence inherent in a system: not

only direct physical violence, but also the more subtle forms of coercion that sustain relations of domination and exploitation, including the threat of violence” (9). Zizek also assumes two different categories of violence, the first kind is subjective violence and the second objective. To support his argument about the connection between subjective and objective violence, Zizek brings up an anecdote:

According to a well-known anecdote, a German officer visited Picasso in his Paris studio during the Second World War. There he saw *Guernica* and, shocked at the modernist “chaos” of the painting, asked Picasso: “Did you do this?” Picasso calmly replied: “No, you did this!” Today, many a liberal, when faced with violent outbursts such as the recent looting in the suburbs of Paris, asks the few remaining leftists who still count on a radical social transformation: “Isn’t it you who did this? Is this what you want?” And we should reply, like Picasso: “No, you did this! This is the true result of your politics!” (Zizek 11)

Through the aforementioned anecdote Zizek stresses the connection between subjective and objective violence. Even though subjective violence is visible, its true source resides in objective violence. Thus, Zizek stresses the role individuals play in perpetuation of objective violence. Besides, they also help the true agents to stay unknown and seem normal.

Furthermore, Zizek puts forward a discussion on the basis of violence and language. Zizek points to the inherent violence in language. To support his claim, he uses Hegel, “As Hegel was already well aware, there is something violent in the very symbolization of a thing, which equals its mortification” (Zizek 61). Zizek describes how the process of naming things breaks the autonomy of the objects and deprives them of their true nature (61). He blames the human inclination for violence on language’s violent nature.

Johan Galtung refers to negative impacts of violence on humanity’s physical and psychological life. He defines violence as a process which can damage people’s physical and psychological potentials. Moreover, it can deprive people of facilities. He remarks that “Thus, if a person died from tuberculosis in the eighteenth century it would be hard to conceive of this as violence since it might have been quite unavoidable, but if he dies from it today, despite all the medical resources in the world, then violence is present according to our definition (Galtung 168). Similar to Schinkel, Galtung finds fault with dealing with narrowed down aspects of violence. Despite the emphasis on physical violence, Galtung states, “The first distinction to be made is between physical and psychological violence. The distinction is trite but important mainly because the narrow concept of violence mentioned above concentrates on physical violence only” (169). Galtung further categorizes violence based on actor, he calls the violence which a known actor commits direct or personal violence and the violence without a known actor indirect or structural violence (170). His concept of structural violence is close to Zizek’s objective violence since both objective and structural violence remain clandestine despite their existence.

Twain adroitly deploys strategies of narration of violent humor which blends with violence and grotesquery to upset whatever the readers deem as normality. Humor of *Huck Finn* bifurcates in to a surface laughter and a bitterness in the depth of the novel. *Huck Finn*

successfully challenges the American ideal and its dominance in order to revise the readers' clichéd outlooks. The world of *Huck Finn* is the arena of incongruous and paradoxical situations, individuals, behaviors, and lives which manage to aid the violent humor of the story in fulfilling its political mission which is liberation from social constructs.

DISCUSSION

Huckleberry Finn is a challenge to the American culture and its promise of equality, justice and freedom. The novel successfully demonstrates the discordance between the ideal and the vulgar reality of life in America. The America that *Huckleberry Finn* depicts is the world of unequal and different individuals while the observable incongruities prepare the ground for humor.

Mark Twain employs a violent humor in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* to disclose the failure of the American ideal. The very first lines of the novel implicitly show that differentiating truth from reality is no easy task. "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. That There was things which he stretched, but mainly he told the truth" (Twain 169). The beginning lines imply that distinguishing truth is rather a complicated task. "The opening of *Huck Finn* implicitly denies our ability to distinguish the truth from the stretchers in *Tom Sawyer* (and, by implication, in *Huck Finn* as well)," Jeffrey L. Duncan explains, "Even when the book is right there before our eyes. In fact the opening implies the possibility that, both in the book and in general, the distinction does not obtain" (203). So the opening signals to the reader to look beyond the appearance of both the characters and the language.

Huckleberry Finn's violence and grotesque quality of the humor aptly try to target and subvert the reader's fixed outlook on American society. In this respect, the book needs to ally the readers with others who are equally independent and thoughtful. To this end, the story begins with highlighting the slippery nature of truth and the difficulty of distinguishing it both in the book and the outer world. In addition, the first chapters also reveal Huck to be an unreliable narrator, he narrates both the events of the story and what goes on in his imagination. At night he imagines things and shows that he is superstitious. Huck's superstitious mind-set induces humor and the concomitant laughter which accompanies it. He says:

Pretty soon a spider went crawling up my shoulder, and I flipped it off and it lit in the candle; and before I could budge it was all shriveled up. 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. (Twain 171)

Plaza maintains that mismatch or incongruity gives birth to humor. So Huck's reaction when he catches sight of the spider violates the normal expectation of the reader and

makes the passage seem very exaggerated and humorous. In addition, incongruity between cultural codes and the reality of the existence also results in humor. “As Schopenhauer’s theory puts it, the incongruity between life as abstracted and life as lived, or to put it in modern parlance, the cognitive dissonance between cultural mores and the realities of existence, can cause laughter” (Camfield 158). The difference between the reality and the ideal is the state around which the violent humor of the book revolves. Apart from the incongruities which are the main source of the humor in *Huck Finn*, the nature of incidents and Huck’s narrative technique intensify the humorous quality of the novel, too.

Huck’s narration from the very early lines of the novel entangles the reader as much as the reader may ignore the intensity of the involvement with the wry language of the book. Huck gives an account of the events with a tinge of exaggeration like when he describes Miss Watson’s religious instructions:

After supper she got out her book and learned me about Moses, and the ‘Bul-rushers’; and I was in a sweat to find out all about him; but by and by she let it out that Moses had been dead a considerable long time; so then I didn’t care no more about him; because I don’t take no stock in dead people. (Twain 169)

Huck overstresses his reactions toward what Miss Watson tells him about Moses and how uneasy it makes him feel. At first, he is in distress but he feels comfortable when he understands it is only an old story. Huck’s attitude on this religious story is part of the violent humorous strategy used throughout the story. Since the violent humor of the book assaults and disrupts different value systems. One of the institutions that the narrative assails is religion. In this line, William Keough expresses:

But the violent exaggeration of much nineteenth-century American humor was often the whole point. The great American joke, as Louis Rubin defines it, ‘arises out of the gap between the cultural ideal and the everyday fact, with the ideal shown to be somewhat hollow and hypocritical, and the fact crude and disgusting.’ (136)

Keough mentions that the exaggerated violent humor is due to the disparity between the ideal and the shallow real. Huck states that Moses’ story makes him sweat and be worried, however, it relieves him to know that Moses is dead. The exaggerated view of Huck shows the failures of religious doctrines in heterogeneous American society. Huck’s naiveté stands against the serious adult world from the beginning of the novel which adds to the humor of the narrative, situations, and characters. “Thus, Huck immediately presents us with unappealing portrait of his life with the Widow Douglas, and this description becomes the ‘landscape’ against which he will forever rebel—” Harold Bloom postulates, “A background of adults who, while seeking to impose strict regulations on adolescent behavior are nevertheless ineffectual, hypocritical and in the case of Huck’s father, wholly irresponsible and dissolute in their own right” (24). What the reader hears from Huck makes him/her aware

of his innocence compared to the complicated world in which he leads a life with a bunch of hypocrite adults.

The simplicity of Huck's mind-set stands against the civilized society which dictates its doctrines to the citizens and controls them. Beneath the surface of humorous and discordant scenes of story whether they concern religion or other matters lies a serious intention. That is to open the reader's eyes to the reality as dirty as it may seem. The discrepancies both help transform the reader's view and have a humorous function simultaneously. Götz regards humor and the laughter accompanying it to be the results of an incongruity or a paradox (84). The cluster of viewpoints of different characters, their behaviors, and beliefs constantly clash with each other resulting in paradox and humor.

Even the language modes used in the novel are paradoxical which intensify the violent humor. "Language itself, though, is one of the primary sources of humor precisely because it is so thoroughly artificial, and anything artificial, anything constructed, is always open to deconstruction through its internal inconsistencies" (Camfield 158). The various Southwestern dialects break the reader's normal expectation of the ordinary English, a lot of imaginary and unrealistic matters are narrated in a way that do not help progression but digressions in the narrative line. Huck's dealing with the itching problem in chapter two is an outstanding instance, where he voices that "There was a place on my ankle that got to itching; but I dasn't scratch it; and then my ear begun to itch; and next my back, right between my shoulders" (Twain 171-172). Despite the fact that what Huck tells about itching has no narrative value, it is part of the humorous methods used in this book as it emphasizes the body. In this respect, Dunn assumes:

Calvinist humor consists in the perception of imperfection. When we perceive that only others are imperfect, we participate in the form of Calvinist humor preferred by William Bradford and Nathanael West. When we perceive that others are imperfect, as we all are, we participate in the form preferred by Mark Twain and William Faulkner, . . . (Dunn 2)

Through stitching such unnecessary parts, the novel emphasizes the fallen condition of the man which keeps him away from the ideal. "[...] Twain can be seen as a Calvinist humorist," Dunn states, "No matter where we plug into his work" (Dunn 15). Another example is in chapter three where Huck passes his observation about religion in relation to himself, "Sometimes the widow would take me one side and talk about providence in way to make a body's mouth water; but maybe next day Miss Watson would take hold and knock it all down again [. . .], seeing I was so ignorant and so kind of low-down and ornery" (Twain 176-177). Along with expressing his thoughts in regard with religion in terms of bodily metaphors like mouthwatering, he evidently blames himself for being ignorant and fallen, too.

Accentuating the body and its fallen condition makes the humor of the novel verge on the grotesque. Huck gives such a description of the duke on the stage, "[. . .], and the next minute the king come a-prancing up on all fours, naked; and he was painted all over, ring-streaked-and-stripped, all sorts of colors, as splendid as a rainbow" (Twain 283). In grotesque likewise humor the body and its incompleteness is underlined. "Life is shown in

its twofold contradictory process; it is the epitome of incompleteness.” Bakhtin notes, “and such is precisely the grotesque concept of the body” (26). Grotesque highlights incompleteness as does American humor through depicting the harsh realities of the characters’ lives. When grotesque humor highlights fragmentation, it creates an opportunity for renewing the reader’s worldview. So, humor accomplishes its serious mission which is transformation of the reader’s thought system.

Similar to Bakhtin, McElroy points to grotesque’s transformative function, exaggeration is one of the techniques used in grotesque to draw reader’s attention to the artificiality and abnormality of the concept which have a normal appearance. Huck makes use of an exaggerated language while the content of what he speaks about complements it. Like the story he tells Jim about French king’s escaping to America:

So I went to talking about other kings, and let Solomon slide. I told about Louis Sixteen that got his head cut off in France long time ago; and about his little boy the dolphin, that would a been a king, but they took and shut him up in jail, and some say he died there.”

‘Po’ little chap.’

‘But some say he got out and got away, and come to America.’

‘Dat’s good! But he’ll be pooty lonesome-dey ain’ no kings here, is dey Huck?’

‘No.’

‘Den he cain’t git no situation. What he gwyne to do?’

‘Well, I don’t know. Some of them gets on the police, and some of them learns people how to talk French.’ (Twain 227)

The story on the surface shows America as an ideal place while the twist in the story makes it ludicrous and gets the reader to ponder about America as a perfect place critically. Moreover, the awkward dialect slows the reader’s reading pace and stimulates further thought, on the importance of dialect John Lowe assumes that “since dialect, at least to the oppressor, is part and parcel of the negative stereotype, pride in dialect constitutes inversion, transforming an oppressive signifier of otherness into a pride-inspiring prism, one which may be used for the critical inspection of ‘the other’” (448). Dialect helps to criticize the malfunction of the America’s definition of itself, the collision of dialect and grotesque strengthen humor and its violent quality. Use of dialect emphasizes the crudeness of the reality since the broken grammar and vocabulary have enormous distance away from the standard and the ideal language. In other words, disparate dialects highlight the discrepancies in the society which stand against the equality the American Dream preaches. So, the collaboration of dialect and humor manage to subvert flawless appearance of reality to

reveal the huge faults hiding underneath. On the significance of language in *Huckleberry Finn*, Cox posits:

That profound democracy of expression, surely the first and the last truth about Mark Twain's humorous genius, brings us irrevocably to the language, the character, and the action of his masterpiece. By letting the 'low' vernacular thrust him aside, Mark Twain was able, at the height of his career, to imply conventional language without overtly using it as a frame for dialect. This vernacular or 'bad' language is the perfect expression of the action of the book - the story of a 'bad' boy doing the 'bad' deed of freeing a slave in the Old South. This triply reinforced vision secures the total audience approval which constantly transforms what Huck thinks are bad actions into good ones. (Cox 150)

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is full of incongruous characters who live in unequal conditions and speak in heterogeneous dialects. The situations in which characters live are so much dissimilar that emphasizes the inequality of individuals while American ideal highlights equality. The reader can easily sense mocking of these ideals in warped logic of Pap's lecture to Huck that there is no way for him to become civilized:

Well, I learn her how to meddle. And looky here-you drop that school, you hear? I 'll learn people to bring up a boy to put on airs over his own father and let on to be better'n what he is. You lemme catch you fooling around that school again, you hear? Your mother couldn't read and she couldn't write, nuther, before she died. I can't; and here you're a-swelling yourself up like this. I ain't the man to stand-you hear? Say-lemme hear you read.' (Twain 182-183)

The novel violently attacks the American stereotype, "In *Huckleberry Finn* for instance, Twain ridicules the democratic pretensions, of Pap Finn, Huck's reptilian Daddy-O" (Keough 137). *Huck Finn* manages to point to the violent life system in America which deprives individuals of their true potentials.

Huck's view of Jim suggests that, for the whites, slaves are nothing but properties. The trickeries he plays on Jim give the readers feeling of superiority and detachment. In *Inside Jokes: Using Humor to Reverse-Engineer the Mind*, Hurley et al. observe that "Humor's role is to point out problems and mistakes for the purpose of boosting one's current view of oneself in comparison with the disparaged party" (40-41). When the readers face the unethical behavior of Huck with Jim for entertaining himself by scaring Jim, it makes them feel morally superior for they disparage Huck. Nevertheless, Michael Egan clarifies that "Twain involves us in Huck's circumstances so quickly (who is Aunt Polly? Mary? The dishonest Mr Mark Twain, etc.?) that we don't notice our more or less rapid entanglement in his vocabulary and speech rhythms" (52). The adventures Huck experiences put him through constant moral ups and downs which make the readers see the domination of ideology over the individual while the readers themselves are no exception.

The constructed social morality constantly haunts Huck and he is troubled about whether to help Jim or turn him in. In chapter sixteen, Huck thinks that “I tried to make out to myself that *I* warn’t to blame, because *I* didn’t run Jim off from his rightful owner; but it warn’t no use, conscience up and says, every time, ‘But you knowed he was running for his freedom, and you could a paddled ashore and told somebody’” (Twain 234). Huck is morally bewildered since he is unable to transcend beyond the dominant ideology. The novel suggests the failure of American dream which prioritizes the individual over society. Traber acknowledges:

One of the principal naturalized myths of the United States is that the individual takes precedence over the larger community and is therefore unconstrained by society, culture or history. This ideal is clearly evident in American literature where there is a well-established emphasis on the individual both American authors and the postwar scholars who constructed the canon. (Traber 25-26)

Huck’s constant hesitations and change of decisions regarding either to help Jim or not manifests how societal constraints haunt the individual which defies existence of a totally free individual over society. Through Huck’s hesitations the novel shows that the idea of a free individual who stands above society is nothing but a motto. In this line, Traber notes that “However, Twain makes sure it is impossible for Huck to reach full autonomy and agency. The very reason Huck must rationalize his kindness toward Jim as the act of culturally inherited wickedness, the reason he is able to frame himself as a criminal, is because his mind and values are never actually freed from dominance of St. Petersburg” (Traber 30). Society’s values constantly haunt Huck and prevent him from thinking and acting independently.

Nonetheless, Huck’s hesitations tickle the reader’s moral conscience and lay bare the constructed nature of social morality. Twain helps the readers have a closer look at the reality of American life wrapped in humorous naiveté of Huck. Nevertheless, based on Keough, “In a sense, then, our humorists could be said to be poking fun at the American dream by sticking folks’ noses in American reality” (Keough 136). The reader can strongly feel this when Huck rethinks what doing either right or wrong means:

Then I thought a minute, and says to myself, hold on-s’pose you a done right and give Jim up; would you felt better than what you do now? No, says I, I ‘d feel bad-I’d feel just the same way I do now. Well, then, says I, what’s the use you learning to do right, when it’s troublesome to do right and ain’t no trouble to do wrong, and the wages is just the same? I was stuck. (Twain 237)

Twain juxtaposes all of the contradictory thoughts and holds them in abeyance similar to the contrary world of the raft and the civilization. In this line, Cox adds, “later in his career he was to try what he thought were more ambitious projects, but never again was his humor to embody so rich a range of experience, never again was it able to hold so many contradictions in suspension” (Cox 156). Twain lets the contradictions coexist to draw the

readers' attention to the artificiality of the norms and the presence of ideology in almost all of the different spheres of life. It may be one of the reasons for putting the civilized world next to the raft world.

Huck is most human when he is on the raft with Jim because he is even momentarily freed from the society's moral obligations. "He and Jim are most fully themselves on the raft, away from society's oppressions, [. . .]" (Emerson 67). The readers applaud Huck when he decides to go to hell and help Jim while it gives the readers a sense of relief from all of the pressures when they know that Huck is definitely going to heaven. "I was a trembling, because I'd got to decide, forever, betwixt two things, and I knowed it. I studied a minute, sort of holding my breath, and then says to myself: "All right, then, I'll go to hell'-and tore it up"" (Twain 330 *emphasis in original*). According to Plaza, "The relief theory, popular in the field of psychology, stresses the physiological and psychological aspects of laughter and humor" (9). After a lot of dilemmas and tribulations when Huck concludes that he should go to hell, it relieves the readers from all of the psychological tensions they have experienced with Huck.

It gives the reader a sense of ultimate relief to see Huck to be able to break away from the obligations of conscience even momentarily. "What then *is* the rebellion of *Huckleberry Finn*? What is it but an attack upon the conscience? The conscience, after all is said and done, is the real tyrant in the book. It is the relentless force which pursues *Huckleberry Finn*; it is the tyrant from which he seeks freedom" (Cox 176 *emphasis in original*). The humor liberates the reader from all of the oppressions and pressures they have felt with Huck, as Noel Carroll notifies, "Horror, in some sense, oppresses; comedy liberates. Horror turns the screw; comedy releases it. Comedy elates; horror stimulates depression, paranoia, and dread" (147). Although Twain manifests the ugly realities of life, he passes them under the mask of humor which creates an opportunity for the release from the tensions. The intensity of the humor pervades the potential for violence which exists in the book, when Pap is drunk and chases Huck around the hut best confirms this point, "He chased me round and round with a clasp-knife, calling me the Angel of Death, and saying he would kill me, and then I couldn't come for him no more. I begged, and told him I was only Huck, but he laughed *such* a screechy laugh, and roared and cussed, and kept on chasing me up" (Twain 190 *emphasis in original*).

Humor of the book overshadows the violence but Twain successfully exposes humanity's potential for violent actions and the pleasure of committing violent deeds. Concerning this Schinkel posits that sometimes the agent has no reason other than pleasure of violence for committing it. Therefore, the agent's lack of autonomy and control in violent actions should be recognized (109). Pap has no reason for doing violent actions when he is drunk except that he has no control on his actions. There are many examples of senseless violence occurring throughout the book, one of the most important examples of it is when Huck asks Buck why they try to kill Shepherdsons:

"Did you want to kill him, Buck?"

'Well, I bet I did.'

‘What did he do to you?’

‘Him? He never done nothing to me.’

‘Well, then, what did you want to kill him for?’

‘Why, nothing-only it’s on account of the feud.’” (Twain 250)

Buck has no logical reason for the feud which he is involved in while he insists on killing the man. However, the only explanation for the desire to commit violent deeds like what Buck does is its pleasure while it breaks the stereotypical picture Americans have of themselves as civilized people. “The book shows that under the sign of the conscience a civilized man gains the self-approval to justify the atrocities of the adult civilization. And thus man’s cruelty is finally his pleasure. That disclosure nakedly seen would be no joke” (Cox 152). The extent of violence and enmity between Grangerfords and Shepherdsons makes Huck feel very uneasy while it shows the power thirst of humans which makes them do unimaginable violent acts even as severe as killing another fellow man. Schinkel notes that there is a tight relationship between violence and power, he offers that “as the contemporary use of ‘Gewalt’ not merely echoes connotations with power, but explicitly conveys them, the etymology equally shows a certain duality in the concept. This duality is indicative of the close connections that would seem to exist between violence and power” (20). Huck gives the following account of the scene:

All of a sudden, bang! bang! bang! goes three or four guns-the men had slipped around through the woods and come in from behind without their horses! The boys jumped for the river - both of them hurt - and as they swum down the current the men run along the bank shouting at them and singing out, ‘Kill them, Kill them!’ It made me so sick I’most fell out of the tree. I ain’t a going to tell *all* that happened-it would make me sick again if I was to do that. I wish I hadn’t ever come ashore that night, to see such things. I ain’t ever going to get shut of them-lots of times I dream about them. (Twain 255)

Throughout the last chapters of the book when Jim is locked up in Phelps farm and Huck tries to free him with the help of Tom Sawyer, Twain shoots his last arrow at the American ideal when he unmasks the fecundity of the idea of freedom in America. In chapter forty-one Tom reveals that Jim has been a free man and he has known it all the time. “Old Miss Watson died two month ago, and she was ashamed she ever was going to sell him down the river, and *said* so; and she set him free in her will” (Twain 387). When this is revealed to the reader all of the attempts of Jim and Tom to free Jim seem much more ridiculous to the reader.

CONCLUSION

The violent humor of *Huckleberry Finn* challenges the America's equality motto of all individuals and manages to expose the discrepancy between the abstract American dream and the crude reality of life. Huck's naïve narratives are violently humorous as he depicts his experiences during his adventure. The novel successfully shows the dominance of social control on the individuals in Huck's constant hesitations that shows individuals can never stand above society independently. Despite the fact that Twain writes *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in the nineteenth century, it transcends the conventions of Realism for the violent humor of the novel which exists in every layer of the story from the disparate characters to their dialogues and actions of the central heroes. Twain, therefore, is more a humorist than a Realist when he violently unveils the disparities between the American realities and ideals it espouses.

The political mission of the book underneath the humorous surface is to attack and disrupt different value systems from religion to law. Huck and other characters use of dialect creates heterogeneity which further displays the difference of the individuals in terms of education, social class, and economic status. In this respect, the novel lays bare the American ideal for the readers and violently breaks their monolithic worldview. The grotesque humor of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* emphasizes the somatic life of people which keeps them away from reaching the ideal. In general, strategic humorous narrations, along with grotesque violent humor of the book, expose the failure of the American dream.

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