



American Romantic Elements in Mark Twain's The tragedy of Pudd'n'head Wilson

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Abstract— This Paper mainly focuses on the romantic elements used by Twain in the novel “The tragedy of Pudd'n'head Wilson”. The major American romantic elements like a life with nature, civilization is corrupt and, social differences due to slavery. All the points are found plenty in the characters in the novel. The protagonists in the novel are suffering one way or the other because of the social structure that breeds slavery. Slavery is the major theme of the novel and its consequences over the people who walk in and around of it. The novel circumambulates slavery and its effect on people. Slavery is supposed to be the outcome of racial supremacy and “society”. This paper is to prove that society breeds slavery and inequality, and corrupts people with its whims and fancies.



Keywords— romanticism, American romanticism, slavery, society, nature, greed, racial discrimination, belongingness

I. INTRODUCTION

Romanticism is a movement in the field of arts and literature and originated in the late 18th century European world particular in England. The salient themes of American romanticism are such as, a tendency towards nature, a life by living close to nature, elf realization and intensions to regard civilization as corrupt. The American romantics concentrated on transcendentalism which came from the German romantic thought, is defined as: “Any philosophy based upon the doctrine That the principles of reality are to be Discovered by a study of the process of thought, not from experience... (The TYE of GK). Individualism which is the central and prevalent thought of all romantic, is defined as: “They will say that you are on the Wrong Road if it is your own” -(Antonio Porchio in 1968). And to quote individualism strongly as:” A social theory that encourages men to act freely and singly; Opposed to socialism.” (The growth of IKTI.P.336). Most of the American romantics believed that man can achieve his divine qualities by living close to nature and should be guided by his emotions and feelings rather than his intellect. The individualists like

Thoreau, Emerson and Whitman strengthened these ideas in their living as an example to others.

Samuel longhorn Clemens (1835- 1910), universally known as mark twain, grew up in the slave state of Missouri. His novel “Pudd'n'head Wilson” narrates the story of slavery condition in Dawson's Landing in Missouri town. The major characters are Roxana, a female slave; Pudd'n'head Wilson, a black lawyer by profession but he remarked as a town's fool because of his illogical ideas; Tom and Chamber, the identical people switched over by Roxy so as to save her child from being sold; Judge Driscoll (Tom's uncle), a good-hearted white man and a close friend of Wilson; Percy Northumberland Driscoll (a father of tom), a rich white master and considers himself a god to his slaves. This novel is filled with humor and thrills. This project is to prove that the romantic elements are found by doing the detailed character analysis on the two major characters Tom and Chambers.

II. AMERICAN ROMANTIC ELEMENTS IN THE CHARACTER OF TOM ALIAS THOMAS A BECKET DRISCOLL

Roxy's real son Valet de Chambre now grows as Tom Driscoll after she switched the children. Tom grows to be a very bad boy with white supremacy. He is very problematic even in his childhood and behaves so insolently towards the slaves. Roxy pampers him leaving the real heir behind and treats the real with less care. Twain narrates his behavior as,

...Tom was a bad baby, from the very beginning of his usurpation. He would cry for nothing; he would burst in to storms of devilish temper without notice, and let go scream after scream and squall after squall, then climax the thing with 'holding his breath'- that frightful specialty of the teething nursling, in the throes of which the creature exhausts its lungs, then is convulsed with noiseless squirming and twisting and kickings in the effort to get its breath, while the lips turn blue and the mouth stands wide... (PW.P.75)

Tom is a symbol of white supremacy. In spite of being a slave by birth, gets a chance to be a white folk because of his mother's villainous act. He is given whatever he asks for. He was such a child that could not be guessed easily. Two kids of same age but, chamber is treated worse than ever. Their brought up is like,

... Tom got all the petting, chambers got none. Tom got all the delicacies, chamber got mush and milk, and clabber without sugar. In consequences tom was a sickly child and chambers wasn't. Tom was a sickly child and chamber wasn't. Tom was 'fractious', as Roxy called it, and overbearing; chambers was meek and docile... (77)

Tom's treatment towards Chambers becomes worse. He treats him like a play ball and bullies him too. Chambers is a meek slave boy now, tolerates and remains helpful to Tom though Tom is so disdainful towards him. Tom," ... In babyhood Tom cuffed and banged and scratched Chambers unrebuked, and Chambers early learned that between meekly bearing it and resenting it, the advantage all lay with the former policy ..." (77)

Tom and Chambers are together all the time outside house. Tom, in spite of his hate towards chambers, utilizes chambers' strength and his fighting skills to save him from the white folks he doesn't like. He provokes Chambers to beat them. Tom is jealous of chambers' strength and does,

... humble comrade these various ill turns partly out of native variousness, partly because he hated him for his superiorities of physique and pluck, and for his manifold cleverness. Tom couldn't

dive, for it gave him splitting headaches. Chambers could dive without inconvenience, and was fond of doing it. He excited so much admiration, one day, among a crowd of white boys, by throwing back somersaults from the stern of a canoe." (79). Tom waits for his chance to shed his jealousy on chambers, while Chambers is throwing back somersaults from the stern of canoe.

Tom always provokes chambers to fight his enemies and creates havoc out of Chambers by his vicious words. He shouts at, "knock their heads off, chambers! knock their heads off" what do you stand there with your hands in your pockets for?" (80). Tom treats Roxy just like other slaves though she shows him much care and love. Tom is a good example for the white supremacy and a man of "society". Though Chambers is kind enough to protect Tom from his enemies and obedient to tolerate his treatment, Tom, before his father's death, insists him on selling Chambers to the southerners. Twain states that".

...Tom had been trying to get his father to sell the boy down the river, and he wanted to prevent the scandal- for public sentiment did not approve of that way of treating family servants for light cause or for no cause... (82).

After his father's death, Tom is taken care of by judge Driscoll as his adopted son. His wife shows much love towards Tom as they were childless for a long time. She was so blissful for two years with Tom's presence as her son. After her demise, Tom is taken care of by Driscoll's sister, Mrs. Pratt. Tom is sent to 'Yale' for further studies. And he comes back as a failed graduate. And he has inherited some good manners from his foreign experience. He has lost his surliness and duskiness. He looks so soft spoken and smooth now. Tom's eastern polish is much appreciated by the town's youths. Tom looks to them like a man of a peculiar fashioned. His unique dressing sense of eastern culture, made him look like a fool or a person in the town.

One day, when Tom happens to meet a Negro, who is ringing the bell in the church, wore the attire similar to his. From then on, Tom starts wearing the clothes of local fashion. By the time Judge Driscoll gets retire from all his official works and becomes the head of The Free Thinker's society that has only one member, Dr. Wilson.

Roxy plans to meet Tom hoping to get some financial support, because she has lost all the money that she has deposited in the bank. When she approaches Tom, he treats her like a slave without understanding any thought of her love. Tom insults Roxy and tries to kick her out of the house. This angers Roxy and she threatens him that she knows the secret behind his birth. Tom ignores her threatening at first, but when he realizes her stern voice, he

becomes polite to know what she holds for him. The confused Tom ponders over,

... "How can she know? And yet she must have found out--she looks it. I've had the will back only three months, and am already deep in debt again, and moving heaven and earth to save myself from exposure and destruction, with a reasonably fair show of getting the thing covered up if I'm let alone, and now this fiend has gone and found me out somehow or other. I wonder how much she knows? Oh, oh, oh, it's enough to break a body's heart! But I've got to humor her--there's no other way" ... (107)

He becomes so much disappointed and worried that he may lose the property of Judge Driscoll, if the Judge knows the truth. The scared Tom kneels down in front of her that soothes Roxy's anger. Roxy leaves the spot-on condition that he should meet her in the abandoned house in the neighborhood at night to know the truth about him.

Tom is ashamed of kneeling down in front of a slave and thinks over

... "I've knelt to a nigger- wretch!" he muttered. "I thought I had struck the deepest depths of degradation before, but oh, dear, it was nothing to this.... Well, there is one consolation, such as it is – I've struck bottom this time; there's nothing lower..." (111).

In the abandoned house, she reveals the truth that he is not the real son of Driscoll's, but of her. Tom could not believe his eyes and goes into shock to request Roxy to tell him the truth. She explains him what all she did to protect him from being sold. After she tells him the truth, the furious Tom picks a billet of wood to smash her. After realizing the coward in her, Roxy taunts him saying,

... set down, you pup! Does you think you kin skyer me? It ain't in you, nor de likes of you. I reckon you would shoot me in de back, may be, if you got a chance, for dat's jist yo' style- I knows you, thoo en thoo – but I don't mind gitt'n' killed, beca'se all dis is down in writin', en it's in safe hands....(113).

The frustrated Roxy tries to leave the place, but Tom requests her to stay for a while with the grief-stricken politeness. Finally, Tom believes her words and accepts her as mom. He offers her six dollars and confesses to her that he is left with only the money that he has given to her. So, Roxy reluctantly puts a condition that he has to pay half of the money that Tom is getting from Judge Driscoll every month if he wants her not to reveal the truth.

Tom disguises himself as a young girl to steal the valuables in the neighborhood to take care of his gambling debts. His disguise is being noticed only by Dr. Wilson. But Wilson is not aware that it is Tom. Tom looks so uncomfortable and so much afraid of mingling with the white folks as usual as he is so scared that his identity would be discovered. He couldn't sleep peacefully and has sudden waking in the mid-night. His first thought is while awaking,

"...why were niggers and white made? What crime did the uncreated first nigger commit that the curse of birth was decreed for him? And why is this awful difference made between white and black? ... how hard the nigger's fate seems, this morning! – yet until last night such a thought never entered my head..." (117).

Tom feels why this kind of slavery and racial difference are in the society because he is paying to his blackmailer just to save his true identity. Tom, with all these thoughts, is waiting to vent his anger on someone else. By the time, the meek Chambers comes to him and informs him about his breakfast. Tom knows the truth that Chambers is the real "Tom". And he feels sorry for Chambers. He feels bad about his treatment towards Chambers that he did no harm to him but, he has hurt him so much. He mutters to himself, "...he has done me no harm, poor wretch, but he is an eyesore to me now, for he is Driscoll the young gentle man and I am a – oh, I wish I was dead" ... (117).

Tom could not hide his real identity and thinks about what the people would do once after they come to know that he is a nigger. So, he wanders in lonely places thinking how all his "white" manners are going gradually away from him. All his aristocratic behaviors start vanishing one by one. He feels very much like a nigger. When Tom's sweet heart Rowena invites him for a dinner the nigger in him hesitates to accept and politely leaves the place. Tom seems to be a changed man but, binds to do the works to settle down his debts.

Tom steals knife from "Luigi and Angelo" the twins from Spain. When he tries to steal money from Judge Driscoll, he kills him in the scuffle and escapes with the money. Now, he has committed a biggest sin, which is murder. In the end of the novel, with the help of Dr. Wilson's investigation, it is revealed that he is the murderer and Roxy's real son. In the end, he has been sentenced for the Murder of Judge Driscoll. But the people who loaned him the money, request the court that he should be sold (now he is a slave) to any moneyed master to compensate his dues. Finally, he is sold to the southerners.

From Tom's character analysis, it is revealed that social structure makes man greedier and more Egoistic. Tom lost all his innate good qualities to become a "civilized man" to

support slavery. If Tom were under Roxy as her son, he might have been the good Chambers. But the white supremacy and the racial society have spoiled him and made him a murderer. The purpose of a civilized society is to make people good but, in his case it has gone reverse. He has left all his good qualities and love of the people for the sake of his civilized ways of living. Tom is more of a victim than accused. To maintain his status quo among the white people, he has focused more on 'master qualities' than acquiring human values. Hence its proven civilization corrupts people with its whims and fancies. The guilty Tom's soliloquy and his sympathy for Chambers over the difference in the society, show the innate good qualities of Tom but, he has to live in shadow to escape from "being slaved". As J.J.Rousseau says, man is born good by nature but corrupts by the society. One of the salient features of Romanticism is used effectively in the characteristic of Tom.

III. AMERICAN ROMANTIC ELEMENTS IN THE CHARACTER OF CHAMBERS ALIAS VALET DE CHAMBRE

Percy Driscoll's real son Tom grows Valet de Chambre, son of Roxy because of her switching the children to save hers. It has happened just because of the master Driscoll inattention towards his child. Chambers grows to be a poor little slave to the master Tom. He, in spite of being physically strong and intelligent enough, has to tolerate Tom's cruelty towards him. Chambers is not well taken care of by Roxy as she shows much love to the master's child (it's hers). Twain narrates the way the children are treated as,

...Tom got all the petting, Chambers got none. Tom got all the delicacies, Chambers got mush and milk, and clabber without sugar. In consequence Tom was a sickly child and Chambers wasn't. Tom was "fractious," as Roxy called it, and overbearing; Chambers was meek and docile... (77)

Chambers grows to be a strong boy in spite of being fed coarsely. He becomes a good fighter among the boys of his age. Tom's treatment over Chambers, provokes him to overstep his but he was canned by Tom's father. He has to tolerate all the stupidities of his "little" master because he is his master and Master Driscoll,

...told chamber that under no provocation whatever was he privileged to lift his hand against his little master. Chambers overstepped the line three times, and got three such convincing canings from the man who was his father and didn't know

it, that he took tom's cruelties in all humility after that, and made no more experiments ... (78)

Tom misuses his freedom and feels that Chambers is nothing but his slave. Chambers is meant to obey him though Tom's deeds have brought blood and wrath of the boys outside the house.

Tom bullies often the meek Chambers and fools him whenever he gets a chance to insult him. On one occasion; Tom pretends to be struck in the river posing off to be drowned and cries out to Chambers for help. As Chambers is the only protector of Tom, he jumps into the river and tries to save him. Chambers is a good swimmer and well-built to his age. After saving poor Tom, Chambers notices the fellow white boys making fun out of Tom, being saved by him. They,

"... laughed at him, and called him coward, liar, sneak and other sorts of pet names, and told him they meant to call chambers by a new name after this, and make it common in the town- 'Tom Driscoll's nigger pappy,'- to signify that he had had a second birth into this life, and that chambers was the author of his new being. Tom grew frantic under these taunts, and shouted..." (80).

Tom cannot bear their taunting him so; he provokes Chambers to punish them. Chambers refutes his order that maddens Tom. Tom starts scratching him with a knife. The poor Chambers is not able to do anything except bear his master's fury. Chambers is the good example for the sufferings that the slaves endured in name of slavery.

Chambers grows to be well built adult, handcuffed by slavery. He remains a sober and good-hearted man. He is helpful to the fellow slaves and obedient to the masters. He just lives a life simply a slave by obeying Tom's order as he is his slave. Judge buys Chambers from his brother when the jealous filled Tom convinces his ill father to sell Chambers to the southerners. Tom envies Chambers though Chambers remains loyal to him. Chambers' innate good qualities undisturbed by the Civilized, makes him a good and humble human.

Even, the cruel Tom sympathizes for him when he comes to know the truth about his birth. Tom mutters,"... "He has done me no harm, poor wretch, but he is an eyesore to me now, for he is Driscoll, the young gentleman, and I am a--oh, I wish I was dead!" (117-118). It shows how humble Chambers has remained.

When Chambers comes to know that he is the real heir Tom, he is shocked to death by the new changes around him. The new wealth and the social status "white", gives him suffering than nothing. He has spent his entire 22 years of his life as a slave since his childhood. He has nothing of the

“white” manners. His accent is of a negro and his politeness seems to be unfit to the white community. He prefers sleeping in the kitchen to the bedroom as he spent his years in the kitchen as the slaves are supposed to be there. His “white” life makes him very much uncomfortable. Moreover, the white people find him awkward because his manners are very much of a slave not of a master. He is being self-alienated and remains aloof from the white celebrations. He can no more visit or spend time with the niggers as they see him as a white master.

Twain details his poor condition as,

...He could neither read nor write, and his speech was the basest dialect of the Negro quarter. His gait, his attitudes, his gestures, his bearing, and his laugh--all were vulgar and uncouth; his manners were the manners of a slave. Money and fine clothes... made them more glaring and the more pathetic. The poor fellow could not endure the terrors of the white man's parlor, and felt at home and at peace nowhere but in the kitchen. The family pew was a misery to him, yet he could nevermore enter into the solacing refuge of the "nigger gallery"--that was closed to him for good and all..." (225).

Hence it is understood from Chambers' suffering that slavery has made the life of the good people miserable and seeded differences among the people in name of “Society”. Chambers ends up with the thought of “belongingness” as he belongs nowhere now. Humanity is nowhere respected in a civilized society. His character analysis evinces the horrible side of slavery.

IV. CONCLUSION

It is to conclude that the major characters that revolve around slavery and its impact on society like Roxy, a female slave switches her son with the masters to save him from being sold. But at the end, she blackmails her son for her financial support. The same mother ends up in threatening him that she will reveal the truth behind his birth. Her financial condition makes her to do so. The then American slaves were treated like brutes without respecting their expectations and rights as humans. In fact, slavery was bred as a civilized custom. Slavery is a demerit of civilization. The second character Tom is a symbol of white supremacy. His cruelty towards the slaves and pride over his social status quo that transformed him into a selfish hypocrite. It is proven from his character that Civilization corrupts people with its whims and fancies. The third character Chambers, an innocent slave boy, has been cited as an example to the misery that slaves endured during those times. After knowing that he is in fact a white, not a slave, he is

flummoxed to choose his side as a master as he had spent his life as a slave for years. He falls into the trap of “belongingness”. It shows how civilization creates differences and makes people lose their “identity”. These two characters are nothing but the reflection of the then civilized American world grappled by slavery because of its so-called civilized structure. Twain feels that civilization is corrupt by the detailing the characteristic of two identical twins, twisted by the fate to grow up in a different society. Twain also elaborates the sufferings of the slaves through these characters. The demerit of civilization is considered to be one of the American romantic elements. Hence it can be said that though Twain is a realist, he is also very much influenced by the American Romantic Movement.

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