

A Study of *Huckleberry Finn*

— From the Viewpoint of Huck's Humanity —

Tamotsu SATO

Abstract

The influence of Mark Twain on American literature has been of profound significance. Ernest Hemingway once said: "All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*." Hemingway's remark is something of an exaggeration, taken literally. What he meant, of course, is that we cannot talk about American literature without mentioning *Huckleberry Finn*—so great has been the influence of Mark Twain's work.

The reason why *Huckleberry Finn* is so praiseworthy in Hemingway's eyes is not only the book's contents, but also the language in which the story is told. These two factors are true for any literary work, but the case is even more pronounced for *Huckleberry Finn*. In other words, the story and the language in which the story is told are organically combined. As T.S. Eliot once said, the language of *Huckleberry Finn* is "an innovation and a discovery in the English language, a truly epoch-making work." In this respect, when we analyze the work, we need to clarify the relationship between the ideas in the story and the language.

In this paper I would like to pursue Huck's initiation as axes, Huck and Jim. We can see the track of humanity in Huck's reaction to Jim who is a slave and at the same time "a noble savage."

1. Introduction

In about July 1875, Mark Twain finished his first draft of *Tom Sawyer*. The work was not completed until he supplemented and corrected unsatisfactory portions in close contact with Dean Howells. Judging from the correspondence between the two, it was the middle of April 1886 when Mark Twain finally completed *Tom Sawyer*. Twain wrote to Dean Howells on August 9, 1886 the following—about four months after completion of the book:

I "began another boys' book—more to be at work than anything else. I have written 400 pages of it—therefore it is very nearly half done. It is Huck Finn's Autobiography. I like it only tolerably well, as far as I have got. . . ." (Letters I, p. 283)

Huckleberry Finn, published in 1884⁽¹⁾, was written after *Tom Sawyer*. The continuity between the two is basically detected in the last two or three chapters of *Tom Sawyer*, without being mentioned by the writer himself.

I think Mark Twain took the model of Tom as a boy. Twain, however, makes Tom encounter diverse incidents, and places him in various environments. There is something unexpected that happens at the end of the story in *Tom Sawyer*. The unexpected element is the society in which Tom lived and the civilization that is causing harm to the society.

The freedom Tom looked for was really based on the society and civilization. Tom—who is trained and permeated by the civilization and society—is a well-to-do, cunning, and overconfident boy. He is also a naive and cruel “sensation-seeker” who tried to carry out the “chivalric code” at whatever the cost.

Huck, who is opposite of Tom, is a “nature boy.” Huck goes against the social rules and civilization created by man, and he lives his true nature—a boy of existentialism. The true nature of Huck becomes obvious when Huck and Jim go down the Mississippi on a raft in *Huckleberry Finn*. Huck and Jim are engaged in deep communication while traveling the river. Jim as a black boy has a very low social status, and therefore has limited freedom. Huck, however, observes Jim as he is, unrestricted by social bias. Huck reacts to Jim according to his own inward natural reactions and demonstrates straightforward behavior towards Jim. In this sense, Huck is a cool observer and he is also a “brooder” who thinks deeply about the facts he observes. Tom is an extrovert, as opposed to Huck’s introversion. Tom behaves according to formal rules, whereas Huck listens to what his conscience tells him. Huck is cautious in action. In this sense, Tom is a “civilized” boy while Huck is a boy with a primitive or “noble savage” nature.

2. The Origin of Huckleberry Finn

At the time when Mark Twain was about to finish writing *Tom Sawyer*, we could say then that he was fascinated with Huck. So he made Huck the hero of his stories and had him appear as the narrator of the tale. In other works, Mark Twain has himself appeared in “first person.”

In *Jumping Frog*, Simon Wheeler is the “first person”, introducing Smiley. The objective, however, of writing the story for Mary Twain was to talk about a scene from the gold-mining frontier in the West. And in order to best describe the scene in the West, Mark Twain chose Wheeler who hails from there. It could be that this was a background factor for using Huck as a narrator in *Huckleberry Finn*. We cannot say, however, that this was the driving factor for Mark Twain in writing the story.

When we consider the fact that as soon as (or even before) Mark Twain created the character Tom—who is partly Mark Twain himself—he began constructing the image of Huck, who is an opposite, we should go back to considering the opposing factors of “genteel” and “vernacular” within Mark Twain himself. The gentlemen Mark Twain—whom we can see in the Hawaiian letters in which Brown appears; and the Alta letter, which was the source of *The Innocents Abroad*; and a vulgar Mark Twain or Mr. Brown—were not integrated before *Huckleberry Finn*. The integration of the double focus was Mark Twain’s objective in writing the book.

To reiterate, “rhetorical” expressions and “vernacular” expressions were concretely blended and heightened into the human image of Huck. The result was *Huckleberry Finn*—and Huck’s language—that is crucial to the work. In *Innocents Abroad*, Mark Twain did not use Mr. Brown, but this was one solution to the double structure and expression that were

at this time appealing to the genteel tastes of eastern America.

On the other hand, it was not so easy for Mark Twain to write in the "first person." To do so was to use from time to time a traditional and romantic touch, and to adjust the realistic touch that Mark Twain felt in himself. Also, we must consider the "fidelity" of expression he always tried to maintain ever since his boyhood days. Mark Twain himself has stated the following about this matter: "Things that are outside our orbit—our own particular world—things which by our constitution and equipment we are unable to see, or feel, or otherwise experience—*cannot be made comprehensive to us in words.*"⁽²⁾

What is important for Mark Twain is to receive the object as it is and to depict it with language as true to life as possible. It was a long-desired wish for Mark Twain to create a hero who is able to do this with "consistency." The character must have a cool eye and an objective view for not coloring what is observed and to keep at it. Also, the social background must not warp the view, as in the case of Tom. Nor the romantic thinking, that takes one away from the reality. For instance, this is the element that is there when the gang headed by Tom attacks the Sunday school children and they imagine themselves as attacking an Arabian caravan. In this sense, most of the characters appearing in the major works of Mark Twain are not all up to the level.

The character Mark Twain desired must possess the following elements: a pure, unclouded eye and ear for observation; a mind to capture the images and sounds directly as they are caught by the eye and ear; and the power of language to express the images and sounds and the mental reactions caused by these impressions.

Mark Twain through his long years of creative activities searched for such a character and made efforts to create just such a one. Finally, in 1876, he hit upon the image of Huck, who fits very well into the requirement. As Mark Twain was writing *Tom Sawyer*, he envisaged bit by bit a boy with opposing characters, and the image of the character gradually emerged.

We shall dwell upon the sharp objectivity held by Huck. As is well-known, Huck was deserted by a drunkard father and the lad is living like a pauper. Huck fears his father and he avoids with the utmost care meeting his father face-to-face. Huck, however, does not hold a grudge against his father and utters no words of criticism. He accepts the situation as it is, and he has no personal bias towards life. When Huck hits upon the bonanza, his father comes back for it. And the father threatens and lambastes Huck who has been "civilized" by Widow Douglas. But Huck does not budge. Huck reacts to his environment and conditions, and he only listens to naive and straightforward "feeling" without being restrained by outside factors. This "feeling" is peculiar to the "noble savage," and by following what the feeling says, mankind is released from "convention, rules, and codes." Without being influenced by this framework, this "feeling" makes one feel the true nature of life. Huck acts by his "feelings" and he enjoys smoking, fishing, and acting freely without going against this "feeling." After Huck is taken into the custody of Widow Douglas, he does not understand the meaning of formal prayer before meals. Once Huck understands that the Moses person mentioned by Widow Douglas is someone from the past, Huck cuts

Moses as worthless. When the romantic gang headed by Tom decides to attack the "A-rabs," Huck believes it. When, however, the true nature of the "A-rabs" they are attacking is known to be the Sunday school children, he casts doubt upon the intellect of Tom, as being something rather incoherent. The basic posture of Huck is to follow what is dictated by his "feelings."

When Huck goes down the Mississippi with Jim, Huck encounters a wide spectrum of social and human evils. But Huck does not resort to personal criticism. Rather, when faced with the cruelty of man, he denigrates himself as being ignorant and insensible. This also constitutes his simple and straightforward confession of his "feeling."

There is a different aspect to Huck's "feeling" when he deceives others. When he tries to deceive Mrs. Judith Loftus, his words are seen to be untrue. But, immediately afterwards, he takes advantage of the slackness of her mind, and gets what he wants. On another occasion, he will deceive those who come to look for runaway slaves and he even takes \$40 from them. When Huck does these things, he is being true to his "feelings." When he tricks Jim and frames him, and when Huck is told of his cruelty and meanness, he apologizes to the black slave in accord with his "feeling."

Of course, the "feeling" changes its nature according to the situation and environment. Whether on his mind or not, however, his feelings are backed up by the pure and naive voice of his conscience. Huck's true nature is there: a clear conscience—and the clear eyes to call up true images from his conscience.

As has already been mentioned, in *Tom Sawyer* what Mark Twain aimed at first was a piece for adult readers. The theme, however, was the "initiation" of a boy named Tom. In *Huckleberry Finn* the theme is the same: the initiation of nature-boy Huck. In *Tom Sawyer*, however, the theme, plot, and construction of the piece is clear.

In *Huckleberry Finn*, the style is that of an account of a journey. As Ferguson comments: "Though he did not know if the Hawaiian experience had in fact determined the pattern that most of his future writing would assume, it was the pattern of the Mississippi. Motion was its inherent quality. You went on from place to place and wrote about each in its turn."⁽³⁾ In this style of writing, the episode and scenery are described one after the other as in the Hawaiian letters. But no matter how "improvisational" a writer Mark Twain may be, it is hard to believe that Twain would revert to a style he once he used without much thought—while he was writing *Tom Sawyer*—that has an excellent plot and construction.

What we have here is Huck, whom Mark Twain created along with Tom, intentionally and unintentionally. Huck is the hero and the narrator. This means that Mark Twain, in contrast with Tom, knew exactly how Huck views things, feels, thinks, reacts, and behaves.

In the case of *Tom Sawyer*, since it has Tom as the hero, the plot and construction had to be there accordingly. Mark Twain himself said that he is dissatisfied that he could not make Tom into a narrator. In other words, it may be that Tom is a different character from Mark Twain himself. I cannot but sense this, but even if Mark Twain had made Tom to be a narrator, I would think that Tom's language at that point would not have been satisfactory for Mark Twain as a writer.

The typical language of Tom can be seen in *Tom Sawyer* and at the beginning and end of *Huckleberry Finn*. The language used is much more realistic and is very close to the actual language used at that time. But no matter how close to reality Mark Twain made the language of Tom, it would be the expression of the vernacular and the pursuit of the vernacular in actuality. Whether Mark Twain himself was aware of it or not, on an impulse he made an uneducated nature boy the narrator of his story. There is an ultimate orientation in Mark Twain toward resolution and sublation of the points of views of "vernacular" and "genteel"; and I think that there is a clear sign that there is. Then, what Mark Twain looked for is not simple actuality, but pursuit of the reality by the artist Mark Twain—the ultimate peak of the spiritual tract he pursued in his life.

At the same time, it is the pursuit of a naive and simple heart, reached after letting a nature boy with a free mind swim in the stream of life where clear and dark currents mingle. This pursuit is also a concrete expression of reality in the form of language which Mark Twain ultimately acquired in order to be able to express the true world.

When Huck is thrown into the stream of life, from the point of view of the literary work's construction, it is a hodgepodge or contingent of episodes. This, however, is a construction that is becoming to Huck. When Mark Twain was in pursuit of an identity for Huck, in comparison to that of Tom, it would be only natural that Twain chose a construction that is unlike that of *Tom Sawyer*. I must say that it is here we find Mark Twain's stark expression of the "fidelity" in Huck.

3. Huck's Initiation

Mark Twain in the Notice in *Huckleberry Finn* mentions the following: "Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot."

Maybe Mark Twain was posing as a Shakespeare. Twain is assuming a pokerface and is boldly himself. Mark Twain did not want us to look at his work analytically. He wanted us to regard *Huckleberry Finn* as an organic work with "motives, moral, and plot" integrated into one. He wanted us to read the story as it was. The fact that Mark Twain is stressing "motive, moral (the two can be considered as a there), and plot" can be considered that he maintained an aggressive construction of the story, which is becoming and suited to Huck as a boy.

As to the themes of *Huckleberry Finn*, there are several opinions and interpretations. They all relate to one another, however, and they cannot be rigorously categorized within certain frames. If I may use somewhat abstract expressions, the theme of the book is a pursuit of Huck's identity—that is, another self of Mark Twain. At the same time, there is another theme of Huck's initiation. I believe this motif contains most of Mark Twain's intended themes in *Huckleberry Finn*.

The primary reason for considering the theme of *Huckleberry Finn* as the "initiation" is as follows. In this literary work, Huck and Jim work as axes. We can see the track of

humanity in Huck's reaction to Jim who is a slave and at the same time "a noble savage." In other words, Jim plays the role of a "touchstone" for Huck. The enlightenment Huck receives as a white person from the black slave is the commonsense of the days of absolute white supremacy. Mark Twain takes note of the outright rebellion against the white supremacy. Twain experiences the stark realization that the white folks of his time are senselessly deep into racial segregation, and this is made clear through Huck's naive and simple experiences.

The second reason can be found in the fact that, among those writers who are considered to be influenced by Mark Twain, there are many who have as their major works the "initiation of a boy" as the theme. A few examples include Henry Fleming in *The Red Badge of Courage* by S. Crane; George Willard in *Winesburg, Ohio* by S. Anderson; Nick Adams in *In Our Time* by E. Hemingway; Isaac McCaslin in *The Bear* by W. Faulkner; and the hero-narrator Holden Caulfield in *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger.

In the above works, Nick Adams and his father: Isaac McCaslin and Sam Fathers; and Holden Caulfield and his sister Phoebe form the axes of the stories. Henry Fleming and his wartime friend, George Willard—and a grotesque figure who closed himself off from the world because of his pure nature—are comparable to the setting of Huck and Jim.

Huck is enlightened and awakened by the touchstone, Jim. In order for Huck to be enlightened by Jim, however, Huck has to have the mental posture to accept the true nature of the "noble savage" in Jim. It is not a matter of course for Huck—"a child of nature"—to sense and accept Jim's pure and naive expression of primitive spirit. In order for Huck to sense and accept Jim's spirit, Huck would need a corresponding sensitive and pure spirit. Some would have such a spirit as a gift from heaven. Huck has nurtured his spirit in communication with the great Mississippi. The all-encompassing nature of the Mississippi presents a strong backdrop for society. In the Mississippi, Huck has to do away with all the evil and cheap calculation, and must cause his spirit to mingle with that of nature, flexible on end. In other words, when nurtured in the bosom of nature, it becomes possible for Huck to see the natural posture of his spirit. If there is no spiritual development in Huck, which is basic and subconscious, there will be no chance for Huck to experience the true enlightenment of nature.

The direct motive for Huck to escape from the hut where he was detained was to escape from his drunkard father, and to escape from the "civilized life" into which he was coerced by Widow Douglas—no matter how variegated a meaning the crafty reasons could have symbolically—which Huck thinks up for himself. When planning his escape, Huck's reasoning proceeds along the following lines.

"I thought it all over, and I reckoned I would walk off with the gun and some lines, and take to the woods when I run away. I guessed I wouldn't stay in one place, but just tramp right across the country, mostly nighttimes, and hunt and fish to keep alive, and so get so far away that the old man nor the widow couldn't ever find me anymore." (pp. 36-37)

As we can see, the first thought Huck has is not to go down the Mississippi. It was to "tramp right across the country," and go by land. Actually, he goes down the Mississippi.

As Huck says, it was due to the fact that he got hold of a canoe by chance.

"I judged I'd hide her (the canoe) good, and then, 'stead of taking to the woods when I run off, I'd go down the river about fifty mile and camp in one place for good, and not have such a rough time tramping on foot." (pp. 43-44)

Another factor that leads Huck to escape by the Mississippi is his fond memory of going away with Tom to Jackson Inland, where no man is living.

4. "Life on the Mississippi"

More than anything else, Huck feels sincerity toward the great Mississippi. He would go out everyday with his fishing rod. Not only can he get food from the river and live with it, he will always experience new life and freedom from the river. He has little awareness about it, but he knows it somehow. Even if the idea were asleep in the back of his mind, it would have come back to him when it was necessary to escape. This would have been an instinct for him. When he decided when he was locked up to run away from Pap, it was only natural for him to take to the Mississippi that will carry him downstream. Whether he had a canoe or not, he would have gone down the Mississippi. Huck was fascinated with the Mississippi. Huck cannot but get away from the great Mississippi. The Mississippi in the American continent is the great natural phenomenon existing there. It is the great nature with its ancient look with which Huck will compare and criticize humanity's and society's evil directly through his senses as he goes down the river. Nowhere in the United States are nature and civilized society cast into such intimate association with each other as in the Mississippi.

If we look at it from another angle, the Mississippi in *Huckleberry Finn* is the world of innocence where there is no human element or human factor. And the civilized society next to the Mississippi is the symbol of the world of experience. In William Blake's world, innocence and experience are the opposing ideas in the world of religion and metaphysics. In *Huckleberry Finn* the Mississippi is the physical world or concrete American existence, symbolizing innocence. The Mississippi as the existence is the mediator between innocence and experience—the theme of the story. One of the reasons why *Huckleberry Finn* is a favorite with Americans is the sentiment and feeling of nostalgia the people derive from reading the story. They are attracted to the story because they can feel today what their ancestors felt and cherished a century ago. This is at the root of the story's popularity.

When Huck goes down the Mississippi, he is fascinated and he feels rich in his heart.

"I was pretty tired, and the first thing I knowed I was asleep. When I woke up I didn't know where I was for a minute. I sat up and looked around, a little scared. Then I remembered. The river looked miles and miles across. The moon was so bright I could a counted the drift logs that went a slipping along, black and still, hundreds of yards out from shore. Everything was dead quiet, and it looked late, and *smelt*, late. You know what I mean—I don't know the words to put it in." (p. 48)

I think his words, "a little scared," express the serene atmosphere the great river

produced upon the naive mind of Huck—more than an expression of his solitude in the middle of the river. In the sentence that follows, there are descriptions of the conditions of the great river that are reflected on his senses—that are also understandable to the reader. The Mississippi lit up—in the cool midnight moonlight and the quiet that surrounds it. This is not a simple quiet but the quiet of the night with the spirit of the night. Huck senses that firmly, but he does not know how to express it. He says “smelt late” but this is all he can do as best he could to express the atmosphere he felt. The serene atmosphere Huck experiences from the Mississippi is expressed as “kind of solemn” in the description of the second night.

“This second night we run between seven and eight hours, with a current that was making over four mile an hour. We caught fish and talked, and we took a swim now and then to keep off sleepiness. It was kind of solemn, drifting down the big, still river, laying on our backs looking up at the stars, and we didn’t ever feel like talking loud, and it won’t be often that we laughed—only a little kind of low chuckle.” (p. 89)

“We” in the above situation are Huck and Jim. Miss Watson, the owner of Jim, was going to sell Jim off to the Deep South, Jim ran away and was hiding on Jackson Island. Huck discovered him there and they traveled together. Huck thinks that the two of them should go up the Ohio River from Cairo (Illinois), and Jim could escape into a free state. Huck is white and Jim is black but they had something in common. The two are both fugitives looking for freedom, so to speak. In the night the two are naive and quiet and shadow-like in their world of sentiment, and they melt into the atmosphere of the night created by the Mississippi. The whole situation is expressed in the sentence, “. . . it won’t be often that we laughed—only a little kind of a low chuckle.” We can sense from this line that they forgot the scars in their hearts for a moment and were happy for the time being. If Huck’s partner were Tom instead of Jim, then the solemn atmosphere the Mississippi gave to Huck would not exist, and it would have been a farce-like episode at the Phelps’s Farm at the end of the story.

The Mississippi, however, does not always flow as peacefully as it did for Huck and Jim. It does not always impart the “solemn feeling” it gave to Huck and Jim. Sometimes the Mississippi is violent and it breaks its banks. At times, it is ominous and dangerous.

Huck and Jim find a cave at an elevated spot on Jackson Island and they spend the night there. An expression of the violent Mississippi follows:

“Pretty soon it darkened up, and began to thunder and lightning; . . . Directly it begun to rain, and it rained like all fury, too, and I never seen the wind blow so.” (p. 68)

Violent rain pours down and a flood follows. Many things come down the river including a frame house in which can be seen the prostrate body of a man shot to death. There is also a lynching in progress aboard a boat that grounded. With such terrible things happening in the river and on its banks, the Mississippi keeps on flowing. What should be noted is that Huck and Jim are not afraid of the lightning and violent storms in the Mississippi. Rather, they are impressed with the limitless, serene power of the river and the thrust it brings regardless of all the rules in the sphere of man.

It is especially interesting that T.S. Eliot, who was born in St. Louis and was brought up

there in his boyhood, described the Mississippi in the following manner: "I do not know about gods; but I think that the river/Is a strong brown god...." For Huck-with little education but with a pure "mind's eye" perception to feel the objects as they are, we would naturally assume that he felt the same god-attribute in the Mississippi.

5. Conclusion

When Huck goes down the Mississippi-the strong brown god-Huck's heart is with God, and Huck's heart is impressed with the beauty, serenity, grace, and cruelty. His heart is as clear and pure as he is with the greatness of nature. Huck hates the civilized life of Widow Douglas, and wears rags and lives in a "sugar hogshead." He eats whatever is there and enjoys a free and carefree life. He does not just love nature: he lives nature and breathes nature. As he mingles with nature and his instinct makes him learn the serenity of life. He shows a quiet and internal resistance toward things that restrict his freedom and threaten his life. These things he avoids. He would evade these things on the "strong brown god." On the grounded boat, he is scared of the cruel lynching carried out by the rugged men. But when the boat is sucked into the Mississippi, Huck's heart aches as he sees human life in danger, ruffians though they may be.

"Now was the first time that I begun to worry about the men-I reckon I hadn't had time to before. I begun to think how dreadful it was, even for murderers, to be in such a fix." (p. 99)

Then Huck swims to the shore and finds a boatman asleep on the river bank. He tricks the boatman into saving the men on the grounded boat. The disintegrating boat, however, sinks in front of his eyes and he is glad that it is of no further use. Huck then utters these words: "A kind of cold shiver went through me." This is another case of Huck deceiving others in order to save the lives of others, or when it is a matter of freedom.

As Huck goes down the Mississippi, he experiences many incidents. He is full of fear and is then terrified when his raft is destroyed by a steamboat-a monstrous product of civilization. Also, when he is staying at the Grangerford house, he witnesses a feud that frightens him. Old tradition rules the Grangerford house, where each day begins with a senseless ceremony at the breakfast table. The house is externally peaceful but the inhabitants are engaged in a feud with the Shepherdsons of the neighboring village. When Sunday comes, the men carry their guns to church, and the sermon is about "brotherly love." Ruthless killing is repeated in spite of the sermon and Huck describes the sermon in the following:

"It was pretty ornery preaching-all about brotherly love, and suchlike tiresomeness; but everybody said it was a good sermon, and they all talked it over going home, . . . it did seem to me to be one of the roughest Sundays I had run across yet." (p. 168)

The stately lifestyle of the Grangerfords and the difference it poses with the sermon at the church gave rise to hate and shock in Huck. The spirit of love preached in the church was just an empty ideal, and later Sophia of the Grangerfords and Harvey of the Shepherd-

sons elope, a story similar to *Romeo and Juliet*. The feud between the two families becomes even fiercer with this as a trigger. Buck, who becomes a good friend of Huck, is chased toward the river and shot to death. With suppressed emotions, Huck talks about the incident in the following manner :

"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 shooting at them and singing out, "Kill them, kill them! It made me so sick I most fell out of the tree." (p. 175)

Therefore, when Huck makes his way inland away from the Mississippi, he is sickened by the cruel fighting of the people. When he retreats from civilized society and returns to his raft to continue down the river, he begins to feel like his old self again. As a boy who experiences the human and inhuman aspects of life, he just wishes to get away from the world.

"It was just dark now. I never went near the house, but struck through the woods and made for the swamp. Jim wasn't on his island, so I tramped off in a hurry for the crick, and crowded through the willows, red-hot to jump aboard and get out of the awful country." (p. 176)

Huck feels the land he had visited was an "awful country." This makes him feel the Mississippi to be all the more important for him. The civilized societies on both sides of the great river are very far and different from him no matter how close he gets to them physically. As Huck comes near the raft, he makes the following comments :

"I never felt easy till the raft was two mile below there and out in the middle of the Mississippi. . . . I was powerful glad to get away from the feuds, and so was Jim to get away from the swamp. We said there wasn't no home like a raft, after all. Other places do seem so cramped up and smotherly, but a raft don't. You feel mighty free and easy and comfortable on a raft." (p. 177)

There seems to be a spiritual core for Huck in the phrase, "Other places do seem so cramped up and smotherly, but a raft don't. A raft is a most primitive means of transportation. On a raft one is exposed to things such as wind and rain, and it cannot travel on its own accord. At the Grangerford House where Huck lived for a time, he had all such benefits as gorgeous housing, the thoughtful commiseration of the family, and tasty food. It was the best environment that Huck could hope for. Despite these good things that were there for him to enjoy, Huck definitely states that the raft is the best "home" for him. In a word, the strain of human society is too great for him, and his raft on the Mississippi is to Huck the symbol of good living. The raft is a symbol, because it is not a great thing. It is only symbolic of the fact that he can have all the peace and freedom he can hope for. To Huck, the small raft was not "cramped" or "smotherly" compared to the civilized societies extending on either bank of the Mississippi.

What, then, did the Mississippi signify for Huck? Compared with the raft he was on, the Mississippi was as great as God. In this sense, the Mississippi River comprises an

opposite of the civilized world, and the river transcends all the things created by man. At this point in the story, this must have been what was recognized by Huck.

On the other hand, if we consider the Mississippi in our own time frame, the river flows without any relation to the rise and fall of human civilization. The river was probably there before man existed, and it is older than any human civilization. Yet, in our own time, the Mississippi is eternally new because it flows constantly. Since it has been there throughout time and will always be there in the future, too, it is an opposite of civilization and actually transcends civilization. The Mississippi as an existence rises above time and space. When Huck's physical and spiritual characteristics are about to be blotted out by the cruel actions of other humans, the great Mississippi will make Huck say the following: "You feel mighty free and easy and comfortable." This is what had been grasped by T.S. Eliot when he thought of the Mississippi as the "god of a river."

When we think along these lines, the Mississippi is not a simple physical nature nor does it symbolize a static psychological state of innocence. For Huck, the Mississippi is a God designated by that nomenclature, and the river is an everlasting spirit. If there is a possibility for looking at one's numerous virtues that were soiled and lost through civilization-by going back to the primitive world to observe it through the natural working of one's heart-then the Mississippi can be the medium for such an action. The great river will purify one's heart and deepen one's understanding, and in that sense it is an active spirit. In the beginning, the Mississippi was for Huck a means for escaping from Pap and Widow Douglas. The river was a physical entity. But at this point in the story, the Mississippi is a spiritual being: the supporting pillar for Huck's spirit.

Notes

- (1) As the year of publication, there are two opinions: 1884 and 1885. As Walter Blair states, the book was published in England and Canada on December 10, 1884. It was published in the United States on January 18, 1885. (Walter Blair, *Mark Twain & Huck Finn*, p. 355.) Normally, the title of the book is *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. In the American version, however, the "The" is omitted.
- (2) "That Day in Eden," in *Europe and Elsewhere*, p. 341.
- (3) Ferguson, Delancey, *Mark Twain, Man and Legend*, Charter Books, 1963.

Bibliography

A. Works by Mark Twain

- (1) *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, University of California Press, 1985. [All the quotations in this paper depend on this text.]
- (2) *MARK TWAIN*, Chatham River Press, New York, 1982.
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