

Pegasus

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Contents

Problems of Vernacular
Adaptation and Mark Twain's
Huckleberry Finn

Huckleberry Finn and the
American Dream

Lecture on *Huckleberry Finn*

Points to Ponder

Contributors

Sucheta Mukherjee, Lecturer in
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this issue by Prof. Reena Sinha of
our department is deeply
appreciated.

Foreword

Pegasus is late again. Extenuating circumstances notwithstanding, basically it was faulty planning that caused the two-month delay. Because a number of articles on *Huckleberry Finn* had piled up, we decided to make this issue focus on this new and undoubtedly welcome addition to one option in the syllabus. The few words printed in the following pages intend to provide just a peek into the variegated world of this great novel. Hopefully they will enthuse the students to study further.

We came across Ian Johnston's *Lecture* on the Net. It would have been best if the whole lecture could be printed, but constraints of space forced us to take out excerpts. We do not entirely agree with Mr. Johnston, but we find his arguments worthy of note. The full text can be read at his personal webpage or at the address cited with the article. We thank Ian for putting it on the public domain.

There is a small section at the end of this issue where possible themes of exploration in *Huckleberry Finn* have been suggested.

We all remember Charles and Mary Lamb with affection and gratitude for their adaptation of Shakespeare. We also remember Mr. Bowdler, but we do so with derision for his dismemberment of great poetry. The way classic Bengali texts are being corrupted by incompetent hacks for inclusion in school texts is certainly a cause for concern. There is nothing wrong in adapting classics for children, or in changing only the verb to make the language a little more understandable, but changing whole words – while keeping some intact for reasons prompted by dubious logic – just because they were derived from Sanskrit is foolish as well as unpardonable.

Bengali as a language will surely withstand these assaults, but the price will be heavy, at least in the short run, while populism holds sway and power is vested in people of debatable acumen.

Do Elections change anything? Hardly. Or if they do, the changes are more cosmetic than anything. Apart from the fact that no real change in society is possible without a total transformation of power structures, elections do remain a sop in a country where an unbelievable number of people perforce remain illiterates, where grinding poverty saps moral fibre allowing hooligans of all hues to control the casting of votes. Yet, a country as big as India defies control to such an extent that even the best laid plans of politicians and mice often go haywire. As it happened in the recently concluded Parliamentary Polls.

The BJP and its monkey brigade were swept out of power. The economic and political reasons for this drubbing are many and complex and important, but the fact that *Pegasus* finds deeply heartening is that the Indian people have not lost all sense of decency; communalism and bigotry still find only a few takers. We congratulate the people whose choice restored our flagging optimism – even though the new rulers will not be that much different and compulsions of power could change equations with frightening rapidity.

Problems of Vernacular Adaptation and Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* Sucheta Mukherjee

The originality of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* lies in the fact that it is the first American masterpiece to be written wholly in the vernacular. Before Mark Twain, the South-West humorists like Hooper, Longstreet, Harris and Thorpe; the comic journalists like Artemis Ward, Josh Billings and John Phoenix; and the local colourists like Harriet Beecher Stowe and Bret Harte, had all used dialect; but the narrator's presence was always uncheated by genteel speech that was rather condescending in manner. Often it was the contrast between the vernacular and genteel speech that made up part of the comic effect. But in Mark Twain's works the use of the dialect is not merely a stylistic device: it is a linguistic and cultural paradigm. It brings out the difference between the two approaches to life: the sophisticated, artificial one and the more natural instinctive one unmarred by the civilizing influence of society.

In *Huckleberry Finn* Twain uses the dialect for a serious purpose as an implied critique of conventional social mores and accepted modes of thinking. The language is very complex in its texture and is actually far more sophisticated and flexible than it appears to be. At the very beginning of the novel we see Huck in a very depressed and gloomy mood after listening to the homilies of Miss Watson:

I felt so lonesome I most wished I was dead. The stars was shining, and the leaves rustled in the woods ever so mournful; and I heard an owl, away off, who-whooping about somebody that was dead, and a whippowill and a dog crying about somebody that was going to die; ...Then away out in the woods I heard that kind of a sound that a ghost makes when it wants to tell about something that's on its mind and can't make itself understood, and so can't rest easy in it's grave and has to go about that way every night grieving." (p.9)

Huckleberry Finn – a vivid poetic description that can only lose its flavour through inter-translation or intra-translation. A more sophisticated language than Huck's would make the description of stars and rustling leaves sound too sentimental and hackneyed. The crude uneducated language and improper grammatical usage like 'most' for 'almost' and 'was' for 'were' in 'I most wished I was dead' and 'the stars was shining' throw into sharp relief the poetic sensitiveness of this poor neglected outcast. The description of the owl, the dog or the ghost (which is unable to make anybody understand what is in its mind and has to wander about grieving) belongs to the specific cultural milieu of the slaveholding community in which Negro superstition was transmitted by the slaves to white American children, the level of naïve credulousness of both

categories being approximately the same. Any attempt to translate this passage into another language would take it out of its cultural context and make it sound puerile and ridiculous. The language is so artificially simulated that it seems to portray the genuine feelings of a vernacular person as opposed to the supposedly artificial and pre-conditioned reactions of the sophisticate. We hardly stop to think that uneducated outcast as Huck is, how could he possibly be so articulate? It is possible to be superstitious about spiders and owls but expressing one's feelings clearly is not merely a matter of innate talent or sensitiveness: it is a result of training as well as sophistication born of exposure to articulate people.

The vernacular language is used for humorous effect in the description of the over-sentimental Emmeline Grangerford:

Buck said she could rattle off poetry like nothing. She didn't ever have to stop to think. He said she would slap down a line, and if she couldn't find anything to rhyme with it she would first scratch it out and slap down another one, and go ahead. She wasn't particular, she could write about anything you choose to give her to write about, just so it was sadful. Everytime a man died, or a woman died, or a child died she would be on hand with her 'tribute' before he was cold. ... The neighbors said it was the doctor first, then Emmeline, then the undertaker never got in ahead of Emmeline but once, and then hung fire on a rhyme for the dead person's name, which was Whistler. She warn't ever the same, after that; she never complained, but she kind of pined away and did not live long."

(Ch.18, 85-6)

A perfectly original description of the trials and tribulations of a poetess. The apparently naïve, admiring tone is undercut by the description of the extremely absurd lengths to which her sentimentality carried Emmeline. The untranslatability of phrases like 'rattle off poetry like nothing' (Ôð±û±Ëü ßÄ;õîÄ± ÿàËîÄ Äó±õî± or 'she could write poetry with easy facility' which sounds rather too formal) or 'slap down a line' (ßÄ;õîÄ± üÖ;©† ßÄõîÄ ü:û±ü±Ä ð±) becomes apparent when we try to substitute it with words from a different language. The comic incongruity of describing a complex creative and artistic process as 'slapping down' a line and the breathtaking pseudo-poetic fecundity of merely scratching out a line if it did not rhyme and 'slapping down another', the very phrases 'rattle off', 'slap down' in the context of poetic creation is typically Yankee in its irreverence. The extraordinary versatility of being able to write about anything you choose to give her

... just so it was 'sadful' can only add to the absurdity. Even the word 'sadful' loses its comic flavour if we substitute words like 'mournful' in its place. In a more formal, standardized American language only irony at best and sarcasm at worst would have been possible – here a very fundamental question about artistic creativity is raised.

The solemn, apparently unsuspecting manner typical of the Yankee humourist underlines the irony of the description. The crux of the joke is the haplessly pedestrian nature of the verse churned out by Emmeline, in stark contrast to the reverential awe with which it is introduced for the delectation of the reader.

Clemens has shown himself to be a master in the artistry of language in *Huckleberry Finn*. The principal characters (and some of the not-so-important characters too) speak a language of their own, which does not have odd mannerisms as in Dickens, but which is uniquely characteristic of that person.

The Duke, being comparatively educated, almost speaks the language of a gentleman except for the fact that it is the language of highly popular sentimental romance and therefore rings false. It is a parody of the genteel sophisticated language of educated people of Clemens' time.

I am the rightful Duke of Bridgewater; and here am I, forlorn, torn from my high estate, hunted of men, despised by the cold world, ragged, worn, heart-broken, and degraded to the companionship of felons on a raft! (p. 100)

The language of *Huckleberry Finn* is richly layered and there are subtle differences in the various forms of dialect spoken by each character which would be flattened out into a dull uniformity when translated. In the Preface to *Huckleberry Finn* Twain finds himself obliged to write in an explanatory note that:

In this book a number of dialects are used, to wit: the Missouri Negro dialect; the extremist form of the backwoods South-Western dialect; – the ordinary Pike-County dialect; and four modified varieties of this last. The shadings have not been done in a haphazard fashion, or by guess-work but pain-stakingly and with the trustworthy guidance and support of personal familiarity with these several forms of speech.

I make this explanation for the reason that without it many readers would suppose that all these characters were trying to talk alike and not succeeding." (p. 2)

Turns of Yankee speech and illiterate spelling, hallmarks of Down-East humor are to be found in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (as well as in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*). These give the novel its special vernacular flavour and are difficult to either translate or convey in a different language. The different parts of vernacular speech are parts of the comic portraiture and make the characterization far more lifelike, giving it a range and variety that it

would not otherwise have had. The subtle nuances of speech reproduced by Twain in the speeches of the various characters would definitely be lost in translation. Memorable characters like Tom Sawyer, Huckleberry Finn, the slave Jim, Becky Thatcher, aunt Polly (even Mrs. Harper), Uncle Silas and Aunt Sally, the Duke and the King, Mr. Granger Ford, the widow, the Welshman all have a distinctive style of speech and a vocabulary that is peculiar to themselves, revealing the character by each sentence that they utter.

When the *Concord (Mass) Public Library Committee* called *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

the utmost trash ... rough, coarse and inelegant, dealing with a series of experiences not elevating, the whole book being more suited to the slums than to intelligent respectable people

it overlooked a very basic fact about the use of the vernacular *persona* Huck by his creator. Huck's so-called 'incorrect' use of the language of genteel society represents a breaking away from the restrictions of that society on the individual person. Huck is unable, and unwilling, to act according to the norms of that society. The distorted spelling of the word 'civilize' in which Huck uses 's' instead of 'c' is not merely a demonstration of Huck's lack of proper education. It expresses a kind of disgust and physical loathing for the artificial restrictions of so-called civilized society: 'I couldn't do nothing but sweat and sweat, and feel all cramped-up' and later, 'Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and civilise me and I can't stand it' changing the spelling of 'civilize' in the Target Language will merely make it look like a printing error, and Bengali equivalent words like $\div\pm\zeta\text{æ}\text{C}\hat{\text{i}}$ or $\ddot{\text{u}}\text{ö}\text{Ä}\text{É}$ are unable to express the ambivalent social attitudes reflected in the attempt of the widow and Miss Watson to inculcate refined hypocrisy and a pretended complaisance towards contemporary social conventions. The vernacular *persona* of Huck is used as a medium of protest, a means of showing up the hypocrisies and moral contradictions that exist in so-called pious respectable society.

According to James M. Cox in *The Fate of Humor*, It is not simply the 'poetry' or 'beauty' or 'rhythm' of Huck's vernacular which makes the language work, but the presence of a 'commensurate vernacular vision'. (p. 176, Princeton University Press, 1966) The use of the vernacular medium adds to the depth and complexity of Huck's character just as it gives a multi-layered dimension to the novel.. Unless this can be captured in The Target Language any translation, whether inter-lingual or intra-lingual, of *Huckleberry Finn* gives not merely an incomplete version of the novel but also a distorted one.

Note:

All textual quotations are from the Norton edition of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

Huckleberry Finn and the American dream

Siddhartha Biswas

The love for nature and a dislike for corruptions of society are not only the essential features of Romantic poetry but also that of many works of the 19th century American literature. The writings of Emerson, Whitman and Melville reflect the spirit of freedom and the protest against stale social connections, which is a part of the typical 19th century American's dream of liberation, which does seem different from that of the modern politicians of USA. This earlier concept of liberation is from all limiting forces, may they be physical, political or moral. In *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Mark Twain gives expression to this dream through the freedom loving spirit of its protagonist, Huck, an adolescent of twelve years, who refuses to accept the shackles of society, its norms and conventions, and escapes from it on a raft, sailing down the Mississippi.

In a way, Huck looks forward to Nick, the generic hero of Hemingway. The sensitive yet masculine, basically a loner, and disrespectful to the so-called respectability, he is hardly a type, though common to both the writers. Like in the latter writer, Huck also faces a reality which is, to understate, less than innocent. The outcome of this meeting is different, but how much is a question to be faced by readers.

Mark Twain very skilfully blends in *Huckleberry Finn* factual elements with fiction. Telling us about the adventures of Huck, on land and water, he very subtly inserts in the narrative certain facts about men and manners of the time, which one cannot help but notice. Thus the whole panorama of the social setup, the commodity culture and money-mindedness of the people, the prevailing institution of slavery, all pass before our eyes, garbed in the exciting tale of Huck Finn and his Negro companion Jim. But Twain the master craftsman does not mainly present the story with the facts in order to enlighten us or criticize the practices. He manipulates his material to present allegorically the dream of America, its present condition and to give it a new shape and colour.

Huck, the protagonist, in the very beginning of the novel, finds himself a misfit in society. He feels stifled amongst the civilized people, perhaps unconsciously unable to endure their hypocrisy and pretension. He decides that respectability is too much for him and he would not let the Widow Douglas civilize him. '...it was rough living in the house all the time, considering how dismal regular and decent the Widow was in all her ways, and so when I couldn't stand it no longer I let out. I got into my old rags, and my sugar-hogshead again, and was free and satisfied.'

The so-called respectability fails to impress him and this feeling is strengthened later when he comes in contact with the outside world, especially the two tricksters, the King and the Duke, the Shepherdsons and the Grangerfords, Baggs and Colonel Sherburn,

and comes to know their ways. He desperately wants to flee their company, having lost his faith in the established 'civilization'. Huck's reaction against all bondages and his search for a better world is certainly the author's way of expressing the hidden desire of every 'ancient' American, to be free from the fetters of the world.

In all his works Mark Twain expresses his love for adventure and freedom. In *Tom Sawyer* the children lament the fact that there are no more outlaws. They ponder what modern civilization could do to compensate for their loss. The same love for freedom is found in *Huckleberry Finn* when the river current carries off the raft leaving Huck and Jim on a deserted island. Instead of feeling lost they are happy for losing the raft, '...since its going was something like burning the bridge between them and civilization.'

Primitivism is an essential feature of the 'natural man'. This spirit is reminiscent of the days when the first settlers embarked on this new continent and gradually fought against nature, incidentally wiping off 'Red Indians', creating a harmonious relationship with it and making space for themselves. This is the 'Pioneer' mentality which pushed the settlers to create a world for themselves, a world which would be their personal Utopia. Though Huck delights in a life in nature, he is often forcibly involved with society and thrust into its mire and friction. Yet forever he seeks to extricate himself from the social mess and live an uninterrupted peaceful life which he craves for. When he and Jim are alone in nature he indeed experiences such a state of continuous peace and natural harmony, '...we had mighty good weather, as a general thing, and nothing ever happened to us at all that night, nor the next, nor the next.' Huck's heart here resonates with the rhythm of the river and his soul is attuned to the pulse of nature which he so intimately understands. He thus symbolizes the old American dream of a peaceful life lived in communion with nature.

Huck finds solace not on shore but on the river. For him the raft and the river mean more than just an escape from momentary threats. It is the way to freedom both for Huck and Jim. The 'big clear river, which was the free state' is another way of describing that mythical paradise of freedom, peace and harmony which Huck and Jim aspire for. It is this yearning for a lost paradise which is responsible for their endless moving on and the recurring sense of exile. Huck seems to reflect with the river and it is because of his basic allegiance to it that he always seems to feel that he has a distant origin and a remote destination.

W.H.Auden is of the opinion that the Americans are 'liberal optimists' who think that the world is gradually becoming better everyday. For this

reason it may be said that America is a country of optimists. Huck in the novel makes an essentially optimistic moral decision when he shelters the runaway slave Jim. He decides that he is not going to give Jim up but rather try to get him to safety. However, the sense of conventional morality often bothers his conscience, since defending a black man was considered to be a moral error in those days. Huck even writes a letter to Jim's former owner, informing her about his whereabouts. Finally, however, his instinctive humanity wins over the conventional morality and he tears the letter up. 'I took it up, and held it in my hand. I was a trembling, because I'd got to decide, forever, between 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.' Here Huck is flooded with a presocial sensibility which dissolves all the rational obstructions to his humanitarian act. He thus asserts an ideal of equality in which the white man is not superior to the Negro, or the rich man is not allowed to treat a Negro as a commodity that may be sold. This speaks of a world in which all men are equal, living in peace and harmony.

Huck Finn not only expresses the American sense of independence but that of a typical wanderer. His love for adventure drives him out into the world and he is ready to take on everything by himself. He is full of curiosity to know the world but the desire to exploit the unexploited wealth of nature never operates on him, as in the case of the American possessing a dream of fortune and success. Huck's contact with the social world leaves him all the more 'unfit'. Having seen the real face of the world he decides to quit everything and go West, in search of peace and new experience. However, unlike the other Americans he does not go West in search of wealth or for the promise of new resources.

Mark Twain thus captures in *Huckleberry Finn* a unique phase of the American experience when the old agrarian society was slowly giving way to the upcoming industrialized culture. Society, with its violence and corruption, represents the new ethos from which Huck, the typical traditional American shirks. He resembles those values and that lifestyle which the Americans have later lost in the rat race for success. In the novel it is presented as a dream for freedom, for union with nature and for a presocial equality of all men.

Lecture on *Huckleberry Finn*

Ian Johnston

'All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*. ...' claimed Ernest Hemingway. This, no doubt, is a huge overstatement, but it points to something important and worth considering – the way in which this book is closely linked to a culture which is significantly different from the European traditions, which defines itself, in large part, by a revolutionary break with those traditions.

The story falls naturally into three distinct parts: (a) initial escape of Jim and Huck and the setting out upon the river, the beginning of the voyage on the raft; (b) the adventures in the towns with the Duke and the Dauphin, and (c) the events at Phelps' farm leading to the ending. An important interpretative challenge in dealing with this book is to reconcile the different parts of it.

The opening deals with the most complex and serious issue, the notion of slavery and the appropriate response to it, in a society in which assisting a slave to escape is against the law. We are invited here to see that Huck faces a real moral dilemma here in sorting out his conflicting loyalties to the 'law' and to his friendship with Jim. And we follow Huck making a clear decision.

The second section of the novel begins once Jim and Huck pass Cairo, and thus miss the chance to travel north to freedom. From this point on they are,

in fact, moving further and further away from the goal of the original escape and heading towards the place which for Jim is the worst possible place on earth, New Orleans, the heart of the slave trade.

In this section of the novel, the focus moves away from the issue of slavery, for the major attention directs itself onto the adventures of the Duke and Dauphin and onto a savage satire of the townfolk living beside the Mississippi in the pre-Civil War South. To some extent there is still a certain moral pressure facing Huck, as he has to witness the attempts of the Duke and the Dauphin to swindle money out of people Huck has come to like. Here we find it hard not to like some things about the Duke and the Dauphin, even though we recognize that they are con men. But the main energy and focus of much of this part of the narrative have shifted from Jim and Huck's relationship onto the dealings of the two and the various townfolk.

The final section begins with the capture of Jim and Huck's decision to help him: here we seem to be back where we were near the start of the novel. Only now the issue is much more complex, because Jim is captured and they are in the deep South, not conveniently close to an escape route up the Ohio River. But this tone is quickly abandoned with the idea that Huck is mistaken for Tom Sawyer, and for many readers the novel becomes something very

different (and somewhat dissatisfying) once the real Tom Sawyer reappears.

The dissatisfaction stems from two major points. The first is the sheer improbability and over neat coincidental nature of the conclusion. The second, and more important objection, is that the novel does not face squarely the issues it itself raises. Twain puts on the table very early the issue of slavery, and the issue keeps cropping up in the middle section. Having put this question on the table, Twain seems unwilling in the last section to explore it fully, deal with it, or provide an answer for it. So to provide some sense of narrative finality he brings Tom Sawyer back, a character who has, in a very real way, already been discredited in the novel by Huck's learning that life is not like a Tom Sawyer adventure.

Tom decides to steal Jim not out of any intense feeling of friendship for Jim or any revulsion against slavery. He does it to give himself an adventure and needlessly complicates the plans and multiplies Jim's suffering in order to amuse himself.

I want to argue that *Huckleberry Finn* is a fascinating novel because it attempts to provide a model for the way one should live one's life. And the problems which arise out of the novel stem from the very vision of that answer to the conflict between a conforming civilization and a romantically free individual.

Huckleberry Finn shows us a new form of hero, someone called in the literature *The American Adam*. Unlike the first Adam, he carries no taint of original sin (since he has no past); nor does he have an inconvenient and disobedient wife or, for that matter, friends whose demands might compromise his freedom to move; nor does he answer to some supervising deity; nor does he follow any inherited or acquired wisdom; nor does he carry any baggage with him; nor does he stay in one place. Always in motion, always alone, he defines himself day by day in the encounters between him and whatever situation he happens to find himself in. Thus, he is always creating himself anew.

I don't want to force onto the novel a preset notion of what the American hero is. However, I do want to argue that *Huckleberry Finn* is a major contribution (perhaps even the major contribution) towards the development of this heroic figure.

One of the most obvious features of this novel is movement. The major figures are always going somewhere, and we are invited to see in their freedom to move something that sets them apart from those who prefer to stay in residential communities. What commands our attention in this book is figures in motion – their energy, their resilience, their clear intellectual superiority (in terms of wit) over the townsfolk – these qualities insist upon the fact that life on the road brings out the human characteristics most worthy of our admiration (even when the figures involved are cheats and con men). In this sense, the central metaphor of the river is crucial. It is not only the road, but it is a moving road, bringing things of importance with it (like rafts,

fish, and so on) but also carrying the travelers. No other book we have read takes the characters on this sort of a trip.

One might be tempted here to compare Huck with Odysseus. And there is immediately an important similarity, especially in the way in which their 'trips' test them against the unpredictable threats of experience. A good deal of the interest in this book, as in the *Odyssey*, after all, comes from seeing Huck and Jim escape from some predicament and move on. Like the *Odyssey* this novel has a linear episodic structure held together by the central figures who must find all sorts of ways to evade or overcome mischance.

But we should not let those similarities overshadow some of the important differences. Huck is the first character we have met who is always in motion but has no destination. What matters most to Huck is the motion itself. Thus, it's not surprising that the conclusion of the novel sees him moving on.

The nature of the motion is different, also. Whereas for Odysseus nature is something that must be navigated with skill and care, and there is a great danger that people might give up, in *Huckleberry Finn* the motion is effortless. There are dangers, of course, but there is no malevolent nature seeking to catch you unawares. The wonderful thing about being in motion on a raft is the way in which life just, well, happens. The only human community which Huck has any real sense of is the community of travelers who have come together by chance on the raft. On the shore things are very different. There are people and communities on the shore – and they are the source of everything dangerous. Huck is bored with school, indifferent to religion, resentful of clothes, manners, and all the basic requirements of living in groups. Many of the people are generally nice, and Huck makes friends with some of them. There is nothing that tempts Huck to remain anywhere, nothing that persuades him that what he needs to do in life is find the right community for himself. There is no adult figure for him to recognize as a suitable role model (some have characterized this novel as a search, a vain search, for an appropriate father). In fact, the conclusion of the novel suggests that what Huck has really learned in this experience is the importance of moving on. Huck never develops any sense of social responsibility. He resolves any emotional discomfort in the same way: he keeps moving.

This, I think, emerges as one of the central ironies of the book (intentional or not), and it is, in fact, one of the great ironies of the American experience.

Jim, though, is quite clearly in a different situation from Huck. He cannot afford to ignore society or take it lightly. First of all, he is a slave and has therefore a very specific social identity which it is a crime for him to ignore. He has an owner and a cash value. If he forgets that, his life is in danger. He also has a family, which he cares about.

The friendship between Huck and Jim forces Huck to confront social issues and to take a stand on them.

Nothing in Huck's nature prepares him to deal with his friendship with Jim on anything but an immediately spontaneous level. And even having made the decision from the heart, Huck does not then meditate on the nature of the society which enslaves Jim or on slavery as a concept or on any other slaves besides Jim. In fact, for Huck it's almost a game: Jim is my friend, people are after him, therefore we must get out here. So once Jim is freed at the end, then, so far as Huck is concerned the business is concluded. His friend is all right, and that's all that matters. At stake, therefore, was a personal relationship not a social problem.

What I am trying to point out here is that the vital and enormously complex issue of slavery, which this novel raises so clearly again and again, is never explored as anything other than something Huck has to work out personally in his relationship with Jim.

We can argue about whether or not that is part of Twain's purpose. For the case I am trying to make, whether Twain intended us to see that or not is irrelevant. The fact is, the closing off of a more intelligent and mature approach to the 'peculiar institution' of slavery is evident. That, of course, is a part of the book's great appeal. To the extent that we take Huck as a role model, as an admirable hero, we are encouraged to interpret society's treatment of Jim as a bad thing and worth Huck's efforts, but we are not encouraged to raise our sights any higher to examine the possible connections between all the other slaves and all the other Hucks and Tom Sawyers in the society which promotes slavery. There may even be a sense that Huck desire to go into Indian Territory is the result of a desire to get away from a problem which is just too complex for him and which, if he sticks around, he is going to have to face, because it's all around him on the Mississippi.

What makes the motion possible is a faith in nature somewhat different from what we have read in most of our other texts. Nature here is not a great enemy, against which one needs to be constantly on guard. True, it contains rattlesnakes, and you have to be careful. But nature is far kinder than the human community. It provides all the sustenance anyone might require (food and shelter), it brings Huck his raft, and it is, in general, his friend. Above all, nature provides Huck some place he can move through – it exists as something of a backdrop to his exploration.

Huck is not, I would maintain, a lover of nature, nor does he at all speculative about it. It creates in him no metaphysical musings, nor does he see in nature any source of moral meaning (on the Wordsworthian model, for example). At the same time, he likes a fresh morning on the river with the sun coming up. He will look at the stars with pleasure ...

First, Huck in a sense has no past or is defining himself by a rejection of that past. Huck has no particular interest in orienting himself with any cultural past. The commonest sources of that past – books, religion, inherited customs – not only do not interest him, but the novel expressly mocks them.

Huck is not particularly interested in knowledge or curious about the way things work. He has an instinctive trust of hands-on experience as a means of coping with the problem at hand, whether that is faking a murder or navigating the river or dealing with a moral crisis. He is a great on the spot improviser, rather than a thinker.

And the language of the novel contributes to this sense, as well. In reading this novel, we are listening to Huck himself. He speaks in a free-wheeling vernacular, unconstrained by any of the common rules of grammar or formal speech. This gives to the novel an energy and freshness and humour as important as that provided by the ease with which he can move along without regard to social conventions.

Out of this sense of escape from the past, Huck has, in a sense, no firm lasting identity. He is constantly inventing who he is – as are the Duke and the Dauphin. Only the road in a country full of transients can one do this. In any other place in the settled world, one's clothes, accent, and appearance define one fairly clearly. On the Mississippi, however, Huck can be whoever he wants to be, and he is very good at manufacturing an instant identity.

Huck's moral sense is what one might call naively optimistic. He trusts in himself to tell him what to do. He knows what he doesn't want, of course. Again, this is much more of an immediately personal emotional attitude than a thought out philosophy of life. The appeal of such a hero is immense. Huck Finn has become a folk hero, transcending the limits of the book which made him famous.

Another way of putting this is that in *Huck Finn* we have a new vision of freedom which offers us a vision of the good life which is new and hard to resist because it is so easily attained. It requires none of the traditional virtues and no commitment to any thing restricting. The freedom celebrated by Huck Finn is not freedom to do anything special; it is far more freedom from the need to get involved with anything associated with the traditional human community. It is uninformed by allegiance to any complex system of belief or by any commitment to creativity. It is freedom for everyman, and includes the freedom not to have to think about how or why one is acting this way. It is the most infectious brand of freedom.

What makes *Huckleberry Finn* much more complex than simply an evocation of this new form of freedom, however, is the existence in the novel of a different view of freedom, namely, the freedom not to have to live as a slave. This complicates everything, because Jim's lack of freedom is a social problem, requiring a social solution. And so the novel forces on us the need to evaluate the connection between what Huck represents as the good life for human beings and what Jim represents, the reality of slavery. And so embarrassing questions arise: Is Huck's freedom paid for by Jim's slavery? How will those like Jim every be truly free if people like Huck, their intimate friends, simply walk away from the problem? What would Huck have done about Jim if

he hadn't personally liked him? And so on.

In other words, for me the novel raises (but does not solve) the paradox that is peculiarly American: How can a society so committed to freedom also endorse such slavery and racism? How can a society maintain the dream of freedom and celebrate itself as the home of the free, when so many of its citizens for so long have been slaves and are still the victims of discrimination and hatred and the others subscribe to a faith in personal liberty not to address social problems?. How does the reality of slavery square with the commitment to freedom? Maybe it's not surprising that Hollywood produced a film of

Huckleberry Finn in which Jim was not present.

Whatever Twain's intentions, the invention of the American Adam helps to reconcile readers to a social problem, by suggesting explicitly or implicitly that slavery, no matter how vile, unfair, and degrading it may be, is not something which I need to address as a social issue in my life's project, because freedom requires me to remain aloof from such commitments, unless by chance I happen to become involved on a personal level (say, through friendship). Since my life takes place on the road, I don't have time to stop to clear up complex social messes in communities along the way.

(Excerpted from the text of a lecture delivered in *Liberal Studies 401*, in November 1996, released June 1999.

Spellings of the original have been retained. From www.mala.bc.ca/~johnstoi/introser/Twain2.htm)

Points to Ponder

Language and Dialect: Mark Twain's use of language and dialect in *Huckleberry Finn* helped him to bring about the overall feel that he conveyed throughout the book, allowing him to show Huck Finn's attitudes and beliefs concerning the nature of education, slavery, and family values. Through the use of language, he succeeded in showing the thoughts and beliefs of Huck Finn and the world that surrounded him.

Social Conflicts: Mark Twain was known as a humorist and in fact, humour was a tool he used to strengthen his points about what he saw as the major problems of the day. Living at the time of the Civil War, he clearly saw and chose to address such problems as slavery, child abuse, religion and feuds. Mark Twain expresses his loathing for some of these serious social problems and yet in general, he never loses his humorous touch. One of the social problems that Mark Twain addresses in *Huckleberry Finn* is child abuse. Another social problem that Mark Twain addresses in the book is slavery and treatment of black people in general.

Challenge to Slavery: In recent years, there has been increasing discussion of the seemingly racist ideas expressed in *Huckleberry Finn*. In some extreme cases the novel has even been banned. The basis for these censorship campaigns has been the depiction of one of the main characters in the novel, Jim, a black slave. Jim's character is described to the reader, and some think the description racist. However, it is important to separate the ideas of the author from the ideas of his characters. It is also important not to take a novel at face value and to 'read between the lines'. If one were to do this in relation to *Huckleberry Finn*, one would, without doubt, realize that it is not racist and is actually anti-slavery. Through society, Huck's father and Huck, Mark Twain reveals a challenge to slavery.

From Conformity to Manhood: Huck is the narrator. The character of Huck Finn was very different than the society that he was born into. Mr. Twain uses Huck's open-mindedness as a window to let humour and the book's points and morals shine through. Huck always takes things very literally. This not only adds to the humour of the book, but it also lets some of the book's deeper messages come through. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, traces the story of a young man, Huck Finn, from conformity to the Southern way of thinking, to his own ideas about religion, wealth and slavery.

Symbolism of The River: Rivers flow freely, and smoothly, and people usually go to the river to escape from society and civilization. They feel free with the nature surrounding them, which allows them to rest, and relax in peace. Twain uses symbolic importance of the Mississippi River. For Huck and Jim, the river is a place for freedom and adventure. Mark Twain uses the Mississippi River to symbolize freedom, adventure, and comfort. The Mississippi River represents many things.

Role of Women: Throughout history women have been subject to sexual discrimination based on being the physically weaker gender and thus leading to society's negative view of women, there is no exception to the stigma cast on women in *Huckleberry Finn*. In the novel every character portraying a woman shows society's view on the role on women. The issue of sexism was never questioned by Mark Twain, which leads to another question – how can such a powerful novel dealing with such a heated topic like racial prejudices and child abuse among other things remain totally neutral and altogether bypass sexual inequality? One reason Twain may have overlooked the sexism of the time was because he too gave into society's connotation of women's roles.