

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSING TWAIN'S OPUS.

Garrett Zecker

NOTICE

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."

Mark Twain

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn(2)

There has hardly been a book in American letters that has been studied, criticized, banned, or placed under the microscope as often as Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Listed as one of Time Magazine's most challenged books of all time along with *Candide*, *Brave New World*, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and *Catcher in the Rye* among others, *Huckleberry Finn* has made a place in literary history as a book that is not merely a story but a reflection of a time, a country, and a people (Stephey). As a text that defined Mark Twain's life, work, philosophy, and concept of personal and social morality, this was his finest opus that captured America and her people.

To explore such a heavy subject as his text in the short order of this chapter, it is important to create a framework so as to outline that which will be studied and attempt to leave the rest; volumes of text have been dedicated to this most important novel and it would be easy to approach any element of the text as it arises, however it is important to remember the intended goals. The novel will be discussed systemically with brief explanations of notable plot elements, and then analytically through the extrapolation of elements reflecting Twain's philosophy and his inclusion of his brand of Humanistic ideals into his texts, expanding the concepts appropriately with research and theory when applicable.

To begin, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* represented a hulking elephant in Mark Twain's life. As a cultural phenomenon it accounts for the one text that he received the most criticism for during his life, and that criticism on the text continues to this day. The time he worked on it represented a suffocating 9 year period of his life that was spotted with small considerations of failure and surrender to the hopeless mountain that the book represented. The book remains a marker for American culture that was not even nearly appreciated for its language, style, or brilliance in the country of its publication and setting until after the death of its author.

In a piece published in *U.S. News and World Report*, Daniel Boorstin explores this bizarre phenomenon in the voice of Huck himself. His interesting and brief article written with Gerald Parshall begins with the outlining of the broad speculation against the text with a short history written in the dialect of his main character. "...Back in 1885, the book no sooner came out than the quality was pecking at it. The *New York World* claimed it was 'hackwork' and 'rubbish.' The *Boston Transcript* called it 'coarse,' and the Concord Public Library threw it out as 'more suited to the slums than to... respectable people' and Louisa May Alcott...laid into Mr. Twain for pointing 'our pure-

minded lads and lasses' toward perdition..." Huck not only describes the negative side of the argument against his short biography of his adolescence, but also those defending it, "...come 1891, a big critic they had over in England, Andrew Lang, called *Huckleberry Finn* 'the great American novel... Professor William Lyon Phelps wrote in 1924 that '*Huckleberry Finn* is not only the great American novel. It is America,'...and said in 1950 that we was one of the 'world's great books' ... A galoot named T.S. Eliot once wrote that I am 'one of the permanent symbolic figures of fiction,' fit to take my place beside Ulysses and Hamlet."

While their analysis of the historical perspectives of Huck is peculiarly adolescent, it seems that Boorstin and Parshall sum up the arguments for and against the novel in a surprisingly appropriate manner. In its short history, critics, libraries, schools, and readers American and abroad alike have developed personal approaches to the text that have gone from the mundane to the stellar throughout the decades. The book's transformation through its existence is as broadly sweeping, transformative, and serpentine as the river that carries its plot.

Critical viewpoints showcase a tremendous variety of readings that travel from the safe to the bizarre to the sanguine, and regardless of the broad swath of theory covered by all of the conflicting perspectives they all seem to transpose and contribute to the kaleidoscopic embodiment of us all within its pages. That very essence of the book as a dynamic accord among all views bridging humanity and Americanism into a single atom could be considered an embodiment of the "seminal invention of language for American fiction," Huck's very "search for consciousness" that grips our hearts as we travel from adolescence to adulthood, the "vivacious and compelling picture of life in a time and place, or because Huck is vividly alive as of that time and place," the embodiment of a "deep skepticism of the millennial dream of America," or because it "hymns youthful hope and gallantry in the face of the old desperate odds of the world." Regardless of what criticism one considers as a crucial approach to Huck Finn, or if it is considered at all, the single truth to the book is a simple and unequivocal cheer to W.L. Phelps' view that *Huckleberry Finn is America* - the major point in which this chapter will approach the novel in a context of the Humanist strategy that was the essence of Mark Twain's work. Considering Mark Twain lived as a branded legend and myth in his life, there is no arguing that *Huckleberry* himself could be regarded as one as well; his "mythic image, like all great myths is full of internal tensions and paradoxes, and it involves various dimensions – the relation of the real and the ideal, the nature of maturity, the fate of the lone individual in society" (Warren 75).

Readers begin the novel with a frontispiece that was briefly quoted at the beginning of this chapter, and goes on to discuss the various dialects which are used within the novel in an "Explanatory." What is interesting about the explanatory is that Twain begins his novel with the implicit instruction of how his audience is intended to read his novel in order to articulate the authentic atmosphere of his characters and their dialects. He opens with the notice that the book is not intended to be taken seriously, but that the words and dialect of his characters which he "painstakingly" developed with personal familiarity and research should be. This may point toward the concept of the applied Realist approach to the text, however attention must be

paid to the delineation of the difference between "Realism" and perhaps Twain's desire for a cultural and national "Authenticity." Defining an authenticity to the text before it even begins, and then also reminding the audience that they need not have the preconception that the characters were just poorly talking alike shows the ultimate attention to detail that Twain intended before the text even starts.

The notice is just as important to the reading of the text, and it serves as a reminder of the transitory and plotless development of the text itself. Edwin H. Cady describes this as "Block-I...a long central narration, picturesque in form and substance and framed on either end by boy-book narratives. There is not a plot in the book, so much as a series of actions" (101). Developed from the young boy's personal experiences and backed by the current of the river, we are shown a world through the eyes of a young man who even seems to transcend the pen of Mark Twain into a three-dimensional self.

It is obvious in dissecting the structure of the story that it is a choppy and strangely unconnected series of events that seem to stay connected only with the small thread of plot that Huckleberry is interested in helping Jim to freedom. Bernard DeVoto explains in his research that it is "no more than Huck and the river's motion gives continuity to a series of episodes which are in essence only developed anecdotes. They originate in the tradition of newspaper humor, but the once uncomplicated form becomes here the instrument of great fiction" (*America* 314). Creating a narrative using the short, headline anecdotes of the journalistic narrative that was so instrumental in the development of Twain as an artist may very well be the inspiration that Ernest Hemingway found when he called this the origin of all American letters. Creating a text such as this may also offer some insight into the confusion that Twain suffered 400 pages into creating the mammoth text, lacking a clear narrative structure and transforming it into the episodic Quixotian novel that he may or may not have originally intended on writing.

As a writer focusing on the art of the narrative, to write a tremendous amount of work and not have a clear objective and plot structure is a death knell for the creative process. Twain's experience for the nine years he was writing *Finn* certainly paid tribute to this - no matter how much of his heart he poured into the text, the development of the plot would certainly begin a downward spiral of purpose at the halfway mark. Therefore, it is no wonder that the major points where Twain decided he would put the text down for an indefinite period were the points where he ran out of steam and certainty of where the text was going next. Regardless of this, we are given a text with short bursts of energy and placement in the overall scope of a structureless giant that identifies with many American concepts, ideals, and philosophies, and his presentation adds to the thematic structures within the novel.

There are several important elements of the text that propel the story forward into the skeletal avenues that it eventually takes, however, joining together the anecdotes into a cohesive linear plot - the staged death of our protagonist, the withdrawal from society and joining with a brother-in-escape Jim, the development of the boy's philosophical truths as an accessory to Jim's escape, the Duke and the Dauphin's social engineering, and the rebirth of a new identity and manhood at the Phelps' plantation. Richard P. Adams refers to this context in relation to the physical and psychological as a "complex relationship of social, cultural, political, and economic forces (through

the explication of three key ideas in the text:) slavery is evil, the pseudo-aristocratic society of the antebellum south which fosters and depends on slavery is also evil, (and that) the sentimental cultural veneer with which that society conceals its evil from itself, if not from others, is evil as well" (90-91). The development of the characters and their motivations based on this set of assertions and events within the text could certainly add to hammering down overall thematic goals within the novel. Bringing these together, there are several obvious contributions to the development of Twain's humanist philosophies and possibly even evidence concerning his methodology of projecting them on to the character of Huckleberry Finn.

Huckleberry begins the novel as a religiously ignorant character – as a matter of fact, his blasphemous rantings on his confusion on the subject of his Old Testament teachings are commented on when he observes, "I don't take no stock in dead people" (4). At the time of its publication, this could be misinterpreted as Huck as a morally hollow being, however we do begin to see the light of his goodness and powers of observation on social justice as he observes his father, wracked with delirium tremens and abusive to Huck, the government, slaves, and his place in life. Huck's character is basically an atheist who holds strong moral and ethical standards that develop throughout the book. Like a monk, he sheds all of his earthly possessions, not finding any worth in his inheritance or any of the material goods in his world unless they serve as provisions for survival.

As a contrast to Huck, Pap's character in general seems to be a safe example of the power of Humanism in Twain's text, the audience exploring his character in terms of his response to various necessary social stimuli. The whole reason the audience learns of him in the beginning of the book is that he is back in town in order to secure a claim to Huck's inheritance that he found with Tom in the previous book. Twain sees Pap as the modern equivalent of the man who is chained to his own self-interests in his ambitions. What makes Pap such a deplorable character is that he is given many opportunities to prove that he has goodness and agreeableness in his heart. He is given the clothes, the opportunities, and the facilities to prove that there is a shred of decency within his troubled heart by the new judge who is interested in assisting Pap claim his son and his son's property. The end result, however, is that it is in his nature to be an abusive, sloppy self-interested alcoholic.

This performance is described by James M. Cox as characteristic of a central part of the novel. He explains that as a member of the audience "experiencing the humor involves an instinctive recognition of Pap's humanity... (The humor of his brutality comes) from the exposed ironic relationship between his attitudes and his behavior. Equally important, it comes from the economy of the pity we enjoy upon seeing him so justly and so visibly in pain" (*One* 390). Reduced to a simplified character stuffed with an obvious penchant for vice and superstition, he feels as though he is entitled to a greater slice of the sphere of the American Dream, although there is nothing that he can blame for his lack of success in his life but the government: "the law takes a man worth six thousand dollars and up'ards, and jams him into an old trap of a cabin like this and lets him go round in clothes that ain't fitten for a hog. They call that govment!" (27). The humanity of his character is built upon the Humanistic supposition that,

without the inner compass to steer oneself in the direction of listening to one's ultimate goodness, this side would in fact never arise under the burden of the mechanistic self. Pap's social supporters and witnesses, including the Judge, Huck, Douglas, and other townspeople seem to consistently be giving him another opportunity to prove himself, and it is his own decision to cut himself and his son out of society at the moment that the audience and his supporters in town give up all hope on his humanistic salvation.

Cox goes on to say that without the character of Pap, we cannot fully understand and appreciate the character of Huckleberry's surrogate father, Jim. This man, who would otherwise be steeped in a sainthood, is given opportunities to develop his own actions and belief systems that develop a Humanistic ideal but contrast common social ideals. This works on many levels: he is a man of god but holds superstition very close, he is a property rather than an identity making it wrong that he is leaving his master, and finally he is a father who mistakenly misinterprets cues from his daughter about apparent disabilities and punishes her for them. It is only on a contextual level that these could be held against him, however; on a literal level we read a man who is a compassionate and holy man in words and actions. He is an extremely selfless individual throughout the text – and while Twain's philosophy may insist that Jim's performance throughout the novel are behaviors that serve his best interest, this is not reflected in the sacrificial constant companion to Huck. As Jim transforms in Huck's eyes from a slave to a human being, so does he transform from supporting cast member to main character in the audience's eyes as well.

This element is most important in a scene in chapter XV where Huck is separated from Jim after a particularly foggy night just before approaching the Ohio River. On the canoe Huck is separated from Jim because of the thick fog for the entirety of the night. The next morning he is reunited with him, and Huck makes up a story to trick Jim into thinking that the previous night never happened. Jim is obviously upset with himself for having lost Huck, asking him, "...is dat you, Huck? En you ain' dead – you ain' drowned – you's back again?" and he continues with how very upset he was at the prospect of his disappearance, "When I got got all wore out wid work, en wid de callin' for you, en went to sleep, my heart wuz mos' broke bekase you wuz los', en I didn' k'yer no' mo' what become er me en de raf'. En when I wake up en fine you back ag'in, all safe en soun', de tears come, en I could 'a' got down on my knees en kiss yo' foot, I's so thankful" (82-3). Huck was absolutely distraught over having lied to Jim, and Jim was completely angry over being lied to, but the scene truly shows how much responsibility Jim took for the wellbeing of Huck – while his freedom was the responsibility of Huck's, Huck's well being and safety regardless of the odds was Jim's responsibility.

It is not nearly the only time that Jim dedicated himself to a humble compassion toward other characters. Throughout the book we see basic fathering of Huck almost directly, as he fawns over and pats Huck to sleep throughout their journey, his repentance over abusing his daughter because she was not following his directions but had gone deaf after having scarlet fever, and his sacrifice to stay and take care of Tom after he had been shot helping him get away:

Well, den, dis is de way it look to me, Huck. Ef it wuz *him* dat 'uz bein' sot free, en one er de boys wuz to git shot, would he say, 'Go on en save me, nemmine 'bout a doctor fr to save dis one'? Is dat like Mars Tom Sawyer? Would he say dat? You *bet* he wouldn't! Well, den, is *Jim* gwyne to say it? No, sah—I doan' budge a step out'n dis place 'dout a *doctor*, not if it's forty year! (264)

Finally, Jim strove to find the best in everyone and forgive them for their faults no matter their place or purpose in life. While the King and the Duke were obviously dangerous frauds, he reconciled any animosity that he held against them because he could trust them for the majority of their journey. Huck became the most trusted white person he had ever met, and the entirety of his escape was not to escape abuse or work, but rather because he couldn't bear not being able to see his family any longer. Their relationship becomes represented early in the novel with the mention of King Solomon - "Jim's ludicrous horror at Solomon's apparent willingness to split a child in two is, as it turns out, a humorous statement of his loving care for the integrity of his white child" (Lynn 56).

This character with the most commentary on the lives and existence of the various characters in the text is, of course, our integral narrator Huckleberry Finn himself. His experiences not only allow for many opinions and observations, but create the powerful philosophical inner dialogue reflecting on all of the events that he experiences through his journey. Huck's responses to his surroundings work to attach the Humanistic idealism to the text, and also build the picturesque landscape of America and her residents as the novel progresses. As this young man dies and is reborn a free youngster on his own in a world of possibilities, the curtain opens on his culture, and it comes screaming forth from the chasms at the rear of the stage unencumbered by his previously sheltered existence.

Through his eyes, Huck reveals the many manifestations of other characters' deep desires and hidden agendas. The first characters that we meet are the Widow Douglas and Miss Watson. To Huckleberry, these women represent the hypocritical angles of authority, the religious right, and even the unethical treatment of young people. Their oppressive and stark behavior directed at Huck in their seeming criticism of everything that he does is a simple manifestation of the binary opposite of freedom. Remember, at the end of the book it is the very threat of any resurgence of this proverbial prison that pushes Huck to decide for himself that he would write his own future in a self-motivated trip out west. The freedom of the raft and the river become a sufficient antonym of the life he had lived as a child under strict supervision, and is a definition of freedom that needs an opposite to be as effective as it is.

After becoming free from Watson and Douglas, Pap even becomes a symbol of oppression, imprisonment, and ignorance. Huck was happy for his newfound freedoms with his father living in the woods, "kind of lazy and jolly, laying off comfortable all day, smoking and fishing, and no books or study. Two months or more run along, and my clothes got to be all rags and dirt, and I don't see how I'd ever got to like it so well at the widow's, where you had to wash, and eat on a plate, and comb up, and go to bed and get up regular... It was pretty good times up in the woods there" (24). But it became clear that this lifestyle was not so much freedom as it appeared to be as Pap

locked Huck indoors all day, criticized him for seeming superior to his father in his education and manners, and was threatened with his life when his father experienced deep alcoholic hallucinations. Pap represents how "easily a man can take the word for the deed in the conduct of his own life when he is motivated by that most natural of human impulses, greed" (Mizener 42).

In staging his death, Huckleberry finds a welcome expanse of nothingness beginning to pervade his existence. That nothingness, representative of the lack of civilization, responsibility, and adults in his life becomes the river that voluntarily carries him from episode to episode in the narrative he provides us. The river itself is a character where we meet the ultimate example of the Humanistic ideals that Huck and Jim try to embody as they race away from the torrential humanity that lay on the banks of the river, in the hearts of the slave hunters and slave owners, and the fear Huck has for every adult figure. On their raft, sailing down the free river, the "escaped slave and the white boy try to practice their code: 'What you want, above all things, on a raft, is for everybody to be satisfied, and feel right and kind toward the others.' This human credo constitutes the paramount affirmation of the (novel), and it obliquely aims a devastating criticism at the existing social order... the river provides a means of escape, a place where the code can be tested" (Marx 424).

In his introduction to the text, T.S. Eliot found the river to be a central character as an almost religious deity – the "only natural force that can wholly determine the course of human peregrination...(the river is a) God, and it is the subjection of Man that gives to Man his dignity. For without some kind of God, Man is not even interesting" (Eliot 332-334). But it is this observation that we see a clear reference to, perhaps, a mistaken concept of Humanism. While we can certainly see the power of the River and compare it to Eliot's "River God," we ignore the power that the river has over Jim and Huck as a simple vehicle for them to worship by living freely, shedding the social boundaries that normally afflict their lives. The river is their religion of freedom, peace, and social justice because of the fact that they are away from society and allowed to behave as men stripped of any racial, social, or other involuntary obligations..

The river undoubtedly also contributes to the blooming of Huck and his humanistic religion. At many points in the novel, the river whispers to Huck the ultimately correct and just thing to do, regardless of any punishment Huck fears in the afterlife. He saves the lives of the robbers aboard the *Walter Scott* by turning them in, but he wouldn't want the three of their deaths on his conscience. It is the Humanism of the river that teaches Huck that there is no god that would punish him for turning Jim in, and that if there were, to sacrifice oneself for the freedom of another human being would be just and righteous. Finally, the freedom that the river provides was the driving force behind his denial of the Duke and the Dauphin to commit their hideous scam on the Wilks and steal their inheritance. The river provides the safety and the freedom for Huckleberry to feel capable and strong in his quest for justice and social tranquility.

Huckleberry also finds virtue and goodness in the hearts of many of those people that he meets along the way, regardless of the ultimate motivations of their moral stature. A great example of this, while most pervasive and obvious in the Duke and the Dauphin, would likely be with the Grangerfords. The family is a close knit brethren whose

lifestyle and focus on the familial community was completely foreign and somewhat attractive to Huck. Their amenable and comfortable surroundings were quaint and perfect, simply put, described as "lovely," with "good cooking," and members who were "gentlem(e)n all over; and so was the family." All this until Huck discovered the feud with the Shepherdsons and witnessed the needless murders of family members falling one after another during their sleepy, vengeful battle. He couldn't shake the images of the inhumanity, and mentions that he "wished I hadn't ever come ashore that night to see such things. I ain't ever going to get shut of them – lots of times I dream about them." When he finally returns to the raft finding Jim once again worried about the sad state of not knowing where Huck was under his watch, Huck describes the feeling of being away from such miserable irrational behavior, "you feel mighty free and easy and comfortable on a raft" (101-13).

The King and the Duke that board their vessel shortly after become a large aspect of the fallacy of the human condition. Of course, through the entire time that Jim and Huck are cavorting from town to town with them there is no mistaking that their goals reflect a bizarre conniving business of swindling those town's residents; but Humanism lies within the psychology of each of their various swindles as they articulate their knowledge of what a society requires in engineering their minds and hearts in emptying their pockets – and there is absolutely no shame in their fashion of doing it.

This is most notable in their roadshow, "The Royal Nonesuch," was billed as an attraction where women and children are not allowed to attend in order to sell more tickets; "if that don't fetch them, I don't know Arkansas!" The performance required the King to parade about the stage completely naked and painted from head to toe, and the audience most readily ate it up. This was completed for a cycle of three times until the very audience felt as though they had been had for the amount of money that they had paid for attendance to the show. They sold the house out for the two following nights, gaining a heftier audience for each billing, but left the theater without performing for the third for fear that they would be attacked by the townspeople for their performance. Huck labels their performance and attitude as "ornery," a word he often evokes. From here, the men begin their swindling of the Wilks, which upon further consideration Huck describes their behavior and acting as "enough to make a body ashamed of the human race" (146, 157).

Huck does nothing to hide his complete lack of faith in these men, only allowing them to continue their business of lies and swindling until he can no longer bear it. He does understand that the men have something over them: what was originally mistaken for royalty, these men hold Jim and Huck hostage to assist and defend their desire for dominating others. They "personify the theme of fraudulent role-taking... Huck (representing Twain's utter revolt of the misguided piety and perversion of Christianity in the prewar south) reaches (his highest point of disgust) when the King delivers his masterpiece of 'soul-butter and hogwash' for the benefit of the late Peter Wilks's fellow townsmen" (Smith 118). Huck's commentary on the utter horror of the behavior of these men, his desire and application of doing his best to thwart their

plans, and his constant deliverance to the river, we see his clear commentary through the characters that their behavior is counterintuitive to the Humanistic tradition that Huck is attempting to breed through his travels.

As an articulate and authentic text, we begin to see patterns of the characters and faces who Huck describes in the novel. Henry Nash Smith's comment that the King and the Duke are Twain's indictment of the prewar South's misguided piety and other perversions of Christianity, and that religion in this fictive world stood center of their system of values clearly plays into the Realist and Naturalist arguments for this text. These two characters are nothing more than stinging descriptions of the residents of a wild frontier who make their horrible mark on each town they visit through the ignorance and boredom of their residents.

Finally, the showcase of the episode with Colonel Sherburn and the application of group thought in society shows an awestruck Huckleberry staring the concept of mortality in the face of stylized spectacular violence. Huck describes every aspect of the episode as Colonel Sherburn publicly shoots and kills the public drunkard Boggs in the streets in front of his own daughter. The humanity lies in the crowd's appreciation and attendance of the event, and the Humanism lies in the response of Huckleberry himself in his next scene at the circus:

There was considerable jawing back, so I slid out, thinking maybe there was going to be trouble. The streets was full, and everybody was excited. Everybody that seen the shooting was telling how it happened, and there was a big crowd packed around each one of these fellows, stretching their necks and listening. One long, lanky man, with long hair and a big white fur stovepipe hat on the back of his head, and a crooked-handled cane, marked out the places on the ground where Boggs stood and where Sherburn stood, and the people following him around from one place to t'other and watching everything he done, and bobbing their heads to show they understood, and stopping a little and resting their hands on their thighs to watch him mark the places on the ground with Jlis cane; and then he stood up straight and stiff where Sherburn had stood, frowning and having his hat-brim down over his eyes, and sung out, "Boggs!" and then fetched his cane down slow to a level, and says "Bang!" staggered backwards, says "Bang!" again, and fell down flat on his back. The people that had seen the thing said he done it perfect; said it was just exactly the way it all happened. Then as much as a dozen people got out their bottles and treated him.

Well, by and by somebody said Sherburn ought to be lynched. In about a minute everybody was saying it; so away they went, mad and yelling, and snatching down every clothes-line they come to to do the hanging with.

And by and by a drunken man tried to get into the ring—said he wanted to ride; said he could ride as well as anybody that ever was. They argued and tried to keep him out, but he wouldn't listen, and the whole show come to a standstill. Then the people begun to holler at him and make fun of him, and that made him mad, and he begun to rip and tear; so that stirred up the people, and a lot of men begun to pile down off of

the benches and swarm toward the ring, saying, "Knock him down! throw him out!" and one or two women begun to scream. So, then, the ringmaster he made a little speech, and said he hoped there wouldn't be no disturbance, and if the man would promise he wouldn't make no more trouble he would let him ride if he thought he could stay on the horse. So everybody laughed and said all right, and the man got on. The minute he was on, the horse begun to rip and tear and jump and cavort around, with two circus men hanging on to his bridle trying to hold him, and the drunken man hanging on to his neck, and his heels flying in the air every jump, and the whole crowd of people standing up shouting and laughing till tears rolled down. And at last, sure enough, all the circus men could do, the horse broke loose, and away he went like the very nation, round and round the ring, with that sot laying down on him and hanging to his neck, with first one leg hanging most to the ground on one side, and then t'other one on t'other side, and the people just crazy. It warn't funny to me, though; I was all of a tremble to see his danger. But pretty soon he struggled up astraddle and grabbed the bridle, a-reeling this way and that; and the next minute he sprung up and dropped the bridle and stood! (137-147)

Huck's mind is contrasted with the gruesome astonishment of the crowd and their bizarre fetish for the morose and gory; his seeming neutral reporting on the exact sequence of events leads the audience to believe that he is acting as an outside observer, not in the least connected with the horrible sights he is taking in. As the shooting of Boggs unfolds he even mentions that he wants nothing to do with it, sliding out because he felt trouble brewing. As a contributor to the morose crowd mentality at the circus, however, he voices considerable concern for the drunkard (obviously a trained professional to the adult reader), executing his horseback daredevil stunts. These events, seemingly common for the lawless frontier land Huck was coming of age in, seem as real as they ever had been to today's audience on Twain's page.

The authenticity of the characters have been described by every researcher and analyst who has ever approached this text as different elements contributing to an overall text – but to look at it as a psychological and moral contribution to his commentary on America and her peoples is a very real prospect. The realism is not the realism of the text, her character, or her settings; while those are both equally impressive and majestic, they are not the goals Twain had in mind. The characters in the novel are visible everyday in the American idiom, and have been precisely imitated in works from Meredith Wilson's Harold Hill in "The Music Man" to Norman Lear's Archie Bunker in "All In The Family." But is it that the characters have been imitated by these works, or has America been intimidated in them?

Arthur Mizener believes it is the latter. "For Twain, reality lies in man's relations with his society; in how he acts as a social being and in his reasons for acting that way" (34). Mizener suggests that it is America's place in Twain's writing that makes it so vivid and complete. There is nothing more in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* than a wide secular swath of the society of America. There are the entitled, the poor, and the wish-to-be-entitled. There are the free and the captive. There are those that live their lives peacefully, and those that are enticed by their erotic fascination with violence

and blood. There are the religious, and there are the superstitious. The collective is complete, drawing a picture of what lives and breathes in our society as well as Huckleberry's. Mizener continues,

Beneath the uproarious comedy of *Huckleberry Finn*, that is, there is a tragic pastoral, one of the great visions of the unattainable world we see when we imagine men to be the childlike, innocent, natural creatures that they are assumed to be by the doctrine of the Noble Savage, Western Civilization's perennial secular dream of salvation. The dream has been specially important in American society because it contributed a good deal to the conception of society that inspired the founders of the United States. As a consequence it has been important to American literature...(48)

This secular dream of salvation lies within the overall scope of the humanist tradition in our own society. We are country of people that once celebrated holidays that were deemed deeply religious, but now exist as commercial and community entities. Our public squares and marketplaces are adorned with images of stark Christian values such as Christmas, Easter, Saint Patrick's Day, Saint Valentine's Day, and yet as a nation we breathe the winds of these holidays as simple secular commercialization. The result remains a humanist one, however: peace on earth and good will toward men. The result is the building of a love and polite value of our fellow human, and the conceptualization that all men are created equal with ultimately good hearts within themselves.

Our country is much different than the world that Huckleberry Finn lived in, but Mark Twain's was very similar in this regard. Likely, the pastoral world in Twain's book is a virtual old testament to the origins of our secular lifestyles. Huck himself builds a democratic secular view of his world that is a hodgepodge of the religious teachings of Watson, the adventurous ways of Sawyer, and the skeptical and superstitious ways of Jim. Huck's resulting philosophy is that the best values that man can take with him is in the healthy and democratic ethics that he builds within himself, and this becomes a rough and sore assumption of Huck's that leads him on many of the adventures he experiences within the novel.

As Huck develops his personal philosophy in the text, coming to light because of the moral and ethical troubles that befall himself and the implications of the ones chasing Jim, we see his ultimate struggles within himself come to light as he witnesses the various spectacles that befall him. Being the bearer of good judgment and the gift of compassion to give everyone in his personal sphere a chance, his freedoms and plans are constantly underhanded by the subsequent events that surround the King and the Duke, the Grangerfords and the Shepherdsons, the dangerous Colonel Sherburn, and even his platonic surrogate father, Jim. His decisions do eventually carry to positive relationships in his world with the people he trusts; Judge Thatcher seems to be a right and just man, as do the Wilks, and of course, Jim.

These situational considerations with these characters allow Huck to build his ideology into a framework that includes the defending of the just, and the search for justice for the unjust. It is built into the secular Humanism that drives his character throughout

the novel in many manifestations as a result. Simple examples include the scene with Sherburn and the stunt rider at the circus, but these are speculations on the nature of Huck's thought process. A more obvious manifestation arrives in chapters XII and XIII in the incident on the *Walter Scott*.

After traveling for days, Huck and Jim look over the various loot they have pillaged for survival and trim their stash in an ethical purging of items that they do not necessarily need. They come upon the sinking wreckage of the steamboat *Walter Scott* with another boat tied to it, and Huck boards the vessel in hopes to begin a new adventure. What he finds are some criminals who have tied one of their accomplices up so that they do not testify any vital information to the authorities about the robbery they had just committed. Their plan was to murder him indirectly by allowing him to drown in the wreckage, but Huck devises a plan to escape via their boat so that they are all risk death. It becomes a necessity as Jim boards and indicates that the raft had escaped, so they make it to shore and Huck informs a watchman of the stranded passengers in a story he created about his family being stranded on the boat.

The compassion he displays toward even the lowest of criminals represents an innate Humanism because of Huck's lack of any solidified ethical or moral standards, and it is most readily apparent in this vignette. The story is a morality parable that shows Huckleberry's willingness to save even the most lowly of individuals if it meant that he wouldn't have the memory of his neglect on his consciousness, or worse, the death of a man regardless of his criminal background. Of course, there are many other times in the text where this becomes apparent, and the most noble and holy of these is the aiding of Jim's escape, weighing heavily on his mind for the entire adventure. This in itself contains the line that the entire novel hinges on in chapter XXXI when he decides to himself that he would continue to harbor a fugitive and help him to freedom no matter what the punishment because he was a friend, guardian, and fellow human being; "all right then, I'll go to hell."

There are many other characters and situations where this becomes apparent, but in the end it is defined in the novel as a reflection of the freedom and resiliency of the human spirit. Huckleberry and Jim, along with all of the other characters, represent the magnitude of the cultural wash in our melting pot; but it is their own choices and reactions, their social considerations, and their spotless platonic brotherhood that represents that which we hold so dear within our society – the definitive unmasked humanism that defines our morality as a nation. Like the main characters in the text, the river holds the nonjudgmental and unconditional freedom and energy that exists in the colorful cultures throughout her majestic banks, and it reminds us of the power within ourselves to be the same.

At the end of the book, Huckleberry represents all of us in his final words as he indicates his new solidified adult philosophy that he had acquired over his long journey, "I reckon I got to light out for the territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and sivilize me, and I can't stand it. I been there before" (281). Huck is illustrating the elemental forces of freedom and industry that burns like a wildfire within the human spirit. As the spokesman and proverbial Prometheus of the American Humanist Identity, his words only stoke that very fire. Of course, as

Hamlin Hill indicates that the structure of the novel is "a frustrated attempt to escape from restrictions only to find the refuge susceptible to invasion and destruction," it is certain that true freedom and personal revision can only come from the threats that seem to gnaw at us every day, and the Humanistic compassion necessary to help one another overcome them (Hill).

The very thwarted and destructed escape Hill is referring to is the ending of the novel where Tom is reintroduced to build the novel's conclusion. This provides the text's most obvious example of Humanism in the frame of the American experience, along with the most necessary application of Huckleberry's transition into adulthood. Tom arrives with the knowledge that Jim has been free since practically the time they had left Hannibal, however he neglects to disclose this information until he shares with Huck his desire to free Jim from his improvised prison on the property. When they execute the plan, it is hardly as if Jim had been in any real imprisonment at all, and while the escape is successful it still manages to go horribly wrong.

The binary opposition of both Tom and Huck's reaction to Jim's predicament is a may very well allude the most to Twain's vision of American Humanism. While Huck's view of Jim is a most compassionate and familial bond, Tom arrives after not seeing either of them since the beginning of the novel and only seems to play with the fact that Jim is a man or a human being at all. Jim simply serves as a prop for him to execute his newest fantasy-adventure, admitting when asked why he went through with the plan even after knowing Jim was free, "(it is just like women to not understand!) Why, I wanted the adventure of it; and I'd 'a' waded neck deep in blood to" (277). Twain wanted to showcase a familiarity with the ostentatious ignorance of Tom in his adolescent toying with the life of Jim, and present a humorous pageant of bizarre cruelty. Huckleberry is contrast with this as his reactions are the most adult and astute of the party, and Jim serves as the most compassionate, sacrificing his own freedom and safety for the well-being of Tom as he suffered for the gunshot wound he received in their escape.

The showcase of Jim's dehumanization is the very construct that Twain uses to humanize Jim and Huck by the end of the novel through binary opposition. Leo Marx suggests that the end of the novel makes many readers uneasy because it jeopardizes its significance, however I argue that it is the very position of a reader's dissatisfaction or inconclusiveness that may jeopardize the significance the novel has to the reader (424).

Where could the case for humanism appear any more significant than in the lens of once again summoning Tom Sawyer just for the purpose of outlining the stark differences that Huckleberry and Jim display from the beginning of the novel when Tom first started to organize a gang of pirates and robbers. Finally, it is arguable that being caught just one more time may equate to a literal death sentence for Jim now that they are so very deep into slave territory, and yet he has absolutely no qualms with laying his neck down on the chopping block for another human being's safety taking no regard for his own fate. It is through this compassionate and self-sacrificial ignorance that are displayed by both Jim and Huck in the final two chapters that may very well seal the fate of the novel being a definitive American Humanist text. Furthermore, it serves as a text that is seemingly independent of the philosophical

selfishness in "What is Man?" because Jim seems to operate freely from the inner machine that dictates the selfish means by which he would only be concerned with himself and continue his escape from the Phelps' homestead.

What we are left with is not an empty and meaningless ending, but rather an ending that almost entirely circles back to the beginning of the novel and reiterates the development of the text's two main characters by juxtaposing them with the characters from the beginning. This binary opposition is important in defining Twain's goals, bridging a gap that spans the entirety of the novel with the recognition of Huck and Jim's new cultural and psychological gains in the face of all of the hardships they faced throughout the text. While their plans were entirely foiled many times over throughout the narrative, it only takes a simple observation that they had both gained the freedom and independence they so desperately desired.

The value of the experience that the audience engages in when reading *Huckleberry Finn* is not reflective of a choppy story that exclusively reads like a sensationalist humor newspaper article, but rather a cyclical experience that develops into an extremely important parable on defining America and the human condition. The novel is the bible of the secular folk and community traditions of America, bonding many elements of our national identity into a novel that uses the cinders of reality to romanticize the truly pastoral landscape that existed in Huckleberry's time. Further, the spiritual construct that is evoked through the text is the Humanist philosophy that is most readily definitive in the actions and reactions of not only Huckleberry, Jim, and Mark Twain's letters, but of the universal secular identity of America as a whole.

Works Cited

- Adams, Richard P. "The Unity and Coherence of Huckleberry Finn." *Tulane Studies in English* v.6. Anne Taylor, Ed. New Orleans: Tulane University Press, 1956. (87-103).
- Boorstin, Daniel J. and Gerald Parshall. "History's Hidden Turning Points, The True Watersheds in Human Affairs are Seldom Spotted Quickly Amid the Tumult of Headlines Broadcast on the Hour." *U.S. News and World Report*. 110:15 (22 APR 1991): 52-66.
- Cady, Edwin H. *The Light of Common Day: Realism in American Fiction*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press. (88-9, 101-19).
- Cox, James. "A Hard Book To Take." *One Hundred Years of Huckleberry Finn: The Boy, His Book, and American Culture*. Detroit: The University of Michigan Press, 1985. (386-428).
- DeVoto, Bernard. *Mark Twain's America and Mark Twain at Work*. Cambridge, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1967.
- Eliot, T.S. "An Introduction to Huckleberry Finn." *A Norton Critical Edition of the Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Sculley Bradley, ed. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1977. (328-335).

Hill, Hamlin. "Mark Twain." *The Dictionary of Literary Biography, Volume 12: American Realists and Naturalists*. The Gale Group, 1982. (71-94).

Lynn, Kenneth S. "Huck and Jim." *The Yale Review*. 47 (SPR 1958). *Visions of America*. "Huckleberry Finn." Kenneth S. Lynn, Ed. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, Inc., 1973. (49-59).

Marx, Leo. "Mr. Eliot, Mr. Trilling, and *Huckleberry Finn*." *American Scholar*. 22:4 (Autumn 1953). (423-40).

Mizener, Arthur. *Twelve Great American Novels*. New York: The New American Library, Inc. 1967.

Smith, Henry Nash. "A Sound Heart and a Deformed Conscience." *Mark Twain: The Development of a Writer*. Boston: Harvard University Press, 1962. (113-23).

Stephey, M.J. "Censorship in Modern Times." *Time Magazine Online*. 28 SEP 2008. <http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1842832_1842838_1844945,00.html>.