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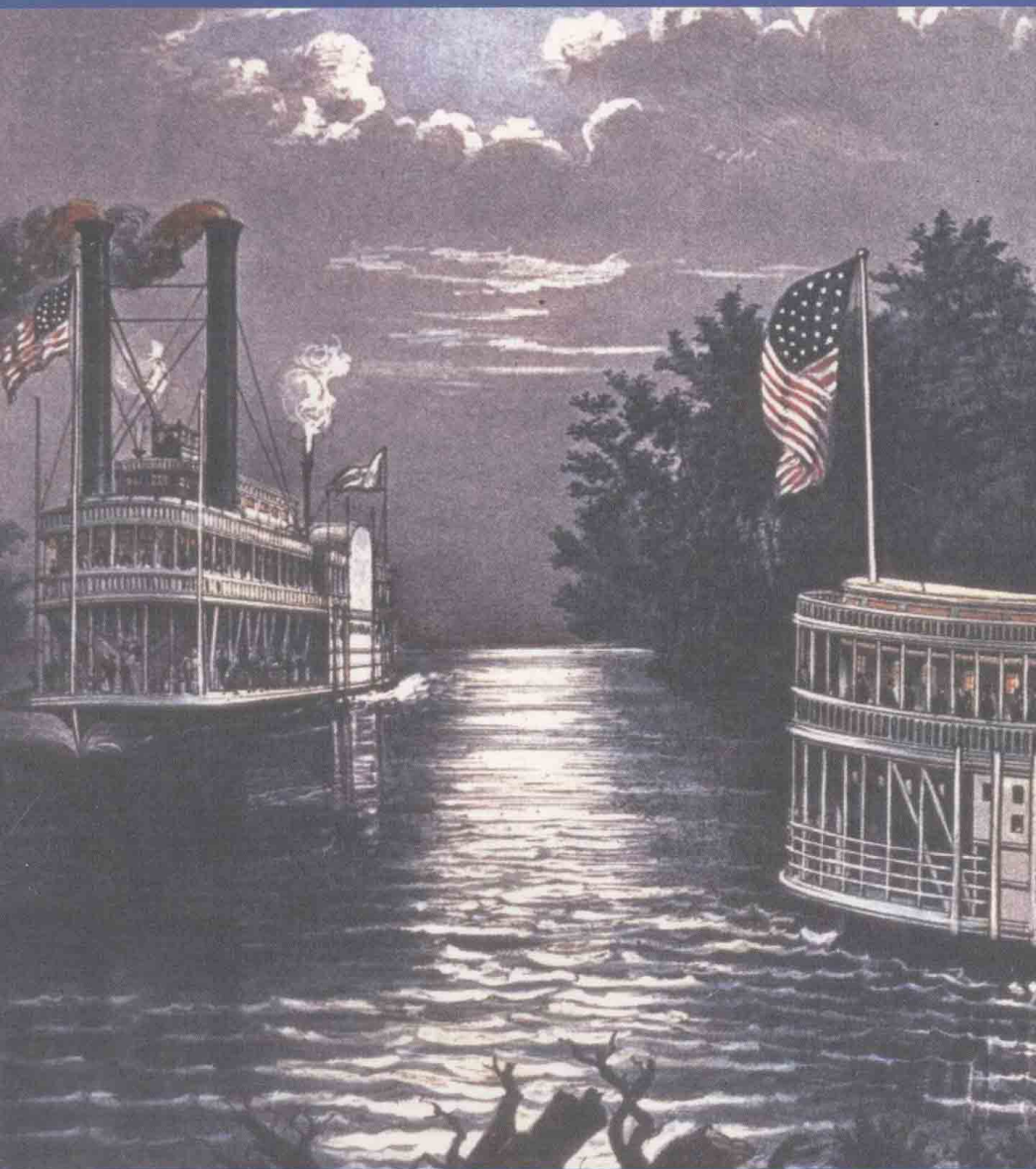
Tom Sawyer & Huckleberry Finn

MARK TWAIN



COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

The Adventures
TOM SAWYER
&
The Adventures of
HUCKLEBERRY FINN

Mark Twain

With an Introduction and Notes by
STUART HUTCHINSON
University of Kent at Canterbury

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Wordsworth Classics are inexpensive editions designed to appeal to the general reader and students. We commissioned teachers and specialists to write wide ranging, jargon-free introductions and to provide notes that would assist the understanding of our readers rather than interpret the stories for them. In the same spirit, because the pleasures of reading are inseparable from the surprises, secrets and revelations that all narratives contain, we strongly advise you to enjoy this book before turning to the Introduction.

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INTRODUCTION

Tom Sawyer (1876) and *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894) excepted, Samuel Clemens's best work is written in the autobiographical first-person form. As we see in *Innocents Abroad* (1869), his first encounter with the Old World, and *Roughing It* (1872), his evocation of the American West, he created in Mark Twain an authorial self who was also a performing self within the narratives. Both are journey books in which Twain takes the episodes as they come, and in which nothing conclusive is promised or achieved. Each is the sum of its mainly comical adventures, though each also has an intermittently desolating undercurrent which will rise irresistibly to the surface in such final works as 'The Mysterious Stranger' (1916). *Huckleberry Finn* (1884–5) develops their method with Huck, ostensibly the creation of Twain, now at an even further remove from Clemens. Only behind the mask of a mask could Clemens in *Huckleberry Finn* engage his profoundest sense of

life's comedy and tragedy, though as in all his books it was an essentially fugitive engagement. In the first paragraph of Chapter 15 Huck announces the journey's destination to be 'way up the Ohio among the free States' (p. 229), but as it evolves the journey is always *away from* rather than *towards*. The villages on the riverbank never get any better, and, if in nothing else, Huck is consistent in his desire to move on and not make things worse, remaining on the run because he is also never convinced he is superior to anyone he meets. This last position is why he rarely moralises, or, if he does so, as in his opening comment, 'I never seen anybody but lied, one time or another' (p.169), offers readers the self-recognition he already has. 'Human beings *can* be awful cruel to one another' (p. 343), his response to the tarring and feathering and riding on a rail of the king and the duke, is a similar offer. Huck like any one of us might find himself joining a mob similar to the one in this scene. Like any one of us, he too might be a victim of a mob. Not that he or Twain or Clemens can be confident readers will recognise themselves in such pronouncements. Clemens and Twain cannot even be sure Huck's guilty reflections (pp. 235–7, 329–31) on his support of Jim's escape will be read ironically, thus revealing Huck to be as essentially virtuous as slavery is morally perverted. Slavery, after all, found a justification in the American South because many normal human beings believed with Huck that aiding a Jim was wicked and would send them to hell. In *Huckleberry Finn* meanings which might offer resolution to the book's conflicts cannot even be *implied* with certainty, and Huck must remain fugitive because the book's adventures never entail, let alone reach, a clarifying destination. For related reasons he also remains inconsistent as a character, telling some jokes but not getting others, being an innocent boy but a shrewd and cynical liar, committed and oblivious to Jim. *Huckleberry Finn* offers no system of meaning in which Huck might be consistent. As its prefatory 'Notice' acknowledges in a typically unsettling joke, it endorses neither 'motive', 'moral' nor 'plot'. When Clemens finally settled on the pseudonym Mark Twain in 1863, after trying several others, he was not only referring to the measurement of river depths for steamboats, but also to the persistent subterfuge and double-dealing he was becoming involved in as a writer in order to tell the 'truth, mainly' (p. 169).

Tom Sawyer none the less is a simpler affair than *Huckleberry Finn*. It offers Clemens's fondest recollection of the village on the banks of the Mississippi in which he had spent his formative years and to versions of which his imagination, released in Mark Twain, recurrently returned. The real Hannibal, Missouri, now becomes St Petersburg as it was to become all the villages in *Huckleberry Finn*, various villages in *A*

Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court (1889), Dawson's Landing in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, Hadleyburg in 'The Man that Corrupted Hadleyburg' (1899) and even Eseldorf (in sixteenth-century Austria) in 'The Mysterious Stranger'. As the novel's Preface indicates, the remembrance for the most part is indulgent in *Tom Sawyer*, Twain looking back on childhood scenes long left behind for that superior adult and more sophisticated world which 'the reader' (p. 8) is also assumed to occupy. Because this imagined reader has nothing of the heterogeneity (black, white, American South/North, European) of readers of *Huckleberry Finn*, *Tom Sawyer* is delivered in Twain's most settled authorial voice. He is as sure of his audience outside the book as Tom, a boyhood version of the author's performing self, is sure of his audience within it. At worst St Petersburg is irksome or boring to Tom, and he can usually triumph over it, as in the famous scene when he whitewashes the fence. To us, St Petersburg is mostly amusing, notwithstanding Chapters 11 and 18, when the town verges on providing material which in *Huckleberry Finn* will propel Huck into haunted flight. Even conscience, an incubus to several of Twain's fictional selves and especially to Huck, is appeasable in *Tom Sawyer*. Whereas in other works it is such a source of irresolvable guilt that Huck can declare, 'If I had a yaller dog that didn't know no more than a person's conscience does, I would pison him' (p. 344), in *Tom Sawyer* it presses Tom to do achievable good things, such as saving Muff Potter at his trial. This reassurance is matched by presenting Huck Finn himself as no more than a picturesque rebel (pp. 33–4), though he finally sows seeds from which his subsequent adventures will grow. If there is a spark of the later work's irony in Huck's comments about eating with the 'mighty good nigger', Uncle Jake (p. 128), it is not allowed to kindle into troublesome flame, and slavery, so fundamentally disturbing to Twain's later attempt at fond recollection in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, hardly casts a shadow. As for the natural world, it is accommodated in *clichés* such as 'great Nature's meditation' and 'the marvel of Nature' (pp. 70–1), though Henry Nash Smith is right to praise the Jackson's Island scenes, and to observe that the passage (pp. 75–6) describing Tom's journey back to St Petersburg, 'sounds like Hemingway' (Smith, pp. 85–6). It anticipates Huck's account of his escape from Pap in *Huckleberry Finn* (pp. 191–5), the particular writing Hemingway himself might have been referring to when he asserted that 'All American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*' (Hemingway, pp. 22–3). Also remarkable and entertaining in *Tom Sawyer* are the intimacy and directness with which the manners and culture of a small provincial town are realised,

together with the experience of being a boy there. Twain expects us to identify with Tom, and even though he mocks his infatuation with Becky, he invites us to see it as typical of the pre-sexual male. Arguably, *Tom Sawyer* enacts male pre-adolescent wish-fulfilment, culminating in the strong male rescuing the weak and grateful female from the cave.

If Tom and Becky were to marry, they would presumably define each other in conventional gender roles, and *Tom Sawyer*'s conclusion seems to offer Tom as a notable exception to several of nineteenth-century American literature's other figures, including Huck. In contrast to their endless commitment to autonomy, whatever the torments of loneliness and estrangement, Tom is finally left with great wealth, a good chance of marrying the community's top girl, and the prospect of an influential place in the world. Fifty years before Fitzgerald, Twain seemingly writes of a Gatsby legitimised and likely to get his girl. Since Tom will never grow up, however, his future remains a proposition, and Tom matches Gatsby, who is himself killed before reaching fulfilment. In *Tom Sawyer* too the rewards and accommodations beckoning the hero will never be attained, and dispossession prevails at least by implication. It supports what Cynthia Griffin Wolff sees as Tom's 'final identification' (Wolff, p. 104) with Injun Joe, the novel's most alienated figure. Each character enabling the creation of the other, Tom can be the acceptable rebel because the violence with which Twain's imagination scourged the world in other books is villainised in Injun Joe. While Tom would be a Sir Galahad to a womankind whom the author himself can denigrate as 'sappy women' (p. 151), Injun Joe has other desires: ' "When you want to get revenge on a woman you don't kill her – bosh! you go for her looks. You slit her nostrils – you notch her ears like a sow's!" ' (p. 133). Yet the first cause of the antagonism between Injun Joe and St Petersburg is never established, and it is not apparent who was originally in the wrong in the grudge he bears against Dr Robinson. Nor is it is clear on what charge, apart from vagrancy, the Widow Douglas's husband had Injun Joe jailed and ' "horsewhipped" ' (p. 133). Presumably, Twain does not want a rational cause-and-effect explanation for him. As the offspring of passions probably rapacious on the white side, Injun Joe's function is to be bogeyman and scapegoat. Like other mysterious strangers arriving in communities in Twain's fiction (notably in 'The Man that Corrupted Hadleyburg' and in 'The Mysterious Stranger' itself), he undermines whatever security the author and townspeople have, whether it be religious belief or assumptions about their own virtue and courage. If, in Helen L. Harris's words, he is Twain's demonstration to whites of 'the typical Indian's treachery, murderousness, cowardice and depravity' (Harris, p. 499), he is also to

Tom and his author what Orlick is to Pip and Dickens in *Great Expectations*, namely the estranged self destined to a desolate fate. Among Tom's fantasies of escape, the desire to 'join the Indians' (p. 45) provides the only scenario native to America. 'Injun Joe infested all [Tom's] dreams' (p. 112), because he is the nightmare of these fantasies of self-gratifying adventure. No wonder Tom feels 'an abounding sense of relief and security', as he stands over of his dead body. With the death of this 'bloody-minded outcast' (p. 203), the nightmare can be thought to be at an end.

In Leslie Fiedler's words, however, *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn* are 'the same dream dreamed twice over, the second time as nightmare; though to be sure, the terror of the second dream is already at work in the first, whose euphoria persists strangely in the second' (Fiedler, p. 568). Death itself means nightmare is never at an end in Twain's work, and it is in Injun Joe's death that he and Tom have their deepest identification with him. Representing the possible desolation of death for us all, it demonstrates human insignificance amid time's ceaseless immensity. Inevitably, there is rhetorical extravagance at this juncture, because heavy themes are injected into a novel too light to carry them. *Huckleberry Finn*'s superiority is that it can always bear its author's profoundest concerns, as we see immediately in the last two paragraphs of Chapter 1 when Huck feels 'so lonesome I most wished I was dead'. To get Shakespeare off its back *Huckleberry Finn* will comically demolish Hamlet's 'To be, or not to be' soliloquy, '"the most celebrated thing in Shakespeare"' (p. 271), but this literal deconstruction follows the creation of an American equivalent in these initial paragraphs. Like *Hamlet*, *Huckleberry Finn* will respond variously to death, the morbid Emmeline Grangerford's drawings and poems, and the sublime king's wonderfully funny claim that the dead Peter Wilks in his coffin, 'lays yonder, cold but joyful' (p. 295) being but two of the responses. In these paragraphs Huck like Hamlet is both tempted and oppressed by death, and neither the physical nor metaphysical world offers consolation. The stars shine. The leaves rustle. The wind whispers. A restless ghost grieves in the woods. Obviously, this is not the sensibility of an innocent young boy. Huck has a number of functions for his creator, and to be boy reporter of experience, unconscious of its implications, is only one of them. He is best seen as allowing unresolved versions of the authorial self (especially younger and older) to engage with its formative American world. He is never given a substantial dramatic life, precisely because these versions remain unreconciled and cannot, therefore, be offered in a consistent character having a developing cause-and-effect relationship with events.

He remains a voice, and if he always sounds the same, as certainly his vernacular prose always looks the same, tensions and contradictions live irrepressibly within this apparent sameness. Take Huck's observation at the Widow Douglas's that, ' "By and by they fetched the niggers in and had prayers, and then everybody was off to bed" ' (p. 170). From Twain's older perspective it is easy to read this as irony, his and his readers' conscience about slavery being pricked by Huck's unconscious acceptance of it. Huck's response (presumably that of the author as a boy) has, none the less, an equal life in the book, Twain recognising that he has been capable of both his young and older views about slavery and, as representative human being, may still be capable of either or their equivalents. No state of being in *Huckleberry Finn* has precedence. Huck is a typical nineteenth-century American literary voice (and thus unlike the narrator of *Great Expectations*) in that he will not grow into a final moral understanding which the author is also offering the reader. *Huckleberry Finn* is written in the past tense, but unlike *Great Expectations* we have no sense of the present to which its past has led. Precedence is aborted, because there is no developing sense of time, and no end from which author, narrator or readers can get a fix on any moment of the narrator's past life. In common with other works of nineteenth-century American literature such as *Moby-Dick* and 'Song of Myself', the only end *Huckleberry Finn* recognises is death. Except for Miss Watson's freeing of Jim, which is extraneous to the adventures, there is no end on the way to *the* end such as is offered by the integral plots and developing moral and time schemes of contemporaneous English novels.

The sentence about the niggers and prayers reveals the author's experience of complicity in slavery. The sensibility enacted in *Huckleberry Finn* can reach to tragedy, because like Hamlet's it knows it is inevitably stained by the sullied world from which it can wish to be free. As when Huck accidentally flicks a spider to its death in a lighted candle (p. 171), it is as if we cannot inhabit the world without participating in violations. Twain's wonderful, seemingly effortless prose then records the town clock striking midnight with an ominous 'boom', while 'twelve licks', announcing another insistent circling day, suggests the punitiveness of time. What is it but adventures and relationships that relieves this relentlessness? What else postpones consciousness of the end? 'That was good!', says Huck, as he hears Tom Sawyer's signal. As for, 'there was Tom Sawyer waiting for me' (p. 171), who can doubt the relief and gratification these words express? Readers of *Huckleberry Finn* may feel they must respond to Tom with derision, and Twain himself was so ambivalent towards this centre-

stage artist that even in *Tom Sawyer* he is momentarily struck by 'all the vicious vanity that was in him' (p. 91). Huck, however, remains full of admiration for his friend. In a world where to leave one village on the riverbank is to run into equal problems in another, Tom's games try desperately to enact what games are supposed to provide. They offer pleasure which is forgetfulness of trouble. 'Being Tom Sawyer was easy and comfortable' (p. 338), because in this identity humankind forgets its cares, including people needing immediate material aide. This dilemma is what the human condition involves us in, and like us all Tom is victim of, and contributor to, this condition. While Huck's final separation from him is a necessary criticism of his wilful indulgence in distraction, we can have no confidence that escape into the 'Territory ahead of the rest' (p. 390) will be more fulfilling than the escapades Tom has scripted. We might see the problematic final chapters of *Huckleberry Finn* as sharing the insights of Poe's 'The Fall of the House of Usher' and James's *The Portrait of a Lady*. In all three works the New World imagination presents the enervation of Old World structures, while having a dependency on them. It is as if there might, after all, be nothing beyond Tom's European books, or the European domains of Roderick Usher and Gilbert Osmond. Old World structures, when all is said, have enabled people to live with the endlessness of injustice, with the difference between what we want and what we can get, with the fact that after Jim is free there will always be someone else in equal trouble. That Jim should need to be freed in America demonstrated the New World as not all that new. Like the Old World, it too depended for justice on the very energies that had corrupted it.

The final adventures at the Phelpses' are longer than their worth, but why should we expect them to have anything to do with the realistic freedom-quest of an adult male slave who is also a husband and a father? This version of Jim, never more than intermittent, would not have got involved with the *Walter Scott* in Chapters 12 and 13 so soon after fleeing his owner. Above all, he would never have continued past Cairo to where he knows 'he'd be in the slave country again and no more show for freedom' (p. 234). The history of the composition of *Huckleberry Finn* bears crucially on this issue. As Victor A. Doyno has shown, Twain began writing the book in the summer of 1876, reaching at this time the current Chapters 15–17 when the realistic plot involving Jim, and announced in the first paragraph of Chapter 15, would need to be developed. At this decisive juncture he abandoned the book, not returning to it till 1879 and then ignoring the plot entirely. Later it was further undermined by the insertion of the *Walter*

Scott material into Chapters 12 and 13, though this material was actually written in 1883 along with the escapades at the Phelpses'. As we now have it, therefore, when the intention to 'go way up the Ohio amongst the free States' (p. 229) duly comes along, it merely signals the possibility of one kind of *Huckleberry Finn* even as the book is already becoming another. This latter *Huckleberry Finn* is inclusive of the realistic plot but not determined by it, because there is no authorial conviction that life in an overall sense can ever improve. Consequently, the raft drifts in the current of a river mightier than human designs towards an ocean still mightier, a natural end (like death itself) in relation to which all other ends may be as contrived as Tom's games.

Even from the beginning there is a manifest degree of contrivance in the way the book's material is displayed. When Huck is kidnapped by pap, for example, it is unbelievable that he never 'got a chance to run off' (p. 185). He and pap cannot be together every minute of the day, and the mighty river of opportunity always beckons the resourceful Huck. The novel, however, needs to arrange an extended engagement with pap, because the question of how to stay free and on the run from civilisation without becoming a pap is central to its themes. Because Huck shares pap's powerful distaste for society's restraints and shaping forces, and because pap is his only known parent, answers cannot be other than complicated and incomplete. In the very funny account of pap's adventures with the new judge (pp. 184–5) the balance of the narrator's and the author's support undoubtedly comes down on pap's side, as he abets Twain's habitual pillorying of sentimental gentility. Similarly, the prejudice and paranoia in pap's tale of his encounter with '"a free nigger"' (p. 188) are realised by Twain with a fascination and comic effect beyond easy condemnation, even as pap unwittingly subverts his own position by his own utterance. Pap can be intriguingly self-conscious, as when he becomes a profane version of 'Ollie' from *Laurel and Hardy*, kicking a tub with his toes exposed, indulging in an aria of 'cussing' (p. 189) and then commenting on his cussing skills. His alcoholic frenzies are partially self-induced even to the point of fearful hallucination, suggesting his most compelling life is with his demons, as when he sees Huck as 'the Angel of Death' (p. 190). A father can be as guilty about a son as a son about a father, and which son fleeing a father can be sure he is not fleeing himself? Huck's elaborate faking of his death, when he escapes from pap, indicates the extremity of his desire to be rid of his identity as pap's son, but it also re-enacts the insecurity and self-despair confessed earlier ('I most wished I was dead'), and not entirely provoked by pap. Perhaps a son is most secure in remembering even such a father with the resignation Huck manifests later, when he

participates in Twain's comic accommodation of the character. If not, the murderousness of Colonel Sherburn's killing of Boggs, another version of the unruly pap, may result. Even the new judge finally has violence in mind with regard to pap. Having discovered the impotence of social and legal restraints, 'he said he reckoned a body could reform the ole man with a shot-gun, maybe, but he didn't know no other way' (p. 185). Here, only the joke separates Huck and Twain from Sherburn's kind of violence. Huck, none the less, must remain inextricably involved with pap, as Jim recognises when he withholds from Huck knowledge of pap's death until necessity compels revelation.

Huck's amused remembrance of pap is evident at the beginning of the description of Colonel Grangerford (pp. 247–8). In this figure the elemental forces realised in the major characters in *Huckleberry Finn* are again apparent in 'the blackest kind of eyes, sunk so deep back that they seemed like they was looking out of caverns at you', and in the 'lightening' that can 'flicker out' from these eyes. What keeps these fearsome energies under control is an exacting performance as a gentleman in the daily costume of 'a clean shirt and full suit from head to foot made out of linen so white it hurt your eyes to look at it'. Whatever is in the caverns behind the colonel's eyes finds ultimate release in a fight to the death with a family exactly like his own, a form of self-hatred. No one can remember the first cause of this feud, but even in this respect it is offered as inherent human conflict rather than one we can mockingly feel superior to. It is not as if the participants were uniquely stupid in listening to sermons about brotherly love and then killing one another. Because no amount of religion, wisdom and love has ever eradicated such killing from our dealings with one another, Huck himself cannot escape a representative complicity in it: 'I reckoned I was to blame, somehow' (p. 255). The dead Buck could as well be a dead Huck, just as any of the corpses littering our screens in life's perpetual conflicts could as well be any of us. If only plots as dubious as the conflicts themselves may save us from such a fate, what may save us from the desperation of those at the camp-meeting (pp. 267–9)? Here, in the novel's general population, we meet again the complexity of energies embodied in pap and Colonel Grangerford. Eventually we move into a 'shed', where one of the preachers is reaching the climax of his performance, and we see people so moved by a vision of 'Glory' that they become 'just crazy and wild'. Heights and depths, if they can be distinguished, are sought by the same appetites and passions, as people with the eternal physical and spiritual maladies look for succour and are often, as by the king, taken for a ride. Even our best qualities, such as hospitality, may betray us. The king 'was invited

to stay a week; and everybody wanted him to live in their houses, and said they'd think it was an honour'. These adventures and the subsequent episode when Sherburn kills Boggs (pp. 273–80) express the living plenitude of Twain's imagination. Entering Sherburn's town with Twain's movie-camera, we encounter the 'loafers' and become aware that Twain can give a reality to loafing unacknowledged by the idealising Whitman in the opening lines of 'Song of Myself'. Hogs rest in the deep mud of the streets and, as the riverbank caves in, houses slide into the water. In this barely choate location Sherburn wants to keep up standards, while Boggs, himself desperate in such a place, periodically gets drunk and cuts loose. They are opposites entailing each other, the colonel being a Twain/Huck trying to settle for civilisation, while Boggs recalls the disparaging pap. Sherburn commands the narrative at this stage, because its voice momentarily identifies with him, even as perspectives other than his are also maintained. Some people, for example, are more relaxed about Boggs's rampaging than the apparently humourless Sherburn can ever be. They try to save Boggs by sending for his daughter, revealing themselves not to be as entirely Yahoo-like as Sherburn claims, though they are 'pretty soon . . . squirming and scrounging and pushing' to look at the dead Boggs lying in a store-window with a Bible on his breast. Huck looks too, for who could resist it? Who would not want to watch the shooting replayed, if only to evaluate the actor's performance? One might not join the lynching mob, visualised by Twain (p. 278) as if he were the elder Breughel, but Huck is there if only to see what happens. He hears Sherburn voicing Twain's own contempt for mobs, though the colonel's stance leaves him in a lonely dead-end, even despising an army as a mob. Which cause would he share with his fellows, and what is he left with apart from violent expressions of personal will?

What do all these adventures leave Clemens and Twain with? At best their implied consciousness is some moves ahead of Huck. 'It's lovely to live on a raft' (p. 258), white and black in harmony with each other and nature, but nature cannot be relied on for succour, as is evident when the snake bites Jim (pp. 207–8), during the fog (pp. 229–31) and in the thunderstorm (pp. 204–5), when nature itself is as full of contradiction as is humankind, its energy evoking the terms 'lovely', 'wild', 'glory' and 'sin'. Whatever your refuge, history's disharmonies descend, returning the identities of white boy and black slave you hoped you had shed. They are returned again by the king and the duke (p. 259), the former recalling pap, who like the ghost in *Hamlet* persistently haunts his son. The adventures get Jim nowhere. Never in control of his fate, he is freed because 'Old Miss Watson died two

months ago, and she was ashamed she was ever going to sell him down the river, and *said* so; and she set him free in her will' (p. 387). In the sense of developing to an end different from its beginning the raft-journey has never been a journey. Topographically, therefore, its distinct stages on the river have not been marked out (the first paragraph to Chapter 31 is exceptional), all the villages being different versions of the same village. Whenever Huck himself in crucial reflections about his involvement with Jim (pp. 235–7, 329–31) shows signs of developing towards an enlightened moral consciousness about slavery (the kind of development in the narrator which *must* be replicated in a developing narrative), Twain, who is not writing a developing narrative, aborts this possibility. On the first occasion he abandoned the book for three years only to resume it at the Grangerfords' with the possibility ignored. On its reprise, when Huck decides 'All right then, I'll *go* to hell' (p. 330), the author forsakes the turning point by moving the book into the escapades at the Phelpses'. He has indeed an investment in not allowing Huck to develop the moral sense which might decide slavery is wrong and which might be associated with a journey towards an end. In a notebook entry of August 1895 he described *Huckleberry Finn* as 'a book of mine where a sound heart and a deformed conscience come into collision and conscience suffers defeat'. Adapting these terms we can see that during his crucial reflections on Jim, Huck is 'sound-heart' and 'deformed-conscience' in that his heart cannot be other than sound, nor his conscience other than deformed. He does right, but cannot think right, and is thus the reverse of what is normally human. Our moral sense may allow us to think right, but it cannot guarantee we do right, and Twain's later works, especially 'The Mysterious Stranger', reveal how enraged he was by the frequent impotence, or self-contradictory results, of moral sense. One of the Hucks in *Huckleberry Finn*, therefore, will bypass these complications. Endowed with the incorruptible and intuitive goodness of a sound-heart this Huck, in crises over Jim, will do good despite deformed-conscience. This Huck, moreover, must journey nowhere, because he is never allowed to develop so as to recognise the possibilities of his own virtue. Not that this is a position Twain can rest on. As in all great books, the authorial imagination in *Huckleberry Finn* turns critically on any thesis it advances. With respect to Jim and slavery, therefore, readers may think right, even though Huck cannot. Irony allows them the moral development withheld from the narrator, and in Christian terms they may become convinced that heaven, not hell, awaits Jim's rescuer. Twain is too much of a realist to believe uncritically in the absoluteness of

intuition, even the intuition of the nineteenth century's Romantic child. If Huck's 'doing whichever come handiest at the time' (p. 237) could lead to a life on the raft in harmony with nature, it could equally result in pap's degradation. Worst of all, abandonment of moral sense produces Sherburn's murder of Boggs.

Even Miss Watson's remorse can be seen as a critique both of Huck's incapacity for moral sense with respect to slavery, and also of the book's fundamental disbelief in development. Miss Watson gives Jim freedom; Huck gets him nowhere. She recognises she has been wrong, and in a very minor key hers is the moral development of many of literature's heroines and heroes. Conscience such as hers is what we traditionally rely on for rectification of evil. The presupposition is that the moral sense complicit in evil can, because of conscience, transform itself and remedy evil. In Miss Watson Twain acknowledges this presupposition's contribution to human affairs, but signals his scant faith (and impending cynicism and nihilism which only the comedy restrains) by not having the adventures achieve an end. Equally, he can acknowledge a book which would have taken Huck and Jim 'among the free States'. *Huckleberry Finn* is plural in its sense of possibility, though it sides with the Melville of *Benito Cereno* in seeing slavery as evidence of the human condition's inherent blight. There *are* 'free States'. Slave owners like Miss Watson *can* be converted. Readers of the book, experiencing Huck's contortions of conscience, *have* to be convinced of slavery's preposterousness and enormity. On the raft there *can* be absolute equality. All these possibilities hold true, yet the evil and injustice of the world remain a constant quantity, no matter which instances are remedied. In *Huckleberry Finn* Twain wants to confirm particular possibilities of arrival, while maintaining the sense of a journey without destination through moral and metaphysical conditions which never change.

For Jim the consequences are that he plays a variety of roles, one of which is the fleeing slave also depicted in a number of pre-Civil War anti-slavery narratives. This last identity is obvious, but it should be recognised that there could have been a simpler *Huckleberry Finn* without Jim. There could have been a Jim-less, open-ended book, in which adventures between Huck and Tom are the occasion for the social panorama we get for much of the time. What Jim's presence as fleeing slave demands is an end. In a book without development or destination, Jim's case requires both, and because of it the drift of Twain's fatalistic novel is brought to a self-questioning halt in Chapters 16 and 31, when Huck is forced to consider what his involvement with Jim entails, and when Twain, through ironical subterfuge (even *post-*

Civil War), is forced to address slavery. Even if all human plots are corrupt, Jim needs a plot which might result in his freedom whatever else it might result in. That he is given the dignity and self-respect which are the inherent right of every human being, but which Miss Watson's remorse might not have recognised, is beyond question. The basis of the book's enduring moral case against slavery, they are expressed in what Jim will not take from Huck, in what he believes the equality of friendship entitles him to: 'Dat truck dah is *trash;* en trash is what people is dat puts dirt on de head er dey fren's en makes 'em ashamed' (p. 233). Note here, it is Jim who is the moral arbiter. It is he who is ashamed of Huck. Presumably, he is never given this stature again, at least not in direct dramatisation, because it would make irresistible demands on the drift of the adventures, and this being so many of Twain's other presentations of him are questionable. We may accept that the vitality of his engagement with mystery and the metaphysical in the marvellous inventiveness of his dream (pp. 172–3) and fortune-telling (pp. 181–2) gladden the book. Seen thus, these episodes become a comedy of wonder at human resourcefulness amid dimensions of experience of which Jim is no more a master than is anyone else. They are like the self-delight Shakespeare takes in Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* Not so, however, when Jim is reported to be 'satisfied' at being dressed up in 'King Lear's outfit', painted 'all over a dead solid blue', and advertised as a '*Sick Arab – but harmless when not out of his head*' (p. 287). Here it is impossible to accede to Twain's assumption that no allegiance to a character should get in the way of a joke. Nor can we ever be untroubled by the farce at the Phelpses' which requires Jim and another black man to become subservient simpletons. Great books, none the less, are not written from within the stockade of unblemished moral positions which critics may find it easy to occupy. In Yeats's words from 'The Circus Animals' Desertion' they begin 'In the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart', which for Twain meant particularly his knowledge of complicity in slavery, his inheritance of original sin. Degrees of evasiveness accompanied even the completeness of this knowledge, as they also accompanied the comedy proffering relief. Ralph Ellison authoritatively addresses these tensions in recognising that 'Jim is not simply a slave, he is a symbol of humanity', but also in pronouncing that Jim is 'a white man's inadequate portrayal of a slave' (Ellison, pp. 32, 58).

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