

A WINDOW TO JIM'S HUMANITY: THE DIALECTIC BETWEEN
HUCK AND JIM IN MARK TWAIN'S *ADVENTURES OF*
HUCKLEBERRY FINN

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Abstract

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This thesis examines Mark Twain's use of the dialectic between the characters Huck and Jim to illuminate Jim's humanity in the classic novel *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Over the course of their adventure, Huck learns that Jim is a human being and not property. This realization leads Huck to choose to assist Jim in his escape from captivity, and risk eternal damnation according to his religious beliefs. Huck's decision is driven by the friendship that develops between him and his fellow fugitive on their adventure. Jim's kindness and stewardship also provide a stark contrast to the treachery of the characters on the banks of the river. Twain thus crafts a message that slavery and race discrimination are wrong without taking the tone of an abolitionist, combining an amusing children's story with a profound social message. Although definitive proof of his intention to do so has never been found, human friendship is the sliver of common ground Twain used to reach across the profound racial gap in the United States in the late 19th century. The analysis takes place in four parts: (1) a comparison of *AHF* to other nineteenth century works that featured slavery to establish it as unique among those works; (2) an analysis of the aforementioned dialectic from a modern text of the novel featuring previous deleted parts from the early manuscript; (3) a review of the critical response to the novel which reveals that if Twain was trying to send a message of racial equality, he was not doing so overtly; and (4) a conclusion in which I posit that Twain

found a creative solution to a social problem and cite critical discourse that notes Twain's course of action. This yielded a work that was both more widely read and timeless than a work that confronted slavery directly. Chapters one, three and four utilize critical dialogue and history from print and digital sources.

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Introduction:

A Window to Jim's Humanity: The Dialectic Between Huck and Jim in Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

In 1884, the United States was a nation under repair. As the country struggled to limit the damage done by the Civil War, its people had little time to worry about the state of those who had supposedly been freed by the war. Reconstruction had been attempted and abandoned, and there appeared to be little concern for the worsening plight of blacks during the post-war period. Into this environment Mark Twain launched *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, a book that at first glance, appeared to be just a story about a runaway slave and a young boy going on a grand Tom Sawyer-style adventure in the middle of the nineteenth century. The book seemed to be as reviled as it was loved by critics, with those who disapproved criticizing the book's appeal to social misfits, and those who approved saying that it was a great adventure story with great characters. A few early reviewers mentioned "a moral" in the story, but provided no real investigation of that contention.

Then, in 1910, shortly after Twain's death, black writer and activist Booker T. Washington wrote a tribute to the late writer. In it he described how Twain had captured the personality of black folks (through the actions and words of the character Jim, the runaway slave) in such a way as to be sympathetic to the cause of the abolitionists who sought freedom for blacks before the war. Later, around the middle of the twentieth century, critics like T.S. Eliot investigated Washington's position and agreed that *AHF* provided better argument against slavery than Harriet Beecher

Stowe's abolitionist watershed *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.¹ The message of racial equality grew in the critical discourse until it was among the many topics regularly discussed.

The purpose of this study is to investigate Mark Twain's use of a dialectic between Huck and Jim, the two main characters, to illuminate Jim's humanity and eventually overcome the racism in Huck's heart. Ultimately, this would compel Huck to step beyond the legally sanctioned inhumanity of slavery and to accept the equally inhumane antebellum price of his action— to “burn in hell” in chapter thirty-one— for helping Jim. Twain's singular command of “American English dialects” allows him to construct a metaphor for the greater conflict between blacks and whites in the South during Reconstruction, suggesting that Huck and Jim are the same (fugitives from their former existences in search of freedom) and that this commonality overwhelms the differences provided by the social atrocity of slavery and its widespread acceptance. Twain disguised this intention by making Huck a lowly, common type that almost any of his readers would know— a wily, tough thirteen-year-old street urchin— and Jim, a kind-hearted, wise, courageous family man who looks out for his young companion. In doing so, Twain tricks readers into empathy for both sides by giving each side qualities that register with the readers, even though they might not consciously agree. Even if readers did not oppose slavery, they would understand Huck's will to protect his friend, having had such friends themselves. This forthrightness of character, along with behavior that can only be called chivalrous on the part of both Huck and Jim, endeared them to nearly anyone who read the book.

¹ Ed. Sculley Bradley. *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: An Authoritative Text Backgrounds and Sources*. 1883. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1961) p. 330.

Readers knew these characters and related to them, even though Huck was white trash, and Jim was the ultimate fugitive, a runaway slave.

Twain employed the “dual stage” nature of a retrospective narrative, and gained an extra step (Huck lives the scenes and then *recalls* them), giving him an added level of control over the content of the narrative. If his message became too overt, he was free to make any changes necessary to “soften” his message of reconciliation. This concern is even reflected in the warning at the beginning of the book, where Twain cautions the reader against finding any deeper message in a simple story. This, however, could have been taken by Twain’s more sophisticated readers to do precisely that, given that they (and their less sophisticated counterparts) were well acquainted with Twain’s advanced understanding of irony.

Examination of the dialectic (in this case, the actual conversations between Huck and Jim, Huck’s recollection of them, and their implications for the plot) is not new. Henry Nash Smith, Daniel G. Hoffman, and the trio of Brooks, Lewis and Warren, among others, have all looked closely at the dialectic between Huck and Jim, but their explorations are on a thematic or structural level. I will explore this same dialectic at the linguistic and semantic level, describing the significance of these observations relevant to Twain’s building of the relationship between the characters. This “deep mining” of the text should reveal new evidence in support of this thesis. For example, I will break down the discussion between Huck and Jim on the topic of King Solomon to reveal its role in enhancing Jim’s image in Huck’s mind. In challenging Solomon’s handling of the proverbial maternal crisis, Jim establishes himself to Huck as a raiser of children and payer of bills; in effect, a king in his own right, pragmatism

rather than legend. Jim speaks from experience and is confident enough to argue his point, even though the point he is opposing is reputed to come from a position of great wisdom. Thus through the dialectic, Jim establishes that he is a confident and competent leader and by necessity, a friend and a father figure to Huck.

We will begin with a discussion of the work of Mark Twain and his peers prior to the release of *AHF* that addresses the topic of slavery. Chapter two will explore the dialectic between the two characters. Chapter three investigates the critical response to *AHF* as proof of Twain's possible intent to send the message that people are the same, regardless of skin color, and that slavery was wrong.

Chapter One: The Unpopular Topic of Slavery in the Work of Mark Twain and His Contemporaries

During the time between 1845 and 1885, many books were written about slavery, mostly by writers in the abolitionist and black press. Some, like *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave* (1845) as the name implies, were descriptions of the lives of their authors (Douglass was a fugitive slave). Others, like J.W. DeForest's *Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Seccession to Loyalty* (1866) were romantic novels that used the Civil War and slavery as a backdrop. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) by abolitionist writer Harriet Beecher Stowe, was a story of long-suffering slaves from a heavily Christian perspective, which asked whites "What would God think of how we treat slaves?" Of all the books written on the decidedly unpopular topic throughout those forty years, only *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* became best-sellers, with *UTC* going on to become the best-selling novel of the nineteenth century.² Although these works all Share the topic of slavery with *AHF*, examination reveals many significant differences between them and Twain's book. For example, *AHF* and Douglass' *Narrative* differ in perspective, with Douglass being a former slave who endured the privation of slavery while Twain was only a witness to it. Another example is *AHF* and Harriet Beecher Stowe's and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Despite the fact that both writers of both books were white, the perspective of the two books is very different. *UTC* argues the polemic of the time, that slavery was wrong from a religious perspective. *AHF* argues

² Frank Luther Mott. Golden Multitudes. (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1947) p. 118.

that religion is one of the social supports of slavery, and is therefore as contemptible as the institution itself.

Works about slavery published in the U.S. between 1845 and 1885

Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave

The most obvious difference between *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* is that of perspective. Frederick Douglass was a former slave born in Tuckahoe, Maryland, around 1820.³ Mark Twain was the son of a lawyer and part-time merchant with a penchant for frontier towns who was born in 1835 in Florida, Missouri.⁴ Douglass lived as a slave until 1838 and then, having gained his freedom, spent the remainder of his life as an anti-slavery activist. Twain moved around with his family, spent some time as a printer's apprentice as a boy, and became a steamboat pilot before the Civil War. The two men therefore had very different perspectives on slavery, despite the fact that their ways of expressing their negative opinions were similar. Regardless of how much disregard for blacks Twain may have witnessed, he never endured it personally. Douglass, on the other hand, personally endured countless acts of cruelty and privation during his time as another man's property. He used his own experiences as a slave to instill revulsion in his readers, while Twain expressed his disagreement with slavery through the unjust treatment of Jim which came from his life-long exposure to slavery and personal aversion to it.

³ In chapter one of *Narrative*, Douglass admits that he has no exact knowledge of his age.

⁴ Geoffrey C. Ward and Dayton Duncan. Mark Twain. (New York: Alfred E. Knopf, 2001) p. 3.

The two authors' treatment of religion provides another contrast. In chapter 11 of the *Narrative*, Douglass cites being owned by a religious master as "the greatest calamity that could befall me," but refuses to indict religion itself. He instead cites the abuse of religion as the culprit and includes it among the dehumanizing effects of slavery upon slaveholders, stating that faith itself was something he had great appreciation for as both a means of survival and even education in some circumstances. Twain essentially leaves religion out of *AHF*, except as a source of guilt for Huck over his assistance to a runaway slave. In chapter 31, Huck overcomes his fear of divine retribution and pledges to help Jim anyway, effectively dismissing Christianity as a viable system of beliefs.

Humor, or the lack thereof, provides a third difference between the two works. Douglass' account is essentially devoid of humor. This is probably because Douglass had little to write about that could be considered funny, and humor would have been inappropriate in this narrative genre. In other words, humor had no place in his memoir about the decidedly serious topic of using human beings as beasts of burden. Twain, on the other hand, used his unique gift for humor generously, producing a fictional work that still inspires belly laughter almost 130 years after its release. Scarcely a page goes by without some attempt at making the reader at least smile or chuckle through the actions of Twain's street-wise protagonist or those he encounters during his adventure.

The final and perhaps most substantial difference between the two works is the way in which each indicts slavery. Both works are indictments of slavery, but their methods of attack are very different. Douglass attacks full-on to the front, using his

account of his experiences as a man treated as livestock. Empathy is inspired in the reader through the exposition of the horrid existence led by many slaves. Douglass attempts to augment whatever knowledge the reader may have by supplying a different view of slavery, that of the slave. Douglass wrote an exposé about what he had experienced and used it as testimony against a great injustice. Twain, on the other hand, employed a more complex strategy than Douglass' method. If Douglass chose direct assault on the front gate, Twain chose to attack more like Odysseus in the Trojan Horse or a modern stealth bomber—bypass considerable defenses and destroy from within, having gained access. By persuading readers to empathize with Huck rather than to simply attack something that was part of recent public memory, Twain sent the message that slavery was bad without sounding like an abolitionist, something that could have had disastrous consequences for a best-selling author twenty years after the Civil War. These difficulties would be somewhat offset by the risk and complexity faced by Douglass as a fugitive slave, but the resulting works are noticeably different. This notion is reinforced by the introductory injunction against finding any ulterior motive in the book, something that some readers of Twain would have taken as an invitation to do exactly that.

Uncle Tom's Cabin, or Life Among the Lowly

Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel outsold *AHF* by selling millions of copies both in the US and Europe. It would eventually become the best-selling novel of the

nineteenth century. In *Golden Multitudes* (1947), Frank Luther Mott estimates the total sales of *UTC* to be in excess of 6.5 million.⁵

Although *UTC* is similar to *AHF* in terms of being a fictional work about slavery and being written by a white author who disapproved of that institution, it differs from *AHF* in meaningful ways. *UTC* functions as an evangelistic work by extolling the virtue and self-sacrifice of the title character. Tom, the benevolent slave, plays a Christ-like role, refusing to retaliate against the institution and later, against those who treat him with great cruelty. Stowe asks, “How would God feel about how Tom is treated?” In the beginning of the book, he is faced with the choice of running away when he learns he will be sold after his master promises not to do so. He chooses to be sold rather than place financial stress on his master or risk retaliation against his family. He bases his pacifism on the belief that no matter what horror he may endure on Earth, he will find peace in Heaven, signifying his belief in Christian sacrifice. Later in the book he meets, saves the life of, and ultimately bonds with Eva, a young white girl, whose father buys Tom to show his gratitude. When Tom is sold to Simon Legree, a brutal master who abuses him, Tom refuses to retaliate and refuses Legree’s orders to punish other slaves, stating his belief about earthly suffering. Legree continues to abuse Tom because he suspects his motives and intends to break his spirit. When Tom refuses to divulge the whereabouts of two other slaves who have just escaped, Legree beats him so severely that Tom dies a few days later. Other slaves, like Eliza, choose to run away rather than be sold, but Tom consistently chooses passive resistance, even though it ultimately leads to his death.

⁵ Mott. p. 118.

Stowe's casting of Tom as Christ-like has two main effects: First, it shows that a black slave can be Christ-like in his refusal to strike back at his tormentors. Next, it gives the reader empathy for Tom, both during the time Tom is alive and suffering, and after his death, as the reader sees that Tom has given his life to protect his fellow slaves.

Twain uses religion in a different, opposing way. In the beginning of *AHF*, when Huck is still in Miss Watson's custody, she tries to tutor him with a Bible. Her telling of Moses being set adrift as a baby to meet his fate leaves Huck unimpressed. He states that the story of "Moses and the bull-rushers" bears no weight in his mind because he takes "no stock in dead people."⁶ As he makes good his escape later in the story, religious support of slavery becomes the only reason he even considers turning in his new friend. In chapter thirty-one, as he contemplates rescuing Jim from his new owners after he was sold by the conman/thief, the King, Huck faces a moral dilemma. He knows Jim is a true friend and he should help, but he has heard since he was a child that anyone who helps a runaway slave will go to Hell. As Huck recalls the times Jim has risked his life to save him, he makes the decision to help Jim, regardless of divine consequence, stating that he would rather go to Hell than let his friend be sold to an unknown fate.⁷

Twain thus does more than establish his position as a secular one; he identifies religion as an obstacle to be overcome in order to achieve his own morality. Huck identifies Christian morality as inferior to his own, and states that going to Hell is better than being the kind of person who would let Jim live the life of a slave after

⁶ *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: the Authoritative Text*. Ed. Fischer and Salamo. (Berkeley: UC Press, 2001) P.2

⁷ *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: the Authoritative Text*. (2001) p. 271

being free and then returned to bondage by the larcenous King. Twain's secular approach is logical in light of the fact that Twain had thirty years to observe the effect—or the lack thereof—that Stowe's evangelical approach had on history. Such observation would give Twain ample reason to believe that people were slow to change, and that *UTC* had little or no real effect on the feelings and actions of whites towards blacks.

Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl

Published originally in 1861, this narrative features a fictional character, Linda Brent, who is generally thought to be based on the author of the work, Harriet Jacobs. Jacobs narrates the story through Brent's voice as she endures sexual peril and harsh treatment at the hands of her master, Dr. Flint. She shows remarkable dedication to her two children by hiding in an attic for seven years in order to stay close to them without being discovered. She also exhibits mental resourcefulness by using a clever mail scheme to convince her master that she is in Boston rather than in the same town as him, during her quest for freedom.

This flight can be seen as similar to Huck's escape in *AHF*, but *Incidents* features a fundamental difference from Twain's book. Jacobs (Brent) was a black woman and a former slave, and as such was socially alien to Twain, a new member of the white gentry of his day. The fact that the two of them were at opposite ends of the social spectrum is exacerbated by the fact that Jacobs was a woman. There is no way Twain could have any understanding of the predation (both social and sexual) endured by Brent. In order to shut Dr. Flint out entirely, she bears two children by

another white man, Mr. Sands. Linda Brent sees this as a more acceptable form of escape than running away. Ultimately, Brent must retreat to an attic above her grandmother's home to avoid detection by the vengeful Dr. Flint. Mr. Sands surreptitiously buys back Brent's children, but she cannot reunite with them without risking detection. She is forced to wait in cramped hiding for seven years before attempting escape in desperation. The story ends with Brent free and hopeful that she will reunite with her children. Feminist critics have hailed *Incidents* as a triumph of the female spirit and hold it forth as a tribute to the power of the love in a woman's heart for her children under circumstances that most could not endure, let alone overcome.

This feminine influence is markedly absent from *AHF*. Twain's female characters are used primarily as background or occasionally as catalysts, but never as heroines like Linda Brent. Women in *AHF* have problems with unruly young boarders, like Huck, or feuding families, like the Sheperdsons and Grangerfords. They never have to deal with anything close to the institutionalized threats faced by Brent as both a slave and a woman. Because *AHF* is a satire and *Incidents* is not, this is hardly surprising. Nonetheless, it separates these two works at a fundamental level. One was written by a former slave trying to shed light on the sexual predation inherent in slavery, and one was written by a privileged, white best-selling author who had respect for blacks and was trying to speak in a subtle way on their behalf.

Our Nig; or, Sketches From the Life of a Free Black in a Two Story White House, North. Showing That Slavery's Shadow Falls even There

This book, originally published in 1859 by Harriet Adams Wilson, was rediscovered in 1983 by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and is regarded as the first work of fiction published in the U.S. by an African American woman. *Our Nig* tells the story of a mulatto girl, Frado, who is not a slave, but is kept in slave-like conditions when she is abandoned by her mother as a child. Frado is subject to cruel treatment at the hands of Mary, the mistress of the household she occupies, even though she lives in a free state. When she is released from servitude as an adult, she endures grinding poverty and is abandoned by two different lovers, one of whom gives her a child, George. Wilson ends the book with a plea to her readers to buy the book and provide her with the funds to find her son, who, in an ironic repeat of the fate suffered by her mother, she had to leave behind when she set out on her publishing venture, financed by money she made as a seamstress.

Our Nig differs from *AHF* in several ways. As a biracial woman, Wilson was a social pariah writing in desperation to make some financial gain in order to find her son. Twain was a well-established white author producing a much-anticipated work for a loyal fan base. Socially, someone as prescient and sympathetic to the plight of blacks as Twain could not have known the dark perspective of someone in Wilson's position.

Perhaps the biggest difference between the two works is the light in which they cast the free North. Both books were narrating events that were thought to have taken place around the 1850s, but whereas *AHF* looks to the free North for salvation, *Our*

Nig shows the North to be a place where servitude still exists and holds considerable sway over the lives of those caught on the wrong side of the color line. Huck and Jim plan their getaway via the Ohio River into free territory where they will live on in freedom and prosperity, and as such, the North is seen as some kind of Promised Land. There is no such dream-like cast over the region in *Our Nig*. Frado's story shows the North to be as unwelcoming to a person of color as the slave-holding South, if not more so.

Clotel; or, The President's Daughter: A Narrative of a Slave in the United States

William Wells Brown published this fictional slave narrative in 1853 featuring a twist; the title character was reputed to be the daughter of U.S. president Thomas Jefferson. Clotel is the daughter of Jefferson's mistress, but this prestige does not save her from being sold into slavery at a young age in Richmond, Virginia, in the middle of the nineteenth century. Clotel endures a life of varied fortunes until she falls in love and has a child, when things take a turn for the worse. She is left alone and returned to slavery from hiding, and although she escapes again, she commits suicide by jumping into the Potomac River to avoid recapture—ironically about a mile from the White House. The story exposes the dichotomy of race boundaries in the South, where only a trace of African blood confers blackness and therefore makes one subject to slavery. Clotel survives for a while passing as a white man, but her suicide reveals her deep hatred of her life as a slave. The book seems to prove that the peculiar institution offers no exceptions, even for those directly related to the founders of the nation.

Clotel differs from *AHF* first in the form of perspective. *Clotel*, like the other female protagonists mentioned, is treated as black and endures all of the attendant inhumanities, despite being mostly white. This is a fundamental difference that Twain could do little about, but it manifests itself in comparison: such hazards as being abandoned with a child to feed or the prospect of suicide being a better option than living, with the exception of Huck's fake suicide, are not present in *AHF*. Also, *Clotel* focuses on the incremental nature of blackness and the blurring of racial boundaries, whereas *AHF* features little such ambiguity. With the exception of the well-groomed, educated "mulatter" (32) whom Pap is offended by in town in chapter six, there is no question about Jim's or any other black character's racial identity. Finally, the story seems to say that systemic racial injustice is inescapable, that even someone with presidential family ties has no hope. Even though the story is set in the pre-war South, *Clotel* might expect some kind of help due to the fact that she is, as Wells states, an heiress to a former U.S. president. But the remarkable disregard for her well-being, shown as she is sold into slavery, implies that there would be little hope for those thousands seeking freedom with lesser connections. *AHF* implies that there is hope for a lucky black man to find freedom as Jim does at the end of Twain's masterpiece. Jim is lucky to find Huck and to have the Christian Miss Watson as a mistress but beyond that, he is just a slave and has no reason to expect favor. He makes it out of slavery, something *Clotel* cannot do. This also contrasts the attitudes of whites is regard to blacks in the 1850s with those thirty years later.

As a group all of these works share a common difference with *AHF*: perspective. All of the previously mentioned works are written from a different position, in terms

of both race and gender. Twain was a member of the dominant class and was also a male, an advantage the other white authors in the group did not possess. The other three authors were black and one was a white female. Despite his empathy for black people, there is no real way Twain could have known anything more than witnessing cruelty inflicted upon slaves. He had no way of directly relating to the subject position of the slave.

Another distinction in *AHF* is that the main character is white and reaches out to a slave. In none of the other works is a good-hearted white given more than a passing emphasis. They are usually featured as those who assist slaves in escape after befriending them. With the exception of Eva St. Clare, there is no evolved friendship like the one that develops between Huck and Jim. If a message were to reach Twain's intended audience, it would have to be contained in the actions of a character reaching from one end of the racial spectrum to the other. This would represent a member of the dominant class both recognizing the rectitude of Jim's quest for freedom, and also taking on great personal risk in his protracted assistance of his friend, the slave.

This points to Twain's methodology. Putting forth such a message could have incurred the wrath of his audience, perhaps ranging from displeasure with the book to personal threats. Twain's use of a retrospective narrative gives Huck some interpretive maneuvering room. Huck first lives the scene with Jim and then remembers and interprets his memory. For example, in chapter thirty-one, Huck remembers all of the things Jim has done to help and protect him, including risking his life more than once, and he concludes that it is better for him to face eternity in

Hell than to abandon such a true friend. This technique is perhaps the most important distinction between *AHF* and the previously mentioned works. An advantage of this tactic is that if the readers are perceptive enough to engage in a little critical thought, they are treated to a story that is both fun to read and profound in its message.

A search of the archives of magazines like *Atlantic Monthly*, *Scribner's* and *The Century* reveals a similar reluctance to discuss slavery in the serial/popular media. There is little or no discussion of slavery or its aftermath during Reconstruction, with all the publications choosing instead a variety of travelogues, special interest stories, war memoirs and sentimental pieces. This positions Twain and Stowe as the two writers of bestselling (in excess of 250,000 copies) works willing to deal with an unpopular topic.

The “Arc of Huck”: Twain’s Progression from Simple Storyteller to Social Crusader

Twain published *The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County* in 1867. By the time he published *AHF*, he had progressed from writing amusing satire to full-on social critique, taking on the racism that still existed in all parts of the country after the Civil War. The progression, however, was not a linear one. Most of Twain’s work did not directly criticize racism at all. *The Gilded Age* (1873) was a study in class conflict, with a focus on the class struggle between Americans of average income and the super-rich of the day. It could be seen as metaphorically applicable to blacks as a population financially oppressed, but no specific reference to blacks, free or enslaved, is made. *The Prince and the Pauper* (1881) could be seen as an

exploration of “the other”; one who is on the other side of a social divide with whom one might have more in common than previously believed. Still, this connection could be only metaphorical, with blacks being excluded by the story’s chronological location (England in the 1500s). Not until *Life on the Mississippi* (1883) does he offer a direct criticism of slavery and the racism that supported it. The publication of *AHF* in 1885 was the apex in terms of Twain’s critique of the concept of blacks as subhuman. The arc is rather steep, with only the brief anti-slavery sentiment in *Life* in position to “ramp up” to the message of equality between blacks and whites. With only one exception, Twain’s early works did not mention blacks more than in passing, but that was soon to change.

In her book *Was Huck Black?: Mark Twain and African American voices* (1993), noted Twain scholar Shelley Fisher-Fishkin describes some key characters in the development of Twain’s feelings towards the African-Americans of his day starting with the first of his publications to focus on a black character. In chapter one Fishkin addresses Twain’s contact with an ex-slave named Mary Ann Cord, who worked as a servant on Quarry Farm, Twain’s summer home in Elmira, New York. She notes Twain’s affection for Cord, quoting him as saying that though she was over sixty years old, she was of “mighty frame and stature...but her eye was undimmed and her strength unabated” (30). He would go on to publish her story, using the alias Aunt Rachel, in the form of a short story for *Atlantic Monthly* in 1874 entitled “A True Story Repeated Word-for-Word As I Heard It.” The piece featured Twain taking the unusual step of recording Cord’s voice in a pronounced African American dialect word for word. Fishkin credits Cord with having an early influence on the style that

Twain would use in the narration of *Huck Finn*. The fact that Twain would use Cord's exact words in a public forum is a strong indicator of the power Twain felt they had. Cord's story, with its tribulations and triumphs, told with her typical cheer, must have affected Twain deeply for him to attempt to bring it to the public in raw form. Fishkin quotes Twain's description of Cord's storytelling style: "Under emotion she had the best gift of strong and simple speech that I have known in any woman except my mother." This reinforces the notion that Twain held his experience with Cord close enough to his heart to affect him well into the future, when he would create what many critics would call his greatest work.

In chapter three, Fishkin details Twain's involvement with a slave from his childhood named Jerry. Jerry used to preach to Twain from atop his master's woodpile. Twain would spend hours listening to Jerry postulate in the old southern style of "signifying." Though this style of speech, with its subtlety and innuendo, was common among black preachers at the time, this was probably Twain's first exposure to it. Fishkin details Twain's attention to Jerry's orations and cites Twain's esteem for him: "To me he was a wonder. I believed he was the greatest orator in the United States and that he would someday be heard from."⁸ Twain published some of Jerry's orations in his essay "Cornpone Opinions" and credits Jerry with a deep influence on him. Of Jerry's effect, Twain wrote, "I can never forget it. It was deeply impressed on me... the black philosopher's idea was that man was not independent, and cannot afford views that will interfere with his bread and butter. If he would prosper, he must train with the majority" (54). In calling Jerry a "philosopher," Twain adds great

⁸ Shelly Fisher Fishkin. Was Huck Black? Mark Twain and African American Voices. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) p. 54.

intellectual respect to the affection he obviously felt for his childhood friend. Again, we see a deep personal connection between Twain and a black person he has known and respected, and that Fishkin contends influenced his life and work.

In chapter five, Fishkin notes Twain's admiration for a servant named John Lewis. She describes how Lewis saved the lives of Twain's sister-in-law, her child and her nurse by risking his own to stop a runaway horse from going over a cliff at Quarry Farm. She quotes Herbert A. Wisbey as saying that Twain "never forgot the incident" (86) and goes on to say that while the incident was never publicized, it was soon known by the whole city of Elmira, New York, where it happened. Lewis is widely regarded by scholars as the inspiration for *Huck Finn's* Jim. Twain admired Lewis's strength, altruism, and courage. This incident lends credibility to the notion that Lewis could have been used as inspiration for Jim, who risks *his* life more than once to help Huck. It seems logical that Twain might have drawn upon the experience as an example of one of Jim's "superhuman" qualities, which are the basis for Huck's regard for Jim.

Examples of Twain's contact with various blacks throughout his life answer the important question of why Twain would want to help blacks as a group. He had seen firsthand the humanity in them from the time he was a small child. In "A True Story," Twain first focused on a black character and her humanity. This tale confronted slavery, in an indirect manner, suggesting that slaves were humans just like whites, and so it followed logically that slavery was wrong. The effect was an implied confrontation: had Aunt Rachel, the story's heroine, been white, she would not have faced many of the terrible things that happened to her. The implied question to whites

was, “If she’s such a good person, we would never do this to her, so how could we have allowed her to suffer so much?” Twain would eventually move from implied to direct speech in his later works, perhaps because he felt a more direct expression of his feelings was necessary.

Before *Life on the Mississippi*, Twain’s works were not known for their critique of slavery, but in later editions he refers to slavery as “that horror” (332). He had seen the failure of Reconstruction during his research for the book and had witnessed the decline of his beloved steam-boat on the Mississippi. Any hope he might have had for justice for black folks was dashed by the dire situation in which most blacks found themselves, especially in the Jim Crow South. *Life* represents a change in course for Twain as a social critic. He was now on record as speaking out directly against the former institution of slavery.

Twain’s next book was *AHF*, in which he progressed from calling slavery an abomination to actually showing through the friendship between Huck and Jim that the reason slavery was wrong was that slaves were real human beings who felt everything that whites did. Even though the message was veiled, the length, depth and reach of the work gives it major status as social criticism, and qualifies it as the peak of Twain’s confrontational stance against slavery.

A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court (1889), Twain’s adventure featuring time travel and technology (the closest he ever got to writing science fiction), avoided race entirely. Not even *Pudd’nhead Wilson*, Twain’s 1894 switched-at-birth story, confronts the “peculiar institution” so directly. In *Pudd’nhead*, Roxy, a light-skinned slave, swaps her baby with her master’s. Despite her good intentions,

“Tom” grows into an avaricious and mean character who ultimately murders his benefactor uncle for his money. “Chambers,” the white child, grows up as a humble slave who never hurts anyone unjustly or without provocation. As such, *Pudd’nhead* is based on the human potential for deception and avarice, regardless of race. This contrasts sharply with *AHF*’s focus on the potential for *good* (Jim’s treatment of Huck and the devotion it inspires), regardless of race. *AHF* thereby presents blacks in a much more positive, hopeful light, and thus presents a more direct confrontation to the institution itself. Twain appears to “take sides” with Jim and the other slaves in *AHF* much more than he does in *Pudd’nhead*. Not only did Twain rise to meet the dearth of literary attention to his topic, but having addressed it, he turned back later to works of a less confrontational nature. This natural confluence is key to the historical importance of *AHF*. It implies that Twain not only advocated a message of racial reconciliation in the face of its historical absence, he then wrote a work that featured no direct challenge to slavery (with *Connecticut Yankee* and its aforementioned avoidance of race) after having done so, perhaps because he felt he had made his point and had chosen to move to another topic.

Chapter Two: The Dialectic Between Huck and Jim

First Contact

Chapter four is the first time Huck and Jim actually converse and their meeting starts their adventure on a congenial note. Huck consults the reputed fortune-telling skill of the black man and his hairball from the stomach of an ox. Huck has heard from Jim that the hairball is omniscient, and goes to him to learn the intent of his father, Pap Finn, the town drunk. After his initial attempt fails, Jim asks Huck for some money and Huck pays him with a slug quarter Jim says can be passed for real. Jim then tells Huck that Pap is guided by two angels, one light and one dark. Pap's intentions are unknown even to himself, and Huck should avoid any contact with him. Jim's next prophecy is one that mirrors Aunt Rachel's words in the afore-mentioned *True Story*: "...You gwyne to have considerable trouble in yo' life, en considerable joy" (21).⁹

All in all, this initial contact between Huck and Jim can be called successful. Huck has received at little cost counsel that proves to be at least partly credible. After he leaves Jim, he finds his warning about Pap's unpredictability to be true when he arrives home and finds Pap waiting for him. Jim has thus established some credibility with Huck, both by indirectly foretelling Pap's appearance and by having the fiscal sense not to be a pushover when dealing with the young, street-wise urchin. Huck has received what he perceived to be a valid warning of a danger he knows to be real, and Jim has a quarter he can spend like it is real, even if it is not. Though both parties can

⁹ Hearn, Michael Patrick. The Annotated Huckleberry Finn. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001) footnote 13, p. 51.

have no way of knowing that their paths will cross again soon, each leaves this first meeting at least satisfied, if not impressed.

Jackson Island

Huck is frightened when he stumbles on Jim's campfire on the Island, thinking it might be someone who could expose his escape scheme, and is relieved to see Jim. Jim thinks Huck is a ghost, having heard that Huck was dead, and is relieved to see him alive. Both thus find themselves in company more congenial than originally thought. There is a comical moment when Jim, thinking he is seeing Huck's ghost, implores him to remember that "uz awluz yo' fren" (51). After asking him if he is hungry, Huck cooks a meal for Jim and explains his plan to escape Pap. Jim pays Huck a true compliment when he says that not even the great Tom Sawyer himself could have thought up a better plan. Jim swears Huck to secrecy, then confesses that he ran away from Miss Watson. Huck then reverently explains several of the signs Jim has seen and the predictions he has made from them.

At the end of their second interaction, the two new companions have already established a few key aspects of their friendship. First, upon meeting for the first time as fugitives, they enjoy a mutual sense of relief: Huck is relieved that Jim is no threat to his escape plan and Jim is relieved that Huck is not a ghost. This provides a positive context in which the two meet up and subsequently plan their adventure. Huck has established concern for Jim's well-being through his concern for Jim's malnutrition since his escape and his solemn oath not to talk to anyone about their meeting on the island. These are by no means typical responses on the part of any

white male of the time, due to the strict penalties for anything that could be considered abetting a runaway slave. Jim in turn has shown trust in Huck by telling him the truth about his escape. He has also attempted to use his superstitious knowledge to aid their situation by avoiding bad luck (and bad weather) and has complimented Huck's intellect with his observation about the quality of his plan. Finally, he has established himself as mentally competent. He is smart enough to recognize that Huck is has been able to manage a clean getaway, and that they now share a common motive. Jim is running from his perception that the relatively safe and comfortable life he had with Miss Watson is about to change to the deadly drudgery of southern plantation life. Huck is running from what could be called the "slavery" (lack of freedom, forced subservience and constant, lethal threat) of his life with Pap.

In the next episode, Huck and Jim's friendship begins to develop after they settle in a cave on a ridge that is the highest point on the island. They move in and cook dinner just as it starts to rain. As they eat, Huck feels content and safe and says to his companion, "Jim, this is nice.... I wouldn't want to be nowhere but here. Pass me along another hunk of Fish and some hot cornbread" (60). Jim responds by saying:

"Well, you wouldn't a ben here, 'f it hadn't a ben for Jim. You'd a ben down dah in de woods widout any dinner, and getting mos drowned, to, dat you would, honey. Chickens knows when it's gwyne to rain, en so do de birds, chile." (60)

He refers to the fact that he predicted the rain earlier and that fact that Huck had argued against camping in the cave citing the long climb to access it. With this comment he takes credit for where they are and the fact that they are dry and

comfortable. Huck does not disagree. He is beginning to see that Jim is both wise and trustworthy.

Soon, the relationship between Huck and Jim becomes more paternal. After two weeks, they see a house floating down the river and investigate. As they enter the structure Huck notices someone lying in a distant corner and calls out. When there is no reply, Jim theorizes that the person is dead and climbs into the house to confirm their grisly find. He does, and warns Huck against looking at the corpse, saying that it is “too gashly” (61). Unbeknownst to both Huck and the reader, the body is that of Pap, Huck’s brutal father. Jim thus protects Huck from the trauma of seeing the corpse. They plunder the house of all they see as valuable and return to the island.

In chapter nine, we see Jim begin to assert himself when he knows he is right. His prediction of rain and his resulting insistence that they camp in the cave to avoid the weather are show prudence and he knows it. He shows his grasp of cause and effect and later shifts his concern for Huck to a more custodial one when they discover the corpse in the floating house. His use of the word “gashly” or ghastly in describing the scene indicates that he thinks Huck is too young to view the body and would be better off not seeing it. It is only at the end of the story that readers learn that the body is that of Pap, who appears to have been shot during a robbery attempt. Jim’s decision is reinforced in this new light and qualifies him as someone who is truly looking out for Huck and seeking to keep him from harm. This behavior is common to one who has children or is around children they care about, and it is the first time Jim’s concerns shift from friendly to paternal in nature. It also pre-figures the Jim’s assumption of fatherly responsibilities now that fate has removed Pap from

the story. The fact that Jim has children is revealed later in the story, but the important, immediate fact is that he is using his parenting skills to watch over Huck. After only a day together, Jim has gained enough trust in Huck to tell him his secret and felt enough affection for him to attempt to protect his young friend. His willingness to assert himself to Huck is another sign of his level of comfort around the boy, doubtless garnered through his previous acquaintance with him. They are at the very least equals in Jim's eyes, and probably in Huck's eyes as well.

In the next episode, we see that although Huck is beginning to respect Jim, he is still skeptical about his superstition. As Huck and Jim go through the loot they found on the floating house and find among other things, eight dollars in silver. Huck is pleased with the haul and announces to Jim:

“Now you think it's bad luck; but what did you say when I fetched in the snakeskin that I found on top of the ridge day before yesterday? You said it was the worst bad luck in the world to touch a snakeskin with my hands. Well, here's your bad luck! We've raked in all this truck and eight dollars besides. I wish we would have some bad luck like this every day, Jim.” (62)

Huck insinuates both that Jim's superstition is silly and that his actions may have actually brought them good fortune. Jim responds, “Never you mind, honey, never you mind. Don't you get too peart. Mind I tell you, it's a-comin”(62). Huck then narrates that Jim's prediction comes true. Huck plants a dead snake in Jim's bed to play a joke on him, but the snake's mate comes to its body and bites Jim when he goes to bed. Huck rightly blames himself, and after Jim suffers for four days, swears never to touch another snakeskin.

Huck's restlessness then leads to an opportunity to for him both acknowledge Jim's cleverness and to show that he is willing to protect him. As the next few days go by, Huck becomes bored and suggests that he go into town that night for some reconnaissance. Jim agrees at first, but then suggests that Huck "...dress up like a girl" (66). Huck agrees, and they find a dress and bonnet among their booty, hike up Huck's trouser legs, and assemble his girl-outfit for his trip to town. Through his practice and Jim's counsel, Huck is ready for his mission. He leaves just after dark and arrives outside of town as the chapter ends.

Chapter ten finds Huck in awe of Jim's apparent clairvoyance: he vows to amend his behavior forever. Jim has both been proven correct in his prediction of bad luck and has also paid a very high price for it personally. The guilt Huck feels is deserved, but he is spared Jim's reaction to his practical joke gone wrong by simply not telling him about the prank. Jim thus credits the snakebite to bad luck rather than a boy's short-sighted prank and despite the guilt Huck feels for effectively lying to his friend, he happily accepts the forgiveness. The two are acting more and more like partners. Huck's going to town in a dress is the best way to get the information they need with what they have on hand, and the idea was Jim's. Huck recognizes the wisdom of the plan and agrees to take the riskier job of going ashore. Huck's initial attempts at operating in drag are awkward, and with Jim's help, the ruse is improved. By the time Huck leaves that evening, they have a plan that is mutual in its creation. Jim has also begun to refer to Huck as "honey," and most of Huck's narrative features him using the pronoun "we," referring to everything that happens when he is with his friend. This supports the notion of a growing affection between the two, with Jim's feelings

leaning more toward a paternal nature and Huck's leaning towards those he would have for a close friend.

Huck is not, however, without his disagreements with Jim. His dismissal of Jim's evaluation of the superstitious harm done by his handling of the snakeskin in this chapter is the second time Huck has flatly disagreed with his counterpart. In chapter eight, Jim tells Huck that bees "...won't sting idiots" (55) and Huck disagrees. Although it reflects something of a lack of self-esteem on the part of the young protagonist, it nonetheless suggests that Huck will not follow Jim blindly or when his own experience compels him to disagree.

Once ashore, Huck learns from a woman that both Pap and Jim are suspects in his murder and that she has seen their fire on Jackson's Island, and thinks that Jim might be hiding there. She also tells Huck of a \$300 reward on Jim's head and explains how she told her husband of her suspicion, and how he and another man are in preparation to investigate. Huck carefully avoids leaving any tracks as he hurries back to the island. When he arrives, he cries the only line of dialogue between him and Jim in chapter eleven: "Git up and hump yourself, Jim! There ain't a minute to lose, they're after us!" (75). Jim responds without a word, working urgently to pack up and leave. They launch the raft and head downriver without saying a word, making good their escape.

Although the amount of actual dialogue is quite small, the entire chapter itself is a reaction on the part of Huck to the information he gathers while ashore. The thought of collecting the reward never crosses Huck's mind. His only concern is to return to the island, alert Jim, and make a hasty getaway. His treatment of Jim could be

compared to the way he would have treated one of his cohorts while he was in Tom Sawyer's gang.

The Wreck

The next event gives Huck yet another reason to respect Jim's cautious approach to their adventure. Five nights below St. Louis in a heavy storm they find the wreck of a steamboat stuck on a rock. Huck immediately wants to board her, but Jim is against the idea, citing the fact that making time down the river is more important than adventure or loot. Huck disagrees, citing the weather and the fact that Tom Sawyer would never pass on such an opportunity. Jim begrudgingly gives in, warns that they must be quiet, and they approach the wreck. Jim's concerns are again proven to be valid shortly after boarding. They have blundered into a criminal enterprise gone wrong, and Jim immediately heads back to the raft. Huck foolishly decides that because Tom Sawyer would never run from such a situation, he also must not if he wants to retain his adventurer's honor. He ends up trapped in a stateroom by the two crooks as they discuss whether or not to kill their errant cohort. They decide to leave him on the wreck and move back to where he is restrained, and Huck barely escapes and beats a hasty retreat back to where Jim and the raft are, only to learn from a terrified Jim that the raft has broken loose and they are trapped.

Huck and Jim escape the thieves on the wreck by stealing their skiff and heading downriver as quietly as they can. Huck decides to go ashore and tell someone there who can help about the thieves on the wreck and let them be discovered and face justice. In doing so, he sees himself as helping minister justice to the miscreants who

would have surely killed him and Jim had they known they stole their skiff. They find the raft and Huck sets out for the shore. Shortly after he spins an elaborate yarn to convince a man on the shore that there are several prominent locals on the wreck who need rescue, he sees the wreck floating down the river in very poor condition. He concludes that no one could have survived. Earlier in his narrative he had concluded that he was right to try to help the thieves on the wreck, but he shows no real remorse when confronted with evidence of their demise. Huck sees them as victims of their own morality, and deserving of their fate, having shown their murderous tendencies through a plan to kill a member of their gang on the wreck and escape with the loot they had stolen. Moreover, the embarrassing scare from the close call on the wreck provided him with ample reason to forget the episode. He returns to the raft and he and Jim put ashore on an island, hide the raft and sleep, as Huck recalls, “like dead people” (92).

The episode in these two chapters aboard the wreck of the *Sir Walter Scott* does much to establish Jim’s judgment as superior to Huck’s. Had they done Jim’s bidding and simply continued down the river, the entire episode would have been avoided. Jim knows the loot is not worth their freedom, and that escape is serious business. His focus remains on getting to their destination safely and attaining freedom for himself. Huck is still thinking like a boy in Tom’s Sawyer’s gang, focusing on adventure, treasure and issues of self-esteem. Huck’s actions reveal him as one who has far less to lose than Jim and also reveal his friend as the one who should be in charge if they both are planning on reaching their destination. After all, his choice to go aboard the

wreck was based on his thirst for adventure, not on making good his escape, and it nearly cost him his life.

The Debate

Huck brags to Jim about his close call aboard the wreck. Jim responds by saying he does not need any more of this kind of “adventure” (93). Jim tells Huck when he saw that the raft had left the wreck, he assumed that the journey had ended for him. He was sure that he would be, as Huck refers to it, “sold south” (93) to hard plantation labor. Huck agrees with Jim’s assessment and acknowledges that “he was right; he was most always right; he had an uncommon level head, for a nigger”(93). This is the first time that Huck acknowledges Jim’s wisdom, albeit in a backhanded way, and it foreshadows the growing affection Huck has for his friend in the coming chapters.

Among the booty they recover from the wreck are some books, and as Huck reads to Jim about the lives of royalty, he is astonished at Huck’s elaborations about their wealth and power. Jim’s amazement turns to skepticism, however, when the account shifts to talk of the King’s harem:

“...A harem’s a bo’dnhouse, I reckon. Mos’ likely dey has rackety times in the nussery. En I reckon de wives quarrel considerable; en ‘dat ‘crease de racket. Tie dey say Sollermun de’ wises’ man dat ever live. I daon take no stock in dat. Bekase why: would a wise man want to live in de mids’ er such blimblammin’ all de time? No—‘deed he wouldn’t” (94).

Huck tells Jim that Solomon is indeed the wisest man ever to live, on the authority of the widow’s testimony. Jim dissents again, referencing the fable in which Solomon

threatens to cut a baby in half to determine its mother. He disputes Solomon's logic, offering instead that the king should have treated the child like lost money and sought its rightful parent instead of risking ending up with, as Jim puts it, "half a chile" (95). Jim uses his money analogy again to question the validity of bisection, saying that there is little use for either half a bill or half a child. Huck tries to interject that the point of the fable is not that Solomon chose to threaten to cut the child in half, but Jim is adamant that Solomon lacks common sense, saying that a man who would act as Solomon did "doan' know enough to come in out'n de rain" (95). Jim then states that the fact that Solomon had so many wives, and subsequently children, was the cause of his casual attitude towards the safety of the child. He tells Huck that a man with only one or two children would be much more careful about their physical well-being, calling on his own personal experience as a loving father with only one wife. Huck marvels at Jim's stubbornness and decides to change the subject.

When the topic ranges to human language, however, Huck and Jim find themselves at odds again. Jim cannot understand why people speak different languages. Huck tries to explain by using the analogy of animals, citing the fact that cows do not speak the same language as cats, that creatures of a kind naturally speak the same language. Jim sees through his false analogy, however, by positing that if a Frenchman is a man, why does he not speak the same language as other men? As the chapter ends, Huck again admits the futility of arguing with his stubborn colleague: "...you can't learn a nigger to argue, so I quit" (98).

Jim establishes three things during this argument with Huck. First, as they discuss Solomon, he establishes that he is the one of the two speaking from personal

experience as a father. Although the emotion he feels for his own children heavily colors his opinion, he argues with enough vigor to overwhelm Huck's logical assertion that the Solomon fable was not actually about cutting a child in half. Jim's position comes from the day-to-day life of having and providing for children. Huck never gets to an explanation of the fable. Considering his comments at the end of the chapter about Jim's stubbornness, he could have avoided challenging Jim's fatherly authority out of simple civility. This implies that Huck sees Jim as a friend he accepts, foibles and all. Secondly, Jim is willing to challenge accepted wisdom on the basis of personal experience that ran contrary to it. This is reinforced by Jim's affection for his own children, but the center of this assertion is based on experience. This also foreshadows the challenge of convention that Huck must face later in chapter thirty-one, when he weighs helping his friend against enduring the social ridicule of helping a runaway slave. Finally, Jim shows that he is better at arguing than Huck. His easy deconstruction of Huck's bad language analogy proves that he has the skills to hash out an issue and argue from a solid position, like one based on first-hand experience. He also establishes that despite the fact that Huck has more formal education, he is capable of using his own lesser knowledge of facts to greater effect when confronting someone with whom he disagrees. Jim may know fewer facts, but his experience and the wisdom gained from it, allow him to assert himself with conviction and ultimately win the argument.

No More Jokes

In chapter fifteen Huck learns that Jim has become a true friend, and that lying to his him is a bad idea. It is essentially a narrative of the separation that occurs when Huck attempts to secure the raft on a new island called a towhead. Huck goes ahead in the canoe in a dense fog and soon he and the raft are separated. Fatigued by his efforts to find Jim, Huck lies down in the canoe and falls asleep. He awakens several hours later and locates the raft in a wide section of the river. As he gets closer, he notices evidence that Jim has had even more trouble on the river than he. Jim is asleep and draped over the steering oar. Huck comes aboard and sees that that Jim has not yet awakened and decides to play another joke on Jim. He nudges him and he wakes up, overjoyed to see his young friend safe. He cries out:

“Goodness gracious, is dat you, Huck? En you ain’ dead—you ain’ drowned—you’s back agin? It’s too good for true, honey, it’s too good for true. Lemme look at you, chile, lemme feel you. No, you ain’ dead! You’s back agin, live en soun’ jis’de same ole Huck, thanks to goodness!”(103).

Jim is overjoyed to see that Huck has survived, but Huck insists that he has never left the raft and jovially asks Jim if he has been drinking. Jim quizzes him on the details of their separation. Huck denies ever having left the raft and says it was all a dream. Jim finally accepts Huck’s insistence that it was a dream and tells him his side of the separation, his not wanting to live if Huck was dead.

He then gives Huck his interpretation of the things he faced as he drifted down the river searching for Huck. When Huck points to the debris on the raft and asks Jim what *it* stands for, Jim sees through the ruse:

"What do dey stan' for? I'se gwyne to tell you. When I 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 agin, all safe en soun', de tears come, en I could a got down on my knees en kiss yo' foot, I's so thankful. En all you wuz thinkin' 'bout wuz how you could make a fool uv ole Jim wid a lie. 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" (105).

Jim's indictment of Huck is simple and to the point. First, he criticizes Huck's lack of respect for his feelings at the thought that Huck was lost to the river. Then he characterizes Huck's actions as equivalent to those committed by *trash*. This places Huck (or anyone who does what Huck did) in the lowest possible social position—even below that of a slave. Jim implies that because he has belittled the love of a friend, he has sunk as far as one can sink in terms of personal character. Jim is right and Huck knows it. The next words in his narrative reflect the depth of his shame: "Then he got up slow and walked to the wigwam, and went in there without saying anything but that. But that was enough. It made me feel so mean I could almost kissed *his* foot to get him to take it back" (105). Perhaps more important were Huck's actions. The next passage describes not only efforts to reconcile with Jim at that moment, but to amend his behavior in the future: "It was fifteen minutes before I could work myself up to go and humble myself to a nigger; but I done it, and I warn't ever sorry for it afterwards, neither. I didn't do him no more mean tricks, and I wouldn't done that one if I'd a knowed it would make him feel that way" (105). Jim thus compels Huck's redemption by inspiring guilt in him for the betrayal of Jim's genuine affection.

Huck reveals himself to be a product of his poor, white, mid-nineteenth century environment. However, the friendship he is beginning to see in Jim inspires him to rebel against this conditioning and embrace Jim as a human being, for the simple reason that Huck has witnessed Jim act in ways only a friend—a good friend—would. This triumph of first-hand experience over distant dogma is the first of several that will guide Huck as the adventure continues, but it is significant in that it is the first time Huck acknowledges something crucially human about Jim—his ability to *care*.

Cairo Goes By

Huck and Jim set out after dark the next night behind a huge raft that has just passed. They discuss finding Cairo, the point where they will head north to freedom, and Huck recommends that he go ashore in the canoe with a cover story to find out where they are. But the two discuss the situation and agree that Huck should sneak aboard the bigger raft and listen for the desired information. Huck credits Jim with the idea, saying: “Jim had a wonderful level head, for a nigger; he could most always start a good plan when you needed one” (107). Huck again uses the phrase “for a nigger” while praising Jim, indicating that even while he is learning of Jim’s true value as a friend, he is not yet ready to drop that qualification.

When Huck returns from his trip to the big raft, he tells Jim that he has no information about Cairo, so his runaway friend begins to stand watch for the town and talk steadily about freedom. As he listens, for the first time the weight of the situation settles on Huck. He realizes that he is at least partially responsible for the fact that Miss Watson has lost a slave worth a large sum of money. He sees that she is

a victim in this situation and feels intense guilt. To make matters worse, Jim tells Huck of his plan to steal his children and free them as well, adding to the financial damage done by his own escape. His guilt gets the better of him and he resolves to go ashore and divulge Jim's presence at the next opportunity.

When Jim spots a light he thinks is Cairo, Huck volunteers to go ashore. As he leaves the raft, Jim rejoices in what he thinks is imminent freedom and further inflames Huck's guilt by saying,

"Pooty soon I'll be a-shout'n' for joy, en I'll say, it's all on accounts o' Huck; I's a free man, en I couldn't ever ben free ef it hadn' ben for Huck; Huck done it. Jim won't ever forgit you, Huck; you's de bes' fren' Jim's ever had; en you's de *only* fren' ole Jim's got now" (125).

Jim inadvertently augments Huck's guilt by singling him out as the only white person who ever kept a promise to him.

Huck is then given an opportunity to show his loyalty to his friend. A skiff with two men aboard comes along, looking for runaway slaves. Huck scares the men in the skiff by insinuating that his family on the raft has smallpox, and they give him forty dollars, tell him to head downstream and leave. Huck is again guilt-ridden when he returns to the raft. He blames his failure to "do right" (127) on his upbringing and concludes that he was bound to cave in and continue on his wayward path. But then he considers how he would feel if he had given Jim up and realizes that choice would have made him feel no better. He decides that doing the right thing is more "troublesome" than doing the wrong thing and that since the outcome of either appeared to be the same (in this case, feeling bad), he would simply to do whatever was most expedient at the time. When he gets back to the raft, he finds that Jim has

anticipated trouble and hidden in the water. Jim tells him that he heard the whole thing: he praises him for his crafty “dodge” (128) and credits Huck with his salvation from certain capture.

As they split the forty dollars the men gave Huck, Jim says that they can now afford passage to anywhere they want to go in the free states and wishes they were there already. Huck begins to suspect that they have passed Cairo in the fog, and fears what they might encounter as they drift deeper into the dangers of slave territory. When he voices this suspicion to Jim, Jim dismisses it: "Doan' le's talk about it, Huck. Po' niggers can't have no luck. I awluz 'spected dat rattlesnake-skin warn't done wid its work" (129), blaming their misfortune on Huck's earlier superstitious infraction. Huck confesses that he wishes he had never seen the snakeskin that brought them so much bad luck; Jim replies that Huck is not to blame. When the morning comes, Huck notices clear water on the east bank of the river, a sure sign that they have passed the confluence of the Mississippi and Ohio rivers and their turning point to head north to freedom. They decide to work back upstream in the canoe and “take the chances” (129).

The adventure then takes potentially deadly turn that leads to the first real separation of Huck and Jim. Back on the river, they notice a steamboat coming upstream towards them though the gloom of the night. Instead of veering off at the last moment, as Huck expects, the steamboat plows directly into the raft! Huck and Jim are thrown off opposite sides and separated. After diving deep to avoid the raft, Huck resurfaces and calls for Jim to no avail. He makes his way ashore and comes

upon an old log house and is cornered by dogs as the chapter ends. The two were almost killed and now must survive as they try to relocate each other.

Chapter sixteen gives us many new developments as well as reinforcements of existing patterns in the dialectic between Huck and Jim. First, Huck defers again to Jim's wisdom in choosing to go aboard the big raft instead of going ashore, per his belief in Jim's "level head." Then after he returns, he feels intense guilt over his involvement in Jim's escape for the first time. He then resolves to turn Jim in to assuage his guilt, another first. Later he refuses to reveal Jim's whereabouts to authority for the second time, this time with the use of a clever lie. Next, he gives up the idea of turning Jim in completely and adopts a more flexible philosophy relevant to traditional virtue after confronting the dubious justice of giving up his friend to two slave hunters. Jim has also revealed a new trait—his deep capacity for forgiveness. He forgives Huck for what they both believe is the root cause of most of their misfortune. This ready exoneration of Huck's perceived misdeed is consistent with Jim's previous pattern of paternal affection and concern for the well-being of his young partner. Now the two fugitives must endure a new peril, their first extended separation. Huck is trapped in front of a strange house and Jim is nowhere to be found, still lost in the river.

The Feud

Huck's separation from Jim begins at least somewhat congenial terms. On shore, he is taken in by the Grangerford family, who owns land and many slaves. The family is locked in a blood feud another family, the Sheperdsons, and several men and even

some boys in both families have been killed. When he asks Buck (about his age) why, Buck explains the feud and asks him if there are no feuds where he grew up. Buck explains that the feud has been going on as long as anyone can remember and is questioned by no one. After a church service on Sunday, his personal slave takes him to a small, densely overgrown island in the swamp and tells him to enter the thicket and leaves. The mystery is resolved when Huck finds Jim inside! Huck details the fact that Jim was happy to see him but not surprised by his appearance: "He nearly cried, he was so glad, but he warn't surprised" (149). This surprising fact is explained when Jim tells Huck about what happened after they were struck by the steamboat on the raft:

"I got hurt a little, en couldn't swim fas', so I wuz a considable ways behine you towards de las'; when you landed I reck'ned I could ketch up wid you on de lan' 'dout havin' to shout at you, but when I see dat house I begin to go slow. I 'uz off too fur to hear what dey say to you - I wuz 'fraid o' de dogs; but when it 'uz all quiet agin I knowed you's in de house, so I struck out for de woods to wait for day. Early in de mawnin' some er de niggers come along, gwyne to de fields, en dey tuk me en showed me dis place, whah de dogs can't track me on accounts o' de water, en dey brings me truck to eat every night, en tells me how you's a-gitt'n along" (150).

Huck is thus shown that Jim has dealt with the situation pretty well, given the fact he is a fugitive. He has also learned that Jim endured considerable peril in order to ensure the safety of both of them by staying out of sight until he could communicate with the Grangerfords' slaves. He then gives Huck some good news; the raft is not only found, but it is in good repair and fully stocked, again thanks to Jim and his dealings with the slaves. He sets about buying new supplies and bribing two of the slaves to ensure their silence. The raft is ready to go and their secret is safe, thanks to

Jim. This example of the bond between Huck and Jim trumping any solidarity with the slaves illustrates the depth of Jim's feelings for Huck. He disregards any solidarity he may have for his fellow slaves in favor of helping his young white friend.

The next day Huck learns firsthand how brutal a feud can be. He wakes up and learns that Buck and another Grangerford are fighting with several Sheperdsons on horseback. As Huck watches, they are shot dead. Huck stays hidden until dark and pulls the bodies out of the river, covers their faces, and heads for the swamp to find Jim. Not surprisingly, he is happy to see Huck alive and Huck advises him to "shove off for the big water as fast as you ever can" (154). They make good their escape and resettle aboard the raft, eating and talking. Huck makes clear his relief at being back aboard with Jim by saying, "Other places do seem so cramped up and smothery, but a raft don't. You feel mighty free and easy and comfortable on a raft" (155).

Huck's comment sheds light on how he must feel departing on the raft. Compared to the brutal contradictions Huck has observed at the Grangerford's, Jim's company on the raft is indeed congenial. Despite his initial approval of his accommodations at the Grangerfords', he soon learns he is in the presence of a social convention run amok, and is happy to be reunited with his friend. It was Jim, after all, who engineered their escape from that friendly but brutal place. Huck had done well enough through the sharpness of his wits and good luck with the Sheperdsons, but he would still be there in the care of a defeated house (Buck notes that several of the remaining Grangerfords had been killed in the latest round of gunfire) were it not for Jim's resourcefulness. Jim did whatever was necessary, including threatening the

other slaves with disclosure, to keep their mission alive, and ultimately came through for both himself and his young friend/charge. Both characters left the company of their own respective races to be with members of “the other,” which provides yet another testimonial to their deepening friendship. Huck describes his relief at being underway and fed a hot meal on what is now the new residence he and Jim have established:

“I never felt easy till the raft was two mile below there and out in the middle of the Mississippi. Then we hung up our signal lantern, and judged that we was free and safe once more. I hadn't had a bite to eat since yesterday, so Jim he got out some corn-dodgers and buttermilk, and pork and cabbage and greens -- there ain't nothing in the world so good when it's cooked right -- and whilst I eat my supper we talked and had a good time. I was powerful glad to get away from the feuds, and so was Jim to get away from the swamp. We said there warn't no home like a raft, after all” (155).

The King and the Duke

Huck and Jim enjoy drifting down the river at night and camping on islands during the day until they make their next fateful encounter. One morning, as Huck is hunting for berries, he encounters two carpetbaggers on the shore in full flight from unseen pursuers and agrees to help them. The two claim to descend from royalty and introduce themselves as the King and the Duke. Huck is suspicious of the two but says nothing to Jim, hoping to smooth things over by playing along.

The King and the Duke take Huck ashore to try a bogus Shakespeare ruse on the locals. As they wait, they witness the murder of the town drunk (named Boggs) by a

prominent local man (named Sherburn) whom the drunk had called out for a showdown. The townspeople decide that the shooter should meet mob justice. The crowd swarms to the house of the shooter, who stares them down and frightens them all away singlehandedly, illustrating a cowardice that provides another contrast with Jim's behavior. The Shakespeare show draws only twelve people. The King and the Duke decide to revise their handbill for the next night, adding a line prohibiting women and children, a tactic they are sure will increase attendance. The next night, the show is sold out, but some in the audience, knowing they have been deceived, convince the rest to come back the next night instead of confronting the King and the Duke on the spot. They come back the next night, but the King and Huck leave early and escape back to the raft. Later that night while the King and the Duke sleep, Jim tells Huck that he knows the two are liars, but Huck encourages him to keep playing along, insisting that the King and Duke are no more fraudulent than real royalty anyway.

Huck goes to sleep and when he wakes he realizes that Jim has taken a share of his watch again. He finds his friend sitting with bowed head remembering the family he left behind. Huck relates to Jim's loneliness and makes an observation:

He was thinking about his wife and his children, away up yonder, and he was low and homesick; because he hadn't ever been away from home before in his life; and I do believe he cared just as much for his people as white folks does for their'n. It don't seem natural, but I reckon it's so. He was often moaning and mourning that way nights, when he judged I was asleep, and saying, "Po' little 'Lizabeth! po' little Johnny! it's mighty hard; I spec' I ain't ever gwyne to see you no mo', no mo'!" He was a mighty good nigger, Jim was (201).

Huck's phrasing of the last sentence indicates a pivot-point in his growing regard for Jim. Gone is the qualification "for a nigger," replaced by the statement "He was a mighty good nigger." The latter phrase is much closer to "He was a mighty good *man*, Jim was." This indicates that Huck is well on his way to viewing Jim as a human being.

Eventually they begin talking and Jim tells Huck how he once struck his youngest daughter because she appeared to be ignoring an order he gave her. He was unaware that she had gone deaf during a bout with scarlet fever, but when he subsequently made a loud sound to which she did not respond, it all came to him with terrible clarity:

Oh. Huck, I bust out a-cryin' en grab her up in my arms, en say, 'Oh, de po' little thing! De Lord God Amighty fogive po' ole Jim, kaze he never gwyne to fogive hisself as long as he live!' Oh, she was plumb deaf en dumb, huck, plumb deaf en dumb— en I'd been a-treat'n her so!" (202).

In chapters nineteen through twenty-three, we see that Huck and Jim are tolerant to a point. They have been accommodating, but Jim knows something is amiss and Huck's conscience is beginning to bother him. Huck sees that what he thought to be harmless and maybe even a little entertaining is becoming harder to tolerate all the time and he feels great guilt at misleading his friend. The King and the Duke provide a strong contrast to the unselfish behavior of Jim, and Huck knows he should not be deceiving the one man in their situation that truly cares about him. Huck also makes what could be the most important discovery of the novel; he realizes that Jim's feelings are as intense and therefore as valid as his own. In the story about his

daughter, Jim shows he can feel great pain at being a human being with a family that he loves dearly, going through what all families go through. For the first time, he begins to see Jim not just as a friend, fellow adventurer, and “mighty good nigger,” but as a human being with intelligence and deeply felt emotions just like his own. His statement that “It don't seem natural, but I reckon it's so” (201) reflects Huck’s awareness of a contradiction in something he has heard all his life. He makes the choice to trust what he sees and feels over what he thinks he believes; he has come a long way since standing next to Jim in the dark with Tom Sawyer, planning how they would play a trick on him.

The Wilkses

Huck and Jim soon see the true depth of the greed of their companions. On the way down the river to the next town, the King and the Duke learn of the death of a local man who has left money for two relatives who are arriving from England. The two thieves plan to pose as the two English relatives and steal the family’s inheritance. They go ashore and charm the family, the Wilkses, with a display of fraudulent grief that makes Huck feel sick. Even when a local challenges them as frauds, their charm holds the family in sway. They steal the family’s money and plan on liquidating their estate, including separating the family’s slaves. Huck, who cannot stand to watch them destroy the family, steals the money back and places it in the dead man’s coffin.

Huck and Jim must then face their second separation, made worse this time by the fact that any reunion may be impossible. When the Wilkses’ real relatives show

up, the resulting confusion causes the locals to exhume the body to determine who the real relatives are. When the coffin is opened, the money is revealed and Huck escapes in the confusion. He reaches the raft and he and Jim shove off, but are caught soon after by the King and the Duke, who have also escaped. The King is so angry he assaults Huck and even threatens his life. He soon gets drunk with the Duke and they both fall asleep. Huck and Jim agree that they will abandon the two at the very next opportunity. When Huck regains the raft he finds that Jim is gone and learns from a local boy that the King has sold him to a local family, the Phelps. Huck and Jim were correct to suspect their motives; now they have been betrayed, and it is too late to save Jim.

Huck goes back to the raft to think things over. He gives himself a headache trying to figure out a way to remedy the situation, but cannot. For him and Jim to have come this far and wind up as prey for two buffoons is hard for him to reconcile. He feels added insult because his friend, who was valued enough to previously command hundreds of dollars, is sold for the pittance of only forty. Huck considers writing a letter to Tom Sawyer with instructions to tell Miss Watson where Jim is, but abandons the idea when he realizes that it will not stop Jim's re-enslavement. The social repercussions for Huck himself would be unbearable. The more he thinks, the more guilt he feels about freeing Miss Watson's property until he begins to see his situation as punishment for the wickedness he showed in helping Jim. He thinks of the times he has heard that anyone who helps a runaway slave is Hell-bound. Finally, he tries to pray but cannot, unable to square his actions with God:

I knowed very well why they wouldn't come. It was because my heart warn't right; it was because I warn't square; it was because I was playing double. I was letting *on* to give up sin, but away inside of me I was holding on to the biggest one of all. I was trying to make my mouth *say* I would do the right thing and the clean thing, and go and write to that nigger's owner and tell where he was; but deep down in me I knowed it was a lie, and He knowed it. You can't pray a lie -- I found that out (269).

He decides to write the letter to see if that will allow him to pray, and is elated when it gives him the feeling of redemption. But as he reflects on the whole adventure, his thoughts turn back to his friend and all they have been through together. He remembers Jim's kindness, paternal stewardship of his physical safety, and the friendship that grew as they made their way down the river. He recalls Jim's gratitude for the time he was able to keep him from being captured. He finds himself unable to "harden" (270) himself against his friend enough to turn him in. He sees the choice as simple: keep helping Jim and go to Hell, or turn Jim in and get back in line for Heaven. He takes a deep breath and announces his decision: "All right then, I'll go to hell" (271) and shreds the letter. He decides to never think "no more about reforming" and that he would "take up wickedness again" because it was in his "line," blaming Pap for his perceived wrongdoing. Finally, he resolves to steal Jim out of slavery and do worse, if need be, because "as long as I was in, and in for good, I might as well go for the whole hog" (271). Huck allows his loyalty to his friend to overcome a lifetime of social and religious dogma.

Huck is now faced with a task that involves considerable difficulty and peril. He thinks up a plan and camps on a nearby island. When he gets to the village, he is surprised to find the Duke putting up handbills for another performance and acting as

though nothing is wrong. Huck fools the Duke by crying when tells him Jim has been sold. He takes the bad information because he already knows where Jim is and pretends to head out into the country, only to turn back towards the Phelps farm, where Jim is being held. Huck can now work his plan for freeing Jim without interference from the King and the Duke if he can find Jim and make sure no one knows of the two thieves' intentions until they are gone from the area.

Although Jim is barely mentioned in chapters twenty-four through thirty-one, his behavior shows a notable contrast in behavior between him, the King and the Duke and even the townspeople they have stolen from along the way. The King and the Duke have progressed from bumbling carpetbaggers to truly merciless predators before Huck's eyes, while Jim has remained consistently smart, resourceful, honest, brave, and concerned for Huck's wellbeing. The Grangerfords showed hospitality, but had also shown a capacity for lethal, brutal hatred that they themselves did not truly understand. Jim harbored no hatred, despite his status as a slave. The mob who confronted Sherburn after he killed Boggs, were shown as having little courage as they were scared away by Sherburn alone. Some of those same people became the victims and perpetrators of the ersatz creation of the King and the Duke. Jim saw through the King and the Duke almost as soon as Huck did, and while he remained polite and compliant in deference to the advantage the King and the Duke held, he made his feelings known to Huck at the first opportunity. However, this favorable comparison between Jim and almost everyone else the two meet is not entirely what drives Huck's decision.

Ultimately, it is the affection Huck feels for his friend that allows him to break the rules so resoundingly. Twain asks readers if they would do the same thing if they were in the same situation. Huck faces what could easily be called the worst fate possible and will not change his mind because it would likely mean that his friend would end up far from home, miserable and mistreated for the rest of his days. During the time they have spent together, Huck has learned that Jim is not property. He is as human as any white person. Therefore ill treatment of him is as unjust as any malfeasance committed by the King and the Duke, the Grangerfords and Sheperdsons, or even the murderous Sherburn. Through their adventures, they have become true friends, and Huck is not about to stand idly by while his friend is victimized by a system he sees as unjust. Twain appealed to the good side of human nature in general, not just those who thought racial equality was a good idea. The result is a perspective and a subsequent decision based not on societal rules, but on human observation and emotion.

Huck's action is the climax of the novel. In the last eleven chapters, the story takes on a decidedly less serious tone, like an extended *denouement* in which Huck's old friend Tom Sawyer appears unexpectedly and helps Huck free Jim, with all the attendant chaos one might expect.

As Luck Would Have It...

When Huck arrives at the Phelps farm, he soon learns that his arrival coincides with that of Tom Sawyer himself. Huck is understandably relieved at his incredible luck, but worries that the real Tom will arrive and give him away, so he sets out to

intercept him. Tom agrees to help steal Jim out of slavery so quickly that Huck is bewildered and wonders why Tom would engage in such a serious crime when he had never before taken such a risk. This larceny is not consistent with his previous values. Huck then suggests a simple and effective plan, but Tom dismisses it, saying that the rescue must follow the example of adventure novels he has read. He then devises a plan that is overdone to absurdity, featuring, among many other things, Jim writing a journal in blood on a shirt and sharing his cell with rats and snakes. The two proceed with Tom's plan, stealing things and causing comical chaos in the Phelps household. When the big escape takes place, Tom is accidently shot. Jim behaves heroically by refusing to leave Tom alone until he gets medical attention. The next day, it is revealed that Jim has been free since Miss Watson's death. This is unexpected, to say the least, but offers an explanation of Tom's earlier willingness to help with the escape of a slave; it was not real, so the risk was nonexistent. This allowed Tom to approach the situation with the cavalier attitude he displayed in his previous adventures. Jim is hailed for his heroism, and Tom gives him forty dollars for his cooperation in the artificial escape.

Twain's reasons for the change of course in the last eleven chapters are unclear. Perhaps he was trying to lessen risk of featuring Huck as the new main character by bringing in an established one to add appeal. *AHF* was initially intended to be a sequel to *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, and Twain might have thought his addition to the story would add thematic continuity, in effect "hedging" his bet that Huck on his own would appeal to readers. Perhaps Twain was trying to use Tom as a kind of time capsule to illustrate the personal growth that Huck had experienced; Huck had

come a long way since his days with the Tom Sawyer gang, especially in his ability to empathize with the plight of another person with whom he felt he previously had little in common. His growth from Tom's second in command to the much more practical and sympathetic survivor is brought into bright focus as he tries to follow his friend like in "the old days," but still completes the difficult and dangerous task of freeing Jim. Twain chose to let the love in the heart of a thirteen-year-old boy for his friend be the bearer of the message that people are all equal regardless of skin color instead of a more direct course of confrontation, like making Jim the hero of the story rather than Huck. This course of action can be taken as a sign that Twain was trying to disguise his message.

The notion of stealth is also supported by Twain's liberal use of the word "nigger." Huck uses the word dozens of times when describing Jim and other slaves— although when he uses it in reference to Jim, it is always part of a favorable description, e.g., "he had an uncommon level head for a nigger" (93). This has been held up as proof that Twain was a racist, but it could be another attempt to "soften" the message. By using the word often, Huck identified himself as a product of a racist culture, like most of the people in the country at the time. It could also be seen as a kind of bargaining chip used by Twain to persuade suspicious readers that he was not trying to convince them of anything they did not want to believe. By peppering the text with the word, the author could muddy up the issue enough to soothe such readers who would rather read a funny story about a boy's adventure than an appeal for racial equality in post-Reconstruction era America. In the end, Twain succeeded in writing

both, although concrete evidence establishing his intent to do so has never been found.

Chapter Three: Critical Response to *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

The critical response to *AHF* can be taken as proof that Twain's stealthy strategy worked. Early responses featured scant recognition of any message of racial equality. These early reviews tended to be of two basic types: those that disapproved of the "coarse" language of the characters and the frequency with which they lied and stole, and those that hailed it as a comedy featuring great characters and an engaging plot. It was not until the middle of the twentieth century that critics began to write at length about the racial message of *AHF*. This message has taken its place among the many topics vigorously discussed in the broad critical dialogue about the book. However, the lack of any real response on the part of scholars and critics for over sixty years suggests that at least around the time of the book's publication, the strategy to hide a moral imperative in a "boy's book" worked.

Many early reviewers panned the book outright. One review, "Mark Twain's Bad Boy," from the *New York World*, March, 1885, typifies the disdain of those reviewers who considered *AHF* unworthy of attention because of the decidedly rustic and ridiculous nature of its protagonist and characters:

Huckleberry Finn is the story (told by himself) of a wretchedly low, vulgar, sneaking and lying Southern country boy of forty years ago. He runs away from a drunken father in the company of a runaway negro. They are joined by a couple of rascally imposters, and the Munchausenlike “adventures” that fill the work are encountered during a raft voyage down the Mississippi. The humor of the work, if it can be called such, depends almost wholly on the scrapes into which the quartet are led by the rascality of the imposters. Huck’s lying, the negro’s superstition and fear and the irrelevance which makes parents, guardians and people who are at all good and proper ridiculous. That such stuff should even be considered humor is more than a pity¹⁰.

This excerpt captures the tone of the entire review. The reviewer holds not only the story, its characters, their adventures and its author in contempt, but all those who might actually find the book funny as well. Any mention of Jim by name is also absent, indicating a racist frame of reference in the reviewer. This disdain extends to the very premise on which the story was written, and its tone is common among early reviews. None of these acknowledges of Twain’s message of racial equality.

Other reviewers resorted to sarcasm, suggesting that Twain would have to resort to illegal means to secure sales of his new novel. The following is from a review entitled “Huckleberry Finn” from the *Boston Evening Traveller*, March 1885:

Mark Twain will probably have to resort to law to compel some to sell it by any sort of robbery or corruption. It is doubtful if the edition could be disposed to people of average intellect at anything less than the point of a bayonet... Mr. Clemens has contributed some excellent literature that is excellent and will hold its place, but *Huckleberry Finn* appears to be singularly flat, stale and unprofitable.¹¹

The reviewer rips the book and then qualifies the criticism by saying that Twain has produced great work in the past, but not this time. We see another good example of

¹⁰ Louis J. Budd, ed. *Mark Twain: The Contemporary Reviews*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999) p. 265.

¹¹ Budd. p. 267.

intellectual condescension, but nothing to indicate the reviewer noticed a message of equality among human beings.

The notion that *AHF* was too lowly for public consumption reached a kind of peak when the Public Library in Concord, Massachusetts, banned it. An article in the *Boston Evening Transcript* from March of 1885, entitled “The Concord Libraries [sic] Banning of Huckleberry Finn,” details how the public library committee found the book to be the “veriest trash” and “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.”¹² This controversy represents perhaps the greatest outcry ever raised against a work produced by Mark Twain. A group of people took it upon themselves to actually attempt to block public access to the work. Yet despite its intensity, we see another indictment of the social station of the characters, not the reconciliatory content of the book. This response could also be indicative of the fear people felt at the time of a message of racial equality.

Others reviewers enjoyed the book and reflected that fact in their writing. The *Athenaeum* featured an unsigned review that rejoiced in the fact that Twain’s writing had returned to a more humorous vein after his attempts at “serious” literature in the forms of *The Prince and the Pauper* and *Life on the Mississippi*. The reviewer praises the richness of the characters and their dialects and then offers the following summary and endorsement:

¹² Laurie Chapman, ed. The Critical Response to Mark Twain’s Huckleberry Finn. (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991) p.13.

Huckleberry, it may be noted, is stolen by his disreputable father, to escape from whom he contrives an appearance of a robbery and murder in the paternal hut, goes off in a canoe, watches from afar the townsfolk hunting for his dead body, and encounters a runaway negro—Miss Watson's Jim – an old particular friend of Tom Sawyer and himself. With Jim he goes down the river, and is the hero of such scrapes and experiences as to make your mouth water (if you have ever been a boy) to read them. We do not purpose to tell of a single one; it would be unfair to author and reader alike. We shall content ourselves with repeating that the book is Mark Twain at his best, and remarking that Jim and Huckleberry are real creations and the worthy peers of the illustrious Tom Sawyer himself.¹³

The review reads like a grocery list of wild adventures. The author so enjoyed the book that he refuses to give away any of the story, afraid to ruin what he believes to be a wonderful surprise. If anything, the review celebrates the lack of any serious message, racial or otherwise, having lamented the same in Twain's previous, more serious works penned after *Tom Sawyer*.

Another example of a positive review can be found in the *San Francisco Chronicle* from March 1885. The reviewer starts by echoing the sentiment expressed by the author of the aforementioned review—mainly that Twain has returned to a more humorous style of story and character, much to the benefit of the reader. He then goes on to compare Twain to a great inventor of the time, and his work to a classic of the literary canon:

¹³ Frederick Anderson, ed. *Mark Twain: The Critical Heritage*. New York: Barnes and Noble Inc. (1971) p. 120-121. William Earnest Hensley is listed as a possible author.

Mark Twain may be called the Edison of our literature. There is no limit to his inventive genius, and the best proof of its range and originality is found in this book, in which the reader's interest is strongly enlisted in the fortunes of two boys and a runaway negro that he follows their adventures with keen curiosity, although his common sense tells him that the incidents are as absurd and fantastic in many ways as the *Arabian Nights*. Here is where the genius and human nature of the author come in. Nothing else can explain such a *tour de force* as this, in which the most unlikely materials are transmuted into a work of literary art.¹⁴

Here the reviewer focuses on the very thing that drew the derision of so many critics—the lowly social station of the characters in the story—but hails Twain's ability to use these crude raw materials to produce a richly rewarding work of art. High artistic praise indeed, but not a recognition of a specific racial message.

A third example can be found in the *British Quarterly Review*, proving European critics capable of understanding Twain's sense of humor, even if it is a little bawdy:

But Mr. Mark Twain, if he is sometimes a little coarse, sometimes a little irreverent, and inclined to poke fun at the Old Testament, is decidedly humorist, and it must be admitted that in this volume he is full of spirit and wit and drollery. Huckleberry Finn's adventures are told with a prevailing dryness and sense of reality that does much to offset offenses against taste.¹⁵

The reviewer qualifies the vulgarity with its effectiveness, stating that because the humor works well, there is no offense in choosing an unsavory subject. The reviewer also gives Twain credit for writing a piece of humorous fiction, but not for promoting racial equality.

There is a third category of review: those that *do* recognize Twain's stealthy technique, albeit in a somewhat vague way. An example can be found in the *Atlanta*

¹⁴ Budd. p. 270-271. George Hamilton Fitch is listed as a possible author.

¹⁵ Budd. p. 275.

Constitution from May 1885. The reviewer, Joel Chandler Harris, takes aim at the hypocrisy of a class of people in America who are financially secure enough to consider themselves able to look down their noses at a work they do not really understand— while remaining decidedly rustic and somewhat backwards— and may not even know why the actions against the book were taken. He then takes on those critics who accuse the book of being coarse, saying that they are missing the genius of the work:

The American leisure class... is not only fond of horses, but is decidedly horsey. It is coarse and uncultivated... The critics seem to have gotten their clue in this instance from the action of the Concord library, the directors of which refused the book a place on their shelves. This action, as was afterwards explained, was based on the fact that the book was a work of fiction, and not because of the humorous characteristics that are popularly supposed to be attached the writings of Mr. Clemens. But the critics had got their cue before the explanation was made, and they straightway proceeded to inform the public that the book was gratuitously coarse, its humor was unnecessarily broad, and its purpose cruel and un-artistic.

Now nothing could be more misleading as such criticism as this. It is difficult to believe that the critics who have condemned the book as coarse, vulgar and inartistic can have read it... It presents an almost artistically perfect picture of life and characters in the southwest, and it will be equally valuable to the historian and the student of sociology. Its humor, which is genuine and never failing, is relieved by little pathetic touches here and there that vouch for its literary value.¹⁶

Harris actually deconstructs the reason for some of the negative reaction to *AHF* as a hasty reaction to a misunderstanding. He concludes the review with a telling comment (emphasis added): "... and the moral of the book, *though it is not scrawled across every page*, teaches the necessity of manliness and self-sacrifice" (280). The "manliness" Harris refers to may be Huck's chivalrous intervention when the King

¹⁶ Budd. p. 279-280.

and the Duke try to steal the Phelps fortune, but the “self-sacrifice” reference is unlikely to be anything other than Huck’s epiphany in chapter thirty-one, where he commits to going to Hell rather than allowing his friend to be sold into slavery. The italicized passage indicates that the author sees Twain’s use of a technique that could be called secretive. Even Harris’s method of briefly hinting (one sentence) at the process without specifically describing it could be called stealthy.

A second example of a review that recognizes Twain’s intent can be found in *Century Magazine* from May 1885. The reviewer, Thomas Sergeant Perry, compares the book favorably with *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, citing that the first-person narrative gives the readers a clear window into the depth of Huck’s courage and inventiveness. He praises the humor of the novel, and then like Harris, devotes a few lines to describing how Huck’s actions belie his lowly social standing: “Another admirable instance is to be seen in Huckleberry Finn’s mixed feelings about rescuing Jim, the negro, from slavery. His perverted views about the un-holiness of his actions are most instructive and amusing.”¹⁷ Perry, like Harris, makes a brief but unmistakable reference to Twain’s hidden purpose. His use of the words “instructive” and “amusing” qualify the didactic nature of Twain’s intent while at the same time giving it a shine that places it with the other more directly humorous parts of the novel. Perry thus softens the “instructive” part by placing it alongside the “amusing” part. Once again, the reference is somewhat qualified, but unmistakable to a perceptive reader.

¹⁷ Frederick Anderson, ed. Mark Twain: The Critical Heritage. (New York: Barnes and Noble Inc., 1971) p. 130.

A third reference appears in a review from the *Hartford Courant* from February of 1885. The reviewer praises the depth and authenticity of the characters, going so far as to say that the book contains episodes that are without peer among the literature of the time. He then notes the complex situation in which Huck finds himself and makes the following observation:

Most amusing is the struggle Huck has with his conscience in regard to slavery. His conscience tells him, the way it has been instructed, that to help the runaway, nigger Jim to escape--to aid in stealing the property of Miss Watson, who has never injured him, is an enormous offense that will no doubt carry him to the bad place; but his affection for Jim finally induces him to violate his conscience and risk eternal punishment in helping Jim to escape. The whole study of Huck's moral nature is as serious as it is amusing, his confusion of wrong as right and his abnormal mendacity, traceable to his training from infancy, is a singular contribution to the investigation of human nature.¹⁸

The reviewer places Huck at the center of a paradox in which he, the lowly urchin, is the one who helps Jim in his dire need, proving that he is a morally vital being. He credits the work for being more than just a funny story, stating that Twain's book transcends the simple tale of a trip on a raft. Then, as if to reassure the reader, he states that the conflicts have no effect on the tone of the story, and that they will find as much (or more) fun in *AHF* as they would reading any of Twain's popular stories. Again, we see a qualification of Twain's technique after its recognition—as if to calm any reader who might balk at a moral message in a humorous adventure story.

Franklin B. Sanborn also recognizes what Twain was trying to do in his *Springfield Republican* review of April, 1885. Sanborn writes more about the hidden

¹⁸ Review, The *Hartford Courant*, 2/20, 1885, p. 2 “The Critical Reception: Contemporary Newspaper, Magazine Reviews” 19 March, 2007 < <http://e-text.lib.virginia.edu/twain/twapubint.html>>. This review was recommended in Budd's book.

meaning of the book than anyone of his time, devoting most of the review to exposition of the hidden moral. He begins by disagreeing with the Concord School Board's decision to ban the book and goes on to say that while the book may not be right for younger readers, it is more than just a funny story:

I cannot subscribe to the extreme censure passed on this volume, which is no coarser than Mark Twain's books usually are, while it has a vein of deep morality beneath its exterior of falsehood and vice, that will redeem it in the eyes of mature persons. It is not adapted to Sunday-school libraries, and perhaps should be unread by growing boys; but the mature in mind may read it, without distinction of age or sex, and without material harm. It is in effect an argument against negro slavery, lynching, whiskey drinking, family feuds, promiscuous shooting, and nearly all of the vices of Missouri in the olden time.¹⁹

He then addresses a specific point in the plot where Huck's dilemma reveals his humanity:

There is hardly anything so true to human nature in the whole realm of casuistry as the young boy's meditations with himself over his duty regarding the runaway slave, Jim, when it first dawns on the boy that he is an accomplice to the escape from slavery (277).

Sanborn then summarizes the episode in chapter sixteen when Huck lies to the slave trackers about smallpox to scare them away, quoting Huck's resolution to do whatever is handiest. He concludes with an appeal to those who understand Twain's intent and a biblical comparison:

Good people must make no mistake about the teaching of this book; for although the author declares that "persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished" and though the Concord library committee have banished the book as immoral, I can see nothing worse in it than in the story of Samson, which contains a great deal of deliberate lying, or the story of Noah, which has a good deal about drinking, rafting, and high water (277).

¹⁹ Budd. p. 276.

Sanborn places *AHF* in the same category as those bible stories that feature human frailty alongside human morality, using a convincing example of how judgment can be passed on a work without full knowledge of items that may exist within the canon of those passing that judgment.

Of the approximately thirty-two reviews surveyed for this study, Sanborn's is the only one to explore the topic so thoroughly. The critiques of Harris and Perry devoted only one or two sentences to the issue, and the *Hartford Courant* review devote three sentences, but Sanborn devotes most of his review to investigating Twain's hidden agenda. I chose the positive and negative reviews because they were more or less representative of their categories. I chose the four examples that acknowledged Twain's subtext because they were the only ones I could find. In any case, the ratio of those who saw the signs versus those who did not is at its greatest one in eight, or 12.5% (including those that merely noticed the issue), and at its least one in sixteen, or 6.25% (including those that elaborated further). It is therefore safe to say that the reviews that recognized Twain's purpose were in the minority. Aside from a brief mention as an "anti slavery tract"²⁰ in an announcement of a new edition, the situation would not change until nearly twenty-five years after the publication of *AHF*.

In 1910, soon after Twain's death, Booker T. Washington wrote a tribute to him in the *North American Review* in which the former slave noted Twain's southern upbringing and temperament and made the following observation about *AHF*:

²⁰ Announcement, *The Nation*, 6/11/1896, p. 454. "The Critical Reception: Contemporary Newspaper, Magazine Reviews" 20 March, 2007 < <http://e-text.lib.virginia.edu/twain/twapubint.html>>.

It is possible that the ordinary reader of this story has been so absorbed in the adventures of the two white boys that he did not think much about the part that “Jim”—which was, as I remember, the name of the colored boy—played in all the adventures. I do not believe that anyone can read the story closely, however, without becoming aware of the deep sympathy of the author in “Jim.” In fact, before one gets through with the book, one cannot fail to observe that in some way or the other the author, without making any comment and without going out of his way, has somehow succeeded in making the reader feel a genuine respect for “Jim,” in spite of the ignorance he displays. I cannot help but feeling that in this character Mark Twain has, perhaps unconsciously, exhibited his sympathy and interest in the masses of the negro people.²¹

Washington not only acknowledges Twain’s stealth “without making any comment and without going out of his way,” but he also points out *how* the author uses it.

Washington notes the deep feelings Huck has for his friend, and that the reader feels the same way. In so doing, he recognizes specifically the way Mark Twain makes the case for the equality of Huck and Jim, and by extension, all human beings.

Washington’s observation advances the discussion of Twain’s stealthy technique by discussing not only what he was doing— pointing out that Jim’s treatment was unjust because he was a human being and not property— but revealing the crucial human connection between that person, the slave with whom most readers could not identify personally, and Huck the person with whom they could. Washington notes how Twain bridges the gap between “us” and “them” in a way to which any human being who has ever had a friend could relate.

It was not until the middle of the twentieth century that the critical dialogue about *AHF* again engaged the topic of a racial message. Lionel Trilling addressed it in “The Greatness of *Huckleberry Finn*” in 1948. Trilling begins by praising the novel’s

²¹ “The Booker T. Washington Papers” Vol. 10: 1909-1911. p. 349 22 April, 2008 < <http://www.historycooperative.org/btw/Vol.10/html/349.html> >.

truthfulness, noting that Huck and Tom lie, but never to themselves, as so many adults do. Then, as he is describing Huck and Jim's relationship, he quotes Huck as he recalls the lie he tells Jim at the end of chapter fifteen after they are separated in the fog. He notes Jim's cold response and Huck's subsequent apology, and makes the following observation:

This incident is the beginning of the moral testing and development which a character so morally sensitive as Huck must inevitably undergo. And it becomes a heroic character when, on the urging of affection, Huck discards the moral code he has always taken for granted and resolves to help Jim escape from slavery. The intensity of his struggle over the act suggests how deeply he is involved in the society which he rejects. The satiric brilliance of the episode lies, of course, in Huck's solving of his problem not by doing "right" but doing "wrong."²²

Trilling then notes Huck's resulting momentous decision in chapter thirty-one after describing the episode in which the young urchin chooses the fires of hell over standing by while his friend is sent back into slavery. He then ends the chapter by noting that the social paranoia after the book's release is indeed ironic given the effect the book will have on thoughtful readers:

We smile at that excessive care, yet in point of fact *Huckleberry Finn* is a subversive book—no one who reads thoughtfully the dialectic of Huck's great moral crisis will ever be wholly able to accept without some question and some irony the assumption of the respectable morality by which he lives, nor will ever again be certain that what he considers the clear dictates of moral reason are not merely the engrained customary beliefs of his time and place.²³

²² *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: An Authoritative Text Backgrounds and Sources*. Ed. Sculley Bradley. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1961) p. 323-324. From the Trilling introduction to the 1948 Rinehart edition of *AHF*.

²³ *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: An Authoritative Text Backgrounds and Sources*. Ed. Sculley Bradley. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1961) p. 324.

Trilling's use of the word "subversive" captures the effect of the book in a social context and is the first such reference to Twain's hidden intent. By separating social conditioning from moral truth, Lionel Trilling identifies both the key conflict of the work (and arguably the nation in which it was published) and its effect upon readers thoughtful enough to find it among the characters, situations, and jokes.

In his introduction to the Rinehart edition of *AHF* released in 1950, renowned poet T.S. Eliot addressed the racial message delivered by the young hero in the context of his ability (and strength, through his identity) to perceive honestly the truth surrounding all those with whom he comes into contact, even to the point of empathizing with some of them, regardless of how dishonest or brutal they may be. He finishes the excerpt by stating plainly that *AHF* is a more effective confrontation of "the peculiar institution" than even the watershed work by Harriet Beecher Stowe:

You cannot say that Huck himself is either a humorist or a misanthrope. He is the impassive observer: he does not interfere, and, as I have said, he does not judge. Many of the episodes that occur on the voyage down the river, after he is joined by the Duke and the King (whose fancies are akin to the kind of fancy that Tom Sawyer enjoys) are in themselves farcical; and if it were not for the presence of Huck as a reporter of them, they would be no more than farce. But, seen through the eyes of Huck, there is a deep human pathos in these scoundrels. On the other hand, the story of the feud between the Grangerfords and the Sheperdsons is a masterpiece in itself: yet Mark Twain could not have written it so, with that economy and restraint, with just the right details and no more, leaving the reader to make his own moral reflections, unless he had been writing in the person of Huck. And the *style* of the book, which is the style of Huck, is what makes it a far more convincing indictment of slavery than the sensationalist propaganda of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Huck is passive and impassive, apparently always the victim of events; and yet, in his acceptance of what the world can do to him and others, he is more powerful than his world, because he is more *aware* than any person in it.²⁴

T.S. Eliot is only the second critic to use words like “against slavery” since the book’s publication over sixty years earlier, the other being a brief mention from a publication in 1906. He recognizes that Huck’s strength lies not only in his developing self-awareness, but in his acute awareness of other people and the world around him; in other words, a morality that transcends his enculturation. Eliot’s comparison of *AHF* and *UTC* is significant. He not only identifies Twain’s message, but qualifies it as “much more convincing” than a book that was not only specifically written to denounce slavery, but would go on to be the best-selling novel of the nineteenth century.²⁵

²⁴ *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*: An Authoritative Text Backgrounds and Sources. Ed. Sculley Bradley. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1961) p. 330.

²⁴ Mott, p.118.

A third example is “Black Magic--and White--in *Huckleberry Finn*,” by Daniel Hoffman, published in 1961. After noting Twain’s humorous “warning” at the beginning of the book, Hoffman comments on the role superstition plays in the story. Then, as he comments on the developing relationship between Jim and Huck, he makes the following observation about Jim scolding Huck for deceiving him after their separation in chapter fifteen:

The speech, so moving in its avowal of dignity, combines Jim’s attempt at magical interpretation (which is fact accurate) with the realism that underlies it, and with his staunch adherence to the code of simple decencies by which good men must live. It is indeed the first major turning-point in the romance. It reinforces the message of the snakeskin: Huck now realizes that he is bound to Jim by ties too strong for mischievous trifling, ties so strong that he must break the strongest mores of the society he was raised in to acknowledge them.²⁶

Hoffman notes the point at which Huck realizes that Jim has the human ability to care, effectively giving him credit for being human. This realization will lead him to his momentous decision in chapter thirty-one. Later in the article, Hoffman observes how Jim reciprocates the life-saving kindness shown by Huck later in the story when he is retrieved by an angry posse of townspeople after the ill-conceived escape from the Phelps farm. Jim’s actions in this scene confirm not only his personal growth, but also his benevolent role in the story:

²⁶ *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*: An Authoritative Text Backgrounds and Sources. Ed. Sculley Bradley. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1961) p. 430

Jim's stature is made manifest at the end of the book when, having suffered such needless discomfitures at Tom's hands, he voluntarily gives himself up in the swamp to help the doctor nurse back to health the boy who plagued him. Then, brought back as he knew he would be—in chains, suffering from the abuse of an angry mob, in momentary danger of a lynching—Jim refuses to recognize Huck in the crowd lest he involve this other, truer friend in his own misfortunes. Jim's loyalty is so great that he is willing to sacrifice his freedom for his young friend's sake. His selflessness is truly noble, a far cry from the chuckle-headedness of the slave who was ridden all over the country by witches when Tom Sawyer lifted his hat.²⁷

Finally, in 1962, noted Twain scholar Henry Nash Smith re-engaged the racial content in *AHF* in "A Sound Heart and a Deformed Conscience." He discusses the main elements of the story and then notes Huck's inner conflict in chapter sixteen, when he meets the slave hunters on the river and tricks them rather than giving Jim up. He then notes Huck's second emotional conflict in chapter thirty-one when he chooses damnation over inaction as his friend is sold into slavery, observing that

the account of Huck's mental struggle in the next two or three pages is the climax of the story. It draws together the theme of flight from bondage and the social satire of the middle section, for Huck is trying to work himself clear of the perverted value system of St. Petersburg. Both adventure story and satire, however, they are now subordinate to an exploration of Huck's psyche which is the ultimate achievement of the book. The issue is identical with that of the first moral crisis, but the later passage is much more intense and richer in implication.²⁸

He then goes deeper into Huck's conflict, breaking down how Twain used his young protagonist to focus its intensity:

²⁷ *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*: An Authoritative Text Backgrounds and Sources. Ed. Sculley Bradley. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1961) p. 431

²⁸ Henry Nash Smith. *Mark Twain: The Development of a Writer*. (Cambridge: The Belknap Press Harvard University Press, 1962) p. 120.

The recognition of complexity in Huck's character enabled Mark Twain to do full justice to the conflict between vernacular values and the dominant culture. By situating in a single consciousness both the perverted moral code of a society based on slavery and the vernacular commitment to freedom and spontaneity, he was able to represent the opposed perspectives as alternate modes of experience for the same character... Huck's conscience is simply the attitudes he has taken over from his environment. What is still sound in him is an impulse from the deepest level of his personality that struggles against the overlay of prejudice and false valuation placed on all the members of the society in the name of religion, morality, law, and refinement.²⁹

Having described Huck's victory over his "deformed conscience," Smith notes the transcendence of Twain's technique and the place to which it has carried parts of his story about the young boy and the runaway slave:

The exploration of Huck's personality carried Mark Twain beyond satire and even beyond his statement of a vernacular protest against the dominant culture into essentially novelistic modes of writing. Some of the passages he composed when he got out beyond his polemic framework challenge comparison with the greatest achievements in the world's fiction.³⁰

These four examples, published between 1948 and 1962, illustrate the increase in discussion of the topic of a racial message in *AHF* in the middle of the twentieth century. Unlike the reviews published at the time of the book's release or early in the twentieth century, these reviews all feature specific references to the message of racial equality. Trilling called it "subversive" in that it worked against the prevailing racism of the time; Eliot not only identified it as an argument against slavery but as an even more effective one than Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; Hoffman commented on the depth of the relationship between the boy and his friend, the runaway slave; Smith identified the conflict within Huck as he struggled to determine what was right and

²⁹ Smith, p.122.

²⁹ Smith, p.123.

wrong while contemplating the horror of Jim being sold back into slavery. The depth of these analyses is another kind of proof that the racial discussion of *AHF* around the middle of the twentieth century had not only increased in frequency, but had evolved in complexity as well.

By the end of the twentieth century, the topic of racial equality had taken its place among the many topics discussed in the critical dialogue about *AHF*. In 1985, on the centennial of the book's publication, Louis J. Budd published a collection of writings called *New Essays on Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. In "Reading *Huckleberry Finn*: The Rhetoric of Performed Ideology" Steven Mailloux discusses the rhetoric and ideologies contained in the book. As he analyzes Huck's relationship to Jim, he makes this observation of the role of readers and the effect the story has on them:

Any ideological coloring has been supplied by the reader, who—as the critical history demonstrates—judges Huck's conscience as racist and his feeling as nonracist and therein naturally "good." Out of this reader-produced distinction emerges the debate's more complex ironies. For Huck's natural "goodness" wins the supposedly ethical debate with an amoral argument, one that silences his public conscience but ignores its appeal to racist ideology. Not only must readers supply the ideological critique, not only must they reject the continued appeal to false authority, they must also realize that "goodness" triumphs by arguing for amorality! This humorous rhetoric works because the reader has become as active in the ideological performance as are Huck's conscience and feelings.³¹

Mailloux recognizes the technique Twain uses to personalize the story for each reader—placing readers in the protagonist's place and asking them what they would do—as I suggested in chapter two. The interesting thing that Mailloux notes is that

³¹ Louis J. Budd ed. *New Essays on Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1985) p. 120-121.

the response to this stimulus was nearly universal, a feeling that Huck's "moral" side wins the argument by being "immoral." This in itself could be taken as proof that if Twain had an ulterior motive in mind (to persuade readers to agree with him that blacks and whites were equal), he achieved it.

In 1995, the Cambridge University Press published its *Companion to Mark Twain*, featuring an essay by Eric Lott called "Mister Clemens and Jim Crow: Twain, Race and Blackface." Lott notes Twain's affection for minstrel shows and investigates the implications of black minstrelsy in his treatment of Jim. He refers both to the costume (a King Lear outfit with a blue face) that Jim wears on the raft in chapter twenty-four to avoid being tied up all day and Huck's statement about Jim being "white inside" in chapter 40. Then he observes,

Convinced of the humanity and identity of American blacks, Twain seems nonetheless haunted by their difference. Hence he returned over and over to the actual practice and literary trope of blackface, which hedges by imagining the Other as black only in exterior, still white inside. A delicate balance must be maintained here. To think of blacks as altogether the same—as all white—threatens white supremacist identity; to think of them as altogether different—as all black—raises the specter of white annihilation and superfluity. As in many societies with subject populations at home and abroad, the Other must be rendered as not quite black, but not yet white. "They" must be a version of "us," caught in a cycle of mimicry (usually construed as "civilizing" or benevolent rule), and yet perennially unable to make the grade. Racist ideologies, even the relatively gentle ones Twain deploys, insert boundaries that ever threaten to evaporate between the kinds of human beings stuck in such a hierarchical relationship.³²

Lott identifies Twain as a product of his environment—in this case, a white man who recognized the sin of slavery, but as a member of the dominant class, was still

³² Forrest G. Robinson, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Mark Twain*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) p. 140.

affected by racism in terms of his actions to address it. This condition was not only present at the time of the publication of *AHF*, but is still present today, evidenced by the frequency with which the term “white guilt” peppers modern critical dialogue about the issue of race.

In *The Singular Mark Twain*, (2003) Fred Kaplan describes Twain’s feeling that whites were responsible for the plight of blacks, and therefore should temper their judgment when a black man runs afoul of the law:

...he was to make definitely clear, in a private letter, his view about the depredations that slavery had wrought. “I must remember, & you must also remember, that on every sin which a colored man commits, the white man must make a considerable discount, because of the colored man’s antecedents. The heirs of slavery cannot with any sort of justice, be required to be as clear & straight & bright as the heirs of ancient freedom. And besides, whenever a colored man commits an unright action, upon his head is the guilt of only about one tenth of it, & upon our heads & mine & the rest of the white race lies fairly & justly the other nine tenths of the guilt.” It was a view even more unpopular in the late nineteenth century than at the start of the twenty-first. He felt himself, though, to be that “just man” whose special empathy with what blackness historically and culturally embodied unstopped his ears and heart. It allowed him in ways different from Harris and Cable, to create a novel about the shared essential humanity between blacks and whites.³³

Kaplan not only describes Twain’s strong feelings about justice for blacks, but also compares *AHF* to the work of Joel Chandler Harris (who wrote *Song of the South*, featuring the character Uncle Remus) and George Washington Cable (who wrote the abolitionist piece “the Freedmen’s Case in Equity”). Twain’s statement is perhaps the strongest evidence that he had seen and understood the brutality of slavery, and that its victims deserved clemency that could only be called extraordinary.

³³ Fred Kaplan. *The Singular Mark Twain*. (New York: Doubleday, 2003) p. 385.

When viewed as a whole, the critical dialogue surrounding *AHF* shows that racial discussion was rare and indirect around the time of its publication. Then, in 1910, Booker T. Washington brought the book's racial message into specific focus, but was not followed by any other critics until almost forty years later, when Trilling, et al. addressed the topic in much greater detail. Finally, in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, the topic was examined in even greater detail as it joined more established topics in the critical discourse. Why was race not discussed earlier? It could be that critics at the time of the book's release were feeling the same weariness with the racial issue that the rest of reconstruction-era America was feeling, and did not wish to speak to preoccupied ears. It could also be that the recognition of that message may have not materialized by more than a few individuals because of a technique used by the author to conceal the message within a readily understandable human context. Either reason gives credibility to the notion that Twain knew his idea was risky, and therefore worthy of precaution in the form of clever concealment.

Chapter Four: Conclusion

It could be that in 1876 when Mark Twain was about to start *AHF*, he found that he had a problem. He had known black people since he was young and felt great affection for them. He had witnessed the way former slaves had been treated during reconstruction and wanted to say something on their behalf, but was aware of the consequences that such a statement could have. He knew that most citizens of both the North and South were too busy trying to put their lives back together after the Civil War to give much consideration to the plight of those who were once enslaved, and that many resented blacks as the cause of the war that caused the deaths of some 600,000 men. To appear to be on the “wrong side” of the issue could be disastrous to someone who made his living gaining the approval and affection of the public. Twain may have had a desire to heal the wounded soul of his country after the Civil War, but he also had a lot to lose. If people believed he was some kind of traitor to his own race, they might not have bought his book, and his reputation as a producer of entertainment could have been damaged beyond repair. It was that simple. Someone as sentient of his own time as Twain would have recognized this and acted accordingly.

There is evidence that he did just that prior to the release of one of his previous works. Fred Kaplan details how Twain edited *Life on the Mississippi* in response to the concerns of publisher James Osgood:

By January 1883, when the book was finally ready to be set in type, Clemens had cut about fifteen thousand words, most of the deletions reflecting Osgood's fear that sentimental Northerners as well as loyal Southerners might find grounds for offense.³⁴

These deletions give credence to the notion that Twain would not have risked his livelihood and his family's security, no matter how strong his affection for blacks was, but they also bring up the question of what *was* removed from the original edition of the book that could have been so offensive.

The answer can be found in later editions of the book in which the deleted material was restored. In the 1984 Penguin Classic edition of *Life on the Mississippi*, a section (which Editor James M. Cox describes in his note on the text as the same deletions as the 1944 Heritage Press edition of *LOM* presented by Willis Wagner) originally intended to be chapter forty-eight, begins with the following two sentences: "I missed one thing in the South—African slavery. That horror is gone, and permanently." Cox then reveals that Twain was indeed concerned about offending those "sentimental Northerners and loyal Southerners" described by Kaplan in the form of an excerpt from the "holograph manuscript" sent by Twain to J. Pierpont Morgan in 1909:

The clearest evidence that some of the material was omitted for fear of offending subscribers to the book appears in a note following page 778 of the Morgan manuscript (page 311 in the present text): "The following pages 779-794, originally constituting chapter XLVIII, were suppressed & never published owing to popular feeling on the negro question." But this note is not in Mark Twain's handwriting.

³⁴ Justin Kaplan *Mr. Clemens and Mark Twain: A Biography*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1966) p. 429.

This constitutes proof that Twain recognized the threat posed by taking a too-strong opinion from the wrong side of an issue that was still a sore spot for large segments of the population, and was willing to act to minimize it. It therefore stands to reason that Twain had good cause to hide any message of racial reconciliation contained in his next book, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

Exactly how to act on this good cause presented a daunting creative challenge for Twain. The evidence presented in this study suggests that Twain chose something that was as ubiquitous as it was binding to allow Huck to achieve his victory of conscience over social conditioning: friendship. Twain effectively asks the attentive reader: *What would you do if one of 'them' became your best friend and push came to shove? Would you still act like one of "us"?* In doing so, Twain found the one sliver of common ground that existed between the two sides of the most divisive issue of his day, and perhaps of ours as well, while not appearing to encourage his readers to reconsider the racism that they had come to regard as normal in any obvious way. As a work for children, the story stands on that merit alone, but when the social depth of a message of racial equality is added, the book becomes both socially instructive in a timeless way *and* entertaining.

I remember finishing *AHF* for a class as an undergraduate. I had not read the book since junior high, and remembered it as a story about running away on a raft. This latest reading, however, produced a different result. Upon reading the last page, I closed the book and stared into space, contemplating what I thought to be the intent of the book. *Did he write a book asking people to reconsider racism less than twenty*

years after the Civil War? I marveled at what appeared to be the bravery of writing a story that equated black people to white when many of them had veteran fathers and uncles who were missing body parts from the war. I knew that bringing up such a touchy subject could be suicidal to anyone who made his living making people smile, but it seemed that Twain had found a way. Twain gave Huck an apparently impenetrable coat of armor against those who would call him an abolitionist or sentimental by giving him a good reason to act in a way that confronted authority—to save his best friend. To my mind, delivering this message at that time seemed risky in any form, but perhaps it is the faith in the good side of human nature that Twain expressed. The fact that Twain chose to hide his message, while possibly vulnerable to accusations of greed or cowardice, has a practical side noted by Twain scholar Shelly Fishkin:

Some of Twain's contemporaries—George Washington Cable comes to mind—launched full frontal attacks against racism in the 1880s. Twain did not. Twain's attacks were more subtle, less risky, less courageous. They are also more lasting. Cable's polemics, *The Silent South* and "A Freedman's Case in Equity," for all their forceful directness, are forgotten, except among a handful of scholars. *Huckleberry Finn*, on the other hand, remains one of the most widely read and taught works by an American writer.³⁵

Fishkin cites historical evidence as proof that whether or not Twain was trying to hide something, his book reached far more people over a far greater period of time. Of course, Twain's superior notoriety played a significant role in the book's success, but Fishkin's assertion brings up the interesting question of whether or not *AHF* would

³⁵ Shelly Fisher Fishkin. *Was Huck Black? Mark Twain and African American Voices*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) p. 143.

have enjoyed the success it achieved if it were an undisguised argument against racism.

Later, as I contemplated works by Shakespeare and Joyce as topics of my Master's thesis, I kept returning to *AHF* because it seemed to me that Twain had done something the other two great authors had not— found a creative solution to a social problem— and had done it in such a way as to keep his solution working 130 years into the future. This interpretation is, of course, debatable, but it has survived my critical rigor. Mark Twain wrote a book that addressed an issue in the history of a nation that was a painful wound on its soul, and made that nation's citizens laugh at the same time.

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