HUCK FINN AND MARK TWAIN

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HUDD FINN AND MARK TWAIN

A study of the character traits of Huck in Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn and of some parallels from the life of Twain himself can provide much insight into Twain's motivation for creating Huck as he is. Huck is extremely young and naive, but he shows a great deal of common sense, and he is basically honest. His conscience, torn between his own natural feelings and what society dictates, gives him much concern and is a basic cause for his feeling of alienation. Huck, a sensitive, sympathetic, imaginative boy, is aware of the evils of society and people, and often reveals his disgust with the human race. My purpose is to emphasize Twain's reasons for giving Huck these particular character traits.

Huck's basic nature, the fact that he is a young boy, is a clever instrument used by Twain. Because Huck is young, naive, and inexperienced, the world looks different through his eyes than in the eyes of others.¹ At the circus, he is completely awed by the costumes and acts. He thought the ringmaster had been tricked, when in reality

¹Donna Gerstenberger, "Huckleberry Finn and the World's Illusions," Western Humanities Review, XIV (1960), 403.
Huck himself had missed the point completely. Although Huck describes in detail and admiration the Grangerford's parlor, he admires it for all the wrong reasons (pp. 99-101). On these and other side-splitting occasions he is somber and naive, a source of humor for the reader. For example, he refers to Miss Watson as "a tolerable slim old maid, with goggles on," (p. 2) not realizing that "spectacles" would have been a more appropriate word. He later remarks that "Rascallions and deadbeats is the kind the widow and good people takes the most interest in" (p. 74). When Jim mourned for his family on the raft, Huck's naive comment, sad in its revelation, is: "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" (p. 153). Huck, then, recorded incidents with naive insight, but because he was uncouth and uneducated, he did so naturally. He was genuine, free from the influence of adults, uncommitted, and unattached. His simplicity makes the satire of what he says even more subtle. He has been described as possessing a:

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2Mark Twain, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, eds. Kenneth S. Lynn and Arno Jewett (Boston, 1926), pp. 146-147. Further references to the text will be indicated by the page numbers in parentheses.

3Walter Blair, Mark Twain and Huck Finn (Berkeley, 1960), p. 75.

Folk mind: a mind which is at once limited in knowledge and inept in abstract speculation but which is still deeply and profoundly aware of those elementary principles which give life meaning and make it tolerable.\(^5\)

Huck is surprised at nothing he sees because of the way he was brought up—uneducated, uncivilized, orphaned, and with a drunken father. It is easy to see why he took the duke and the king for granted.\(^6\) Even the killing of Boggs evoked no moral comment from him; he accepted it as part of the day's activities along with the circus.\(^7\) One authority has said:

We know that his approach to life is peculiar; if his judgments are not those of the average person, we know why they aren't, and we know just how far they depart from the normal, and he has our sympathy. Mark Twain manipulated his material, therefore, so that the most outrageous melodrama could present itself as matter of fact, through the medium of Huckleberry's temperament, and even while we are rearranging the values, and discerning what the boy was blind to, we like him, and concede that he is true to life.\(^8\)

Through Huck's basic nature, Twain could let himself go and say safely what he wanted to say about the society in which he found himself. The more indifferent the public was to the boy Huck, the freer Twain himself was.


\(^7\)Albert Bigelow Paine, "Huck Finn Comes Into His Own," from Mark Twain: A Biography (New York, 1912), II, 796.

\(^8\)Erskine, pp. 266-267.
Huck could say what he wanted, free of censure, because he was only a little boy.\(^9\)

Not only Huck's youth and naivete, but also his language itself is a "sensitive, subtle, and versatile instrument" to carry out Twain's purpose.\(^{10}\) His use of the vernacular makes him more authentic, and the understatement in his speech bring out his comments on various aspects of life.\(^{11}\)

Examples of Huck's basic common sense can be found throughout the book. After Miss Watson had urged Huck to pray for things he wanted, his reasonable question was: "If a body can get anything they pray for, why don't Deacon Winn get back the money he lost on pork?" (p. 11). Furthermore, Huck could not accept Buck's reasoning for continuing the feud as sound (pp. 106-107). Perhaps the best example of Huck's common sense is the contrast between romantic Tom and practical Huck as they were planning Jim's escape from the Phelps' farm. Tom wanted to do things in the most complicated, elaborate way possible, to follow the book and do things with "style." Huck, on the other hand, could see no reason for doing anything besides in the most direct manner (pp. 234-241).


\(^{11}\)Ray B. West, Jr., "Mark Twain's Idyl of Frontier America," *Univ. of Kansas City Review*, XV (1949), 101.
Twain instilled common sense in Huck because he himself argued for a common sense viewpoint, which he found in the attitudes of childhood. Lack of common sense was one of Twain's major gripes against society, as will be further illustrated.

Huck's basic honesty is easily demonstrated. He made a continual effort to describe things exactly as they were; he uses qualifiers such as "perhaps, most (for almost), and maybe" frequently as he describes things. He reports conversations thoroughly, generally making no comment. When speaking of Pap, he described his hair very accurately: "It was all black, no gray" (p. 19). While a member of Tom's gang, Tom and the others imagined ambushing Spaniards and Arabs; however, honest Huck reported that "there warn't no Spaniards and A-rabs, and there warn't no camels nor no elephants. It warn't anything but a Sunday-school picnic, and only a primer class at that" (pp. 12-13). Huck's standard of honesty was that usually women don't lie. He said: "I never seen anybody but lied one time or another, without it was Aunt Polly, or the widow, or maybe Mary."  

Huck's concern with truth is a reflection of Twain's own concern with telling the truth and lying. The author had thought, in 1875, of writing a story of Tom Sawyer in

12Hunter, p. 438.


14Lowenherz, p. 200.
manhood, but decided not to because Tom would be the kind of adult who would lie; therefore the reader wouldn't believe him. Also, Twain often spoke of himself as a liar, although sometimes humorously.

Huck's concern with truth is related to his struggle with his conscience. There are many examples in *Huckleberry Finn* of this struggle. After he and Jim were separated in the fog, Huck tried to fool Jim into thinking he had dreamed the whole incident. Jim knew what had really happened and stood up to Huck, shaming him. Huck's conscience took over; although it was extremely difficult to lower himself to a "nigger," he felt so ashamed and guilty that he finally apologized to Jim (pp. 83-85).

In another incident, Huck had been lying to Joanna Wilks about his experiences in England, and she questioned his honesty. Mary Jane scolded Joanna severely, as did her sister Susan, saying that she must be kind to him because he was a stranger and far from home. They were so concerned about Huck that he began to feel ashamed—"ornery and low down and mean"—because he realized how wonderful these girls were, and that he was standing back and allowing the king and the duke to rob them (pp. 169-172).

Moreover, when the king and duke were playing a fraud show in a nearby town, Huck heard that the townspeople had

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15 Lowenherz, p. 200.
16 Brooks, p. 12.
discovered the fraud, and he tried to warn the two men to escape. He got there in time to see them, tarred and feathered, being rushed out of town on a rail. Huck lamented:

So we poked along back home, and I warn't feeling so brash as I was before, but kind of ornery, and humble, and to blame, somehow—though I hadn't done nothing. But that's always the way; it don't make no difference whether you do right or wrong, a person's conscience ain't got no sense, and just goes for him anyway. If I had a yaller dog that didn't know no more than a person's conscience does I would pison him. It takes up more room than all the rest of a person's insides, and yet ain't no good, nohow (pp. 227-228).

Huck experienced a difficult struggle between heart and conscience concerning Jim and his freedom. As he and Jim were escaping down the river, Huck decides not to tell anyone that Jim is a runaway. Jim, excited about his coming freedom, talks of stealing his wife and children, and Huck's conscience—the conscience of society—begins to bother him. Upon deciding to reveal Jim, he immediately felt relieved. When Jim thanked him for his friendship, however, Huck again was torn emotionally, and therefore when the men approached the raft, he protected the runaway by telling them Jim was white and with his spur-of-the-moment story of the smallpox victims. When it was all over, Huck felt as if he had done wrong, but he also felt that if he had done the right thing and told the truth, he would

17Paine, "Huck Finn Comes Into His Own," p. 797.
still feel guilty.\textsuperscript{18} More trouble with his conscience!

Another struggle concerning Jim's freedom, more climactic than the others, was when Huck knew he should, according to society's conscience, reveal to Miss Watson that Jim was a prisoner at Phelps' farm. He tried to pray, but because his conscience was bothering him, was unable to do so. He wrote a letter to Miss Watson and immediately felt relieved, but then he thought of Jim and fond memories and tore up the note with the daring and damning statement: "All right, then, I'll go to hell" (p. 210). The irony of the whole situation, of course, is that Huck put himself in hell because of his own sense of right, which was opposed to the conscience of society. The society of that day had definite ideas of right and wrong, similar to the world in which Twain himself had grown up. The accepted attitude toward slavery, preached from the pulpits, was that: "Slavery was right, righteous, sacred, the peculiar pet of the deity, and a condition which the slave himself ought to be daily and nightly thankful for."\textsuperscript{19}

It was considered a worthy act to return a runaway slave, and a crime not to do so.\textsuperscript{20} Huck's sense of humane sympathy for Jim, then, was contrary to the standards of

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\item \textsuperscript{18}Norris W. Yates, "The 'Counter-Conversion' of Huckleberry Finn," \textit{American Literature}, XXXII (1960), 4-5.
\item \textsuperscript{19}DeVoto, p. 65.
\item \textsuperscript{20}Albert Bigelow Paine, \textit{A Short Life of Mark Twain} (New York, 1920), p. 25.
\end{itemize}}
right conduct set up by society. When he decided to help Jim, he was converted to actual goodness instead of the goodness of society. 21 By aiding Jim, he had rejected the law, religion, and the conscience of society. 22 Huck's struggle with his conscience is the:

Conflict between individual freedom and the restraints imposed by convention and force; or, within Huck's consciousness, the struggle between his intuitive morality and his conventional conscience. 23

Turning now to Twain's motivation for Huck's struggle with his conscience, one authority says that: "The conflict in 'Huckleberry Finn' is simply the conflict of Mark Twain's own childhood." 24 The conflict is solved in the book because Huck and "the cause of individual freedom" reign, but Twain in his own life surrendered without winning. Twain was not courageous enough to do something if it would get him into trouble. 25 He, like Huck, possessed an intuitive morality; his feelings were usually right. 26 In spite of society's attitude toward slavery, for example, he knew from his father that slavery was a great wrong.

21 Yates, pp. 7-10.


24 Brooks, p. 35.

25 Brooks, pp. 35-36.

26 Branch, p. 195.
The Clemens' slaves, except for the great loss of money involved, would have been set free. Also, Twain was concerned with the consequences of huge guilt produced by the conscience. He expressed in Huck the hope that decisions independent of a person's conscience are possible.

Something was wrong in Twain's inner life. He imposed on himself a daily chiding of his own conscience. Many of his jokes concerned his moral cowardice. He bathed himself in remorse and self-accusations; he blamed himself for his younger brother's and his daughter Susy's deaths. Twain lived with a feeling of living in sin, and for him literature was a means of confessing sins. Thus Huck had traumatic struggles with conscience, as Twain himself did.

A frequently-used adjective of Huck's is lonesome. The story is one of the earliest expressions of man's alienation. This is not surprising when one considers the life Huck lived, without family or close friend, and struggling within himself with his conscience. For Huck the world was worse than hell because he was alien to the rest of society. His only purpose in life was to stay alive; his was a life of escape and running. Since he was alone,

27 DeVoto, p. 65.
29 Brooks, p. 12.
he searched to find a family. It is interesting to note that his stories, invented to save him in certain situations, all concern large families who die. 31

Specific examples of Huck's loneliness can be found throughout the book. When Huck was in bed at Miss Watson's, he said: "Then I set down in a chair by the window and tried to think of something cheerful, but it warn't no use. I felt so lonesome I most wished I was dead" (p. 3). On Jackson's Island in the evening after the townspeople had searched for his body, he became lonely sitting by the campfire (p. 39). When he lost Jim in the fog he was lonesome (p. 82). Traveling on the river with Jim after the Grangerford incident, all was quiet and Huck mentioned the lonesomeness of the river (p. 116). When Huck first arrived at the Phelps' plantation, all was still and the drone of the bugs and flies sounded "lonesome and like everybody's dead and gone" (p. 215). The breeze in the leaves sounded like dead spirits whispering. "As a general thing it makes a body wish he was dead, too, and done with it all," he says (p. 215). He describes the hum of the spinning wheel as the "lonesomest sound in the whole world" (p. 215).

Twain's own life, like Huck's, was characterized by loneliness and alienation. A review of his childhood helps us understand why as an adult Twain still felt alienated from the rest of society. The world where Twain was born

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was drab and tragic. His family consisted of a weary, disheartened father; a kind, tired, "desperately optimistic" mother; and the ragged children. The village was shabby and unpainted; garbage and decay surrounded the buildings. Violence was prominent; as a boy, Twain had witnessed four murders, Negro beatings, drunks, stabbings, and shootings.  

In addition to the disadvantages of his surroundings, Twain grew up in a home without love. Although his mother had loved a young doctor, she married John Clemens instead. There were no outward demonstrations of love or happiness among family members. Only once, when his brother Benjamin died, had Twain seen one member of the family kiss another. He later reported that he didn't remember ever hearing his father laugh. The unfortunate man, who suffered from "sun-pain" every spring, seldom spent any time with the children. Moreover, his mother was a fanatic for using pain killers and other medicines.  

Twain's mother had a tremendous influence on young Sam's life, and much of this influence was destructive. She was portrayed in Tom Sawyer as Aunt Polly. Jane Clemens was a busy person, and Twain later reported that: "It was just as well to be fairly out of range when she was occupied with her employments." She domineered her husband and directed her children with firmness. She fixed her

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32 Brooks, pp. 28-29.
33 Brooks, p. 30.
34 Paine, A Short Life of Mark Twain, p. 8.
attention on Sam, mothering him and worrying over him. She was a woman with a great capacity for love, but since she had a lack of deep love for her husband, she showered her affection on Sam, a puny, sickly child, smothering him.\textsuperscript{35} Because of his deprived background, impersonal home life, and mother's influence, Twain's alienation can be more easily understood.

Twain's adult life also helps us understand his alienation from the rest of society. His four years as a river pilot gave him a chance to become an artist, simply because a pilot was an indispensable occupation in Hannibal. Since the pilot's direction of the boat was absolute, it was only courtesy to consult the captain on any matter. The pilot was a gentleman of prestige and good salary. His was considered to be a regal occupation.\textsuperscript{36} Twain enjoyed great popularity as a pilot, and wrote freely in his spare time.\textsuperscript{37}

However, when Twain reached Nevada, the situation was completely altered. No special occupations existed because no vocation was indispensable. They simply weren't tolerated. The pioneer law of the land was that a man who persists in one job implies criticism on easygoing neighbors, and of course, this wouldn't have been received kindly. Twain, as a result, was unable to develop his native creativity and at the same time fulfill his desire for prestige among

\textsuperscript{35}Brooks, pp. 32-33.

\textsuperscript{36}Paine, \textit{A Short Life of Mark Twain}, p. 51.

\textsuperscript{37}Paine, \textit{A Short Life of Mark Twain}, p. 63.
his neighbors. Therefore he repressed his individuality, his free sentiment, his love for reading, his desire and need for privacy. Indulging in these activities made him "different;" he became the butt of jokes and pranks and was ridiculed severely. \footnote{Brooks, p. 77.} Therefore he felt acute alienation from society.

In his later years Twain's loneliness and bitterness against society became so strong that his condition of mind could be described as despair. Huck in his loneliness shows some signs of despair, but not as acutely as does Twain in this quote from The Mysterious Stranger, written later in his life. This is the very basis for the author's own alienation:

> There is no God, no universe, no human race, no earthly life, no heaven, no hell. It is all a dream—a grotesque and foolish dream. Nothing exists but you. And you are but a thought... wandering forlorn among the empty eternities! \footnote{Olan, p. 145.}

In addition to his feeling of alienation, Huck possesses certain fine qualities of imagination, sympathy, and sensitivity. Huck's imagination is demonstrated many times in the book. When he made his escape from Pap's cabin, he killed a pig and dragged it bleeding to the river so Pap would think he was dead and not try to find him. He paid careful attention to other details to conceal his get-away (p. 33). As Sarah Mary Williams, he concocted an imaginative story to hide his real identity. With
equal skill he created other stories to meet the occasion—to attempt to rescue the men on the Walter Scott (pp. 72-74), to save Jim from the men on the raft who finally retreated in haste when they suspected Jim had smallpox (p. 89), and to conceal his identity from the Grangerfords (p. 98).

Huck's sense of sympathy is easily proven. After he and Jim escaped from the wrecked Walter Scott, Huck said:

Now was the first time that I begun to worry about the men— I reckon I hadn't had time to before. I begun to think how dreadful it was, even for murderers, to be in such a fix (p. 71).

He felt so concerned for them that, as mentioned above, he invented a yarn to attempt to get them rescued. In a later incident he saw the duke and king tarred and feathered, those rapscallions who had cheated so many people and caused Huck and Jim so much trouble. Huck's comment was that they:

Looked like a couple of monstrous big soldier-plumes. Well, it made me sick to see it; and I was sorry for them poor pitiful rascals, it seemed like I couldn't ever feel any hardness against them any more in the world (p. 227).

Such was the quality of Huck's universal sympathy; there was no intolerance, no cruelty, no hatred in his nature.\footnote{Edward Wasiolek, "The Structure of Make-Believe: Huckleberry Finn," Univ. of Kansas City Review, XXIV (1957), 100.}

As Huck matures he learns increasing compassion for others; for example, his sense of obligation and sympathy toward Mary Jane.\footnote{Cummings, p. 8.}
Huck's sensitivity is revealed first of all in his sensitivity to nature. Lying on his back in the canoe on the river, he says: "The sky looks ever so deep when you lay down on your back in the moonshine; I never knowed it before. And how far a body can hear on the water such nights!" (p. 35). Another example is his vivid description of the storm (p. 48). Huck is at ease in nature, and therefore is tuned to the physical environment and concerned with the details of it.  

Huck's sensitivity is demonstrated in other ways, also. He describes the sensation of seeing three or four lights on in a dark village. Both Huck and Jim are free, whole in spirit, and sensitive; they are the only real human beings in the whole book. For the gentle Huck, whose most violent act is killing a pig to disguise his escape from Pap's cabin, the Shepherdson chase is completely nauseating. After he had seen Buck murdered, Huck was overcome:

"It made me so sick I most fell out of the tree. I ain't a-going to tell all that happened--it would make me sick again if I was to do that. I wished I hadn't ever come ashore that night to see such things. I ain't ever going to get shut of them--lots of times I dream about them (p. 113)."

42 Branch, pp. 191-192.
45 Cummings, p. 3.
These comments, along with "I was mighty down-hearted," and "I cried a little," convey rather than declare his sincere emotions, since they are such profound understatement.\textsuperscript{46} Statements like these help the reader realize how strong were his feelings, even more so than if he had said he sobbed his heart out. One feels the depth of his emotion through what he doesn't say rather than what he describes.

I have shown that Huck was imaginative, sympathetic, and sensitive, and my purpose now is to demonstrate that Twain himself possessed these same qualities. As a child, Twain was very sensitive. He was high strung, an "impetuous child of sudden ecstasies." He was capable of much feeling.\textsuperscript{47} When Sam's father died, the eleven-year-old boy was described as follows:

The boy Sam was fairly broken down. Remorse, which always dealt with him unsparingly, laid a heavy hand on him now. Wildness, disobedience, indifference to his father's wishes, all were remembered; a hundred things, in themselves trifling, became ghastly and heart-wringing in the knowledge that they could never be undone.\textsuperscript{48}

Furthermore, as a child Clemens dreamed of the terrible things he had seen—a slave killed, a drunk shot down, a man murdered. He saw these things as warnings sent to improve his taste for a better life. His mother's idea was that these dreams were his conscience torturing

\textsuperscript{46}Blair, p. 239.
\textsuperscript{47}Brooks, p. 31.
\textsuperscript{48}DeVoto, p. 85.
him, and because of his high respect for her moral opinions, he accepted them as such.  

Twain also was a man of great sympathy. His compassion for the slaves was mentioned before. Although he didn't recall seeing a slave auction as a child, he later said that:

I am suspicious that it is because the thing was a commonplace spectacle and not an uncommon or impressive one. I do vividly remember seeing a dozen black men and women, chained together, lying in a group on the pavement, waiting shipment to a Southern slave market. They had the saddest faces I ever saw.

His sympathy is further illustrated by an alleged incident in his childhood when he discovered a flying bit of paper, a partial history of Joan of Arc, telling how she was mistreated by her captors. Sam's feeling of indignation against them and his sympathy with her inspired him to read French history and learn more about her. It was said of him that: "Furthermore, his sympathy for Joan prompted him to a hatred of all oppression and human injustice. He became the champion of the weak, the defender of the underdog." This statement seems a bit overly-dramatic, but one cannot doubt Sam Clemens' basic sympathy.

Twain had a tendency toward creativity, but it was stifled from the beginning. His mother, an advocate of "old-fashioned, cast-iron Calvinism," punished any

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49 Paine, A Short Life of Mark Twain, p. 20.
50 Paine, A Short Life of Mark Twain, p. 17.
51 Paine, A Short Life of Mark Twain, p. 33.
individuality or sign of creativity in her son. In order to develop his creativity further, Twain would have needed to assert it and develop it in his vocation, but instead his attempts were thwarted.52

Huck showed himself to be very critical of the society in which he was existing. Some of his comments are quite subtle, while others are extremely pointed. Both kinds show his disgust with the human race. Huck first of all makes several comments about religion. After he had been in the church on Sunday afternoon and found the hogs asleep on the cool floor, he innocently points out that: "If you notice, most folks don't go to church only when they've got to; but a hog is different" (p. 109). Also, the Grangerfords faithfully attended church, learned about brotherly love, discussed it, and then murdered in cold blood (pp. 108, 113-115).

After Boggs was fatally shot, Huck observed that the people laid one Bible under the dying man's head, and another one on his chest (p. 141). Although Huck makes no moral comment, his point about the people's religion is obvious. Also without further comment, he told how the king had cheated the people and stolen their money with his pirate story at the camp meeting (pp. 130-131).

A look at Twain's life reveals the reason for Huck's negative experiences with religion. Although he had been a member of the Presbyterian church, Twain himself had

52Brooks, pp. 34-35.
little use for religion. When young, he often joked about his own religious laxness. In 1883 he wrote a paper indicating an interest in conversion. He wrote the first eighteen chapters of *Huckleberry Finn* about the same time that his brother was expelled from the church for unorthodoxy.\footnote{Yates, p. 3.} So Twain's ideas about religion, that it was of little value because church-going people were hypocrites, and that religious people would believe any story, were aired through Huck's character.

Huck was also critical of other aspects of society. He made a point about professional reformers when he told of the time the judge had "reformed" Pap. Although the latter swore faithfully to live a good life from then on, he got drunk again that very night, showing himself to be a hypocrite and a drunkard.\footnote{Blair, p. 12.}

In the Peter Wilks incident Huck showed his disgust with the human race by telling of the fake tears and pretensions at the funeral and the other slobbery scenes staged by the two frauds.\footnote{Blair, p. 332.} He said, "It was enough to make a body ashamed of the human race" (p. 160). The success of the show presented by those two where ladies and children were not admitted was also a comment about society (p. 148). Earlier in the book the "humanity of man" was illustrated by the incident when the men gave Huck two twenty-dollar
gold pieces instead of helping him when they suspected that his family had smallpox (p. 90).

Perhaps Huck's strongest criticism of society is against the animal-like, brutal nature of mankind. When Boggs was murdered, the people behaved like wild animals, pushing and shoving to get a look at the body out of a sense of curiosity. Even more appalling was the fact that they had allowed the murder to occur in the first place. Furthermore, when someone suggested that Sherburn should be punished by lynching, he was able to persuade the mob to disperse by simply taunting them (pp. 141-145). These people were supposedly moral people. Huck was implying that men in masses see things in an "ostrich-eyed" manner.56

Furthermore, when he saw the king and duke tarred and feathered, Huck's sad comment was: "Human beings can be awful cruel to one another" (p. 227). Huck's ultimate comment on the brutality of man was the feud. Although the Grangerfords were described as nice-looking, cultured, well-mannered, fine people, they behaved like a mass of animals in the senseless slaughter of the young boys.

A very basic reason for Huck's disgust with society was the fact that society served as a binder on him; he was a rebel against its restrictions and conventions. He is happiest when he is free of it, when he is free of the constraint of Miss Watson and the Widow Douglas.57

56Gerstenberger, p. 404.

57Levy, pp. 386-387.
struggles to declare that he is his own boss and to rise above society, specifically the society dictated by those two women. When he encounters certain members of that same society, such as the Grangerfords, Sherburn, and the duke and king, he decides that because these men and their organizations are stifling and destructive, there is no place in this world for the real self to exist. He therefore tries to flee from these aspects of society.

A major theme of the book is Huck's initiation into respectable society. Although in the end he is almost overtaken by society, he still wants to "light out." His body had been captured, but not his mind. Huck is in, but not of, this world. He is aware that a complete initiation into society would deny his own character and values. Because he once again leaves society at the end, there is hope expressed in Huck that life can be more real without the make-believe conventions of society.

Twain in Huckleberry Finn, we can see, presented a pessimistic view of a stilted "real life" created by the conventions of society. By examining his life further, we can see his reason for doing this, and for Huck's protest

59 Olson, p. 150.
60 Coxe, pp. 394, 396-397.
against society. Twain, who had had no formal education, and who had lived an active life in a mobile society, had had no upbringing in "continuous and ripening tradition." 63

Twain, a man of democratic ideals and a deep hatred for injustice, believed that men themselves are more important than the past and its show, color, and glitter in old worn-out institutions. Huck, like Twain himself, valued living people instead of institutions. 64

Twain was repeatedly stifled by society, so naturally he protested against its conventions. At his marriage, his artistic tendencies were destroyed when he accepted his father-in-law's financial aid. As editor of the newspaper "Buffalo Express" his pledge, of necessity, was that no startling reforms would be initiated. "Custom is law and must be obeyed," he said. 65 Although he had willingly given in to society, in actuality he had little choice. The gold fields during the Gilded Age were no place for a man of Twain's artist's ability. His new environment, as has been pointed out, was opposed to individuality, and his obligations bound him to society's way. While a pilot on the river at age 23, his salary was larger than his father's had been, and therefore young Sam had become head of the family. Later in the gold fields, he was compelled

63 DeVoto, p. 207.


65 Brooks, pp. 117-118.
to make money and restore his family to prosperity. The following quote sums up the situation:

These circumstances, I say, compelled Mark Twain to make terms with public opinion. He could not fall too far behind the financial pace his piloting life had set for him, he was bound to recover the prestige that had been his and to shine once more as a conspicuous and important personage, he had to "make good" again, quickly and spectacularly: that was a duty which had also become a craving.

In addition to the restrictions imposed by the community, there were restrictions at home. Mrs. Clemens was very particular and was overly-concerned with many petty things. For example, there was to be no smoking on Sundays and no swearing. Neckties must be worn. In short, she was completely drilled in the gentilities of her sex and era, a true lady of gentility. She even read her husband's manuscripts and changed some of the wording to make it more acceptable to the genteel tradition. Although Twain seemed to welcome her corrections, his writing suffered nevertheless from the traditions of that society:

It is to be observed, then, that the writing of Mark Twain suffered a little, here and there, from the convention of verbal delicacy which, once in the East, he seldom resented and never questioned. His writing suffered much more from his accepting material and themes of interest to the genteel tradition instead of confining himself to his native interests--though this assertion rests on the hypothesis that something else might have

66 Brooks, pp. 74-76.
67 Brooks, p. 76.
68 Brooks, p. 196.
69 DeVoto, pp. 208-209.
been possible and is rendered exceedingly dubious by the presence in Mark Twain's nature of impulses toward these alien themes that may have been as authoritative and profound as any that he had.

The books of Mark Twain, then, in these two particulars, suffered from the conflict of Western life with the genteel tradition. 70

Huck, therefore, expresses criticism of the tastes, manners, morals, codes, and institutions of the society in which he found himself. 71

Although we have found that each of Huck's characteristics was created by Twain for a certain reason, Huck's character is not completely original. Twain in his autobiography says that Huck was modeled on a boyhood friend of his. This friend, Tom Blankenship, was the envy of the other boys. Says Twain:

In Huckleberry Finn I have drawn Tom Blankenship exactly as he was. He was ignorant, unwashed, insufficiently fed; but he had as good a heart as ever any boy had. His liberties were totally unrestricted. He was the only really independent person--boy or man--in the community, and by consequence he was tranquilly and continuously happy, and was envied by all the rest of us. We liked him; we enjoyed his society. 72

In conclusion, then, Twain, hopelessly encumbered by society, was able to express his own true feelings about mankind through the medium of Huck's carefully-constructed character--his youth, naivete, common sense, honesty, active conscience, loneliness, alienation, imagination,

70 DeVoto, pp. 206-207.

71 Cummings, p. 2.

72 Fred W. Lorch, "A Note on Tom Blankenship (Huckleberry Finn)," American Literature, XII (1940), 351, from Mark Twain, Autobiography (New York, 1924), II, 174.
sympathy, sensitivity, and disgust with human nature and society. With Huck as a mouthpiece for his deepest feelings, Twain's sense of release was magnificent:

His whole unconscious life, the pent-up river of his own soul, had burst its bonds and rushed forth, a joyous torrent! (Thus the freedom on the river and raft). Do we need any other explanation of the abandon, the beauty, the eternal freshness of "Huckleberry Finn"? 73

73 Brooks, p. 196.
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