

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

Twain must have awakened the child inside him so as to write such an awe-inspiring work. Twain's life may have been, according to his ironic personality, a non-stop joke. During his life time many sorrowful events, which left him no opportunity to even smile, have taken place. He, however, could make a lot of people laugh. This is considered the hardest and most distinguishable kind of laughter. "The secret source of humor is not joy but sorrow"¹ he says. Thanks to "laugh rather than weep" policy he could write valuable novels and have a successful career.

Adventure is still childishly tickling everybody's mind; it breaks the unbeatable routine of life. Sometimes, what life exactly requires is a bit of irrationality and insanity. Experiencing new adventures without knowing the consequences has unforgettable memories. It is figuratively like approaching the sea and swimming without having any idea about it. What will happen? I would die. This is one possibility, the other one is that I would learn how to survive. Though he may be killed or hanged, Jim, as well as Huck, undoubtedly decides to make an adventure.

Nobody is instinctively a slave, it is the environment in which he has been brought up, that either strengthens or weakens, breaks or empowers the self-image. Jim, like any other slave at that time, has no right to live as he likes, he is a "Nigger". The arrogant American society has never discerned that it is slaving the other. They were afflicted by another kind of slavery; "the slavery of ideas". They, like idiots, have defecated themselves and have distributed liberty to some people, depriving the others of it. It is beyond doubt that the relationship between Jim and Huck is a paragon and a proof at the same time that the white and the black would unite only if there were common targets between them. Actually, that would never transpire as long as the white has used to treat the black inferiorly.

Though he is a white boy, Huck has searched for freedom as well. The island has been a refuge for both characters, for different purposes. They have been searching for their lost paradise on earth. For Jim, to find the island is a matter of life and death. If he does not find it, he will have to accept being a puppet in their theatre for the rest of his life. Unlike vulnerable, meek slaves in America, Jim has a considerable goal to achieve. He could no longer bear the unavoidable cry in his heart that has revived the ruins of his dignity. Now and then, he would have cried in silence but he finally decides that enough is enough.

Being brought up between irresponsible drunkard father and two irrevocable women, Huck has to lie to survive. He has to behold the world from his own perspective. It is always awkward for children to walk behind the elder's footsteps. Neglectfully, Huck's father is the most detestable character in the novel. Though he is on the verge of killing his son, he becomes sad after he realizes that his son is dead.

Unlike Ibsen's works, these of Twain do not focus on values and correcting conceptions. "I have no love for children literature" Twain admits to his brother "Orion"ⁱⁱ. He does not rather narrate trivial events about imaginary creatures. Thus considered, according to him, naivety. Twain admits that he has never written a book for boys. "I write for grown-ups who have been boys" he saysⁱⁱⁱ. Children however did like his novels; they influenced them negatively. That undoubtedly aroused the poor mother's ire. Huckleberry Finn was cordially hated by each mother in Mississippi; "because he was idle, lawless and vulgar... and because all children admired him so much and wished they dared to be like him"^{iv}. "Huck mania" has become a phenomenon almost all over the U.S.

Huck will never be a fascinating personality, for the juveniles at least, unless he tells lies, has a cigar, talk with strangers and, most dangerously, be at gunpoint with his father. Twain has broken the customary boring image of children in 1885. Children were always taught to be terribly decent and to obey their parents blindly. Though the novel, Twain

implicitly says; “the parents are not angels, they make mistakes. Their orders are not bible and they could be debatable.” However, it is always difficult to satisfy everybody. “If Mr. Clemms (Twain) cannot think of something better to tell our pure-minded lads and lasses, he had best stop writing” protested Louisa May Alcott, the famous author of Little Women (1868)^v. Actually, I have studied Alcott’s novel but it was not as thriving as Mark Twain’s.

Twain’s depiction of Huck is believed to be exaggerated. Interestingly enough, Twain worked on the novel for over 8 years, till its publication in 1885. It is conspicuous that he did not write this novel to kill time. He, I think, spared no effort to make Huck’s character sound reasonable. Actually, it does seem so. Twain’s imagination knows no limit. Furthermore, to narrate about juveniles gives much bigger space for freedom. He was not ready to say goodbye to his creation as easy as that^{vi}. The novel therefore sounds more convincing. On the other hand, Twain’s portray of Jim is exhaustively expressive. One would never know how slavery is unfair if it were not for the way Huck treats Jim. He says to him, at first, that he will never apologize for a slave. Huck, in this case, is a mouthpiece of the Americans who think the black has no dignity to be hurt. One of the well-written scenes of the novel is arresting Jim. “They stroke and restricted him, they swore not to let him eat or drink”. The black Jim has a bleak future. He has been treated as though he is their property. The men were cruel enough to treat him as though he is a priceless prey whose hunters are blindly hungry for killing and blood.

Children, like elders, always have something to say. They would express their opinions in more than one way. Each one of them would refuse, object to what they dislike and approve of what they do consider “pleasant”. They are smart enough to play games in order to achieve their goals. However, they are always hindered since the “etiquette” does not give them a chance to do so. In each child, there is an infinite aptitude whose only outlet is frolicking. They have no job to do, neither do they know the appropriate rules. Actually,

laws, for them, are invaluable orders put by the elders specifically to spoil their happiness. They would regard anybody trying to make them silent statues as “an enemy” who should be defeated. Not all children are as intelligent as other; some of them are extremely talented at wasting time. Killing time in a funny way is their job for which they are not paid. Huck, for instance, could not bear the deadly, strict discipline in the widow’s house.

As a matter of fact, the widow’s house is, undoubtedly, opposing the naughty, restless child that was driving his personality. Yet Huck is an extraordinary child or, in other words, superchild! Having a cigar is a transparent signal that he is fed up with the widow’s perplexing orders and his father’s ill-mannered behaviors. In addition, it would be a competition of Huck’s image of manhood; as though he says to himself: it is a manly behavior and I am a man enough to do that. Another possible reason for having cigars is that it would be an attempt to forget, at least in the moments he smokes, about the fact that he is a son of a totally vulgar father. In particular, the father is, for his son, a mirror or a model through which they can perceive the world. That is why, Twain did not give Huck’s father a name, he keeps him nameless till the end of the novel. He plays no role in his son’s life because he is drunk most of the time, he has no time to spend with his son. It seems that he has paid no attention to the father-son relationship. Thus, Huck has searched for alternatives, most obviously is his friend “Tom Swayer”.

Twain’s creation, Tom Swayer, is just a little white adventurous boy, but the most impressive trait about his personality is that he could influence almost all his friends. He always knows what he should say. He is also ready for the unexpected wholeheartedly. He is a chief of a small gang of children, unlike Al Capone’s gang, the well known American gangster; Tom’s gang has different purposes. Their priority is to put an end to the thieves and to catch the criminals. Tom’s mind has an inborn tendency to draw well-plotted plans. He does not want to only save Jim, he wants to make that an adventure as well. Being startles of

what Huck has suggested to free Jim, Tom regards his friend as an empty-minded boy whose imagination cannot sew a gripping story. Huck must have learned how to be a little explorer from his friend "Tom". However grotesque it is, I can see Tom when he turns 30 years old. He would be a chief of a successful company, a persistent explorer or one of the consultants of the King, as he is capable of solving the problems cleverly. Provided that nobody is trying to clip his wings, his mind will always think in a creative way. In other words, the less attempts to kill his childhood, the more chances he has to be a great man.

Jim could easily stir the reader's sympathy. He has no right to buy or even see his family. The only way to buy freedom is money but he has no money. He, however, does not surrender. Unlike Huck's father, who has been enslaved by drinking alcohol day and night, Jim has not given up till the last moment. He has considerable reasons to live, though his life is totally insignificant for the Americans. He does not dream of having a car, living in a prestigious palace or leading a luxurious life. He is only asking to be treated as a human being. According to the Americans, the slaves have no right even to dream. Nevertheless he has been whipped, he has insisted to carry on his journey. It is incumbent upon him to free his family, not only because being the father but also out of feeling guilty as a result of killing his little daughter "Elizabeth". He could never forgive himself for this deed. "I will make you obey my orders" is his reply to the innocent child. He could not change anything around him. He could do nothing and even his little child makes it worse. Actually, he has been trying to kill the elegance of the American society when he has killed his daughter. This is the only thing he can do without being whipped or punished. The girl is his property. Instead of helping free his daughter, he kills her.

The journey to "Cairo" has changed both Huck's and Jim's life forever. It also changes their characters as well. Huck, who always thinks that it is difficult to argue with a slave, feels guilty that Jim has been sold. He seeks to free him later as he thinks that he is his

friend. Though he knows nothing about adventures and his life is terribly dull, Jim and Huck could be true friends. It has not been a journey for getting freedom only, it has been a journey for reshaping their lives.

Ultimately, the novel speaks about the cruelty of human beings towards one another. Although some of them are well-educated, their mentality is more dull than a black slave. Being a professional, sincere writer, Twain could make his themes as vivid as the sun in a summer's day. Indeed he contributed to making an enduring part of American literature.

ⁱ Wikipedia

ⁱⁱ Writers for Children: Critical Study of the major Authors since the 7th Century by Jane Bingham, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1988, Page 573.

ⁱⁱⁱ Writers for Children: Critical Study of the major Authors since the 7th Century by Jane Bingham, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1988, Page 573.

^{iv} Writers for Children: Critical Study of the major Authors since the 7th Century by Jane Bingham, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1988, Page 574.

^v Writers for Children: Critical Study of the major Authors since the 7th Century by Jane Bingham, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1988, Page 578.

^{vi} Wikipedia