



“THE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN- IS THE FIRST REALISTIC NOVEL IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

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Abstract: The following article is devoted to the first realistic novel in American literature written by Mark Twain “The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn”. It is the combination of simplicity and subtlety, directness and complexity that has given the novel its status as the American classic.

Keywords: realism, Civil War, freedom of choice, Huck Finn, slavery, Jim, the Mississippi River.

In American literature, the term "realism" encompasses the period of time from the Civil War to the turn of the century during which William Dean Howells, Rebecca Harding Davis, Henry James, Mark Twain, and others wrote fiction devoted to accurate representation and an exploration of American lives in various contexts. As the United States grew rapidly after the Civil War, the increasing rates of democracy and literacy, the rapid growth in industrialism and urbanization, an expanding population base due to immigration, and a relative rise in middle-class affluence provided a fertile literary environment for readers interested in understanding these rapid shifts in culture. In drawing attention to this connection, Amy Kaplan has called realism a "*strategy for imagining and managing the threats of social change*"¹.

Realism was a movement that encompassed the entire country, or at least the Midwest and South, although many of the writers and critics associated with realism (notably W. D. Howells) were based in New England. Among the Midwestern writers considered realists would be Joseph Kirkland, E. W. Howe, and Hamlin Garland; the Southern writer John W. De Forest's “Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty” is often considered a realist novel, too.

Realism sets itself at work to consider characters and events which are apparently the most ordinary and uninteresting, in order to extract from these their full value and true meaning. It would apprehend in all particulars the connection between the familiar and the extraordinary, and the seen and unseen of human nature. Beneath the deceptive cloak of outwardly uneventful days, it detects and endeavors to trace the outlines of the spirits that are hidden there; the measure the changes in their growth, to watch the symptoms of moral decay or regeneration, to fathom their histories of passionate or intellectual problems. In short, realism reveals. Where we thought nothing worth of notice, it shows everything to be rife with significance.

*“Realism is nothing more and nothing less than the truthful treatment of material.”*²

¹ Kaplan, Justin. Mister Clemens and Mark Twain. New York: Touchstone, 1966. - P.9.

² Berthoff, Warner. The Ferment of Realism. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1965.- P.15.

"Realism, and the art of depicting nature as it is seen by toads. The charm suffusing a landscape painted by a mole, or a story written by a measuring-worm."³

In its own time, realism was the subject of controversy; debates over the suitability of realism as a mode of representation led to a critical exchange known as the realism war. In most people's minds, the years following the Civil War symbolized a time of healing and rebuilding. For those engaged in serious literary circles, however, that period was full of upheaval. A literary civil war raged on between the camps of the romantics and the realists and later, the naturalists. People waged verbal battles over the ways that fictional characters were presented in relation to their external world.

These American realists believed that humanity's freedom of choice was limited by the power of outside forces. At another extreme were naturalists Stephen Crane and Frank Norris who supported the ideas of Emile Zola and the determinism movement. Naturalists argued that individuals have no choice because a person's life is dictated by heredity and the external environment.

"The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" is considered to be the first realistic novel in American literature. It was originally planned as a sequel to "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer" – but the plan was altered along the way. So "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" stands alone and is beyond doubt Mark Twain's masterpiece. Huck Finn's voyage down the river on a raft with the runaway slave, Nigger Jim, gives rise to universal issues like human relations and moral reflections. The composition is a picaresque-like narrative that in a way resembles the famous story about Don Quixote. Next to the two characters on the raft there is a third protagonist – the mighty and mystic Mississippi, the delusive companion carrying them towards freedom.

The novel certainly justifies its rank as a classic in world literature.

It is a novel depicting an era of southern society and environment and the ignorance of southernism opposition to slavery. It is written in southern dialect and seen through the adventures of two boys from different societies running away from civilization. The author bases the novel on the conflict between civilization and natural life.

Twain took Huck's views of Slavery, Social Acceptance, and religion to show how one could have been free from the accepted yet untested ways of society. Civilization is that single understanding allowed by the set of values common to each member of a community. In the novel *"The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn"* civilization was known as the suitable attire that you wore, a strong belief in religion, and the importance of education much like it is today. Huck was raised to be known as an uncivilized outcast in his village. People rejected him because they saw him as a trouble-maker. Huck was raised outside of society, and this made it hard for him to conform. Huck revolted against the Widow Douglas and her attempts to dress him in clothes that were considered proper from young men. Huck's idea of suitable attire was his old rags and barefoot feet. Widow Douglas turned to her faith for all of her aspects in life.

"She told me to pray every day, and whatever I asked for I would get it. But it wasn't so. I tried it"⁴. Instead of praying for help in finding faith, he prays for a fishing line.

Huck saw no importance in religion. His views of praying also reflect his lack of serious concerns. Miss Watson tried to make Huck realize the importance of education by giving him lessons. Huck didn't see a reason why he should pay attention to his educational lessons from Miss Watson.

Most slaves were very unintellectual and had no education whatsoever.

³ Cunliffe, Marcus. *The Literature of the United States*. New York: Penguin Books Ltd, 1986.- P.41.

⁴ Twain, Mark. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. New York: Penguin Group, 1959.-P.15

*"He judged it was all up with him anyway it could be fixed; for if he didn't get saved he would get drown; and if he did get saved, whoever saved him would send him back home so as to get the reward, and then Miss Watson would sell him South, sure. Well, he was right; he was most always right; he had an uncommon level head for a nigger."*⁵

Huck joins in the common belief that blacks are less intelligent than whites. This is when Twain brought Jim into the novel to play the character of a Miss Watson's black slave in which Huck befriended. After Huck runaway from civilization and society he meets up with Jim who has also escaped from his high standard as a slave. As Huck became closer with Jim he started believing differently and changed the way his heart felt about many things. Huck rarely shows remorse for making up stories, but he feels terrible after he plays a trick on Jim. Huck pretends that a terrible storm, which had separated the two travelers, never took place, and insists that Jim must have dreamed the entire episode. When Jim discovers the truth and expresses disappointment in his young friend, Huck swallows his pride and apologizes: *"It was fifteen minutes before I could work myself up to go and humble myself to a nigger; but I done it, and I wasn't ever sorry for it afterwards, neither."*⁶ As their adventures down the Mississippi River continued Huck started questioning himself for assisting with the Negro's escape, because he is violating strict slave laws, laws that can result in harsh penalties for whites. Huck treats Jim as a friend and an equal, but also rejects the common interpretation of the bible, that blacks are inferior to whites.

As a coming of age character in the late nineteenth century, Huck views his surroundings with a practical and logical lens. His observations are not filled with judgments; instead, Huck observes his environment and gives realistic descriptions of the Mississippi River and the culture that dominates the towns that dot its shoreline from Missouri south. Huck's practical and often socially naive views and perceptions provide much of the satirical humor of the novel. It is important to note, however, that Huck himself never laughs at the incongruities he describes. For example, Huck simply accepts, at face value, the abstract social and religious tenets pressed upon him by Miss Watson until his experiences cause him to make decisions in which his learned values and his natural feelings come in conflict. When Huck is unable to conform to the rules, he accepts that it is his own deficiency, not the rule, that is bad. Abstractly, he does not recognize the contradiction of "loving thy neighbor" and enforcing slavery at the same time. He observes the racist and anti-government rants of his ignorant father but does not condemn him because it is the "accepted" view in his world. Huck simply reports what he sees, and the deadpan narration allows Twain to depict a realistic view of common ignorance, slavery, and the inhumanity that follows.

As with several of the frontier literary characters that came before him, Huck possesses the ability to adapt to almost any situation through deceit. He is playful but practical, inventive but logical, compassionate but realistic, and these traits allow him to survive the abuse of Pap, the violence of a feud, and the wiles of river con men. To persevere in these situations, Huck lies, cheats, steals, and defrauds his way down the river. These traits are part of the reason that *Huck Finn* was viewed as a book not acceptable for children, yet they are also traits that allow Huck to survive his surroundings and, in the conclusion, make the right decision.

Because Huck believes that the laws of society are just, he condemns himself as a traitor and a villain for acting against them and aiding Jim. More important, Huck believes that he will lose his chance at Providence by helping a slave. When Huck declares, *"All right, then, I'll go to hell,"*⁷ he refuses his place

⁵ Twain, Mark. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. New York: Penguin Group, 1959.-P.81.

⁶ Twain, Mark. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. New York: Penguin Group, 1959.-P.96.

⁷ Twain, Mark. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. New York: Penguin Group, 1959. – P.206.

in society and heaven, and the magnitude of his decision is what solidifies his role as a heroic figure.

Mark Twain's delicate familiarity with children's psychology, his thorough understanding of society, his great contribution to American literature as a great realist and satirist and his immense witty humor have won great respect and reputation among the people around the world. Of all the works Mark Twain accomplished in his life, "The Adventure of Huckleberry Finn" is the most successful. This remarkable masterpiece brings the world prestige to him. It is the combination of simplicity and subtlety, directness and complexity that has given the novel its status as the American classic. Seemingly the novel is telling a story of a young boy and a runaway slave journeying on the Mississippi. However, it is of great moral passion. It deals with the virtue and depravity of man's heart, which can only be fully understood by adult readers. Throughout the novel, Twain illustrates the white people's enormous capacity for evil. Twain also demonstrates that not all white men were evil or that everything, necessarily, was completely black or white. There existed a moral confusion. Not all the southern slave-owners in the novel are depicted as innately evil: many of them, in fact, seem genuinely goodhearted people.

The list of used literature:

1. Kaplan, Justin. Mister Clemens and Mark Twain. New York: Touchstone, 1966. - P.9
2. Berthoff, Warner. The Ferment of Realism. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1965.- P.15.
3. Cunliffe, Marcus. The Literature of the United States. New York: Penguin Books Ltd, 1986.- P.41
4. Twain, Mark. The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. New York: Penguin Group, 1959.