

It is so glorious that you like Tom Sawyer so well....As to that last chapter, I think of just leaving it off and adding nothing in its place. Something told me that the book was done when I got to that point -- and so the strong temptation to put Huck's life at the Widow's into detail, instead of generalizing it in a paragraph, was resisted.  
 -- From Twain's letter to Howells, Nov. 23, 1875. 87

## CHAPTER V    THE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is a sequel to Tom Sawyer. The book is a good example of Twain's well-known habit of composing under the inspiration of the moment and then putting the manuscript aside when that original impulse became diminished. At the end of Tom Sawyer Twain was tempted to describe in detail Huck's life at the Widow's but he gave up the idea. However, the publication of Tom Sawyer proved such a success that Twain therefore began another boy book relating the adventures of Huck. Yet, as he went along Twain found himself in difficulty concerning the outcome of the book. The first section was written in 1876. Near the end of Chapter 16 Twain could not see clearly where he was going and laid aside his manuscript. Twain's narrative plan came into difficulties after Huck and Jim shove off in haste from Jackson's Island to escape the immediate danger of the slave hunters Huck has learned about from Mrs. Loftus. The raft floats along the river carrying the two fugitives until at the beginning of chapter 15, Huck plans to sell the raft when they reach Cairo, and get on a steamboat and travel up the Ohio where they will be out of trouble among the free states. But they drift past Cairo in the fog and their canoe

disappears while they are sleeping. Huck and Jim therefore drift downstream with the current, seeking a chance to buy a canoe to go back. And the story is abandoned here for Twain's plot had taken a shape that was difficult to deal with. He did not know how he could justify his runaway slave drifting deeper and deeper into slave territory.

After an interval of three years, Twain took up the manuscript again in 1879. By this time he had a different plan for the story. Instead of concentrating on Huck's and Jim's escape, he began a critical description of the prewar society of the South seen through Huck's innocent eyes. Therefore, Chapters 17 and 18 are devoted to the Grangerford household and the feud. Meanwhile Jim has disappeared from the story. However, later Twain found a way to combine social satire with Huck's and Jim's journey on the raft by introducing the Duke and the King.<sup>88</sup> Huck's and Jim's quest for freedom has failed; only the outward form of the journey is retained. Twain solves his plot problem facily at the end by revealing that Jim has been freed in Miss Watson's will. Thus in terms of the plot reason for their journey becomes pointless. And yet, because the book is so important to the development of American fictions, it is one of the most important journeys in American literature.

Twain obviously intended to capitalize on the success of Tom Sawyer by writing another book using the same characters, this time with Huck in the spotlight. But Huck Finn is a very different book indeed. The reader knows, for example, from the first sentence that something new has been added:

You don't know about me, without you have read a book by the name of The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, but that ain't no matter. That book was made by Mr. Mark Twain, and he told the truth, mainly. There were things which he stretched, but mainly he told the truth.<sup>89</sup>

Thus, the book is distinguished by the use of first-person narrative technique. Twain makes the boy of thirteen years old tell his own story in his own vernacular idiom. The use of Huck's narrative voice gives many benefits. It resolves the difficulties about point-of-view and style which had occurred in Twain's earlier works. Twain wears the mask of Huck and gives his ideas through the mouth of the boy and avoids annoying the readers with his preaching. Besides, in letting Huck relate his own adventures in his boyish expression, the book becomes realistic and gains stylistic unity.

Another advantage of Huck's narrative is the folk beauty of the vernacular idiom. Huck's wonder at the natural world around him is beautifully expressed. Huck, an ignorant boy, and the runaway slave Jim lie on the raft surrounded by the beauty of the physical world and express their feelings about nature in some of the most lyrical passages in American literature:

We had the sky up there, all speckled with stars, and we used to lay on our backs and look up at them, and discuss about whether they was made or only just happened. Jim he allowed they was made, but I allowed they happened; I judged it would have took too long to make so many. Jim

said the moon could a laid them; well, that looked kind of reasonable, so I didn't say nothing against it, because I've seen a frog lay most as many, so of course it could be done. We used to watch the stars that fall, too, and see them streak down. Jim allowed they'd got spoiled and was hove out of the nest.<sup>90</sup>

Although both of them are illiterate, their discussion reflects their intimate personal knowledge of nature. The passage is rich with the beauty of the vernacular idiom and fresh vision of the beauties of the natural world.

Again, the description of the sunrise on the Mississippi River is innocently and freshly reported through Huck's eyes. The description is truthful and realistic according to Huck's feelings and vision:

Next we slid into the river... and watched the daylight come. Not a sound anywheres -- perfectly still-- just like the whole world was asleep....The first thing you see, looking away over the water, was a kind of dull line; that was the woods on t'other side...then a pble place in the sky; then more paleness spreading around; then the river softened up away off, and weren't black any more, but gray you could see little dark spots drifting along ever so far away -- trading scows, and such things... and by and by you could see n streak on the water which you know by the look of the streak that there's a snag there in a swift current which breaks on it and makes that streak look that way; and you see the mist curl up off of the water... and the river, and you make out a log cabin

in the edge of the woods, away on the bank on t'other side of the river, being a woodyard, likely, and piled by them cheats so you can throw a dog through it anywheres; then the nice breeze springs up, and comes fanning you from over there, so cool and fresh and sweet to smell on account of the woods and the flowers; but sometimes not that way, because they've left dead fish laying around gars and such, and they do get pretty rank; and next you've got the full day, and everything smiling in the sun and the song-birds just going it.<sup>91</sup>

Huck sets up the picture of sunrise in a simple and colloquial way, using familiar words: "perfectly still," "nice breeze," "cool and fresh and sweet," "paleness spreading around," etc. The passage is accurate, unliterary and beautiful. Besides, freshness of vision is achieved through the use of vernacular language. The achievement is an improvement on Twain's depiction of landscape in Roughing It, discussed earlier. When writing in his own voice, Twain can't help following the stale romantic vocabulary of <sup>the</sup> 19th century. Huck's description of the sunrise is an attempt by Twain to escape from the conventional landscape idiom of his time. Besides, it emphasizes Twain's search for realism: a faithful and realistic mode of expressing exactly what one sees. Huck sees both the beauty and the ugliness of the river. He admires the changing reflection of the sun on the river when the sun is rising; at the same time he points out its dangerous side: the snag, an obstacle to the boat which comes drifting along the river.

Huck can hear birds singing, and smell the fresh sweet smell of flowers. Yet his nose recognizes the smell of the dead fish lying around the bank. His description of the woodyard and the spaces between the logs which are large enough to "throw a dog through" are both a funny and realistic comparison. This detail also displays a characteristic turn of Huck's mind, for it is the dishonesty of the work that he notices.

The more significant thing is that Twain portrays his vernacular narrator with human depth. Huck is seen as a social outcast, ignorant and illiterate, contradicting the moral code of a society built on slavery. Huck is indeed the representative American Southwestern boy who has the right to free himself from civilization and its imperatives. Before his meeting with the runaway slave on Jackson's Island, he has rejected all signs of civilization: wearing shoes, formal clothes, Sunday school, regular hours, prayer books and domestic hygiene. At the same time, Huck cannot bear the dreadful brutality of his father. In coming in contact with Jim, Huck's prejudices against Negroes are gradually destroyed. He finds in Jim innate manliness, gentleness, faithfulness, sympathy and paternal affection unknown to him before. These are the very qualities Huck longs for. Huck learns the meaning of human relationship and friendliness through the fog and snake-bite episodes.

Many times Huck is torn between the conflicting codes of social and religious conventions and the natural feeling welling

up from within. This is the paradox that the book is built on, and it mirrors one of the important paradoxes of life. In fact, what we call "conscience" is something derived from society. Huck's prejudices against Negroes are imposed on him by social and religious teachings, and they strongly shape his mind and thinking about the portrait of the Negro. Yet deep down in his heart Huck has a feeling that the fundamental social ethic is perhaps wrong, though he is unable to conclude that the society is corrupted and thinks instead that he is a sinner. He succumbs to the natural feeling of his heart even though he feels guilty in doing so. His decision to stand by Jim confirms his separation from the social imperatives. Huck's separation from society is of course convincing because of his outcast condition. Huck does not belong to the society like Tom and other boys who are a part of society and bound to its conventions.

As they travel to Cairo, the great moral crisis occurs when Huck realizes for the first time that he has helped a runaway slave escape from his rightful owner. This means he is stealing another man's property; and when Jim makes enough money to buy or steal his wife or children that will accumulate the evil. Huck sees himself committing a sin against the dictum of the sacredness of property. However, Huck's natural humanity and Jim's confidence in Huck's goodness push him to struggle against the social code and the church teachings. Huck courageously adheres to the moral truth of his heart when he confronts the slave-hunters coming along the Ohio River. They suspect that Huck is concealing a slave on the raft.

Huck admits that there is a man on the raft but is hesitating as he tells the lie that the man is white. The men then decide they will go to see for themselves. Huck suddenly tells them that the man is his pap and that he is sick.

Pap'll be mighty much obleeged to you...  
 Everybody goes away when I want  
 them to help me tow the raft ashore,  
 and I can't do it by myself.  
 "Well, that's infernal mean. Odd, too.  
 Say, boy, what's the matter with your  
 father?"  
 "It's the - a - the - well, it ain't  
 anything much."  
 They stopped pulling...  
 "Get her back, John, get back!" says  
 one. They backed water. "Keep away,  
 boy ---...Your pap's got the small-  
 pox... Why didn't you come out and  
 say so? Do you want to spread it  
 all over?"<sup>92</sup>



Huck's wonderful lie stops the slave-hunters. They even pity Huck's poor father (and feel guilty about not helping) and donate a sum of money for him. With brief advice, they hurry away without asking to investigate the raft.

In Chapter 31, Huck meets his second mental struggle. After he has learned that the King has sold Jim to Silas Phelps, Huck thinks of writing a letter to Miss Watson telling where Jim is, since Jim is her possession. But then Huck realizes that Miss Watson would be likely to sell him down the river again as a punishment for running away. Moreover, people will denounce Huck for helping Jim to get his freedom. In this way, Huck comes to brood over the wickedness of the crime. He is afraid of the



everlasting fire and tries to pray but the words won't come out. He then writes a letter to Miss Watson to ease his troubled conscience. After that he feels washed clean of sin; but suddenly the picture of Jim rises before his mind. His memory of Jim's kindness and goodness defies his conscience. Huck tears up the letter and declares to stand firmly by Jim

"All right, then, I'll go to hell."<sup>93</sup>

The account of Huck's mental struggles marks the emotional climax of the book. Huck detaches himself from the debased social values of St. Petersburg. He realizes that he is a social outcast.

"I would take up wickedness again,  
which was in my line, being  
brung up to it and the other  
wasn't".<sup>94</sup>

Huck then definitely determines to help Jim gain his freedom. In doing so, Huck is convinced that he is committing a terrible sin against his conscience and society.

Similarly to Tom Sawyer, in Huck Finn Twain parodies the kind of writing he despises -- sentimental writing. The poetry in the scrap-book written by Emmeline Grangerford is the same kind of composition written by young ladies to be read on the "Examination" day in Tom Sawyer. Twain makes fun of such writing through Huck. Huck, a social outcast with no artistic training, honestly and innocently praises Emmeline's poetry written in memory of Stephen Dowling Bots, a boy who had fallen down a well and was drowned:

Ode to Stephen Dowling Bots, Dec'd.  
 And did young Stephen sicken,  
 And did young Stephen die?  
     And did the sad hearts thicken,  
     And did the mourners cry?  
 No; such was not the fate of  
     Young Stephen Dowling Bots;  
 Though sad hearts round him thickened  
 'Twas not from sickness' short.  
 .....  
 Oh, no. Then list with tearful eye,  
     Whilst I his fate do tell,  
 His soul did from this cold world fly  
     By falling down a well.<sup>95</sup>

The poetry is sentimentalized nonsense. Emmeline wrote it just because it allowed her to weep over the sad event. Huck is amazed by it and has nothing but praise for it:

It was very good poetry.<sup>96</sup>

He even tries to "sweat out" a verse or two as a tribute to her but he fails. But on the other hand, when he sees Emmeline's greatest picture -- an unfinished sketch a young girl in long white gown with three pairs of hands stretched out in different directions -- which the family highly treasured by hanging flowers on it every year, Huck's common sense tells him the picture is not art. To him, the girl looks "too spidery."<sup>97</sup> (Emmeline had planned to paint out the two pairs of arms she didn't like, but died before she could). Thus, ironically Huck's innocent eye can see through sentimentality and pretensions of Southern culture.

Twain's complicated point-of-view is seen in his attack on the bad taste of the Southern people. Instead of having to rely

on direct, straightforward statement, Twain can ironically make Huck admire the provincial taste of the Grangerfords:

...there was a big outlandish parrot on each side of the clock, made out of something like chalk, and painted up gaudy. By one of the parrots was a cat made of crockery, and a crockery dog by the other; and when you pressed down on them they squeaked, but didn't open their mouths nor look different nor interested. They squeaked through underneath. There was a couple of big wild-turkey-wing fans spread out behind those things. On a table in the middle of the room was a kind of a lovely crockery basket that had apples and oranges and peaches and grapes piled up in it, which was much redder and yellower and prettier than real ones is, but they warn't real because you could see where pieces had got chipped off and showed the white chalk or whatever it was underneath.<sup>98</sup>

Huck, lacking any experience in matters of taste, innocently admires what he finds strange in the house to be lovely and wonderful. The passage is an improvement on the treatment of same subject in Life on the Mississippi, Twain's next completed work. In the more reportarical travel book Twain must use his own voice.

Since Twain wrote Huck Finn by fits and starts, the book has no preconceived plan or carefully structured plot. Yet, the book does have certain themes, treated almost musically, to follow with their repetitions and variations. The book begins with Huck's first moral lesson learned from the widow. The lesson is about Moses and the "Bubrushers," a Biblical story which here symbolizes birth.

It establishes from the beginning that birth and death will be significant themes <sup>that</sup> recur throughout the book. But Twain wants to disguise the theme of rebirth; he therefore characteristically makes a joke of it by portraying Huck being in a sweat over the loss and making fun of it himself. The story of Moses is also symbolic of redemption from water, and, of course, Huck gains his salvation by water. After his pretended murder, Huck gains spiritual renewal by being symbolically reborn. Now he runs away from society and his dreadful father. After establishing himself with Jim on Jackson's Island, Huck finds himself and his slave insecure among the slaveholding communities along the Mississippi River. For their safety, Huck is obliged to take up different identities and keeps on inventing new stories to disguise the real one. Being a magnificent liar, many times Huck succeeds quite well with his elaborate convincing life stories. Besides, his various identities provide the book with excitements and funny episodes.

The Mississippi River is the central core of the book. It is not just a background; it determines the action. It gives a unity to Huck's adventures. Though in many chapters Huck and Jim are not on board the raft, the outward appearance of the journey down the river is retained throughout the book. Besides, the river is the vehicle for Huck's escape from civilization and Jim's flight for freedom. It also provides a community on the raft between Huck and Jim. They both find deep human values previously little-known to them: simple fellowship, mutual kindness, self-reliance, human

dignity and equality and a general harmony in human relationships. But when the two vagabonds, the Duke and the King, join them, selfishness and hypocrisy destroy this ideal community.

Another theme of the book is Huck's search for a father. Having learned about his son's wealth, Pap suddenly reappears to claim Huck and get the money. He denounces Huck for the civilized habits the Widow and Miss Watson have imposed on him. He then takes Huck to live with him in a cabin in the woods and treats him brutally. Huck kills a hog and smears its blood on his clothes and on the floor as the evidence of his death before he escapes down the river. Many times Pap is compared to a hog in the book and it symbolizes filth and ignorance and moral poverty. Thus, in killing a hog, Huck is symbolically killing his father. His trip down the river is symbolically a search for a new father to replace the unworthy one. In Jim, he finds spontaneous affection and paternal care: the very qualities Huck longs for.

Through the journey down the river, the innocent Huck is exposed to a world of all sorts of horrors -- mainly man being unkind to man. The communities on the banks of the river represent social constructs based on different systems of values, none of them wholly admirable. The farther down the river the trip proceeds, the more darkly the vision of man and the vision of America are portrayed.

Both Huck and Jim are aware of the existence of evil in society when they first come upon a floating house on the island. Similarly to the cave in Tom Sawyer, the house is the place where evil is exposed to Huck and Jim. They meet there a corpse lying on the floor shot in the back, old heaps of greasy cards scattered

around, whisky bottles, masks, obscene words and pictures on the wall, some women's under-clothes, a new Barlow knife, a hatchet, a wooden leg, etc.<sup>99</sup> Both Huck and Jim see the house as a mysterious place, a nightmare. But the more they travel down the river, the more convincingly evil is exposed to them.

South of St. Louis Huck and Jim come upon the wreck of the steamboat "Walter Scott" there they find a gang of murderers, violent and dreadful, treacherous and greedy for money. The steamboat is symbolically named. It shows Twain's belief that the values of the South have been corroded partly by an addiction to the overly novels and a glorified, romantic image of itself as the last land of knightly chivalry. Twain's criticism of the South, as embodied in the name of the boat, is altogether characteristic. He criticizes Southern society in the same spirit to attack Cooper's style or parodies the pilgrims rhapsodizing over the ruin of the "Last Supper."

During the separation of Huck and Jim caused by the smashing of a steamboat through the raft, Huck finds himself in the society of an aristocratic clan, the Grangerfords. Huck's experience throughout this episode lays open a society in which high civilization shines through brutality and cruelty and a dreadful tradition of feud. Huck accompanies Buck, a thirteen-year-old boy of gentle blood, to the fight with another aristocratic clan, the Shepherdsons. Buck's death signifies the inhumanity of the Southern aristocratic code. Buck feels sick and refuses to comment on his feelings about

Buck's death. Huck is very glad to return to the raft with Jim and escape from the feuds.

In Bricksville, Huck witnesses brutality in society, Colonel Sherburne's cold-blooded murder of Boggs, the town drunkard. The drunken but harmless Boggs threatens the colonel and in anger the latter shoots him down on the main street. A curious mob pushes its way to catch a glimpse of Boggs lying dying in the drugstore. Huck follows the angry mob as it approaches the colonel's house. They all agree that Sherburne should be lynched. They then hurry to the house and yell madly along the way. Yet, when they reach the place, their courage and anger are tamed by Sherburne's contemptuous speech. The colonel defies the mob with his scornful courage:

I know you clear through....The average man's a coward....The average man don't like trouble and danger....The pitifullest thing out is a mob; that's what an army is -- a mob; they don't fight with courage that's born in them, but with courage that's borrowed from their mass, and from their officers....Now the thing for you to do, is to droop your tails and go home and crawl in a hole....Now, leave -- 100

Sherburne belongs to the series of Twain's characters who are isolated above the mob by their personal force and intellectual superiority. They are contemptuous of mankind. Such a scornful attitude as the colonel's will become stronger in Twain's later characters of the same type. In fact, the colonel is Twain's first self-projection of himself who reflects Twain's attitude to mankind in general. The colonel is the first tentative mouthpiece

of these thoughts. Later it is all too clear that this attitude is exactly Twain's own.

In meeting with a pair of scoundrels, the false Duke of Bridgewater and Dauphin of France, the ideal happiness on the raft is destroyed. These representatives of the wickedness of the social order come invading the raft. They fool Huck and Jim with their former life-stories in order to take over the raft and treat them as their servants. Huck's common sense assures him that they are both liars and frauds, but he makes no move to escape them. The two fakes contrive many schemes to collect dishonest money and cheat people whenever they have the chance. The King's first scheme is to go to a camp-meeting, the place where people are gathered for a frenzied religious service. In this scene Twain wants to show the false values of this sort of religion. There is a lot of singing, shouting, weeping and groaning as the preacher proceeds with his sermon. People fling themselves down on the floor. One can't make out what the preacher is saying because confusion reigns over the place. In such an atmosphere, the king perceives a chance to make some money. He introduces himself to the meeting as a converted pirate who has the good intention of turning his fellow-pirates to the path of virtue. People are moved by his life story and take up a collection for him:

So the king went all through the crowd with his hat, swabbing his eyes, and blessing the people and praising them and thanking them for being so good to the poor pirates



away off there; and every little while the prettiest kind of girls, with tears running down their cheeks, would up and ask him would he let them kiss him for to remember him by; and he always done it.<sup>101</sup>

When the king returns to the raft, he finds he has collected eighty-seven dollars and seventy-five cents.

Another plan to make money is to have a first-class Shakespearean revival, the balcony scene in Romeo and Juliet and the sword-fight in Richard III. The performance proves a failure. They therefore arrange a performance of exceedingly low comedy, the Royal Nonesuch. This time the plan works and they collect much money through cheating the people with their ridiculous vulgar performance. They succeed in escaping the revenge of the town-people. Another episode showing the two scoundrels plan to take over others' property is when they fleece the Wilkes girls by pretending that they are the two English uncles they are waiting for. Though this time, through Huck's intervention, they are caught, they succeed in escaping to the raft.

Huck's experience with the two frauds makes him realize even more strongly the wickedness found in the social order. All the time, Huck and Jim try to compromise with the king and the duke by letting them have their own way and by letting them sleep inside the shelter on the raft. For Jim's safety, Huck tells them from the first time he meets them that Jim is his only property left

in the world, Yet, later on, the two fakes consider Jim "our nigger". When they are short of money, they sell Jim and take the money to set up a new performance of the "Royal Nonesuch" in Pikesville. Huck is sickened by their selfishness, wickedness and hypocrisy. Yet, at the end, when Huck learns that the townspeople know about their fake show which is going to be performed in the town, Huck persuades Tom to warn them about the approaching danger. This action is an evidence that Huck's good will shines brightly and rights supreme in the book, no matter how wicked and unkind the King and the duke had been to him and Jim. But Huck and Tom arrive too late and see the duke and the king being ridden out of the nearby town on a rail, surrounded by a howling mob. Huck speaks from his heart and speaks for humanity:

It was a dreadful thing to see.  
Human beings can be awful cruel  
to one another.<sup>102</sup>

It should be noted that the book is one of the last and greatest children of Southwestern humor. Huck tells his own story in the Southwestern idiom without a framework technique just as in the Sut Lovingood stories. Since the book was written by fits and starts, there are many improvised episodes Twain fitted into the book. Some of these are influenced by Twain's forerunners, the Southwestern humorists. The camp-meeting episode is directly borrowed from Hooper's Simon Suggs' Adventures and Travels, discussed earlier. Chapter 14, the King "Sollerman" dialogue, is

a literary comedian set-piece and uses exactly the same joke as the account of Brigham Young's many wives in Roughing It. The Jim we know is lost during this chapter and appears as a minstrel Negro, direct from the vaudeville stage. Though Jim appears inconsistent to his character in this chapter, the humorous material is more than just funny, for it creates continuity in the book. Jim's discussion of royalty and the French language is an introduction to the fake Dauphin, and the "Duke of Bridgewater". Since Huck Finn is a novel, and a picaresque novel at that, such continuity of elements is necessary. Thus, the technique of humorous devices in Huck Finn is an artistic improvement on the humorous devices in Roughing It. In Roughing It, comic episodes are extended jokes written out according to sudden inspiration. Of course Roughing It doesn't need as much coherence of materials since it is a travel book.

The ending of Huck Finn proves a failure when Twain brings us back to the world of the romantic Tom with a complicated and needless plot for rescuing Jim from captivity. When Huck arrives at the Phelps' plantation where Jim is being held for reward, he learns that the Phelps are in fact Tom's relatives and that they are expecting Tom's visit. Thus, incidentally Huck is plunged into another identity for the Phelps assume him to be Tom Sawyer. Shortly after, Tom himself comes along and meets Huck when Huck is half-way up to the town to fetch down his own baggage. Huck leaves the difficulty to Tom to solve. Tom cleverly takes

the role of Sid, his brother, and both Tom and Huck dedicate themselves to freeing Jim. Jim's escape is managed with complicated romantic intrigues and with elaborate burlesque that doesn't ring true in a novel that had been so essentially serious. In spite of Tom's knowledge of Jim's having been freed in Miss Watson's will, he withholds the information in order to play a cruel and meaningless game. Jim is not treated like a human being when he is surrounded by all sorts of animals, rats, spiders and rattlesnakes to be tamed. In fact, Jim can escape simply by someone stealing a key and opening the door of the cabin for him. But Tom insists upon unnecessary cruel means that imitate the books he has read. Though Jim can lift the bed to release his chain from the leg, he must saw through the leg, eat the sawdust and cover the saw-marks. Though Jim cannot write, he must keep a journal on a shirt written in blood and must scratch secret messages on the backs of tinplates. Though Jim is on the ground, he must make a rope ladder. These comic elements are not funny but strained and out-of-place. As a whole, the Phelps episode is a painful disappointment. There are melodramatic incidents at the ending which pull down the book from the highest level of achievement: a visit from Aunt Polly, the revelation of Jim's freedom and Pap's death. Twain realizes that the book needs an ending but he doesn't know how to end it. He tries to cover up a leak in the book and instinctively returns the story to Tom Sawyer's world in which Huck and Jim are subordinate to Tom. Tom Sawyer would never have tried to free a slave unless

he was already free. Huck would never have subjected a fellow human being to such idle torture. The book ends with Huck's decision to detach himself from society:

But I reckon I got to light out for the territory ahead for the rest, because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and civilize me, and I can't stand it. I been there before.<sup>103</sup>

The ending is Twain's desperate improvisation. Twain has a dilemma he doesn't know how to solve: how to keep Huck pure, unspoiled and safe from society. Letting Huck light out for the territory is all he can do to preserve his innocence -- and civilization will no doubt follow him.

Despite the ending, Huck Finn remains the masterpiece of Twain's writing. It reveals Twain at the highest peak of his creative achievement. In fact Huck Finn was, with the Scarlet Letter and Moby Dick, the third American novel that can be called great.<sup>104</sup> Twain seizes upon the theme of innocence, his typical theme, and puts it in the most successful artistic form he ever discovered.

Innocence is of central significance to American experience. A country without history, America constructed a national myth of youth and greatness. It was the land of nature and God's bounty, but inevitably they cut down the trees to let civilization progress, and they never got over feeling guilty about it. Huck Finn captures this essential ambiguity in American experience. Twain, like many of his fellow-countrymen, was reluctant to celebrate

mechanical progress since it brought him some problems he could not solve. Besides, it also deprived him of the idyllic happiness of his village childhood. Twain therefore recaptures that lost world of innocent man in the midst of nature. The world of that river is a beautiful one, but Twain knows that there is evil all along its banks.

Huck Finn reveals Twain at the height of <sup>his</sup> powers. The use of the vernacular idiom, Negro speech, and the firstperson give it special significance. In addition, Twain is at this moment at a point of balance between innocence and evil. He still cherishes his vision of innocence though Huck must light out for the territory at the end. Yet, Huck's purity, innocent good will are at least temporarily preserved. At the same time an incisive criticism of American river-towns -- and by extension of American society -- is brilliantly presented through the innocent eyes of boyhood. The balance of innocence and evil tips in neither way.