

READING SLAVERY IN *ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN*

KEIKO NOGUCHI

I

Having Suffered from a long critical controversy over the appropriateness as reading material in public places¹ ever since its publication in 1884², Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* has, nonetheless, enjoyed one of the highest evaluations in American literature. It is well known that Ernest Hemingway extolled the book in *Green Hills of Africa* (1935): "All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*. If you read it you must stop where the Nigger Jim is stolen from the boys. That is the real end. The rest is just cheating. But it's the best book we've had. All American writing comes from that. There was nothing before. There has been nothing as good since" (15). His assessment seems to have fixed the place of *Huckleberry Finn* in the history of American literature.

Following Hemingway's laudation, T. S. Eliot in his introduction to the 1950 London edition of *Huckleberry Finn* admired the book as a masterpiece even more wholly than his predecessor; he revalued the last "cheating" part, as well, in which Tom Sawyer appears to rescue Jim, by insisting that it is the right ending because it "[brings] us back to that [the mood] of the beginning" (353). By maintaining that the two elements, "the Boy and the River," make *Huckleberry Finn* great (348), Eliot seems to indicate what an American hero should be and what makes the authentic American literature—the male drama engaged in an arena between nature and civilization. Although Leo Marx attacks Eliot's (and Trilling's) uncritical approval of the ending as an act eager to justify everything of a work that "has been admitted to the highest canon of literary reputability" (16), he, too, regards the book as a mas-

terpiece in spite of its structural failure at the end and underscores the hero's spiritual growth through the adventures in the Mississippi Valley; he probably agrees with Hemingway's view, "The rest is just cheating. But it's the best book we've had."

Even though we take the rhetorical emphasis into consideration, Hemingway's laudatory comment on *Huckleberry Finn* seems to reflect his wish to nullify the literary tradition that modern American literature may well have inherited ("All American writing comes from that. There was nothing before"). Hemingway and the white male writers and critics that follow him try to conjure an image that the "masterpiece" appeared all of sudden from nowhere. What they are anxious to sever it from, in a sense, paradoxically testifies its definite influence. When Eliot says, for example, "the *style* of the book ... is what makes it a far more convincing indictment of slavery than the sensationalist propaganda of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*" (350), he reveals the two important factors that connect *Huckleberry Finn* to the nineteenth-century best-selling novel by Harriet Beecher Stowe: the subject of slavery and the legacy of antislavery literature.

As Jane Smiley points out, referring to Nina Baym's feminist essay, "Melodramas of Beset Manhood: How Theories of American Fiction Exclude Women Authors," *Uncle Tom's Cabin* failed to occupy a place in the canon of American literature because the traditional canonization was limited to "a very narrow range of white, Protestant, middle-class male authors"; it regarded "the struggle of the individual against society" as the only worthy subject of American literature and dismissed "all other themes and modes of literary expressions" as "un-American" (Smiley 361). Thus *Huckleberry Finn* was not only isolated from its ancestral work *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the rich cluster of antislavery literature, but one of its major themes, slavery, was blurred and reduced to a mere background before the protagonist's heroism in escaping to freedom from civilization represented by the female-dominant domestic life.

Considering that the novel is set in Southern society in the 1840s, it would be significant to reexamine *Huckleberry Finn* in the context of slavery, for this kind of reading will lead to relating Twain's work to

the long literary tradition of antislavery literature that dates back almost to the beginning of the American republic. And by this reading, we can see that the issues that the theme of slavery (and race) produces are never past ones, but ones existent in the heart of modern American literature.

II. Is Huck a Slave?

Since the adventures are narrated in the first person by the fourteen-year-old orphan with little education who prefers a carefree life in wild nature to restrictive manners of a civilized life and his tone is generally humorous, the reader is apt to forget that the whole story is developed in the Southern society under the strict slavery system, and to fail in taking the slavery issue seriously. The book is in fact replete with scenes and episodes that imply slavery. The narrator-hero Huck was adopted by Widow Douglass and educated by her sister Miss Watson who owns at least one slave, Jim. The Grangerfords, whom Huck visits after the raft is smashed by a steamboat, run many farms with more than one hundred slaves; it is taken for granted that each member of the family has a slave to wait on him or her, including Huck, a temporary guest, who, unfamiliar with being served, commands "his slave" to do almost nothing, while Buck, the youngest boy of the family, works his hard: "My nigger had a monstrous easy time, because I warn't used to having anybody do anything for me, but Buck's was on the jump most of the time" (126). Huck's slave, however, works hard to help Jim hidden in a swamp, a typical locus of fugitive slaves, and leads Huck to the reunion with Jim.

Huck and Jim later come to serve passively like slaves the king and the duke, the frauds who suddenly invade into their journey on the raft. The late Peter Wilks, whose bereaved blood relatives are one of the targets of the two frauds' swindling, was also a wealthy planter, and his slaves are all sold by the king separately and out of town, so that the auction presents a heartrending scene of screams and tears to the extent which Huck feels sick to see them even though he knows they will be

united because the sale is not a legal transaction. We may remember here that the repeated scenes of separation of slave families are characteristic of Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and are integral to the novel's power to induce readers' sympathy for the cause of abolition. Even the most idyllic Phelps place in the book is "one of these little one-horse cotton plantations" (228), and it is in this plantation that Jim is imprisoned; its head, good-natured Silas, a farmer and a preacher, *is* a slaveholder and keeps Jim in a locked cabin until he gains two hundred dollars by returning him to his supposed master. And Tom's "romantic" scheme to free Jim actually causes a slave hunting that involves a group of neighboring farmers armed with guns and hounds.

Only a few episodes are enough to illustrate the kind of slavery society where Huck's adventures take place. If we further examine the implications beneath them, we then will probably see how deeply the issue of slavery is rooted in the novel, especially in the relationship between Huck and Pap, his despotic father. Although Huck's journey down the Mississippi is generally interpreted as an escape from civilization, the immediate factor that sends him into a fugitive life is the mad violence of Pap. As many slave narratives expose that severe whipping by a master is everyday occurrence within a plantation, Huck is often whipped in the hut where he is confined, and Pap's violence gradually increases: "by and by pap got too handy with his hick'ry, and I couldn't stand it. I was all over welts" (37). For Pap his son merely means his "property" and he thinks it his just right to take up everything Huck has, so that Pap pesters and presses Huck for money.

Being uneducated himself, Pap does not allow his son to learn how to read or write; he even tries to obstruct Huck's schooling. Whatever Huck says, except perhaps for a docile "yes," signifies impudence to his father, just as answering back by a slave, whatever just reason he or she has for it, was always regarded as a sign of "sauce," dissatisfaction, or resistance:

"Starchy clothes—very. You think you're a good deal of a big bug, *don't* you?"

“Maybe I am, maybe I ain’t,” I says.

“Don’t you give me none o’ your lip,” says he. “You’ve put on considerable many frills since I been away. I’ll take you down a peg before I get done with you. You’re educated, too, they say; can read and write. You think you’re better’n your father, now, don’t you, because he can’t? I’ll take it out of you” (31)

While education of black slaves was unlawful in the antebellum South, it is often seen in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and many slave narratives that a white master jealous of his servant’s talent treats him or her even more cruelly than he usually does.³

Pap’s anger is directed not only at literate slaves but at any black better off than he is. Whenever he is drunk, he falls into attacking the government that lets him remain as he is, a poor miserable vagrant, while leaving free blacks to have everything in their own ways. His raging harangue about the free mulatto from Ohio is worth citing here:

There was a free nigger there, from Ohio; a mulatter, most as white as a white man. He had the whitest shirt on you ever see, too, and the shiniest hat And what do you think? they said he was a p’fessor in a college, and could talk all kinds of languages, and knowed everything. And that ain’t the wust. They said he could *vote*, when he was at home. Well, that let me out. Thinks I, what is the country a-coming to? ... And to see the cool way of that nigger—why, he wouldn’t a give me the road if I hadn’t shoved him out o’ the way. I says to the people, why ain’t this nigger put up at auction and sold?—that’s what I want to know. And what do you reckon they said? Why, they said he couldn’t be sold till he’d been in the State six months, and he hadn’t been there that long yet They call that a government that can’t sell a free nigger till he’s been in the State six months. (39-40)

We can see from the passage above that Pap makes no distinction between a free black and a slave; a “nigger” means a slave to him and should accordingly behave like a slave (he must give the road to a white

person). A learned black is the most detestable; he should be sold at once in a slave market to know his place. Pap's prejudice against blacks was probably shared in common in the white South before the Civil War as the antislavery literature attests. And his sentiment towards a free black perhaps reflects the backlash in the post-Reconstruction period when the novel was written. To this issue I will refer later again.

In *Was Huck Black?* Shelley Fishkin demonstrates that Huck's narrative reflects African American voices and, thereby, proves how much Twain had been influenced by African American speeches and culture. But her discussion does not include a thematic analysis from the viewpoint of antislavery literature. A close reading of the novel shows that not only does Huck speak like blacks of the time, but he is treated like a slave as well. We may ask, "Is Huck a slave?" instead of "Was Huck black?" Although many critics identify racism in the stereotypical description of Jim as similar to the comic blackface in minstrel shows, his ignorance, gullibility, and superstitiousness, in particular, they tend to fail in detecting similar characteristics in Huck.

Huck's innocence is at times almost synonymous with ignorance. He takes what others say literally. As Miss Watson told him, for instance, that he would get whatever he asked for, if he should pray every day, he prayed hard for fishing hooks in vain. Calling him a fool, she explains that she meant "spiritual gifts" by earnest praying. In Tom's gang play, too, a comic tone is engendered as Huck takes what Tom says literally; when Huck complains that he saw no Spanish merchants or rich Arabs on camels as Tom had pictured but only "an Sunday-school picnic," Tom said with scorn, "if I [Huck] warn't so ignorant, but had read a book called 'Don Quixote,' I would know without asking" (24-25). Similarly, Huck rubbed an old tin lamp till he was exhausted to death, for Tom told him about a genie who would appear out of a lamp to serve the person that rubbed it.

Such ignorance/innocence is connected with superstitiousness. Huck is, in fact, as superstitious as Jim. When a spider that Huck flipped off fell in the flame of a candle and was killed, he was very scared because he believed it was a sign of bad luck: "I got up and

turned around in my tracks three times and crossed my breast every time; and then I tied up a little lock of my hair with a thread to keep witches away” (16). On another occasion when he turned over a salt-cellar at breakfast, he quickly threw some of the salt over his left shoulder in order to avoid bad luck, and was severely scolded by Miss Watson for the mess he had made.

Huck and Jim share characteristics other than innocence/ignorance and tendency to believe others and superstitiousness. Both of them are outcasts in a strictly hierarchical society and become fugitives travelling in the darkness at night and hiding in nature during the daytime. Though socially weak as lowly beings, they are both resourceful to survive dangers latent in nature as well as in the racist society, resorting to the instinctive wisdom that comes from practical experience rather than intellectual knowledge. Huck knows well that he can expect many blessings when the river rises and is alert enough to catch a drifting raft necessary for the escape, while Jim builds on the raft a “snug wigwam” to keep off the blazing sunlight and rain, and makes a high floor to keep things dry (75). They are good at handling people around them, too; finding that the lost raft is in the hands of some black slaves, Jim convinces them that it belongs to him and Huck, giving them each ten cents, and repairs it for resuming the journey again, while Huck manages to get through the crisis of the capture of Jim by the two white slave hunters by means of telling a lie in an instant and even obtains forty dollars from the men who become sympathetic about the trouble Huck has fabricated.

III. Slavery Discourses in the Adventure Story

As we have examined in the previous section, Huck and Jim share many things in common and they help each other in face of difficulties. The two runaways, thus, enjoy a journey for freedom together. However, Huck is, of course, no slave, but a white boy. Though an innocent child, he has internalized to some extent the prejudices against blacks prevailing in the society where he lives.⁴ Whatever low social tier he

belongs to, his position is quite different from Jim's. The definite distinction between their experiences that their racial difference brings about makes itself manifest immediately as the two frauds intrude into their journey on a raft; it is taken for granted that the king and the duke occupy the relatively comfortable beds in the wigwam, while Huck takes the third best, "a straw tick—better than Jim's ... a corn-shuck tick" (144). But the stern reality of slavery has been already disclosed in the episode in which Huck, despite Jim's opposition, gets into a ferryboat wrecked on a rock, where he finds three robbers—the two of them are about to kill the other one who has betrayed them. Their raft being accidentally gone, Huck and Jim will fall into the same destiny of imminent death with the robbers unless they steal or borrow the criminals' boat before the ship sinks. They have a narrow escape, and when they are safe again on their raft, Huck and Jim tell each other what they have respectively experienced:

I told Jim all about what happened inside the wreck, and at the ferryboat; and I said these kinds of things was adventures; but he said he didn't want no more adventures. He said that when I went in the texas and he crawled back to get on the raft and found her gone, he nearly died; because he judged it was all up with *him*, anyway it could be fixed; for if he didn't get saved he would get drowned; 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. (86; emphasis mine)

The passage is very significant because it suggests three important elements of the slavery discourse in this novel: 1) the racial difference in their journey, 2) the double bind situation of Jim, and 3) Huck's initiation into the knowledge of the reality of slavery. There is a large difference, in the first place, between the degrees of risk that Huck and Jim take. Huck wanted to explore the wrecked ship because it was an "adventure" a boy like Tom would never have missed. But it was "a

matter of life and death” for Jim, as Frederick Douglass puts it in his 1845 narrative in describing terrible dangers that await for a runaway slave (87). Jim wants “no more adventures,” for he thought it was the end of him as he found the raft gone; if he did not get a helping hand, he would surely be drowned to death, and if he was saved by someone, he would be sent back to his owner who would most probably sell him down the river—a punishment tantamount to a death sentence for many slaves. This double bind situation in which Jim is placed elucidates the frightful reality of slavery. Having heard Jim voicing his thoughts, Huck begins to comprehend what it means to live as a slave and what an awful risk Jim is taking in running away—it is truly no “adventure.”

The scene of Jim’s recapture towards the denouement of the story illustrates how a fugitive slave was actually treated when captured in antebellum South. The village men are “very huffy” and some of them insist on hanging Jim “for an example to all the other niggers around there” so that they will not try to run away as Jim did (287). What checks their cruel impulse is the price that they have to pay to Jim’s owner if they should kill him: “the people that’s always the most anxious for to hang a nigger that hadn’t done just right, is always the very ones that ain’t the most anxious to pay for him when they’ve got their satisfaction out of him” (288). The evident irony in the quotation is the author’s rather than Huck’s. Even after the first excitement cooled down, the men terribly cursed Jim, freely hitting him on the side of his head, and chained his hands and legs. But for the doctor’s defending explanation of how Jim helped him to cure injured Tom at the sacrifice of his chance to run away, Jim would have been even more heartlessly treated.

Twain seems to illuminate the fact that a slave was not regarded as a human being by emphasizing good-naturedness of Southern country people who are likely to join a frenzied mob to lynch a black slave, or to be heartless enough to disregard the entire humanity of blacks. Aunt Sally is typical of the character. She is a warm-hearted, motherly woman who cares very much for the Sawyer boys and spends a sleepless night, worrying over Sid’s (Tom’s) late return, whereas she does not care at all about a black person even if he or she is killed:

“It wasn’t the grounding—that didn’t keep us back but a little.
 We blew out a cylinder-head.”
 “Good gracious! anybody hurt?”
 “No’m. Killed a nigger.”
 “Well, it’s lucky; because sometimes people do get hurt”
 (230)

Here Huck surely makes his speech conform to the view of blacks prevailing in the South, when he says that no one was hurt except for “a nigger.” He should be careful not to arouse suspicion by showing sympathy for blacks especially when speaking to a stranger; it is mostly safe, in other words, to express a racist sentiment in the slavery South.⁵ As is expected from a “good” Southerner, Aunt Sally expresses no sympathy for the black victim, saying “it’s lucky” because no people were hurt. Clearly blacks are not included in “people.”

Huckleberry Finn reveals the cruel society that admits no humanity to African Americans and this is underscored by showing Jim’s humanity, in how Jim, a black runaway, is a human being just as a white person is. Twain’s depiction of Jim has been repeatedly criticized for being stereotypical. As David Smith suggests, Twain’s use of stereotypes may be a natural consequence of the genre of humorous writing: “Frontier humor relies upon the use of stock types, and consequently racial stereotypes are just one of many types present in *Huckleberry Finn*” (95). It is certain that Jim is presented as a stereotypical black person, being gullible, superstitious, and always obedient to white people. And yet he is no mere comical fool like a blackface in minstrel shows, for he evinces shrewdness, rich human feelings such as compassion, sorrow, joy, resistance, and anger. “Twain’s strategy with racial stereotypes is to elaborate them in order to undermine them” (Smith 95).

As he became the victim of Tom’s prank, for example, in the second chapter—Tom hung Jim’s hat on a limb of a tree while he was asleep and left a five cent for the candles he stole—Jim did not remain a mere superstitious victim but made use of it as his special experience by creating a story: “the witches bewitched him and ... rode him all

over the State” (19). The story was stretched every time he retold it, showing the five cent that he hung from his neck as a sign of his contact with the devil. Jim became famous among black people, some of whom came from afar to hear his story, and he grew awfully proud of himself to the extent that he was “most ruined, for a servant, because he got so stuck up on account of having seen the devil and been rode by witches” (19). He is not a simple gullible fool, but has quick wits to exploit whatever he has to raise himself in his limited world. A similar example is seen when Huck asks him to tell his fortune. Jim makes Huck pay a quarter by saying that the “hair-ball” sometimes “wouldn’t talk without money” (29). Jim is shrewd enough to earn money without demanding it directly, while Huck is also witty to offer “an old slick counterfeit quarter” because the hair-ball “wouldn’t know the difference” (29).

Through their journey for freedom on the raft, Huck and Jim construct an egalitarian relation and Jim expresses his true feelings within this relationship. When Huck could safely join Jim, for instance, on a heavily foggy night after the long hardship to catch his raft, he tried to fool Jim into believing that he had been dreaming and that there was no separation. Being upset by Huck’s tricks, Jim reproached him hard for slighting his deep feelings—his worries about Huck’s safety and unthinkable delight to see him again:

[My] heart wuz mos’ broke bekase you wuz los’, en I didn’ k’yer no mo’ what become er me en de raf’. En when I wake up en fine you back agin, all safe en soun’, de tears come en I could a got down on my knees en kiss’ yo’ foot I’s so thankful. En all you wuz thinkin ‘bout wuz how you could make a fool uv ole Jim wid a lie. Dat truck dah is *trash*; en trash is what people is dat puts dirt on de head er dey fren’s en makes ’em ashamed.” (95)

The outburst of emotion in the above speech tells quite eloquently of his feeling heart. It did make Huck ashamed, and he apologized to Jim for his “mean tricks” after some hesitation. We have to note here that it was unusual for a white person, even a boy, to give an apology to a

black person in antebellum America: “It was fifteen minutes before I could work myself up to go and humble myself to a nigger—but I done it, and I warn’t ever sorry for it afterwards, neither” (95). This is Huck’s first heroic moral decision to “humble [himself] to a nigger,” to do justice to him, the act that, he declares, he has never regretted. And it also marks Huck’s spiritual growth.

Jim’s feeling heart manifests itself when he soliloquizes the memory of his small daughter whom he once hit hard because she would not obey to his order, without knowing the fact that she had become “deaf and damn,” the aftereffect of scarlet fever. He sheds tears thinking of his poor daughter whom he had left at home. As Toni Morrison remarks that this tale by Jim is “one of the most moving remembrances in American literature” (389), it can be a fine piece of fiction by itself.⁶ While Jim can thus express sorrows, he easily laughs at a trivial and funny incident like Huck’s dropping off the raft into the river by a sudden spray of water: “It most killed Jim a-laughing. He was the easiest nigger to laugh that ever was, anyway” (144). Furthermore, he can reason well, as he argues Huck down about both the biblical figure Solomon and the French language so that the white boy has to utter defensively and silently (to the reader), “you can’t learn a nigger to argue” (90).⁷

By giving a voice to black Jim, *Huckleberry Finn* thus undermines the stereotype of a meek grinning slave servile to white people. It is, to be sure, only when Jim and Huck are alone, that Jim’s voice is forwarded,⁸ but his voluble affectionate voice demonstrates that a black slave is no chattel like cattle but a human being with affluent emotions, wisdom, and a powerful voice and thereby subverts the basis of the proslavery discourse that blacks are subhuman.

IV. Violence in American Society

It is true that *Huckleberry Finn* is not a story for boys,⁹ for it includes so many depictions of violence and satire on bigotry of Christian—that is, civilized—people in the South. Miss Watson, supposedly a

model Christian, who tries to civilize the protagonist, owns a slave and even thinks of selling him for the sake of money. The Grangerfords are all very respectable aristocrats like Widow Douglas; Colonel Grangerford, above all, is a perfect gentleman, always well dressed and hospitable to a visitor like Huck, and yet he is merciless to the Shepherdsons, the family's old enemy. They are "pious" Christians, too, and go to church every Sunday, carrying guns with them, and, in spite of all the customary killing and being killed between the two families for the reason they have already forgotten, they are impressed with the minister's sermon on "brotherly love" and talk about "faith, and good works, and free grace, and preforeordination" (129). Twain's satire on hypocrisy of "respectable" Christians is evident.¹⁰

Although life is dealt lightly in the Grangerford family, the actual killing is so gross that Huck feels too sick to tell everything that had happened in the shooting; he cries when he finds Buck killed and pulls his body up from the shore and covers his face. Men, including young ones and small boys, lose their lives in meaningless fights. This is not restricted to the privileged people alone. Monstrous violence follows Huck wherever he goes in the American South. In a small town in Arkansas, which looks poverty-stricken, men loaf about the stores along a mud street, doing nothing but chewing tobacco or bullying pigs and dogs; they set a few dogs on a pig, which runs away "squealing most horrible," or even "[put] turpentine on a stray dog and [set] fire to him" (156). The climax of their cruel joy is the appearance of drunk Boggs who thoughtlessly challenges Colonel Sherburn to a duel. Although Boggs is really a good man and everybody knows that his reckless rampage is only a harmless show, Sherburn ruthlessly shoots him as if to deal with a annoying fly. Huck witnesses the murder and describes it in a realistic way:

They laid him on the floor, and put one large Bible under his head, and opened another one and spread it on his breast—but they tore open his shirt first, and I seen where one of the bullets went in. He made about a dozen long gasps, his breast lifting the Bible up when he drewed in his breath, and letting it down again

when he breathed it out—and after that he laid still; he was dead.
(159)

The practical use of two large Bibles here may also indicate some innuendo to Southern Christianity. At the death of good-natured Boggs, the bystanders become a raging mob and rush to Sherburn's house to lynch him; they are, however, driven away, being overwhelmed by the murderer's menacing speech.

The world of *Huckleberry Finn* is indeed full of violence like the western frontier of outlaws. It presents many implications of lynching. Not only did Huck witness a scene of lynching, but he came close to be lynched as well. This surely reflects the antebellum South in the 1840s when the novel is set, but it also mirrors the 1870s and the 1880s when the work was composed,¹¹ the period from Reconstruction to post-Reconstruction when Jim Crow laws was expanded and enforced. In theory, Jim Crow laws was a "separate but equal" legal doctrine for African Americans, but in practice it meant racial segregation based on the idea of white supremacy and condemned black civil rights (Hansan). It inherited the principles of the Black Codes that aimed to undo the various reformatory changes established in the Reconstruction era and to "[get] things back as near to slavery as possible" (Foner 199).

Against this social background of white backlash emerged the notorious Ku Klux Klan. Founded in 1866 "as a Tennessee social club," the Klan had spread into "nearly every Southern state" by 1870, causing "a *nameless terror* among negroes" and the Republicans who supported the civil rights for them (Foner 342). "It aimed to reverse the interlocking changes sweeping over the South during Reconstruction: to ... reestablish control of the black labor force, and restore racial subordination in every aspect of Southern life" (426).

Violence swept across the whole South. Countless cases of lynchings, rapes, destructions of buildings (often by burning), mysterious murders, enforced evictions, etc., were reported: in 1868 in New Orleans, for instance, "a mob destroyed a local Republican newspaper" and then killed 200 blacks on the plantations around it (Foner 342);

William Luke, an Irish teacher at a black school in Alabama, and four black men were lynched in 1870 (428); Page Wallace, an African American in Virginia, accused for the alleged rape of a white woman, was killed by lynching in 1880 (Wolfe and Baker). As Eric Foner states, leaders of the Ku Klux Klan included the “most respectable citizens” like “planters, merchants, lawyers, and even ministers” (Foner 432; emphasis mine). And their action of violence, as is well known, was conducted in the dark with their faces masked by white hoods.

Given such social background against which Twain’s adventure story was written, there is no denying that it indeed reflects the violence thriving throughout the South in the post-bellum era. Here it is worthwhile to quote Sherburn’s speech, though rather long, in order to show that Twain’s satire is directed also at his contemporary society. Colonel Sherburn attacks the mob who has come to lynch him:

“Do I know you? I know you clear through. I was born and raised in the south, and I’ve lived in the north; so I know the average all around. The average man’s a coward. In the north he lets anybody walk over him that wants to, and goes home and prays for a humble spirit to bear it. In the south one man, all by himself, has stopped a stage full of men, in the day-time, and robbed the lot. Your newspapers call you a brave people so much that you think you *are* braver than any other people—whereas you’re just *as* brave, and no braver. Why don’t your juries hang murderers? Because they’re afraid the man’s friends will shoot them in the back, in the dark—and it’s just what they *would* do.

“So they always acquit; and then a *man* goes in the night, with a hundred masked cowards at his back, and lynches the rascal. Your mistake is, that you didn’t bring a man with you; that’s one mistake, and the other is that you didn’t come in the dark, and fetch your masks. You brought *part* of a man—Buck Harkness, there—and if you hadn’t had him to start you, you’d a taken it out in blowing.

“You didn’t want to come. The average man don’t like trouble and danger. *You* don’t like trouble and danger. But if only

half a man—like Buck Harkness, there—shouts ‘Lynch him, lynch him!’ you’re afraid to back down—afraid you’ll be found out to be what you are—*cowards*—and so you raise a yell, and hang yourselves onto that half-a-man’s coat tail, and come raging up here, swearing what big things you’re going to do. The pitiful-est 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. But a mob without any *man* at the head of it, is *beneath* pitifulness. Now the thing for *you* to do, is to droop your tails and go home and crawl in a hole. If any real lynching’s going to be done, it will be done in the dark, southern fashion; and when they come, they’ll bring their masks, and fetch a *man* along ...” (162).

Sherburn’s speech gives a good analysis of the collective psychology in mob violence as well as persuasive reason why the judiciary cannot control the murderers—juries are afraid of unlawful retaliation. It also condemns “the southern fashion” as the “pitiful-est thing”—the masked attack in the dark from behind, exactly like the Klan’s well-known method. It is interesting that he equates a mob with an army since both of them are organizations that rely on the power of mass, and that their individual members are in fact cowards. Being an embodiment of outlawry himself, Sherburn tells some truth of the lawless South. Through his character, Twain criticizes the increasingly violent and inhuman Southern society, and his sentiment about it is summed up by the sentence that Huck pronounced when he saw the king and the duke being lynched: “Human beings *can* be awful cruel to one another” (239).

V. The Tradition of Antislavery Literature

Set in the social and historical context of the American South, Huck’s dilemma about helping Jim, a runaway slave, becomes more realistic and persuasive to us, modern readers, who have no difficulty in understanding that the “wicked” things the protagonist is afraid of are

the very right things to do. It was hard for a Southern white to express any sympathies for blacks. Douglass also notes this point in the passage of his narrative that describes the problem of suing white offenders as he was assaulted by several young white workers and was awfully injured: "it was impossible to get any white man to volunteer his testimony in my behalf, and against the white young men. ... It required a degree of courage unknown to them to do so; just for that time, the slightest manifestation of humanity toward a colored person was denounced as abolitionism, and that name subjected its bearer to frightful liabilities" (93).

The idea of helping a fugitive slave weighs heavily on Huck's "conscience" from the start and it no doubt reflects the psychological fear Douglass had depicted. While agreeing never to tell anybody about Jim, he worries that "[people] would call me a low down Abolitionist and despise me for keeping mum" (55). As the raft approaches Cairo, the gateway to freedom, both of them become restless for different reasons. Jim gets excited and thinks of what he will do in a free State, whereas Huck worries about his not doing his "right" duty to inform Miss Watson of her slave. When Jim even refers to a possibility that he will ask "an Ab'litionist to go and steal" his children, Huck is appalled at Jim's sudden audacity, saying like a slaveholder, "give a nigger an inch and he'll take an ell" (110), the words that remind us of Douglass's master, Hugh Auld. And when he has to decide whether he should let them know the whereabouts of Jim, his anxiety reaches its peak. His final declaration to help Jim, "All right, then, I'll go to hell" (223), therefore, manifests his heroic determination greater than we assume it to be and it marks a superb abolitionist statement.

Reconsideration of *Huckleberry Finn* from the perspective of slavery discourse proves that this classic adventure story is also an extension of antislavery literature. As the title of Douglass's second autobiography, "My Bondage and My Freedom," implies, the subject of slavery can be applicable to every person, dark or white, on a metaphoric level. The dilemma between social restriction and individual freedom is indeed a universal problem. And this is perhaps the reason

why records of suffering slaves appeal to us still now. However, if we retrieve and reduce the affluent constellation of antislavery discourses into an abstract one of bondage and freedom—even if we replace the former word with exploitation, oppression, persecution, or subjugation—we will be in danger of losing the rich sources of modern literature.

Huckleberry Finn is a modern offspring of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and slave narratives, despite Hemingway's statement, "there was nothing before." It is interesting to remember that the period when Mark Twain composed the novel (1876-1884) corresponds with the years when he lived near the house of Harriet Beecher Stowe in Hartford, Connecticut.¹² The prospective great writer might have discussed racial problems and increasingly money-oriented violent American society with his next-door neighbor who had already attained celebrity as the author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Notes

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¹ *Huckleberry Finn* was banned in some public libraries first for its indecent language, and was later condemned, and has been criticized, for racist aspects. For the censorship of this novel, see Thomas Cooley (vii), Marx (7), and James Cox (87-88).

² *Huckleberry Finn* was first published in December, 1884, in England and Canada; the American edition was delayed by about two months because of the misplacement of one of the illustrations for the novel. For details, see John Gerber (95-99; 102-03) and Victor Doyno (343-44).

³ George Harris in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, for instance, is a very talented mulatto, and because of the very gift his master tries to change him from a factory worker to a field hand with much harder labor; this makes him decide to escape from slavery into a free land.

⁴ Huck's speech clearly reflects the social assumption that blacks are inferior to whites as is seen in his comments on Jim like "he had an uncommon level head, for a nigger" (86), or "you can't learn a nigger to argue" (90). Yet this is also Twain's device to reveal the widespread presupposition as groundless.

⁵ Tom also uses this strategy when he tries to deceive a servant of the Phelps in order to perform the plan of rescuing Jim. Giving him a dime, Tom then looks at Jim and says as if he had seen him for the first time:

“I wonder if uncle Silas is going to hang this nigger. If I was to catch a nigger that was ungrateful enough to run away, I wouldn’t give him up, I’d hang him.” And whilst the nigger stepped to the door to look at the dime ... he whispers to Jim, and says:

“Don’t ever let on to know us. And if you hear any digging going on, nights, it’s us: we’re going to set you free.” (245)

⁶ While highly evaluating the episode, Morrison, however, criticizes Twain’s way of silencing the protagonist, keeping Huck from responding to the sad moving story Jim has confessed (389).

⁷ Smith suggests that Huck could not refute Jim’s argument well in the scene and that the humor in Huck’s concluding comment, “you can’t learn a nigger to argue,” arises from the reader’s recognition that “Jim’s argument is better than Huck’s” (98).

⁸ Referring to the last part in which Jim is “reduced almost to a parody of the ever-faithful, long-suffering, mindless, and stupid darcy,” Michael Hoffman remarks that it is “a matter of circumstances.” With Huck alone, Jim can show his humanity, but in other occasions he has to “play the slave” (41).

⁹ Smiley suggests that Mark Twain himself recognized, while writing *Huckleberry Finn*, it was not “a boy’s novel, like *Tom Sawyer*, but a man’s novel, about real moral dilemmas and growth” (356).

¹⁰ Hoffman sees in the feud between the two aristocratic families “an elaborate game with unquestioned rules” that are similar to wars, including the Civil War (36-37).

¹¹ For the period when *Huckleberry Finn* was composed, see Laurence Holland (84) , Smith (91-92), and Gerber (95-103).

¹² Twain lived for seventeen years (from 1874 to 1891) in the Hartford house located adjacent to the brick house where Stowe spent her last twenty-three years (1873-1896). For Twain’s bibliographical information, see Albert Paine, and for Stowe’s, Joan Hedrick.

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