

A Journey of Racial Neutrality
—**the symbolic meaning of the Mississippi in**
The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

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As T. S. Eliot and other critics have noted¹, the fame of the novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, hereafter referred to as *Huckleberry Finn*, rests on the presence of the Mississippi River, which serves as a symbol for the theme of the novel: racial neutrality. According to Eliot, the river is the only natural force that “can wholly determine the course of human peregrination” (“Introduction” in Laurie Champion, p. 47), for when people are “at the sea” or “on the prairie” (Eliot, p. 47), the route and direction of the journey can be changed by other forces such as wind and currents and even travelers’ choices. “But the river with its strong, swift current is the dictator to the raft or to the steamboat. (Eliot, p. 47)” T. S. Eliot compares the River with Huck, and draws a comparison between such a strong natural power and the orphan-like child: “Like Huckleberry Finn, the River itself has no beginning or end. In its beginning, it is not yet the River; in its end, it is no longer the River. (Eliot, p. 49)” In this novel, it is the land, where Jim gets freedom that ends the river and the journey on it.

However, the ending of the whole novel is unbearably “tedious” to Leo Marx, who doubts the significance of *Huckleberry Finn* as a masterpiece with such an end². Marx also strongly disagrees with T. S. Eliot in his argument that on that the journey results in freedom. Marx argues that the fact that Jim is set free by Miss Watson’s instigation makes Mr. Eliot’s statement that it is the river which makes Jim free a “moral imagination”³. Therefore, Marx insists that Mr. Eliot has exaggerated the significance of the journey. Marx acclaims the journey only “provides a means of escape” (Marx, p. 55) and “allows Huck and Jim some measure of freedom” (Marx, p. 54). That is to say, to Leo Marx, the river is only a feeble media with no influences on the journey, on which I strongly disagree, though there

¹. For further detailed about T. S. Eliot’s statement on the river and the significance of the *Huckleberry Finn*, see “Introduction”, pp. 44-49 in *The Critical Response to Mark Twain’s Huckleberry Finn*, edited by Champion, Laurie, 1991

². For further details of Leo Marx’s attitude towards the end of *Huckleberry Finn*, see “Mr. Eliot, Mr. Thrilling, and *Huckleberry Finn*” pp. 50-60 in *The Critical Response to Mark Twain’s Huckleberry Finn*, edited by Champion, Laurie, 1991

³. For a more detailed explanation of “moral imagination”, see “Mr. Eliot, Mr. Thrilling, and *Huckleberry Finn*” pp. 50-60 in *The Critical Response to Mark Twain’s Huckleberry Finn*, edited by Champion, Laurie, 1991

are many brilliant ideas and statements in his critic on *Huckleberry Finn*.

As Eliot has noted, “Mark Twain makes you see the River... more clearly than the author of any other description of a river”.⁴ Furthermore, after reading through the novel, “you do not merely see the River, you do not merely become acquainted with it through the senses; you experience the River” (Eliot, p. 47). Mark Twain himself takes the Mississippi river as an uncommon place, which is worth “reading”⁵. The river is worth analyzing as a symbol because of its traits. The river is a neutral meeting place which allows mutual understanding to develop in facing with unceasingly occurred crisis; the river is capricious in weather, and accidents happen randomly, which makes the river an unpredictable natural phenomenon. For these reasons, survival requires mutual understanding and cooperation. Furthermore, the fluidity and ever-changing nature of the river require those who journey on it are flexible in their characters and willing to recognize and accept changes. This is an excellent foundation for furthering racial understanding.

This essay argues that the journey on the Mississippi River symbolizes the developing process of realization of racial equality. Because of the traits of the river, the journey provides an invaluable opportunity to even racial differences and to reduce prejudices in achieving further mutually appreciations. Huck and Jim and the river are quite separated at the beginning of the novel; but finally the three become one, which is mirrored in the river itself, which is a “watery trinity” (*River World*, p. 24, 1959) of three different rivers but not one.

Racial relations in Huck’s time

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, published in 1884, but set in a decade before the Civil War (1861-1865) portrays the ante-bellum, racially prejudiced society that Mark Twain criticizes so strongly in his novel. During the decade in which Huck and Jim were living, the abolition of slavery was highly advocated in the North America. However, to change the formed ideology, it is a time-consuming process. I am going to enlarge on from three aspects in analyzing the racial relations in the time of the story.

Firstly, the racial relations in the time appear when Huck is fighting with his “conscience”, which, as one critic has noted, can be seen as the “prevailing morality” (p. 57)

⁴. For more detailed information about T. S. Eliot’s opinion on Twain’s deftness in depicting the river, see “Introduction”, pp. 44-49 in *The Critical Response to Mark Twain’s Huckleberry Finn*, edited by Champion, Laurie, 1991

at the time. Marx observes that “one mark of Clements’ greatness is his deft presentation of the disparity between what people do when they behave as individuals and what they do when forced into roles imposed upon them by society” (Leo Marx, p. 57). Huck’s being disturbed and tortured by his “conscience” (*Huckleberry Finn*, p. 234) at the probability of Jim’s being a free man is an excellent example for Twain’s deftness in presenting the disparity. Huck and Jim have very similar feelings considering they are so close to Cairo: being “all over trembly and feverish” (*Huckleberry Finn*, p. 234), but the reasons for this reaction are very different: for Jim, it is based on a desire to be free; for Huck, it is the possibility of Jim’s going to be free. Huck’s stereotyped thought, in which niggers have no right of freedom, “scorched” him even “like a shot” (p. 234). Huck thinks about Miss Watson, who is of his own race and social status as a white and a slave owner. By mixing with the newly-established friendship with Jim, Huck’s preconception, according to which niggers should be slaves with no freedom, disturbs and tortures him by heating and freezing his heart at the same time. Then the severe struggle inside Huck’s mind leaks out: “I got to feeling so mean and so miserable I most wished I was dead” (*Huckleberry Finn*, p. 234); “if it was Cairo I reckoned *I would die of miserableness*” (*Huckleberry Finn*, p. 235. My emphasis). The subjunctive mood in the former sentence shows that Huck knows what he has to do (to tell people on the bank that Jim is a fugitive slave in order to make him to be arrested), but he can not make up his mind to do so immediately. So his intension to escape from making the decision is leaked out by his thinking of death. To him, it is better to die that to make such a decision. The use of the subjunctive mood in the italicized sentence shows that morality is powerful enough to kill people by arousing their sense of guilty. However, Huck overcomes his “conscience”:

‘... Is your man white or black?’

I didn’t answer up prompt. I tried to, but the words wouldn’t come. I tried, for a second or two, to brace up and out with it, but I warn’t man enough—hadn’t the spunk of a rabbit. I see I was weakening; so I just give up trying, and up and say: ‘He’s white.’ (p. 236)

He tries twice to tell of the secret that Jim is a fugitive nigger according to his “conscience”, but he can not do so. He says “I warn’t man enough”, “hadn’t the spunk of a rabbit”, “I was weakening”, “I just give up trying”—all these expressions seem to be negative ones, which

show Huck's timidity in telling people on the bank, who are supposedly white people, that Jim is a runaway nigger. He "[gives] up trying" to say "Jim is a black and you can take him away". So here, it is "what he is expected to do about [Jim]" surrenders to "how he feels about Jim" (Leo Marx, p. 57). The negative expressions, such as "didn't", "wouldn't", "warn't", "hadn't" show that Huck is in a dilemma and is trying to slow down and to think twice in order to make a decision in hiding Jim from being arrested. The last sentence tells us Huck's decision to hide Jim in order to help him. As Leo Marx argues that "Huck's victory over his "conscience" is a victory, presenting in the form of a failure, over the prevailing morality" (Leo Marx, p. 57), which can easily exert an irresistible influence on people's deeds and thoughts. So Huck's victory here is a great and a difficult one.

Though Huck decides to help Jim to be a free man, he still feels sorry for Tom's getting involved. Huck's sense of guiltiness to Tom shows the racial relations at the time:

That was the thing that was too many for me. ..., than to stoop to this business, and make himself a shame, and his family a shame, before everybody. I *couldn't* understand it, no way at all. ... and so be his true friend, ... and save himself. And I *did* start to tell him; ... (p. 345)

Huck takes getting Tom involved in saving Jim as a definitely wrong deed, which will "make himself a shame, and his family a shame, before everybody". Being broken up by two commas, it is emphasizing that the shame will be made respectively and repetitiously on Tom and his family. By repeating "a shame", it sounds like the "shame" is twice as strong for Huck as well as for Tom and his family. And by separating with a comma, "before everybody" is also emphasized. The repetitious and exposed "shame" tells how terrible it is to Huck for getting Tom involved in. The italicized "couldn't" shows to a great extent, Huck can not understand Tom's getting in. Huck takes the thing of helping Jim to be a free man as a private mission of his own, which is an irresistible but a wrong thing as well for him to do.

Secondly, racial relation even goes against people's religious belief when Huck is communicating with "Him":

Why wouldn't they? It warn't no use to try and hide it from Him. Nor from me, neither. I knowed very well why they wouldn't come. It was because my heart warn't right; ... it was because I was playing double. (p. 329)

Here in the above quotation is a self-contradiction: the question shows Huck does not know the reason why he cannot pray. Then he says that he knows “very well” why. He wishes that he did not know why he can not pray, but indeed, he knows. “Him”, with the first letter being capitalized, refers to God. When facing “Him”, Huck is honest and confessing. Then he finds himself is “playing double”, which means that he does believe in God and he does want to save Jim. He takes the two as a sharp contradiction and cannot co-exist. He knows that to tell out Jim's being a fugitive nigger is the right thing to do, which makes him feel “as light as a feather” (*Huckleberry Finn*, p. 330). He feels like a “washed clean of sin” and “could pray” (*Huckleberry Finn*, p. 330) again, too. However, in the end, he chooses to help Jim and drops all the religious inhibitions, through this will lead the way to the Hell: ““All right, then, I'll go to hell'—and tore it up. (*Huckleberry Finn*, p. 330)”

Runaway slaves should be caught up and the white men can make money out of selling the slaves; slaves have no rights to decide or to refuse: ““it's a good job they got him. ‘Well, I *reckon*! There's two hundred dollars reward on him. It's like picking up money out'n the road.’” The italicized “*reckon*” shows that the boy takes it for granted that the runaway slave should be caught and sold. In using the simile, niggers are “things”, which in the white's eyes can only serve as a tool to earn money. Just like inanimate objections, such as “money”, niggers are vulnerable and powerless in controlling their destiny, which can be picked up and used by its owner.

Huck takes the thing like to save Jim from being arrested and to help him in getting freedom as a go-to-hell one (*Huckleberry Finn*, p. 330), though he cannot refuse to. It is the evidence for the rule the white held in treating the black people: they should be slaved; one, who set them free, will be abandoned by the God and even sent to the Hell. In Christianity, to go to hell is the most severe punishment, which could be the worst result that one can ever get after their lives. This time, Huck fights with his religious belief: “but something inside of me kept saying, ‘There was the Sunday school, you could a gone to it; ... (*Huckleberry Finn*, p. 329)” “Sunday school” stands for the place where Huck officially gets the religious belief; the use of perfect tense “gone”

shows that he has had the religious constricts inside him, according to which, he can not tell lies—that is why he struggles so severely in his mind.

Thirdly, Huck's attitude to Jim also shows the racial inequality. When Huck is trying to read to Jim, he is shocked by Jim's arguing with him. As a child, it is natural for Huck to argue back, but he does not. As Mr. Eliot argues, being different from Tom, at whom we look "as the smiling adult does" ("Introduction" in Laurie Champion, p. 44), "we look at the world through his (Huck's) eyes" (Eliot, p. 44) and "*Huckleberry Finn* does not fall into the category of juvenile fiction" (Eliot, p. 45). Twain himself says in his letter to a Brooklyn librarian that "I wrote Tom Sawyer and *Huckleberry Finn* for adults exclusively" (N. Robert, *Huckleberry Finn is a Moral story*, p. 141). Huck's reaction to Jim's arguing shows a very adult way of behaving when he is irritated by Jim's different way of thinking: "You can't learn a nigger to argue, so I quit. (*Huckleberry Finn*, p. 228)" Why can Jim not argue? Because he is a nigger. So Huck just "quit". Huck's surrender-like reaction to Jim's arguing is not showing respect and being convinced, but Huck's underestimation to Jim.

"He had an uncommon level head, for a nigger." (*Huckleberry Finn*, p. 225) The comma here between "uncommon level head" and "for a nigger" marks the disconnection between Huck's unconsciousness and consciousness: unconsciously, Huck finds and appreciates that Jim is smart and capable; however, his racial consciousness reminds him that Jim is only a nigger, who cannot be as smart and capable as the white people. Then here comes the comma, as a break for Huck to think over. Huck then makes the addition that Jim is smart and capable enough as a nigger, which implies that Jim's smartness and capability is in lower level than white men. Though Huck's appreciation to Jim, we see the racial inequality at the time.

The novel clearly reveals the racial relations in Huck and Jim's time which is part of the social ideology. First, black people were considered slaves by birth: their birthright dictated that they should be subordinate to white people; second, blacks were considered to have lower intelligence; and third, slavery was so deeply-rooted in social and cultural conceptions at the time that it was thought to be a sin to witness the setting free, let alone be instrumental in setting free a slave. The land, universally speaking, is a static space, on which people have been living from generation to

generation. Customs, values, conventions and ideologies become deeply rooted and difficult to change. In *Huckleberry Finn*, however, the river introduces the possibility of change. The freedom of the river stimulates new thinking because it is fluid and because it does not encourage the reinforcement of old ideas and way.

Land and River

The land⁷ is the civilized human society in *Huckleberry Finn*, in which there is deep-rooted morality and ideology as well as religious belief. Though Huck hates to be civilized, he is on the land both at the beginning and the end of the novel. The beginning and the end of both the river and Huck is on the land, not as T. S Eliot says in his 'Introduction', which I mentioned before that they both have no beginning or end. But Huck's beginning on the land is not pleasant. With such a father and no mother, Huck has no home, no sense of security and no paternal and maternal love; being adopted by Widow Douglas, who treats Huck well but always tries to "civilise" him, Huck has no freedom and sense of being understood. His body is under bullying and his nature is oppressed. At the end of the novel, Huck goes back to the land but with huge changes especially on his attitude to niggers. And Huck's changing of attitude to niggers is going to be enlarged on later in this essay.

Jim's circumstances on land are miserable. He has no freedom and he is facing to be parted with his wife and children forever. He is not treated as a human but a tool or an unanimated object. His whole-life dream is to get freedom and unification with his family.

Base on such miserable circumstances, Huck and Jim meet each other on the river. At first, the river is the only for them to escape from their unpleasant lives. The river plays as a natural protection and camouflage for the two protagonists to form a mini world in which both of them are free. The changing nature of the river provides a platform for the two to show their ability. In dealing with the harsh conditions on the river, they cooperate and divide labours in order to survive. Jim gets Huck's trust and respect for his being capable and smart. Having receiving Jim's paternal and brotherly affection, Huck is complemented.

⁷. For further details of his argument on the different world on the land and on the river, see Wu Bin, 'The equilibrium between the river and the shore in *Huckleberry Finn*', Sino-US English Education. He uses "the shore" instead of "the land".

During the journey on the river, Huck fights over his pre-conception on niggers and determines to help Jim to get freedom. On Jim's side, out of his humanity and capability, he gets the righteous respect from the white boy.

The development of racial neutrality

Huck and Jim's begin their relationship when they meet outside Miss Watson's kitchen door. Jim's identity and the name of his owner are made clear.

Miss Watson's big nigger, named Jim, was setting in the kitchen door; ...
 He listened some more; then he come tiptoeing down and stood right between us; we could a touch him clearly... and we all there so close together. There was a place on my ankle that got to itching.
 ...and he stretched his legs out till one of them most touched one of mine.
 My nose begun to itch. It itched till the tears come into my eyes. But I dasn't scratch. (p. 172)

Jim's actions show some merits in his characteristic: he "[listens]" but "some more"; his "tiptoeing" shows he is nimble and alert; he "[stands] right between us" shows his friendliness and being easy-going. Then Huck's reaction of feeling "itching" from Jim's getting "so" close shows that his attitude to Jim. When some one dirty touches us, we feel itching and uneasy. It is the first impression of Jim to Huck. "But I dasn't scratch" shows his vague and instinctive humanity to niggers, for Huck does not behave like he is discussing at Jim's getting close to.

Through he is an obedient friend of Tom's, Huck refuses to "tie Jim to the tree for fun" (*Huckleberry Finn*, p. 172). He himself then does not aware of the reason for his refusal. This can also be explained by his "instinctive humanity", which makes it possible for their relationship to change:

...but I said no; he might wake and make a disturbance, and then they'd find out I warn't in.
 Tom... must crawl to where Jim was... and play something on him. I waited, and it seemed a good while, everything was so still and lonesome. (p. 172)

Huck is waiting, instead of joining in playing tricks on Jim. It shows that Huck does not

like a normal naughty boy, never sympathizing. “[Everything] was so still and lonesome” mirrors Huck’s mind, which is then still and lonesome. He does not want to join in the trick, but he does nothing to stop what he thinks is wrong. Huck’s being negative shows that Huck, at the beginning of the novel is an obedient friend of Tom’s. Huck seems to know that he does not want to play trick on Jim, but he does not know why and thereafter does not stop Tom to do so. Huck’s lonesome can be interpreted as his subconscious. After the trick, the river makes its first appearance:

... [And] down by the village was the river, a whole mile broad, and awful still and grand. We went down the hill and found Joe Harper, and Ben Rogers, and two or three more of the boys, hid in the old tanyard. So we unhitched a skiff and pulled down the river two miles and a half, to the big scar on the hillside, and went ashore. (p. 173)

The river is broad and still, and it is safe to be on it. Through the river, those several boys find their secret place to play in forming a Gang (*Huckleberry Finn*, p. 173). It shows that the river can serve as a shelter to protect people and to provide a space for people to form their relatively isolated community, in which, Huck and Jim are staying together for a long while during the journey and forming a mutual understanding and reliance.

In this sense, the traits of the river of being grand and isolated from the land provide the basic necessity for Huck and Jim’s development of relationship.

The change in Huck’s attitude toward Jim shows the development in their relationship, which evolves in four stages, moving from a sense of partnership to one of mutual dependency and equality. (The idea of the four levels must be presented at the beginning of the essay so the reader is prepared for this)

Stage one

Huck and Jim’s purpose in fleeing to the island are quite different: Huck intends to escape from being abused and civilized; Jim hopes to become a free man. As Leo Marx points out, “Huck knows that the journey will have been a failure unless it takes Jim to freedom (Marx, p. 51)”. The journey means more to Jim than to Huck, for Huck is a helper for Jim’s escape. The river is miles wide, requiring considerable effort and

courage of those who must cross it. For Jim, “De river wuz a-risin’ en dey wuz a good current” (*Huckleberry Finn*, p. 201), it implies that the river is a channel for his being free. The rising current of the river, which provides convenience for Jim’s escape, hints abolition of slavery is the historical current. Through Marx argues that the river is not the means by which Jim is leading to freedom, it indeed the river, which leads to the possibility for freedom by providing protection and “microcosmic community” (Leo Marx, p. 54), in which “Huck and Jim establish” equality.

It is at the Jackson’s island, where Huck and Jim meet each other as two separated individuals of different social status. An island presupposes land surrounded by water. However, Jackson’s Island is quite different, as it “all under water” (*Huckleberry Finn*, p. 195). One can argue, therefore, that Huck and Jim’s relationship is initiated on the river.

The first stage of Huck and Jim’s relationship is founded on the common basic needs of human beings: to gain protection and to have the company of a fellow human being. Huck is extremely glad to see Jim after having escaped from his father’s abuse (*Huckleberry Finn*, p. 199): “I was ever so glad to see Jim. I wasn’t lonesome now (p. 119) can be easily made clear by his experiences and mentality before they met: on the one hand, the river provides Huck freedom, making him feel like he could go and stop anywhere he wants to, and the rise of the river made it easy for Huck to get where he wants to go; however, on the other hand, the river is big and terrifically dark during the night, so Huck gets very tied of being scared and alerted and being alone.

Thus, when Huck arrives at Jackson’s island, he runs “the canoe into a deep dent” and parts “the willow branches to get in” and “[makes] fast nobody could a seen the canoe from the outside” (*Huckleberry Finn*, p. 195); he gets his gun with him and “[slips] out” the “edge of the woods” (p. 199); he “[runs] across the camp fire, stopping every minute or two to listen” (p. 199). Huck is extremely anxious and clearly lacks the security of fellowship with another human being. Then we can easily imagine how happy and released when Huck sees Jim, for then he can get rid of loneliness and the sense of insecurity. It is a good start in their relationship. Huck and Jim share a common need for security. This need forms a firm basis for their friendship and is a precondition for the creation of racial equality between Twain’s two protagonists. The new relationship is based on cooperation, where each of the two characters does what he

is best at the service of the other. Huck, for example, fetches “meal and bacon and coffee” and catches “a good big cat-fish”; while Jim builds a fire, cleans the fish and fries it. Jim is keen to share his knowledge of how to interpret signs on the river and Jim’s knowledge of the weather on the river make himself been admired by Huck: “Jim said it was a sign it was going to rain”; “Jim knowed all kinds of signs” (*Huckleberry Finn*, p. 202). Their different labors in the cooperation show that Huck provides materials while Jim, a nigger with no material properties, provides skills and knowledge. Such divisions of labor in their cooperation cement the base of their relationship and serves as a reason for their inseparability.

The building of the joint wigwam is a concrete result of the partnership between Huck and Jim. The division of labor is not clear but the growing relationship of the two boys is secure enough to cope with vagueness. The use of “we” shows they do almost everything together: “we [makes] a layer”; “we [makes] an extra steering oar”; “we [fixes] up a short fork stick”; “we [catches] fish” (*Huckleberry Finn*, p. 216). It shows that the two are getting familiar thus being more and more mutual cooperative. There are two reasons for building the wigwam: one is that the river was rising, and it was necessary to protect the boat; the other is that without a wigwam as a shelter, Jim cannot be hidden during the day. Physical necessity is thus an important factor in cementing the relationship between Jim and Huck.

Stage two

As Huck and Jim’s journey continues, their relationship is modified in response to what they see and encounter on the river. At the place near St. Petersburg, the scenery on both sides is quite different:

The river went on raising and raising for ten or twelve days, till at last it was over the bank. The water was three or four foot deep on the island in the low places and on the Illinois bottom. On that side it was a good many miles wide; but on the Missouri side it was the same old distance across- a half a mile- because the Missouri shore was just a wall of high bluffs. (p. 213.)

On the Illinois side, the river is “good many miles wide”, which is in contrast with the Missouri side, “a half a mile” and “the Missouri shore [is] just a wall of high bluffs”.

The differences of the sceneries on each sides of the river imply the different circumstances of abolition of slavery respectively: Missouri was the border state during the American Civil War, and there war intrastate fight within the national war⁸. “A wall of high bluffs” symbolizes obstacles and barriers in abolition of slavery on the Missouri shore. The river is “rising and rising” for several days: the repetition carries two implies: one is that the abolition of slavery is advocated stronger and stronger; the other is that there is instability in the abolition of slavery, which seems to say that there will be dangerousness and sever fights. Illinois is a major supply of regiments during the Civil War⁹. The depiction of the extensiveness of the Illinois bank of the Mississippi shows the enormous strength there for its acting as a strong supporter in fighting with slavery.

Jim’s behavior at seeing the dead man, who is turned to be Huck’s father at end of the novel, shows Jim’s desire of protecting Huck. “I didn’t look at him at all. Jim threwed some old rags over him, but he needn’t done it” (*Huckleberry Finn*, p. 206). Jim is quite superstitious, who believed that dead man “fetch bad luck” (*Huckleberry Finn*, p. 207). However, he still “[throws] some old rags over him”. The reason is that he knows the body is Huck’s father. It shows that Jim is trying to protect Huck from getting to know such cruel news. He shows his kindness to Huck. What’s more, this detail of covering the corps tells that Jim is a man who loves family. He knows the importance of the father to a family. Then it is easy to understand why he is running away for freedom: he is the father of his family, and he has the responsibility to his family members. The father of Huck’, a white man with freedom, being very selfish and cruel to his son, is in a sharp contrast with Jim, who has no money nor freedom but deep affection to his family. When Huck knows Jim’s affection to his family, he is greatly impressed and touched, thus his relationship with Jim goes deeper emotionally. It is possible for Huck to seek a kind of paternal love and protection on Jim. It is the continuous rise of the river brought the body of Huck’s father, a test stone of Jim’s spiritual merits of being sympathetic, humane and family-devoting. And all these merits in Jim’s character are formed the base of the further development in the relationship between the two. The river works as a pusher for their relationship development.

⁸. For further details about “Missouri in the American Civil War” see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Missouri_in_the_American_Civil_War_2009-11-23

⁹. For further details about Illinois’ contributions during the Civil War, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Illinois_in_the_American_Civil_War_2009-11-23

After the incidence of the dead man's body, Huck begins to accept Jim's words as "reasonable" ones (*Huckleberry Finn*, p. 207). It is only a beginning. Huck then trusts Jim pretty much: "So I judged he was all right." (p. 208), "then he studied it (the notion) over again and said.... That was a good notion, too" (p. 209), "Only Jim said I didn't walk like a girl; ... I took notice, and done better" (p. 209). Trust has been growing up in between Huck to Jim. A sense of trusting can lead to a sense of respect and a detail in the later proved this: "Well, he was right; he was most always right (*Huckleberry Finn*, p. 225)" The two clauses here are not repeated one and another, but getting deeper in extent. The word "always" is a climatic point of trust.

After having been in St. Petersburg, Huck feels Jim's feeling: how deeply he is scared by the possibility of being caught: "Jim never asked no questions, he never said a word, but the way he worked for the next half an hour showed how he was scared." (*Huckleberry Finn*, p. 225) At this point, a new ingredient is added to Huck's and Jim's relationship, namely intimacy: Jim does not believe that he can go any further, but Huck encourages him; they communicate in silence: "We went gliding swift along, dead silent ... and we was safe, and knowed it (p. 225)."

The relationship between Huck and Jim is strengthened significantly in St. Louis, the junction of the three rivers: the Missouri, the Ohio and the Mississippi. In this novel, the junction of the three rivers symbolizes the combination of the three in the novel: Huck, Jim and the river. They form a small but isolated world of their own⁹. Huck and Jim establish a more intimate relationship, both physically and mentally: the building of the wigwam (as I mentioned before in this essay, in building which, the sense of partnership establishes between Huck and Jim) makes a separated little world of their own, which is also a free space for them to stay together; during the building of the wigwam, their cooperation, based on division of labor, form familiarity and privy to cope with the changeable weather on the river. They talks and chuckles in a low voice together, swam together, lay on their backs looking up at the stars together, during which they are getting more and more familiar to each other in a brotherly way. The river, being "changeable" (*Huckleberry Finn*, p. 217) and "solemnly big" (p. 216), is serving as the background and the environment for the two, which is always the witness

¹⁰ . In Leo Marx, "Mr. Eliot, Mr. Trilling, and *Huckleberry Finn*", p. 54 in *The Critical Response to Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn*, edited by Laurie Champion, 1991, he enlarges on the private community formed by Huck and Jim.

for the continuous changes in their relationship.

While the two protagonists are going down from St. Louis for five days and nights, the weather changes violently, causing a shift in their relationship:

The fifth night below St Louis we had a big storm after midnight, with a power of thunder and lightning, and the rain poured down... when the lightning glared out we could see a big straight river ahead, and high rocky bluffs on both sides. (p. 217)

Huck and Jim are frightened and must rely on each other as well as encourage each other “Jim said he didn’t believe he could go any further—so scared he hadn’t hardly any strength left... But I said come on... (*Huckleberry Finn*, p. 221)” thus they get much closer; they forms intimacy (p. 222); Huck trusts Jim firmly (p. 225); the severe lightening and pouring rain on the river also symbolized the possibility of their arguing: “I never see such a nigger. If he got a notion in his head once, there warn’t no getting it out again (*Huckleberry Finn*, p. 227).” Huck takes his idea on Jim’s being stubborn as an individual case: “such a nigger”. The black dares to debate or to argue with the white is much more significant for they are getting closer to be equal.

Hereafter, something conversing is happening. Firstly, Jim, who is very capable and decisive, shows his uncertainty to the future: “Jim said he didn’t believe he could go any further—so scared he hadn’t hardly any strength left (*Huckleberry Finn*, p. 221)”. And Huck, who trusts him and appreciates his reasonable deeds, on the other hand, encourages him to persist. Secondly, Huck’s behavior is very controversial:

... I give his shoulder two or three little shoves, and begun to cry.

He stirred up, in a kind of a startlish way; but when he see it was only me, he took a good gap and stretch, and then he says:

‘Hallo, what’s up? Don’t cry, bub. What’s the trouble?’

I says:

‘Pap, mam, and sis, and—’

Then I broke down... (p. 223)

Huck is influenced by Jim’s deep affection to his family thus begins thinking about his pap, mam and sister. His crying in front of Jim is showing his weakness and softness,

which means that Huck trusts Jim and is getting emotionally reliant on Jim.

Stage three

The third stage in the development of Huck and Jim's relationship centres on Huck's sense of guilty in relation to his social class and religious belief. There are two scenes of struggling in Huck's mind in facing Jim's being free.

The first scene focuses on Huck's "conscience". Huck, though he is freedom-loving, is disturbed and tortured by the probability of Jim's being a free man, because his "conscience" (*Huckleberry Finn*, p. 234), which has firmly accepted the slavery system: the black people are born slaves with no right of freedom. "The river [is] very wide" (*Huckleberry Finn*, p. 233) implies that they are protected by the river, which provides a free space for them to talk about the forbidden topic: to set a slave free. They drift to a "big bend" (*Huckleberry Finn*, p. 233) hints a turning point in their relationship. But whether the turning pointing is one for good or for bad is at this point unknown. Because it is a night, things can not be seen clearly as well as the future of their relationship in front of such an intractable matter. And the "solid timber" (*Huckleberry Finn*, p. 233) walls the river "on both sides" (*Huckleberry Finn*, p. 234), symbolizing the ideological influence of restriction, is a strong evidence for the obstacle they come up with in reach a consensus on Jim's going to be free.

I tried to make out to myself that I warn't to blame, because *I* didn't run Jim off from his rightful owner; but it warn't no use, conscience up and says, every time, 'But you knowed he was running for his freedom, and you could a paddled ashore and told somebody.' That was so—I couldn't get around that, no way. That was where it pinched. Conscience says no nigger go off right under your eyes and never say one single word? (p. 234)

The italicized "*I*" is designed to give comfort to the speaker, by thinking of which, Huck is trying to make an excuse for letting Jim go. The "but" makes his excuse a lie. There is a severe struggle inside Huck's mind between what he knows that he should do and he wants to do. It seems that a voice of conscience is speaking to Huck's left ear and another voice of willingness is speaking to Huck's right ear. The two voices, speaking simultaneously but contrarily, make Huck feels anxious and upset. He knows

that he must follow one of the two voices, which means that he must abandon the other. Because for Huck, there is no middle way between the two: to help a nigger to get freedom and to be with God. Then here comes the second scene, in which Huck chooses the go to hell.

The second scene for Huck's struggle is the "go-to-hell" one, which is in chapter thirty-one. This time, Huck's inner struggle is not a moral one but has some to do with religious. After the king and duke episode, Huck's conscience comes back again to "[grind]" him:

It would get all around that Huck Finn helped a nigger to get his freedom; and if I was to ever see anybody from that town again, I'd be ready to get down and lick his boots for shame. ... a low-down thing, ... the more I studied about it, the more, my conscience went to grinding me, and the more wicked and low-down and ornery I got to feeling... Providence slapping me in the face and letting me know my wickedness was being watched all the time from up there in heaven. (p. 329)

The word-chosen here is quite related to religion: "wicked", "Providence", "heaven". It shows that to help a nigger to get his freedom offends not only the moral value at that time, but also, offends the religious belief, which can be more unbearable.

Stage four

Having overcome his religious and moral qualms, Huck gets the victory over the prevailing morality. The victory makes Huck to be braver. As Leo Marx observes, when Huck determines to go to hell in order to save Jim, this is the climax in their relationship because it is based on profound self-knowledge. This self-knowledge enables Huck to recognize that Jim is his equal both in terms of emotions as well as intelligence and talent. The two protagonists need each other and indeed complement each other.

Their emotional communication begins from the trick that Huck intends to play on Jim. Then Huck apologizes to Jim after Jim's words on his affections to Huck:

En when I wake up en fine you back agin', all safe ensoun', de tears come en
I could a got down on my knees en kiss' yo' foot I's so thankful. En all you

wuz thinking '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. (p. 233)

A series of verbs, such as: “wake up”, “[find]”, “got down on my knees”, “kiss [your] foot” tell Jim’s affection and concern for Huck. The italicized “*trash*” as well as “dirt” and “ashamed” are a harsh abuse from Jim to Huck, who is made regretful: “I didn’t do him no more mean tricks, and I wouldn’t done that one if I’d a knowed it would make him feel that way. (*Huckleberry Finn*, p. 233)” The subjunctive mood in the if-clause shows Huck’s regret. Hereafter, Huck never plays any tricks on Jim.

The king and the duke are helping Jim when they have to stay in the wigwam, and they even help camouflaging Jim by tying him:

You see, when we left him all alone we had to tie him, because if anybody happened on him all by himself and not tied, it wouldn’t look much like he was a runaway nigger, you know. (p. 287)

It is on the river where the duke and the king are helping hiding Jim: “[We]” here refers to Huck, the king and the duke. It is in a sharp contrast after “the king [goes] ashore” (*Huckleberry Finn*, p. 327) that he and the duke sell Jim. Such a contrast in dealing with nigger affair shows that the river is a crucial role in achieving racial equality, for the river provides no market for nigger selling and buying and on the river, a helpful hand is more important than a bunch of money. On the contrary, things on the bank are quite different:

... [Everything] all busted up and ruined, because they could have the heart to serve Jim such as that, and make him a slave again all his life, and amongst strangers, too, for forty dirty dollars. (p. 329)

Everything is “ruined” and the dollars are “dirty” show that Huck’s heart is filling with sympathy out of humanity. He feels Jim’s painfulness of being a slave “all his life”, with no unification with his family but only “amongst strangers”. Though it was normal in Huck’s time that the black were born slaves and to be slave whole-life long, Huck finds it is unbearable for him to see Jim to return to the slavery life. That means after

understanding Jim, his affection to his family, his capability and his kindness, Huck views Jim as a human being, who needs freedom and to be with his family as the white does.

After Jim having been sold, we see clearly the emotional reliance and attachment formed between the two, especially from Huck to Jim:

Jim was gone! I set up a shout—and then another—and then another one; and run this way and that in the wood, whooping and screeching; but it warn't no use—old Jim was gone. Then I set down and cried; I couldn't help it. (p. 328)

The exclamation mark shows the fact of Jim's gone is beyond that Huck can bear. Then the dash: "shout"—then another—then another, makes the scene of Huck's shouting anxiously vivid in front of us. "[This] way" and "that way", the two spatial phrases also show Huck's anxiety. Then Huck cries, because he "couldn't help it": "Jim, poor Jim (*Huckleberry Finn*, p. 332)". Huck's anxiety and his cry after Jim have gone show his sense of emotional reliance on Jim. This is necessary for the final stage in the evolution of the two protagonists' relationship: the creation of equality. For Huck, a white boy with the thoughts that niggers belong to they white masters, the sign of his acceptance of Jim's being equal with him is to view Jim as a white, with the same feelings, intelligence and rights. Hereafter, I will enlist some examples in which, Huck's attitude to a nigger is changing and finally he views Jim as the same as the white people.

Huck is greatly touched by Jim's deep affection to his family:

I knowed what it was about. He was thinking about his wife and his children... and he was low and homesick... I do believe he cared just as much for his people as white folks does... It don't seem natural, but I reckon it's so... He was a mighty good nigger, Jim was. (p. 286)

Though Huck thinks it is not "natural" to say Jim has some same traits as the white people, he certainly thinks so. He also feels Jim's feeling, like being "low and homesick". Huck then states that Jim is a "mighty" good nigger. "[Mighty]" have two meanings: one is "very" and the other is "powerful". The chosen of "mighty" here shows Huck's appreciation to Jim.

One other example of the acceptance of Jim is the same creature as the white is in the end of the novel: "I knowed he was white inside, and I reckoned he'd say what he did say... (*Huckleberry Finn*, p. 377)" It is showing that Huck has already accepted Jim as an equal white man, who is thinking in the same way as he himself does. Therefore, the development of their racial relationship ends, with mutual equality, reliance and respects.

Conclusion

This essay analyzes the symbolic meaning of the Mississippi River as a medium as well as a pre-requisite for racial equality achievement between Huck and Jim. The river, in contrast with the land, is a natural power to isolate people from their society. Thus, on the river, it is possible for people from different social statuses to form a new relationship. The relationship formed on the river will be an equal one because of the traits of the river. Under its changeable weather and determined route, cooperation is the only way for survival.

Huck and Jim's relationship is developing during their journey along the Mississippi River. The development of their relationship is not a simple one, which is only a development of their friendship. The foundation of the development of their relationship is mutual understanding. The journey and the river provide the possibility for them to get such mutual understanding, which can not be achieved on the land, where there lies the racial-repressed society. In this sense, the river provides the material necessity for them to get racial equality.

Huck and Jim cooperate with each other in coping with the natural conditions on the river. During their cooperation, they get to know more about each other's personality and characteristics. It is also during the various kinds of cooperation, the two get to be more and more mutual-reliant. They show their weak emotional sides to the other and they encourage each other to be stronger. They have their separated and private space and form a micro-community of their own, in which they are equal: Jim scolds Huck and Huck admires Jim.

The novel ends with Jim's being free. Though Leo Marx disappoints with the way of Jim's getting freedom, it is still a victory for him to get Miss Watson's will. It is not until the journey on the river when Huck, as a representative of the white

people with preconceptions towards the black that they are born to be niggers with no freedom, realizes that Jim, as all the niggers, is as affectionate to his family and freedom as every white people. It is a good start for Huck and the white society around Huck to realize that the black are the equal creature of the white, and the black has the same basic needs and desire as the white does. As Mr. Eliot points out in *Introduction*, the river in the whole journey is like a dictator, determines the route, the destination and the experience of Huck and Jim's. Like the river in the novel, with no beginning or end, Huck and Jim's relationship does not end on the river. Their journey on the river actually leads to the land, where lies the mainstream human society. The victory in their micro-society on the river over racial bias is not the true victory. On the land, Miss Watson's will for setting Jim free can be seen as the end of their journey aiming to racial equality and Jim's freedom. The end of the journey on the river is a good start of the journey on the land in achieving abolition of slavery in the American society.

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