

THE PLURALISTIC WORLD OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN

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A hundred years of critical attempts to unravel the multiple meanings of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* have produced countless interpretations of this novel and of its various aspects and characteristics. Yet in spite of all this critical scrutiny, *Huckleberry Finn* seems to remain one of the most enigmatic novels in American literature. The discovery of previously unperceived complexities and dimensions only appears to generate a new necessity for further attempts at the revelation of its unsuspected depths and hidden significance. Thus, ever fresh efforts to accommodate it to our new knowledge and notions of the world not only keep transforming *Huckleberry Finn*, but also make it necessary for us to return to it with new possibilities of its understanding. The fact that the text of *Huckleberry Finn* continues to provide a challenging battleground between Mark Twain and his readers testifies to its artistic vigour and to its profound relevance for contemporary readers. This same fact also poses the question concerning its persistent and wide appeal to American readers and readers all over the world: according to some estimates more than ten million copies of this novel are read on all the continents.

It has become a critical commonplace to attribute the greatness of *Huckleberry Finn* to Twain's decision to have Huck tell his own story in his own idiom. The use of Huck as a narrator not only makes possible »the elimination of the author as an intruding presence in the story« and opens »previously unsuspected literary potentialities in the vernacular perspective«, as Henry Nash Smith points out;¹ it also contributes to making the novel a complex multilayered modern text posing the questions of multiple realities and their perception, resulting from the complete removal of the narrator's filter. Various consequences of the use of Huck as a narrative person have been discussed and more or less explained, ranging from the individual characteristics of his speech to the striking overall bifocal effect which, throughout the novel, enables the reader to see and know more than Huck is ever aware of himself, since »... Huck's innocent eye perceives more than his mind can fully comprehend or his moral sense can retain.«² Despite numerous efforts, critics do not seem to have found a satisfactory explanation of this bifocal vision and its effects or an answer to the central question: why

¹ Henry Nash Smith. *Mark Twain. The Development of a Writer*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1962), p. 113.

² Albert E. Stone, Jr. *The Innocent Eye. Childhood in Mark Twain's Imagination*. (New Haven: Yale University Press; 1961), p. 150.

does Huck see things as he does? Why is he so singularly open to the experience of the world »in all its gloriously imperfect actuality« and able »to accept the world as he finds it without anxiously forcing meaning upon it?«³ Is innocence really the primary feature of his vision? And if so, where does it come from? If, however, Huck is to be regarded as more superstitious and fatalistic than innocent,⁴ how can these influences of Negro Culture be explained? Are his empiricist distrust of things and his consequent need to test everything⁵ characteristics which can be accepted without further inquiry into their origins? Are we to understand his bafflement with things and events as a mere by-product of his »inborn« innocence and naivety, or as a feature explainable in terms of his interaction with his environment?

Since the novel is told in the first person and thus offered from the opening sentence: »You don't know about me, without you have read a book . . .« to the last: »(The End) Yours Truly, Huck Finn.« as Huck's own words, the answers to all these questions must be sought and found in his narration only. This makes all the questions concerning Huck's linguistic behaviour most relevant for our inquiry. Why is Huck so literal-minded as to accept all statements at face value only to be comically and shockingly disillusioned when their falsity is revealed? Why does he catalogue his impressions without ever enforcing any logical links between various items, letting the objects and events pass unexplained and unrelated? Why does his narration not use the conventional apparatus of descriptive writing? Why does he merely record his experience without any attempt at rationalizing it, understanding it, or learning from it? Why is his language completely unable to deal with abstract concepts, and why can he not grasp the most elementary ethical concepts?⁶

Should we rest satisfied with Raban's explanation that »he (Huck) lives in a diffuse and various world, incapable of articulating his true motives, crippled with fatalism« and take his vernacular narrative as »the language of the marginal figure whose only response can be to stand and stare in wonder at the human chaos which surrounds him.«⁷ Or should we accept Twain's own words at face value and believe that he has simply »drawn Tom Blankenship exactly ah he was . . . ignorant, unwashed, insufficiently fed;«⁸ and understand all of Huck's characteristics as deriving from his actual model by way of Twain's direct artistic insight, without further speculation. Should we not rather try to reach a more complex understanding of Huck

³ Leo Marx. »The Pilot and the Passenger: Landscape Conventions and the Style of *Huckleberry Finn*.« In *Mark Twain*. Ed. Henry Nash Smith. (New York: Prentice Hall, 1963), pp. 57, 58.

⁴ See Jonathan Raban. *Mark Twain Huckleberry Finn*. (London: Edward Arnold, 1968), pp. 16, 17, 22 and Daniel G. Hoffman. »From Black Magic — and White — in *Huckleberry Finn*.« In *Mark Twain*. Ed. Henry Nash Smith. (Prentice Hall, 1963), pp. 101—111.

⁵ William R. Manierre. »Huck Finn, Empiricist Member of Society.« *Modern Fiction Studies* 14 (1968): 57—66.

⁶ Jonathan Raban. *Mark Twain Huckleberry Finn*. (London: Edward Arnold, 1968), pp. 12, 15, 17, 18. Raban's illuminating description of such characteristics of Huck's language provides no explanation of their origin and consequences.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁸ *The Autobiography of Mark Twain*. Ed. Charles Neider. (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), p. 72.

closely scrutinizing what he directly and indirectly conveys to us about himself and his encounters with his world — an understanding, which based on our present extraliterary knowledge, could also account for Huck's behaviour, not only describe it. Such an attempt seems worthwhile if it can furnish further insights into and/or explanations of Huck's ways with the world and his singular manner of looking at it and recognizing in it the unsuspected pluralism of 19th century America. If it can illuminate how it is that an ignorant — uneducated and semiliterate — narrator can perceive so much and convey his perceptions so efficiently as to keep countless critics and readers busy speculating for a full century.

The absence of the omniscient narrator who would be in a position to provide authorial explanations leaves the answers to such questions concerning Huck's linguistic habits and other attitudes to the reader's deliberate imagination. In this respect *Huckleberry Finn* resembles the modern novel whose meaning — abounding with so-called places of indeterminacy to be filled in by the reader — depends on the reader's own intense participation and contribution. The reader may leave such questions unasked and unanswered, or, as so many critics have done, provide whatever answers he finds appropriate. Depending on the extent of his participation, the text will yield a more or less rich and complex meaning. The possibility of such a meaning seems to be sufficient justification for the search for such answers.

The reader's only way to understand Huck is through the latter's words and the rather scarce information he offers about himself and his responses to objects and events. In the very opening sentence of the next Huck reveals his awareness of the common linguistic practice of lying — or as he calls it »stretching« — and thus alerts the reader to the different possibilities of language which will trouble Huck throughout the novel. Later, in the first chapter, Huck reports his complete loss of interest in the Biblical story about Moses, because the widow lets it out that he has been dead a considerably long time and Huck argues that he takes no stock in dead people.⁹ He is obviously puzzled as to why she should be »a bothering about Moses, which was no kin to her, and no use to anybody, being gone . . .« and is persuaded that her interest in Moses is just as much out of place as her intolerance of his smoking.

The third chapter opens with Huck's disappointment over prayer. He wants to put it to the test, but getting only a fish-line but no hooks, and later getting no hooks after a further three trials, he decides that he simply »couldn't make in work«. In the same chapter he is deeply disappointed with playing robbers, though originally he decided to return to the »dismal, regular and decent« ways of the widow's »sivilizing« him for the very sake of participating in Tom's band of robbers. He clearly calls playing robbers pretending: »We hadn't robbed nobody, we hadn't killed any people, but only just pretended,« and declares he »could not see no profit in it.«¹⁰ Later on Huck is again puzzled because he could not see the A-rabs, elephants and things though no other child of Tom's robber band is disturbed by such problems.

⁹ Mark Twain. Samuel Langhorne Clemens. *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. In *The American Tradition in Literature*, Vo 2. Ed. Sculley Bradley, Richmond Croom Beatty & E. Hudson Long. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1961), p. 262 Further references will be to the same edition, indicated by the title and page reference.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 270.

Tom's explanation that it was all done by enchantment does not satisfy him and when his test of an old tin lamp and iron ring also does not work, Huck thinks it over for two or three days and comes to the conclusion that it must be all lies: »So then I judged that all that stuff was only one of Tom Sawyer's lies. I reckoned he believed in the A-rabs and the elephants but as for me I think different. It had all the marks of a Sunday school.«¹¹

Without further enumeration of Huck's literal-mindedness and its shocking and comical effects, we can ask ourselves which of Huck's characteristics are revealed by the events listed and his reports about them. Huck's responses to the linguistic practices of other characters and his reflections about them make it obvious that Huck has not been initiated into the usual social uses of language. Irrespective of whether we regard this as freedom from the social uses of language or as ignorance and inability to cope with them (both possibilities are used by Twain) we cannot disregard the fact that Huck's peculiar linguistic behaviour shows that he is not familiar with the accepted practice of prayer, of Biblical stories, and, above all, of the make-believe of children's games. The last seems most stressed because it sets Huck apart from all the other children who can easily participate in the make-believe world and its linguistic practices, and is additionally offset by Tom's absolute trust in words as the ultimate authority more important than reality, even when the meaning of words is unknown.¹²

To be able to understand the full significance of this characteristic for Huck and for his vision of the people and the world we must first consider when a child normally acquires social uses of language and describe the usual consequences of the proper acquisition of the same for his personal development and relationship to the world. Psychology and the sociology of knowledge claim that children normally acquire such uses of language in the formative years of early childhood. Along with them they internalize the concept of objective reality which later underlies and forms all their expectations of what is (un)likely to happen. This process is usually conceived as primary socialization, in which the parents introduce their children to the social knowledge of »what everyone knows« and transmit to them »the knowledge that is learned in the course of socialization and that mediates the internalization within individual consciousness of the objectivated structures of the social world.«¹³ This same process helps the child to acquire a subjectively coherent and plausible identity by identification with parents or significant others. In carrying out this process language plays the most important role, since the world can only be objectified through language and the cognitive apparatus based on language, by means of which objects are ordered so as to be apprehended as reality. The child's internalization of identity and of objective reality are thus concurrent with the internalization of the uses of language which »constitutes both the most important content and the most important instrument of socialization.«¹⁴ Participation in the social stock of knowledge, made available by primary socialization, also

¹¹ Ibid., 271—2.

¹² See, *ibid.*, 268 the discussion what the unknown word »ransomed« could mean.

¹³ Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann. *The Social Construction of Reality. A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge.* (New York: Doubleday & Co, 1967), p. 66.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

»permits ‚location‘ of individuals in society and the ‚handling‘ of them in appropriate manner«... »The social stock of knowledge further supplies (every individual) with the typificatory schemes required for the major routines of everyday life not only typification of others... but typifications of all sorts of events and experiences both social and natural.«¹⁵ The acquisition of such knowledge has a double function, on the one hand it provides ready-made labels which make identification of people and phenomena much easier and faster; on the other, it also furnishes feelings of security, of being inside a wider community of shared beliefs and opinions.

If we inspect Huck's literal-mindedness and inability to participate in the accepted uses of language in the light of these descriptions of the effects of primary socialization, we can safely conclude that these characteristics of his betray his lack of primary socialization. Before we pass to the examination of other consequences of this lack for his narration and his entire vision of the world, we should point out that his story clearly supports this interpretation. Huck has no parents to enforce his primary socialization. With his mother dead the only parental influence upon him is exerted during Pap's intermittent appearances. A town drunkard and social outcast Pap is thoroughly antisocial and can only provide a model of behaviour and morals for rather limited types of situation. In such situations Huck persistently uses Pap's »logic«, for instance when he conceives of stealing as »borrowing«. From him Huck has the officially accepted attitudes to negro slaves and a considerable knowledge of the behaviour of drunkards and frauds,¹⁶ but no knowledge of how to behave in the company of other humans, children or grown-ups. Hence his difficulties not only in the grown-up world of the widow and with Jim, but also in the children's make-believe world. Differently from Pap, however, he craves human company and suffers when he experiences loneliness.

In this connection it is interesting to note that Pap's one and only described parental intervention in Huck's upbringing — besides inhuman beating — is directed at preventing Huck's acquisition of reading, i. e. his ability to handle language more efficiently. To give weight to his argument Pap, on this occasion, resorts to the authority of Huck's dead mother who is mentioned nowhere else in the entire text of the novel:

»Your mother couldn't read, and she couldn't write nuther, before she died. None of the family couldn't, before *they* died. I can't; and here you're a-swelling yourself like this. I ain't the man to stand it — you hear?«¹⁷

Instead of the socially shared knowledge of his white community Huck has obviously acquired a considerable knowledge of Negro signs, portents and hidden meanings from his association with negroes and from Pap. His association with negro culture can be held responsible for his superstitiousness, non-rationalism and occasional fatalism, and, in a way, it also prepares

¹⁵ Ibid. pp. 42—3.

¹⁶ *Huckleberry Finn*, p. 357: »If I never learnt nothing else out of Pap, I learnt that the best way to get along with his kind of people is to let them have their own way.« See also Mark Twain. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. (New York: Collier Books, 1962), p. 116: »When he is full, you might take and belt him over the head with a church and you couldn't phase him. He says so, his own self.«

¹⁷ *Huckleberry Finn*, p. 276.

him for his relationship with Jim, which would be hard to accept without his previous acquaintance with it. Thus it is functionally and structurally justifiable, though its extent and precise role are hard to determine, but to describe Huck as an »aficionado« of negro culture may well be exaggerated.¹⁸

The respectable world of Tom's and the widow is the third influence contributing to Huck's pluralistic outlook. The widow's influence is too late and too brief to be of great significance. It remains rather superficial and easy to forget. Tom's presence can be, as we have seen, the origin of conflict for Huck, so Tom is mostly revered in his absence as a standard of behaviour and especially style, when there is no possibility of conflict and no need for Huck to submit.¹⁹

The possession of such mixed knowledge and attitudes without any systematic primary socialization, which would prepare Huck for the »normal« ways of the world makes his encounters with other people a constant source of bafflement to him and of amused laughter for the reader who is naturally well acquainted with all such ways through his own primary socialization. Since Huck has at his disposal no typificatory labels which would help him to »understand« his encounters and »place« the encountered people, the latter remain for him bewildering in their unpredictable differentness and unknowability; their unsuspected corruption and stupidity take too many forms to permit any integration into an ordered picture of society from which Huck could learn. The integrating effort — the unification and understanding of Huck's experience — has to be performed by the reader himself, who in this way comes to see more than Huck: not only the pluralism of many different people and events but also the reasons for Huck's inability to understand what he sees.

Because of his lacking primary socialization and resulting tendency to pluralism, Huck is unable to impose any such order on his individual impressions, his knowledge is not sufficient for him to »handle« his social reality. In this way Huck can only see the rich natural plurality of the people, each inhabiting the limited world of his own selfish interests. This plurality — which is usually covered by typificatory labels and blurred by consequent expectations — seems to be magnified by Huck's inability to comprehend it, by his willingness to accept it as it is without too much questioning or effort at understanding.

Thus, for instance, listening to the widow's and Miss Watson's different discussions of Providence Huck reaches what is for him the only available conclusion that there must be two Providences: »I could see that there was

¹⁸ Jonathan Raban. *Mark Twain Huckleberry Finn*. (London: Edward Arnold, 1968), p. 16. In *Tom Sawyer* Huck tells Tom about his experiences of Roger's nigger Uncle Jake: »I tote water for Uncle Jake whenever he wants me to, and any time I ask him he gives me a little something to eat if he can spare it. That's a mighty good nigger, Tom. He likes me, becuz I don't ever act as if I was above him. But you needn't tell that...« The question of the influence of negro culture on Huck's upbringing is too complicated to be discussed here. The role of slaves in early upbringing was probably much stronger than it was expected to be.

¹⁹ Whereas in *Tom Sawyer*, Tom seems to occupy the position of Huck's closest friend (see p. 229: Discussing Tom's marriage Huck confesses:«... Only if you get married I'll be more lonesomer than ever.«), in *Huckleberry Finn*, Huck comes to be quite critical of his lies and interest in style. Only when Tom is physically absent does he come to represent for Huck, and for Jim, the standard of the respectable boy and cleverness.

two Providences, and a poor chap would stand a considerable show with the widow's Providence, but if Miss Watson's got him there warn't no help for him any more.«²⁰ Unacquainted with the possibilities of different language uses, Huck simply cannot integrate two representations of the same concept into one Providence. Such situations make the reader laugh over their irony; for Huck, however, they remain truly confusing and disturbing. So he duly reports his inability to handle them: after his consideration of the possible meanings of »spiritual gifts«, he can only go to the woods, turn it over in his mind for a long time, and, seeing no advantage in it, worry no more but just let it go,²¹ or, as we would say today, resort to self-protective forgetting.

When Huck moves away from the relatively innocent world of children's make-believe and the basically benign »sivilizing«, society of the widow, his encounters with the various representatives of the corrupt shore society result in ever more bewildering doubt and conflicts which on some occasions acquire truly grotesque dimensions. In order to explain his unaccountable position on the raft amidst the Mississippi he has to pretend, and assume a number of false identities. To make these believable he resorts to exaggerated lying, even though he has previously disproved such behaviour on part of Tom.

Discussing Huck's attitude to lying Thomas Brooks claims that it is necessary for Huck »to adopt the same methods of deceit and role playing that makes the world of the shore so repulsive« in order to combat society's hypocrisy and to find his own way through a world of socially imposed lies. Since Huck is really »forced to use a language system that is not his own« whenever he opens his mouth, Brooks maintains that Huck's real choice is not between the true speech of the raft and the false speech of the shore but rather between speech and silence.²² If we accept the view that Huck must lie in order to come to terms with the society of the shore on its own lying terms, it seems more important to call attention to his inability to lie really efficiently. His numerous attempts at lying usually make him extremely uncomfortable and produce additional trouble for him. This situation is repeated several times from his first attempt at lying to Mrs. Loftus to the eventual explicit admonition of the lawyer Levy Bell:

»Set down, my boy, I wouldn't strain myself, if I was you. I recon you ain't used to lying, it don't seem to come handy; what you want is practice. You do it pretty awkward.«²³

In both situations in which he invents different names and identities for himself he fails to remember his own other name. His inability to lie more effectively cannot be sufficiently explained by his innocence or naivete, it rather seems to indicate that his lying must be viewed as an unsuccessful effort at imitating the lying habits of other people, as a superficial practice poorly mastered because it has been acquired without the timely initiation in the true art of lying in his early youth.

²⁰ *Huckleberry Finn*, p. 270.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 269.

²² Thomas Brooks. »Language and Identity in the Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.« *Mark Twain Journal* 20. 3 (1981): 17. Lionel Trilling believes that Huck has to lie in order to protect the relationship on the raft. See *The Liberal Imagination*. (New York: The Viking Press, 1951), p. 109.

²³ *Huckleberry Finn*, p. 411.

The inability to lie efficiently sets Huck apart from all the people he encounters. These people exemplify different attitudes and values, thus revealing a picturesque pluralistic society, from the cunning but good-hearted Mrs. Loftus, the real robbers on the wreck of the Walter Scott, the two slave hunters willing to make up with money for their lack of humanity, to the Grangerfords and the Sheperdsons sincerely believing in the values of honour and gentility, and the two fraudulent role-players the Duke and the King. Yet they all share a common characteristic: in contrast to Huck they are all very efficient users of conventional language, especially lying, usually obtaining what they want, be it self-delusion or cheating of others.

Amidst this incomprehensible and bewildering variety of people Huck develops no capacity for coping with them more adequately in terms of their linguistic habits of lying and deluding themselves and others. Nor does he ever understand and integrate his impressions of them into a unified picture of the shortcomings of the human race. Unused to seeing the world in terms of such ordered images of reality he feels no need to see it in this way. Indeed, he seems to lack the very ability of verbal processing and the impulse of »putting the world together« verbally. Thus his experiences of other people and events come to him piece-meal and remain essentially fragmented, never inducing in him any attempt at ordering them into a meaningful idea of society.

When Huck's inability to participate in the socially accepted uses of language is noticed by other characters, they find in it an expression of his stupidity and reproach him for his ignorance. Thus Miss Watson calls him a fool for his putting prayer to a practical test, and Tom on several occasions explicitly accuses him of ignorance. When Huck reveals his disbelief in the make-believe world of the other children Tom immediately puts it down to Huck's ignorance:

»Shucks, it ain't no use to talk to you Huck Finn. You don't seem to know anything, somehow — perfect sap-head.«²⁴

Later on, in their plan to free Jim, Tom explicitly tells him that he would keep still, if he was as ignorant as Huck and maintains a position of superiority due to his knowledge:

»It might answer for you to dig Jim out with a pick, *without* any letting-on, because you don't know no better; but it wouldn't for me, because I do know better.«²⁵

Huck, however, simply accepts the consequences of his upbringing, and believes it too late for him to reform himself. After the failure of his attempt to do right and report Jim he reflects:

»I see it warn't no use for me to try to learn to do right; a body that don't get *started* right when he's little, ain't got no show — when the pinch comes there ain't nothing to back him up and keep him to his work, and so he gets beat.«²⁶

²⁴ Ibid., 272. See also pp. 441 and 442: »Oh, shucks, Huck Finn, if I was as ignorant as you, I'd keep still — that's what I'd do...«

²⁵ Ibid., p. 447.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 331.

Later on, when his conscience troubles him because of his decision to help Jim, he again blames it all on his upbringing:

»Well, I tried the best I could to kinder soften it up somehow for myself, by saying I was brung up wicked, and so warn't so much to blame; but something inside of me kept saying...«²⁷

Though he himself does not seem to care too much for upbringing, he obviously attributes some considerable importance to it: he clearly reports his inability to understand how Tom »could help a body set a nigger free, with his bringing-up.«²⁸

In such a frame of mind — with a mixture of attitudes and no power to understand (i. e. impose order on) his experience — Huck can only resort to one solution, to his urgent and almost automatic wish to be out of the situation in which he finds himself. This wish comes to be the basic pattern of his reactions to all troublesome situations. His narration very appropriately ends with this very solution to the last threatening situation, the possibility of his being »sivilized« again: »But I recon I got to light out for the Territory ahead of the rest...« Unable to reach any understanding of his experience Huck never takes to evaluating or even moralizing about them, he can only directly report the various shades of his feelings after each of his encounters. In this way the reader is offered a unique collection of concise descriptions of loneliness, sadness, and other states of fear, bafflement and disgust. Many of these descriptions — when he felt so lonesome he most wished he was dead, or down-hearted and scared, or most ready to cry, uneasy, and shaking like a leaf, solemn and all in a cold sweat, all over trembly and feverish, or mean and miserable to most wish he was dead, or so sick he most fell out of the tree, or orney and low down mean, blue, or when he cries and cannot help it, or he is made to shiver and wish he was dead, or when he felt his heart fell down his lungs and livers and the things²⁹ — reveal Huck's helpless wonder at the incomprehensible world around him. They may also make the reader realize that Huck, like other fourteen-year-old heroes, has not yet learnt that in order to keep one's own individuality one must be able to tolerate a considerable amount of loneliness.

It is entirely up to the reader to see more: not only to see what Huck sees and experiences, but also to see the special conditions under which he sees which can reveal his entire vision in a new light. If readers come to realize that Huck's vision is not merely the vision of a typical innocent narrator, but rather the vision of a boy uninfluenced by primary socialization and accordingly totally uninhibited by the traditionally transmitted ways of seeing the world and people in it, they can see this vision in all its peculiar beauty and uniqueness. They can also begin to consider what determines this vision: both Huck's and their own. Unfiltered by the usual typificatory labels for people and — distrustful of words — penetrating beyond their false verbal armour Huck's encounters with people reveal an unprecedented plurality of human interests and outlooks. Huck's picture of unmodified diversity, complexity and also corruption, devoid of all hope of order, seems

²⁷ Ibid., p. 421 see also 423.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 479.

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 263, 267, 305, 306, 310, 314, 327, 328, 349, 394, 397, 420, 422, 426, 450.

less disturbing for readers today who have a different attitude to pluralism from that which Huck or his contemporaneous readers and critics had.

Huck's uninhibited way of looking at the world is especially fascinating in his contacts with nature. He sees it directly, not through language or any socially conditioned expectations of what things »really« are or should be like. When he comes to Jackson's island his perception seems to come alive in a new way and his unforgettable descriptions of the river and the life on the raft reveal an openness to immediate experience, without the least interference of any preconceived ideas of the »beauty« of nature. These descriptions obviously provide such a rich source of pleasure for the readers that many critics have quite understandably felt resentful about Huck's return to the shore.

Disrespectful of all accepted concepts of looking at the world, Huck's vision of his fragmented and pluralistic world remains a challenge not only to all such concepts but also to the very process of social transfer and maintenance of such concepts. Though readers are most likely to begin reading *Huckleberry Finn* fully relying on their own concepts of reality and the ways in which the world is ordered thereby, they may — having experienced to the full Huck's unique vision — end up reading with questions about the arbitrariness of their own concepts and any other concepts and ways with the world and about the illusory nature of order. The appeal of Huck's narrative seems to draw its enduring force from our inborn distrust of all socializing influences which make our socialized conscious selves conform to the social rules and the official vision of reality, but which cannot erase our subconscious craving for, and consequent enjoyment of, the unsocialized, unrestricted and uninhibited direct experience of things as seen and reported by Huck. Such subversive messages of Huck's vision become most powerful only at the more complicated strata of its meaning: if readers come to recognize the conditions of Huck's vision as a significant structuring force which, when recognized, helps them to see and organize the text in its light.³⁰ At this level of reading *Huckleberry Finn* is transformed from the 19th century novel as mimesis into a modern novel as a structure which enables readers to understand how they make sense of the world.³¹

³⁰ See Roland Barthes. *S/Z* (Paris: Seuil 1970), p. 82.

³¹ Jonathan Culler. *Structuralist Poetics*. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 238.