

MARK TWAIN'S *THE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN*: A JOURNEY OF AN ARCHETYPAL HERO

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Abstract

In this paper an attempt has been made to study universal archetypes in Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Characters, setting and plot in the novel follow multiple archetypal formats. Each character falls into a universal subtype as do the surroundings in which characters function.

Key Words: Archetype, Slave, Hero, Trickster, Huck, Jim

Introduction

The New Encyclopaedia Britannica defines Archetype (from Greek archetypes, original pattern) in literary criticism as a primordial image, character or pattern of circumstances that recurs throughout literature and thought consistently enough to be considered a universal concept or situation. The term was adopted and popularized by literary critics from the writings of the Swiss psychologist Carl Jung, who formulated a theory of "collective unconscious" (Concept of Collective Unconscious at Jung). For Jung the varieties of human experience have somehow been genetically coded and transferred to successive generations. The origins of the archetypal hypothesis date back as far as Plato. Jung himself compared archetypes as Platonic ideas. Plato's ideas were pure mental forms, which were imprinted in the soul before into the world. They were collective in the sense that they embodied the fundamental characteristics of a thing rather than its specific peculiarities. In Jung's psychological framework archetypes are innate, universal prototypes for ideas and may be used to interpret observations. Jung treated the archetypes as psychological organs, analogous to physical ones in that both are morphological constructs that arose through evolution (Michael 118). Jung outlined five main archetypes:

1. The self
2. The shadow
3. Anima
4. Animus
5. The persona

Although archetypes can take on innumerable forms, there are a few particularly notable recurring images in literature:

1. The hero
2. Wise old man
3. The Trickster
4. The Great mother
5. Water
6. Sun

The term Archetype has been much used in literary criticism, especially since the appearance of Maud Bodkin's *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry*. In criticism "archetype" is applied to narrative designs, character type or images which are said to be identifiable in a wide variety of works of literature as well as in myths, dreams and even ritualized modes of social behaviour.

ANALYSIS

In Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* Huck Finn is a boy who escapes his hometown and undergoes adventure while aiding a friendly slave named Jim to freedom falls into the role of the 'hero'. Huck Finn is a hero archetype according to the archetypal approach and the *Dramatis Personae* of Vladimir Propp, a Russian structuralist scholar, who have given seven broad character types in his analysis of hundred Russian folk tales. For the hero, he says "in every story there is a major character with whom the reader will normally associate most strongly and who is the key person around whom the story is told" ("Propp's *Dramatis Personae*"). In *Huckleberry Finn* Huck is the key person, the protagonist around whom the story revolves.

The heroic journey in *Huckleberry Finn* could be called as an 'initiation' where "the hero undergoes a series of excruciating ordeals in passing from the ignorance and immaturity to social and spiritual adulthood. Thus achieving maturity he becomes a full-fledged member of his social group. The initiation most commonly consists of three distinct phases: 1. Separation 2. Transformation 3. Return. In the novel the first phase that is separation is caused by Huck's father character. He caused the call to take an adventure which Huck undertakes. With his sinister repulsiveness, Huck's father is a classic representation of the devil figure outlined by Jung as the 'Shadow'. He is very crucial to his son and due to his erratic behavior Huck runs away from him to Jackson's island and separated from his social group. As Joseph Campbell writes, "A hero ventures forth from the world of the common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered, and a decisive victory is won: the hero come back from the mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man" (Moyer 31). Since Huck's father caused his separation from his social group he fits into the character type 'the Dispatcher', who sends the hero on the mission, according to Propp's *Dramatis Personae*. The second phase of 'Initiation' is the transformation in which Huck becomes a new person. Huck matures morally and spiritually. He develops his own sense of logic and opinions based upon his own moral values. His perception of human relationships is completely transformed and he matures from seeing Jim as a slave to seeing him as human and a friend. Though he encounters temptation (a dark or evil side) also when he has the chance to give Jim up, but he lies to protect him. The transformation phase is the most significant phase, since the entire story of the novel is based upon it. At the end of the story, Huck returns to his past life. But his

adventure caused a change in his life. Aunt Polly wishes to adopt Huck and civilize him and he agrees to be civilized. Thus, Huck passes through the three phases of 'Initiation'.

The hero in a story displays honesty, leadership and goodwill. Huck Finn best fits this description of a hero. After staging his death to escape his father's erratic behaviour when Huck encounters Jim he promises not to tell anyone that Jim is a runaway slave and ends up taking leadership of a journey to Jim's freedom. Huck's honesty remains strong when he decides not to turn Jim in. Despite external pressures, such as the \$300 reward for Jim's return, Huck retains his integrity by refusing to go against his newly founded morals. Huck decided that we wouldn't pay attention to what his conscience stated, instead he "was a trembling, because I'd got to decide, forever, betwixt two things, and I knowed it. I studied a minute, sort of holding my breath, and then say to myself: 'All right then, I'll go to hell' - and tore it up" (Twain 308). In other words he refused to do what was expected by society but rather he does what he thinks is for the greater good. An example of this is when he protects Jim from being found by creating a lie. Even though society sees turning in a slave as being ethical, Huck goes against this public concept because he feels that slavery is unjust. The moral beliefs of Huck best connect him with the archetype of the hero. His willingness to go against society to support his own feelings set him apart from others. He maintains his honesty throughout the story although ironically he has to lie in order to protect Jim. Honesty and defiance of public ethics to fight for what he believes defines Huck as the archetypal hero. In this sense Huck Finn's character is effectively the quintessential personification of the ideals of independence, self-reliance and nonconformity.

Huck is a free thinker influenced only slightly by the society. From the start of the novel, it is evident that he comes from the lowest class of society. His father is a drunkard who is constantly away and as a consequence he is constantly homeless. The fact that he comes from the lowest class of society and doesn't have a caring father allows Huck to be "uncivilized" and very independent. Huck prefers to sleep under a tree, wear loss and sloppy clothing, eat with his hands, and act however he pleases. Although Widow Douglas attempts to reform Huck to make him "civilized", he resists her attempt and retains his independent ways. This is partially because many aspects of white society seem hypothetical to him. Huck grows stronger morally by being true to himself. This is seen when he realizes that he will feel bad if he sold Jim out to the slave hunters.

Henry David Thoreau in *Civil Disobedience*, states that people must think for themselves and not according to the law or the given social standards. Ralph Waldo Emerson in his work "Self Reliance" emphasized the importance of 'trusting thyself' and said that "he who would be a man must be a nonconformist" (3). Being self-reliant, according to Emerson, is to stand up for one's own beliefs. Huck constantly wonders which is correct, to sell Jim out or help him. Initially, he believes that it is against social standards so it is morally incorrect to free Jim. However, Huck thinks deeply about the issue and decides that it seems right to help Jim. He stands up for the belief when he tricks the slave hunters about a small pox outbreak to prevent them from finding Jim. Although Huck thinks that doing so seems right, his action would shock the people of his time. According to Emerson's Self Reliance, "it is easy in the world to live after the world's opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the great man is one who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude" (3). Huck effectively represents 'the great man' in several instances.

Huck epitomizes civil disobedience by risking danger and breaking a law he felt was wrong according to his sense of fairness. Many people of his time would be shocked to learn that

Huck, a white, would rather “go to hell” and help Jim, than to just return him back to Miss Watson and be rewarded for it. Perhaps the most impressive ability of Huck is that he is able to think about a situation, and rather than conforming to his societal implanted beliefs, he creates his own rules. When the conmen were tricking the Wilks family of their inheritance from Peter, Huck is disgusted with them. Although he is supposed to be on the conmen’s side, he steals money and hides it in Peter’s coffin. Huck is confronted with a situation, thinking about the situation he does what he thinks is right.

Huckleberry Finn fits into the tradition of the bildungsroman: a novel about the moral and psychological growth of the main character. As a poor, uneducated boy, for all intents and purposes an orphan, Huck distrusts the morals and precepts of the society that fails to protect him from abuse. This apprehension about society and his growing relationship with Jim lead Huck to question many of the teachings he has received, especially regarding race and slavery. More than once, we see Huck choosing to “go to hell” rather than go along with the rules and follow what he has been taught. Huck bases these decisions on his experiences, his own sense of logic and what his developing conscience tells him. On the raft, away from civilization, free from society’s rules, Huck is able to make his own decisions without restriction. Through deep introspection, he comes to his conclusions, unaffected by the accepted and often hypocritical rules and values of Southern culture. By the end of the novel, Huck has learned to distinguish good and bad, right and wrong, and so on. He overcomes many stereotypes and preconceived notions about slaves and blacks. At the beginning of the novel his view of Jim is very typical of what any perception would be of a slave during that time period. He thinks of Jim just as Miss Watson’s slave, not a person and definitely not a friend. However, when he and Jim find each other and go out to the island, Huck begins to see Jim as a person, not just a slave. This was a major step because Huck grew up with the notion that slaves were less than him, and he reversed that stereotype within his mind.

According to Jungian concept the hero in the accomplishment of his journey and spiritual maturity is always supported or helped by a sagacious and helpful ‘wise old man’. In *Huckleberry Finn* Jim exemplifies the Jungian concept of the ‘wise old man’, who provides spiritual guidance and moral wisdom for the young hero. In Propp’s *Dramatis Personae*, Jim fits into the character types of ‘the helper’ or ‘the donor’, helping the hero in his quest. Without Jim’s guidance for Huck, his journey would have failed. Jim is a man of remarkable intelligence and compassion. At first glance, Jim seems to be superstitious to the point of idiocy, but a careful reading of the time that Huck and Jim spend on island reveals that Jim’s superstitious conceal a deep knowledge of the natural world and represent an alternate form of truth of intelligence. In this sense Jim’s superstitious serves as an alternative to accepted social teaching and assumptions and provides a reminder that mainstream conventions are not always right.

Fitting into the traits of his archetype ‘wise old man’, Jim is always ready to help Huck. He plays the role of a father to Huck by providing for his physical, emotional and moral well-being. He cooks for the boy and shelters him from some of the worst horrors that they encounters, including the sight of Pap’s corpse and for a time, the news of his father’s passing. Although Jim’s ability to protect Huck is limited because of his status as a black slave, he protects him as best as he can. The king and the Duke are other important characters in Huck’s moral growth. They are the two conmen that Huck encounters during his journey. Both of them display the archetype of the ‘trickster’. The trickster archetype displays a team of people that creates a false persona, fools others, steals valuables and is dishonest and untrustworthy. When

the king and the duke introduce themselves it is clear to Huck that the two are frauds. Their deceptive actions such as staging a fake play and impersonating the heirs to a fortune pair them with the archetype flawlessly. The king and the Duke always betray others by giving false names, hosting fake performance and even lying to Huck about not turning Jim in. These conmen's lies are bad for they hurt a number of innocent people. Finally their deceptive manners lead to their downfall as they are ousted from town since Huck spoiled their plans. Both of them help in Huck's moral growth. As Huck observes them, he is able to judge that what they do is wrong and learn accordingly by negative examples.

Besides the king and the Duke, Huck also presents himself as a 'trickster' throughout the entire journey of his maturity. Huck's nature is tricky from the beginning of the novel. When Huck was left with Widow Douglas he was imaginatively studying about the behaviour of Widow in a tricky way. Huck's tricky behave can be clearly seen in the relation with his father. Huck escapes his father's abusive and increasingly erratic behaviour by staging his own death. Similarly when Huck and Jim are separated, Huck again uses his trick and becomes free from Grangerferds. In this way throughout the development of the holistic plot structure events one after another are connected with Huck's tricks. As a whole the complete adventure of Huck from his childhood, or ignorance to maturity are related with his tricks.

Mark Twain, in *Huckleberry Finn* has used various concrete objects to symbolize a diverse range of feelings, emotions and even actions. The ultimate symbol in the novel is the Mississippi river. One could hardly imagine the novel without the Mississippi. All the incidents and events of the novel appear on its shores or on its surface. It is an archetype in itself characterized by a passing of time and a change of consciousness. The river has served as a mechanism for the development maturity of Huck. The Mississippi river is a setting where time passes often parallel with a change of consciousness. It also hosts a shift from life to death as seen with Huck's father. Mark Twain uses the river to transport his characters from one setting to the next over a period of time and uses it as a scenario where alterations in mood and other forms of consciousness occur. On the river Huck and Jim witness life and death, tragedy and comedy, strife and peace. They quickly discover that it is key to their happiness.

The Mississippi river symbolizes freedom, in contrast to the restrictions and responsibilities Huck experience on land. Alone on their raft, they do not have to answer to anyone. The river carries them towards freedom. For Jim towards the free states and for Huck away from his abusive father and the restrictive "sivilizing" of St. Petersburg. The river promotes Huck's maturity. He grows up, having the river as a place for solitude and thought where he can participate at time and other times sit back and watch. Mark Twain uses the river to place Huck on a figurative island separated from the influences of society. This separation allows Huck to develop his own opinions according to his own moral values. Thus, Huck Finn epitomizes the archetype of the 'American Adam' also. R.W.B. Lewis describes this archetype in his book *The American Adam*, "a radically new personality, the hero of the new adventure: an individual emancipated from history, happily bereft of ancestry, untouched and undefiled by the usual inheritances of family and race; an individual standing alone, self-reliant and self propelling, ready to confront whatever awaited him with the aid of his own unique and inherent resources" (1).

Huck displays many character traits of the American Adam. He is thoughtful, intelligent and willing to come to his own conclusions. Huck also symbolizes the American Adam because he undergoes many adventures to try and capture a significant part of the American dream

concerning freedom. Huck and Jim travel by the river and encounter a number of situations in which act in a manner which leads to their freedom. Huck wants freedom from the limits of civilization and Jim from slavery. During the course of his journey Huck is exposed to so much evil in human nature, but he is saved from pessimistic gloom by his sense of humour and sense of humanity. And he became a better person after experiencing many different events. By the end of the novel, Aunt Polly adopts Huck. In this manner Huck completes his journey by being separated, transformed and finally reunited to his social group.

Conclusion

Summing up, we can say that in *The Adventures of the Huckleberry Finn*, archetypes shape the characters, mood and setting of the story. Each character's actions and words shape how they react in particular situation. As different a character may seem externally, there are underlying universal themes that successfully unite them with one another. Thus the various characters introduced in the novel help Huck in completing his heroic journey and attaining spiritual maturity. Huck Finn, after undergoing series of painful experiences in passing from ignorance to innocence into spiritual maturity, is morally reborn. His awareness of the world gets enlarged a great deal. He has understood the meaning of human relationships. The funny thing about Huck is that awareness comes to him not through acceptance of his own moral values and the rejection or we can say that is the acceptance of his own moral values and the rejection of the societal values. During the course of his journey, Huck realizes that even telling a lie can actually be a good thing, depending upon its purpose. This insight is part of Huck's learning purpose, as he finds that some of the rules he has been taught contradict what seems to be "right". Another important point is that the novel is not in freeing Jim, since he was already released by Miss Watson two months before their return. But rather the victory lies in seeing Huck Finn as a real person. The perilous journey was labour not of attainment but of reattainment, not discovery but rediscovery of Huck Finn.

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