MARK TWAIN`S HUCKLEBERRY FINN - A LESSON OF THE RIVER IN THE SPIRIT OF PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION AND AN INVENTION OF LANGUAGE IN AN EMERSONIAN SENSE

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Abstract: This paper illustrates that Mark Twain`s Huckleberry Finn survives mostly because Huck`s search for a freedom of "consciousness", which takes the form of a journey and transforms itself into a life lesson in terms of progressive education as it was conceived by John Dewey, in his educational theory, and because it is an invention of a language for American fiction as it was envisaged by Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Keywords: experience, consciousness, pragmatism, progressive education, language of the ordinary man.

1. Introduction:

The appreciation of human values in Huckleberry Finn, and the sense of epic inspired by life on the Mississippi establish Mark Twain`s place in American letters as an artist of "*broad understanding and vital, although uneven and sometimes misdirected."* (Brooks, Cleanth et al ,1973,1274)

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is the sequel to Tom Sawyer. Although it continues the picaresque story of the characters of Tom Sawyer the sequel is a" *more accomplished work of art*". (Brooks, Cleanth et al ,1973,1275).

Narrated by Huck, the sequel begins with its almost illiterate hero under the protection of the widow Douglas and her sister miss Watson.

When his father comes to ask for the the boy's fortune, Huck misleads him by transferring the money to judge Thatcher. But his father kidnaps him and imprisons him to an isolated cabin. When the old man has been drunk, Huck escapes to Jacksons` island where he meets miss Watson's runaway slave Jim. They start their journey down the river on a raft. After many adventures, the raft is hit by a Steamboat and the two are separated. Huck swims ashore and is sheltered by the Grangerford family which is a great enmity with Shepherdsons. The boy discovers Jim, and they leave again on the raft giving refuge to the Duke of Bridgewater, a fraud and Dolphin, Louis the 17th of France, a faker. They present, as Kean and Garrick, dramatic performances ending in the fraudulent exhibition of the Royal None- such.

Huck witnesses the murder of an innocent drunkard by an Arkansas aristocrat. The impostors learn of the death of Peter Wilks and pretend to be his heirs as his brothers. Huck defends the three daughters, and the masquerade is stopped by the arrival of the real brothers. Then he discovers that the king has sold Jim to Miss Phelps, Tom Sawyer's aunt. At the Phelps farm he pretends to be Tom to rescue Jim. When Tom arrives, he impersonates his brother Sid and elaborates a plan to free Jim. During the rescue Tom is accidentally shot and the slave is recaptured. While Tom is recuperating, he reveals that miss Watson had died, offered Jim his liberty in her will. It's also revealed that Huck`s fortune is safe because his father died.

Because of this well-designed and knotted plot, the novel survives everything, but more than that Huckleberry Finn survives mostly because of Hucks search for a freedom of "consciousness" as a very rewarding learning experience and because it is also an "invention of a language for American fiction". (Brooks, Cleanth et al ,1973, 1285).

2. Learning by experience- Education is life itself.

The concept of experience is the basis of Dewey's theory of instruction and this unifying concept is the core of Pragmatism- its philosophical foundation.

Dewey specifies in this respect that Santiago Charles Sanders Peirce, the founder of pragmatism, sought "*to establish the law of practical reason in the a priori area, Peirce also sought to interpret the universal concepts in the area of experience*". (Stanciu, G.I., Nicolescu V, et al. 1971, 28)

Each experience is based on the interaction between subject and object, between self and its world and represents only the result of the integration of human being into the environment.

Experience includes action and knowledge. The first one acts on the environment modifying it and the second means understanding the connections within an object, which determine its applicability in each situation. (Dewey, J.1977, 18)

The process of knowing develops when the human being is in a problematic situation. The dual nature of man (biological and social), the changes that prevail permanence are asserted by Pragmatism; and, therefore, the relativity of values and critical intelligence represent irrefutable values for human conduct.

John Dewey gives an illustrative definition to his own philosophy, and by default, to pragmatism considering that reality has a practical character, expressed in the most efficient way through intelligence. (Dewey, J., 1968, 64)

In the American pedagogue's opinion, the educational process includes two aspects: a psychological and a sociological one.

He considers the psychological aspect to be fundamental and very important. The learning capacity should continue in adult life, without disappearing after childhood. In John Dewey's view, growth is represented by the ability of learning, forming habits and readjusting activity to new conditions. Students learn by doing. The authentic knowledge could be achieved only through direct experience. Dewey combated the idea that school prepared for life, considering school as being life itself (Dewey, J, 1992, 68).

3. Experience on the river – A lesson of Life

Huckleberry Finn is a novel based on a series of boyish adventures, but these adventures are place in the context of a certain reality, the adult world.

The journey has started under urgent circumstances. Both Huck and Jim are more than simple wanderers; they are escaping from their own social constraints. To escape they give themselves to the river. As T.S Eliot implies the river seems to be "*an image of freedom and regeneration. The river teaches a kind of human relationship at odds with the vanity selfishness competitiveness and hypocrisy of society." (cited in* Brooks, Cleanth et al ,1973,1276).

Mark Twain takes the boy of 12 through life. If the wanderings of the hero are to be through life, he should learn something about life. The personality of the learner is extremely important. In this case, Twain needed a hero sensitive enough to ask the right questions of his adventures in growing up, and intelligent enough to demand the right answers. We are precisely in John Dewey`s case where education is life itself and reality has a practical character, expressed in the most efficient way through intelligence. For Huck the discovery of reality will mean freedom. *(*Brooks, Cleanth et al ,1973)

In fact, Huck`s journey is nothing more than stages in searching and reaching freedom. Episode by episode, he is trying to escape from illusions which are his bondages, "*all the lies that society tells to justify its values" (*Brooks, Cleanth et al ,1973, 1280).

3.1 Lesson about Good and Evil

Huck learns in his keen observation of society that good and evil rarely appear separated. Society is a mixture of them, and so is the human being. The woman who would catch Jim for $300 is a kind woman. The men on the river who are looking around for capturing slaves were enough merciful to offer them $220 gold piece. The discovery of the mixture of evil with good means a stage towards Hucks growing up. For John Dewey education means growth and growth is nothing more than progress and development very specific for progressive education.

3.2 Lesson of consciousness

Conscience could be considered voice of the society in which someone has lived. Against this "conscience" Huck would oppose a consciousness resulted from the unillusioned observation of experience. "Huck wants to look at the world directly, with his own eyes, and this talent is the reward of being outside society". (Brooks, Cleanth et al ,1973, 1282)

Huck is a moral pragmatist in John Dewey's terms: he wants to derive his values "fresh, from experience to create his own moral consciousness". (Brooks, Cleanth et al ,1973, 1282)

If his consciousness has been educated to freedom, Huck has also learnt to be humble. Huck has accepted the Jim`s love, a man he previously considered to be inferior. Escaping from the bondage of society, Huck has lost the old self. He must be looking for a new one.

"*With every new venture back to the shore - that is to society - Huck takes on a new role, has a new personal history to tell, a new "self" to try on for size. The act represents a seeking for identity. For Huck is not seeking to exist outside of society. What he seeks is simply a new kind of society, a kind prefigured body harmony and mutual respect necessary on a raft. He is also seeking a new kind of father and here is where Jim assumes another significance; Jim is the father who can give love. Jim on the raft is the father deprived of his blood children and now needs to find a son to spend his love on".* (Brooks, Cleanth et al,1973,1282)

To sum up: Huck discovers of a rewarding vision. This is a vision "of freedom to be achieved by fidelity to experience, humanity, love, and pity for suffering". (Brooks, Cleanth et al ,1973, 1282). As Huck drifts down the river, he learns a lesson taught by the symbolic river, which proved to be a great teacher.

4. Emerson and language of the ordinary man

The novel, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, survives not merely because Hucks search for a freedom of "consciousness" but because it is also an invention of a language for American fiction in terms in which Emerson envisaged it.

"Emerson has the conviction that action is the great power behind language. This pragmatic view made him keenly alert to the possibilities of the vernacular". (Dumitriu, Geta, 1985,125).

He focused attention on the language of the ordinary man. *The ordinary man is akin to the poet for he too stands in close relation to the world of things; while the poet reaches it by imagination, the ordinary man is involved with it in more physical sense.* (Emerson, Ralph Waldo , 2000, 29):

Emerson considers that ordinary man can speak an unpaired fresh language *(*Dumitriu, Geta, 1985).

He proclaims the equality of all the domains in which human beings are involved. Traditional hierarchies of facts into high and low are denied and the classification of words into high and low is not acceptable. *The critical role which Emerson played in American fiction, had much to do with a new perspective he had opened: prosaic, everyday life came to be seen as deserving serious literary treatment. (*Dumitriu, Geta, 1985,127)

5. Language narrated by Huck – The language of an ordinary boy, full of poetic force.

Language narrated by Huck is the language of an unschooled hero. "*In Huck`s language a magnificent expression as Bernard De Voto has put it of the folk mind. Twain found the miraculous solution, blending two traditions. The first was that of the frontier humorists Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, Davy Crockett. The second was that of the early writers of the local color school as James Russell Lowell and Harriet Beecher Stowe".* (Brooks, Cleanth et al, 1973,1276).

The colloquial language is full of flavor, flexible, and natural. Even if the speaker is almost illiterate his language is expressive capable of transmitting subtle feelings and thoughts (Brooks, Cleanth et al, 1973).

Huck`s language reveals Huck`s origin as the sun of drunkard father. It is specific for the world of common, but it is a language of capable of poetry in Emersonian terms.

A language capable of poetic force is used to be spoken by a speaker capable of poetic thoughts and feelings.

This sensibility is a characteristic of for Huck's moral awareness, becoming aware of the surrounding reality, the way the world moves on. The language of Huck is an indicative to his growing up, to his development and progress as John Dewey envisaged in his progressive instruction.

6. Conclusion

The novel survives because it is an invention of a language for American fiction. It is characteristic for the world of common, but it is a language full of poetic force to which Emerson predicted a great future in American literature, full of flavor, flexible and natural, expressive, a language of freshness, capable of poetry.

It also survives because Huck`s search for a freedom of "consciousness'' takes the form of a journey, a vast experience, which transforms itself into a life lesson in terms of progressive education as it was conceived by John Dewey. This experience is on the interaction between Huck and his world. If Huck` s experience through life, he will learn something about life.

If according to John Dewey the authentic knowledge could be achieved only through direct experience, Huck`s experience proved to be very rewarding. After this experience Huck was rewarded with a redemptive vision This is a vision of freedom achieved by fidelity to experience, humanity, and love. Huck is taught a great lesson by the symbolic river. Conscience in short is merely the voice of the society in which a person has been bred. Against the voice of his society Huck set up his consciousness appeared as a result of his close inspection, depleted of illusions upon experience. Huck wants to look at the world directly, with his own eyes, and this is the reward of being outside society.

Huck is a moral pragmatist: he wants to derive his values "fresh", from experience to create his own moral consciousness.

Twain 'hero is sensitive enough to ask the right questions while growing up, and intelligent enough to demand the right answers, John Dewey considering that reality has a practical character, expressed in the most efficient way through intelligence.

To sum up, Mark Twain`s Huckleberry Finn is a journey for searching freedom of "consciousness", in fact, a life lesson in terms of progressive education as it was conceived by John Dewey in his education theory, and an invention of a language for American fiction as it was envisaged by Ralph Waldo Emerson.

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