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Research Article

THE RIVER USED AS A GREAT SYMBOL IN THE FICTIONAL WORLD OF MARK TWAIN: A BRIEF ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

This paper throws light on the fictional forte of Mark Twain as a prominent story-teller who depicts authenticity, moral and spiritual growth. He lays emphasis on the importance of river, which displays the beauty, power, generosity etc. 'The River' is a source of unity and so he has used 'River' as a great symbol in the novel.

Key Words:

Imagination, Adventure, Moral, Spiritual,
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INTRODUCTION

Mark Twain (1835-1910), originally known as Samuel Langhorne Clemens, was an American novelist, short story and novella writer, journalist, essayist autobiographer and dramatist. Born in Florida, Missouri, he was a typical son of the westward migration. During 1848-'69, he worked as a printer, reporter and even as a steam boat pilot and his thoughts expressed themselves in the patterns he had learned in Missouri and on the River before the civil war. The river is said to have left an indelible imprint on his imagination, thereby stimulating his interest to write several novels, anecdotes, speculations, recollections and later on his autobiography. He was a prominent story-teller. As a story-teller, he could convey authenticity, because he had intimate knowledge of the things he described. Mark Twain lays emphasis on the importance of the river Mississippi in the moral and spiritual growth of the child heroes Tom and Huck. The Mississippi with its countless squalid towns and its palatial steam boats was a ferment of commingled and insoluble life. All the elements of the American East and all the elements of Europe seethed here, in the hunt of wealth. A delirium of dreams and schemes and passions, out of which shaped our genius for invention and exploitation. The whole gamut of American beginnings ran with the river. Huck is a candid, courageous child full of the cunning and virtue of the resilient savage. He wears the

habiliments of the civilization from which he comes loosely, like trinkets about his neck. He and his companions build a raft and float. The adventures that Huck has are the material of pioneering life. Huck is almost America, floating down the current of a mighty stream.

The grand majestic Mississippi River is of great importance in the lives of Tom and Huck the child heroes of Mark Twain. The river contributes to their spiritual and moral growth. The river displays among its myriad qualities, beauty, mystery, power, gentleness, generosity, constant threats and on often deceptively benign surface, covering an interior that is not easy to fathom. 'Tom Sawyer' and 'Huckleberry Finn' have the full flavor of the Mississippi river on which the author spent his own boyhood and from the contact with the soil of which he has always risen reinvigorated. They have a historical dimension and can be approached as a guide to what life was like along the Mississippi in the years before the Civil War, as a mirror of the pivotal position the Missouri region occupied in the slavery controversy as a species of 'frontier humour'. The town where Tom Sawyer was born and brought up in some such idle, shabby little Mississippi River town as Mr. Mark Twain has so well described in his piloting reminiscences, but Tom belongs to the better sort of people in it, and has been bred to fear God and dread the Sunday School according to the strictest rite of the faiths that have characterized all the

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respectability of the West. Loosely based on Twain's in Hannibal, Missouri Tom Sawyer relates the exploits of its adolescent hero over the course of a summer in the fictional Mississippi valley town of St.Petersburg. Tom is presented as a mischievous child who delights in such boyish pranks as stealing jam from his Aunt Polly's kitchen, getting into flights with the neighbourhood boys and tricking other children into doing chores. In the Story "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer", it is Huck who gives the book style. The river gives the book its form. But for the River, the book might be only a sequence of adventure with a happy ending. A river, a very big and powerful river, is the only natural force that can wholly determine the course of human peregrination. It is the river that controls the voyage of Huck and Jim; that will not let them land at Cairo, where Jim could have reached freedom; it is the river that separates them and deposits Huck for a time in the granger ford household the River that reunites them and then compels upon them the unwelcome company of the king and the Duke. Recurrently we are reminded of its presence and its power.... We come to understand the river by seeing it through the eyes of the Boy; But the Boy is also the spirit of the river.

The River makes the book a great book. As with Conrad, we are continually reminded of the power and terror of Nature and the isolation and feebleness of man. Conrad remains always the European observer of the tropics, the white man's eye contemplating the Congo and its back Gods. But Mark Twain is a native and the River God is his God. It is as native that he accepts the River God and it is the subjection of man that gives to man his dignity. For without some kind of God, man is not even very interesting. Like Huckleberry Finn, the River itself has no beginning or end, in its beginning, it is not the river in its end, it is no longer the river... things must merely happen, here and there to the people who live along its shore or who commit themselves to its current. And it is as impossible for Huck as for the River to have a beginning or end a career. So the book has the right, the only possible concluding sentence. The chief figures in the story are the boys and the River. The River as Eliot says is time and timelessness, "a strong brown god" with his own thoughts about the machine, the Hurry and fuss of cities, the illusions and struggles that make us lie, steal or cheat. But the River is also the Mississippi as it borders the state of Missouri, the very heart of America. If Twain helped create a mythic river, the river also helped Twain find his place as a legendary writer.

'The River' is a source of unity – after each adventure Huck returns to the raft and the river. Mr.Tritting says that Huck is "the servant of the river – God". Mr. Eliot puts it this way:

"The River gives the book its form, But for the River, the book might be only a sequence of adventures with a happy ending" (37)

Twain had a knowledgeable respect for the Mississippi, and provides excellent reasons for his characters' intense relations with it. It is a source of food and beauty and terror and serenity of mind. But above all it provides motion; it is the means by which Huck and Jim more away from a menacing civilization. They return to the river to continue their journey. The Mississippi River is of central importance of Mark Twain's novels and a lot of scholarly effort has been expanded in evaluating its role. Huck narrowly escapes being killed by his

father during one of the old man's drunken binges, he decides to flee in a canoe he has found informing us that "I judged I'd hide here good and then, stead of taking to the woods when I run off, I'd go down the river about fifty mile and camp in one place for 'good' point to Huck's stopping more than temporarily not to a continual push to put increasingly many miles between himself and his father. A little later shortly after Huck escapes from the confinement imposed upon him by pap his first act is to hide his canoe, have a snack, and then. "Smoke a pipe and lay out a plan". His lien of reasoning is clear: I say to myself, they "follow the track of that sackful of rocks to the shore and then drag the river for me". They won't even hunt the river for anything but my deed carcass. They'll soon get tired of that and won't bother no more about me. All right, I can stop anywhere I want to Jackson's island is good enough for me; I know that island pretty well and nobody ever comes there, And then I can paddle over to town, nights and slink around and pick up things I want. Jackson's Island's place" (P 41).

Huck and Jim are forced to begin continually using the flow of the river to avoid capture. Even crossing the river can be viewed as problematic. Jim, for example, is thwarted in his attempt to escape across the river and leave the threat of enslavement. The river also takes Jim and Huck past Cairo and safety and ever deeper into slave country, but for this, it is in no way to blame unless it is seen in an anthropomorphic light. Huck never sees the river in such a light, however, and his uncomplicated attitude toward this powerful entity seems apparent in a brief comment he makes shortly after the dissipating of the fog, along with its fears. Displaying awe and his habitual lack of prejudice, Huck remarks "It was a monstrous big river here" (102). In the end, the Mississippi must finally be left behind by both Huck and Jim. Neither wished at the outset to be on the river.

To conclude, the river by itself is a great symbol in the novel and into its fabric all the experiences of the characters are woven into. The river carries them far from the hustle and bustle of the mundale world into a close affinity of nature where the soul is blessed with joy and serenity. Huck has an everlasting relationship with the River like that of mother and son. The River remains with him for the beginning to the end.

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