Studies on Intermediality and Intercultural Mediation – REUNIDO
*Journal of Artistic Creation and Literary Research* – 14.1 (June 2026): 1-20
e-ISSN 2340-650X
DOI: https://doi.org/10.17811/jaclr.24628


# THE LUMPENPROLETARIAT IN MARK TWAIN'S *HUCKLEBERRY FINN*[1]

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Abstract: A lumpenproletarian coterie populates Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn. Attention to the lumpenproletariat adds important nuance to analyze the book from the vantage point of class and grapple with its contours and those of race. Twain's lumpenproletarians (namely Pap, the Duke and the King) abuse enslaved people to their advantage. This is a different but productive iteration of the classic Marxist take on the lumpenproletariat, predicated on their betrayal of salaried workers as long as it pays off economically. Where there should be class solidarity, the lumpenproletarians in Huckleberry Finn tread down on enslaved people, who are their unpropertied fellows. Such rupture of class solidarity between the propertyless registers the pervasiveness of the racial capitalism of Antebellum America, where living on the margins of society did not preclude access to white privilege. Dissolute individuals displaced from the economic center of society and ensconced in atypical economic relationships feed off racial supremacy as much as the propertied or wage workers. Huck, also a lumpenproletarian, seems, on the contrary, able to press his class position into the service of an anti-racist ideology. As opposed to the other characters whose marginal class position allows them to benefit from institutionalized slavery, Huck breaks through his racist conscience thanks to the same relationship of production that corrupts them. Huckleberry Finn is therefore a novel concerned with the progressive or reactionary potential of the lumpenproletariat. It ultimately favors the latter by making Huck's racial justice convictions futile when he becomes passively complicit with the logic of institutionalized slavery in the attempt to free Jim from his imprisonment. This ending condemns the bourgeois moral discourse spread by the widow that discourages Huck from acting on his anti-racist persuasions.
Keywords: lumpenproletariat; Marxism; racial capitalism

# EL LUMPENPROLETARIADO EN *HUCKLEBERRY FINN* DE

Resumen: Un grupo de lumpenproletarios puebla Huckleberry Finn de Mark Twain. Prestarle atención al lumpenproletariado brinda un nuevo punto de vista desde el que abordar los contornos de raza y clase del libro. Los lumpenproletarios de Twain (el padre de Huck, el duque y el rey) abusan de esclavos para su propio beneficio. Esta es una versión diferente (pero productiva) de la concepción marxista clásica del lumpenproletariado, basada en su traición a los trabajadores asalariados siempre que

[1] Recommended Citation: Sanz Brea, Manuel. "The Lumpenproletariat in Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*." *Journal of Artistic Creation and Literary Research* 14, no. 1, 2026, pp. 1-20: https://reunido.uniovi.es/index.php/jaclr/index

resulte económicamente rentable. Donde debiera haber solidaridad de clase, estos lumpenproletarios de Huckleberry Finn pisotean a los esclavos con los que se encuentran, que en realidad son sus compañeros desposeídos. Esta ruptura de la solidaridad de clase entre los que no tienen propiedad registra la omnipresencia del capitalismo racial de la América pre-guerra civil, donde vivir en los márgenes de la sociedad no limitaba el acceso al privilegio blanco. Personas depravadas que han sido desplazadas del centro económico de la sociedad y habitan relaciones económicas atípicas se alimentan de la supremacía racial tanto como los propietarios o los trabajadores asalariados. Huck, también un lumpenproletario, parece, por el contrario, capaz de poner su posición de clase al servicio de una ideología antirracista. A diferencia de los otros personajes, cuya posición de clase marginal les permite beneficiarse de la esclavitud institucionalizada, Huck rompe con su conciencia racista gracias a la misma relación de producción que a ellos los corrompe. Huckleberry Finn es por tanto una novela interesada en el potencial progresista o reaccionario del lumpenproletariado. En última instancia, se inclina por este último al hacer que las convicciones de justicia racial de Huck resulten inútiles al volverse cómplice pasivo de la lógica de la esclavitud institucionalizada en el intento de liberar a Jim de su captura. Este final condena el discurso moral burgués esparcido por la viuda, que desalienta a Huck de actuar según sus convicciones antirracistas.
Palabras clave: lumpenproletariado; Marxismo; capitalismo racial

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Across almost a century and a half of criticism, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* has tantalized scholars, defying a single, unitary reading. Two of the textual elements that have stood above critical dissent are Huck's (partial) moral awakening and how the changing setting where it unfolds is instrumental to it. In casting off Antebellum America's received notions on race, he undergoes a piecemeal process of ideological emancipation staged in the Mississippi and its adjacent towns. Huck's self-definition is in part achieved thanks to the river and the itineracy it allows for Jim and him. Their constant movement is so narratively determining that one of the definite conclusions we can glean from the book, as Michael Egan does, is that "this is a novel of continual flight and escape" (17). Yet the couple's surroundings can be threatening as well as enabling. On the dual character of the river, an arcadia free from societal constraints and at the same time a netherworld, Robert A. Lee argues that "where the Mississippi can offer restoration and calm to the soul, it can, and frequently in the novel does, turn treacherous, full of dangerous eddies, fogs, hidden risks and banks. Further, it is not immune to the different corruptions of the shore: the Duke and Dauphin [King] will get on board" (35). Certainly, the river ushers in these two despicable characters whose parasitical relationship to society establishes them as lumpenproletarians. As much as geographic setting seems to

structure the novel, *Huckleberry Finn* constructs race and how characters make sense of it through its crossover with class in the form of the lumpenproletariat.

Marxist theorizations of the lumpenproletariat have been articulated across two different lines, namely who belong in the category and what their historical role is. These two sides of the definition interlock, and the lumpenproletariat's contribution to the fate of society stems from their class condition. The grounds to determine belongingness to the lumpenproletariat are purely economic; they are distinct from both capitalists and workers because they have eschewed, most often unwillingly, the bond of wage labor or any other legal means of legally making a living. The destituteness that lacking a source of livelihood sanctioned by the state foists on them encourages taking to base jobs. Marx sees the lumpenproletariat in *The Class Struggles in France* as "a body clearly differentiated from the industrial proletariat, a recruiting-ground for thieves and criminals of all sorts, living on the refuse of society, people with no definite trade, vagrants, gens sans feu et sans aveu [people without hearth or home]" (276). From this condition follows their ambiguous disposition to societal change. During momentous periods, the need to secure a day's bread makes the lumpenproletariat willing to exploit the historical circumstances to their own benefit. This often takes the shape of willingness to antagonize waged workers in exchange for sustenance. Marx offers as an example the formation of the Mobile Guard (Garde Mobile) in Paris in 1848. Following the February Revolution that overthrew the July Monarchy, the provisional government established this militia, recruited from the Parisian lumpenproletariat, who joined out of economic necessity rather than political conviction. When the workers of Paris rose in the June Days insurrection, the Mobile Guard would go on to crush the uprising. Marx's blistering critique and view of the lumpenproletariat as a counterrevolutionary force emerge from this hostility to their peers, and not from any moral ground.

*Huckleberry Finn* features a set of characters that run the gamut of the lumpenproletariat class, with some minor changes when compared to the textbook Marxist concept. In light of an economic status unmoored from conventional capitalist production, the Duke, King, Pap and Huck fit seamlessly into the economic irregularity and instability of the lumpenproletariat. In agreement with the orthodox Marxist notion, I use the term lumpenproletariat in the essay to strictly describe this anomalous economic experience of being unwaged yet unpropertied. My usage becomes more flexible at two analytical moments. First, to refer to the actions that Twain's lumpenproletarians are

driven to due to their class position. These characters differ from the original formulation in whose lives they disrupt to ensure their own survival (in the case of the King and Duke) and whose interests they try to protect (in Huck's case). For Antebellum America lumpenproletarians, the historical contingency to be manipulated and transformed into a means for supporting one's life was slavery. Where Marx pointed to the European lumpenproletariat backstabbing waged workers, Twain's book shows the Duke and King and Pap being contemptible towards enslaved people, with the Duke and King using them for subsistence despite not owning them. Huck's ambivalent solidarity also develops, not with waged workers, but with the slave class as personified by Jim. Second, I broaden the notion of the lumpenproletariat for it to encompass Jim. He is first an enslaved person, and only a lumpenproletarian in as much as he is on the run and has to provide for himself without entering a legal work contract. Recognizing him as a lumpenproletarian has deep implications for the novel, and clarifies its stance on the interplay between class and race.

Critical scholarship of *Huckleberry Finn* has left the lumpenproletarian dimension of the book underexplored. Some non-Marxist pieces have thought through the presence of the lumpenproletariat and described their brazenness as derived from their class position without attaching the lumpenproletariat label to them. Leo B. Levy, for example, speaking of Pap's "dirt, brutality, and degeneracy" finds that these "remain abiding characteristics of the experiences that follow [Huck's] plunge into the "freedom" that is antithetical to the social restraints he has cast off" (385). Here, Levy implicitly ties the lumpenproletariat characters' foulness into their withdrawal from conventional society and economic relationships. In the same vein, another scholar has more recently articulated a binary at the crux of the novel, which "pits Civilization with its various defining narratives, on the one hand, against unCivilized outlawry" (Tebbets 181). For Tebbets' "unCivilized outlawry" we could roughly read a lumpenproletarian way of life. In this essay I aim to foreground the relatively neglected role that this plays in *Huckleberry Finn* in shaping attitudes to race.

The insufficient theorization that this overt dimension of *Huckleberry Finn* has received, even though some of its characters are the pinnacle of lumpenproletarianism, possibly owes to a specific Marxist theory/literary criticism conjuncture. The concept of the lumpenproletariat is relatively obscure in Marxism, both popularity and content-wise; the few scholars who strive to reckon with it are confronted with an intellectually unclarified affair (likely the origin of its unpopularity in the first place). Robert L. Bussard

discusses an atypical lack of systematicity and rigor in Marx and Engels' definition. He gauges their inconsistent theorization of the concept by its poor reception in Marxist circles, and argues that, although it recurs in Marx and Engels' key works, "there is nonetheless a surprising paucity of scholarship on its origins and overall significance in leftist thought" (675), with the corollary that "the notion of the lumpenproletariat represents one of the undeveloped, unclear levels of Marxist thought" (676). Clyde W. Barrow, the author of the only scholarly monograph on the lumpenproletariat, has also found that later Marxists have often refused to take it up as a valuable contribution. He has shown that use of the term sharply declined from the 1980s, after various theorists berated it (7-9). Against the repelling haziness of the idea of the lumpenproletariat, the magnetism of *Huckleberry Finn*'s characters' encounters with race has tended to monopolize critical interpretation. The salient racial dynamics of the novel have called for critics to analytically gravitate towards them, and the concept's unpopularity and supposed theoretical nullity made its application to the text more unlikely than its evident racial theme already dictated.

But in the novel, as is often the case, relations of production and race interweave and are constitutive of one another, and failing to account for the lumpenproletariat as a meaningful textual layer comes at the expense of our understanding of how racism operates in it. Attention to the lumpenproletariat adds important nuance to analyze the book from the vantage point of class and grapple with its contours and those of race in *Huckleberry Finn*. Twain's lumpenproletarians abuse enslaved people to their advantage. This is a different but productive iteration of the classic Marxist take on the lumpenproletariat, predicated on their betrayal of salaried workers as long as it pays off economically. Where there should be class solidarity, the lumpenproletarians in *Huckleberry Finn* tread down on enslaved people, who are their unpropertied fellows. This rupture of class solidarity between the propertyless registers the pervasiveness of the racial capitalism of Antebellum America, where living on the margins of society did not preclude access to white privilege. Such breakage of class alliance is especially virulent in the Duke and King's dealings with Jim. Because Jim inhabits the same relation to production as them, in depriving him of the rights to which the white lumpenproletariat is entitled, they overlook their shared class position. They follow instead the ethical imperatives imposed by racial ideology, which overshadow and deny their class commonalities. Twain thus shows how dissolute individuals displaced from the economic

center of society and ensconced in atypical economic relationships could feed off racial supremacy in the period as much as the propertied or wage workers, even if they had closer class ties to their victims than they were able to see.

Dwelling on its self-interest and the possibilities for societal development that the lumpenproletariat harbors, Marx observes that it is "in every way impressionable [thoroughly malleable], apt to perform the most heroic deeds, the most exalted sacrifices, as well as the meanest forms of brigandage and the filthiest corruption" (276). The adjectives "meanest" and "filthiest" index his repulsion at the lumpenproletariat's historically proven tendency to act as a tool against the interests of the working class. Conversely, although mistrusting of the mercenariness that characterizes the lumpenproletariat, he acknowledges here their potential progressive character. *Huckleberry Finn* is a novel similarly concerned with this reactionary/progressive duality, the former embodied by the Duke, King and Pap, and the latter by Huck. While the three men represent lumpenproletarian selfishness and opposition to change, Huck breaks through his racist conscience thanks to the same relationship of production that corrupts them. Experiences that instil in Huck sympathy for Jim owe to the manner of living that their lumpenproletarian class position fixes on the couple, and his embracement of the desire to save Jim is encouraged by the stigma surrounding his lumpenproletarian way of life. Lumpenproletarianism sometimes has the opposite effect and leads Huck to take part in racism, again thematizing the ambiguity Marx outlines, but its overall effect on his development is positive until the episode of Jim's imprisonment. Here the novel's ending deflates the potential that it had built in Huck as a character whose moral framework has improved thanks to retreating from wage labor. *Huckleberry Finn* tries to balance the reactionary lumpenproletarian agents with a progressive one to show the affordances of this relationship of production to unsettle or perpetuate the limits of mid-nineteenth-century American racial capitalism. Ultimately, the class's subversive potential is undercut by the bourgeois moral codes spread by the widow, which co-opt Huck. Stigmatization of the lumpenproletariat encourages him to turn into an appendage to Tom's scheme to use Jim to his own ends, thus sacrificing his recently arrived-at anti-racist stance.

## 2. THE LUMPENPROLETARIAT IN *HUCKLEBERRY FINN*

The lumpenproletariat figures as a structuring force for the narrative before the novel's plot sets in motion. In one of the few critical pieces with economic analytical coordinates, Paul Taylor calls *Huckleberry Finn* a "money-determined story": "If it were not for the gold Huck took out of a hole in the ground, there would have been no need for him to escape from both Pap and the widow and thus no adventures and no story" (342). The story's catalyst, in turn, has a distinctive origin, since Huck's gold launches the action only thanks to his and Tom's habit of meddling with the lumpenproletariat. The lumpenproletarian substrate of *Huckleberry Finn* harks back to *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, where the two boys repeatedly come into contact with Injun Joe. They first encounter him as a body snatcher, and later as a thief looking to hide his stolen loot. In his attempt to find a safe spot for it, Injun Joe unearths the gold that Huck and Tom will later get a hold of, thus making the appropriation of the element that jumpstarts *Huckleberry Finn* (and with this the book as a whole) only possible through the involvement of the lumpenproletariat in its prequel. This condition of possibility prefigures the novel's ensuing concern with the lumpenproletariat and its divergent performance as agents of forward-looking change (Huck) or stationary bigotry (the Duke, King and Pap).

The other sense in which this is a lumpenproletariat-spawned story is that Pap is drawn to rob his son of his fortune by his meager condition. If the trigger of the story is the product of a liaison with the lumpenproletariat, the main characterological conflict needs from a lumpenproletariat background to be activated. As the permanently unemployed drunkard who is recurrently imprisoned for raising hell around town, Pap represents the utmost example of the lumpenproletariat. His insistence on exercising mastery over his son being phrased in economic terms—"he would show who was Huck Finn's boss" (36); "the law backs that old Judge Thatcher up and helps him to keep me out o' my property" (39)—suggests an interweaving between the private and productive spheres. He confirms for the reader that the rascality he lives in seeps into his treatment of others when he voices his diametrical opposition to the slow racial uplift taking place in the North. A Black man's teaching position at a university in Ohio and his supposed right to vote outrages him: "why ain't this n***** put up at action and sold?" (40).[2] Pap's

[2] While the original text of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* displays this racial slur in full, it has been modified throughout this essay to avoid explicitly harmful and offensive language.

anxieties concern the loss of white privilege which, as Jim will attest to, lumpenproletarians can capitalize on. He stands for the quintessentially lumpenproletarian reactionary push Marxism warns about, their resistance to superseding old values, how, according to Marxist author Hal Draper, "they tend to be inhospitable to social ideals socially implemented" (2309). Additionally, Huck's father exploits the judge's good faith to fuel his rampant alcoholism in a dishonest performance that draws parallels between him and the Duke and King. The two rapscallions will drown in the same vulgarity Pap displays first and that Huck tries to steer clear of.

While Huck never engages in either of the novels in any of the dastardly deeds the adult lumpenproletarian characters are prone to and restricts himself to stealing for survival, it is no act of vacating the term of its original meaning to assure that he falls, economically, under the same group as them. His age should not prevent an accurate classification (there would be no question if he was older), and neither should we be deluded by the fact that his portion of the gold is earning him an interest. Taylor claims that the self-valorization of Huck's money overbears his lumpenproletarian customs: "Huck has become a capitalist; his money is earning interest in Judge Thatcher's hands" (342). There is, however, little doubt of what grouping is more apt for Huck when it comes to his relation to production. We should bear in mind the necessary requirement to pivot from money owner to capitalist proper: "he functions as a capitalist, or as personified capital endowed with consciousness and a will, only insofar as the sole motivation driving his operations is to appropriate more and more abstract wealth" (Marx, *Capital* 127). Huck, of course, could not be less inattentive to his gold. The widow's adoption of him is an interim arrangement that briefly suspends the lumpenproletarian way of life he was immersed in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, but which he embraces again early in *Huckleberry Finn*, regardless of his wealth. At the end of the first book Tom finds him in an abandoned slaughterhouse, in a scene that crisply encapsulates the lawlessness that governs his life: "Huck had slept there; he had just breakfasted upon some stolen odds and ends of food, and was lying off, now in comfort, with his pipe" (199). Huck's way of supporting himself exudes lumpenproletarianism, albeit a more inchoate one in as much as he has just dipped into minor crimes. This more agreeable strain will later find correspondence in the progress he makes towards an anti-racist ideology, in what he runs against the grain of the Duke and King.

Besides presenting the reader with the first example of lumpenproletarian backwardness, the first segment of the novel lays the groundwork for the high stakes that lumpenproletarian ways will have for Huck's self-development and his treatment of Jim in the final episode. His earlier vagrant days seem to the widow to have scarred the boy's behavior; the parts of him she is fixed on changing were all staples of his child-lumpenproletarian lifestyle. The widow's judgement of him as irredeemable is, on this basis, an avenue with far-reaching narrative effects. First, Huck's embracement of the wickedness she imputes to him marks the beginning of his mission to rescue Jim. Later, due to the same sense of indignity and despite his liberal take on slavery, Huck will partially fulfil the Marxist formulation of the lumpenproletariat by putting himself at the disposal of the status quo. The last chapters of *Huckleberry Finn* have him narratively enact this role. In them, he reluctantly accepts the period's prevailing view that Jim's life is valueless by following Tom's plan to entertain themselves while freeing him. His giving into the widely circulating racial logic is not to obtain necessities, though, as the orthodox Marxist concept would have it. The desire to escape the faulty moral compass Huck believes he has put together as a lumpenproletarian promotes his capitulation instead. Economic lumpenproletarianism spills over into the psychological by way of his damaged self-esteem, and grows into a passive betrayal of Jim. The widow's linkage of the lumpenproletariat with immorality, 'uncivilization' and sin is hence a piece of bourgeois moral discourse that arrests Huck's racially egalitarian drift. I shall later come back to this narrative axis to explain the novel's trajectory.

For now, it will suffice to say that his plunge back into the lumpenproletarian condition reverses the 'civilizing' education the widow had worked to provide him with, and that returning to the way of life she condemns and associates with moral debasement will grant Huck the possibility to partly break away from the racist lineage he has inherited. At an early stage of the plot, an event as crucial as Huck's escape is enabled by the strictures of lumpenproletarian life. The precariousness of his and Pap's life in the hut and his father's alcoholism make his fleeing possible. They scrape by hunting and fishing, and selling the items the river carries. Huck takes advantage of Pap's inability to check his impatience to sell nine found logs—"he must shove right over to town" (45)—to engineer a scene appropriate to the lumpenproletariat (a burglary). From this point forward Huck realizes his lumpenproletarian intent by relocating to Jackson's Island, where he can "paddle over to town, nights, and slink around and pick up things

[necessities]" (46). This setting marks the beginning of his gradual attunement to Jim's plight.

Coexistence with Jim in Jackson's Island functions as a wake-up call for Huck. In this piece of land, the specificity of Jim's institutionalized relation of production (slavery) begins to unravel in front of the boy, whose evolving integrity we need to assess against the blissfully unaware state he shows here. Huck's assurance that "nobody else would come a-hunting after [him]" (51) sets the tone for many a chapter where his self-centeredness prevents him from taking stock of Jim's circumstances. He is, for instance, struck at the poverty of Jim's diet, devoid of meat or bread since he has run away. A hard pill to swallow, Jim decries the influence the class relationship he inhabited prior to his escape has on the character of his new life on the run: "I couldn' git nuffn else" (54). Huck's romanticization of the cave they sleep in in Jackson's Island, that he "wouldn't want to be nowhere else but [t]here" (60), similarly exposes the white privilege subtending his biased experience of their flight. At this point, Huck's overall awareness of the dangers and precautions that rule over Jim's life is unstable at best, and correct appraisals are soon offset by his ignorance. Some critics have interpreted Huck's heads-up at the end of chapter XI—"they're after us" (72)—as his first outpouring of empathy. I read it instead as encoding Huck's obliviousness to the chasm that separates him and Jim: the superimposition of Jim's lumpenproletarian lifestyle on his more fundamental economic bond.

For Jim, his current way of life is determined by the tangible class relation that predated it (slavery) rather than the other way around, whereby Huck's class position is strictly determined by his way of life. Whereas Jim is a fugitive running away from a relation of production, Huck is not fleeing any; in fact, his escape guarantees reestablishing the externality to typical ones he covets. This is not to say that Huck chooses to become a lumpenproletarian (although he does seem to adopt the lifestyle for longer than needed) and Jim does not. He is forcibly jolted into marginalization by his father's violence, but the class position that arises from it is independent of any other. Jim's lumpenproletarianism, by contrast, is always subservient to his enslaved status. This is a continuation of an earlier class configuration: while at the widow's, Jim's lumpenproletarianesque strategies like charging money for showing his allegedly witch-delivered nickel or for telling the future with a hairball were secondary to slavery. Huck starts to slowly gain cognizance of this hierarchy of class relations through which Jim's

enslaved status subsumes his lumpenproletarian one. In the same vein, he reaches an associated realization when he unpacks that Jim's being an enslaved person is no proof of his inferiority.

Huck's lumpenproletarian way of life in company of Jim is instructive in this sense. An analysis of *Huckleberry Finn* from the lens of the lumpenproletariat must reckon with the distinction between how this relation of production bears on the text as opposed to, simply, setting. They are indeed somewhat coterminous, and therefore easily conflated, especially in the early stages of their relationship. By the time Huck claims that some St. Petersburg men are after them, the couple's lumpenproletarian ways have forced him to confront Jim's burden. Their lumpenproletarian class position subtends events like the one described above, where they discuss how they have got by food-wise. So is the case in their ransacking a house where lies Pap's dead body. For the first time, Huck cannot avoid noticing Jim's status as a runaway enslaved person. It is now up to him to decide whether to overlook it or acknowledge it and face the racial oppressiveness of the society they have left behind by maneuvering around it.

After making a good haul Huck takes the opportunity for racial empathy afforded by their context and has Jim "lay down in the canoe and cover up with the quilt, because if he set up, people could tell he was a n***** a good ways off" (62). While this is an experience for which their being on the run may seem to be solely responsible for, the true decisive factor that works to help reconfigure Huck's stance on race is not the environment where his relationship with Jim develops. Instead, their nonrelation to economic production and the subsequent imperative to procure necessities as best as they can are the true circumstances that allow for his development. In this case the necessity for stealth that alerts Huck to Jim's situation is the result of having looted a house. Had they not been prompted to it by their poverty, there would have been no journey back that Jim had to hide through, and no enlightenment for the boy. Hence, having the money to travel back to town and get hold of material provisions through legal economic exchange would have prevented his realization.

Once they have parted from the island on the raft, Huck's and Jim's class status proves even more conducive to the boy's rejection of racism. Their unstable source of livelihood acts as a frame that allows them to discuss their stealing policy as equals: "So we talked it over all one night, drifting along down the river, trying to make up our minds… towards daylight we got it all settled satisfactory" (75-6). Again, if Huck had

had access to reliable means of living, this possibility would have been foreclosed. In the next page Huck suggests they hop on the shipwrecked *Walter Scott*, of course with a goal in mind conditioned by the same scantiness: "we might borrow something worth having, out of the captain's stateroom. Seegars, I bet you—and cost five cents apiece, solid cash" (77). On the one hand, the episode is a training ground for Huck to put himself in somebody else's shoes and develop his own sense morality, which will come to a head in the decision to save Jim. The more significant outcome in this section is Huck's honest understanding of Jim's vulnerability. Jim reasons with him and Huck seems to take it in.

> He said he didn't want no more adventures. He said that when I went in the texas and he crawled back to get on the raft and found her gone, he nearly died, because he judged it was all up with him, anyway it could be fixed; for if he didn't get saved he would get drownded; and if he did get saved, whoever saved him would send him back home so as to get the reward, and then Miss Watson would sell him South, sure. (86)

This represents a turning point in the book, not only because Huck seconds Jim's reasoning, but also because he praises him for the first time, even if the compliment is still mired in racism: "Well, he was right; he was most always right; he had an uncommon level head, for a n*****" (86). Huck later deploys the compliment again, this time to illuminate differently how the paltriness of their lives encourages the shift to a more positive valorization of Jim. Thanks to his suggestion that it is dark enough for Huck to get on board of another raft without being noticed, Huck says that "Jim had a wonderful level head, for a n*****: he could almost always start a good plan when you wanted one" (97). Coming up with the plan has positioned Jim as a proficient lumpenproletarian who has what it takes to survive in the wild. Even though Huck jumps on the raft to obtain information and not food or money, Jim has showed he can apply his own supple thinking to the lifestyle Huck is most fond of. The respect Jim receives here is predicated on class alliance, which, as will become evident soon, is an unreliable antidote against racial hierarchy.

This scene is preceded by one of the events Huck's development hinges on, where Jim chastises the boy for having manipulated him into believing they had never parted ways in the river. To add to its significance from this perspective, the scolding Jim gives Huck is a signpost for the turn the narrative is about take. The raft has traversed through the river and clashed with its wild greenery, its logs and barks. Remains of leaves, branches and dirt have cluttered on it during its race down the water, and the scrapheap they make is the indelible mark of the duo's marginalized existence. The organic matter

has clumped on their 'home' as a consequence of their lumpenproletarian, nomadic way of life's exposure to the forces of nature. When Jim says that "dat truck dah is trash; en trash is what people is dat puts dir on de head er dey fren's en makes 'em ashamed [sic]" (95), he is tying a material byproduct and emblem of their lumpenproletarian condition to racial hatred, he puts a symbol standing in for the class on a level with Huck's abusive racist attitude of gaslighting his enslaved friend. With this association he hints at a pattern larger than the moral/actual "trash" metaphor, which we have already picked up on: that the lumpenproletarian class position, despite its transformative flashes, is no guarantee of a respectful treatment of Jim. One inevitably hears echoes of the Marxist insight that lumpenproletarians can be inimical to their fellows. There emerges diluted evidence of it with the well-off Grengfords' adoption of Huck, the ease with which he separates from Jim, and his vanishing from the narrative. Unfortunately, the text further proves Jim right with the arrival of the Duke and King.

After the snapshot on the raft of how lumpenproletarian status does not fully disqualify one from disrespecting Jim, the rapscallions hijack the raft. They concretize the harmful social role that Marxism attaches to their class. For several chapters Huck is defined against them almost exclusively positively, to return to his ambiguous depiction in the last stretch. The Duke's and King's character is extremely callous. Huck, upon meeting them, is not gullible enough to provide us with one of the moments of dramatic irony *Huckleberry Finn* abounds with, and reads them correctly: "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" (142). They go on to make apparent, numerous times, that they have no regard for Jim, who stands as an item encumbering upon their vile deeds and that they can selfishly use as they find expedient. With the swindlers/Jim encounter a new dimension of the book's stance on racism unfurls. Here the semantic elasticity of the term lumpenproletariat that allows us to read Jim as one of them casts a clear light on the race/class overlap. Since Jim is technically their fellow lumpenproletarian (like he is Huck's), the book offers racial hatred as overriding class sentiment, and slavery as one of the domains of society the lumpenproletariat can parasitize, thus redoubling enslaved people's exploitation.

The Duke and King first demonstrate how the lumpenproletariat can mold the institution of slavery to their own ends when they figure out a method for sailing in plain light that depends on performing Jim's capture. Jim's skin color initially impedes on their

means of sustenance because they are forced to travel by night, when they cannot carry out their scams, and they exploit the institution of slavery to circumvent this. Whenever they run into another raft or leave theirs for long, they tie Jim with a rope as proof that they are going to claim the price on his head. The solution to Jim's complaint that he finds being tied up uncomfortable engages in minstrelsy by having him dress up. These acts are expressive of their willingness to tamper with enslaved people and slavery's recapture apparatus so that they can proceed apace with their fraudulent jobs. The rapscallions switch racial targets at the Wilks' household, where they exercise control over the family's slaves, selling them. Their ostracization from society is not remotely at odds with taking part in racial supremacy; on the contrary, it turns out to be a tool to get a piece of the slaveholding pie.

Selling Jim puts a bow on their self-serving objectification of Black people and writes large that the lumpenproletarian lifestyle is not excluded from being buttressed by racism. Thus, *Huckleberry Finn* concludes its statement on the criss-crossing of the race and class categories in Antebellum America, and proposes an implied relationship. Considering the King and Duke have not had any reservations to exploit a fellow lumpenproletarian, the one has prevailed over the other for them by guiding their actions more decisively. Claiming, however, that either category independently governs their decision-making would be to misconstrue the relationship of dependency that Twain suggests exists between the two. The Duke and King are spurred to abuse Jim by scarcity, and their main incentive is alleviating it. Being well-off did not prevent white nineteenth-century Americans from taking part in slaveholding and trading, but the unreliability and precarity of the way the Duke and King fulfil their material needs makes any path to secure them desirable. The lumpenproletarian class status of the swindlers hence partially determines its own later overpowering by race.

Possibly the most interesting of the Duke's and King's instrumentalization of enslaved people from the Marxist perspective happens back at the raft after they have fumbled Peter Wilks' gold. The Duke charges against the King for blaming the enslaved people at the house for its disappearance: "You ought to been ashamed of yourself to stand by and hear it saddled on to a lot of poor n****** and you never say a word for 'em. It makes me feel ridiculous to think I was soft enough to believe that rubbage [sic]" (218). Ironically, the Duke had agreed with the King's wariness of the enslaved people when they decided to hide the gold bag more carefully lest they stole it. When Huck

accused them of having done it, the Duke also took his made-up story for true unquestioningly. This situation is a microcosm of Marxism's sketch of the lumpenproletariat's duplicity, their "willingness to side with anyone—or to even change sides in the middle of the struggle—depending on who is willing to pay them" (Barrow 17). The Duke is trying to craft for himself a favorable business deal going forward with the King by making him appear untrustworthy. His remorse is feigned, his anger a façade. His dishonest uptake of anti-racist discourse consists in pressing it into service for his own benefit, condemning racial supremacy for the same reason that he once upheld it: because there is something to be gained out of it.

The obligation to help the swindlers rob the sisters is the product of Huck's class status; only a lumpenproletarian existence admits something of the like, where being economically functional to society would have allowed Huck to evade it. Economic vulnerability, then, lays the foundation for him to be coerced into complicity. His well-intentioned blaming of the enslaved people in the Wilks' household is indicative of how easily the lumpenproletariat may participate in slavery and racist discourse (everyone in the village believes him), even without meaning to. In this as well as the narrative arch of Jim's liberation, the external forces orbiting around and derived from Huck's class position are the main agent setting him back in his path to an independent racial equality framework. We are also tempted to believe the whole Wilks episode operates this way because it distances Huck from Jim, whom the narrative extrudes without qualifications again. When Huck comes back to the raft he has even forgotten about Jim's costume; Jim, for his part, must have hardly been able to. Yet the other side of his time spent with the Duke and King is that Huck mostly figures as the enlightened lumpenproletarian who sees in them vile counterparts to oppose. In allowing him to help the sisters, the Wilks' gold incident simultaneously sets him up to act as a freethinker soon, when he is on the fence about saving Jim. His duty to obey the Duke and King also means he is placed on equal footing with enslaved people when he "stood behind the king and the Duke's chairs and waited on them, and the n****** waited on the rest" (184).

Finding himself drawn together with Black people plays a part in Huck's evolution. Lumpenproletarian precarity had fostered his empathy for Jim through this same mechanism before, when the rapscallions take control of the couple's wigwam and put them on watch during the night. Sharing with him a condition of domination helps Huck appreciate Jim: "Jim he said he would stand the first half of it for me; he was always

mighty good, that way, Jim was" (144). Their shared subordination further reconciles him to Jim's humane qualities when they bond over having had enough of the rapscallions. After their exchange Jim wears his heart on his sleeve about the guilt he feels for having physically abused her daughter, and Huck appreciates him for who he is rather than for any class relation they have in common as he did before: "I do believe he cared just as much for his people as white folks does for their'n. It don't seem natural, but I reckon it's so… He was a mighty good n*****, Jim was [sic]" (170).

Ultimately, being a lumpenproletarian becomes the key that unlocks Huck's famous dismissal of the racist conscience he has been handed down by society. The embracement of his independent mode of thinking revolves around his self-concept: "[I] never thought no more about reforming. I shoved the whole thing out of my head; and said I would take up wickedness again, which was in my line, being brung up to it, and the other warn't [sic]" (223). This is a deliberation heavily based on who he believes he is as a person, according to what he has been taught about social dropouts. Huck feels the weight of the widow's teachings and her erosion of his self-worth, which is, funnily enough, what pushes the boy to take the leap. "Wickedness" is shorthand for his lumpenproletarian way of life, a relation to production that would not be sufficiently transformative on its own. In conjunction with the deeply ingrained values Huck has attached to it owing to the widow's influence, however, it propels the boy forward in turning his back on the racial theory he has simmered in throughout his life.

It strikes contemporary (and probably some late-nineteenth-century) readers as ironic that those "other[s]" who are not 'lowlifes' like Huck, and should consequently be upright, would not hesitate to help the widow recapture Jim. These upside-down moral categories show their bourgeois tinge in their collapse of participation in capitalism with a laudable moral standing and take on racial justice. Fully excluding the possibility of outsiders to the mode of production having more equitable value systems than those inside it serves the purpose of preserving it. Because it makes the reason seem self-evident, categorizing people on the economic margins as morally low prevents raising the question of why they have been expelled from production. Inspecting how some of them have arrived where they are at would shine a spotlight on the shortcomings of capitalism, but the immediate association of "wickedness" with the lumpenproletariat precludes this from happening. In this way the widow's bourgeois moral discourse works to uphold racial capitalism, yet when Huck decides not to inform her on Jim's whereabouts it seems to

contradict its role in supporting the mode of production. He digs himself deeper into social atypicality by defining himself for what he is not ('proper') and fully siding with Jim.

This route into ideological freedom will turn on its head to keep the racial norms of the period intact and become a double-edged sword for Jim and other enslaved people. In the last section of the novel, Huck assimilates to Tom's unnecessarily convoluted plan to free Jim on the same logic that he had sworn to free him, that is, his own perceived moral perversion. On account of his upbringing, Tom must be a sounder judge than him, or so Huck's train of thought goes.

> Here was a boy that was respectable, and well brung up; and had a character to lose; and folks at home that had characters; and he was bright and not leather-headed; and knowing and not ignorant; and not mean, but kind; and yet here he was, without any more pride, or rightness, or feeling, 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. It was outrageous. (242)

These traits are everything Huck sees himself lacking, and hence the explanation to his acquiescence to Tom's approach to freeing Jim. The widow's bourgeois moral discourse has, with this shift, reclaimed its status as a tool for strengthening racial capitalism. Huck is, in his unwilling compliance with Tom's objectification of Jim during this episode, also a victim to the ideological current equating economic dissidence to moral bankruptcy. Instead of a self-interested striving for subsistence, the element severing the Huck/Jim class and interracial bonds is the stigma associated with the lumpenproletariat. Huck has been cornered into abandoning a socially innovative tide by the insidious narrative that the lumpenproletariat has a skewed sense of morality. Huck's potential to overcome his class's venal tendencies (which its material conditions do set it up to follow) is short-circuited by the dissemination of this idea. Through this duality, wherein the lumpenproletarian consciousness initially inspires Huck to free Jim only to later disable his resolution, the novel problematizes an unthinking stigmatization of the lumpenproletariat.

Its main vehicle to mobilize this critique is the similarity between the impact Huck makes in Jim's life, and that of the King and Duke, in spite of the boy meaning to do otherwise. While the two impostors cause Jim's imprisonment, Huck is forced to prolong it in the Phelps' sequence, against his desires. In addition, at the Phelps' household lumpenproletarianism is harmful for enslaved people other than Jim. Tom and Huck increase an enslaved man's mental turmoil, Nat, by making him believe he has heard

witches speaking rather than Jim recognize them, and that the dogs they have mistakenly let into the hut have been conjured up by them. Their strategy also menaces other enslaved people with facing liabilities for thefts they have not committed. We can consider the lumpenproletarian charge of this episode to be double. Economically speaking, Huck makes a sustenance out of carrying out the crime of impersonating Tom; narratively, his lumpenproletarian-induced decision is what has brought him there. The structural analogy between this last quest and the Wilks' scam highlights the similarity between the two strands of the lumpenproletariat: the sisters believe the impostors are their uncles, and here Huck pretends to be the Phelps' nephew. The openly reactionary Duke and King subdue Jim, and Huck cannot do anything but add to his suffering even when he aims to detract from it. In Jim's flesh, the difference between the rapscallions selling him and Huck's attempt at his liberation is merely a matter of form, since both end up redoubling his submission. Huck's acceptance of Tom's plan, albeit reluctant, recasts the relation of production he is trying to fend off. Jim is forced to work so strenuously that his status as an enslaved person need not be enforced by anybody other than the two boys. The reliance on his friend thwarts his racially progressive prospects, and he becomes a surrogate for white supremacism. Renouncing his principles inscribes him as a corruptible lumpenproletarian, although the element hindering their realization is not the classic lumpenproletarian selfishness, but a psychology trained for prejudice towards his own class.

## 3. Conclusion

*Huckleberry Finn*'s ending fully sabotages the progressive potential of the lumpenproletariat when we discover the widow has set Jim free. Accomplishing his liberation belatedly, even if following Tom's pace, would have been a partial success for Huck at undermining the institution of slavery and realizing his new ethic. First the widow warps his self-perception and disrupts his will to act promptly against Tom's objectification of Jim. She then frees him and obliterates any chance of Huck contributing to social racial progress. The text suppresses a lumpenproletarian-led attack on slavery and transforms it into a law-abiding, much less radical move dependent on a slaveholder's 'benevolence'. The widow seems to despise slave trading rather than slaveholding, since she only releases Jim in her will because she wants to avoid selling him to another master. She acts within the legal bounds of the system of slavery, which did take into consideration manumission, curtailing Huck's anti-slavery impetus. The text thus has her

outperform any of the lumpenproletarians, an unremarkable achievement when it comes to the Duke and King, but deeply suggestive in relation to Huck.

The impact of the Duke and King on the lives of Jim and other enslaved people is overwhelmingly negative; driven by their lumpenproletarianism, they are an invariable source of agony through their heinous actions. Huck starts moving towards his racial epiphany when he stops pranking Jim and gives up his white-privileged cavalier attitude. Some of the experiences afforded by his relation to production run now with, now against his impending assertion of ideological autonomy. Eventually, the contending forces of the lumpenproletarian lifestyle tip in its favor. Huck would not have decided to rescue Jim if not for his own outcast status, but the novel counteracts this by having an individual with a regular relation to production gatekeep the power of social restructuring. It suggests that bourgeois moral discourse that stigmatizes the lumpenproletariat can act as a deterrent for their application of socially progressive ideas, and that, from the point of view of social advancement, it might be counterproductive to treat the lumpenproletariat as morally low. *Huckleberry Finn* portrays two characters, the Duke and King, who square perfectly with the Marxist conceptualization of the lumpenproletariat (mercenary, reactionary), but invites the reader to reevaluate the progressive potential of the class and the factors interfering with its contribution to implementing new social values.

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR

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