A COMPARATIVE CHARACTER STUDY OF:
HUCKLEBERRY FINN AND ISABEL ARCHER

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Abstract:

This comparative study deals with two well known characters in American Literature: Isabel Archer of Henry James' Portrait of a Lady, and Huckleberry Finn of Mark Twain's The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. The paper is an attempt to point out and clarify some of the differences and similarities between these two characters who have a great deal in common with one another.

In these novels the two authors did not set out to write about single characters but about modern man, depicting him with all his problems, frustration and agony. They also explore the idea of the individual and the conflict between self and society.

James’ Portrait of a Lady is simply a study of the American abroad. Basically, the idea in most of James' novels is centered around a young woman who inherits a great deal of money (as does Isabel Archer) or who marries a rich man. That James uses a young woman is significant because for emotional reasons, and regardless of class, if a young woman is beautiful, she can easily move into society, a thing which a young man cannot or might not be able to do so effortlessly. The heroine, like Isabel Archer herself, is usually an innocent character who is intelligent and realistic. This character has no experience in life, thus she is eager to gain as much experience as possible. Ironically she gets entrapped into a society that ruthlessly corrupted and spoiled her. Thus, as a human being, the heroine is deeply hurt when she discovers that her ideals have been corrupted, because she is basically good and she is not aware of the evil in those sophisticated people around her.

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Almost all of James’ novels are set in Europe and among these *A Portrait of a Lady* is considered one of his most famous. In this novel we come across Isabel Archer, a young American lady who is “set in relief against the European background.” Isabel is brought to Europe by her aunt, Mrs. Touchett, who wants to give her niece the chance to develop in the cultural atmosphere of Europe. In fact, Isabel Archer is not the narrator of the novel. She is the person and the mind through whom the story is being presented to the reader. We know almost all about her, mainly through the minds and the eyes of those around her. Even the opening scenes at Grandcourt serve as a preparation for her introduction to the story. Thus, the story is about Isabel and how she is seen by others.

Huckleberry Finn, the hero of Mark Twain’s, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, is the narrator of the book. He is almost totally “literal minded,” and, therefore, he reports everything he sees with great accuracy. His narration is trustworthy and reliable because he does not exaggerate when he reports what he sees. He is the central character of the novel and the story is told to the reader from his point of view, in first person narration. He refers to his adventures with Tom Sawyer, described in a previous novel, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, and tells us about his aim to continue, now, with his own story.

Isabel and Huck are both very important to the plots of the stories in which they appear, and their feeling for those around them are reflected in the structures of both novels. Huck is a fourteen years old boy and Isabel is a young lady. Isabel is positively pretty and Huck is by no means ugly or even bad looking. They are both simple and plain, and they treat everyone kindly and gently. They are both innocent, intelligent, young, ambitious and very active. Though Huck and Isabel are realistic, they both lack experience; Isabel thinks realistically and clearly and Lord Warburton confesses to her that he is really afraid of “that remarkable mind of yours,” while Caspar sees her as “the most beautiful young woman of her time.” Huck also thinks clearly and realistically. He almost always thinks of the consequences of what he is doing and he lets his common sense control his actions though he does not use his common sense when he plays the trick of the snake on Jim, but his deep grief for this action shows the beginning of a deep and true relationship between him and Jim. Both Isabel and Huck Finn are essentially good hearted. They are selfless and they always want to please others. They are sympathetic towards other human beings’ sufferings. Huck tries to
save the cutthroats in *Walter Scott*. He saves the King and the Duke and even feels sorry for them. Isabel Archer always tries to be kind and gentle with the sick Ralph, especially in the final stages of the novel before his death, because she likes Ralph very much and she feels sorry for him. She even feels sorry for Madame Merle, though Isabel realizes that Madame Merle is the cause of her being trapped into marriage and into Gilbert Osmond's evilness. But Isabel pities her, especially when she realizes that Madame Merle will never know the love of her daughter Pansy; Madame Merle is a failure and a loser who is to be pitied accordingly.

Isabel, on the other hand, is deeply impressed by Madame Merle in whom she seems to have seen all that she - Isabel - wants to acquire in Europe. Madame Merle is very influential and she has many friends and connections as well as being a woman of experience - a woman who possesses a thorough Knowledge of life, people, poise, music and many other things. Huck, on the other hand, is greatly impressed by Tom Sawyer in whose presence Huck becomes less independent and loses his self-determination. He is fond of Tom's romantic plan to save Jim. Thus, Huck falls under the influence of Tom, but at the end of the novel he realizes that Tom is only representative of the values of the society from which Huck is trying to escape. Consequently, it seems that both Isabel and Huck are incapable of making any decisions of their own, especially in the presence of Madame Merle and Tom Sawyer. Throughout most of the two novels Huck and Isabel fall under the influence of any strong character such as Tom, in the case of Huck, and Madame Merle and Osmond, in the case of Isabel Archer. But at the end they intend to make their own decisions. Huck decides to go to the Indian Territory because Aunt Sally wants to adopt him and “Civilize” him and he cannot accept that; when Isabel decides to go back to Osmond it is because of her promise to Pansy to stay with her and because she feels that she has some obligation towards her husband.

Isabel Archer reads a great deal because reading widens her range of general knowledge. Reading a text on the “history of German thought” would no doubt improve her knowledge of Teutonic culture. Huck on the other hand, does not read that much, though he sometimes reads some books on history. He seems to have too much knowledge of history and some other matters, a thing which is somewhat unlikely for a boy of fourteen years, according to some critics. Huck and Jim, as a matter of fact, rescue many books from the wrecked *Walter Scott*, among which there are some which deal with kings, dukes and earls and their adventures in life. This shows that Huck reads sometimes but reading does not mean very much to him.
The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn and Portrait of a Lady are about destiny and freedom; they are the stories of Huckleberry Finn and Isabel Archer who are mainly freedom seekers. From beginning to end Huck despises society and tries to escape from "sivilization" in order to secure his freedom. He dislikes civilized ways because of their restrictiveness and difficulties. When he feels that he is restricted and handcuffed by society he escapes to freedom. The Widow Douglas is always after him, trying to civilize him, but he can never stand that because if he is civilized he will not then be able to do whatever he wants, such as smoking or lying on occasions. He will no doubt be tied up by the system of society. In fact, he encounters many aspects, attitudes, and principles of society, but he usually prefers his own individual freedom. Sarcastically enough, Twain misspells the word civilization to reflect and express the anti-establishment feeling in his hero. We can easily notice that in The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn the conflict between society and the individual becomes a controlling theme and one might possibly say that this novel is about a boy who is fighting society and who is against getting "sivilized" or tied up to any system.

Isabel Archer is also a freedom seeker and she "was quite independent". She had been brought to Europe by her aunt Mrs. Touchett who wanted to give her niece a better chance to see the Continent. Mrs. Touchett told her son, Ralph, that she brought Isabel to Europe because "I thought she was meant for something better." But she added that Isabel, at any rate, had a mind of her own and that she would probably rely on her own decisions, not on anybody else's. Isabel herself wanted very much to travel and see the world so that she might gain some experience in life. Also, she was very fond of her independence and freedom. Such independence was the quality about her most often emphasized. Mrs. Touchett has taken her up, but she was not, she assured Ralph, "a candidate for adoption!" "I'm very fond of my liberty," she added. When Ralph wanted to "put a little wind in her sails" he persuaded his father to change his will at the last minute in order to leave Isabel half of the estate that Ralph himself was to inherit. Ralph liked Isabel very much and he wanted to provide her with enough money so that she would have her independence and would have the chance to do whatever she wanted to. He wanted her to enjoy life, to increase her experience and to see as much of the world as she possibly could. Thus, he sacrificed his own inheritance for the sake of Isabel. For the sake of her own freedom and independence Isabel refused the proposals of Casper Goodwood, the successful American businessman who represented strength to her, and Lord Warburton, the English nobleman. She told Lord Warburton that she could not marry him because
she wanted to be free and marriage would deprive her of her sense of freedom. She said that, “It’s that I can’t escape my fate --- from the usual chances and dangers, from what most people know and suffer.” She wanted to be free from any bondages so that she might see the world, and that was the reason for her refusal to marry Casper Goodwood or Lord Warburton. Huck, if we might say so, had the same idea about adoption. They were both fond of their liberty and independence.

Material comforts and wealth were not very important to either. Isabel and Huck started poor but they were both fond of adventures and made a sort of a journey, leaving one world for another looking for freedom. But still, money and the role of money played vital parts in their fates - Huck and Isabel were well supplied after the former found a treasure and the latter inherited a great deal of money. From that moment onwards their lives began to be changed. To Isabel, wealth was her means to discover the world and to experience life. But with that great sum of money Isabel became an easy target for Madame Merle and Osmond, the fortune-hunters. She married Gilbert Osmond believing that he was the only person with whom she was going to be happy. Madame Merle, the cause behind this marriage, planned the whole thing in order to secure her daughter’s future. Osmond, on the other hand, never cared for Isabel and what he wanted from her was her money. Therefore, he treated her very badly and neglected her all the time. But Isabel found in Osmond’s daughter, Pansy, a very good friend and they both spent almost all their time together. Ralph was greatly disappointed when she made that poor choice of a husband, and he tried very hard to rescue her from it but he completely failed. She was fully under the influence of Madame Merle and of Gilbert Osmond and she “receives in one undivided flood her impressions of the aesthetic and the social qualities of Madame Merle and of Gilbert Osmond.” In the end, Isabel was aware of Osmond’s motives and aims but she decided to stay with him. Huck seemed to be clever enough to realize the fact that his Pap was actually a fortune-hunter (like Osmond). So, with that great sum of money, and with his father running loose to get it, Huck was not only going to lose his money, which was not so important to him, but he was also going to lose his freedom and independence. Thus, he gave the money up to gain his freedom. Huck’s father cursed him for trying to be educated and for trying to put on nice clothes. Pap locked Huck in a cabin and beat him regularly in a drunken rage. Huck was mature enough to realize the danger and only when he was sure that Pap was a definite threat to his life did he decide to escape, giving up everything except his own freedom. He lived on his own from the beginning and he decided to go on that way. Isabel’s marriage was not a
happy union and Huck’s relationship to his society or civilization where he cannot
smoke the pipe, or do whatever he wanted, was also not a happy relationship. Were it
not for their money, Isabel might not have been trapped by Osmond and Madame
Merle, and Huck’s father might not have caused him any trouble.

Huck had a very good inventive ability and a very good magination. He was
always able to invent stories and lies to serve his purposes in saving a particular
situation. Isabel cannot lie, though she has a very good imaginative mind. She actually
took life very seriously and realistically. Throughout Huckleberry Finn, Huck was
losing his identity and he assumed different names, even disguised himself in a female
costume, identifying himself as Sarah Williams. On other occasions he arranged his
own murder to avoid being tracked by others when he escaped from his father. On
another occasions he invented very convincing stories by which he saved those whom
he wanted to save, as in the case of the cut-throats and as in that of the King and the
Duke. He was sure from the first moment that the King and the Duke were frauds: “It
didn’t take me long to make up my mind that these liars warn’t no kings and dukes, at
all, but just low-down humbugs and frauds.” This ability of inventing stories meant
that he had good knowledge of human nature.

At the beginning of the two novels, and almost throughout the greater parts of
them, Isabel and Huck are innocent, simple, intelligent and lacking in experience.
At the end of the novels, they become much more mature. They are
not flat characters in that they are developing gradually, to the point that they become
capable of making their own decisions. They become more mature, more selfreliant,
and more human. Huck becomes aware of what an honest and real friendship means
when he tears up the letter, written previously by him to Miss Watson to inform her
about Jim, and he prefers to “go to hell” for him. Towards the end of the novel, Huck
begins to ridicule Tom’s formalities and romantic actions in every plan he makes,
especially the one concerning the safety of Jim. Huck, as a matter of fact, sacrifices his
own safety and gives up his own values and principles in life for the sake of Jim. Before
he met Jim, Huck’s belief was that everything, including slaves, must be turned to the
rightful owner, but after that he finds in Jim what he cannot find in society, he finds in
him a real good friend and an honest man who actually cares for human beings and
sacrifices his own safety and life to save anyone who is in trouble as when he tries to
save Tom from being shot and killed at the Phelps. Huck also learns to make moral
evaluations especially when he comes across fraudulent people like the king and the
duke. Finally, he makes his own decision to go to the Indian Territory to avoid being civilized: “But I reckon I got to light out for the territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she’s going to adopt me and sivilize me, and I can’t stand it. I been there before.” Huck is sacrificing money again in order to obtain his freedom. He must not go back to civilization and he can never stand being adopted by anyone because he is fond of his liberty and independence.

Isabel Archer also became much more mature towards the end of the novel. She knew that her marriage to Osmond was a failure because after the marriage she discovered that he was selfish and insulting. He was not interested in her mind and his main purpose was to suppress her intelligence. She knew that she had made a poor choice for a husband, but she was strong and mature enough to realize that she must go back to him because she made the promise to Pansy that she would not abandon her. Isabel decided to return to Osmond mainly because she realized that she must accept the consequences of her poor choice when she married Osmond. Therefore, she cannot ignore her responsibilities toward her home, her stepdaughter, Pansy, or even her husband Osmond. She had pride and confidence in herself and because of that pride she decided to go back to her husband, or as one of the critics said: “When Isabel Archer returns to her husband, in spite of the certainty of unhappiness with him, it is not altogether, it is not mainly, I think, on account of Pansy and what she owes to her unprotected state. Or Pansy is thought of as but one factor in the general matrimonial situation. Isabel returns because her pride requires that she shall carry through what she has undertaken, that the stuff of her life may not be left torn and ragged.” Consequently, her innocence and her honesty caused her unhappiness and her tragic ending.

Huckleberry Finn and Isabel Archer were the victims of their innocence as well as the victims of society. They were both inexperienced, in that they did not have full control of their own destinies. Therefore, they were under the influence of any strong character: Isabel was mainly under the influence of Madame Merle and also under the influence of Gilbert Osmond. Meanwhile, Huck was mainly under the influence of Tom Sawyer and for some time under the influence of Aunt Sally, and the King and the Duke. But, one must not ignore the fact that though they were the victims of their own innocence, they proved to be mature enough and experienced enough to make their own decisions and to plan their own future. In fact, it was clear that Mark Twain and Henry James seemed to have approved Huck’s and Isabel’s fates, largely because the hero and the heroine were unawakened throughout almost the whole of the two novels.
The best way to sum up this comparison and contrast between Huckleberry Finn and Isabel Archer is to bring out Walter Blair’s excellent statement of the subject. Blair says:

“No two books could seem more dissimilar at first thought than Portrait of a Lady and Huckleberry Finn, upon which Mark was working or meditating through much the same years when James was writing. Yet Mark, like Henry, might have got his formula from the great Russian Turgenev, who was contemporary with both. All three selected the situations most likely to express the central figure of a story which is more valuable in the kind of stories all three wrote than a plot. And as backgrounds, both Henry and Mark used the richest: Henry, the soft lawns of an English country house and its pictured corridors, and Rome; Mark the incalculable Mississippi. More cogently, both for Isabel, the would-be intellectual from the Hudson Valley, and Huck from the new West, the theme words were always freedom, liberty, and independence. Huck was wiser for himself. The Widow and convention were always on his trail, but he knew how to escape, while, as Ralph said, Isabel was ground in the very wall of the conventional. Most important in the comparison, however, is this: Isabel and Ralph have a warmth of life that makes you care deeply what happens to them, in the course of the story, and what happens to Isabel afterward. They, like Huck are the products of “felt emotion” and they produce it—which is by no means true of most of James’ great gallery of characters who stir the mind more than the heart and are remembered by their brilliant characterizations more often than by their personalities, or even by their names.”
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END NOTES

4. Ibid., p. 138.
5. Walter Blair, Mark Twain and Huckleberry Finn (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1960), p. 159 - 60.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


دراسة مقارنة لشخصية هكلبيرى وايزابيل آرتشر

الدكتور: عادل عطا إلياس
استاذ مساعد - قسم اللغة الإنجليزية

ملخص البحث

ينطلق هذه الدراسة المقارنة الشخصية معروفيتين في الأدب الأمريكي وهما آيزابيل آرتشر، من رواية هنرى جيمس صورة سيدة، وهكلبيرى في رواية مارك توتون، مغامرات هكلبيرى. وبالموازاة لبيان لوجه الخلاف والشبه بين الشخصيتين التقدمان في اتجاه عديدة.

ودأت هذين الروائيين لم يكن هدف الروائيين أن يكون عن شخصية واحدة، بل عن الإنسان المعاصر، إذ يركز كل منهما على تصوير هذا الإنسان بكل مشاكله وإحباطاته وإلهامه، كما يكشفان فكرة الفرد، والصراع بين نفسه وبين المجتمع.
I enjoy discussing characters, and so I wanted to point out my recent post at Comparative Geeks today. I went to see the Ant-Man movie on Friday and I loved it. So much it seems, that I can’t stop talking about it! The comparative method is often used in the early stages of the development of a branch of science. It can help the researcher to ascend from the initial level of exploratory case studies to a more advanced level of general theoretical models, invariances, such as causality or evolution. The design of comparative research is simple. Your objects are specimens or cases which are similar in some respects (otherwise, it would not be meaningful to compare them) but they differ in some respects. These differences become the focus of examination. Only RUB 220.84/month. Comparative law - character, definitions, functions, object. STUDY. Flashcards. Learn. Comparative law signifies the systematic application of the comparative technique to the field of law. It means the study of, and research in, law by the systematic comparison of 2 or more LS or of parts, branches or aspects of 2 or more LS - who defined. Wj kamba. The BASIC FEATURE of comparative law, as a method, is that it can be applied to ALL TYPES and FIELDS of legal inquiry - who said ? GUTTERIDGE. Wj kamba - definition (keywords?) “Comparative law signifies the systematic application of the comparative technique to the field of law. The character of a nation remains a challenge to comparative education because it influences the educational aims and content of that particular system. Many studies in many countries show that the national character is determined to a large extent by both physical and social environment. According to Michael Sadler a renown comparative education scholar said that “things outside the school often influences things inside the school”. When he talks of things outside the school system he has in mind, geographical, social-economic, historical, religion, technological and cultural. The character Mark Antony in the play Julius Caesar by Shakespeare is a bold and brave warrior. Like Antonio, he admires the friendship of Julius Caesar. But his personal life does not seem to be socially acceptable as he has a secret love affair with Cleopatra, besides his wife Octavia. In his early age, Antony had developed bad habits like drinking and gambling resulting in huge debts.