

## DISCOURSE MODES AND IDEOLOGICAL CONTESTATION IN MARK TWAIN'S THE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN\*

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the use of discourse modes in the portrayal of contesting ideologies of racism and anti-racism in Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Using Robert Sutherland's framework of inherent ideologies in children's literature, this study specifically focuses on examining the persuasive strategies employed by these ideologies. Through comprehensive qualitative analysis, it becomes evident that the novel navigates between advocating anti-racism and subtly reinforcing racial ideologies, depicted primarily through portrayals of racial disparities and variations in discourse modes such as attack, advocacy, and assent. A significant revelation of this study is the influential role played by different discourse modes in shaping the reader's interpretation and interaction with the ideological dimensions within the novel, highlighting the complex interplay of ideologies in literary texts.

**Keywords :** 1. Discourse modes 2. Ideologies 3. Racism 4. Anti-racism

### 1. Background and Problem Statement

The dynamic relationship between literature and ideology has long been a topic of considerable interest in literary criticism. Authors, through literature, convey their beliefs, ideas, or ideologies to readers. Even children's literature embodies certain ideas while suppressing or omitting others, holding the power to shape readers' attitudes and opinions towards particular beliefs (Eagleton, 1991; Jameson, 2007; Nodelman & Reimer, 2003; Stephens & Watson, 1994; Oatley, 2012).

Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* serves as a critical example of this complex relationship between literature and ideology. Although the novel was notable for its radical anti-racist message at the time, as evident in its gripping plot and memorable characters, it has long been criticized for perpetuating racist stereotypes and reinforcing white supremacy through the frequent inclusion of racial slurs and

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portrayal of black characters (Fishki, 1993; Gribben, 2011; Railton, 2003; Rush, 2003). This controversy exemplifies the complexity of the relationship between literature and ideology in which both explicit and implicit ideologies can manifest within the same text, and the distinction between the two is not always clear-cut (Lazar, 2000; Hinkins, 2007).

## **2. Research Objectives**

This study seeks to examine the controversy surrounding *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by analyzing how three different modes of persuasive discourse, including attack, advocacy, and assent operate within the text to either promote or challenge racist ideologies. Using Robert Sutherland's framework of inherent ideologies in children's literature, the analysis focuses on characterization, the use of racial slurs, and the portrayal of black characters in comparison to their white counterparts.

## **3. Research Benefits**

The nuanced insights uncovered by this study aim to encourage readers to engage with texts in a more conscious and reflective manner, promoting a broader understanding that challenges racial biases, fostering a more inclusive and appreciation of diverse perspectives in literature and beyond.

## **4. Research Methodology**

Employing a close reading approach based on Sutherland's framework, this study systematically explores the ideologies embedded within *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Sutherland (1985) classifies political ideologies into three categories based on their mode of persuasion as follows:

The first category, known as the discourse of advocacy, aims to persuade readers to believe the idea it supports by promoting or defending a specific concept or viewpoint. This strategy is frequently employed to support social norms, beliefs, and ideas that are widely held by society as a whole. The second category, the discourse of attack, is generated when an author encounters an idea that contradicts their own. This approach does not explicitly challenge or criticize the idea, but rather employs irony and satire to criticize or challenge it. The third category, the discourse of assent, is more challenging to discuss than the first two as it advocates for something indirectly. Its role is not to attack or overtly support a concept, but rather to affirm something that already exists. It indirectly informs readers of the existence of an idea embraced by society, even if that idea is not entirely accurate.

Each mode of persuasion offers a lens through which the novel's subtle and overt ideologies, particularly concerning race and racism, can be critically examined and understood. By exploring these persuasive discourses, this methodology reveals the complex ideological presentations within Twain's narrative, encouraging a profound engagement with the text's portrayals of race and racism.

## 5. Research Results

### 5.1 The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn as an Anti-Racist Novel

Through the lens of attack discourse, Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* can be considered an anti-racist novel. In an overt way, the novel denounces racial prejudice and promotes anti-racism, asserting that racial inequality should not exist. With the use of attack discourse, Twain exposes the racist ideology that was prevalent in his time and critiques the social and political systems that upheld it.

To begin with, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* addresses racial prejudice through a nuanced exploration of morality and ethics among its characters. One method the novel employs to reinforce the idea of white supremacy is by introducing the concept of "white trash" through the character of Pap, Huck's father. Despite the fact that he is a white individual with a lower social standing than other whites, Pap holds prejudiced views towards black people. This dynamic exposes the fallacy of the belief that all white people are inherently superior to people of other ethnicities, as even the poorest white person can hold racist views. Consequently, Pap's character serves not only as a representation of corrupt and immoral white characters but also as an illustration of how white trash can perpetuate racist attitudes. For instance, when Pap insists that black people should not be granted any rights, he demonstrates a refusal to acknowledge their potential for knowledge or deserving treatment equal to that of white people: "They said he was a p'fessor in a college, and could talk all kinds of languages, and knowed everything. And that ain't the wust. They said he could vote when he was at home. Well, that let me out. Thinks I, what is the country a-coming to?" (Twain, p.29). Pap's resentment and refusal to recognize the rights of black people reveal the pervasive racism of the time.

Additionally, the novel also portrays seemingly good white characters, such as the King and the Duke, who are ultimately revealed to be immoral and exploitative. In one scene, the King and Duke devise a plan to impersonate the deceased William's brother to defraud his family of their inheritance. As part of their plan, they suggest

that Jim be restrained and hidden away so that he does not arouse suspicion. Later, they sell Jim to Silas Phelps and falsely inform him that the slave is tied up in the woods. The actions of the King and the Duke are portrayed in a satirical manner, which highlights their hypocrisy and immorality as Huck remarks: “It didn’t take me long to make up my mind that these liars warn’t no kings nor dukes at all, but just low-down humbugs and frauds” (Twain, p.127). By depicting the King and Duke in this way, Twain underscores the idea that immoral behavior is not exclusive to any particular race and that white people can be just as untrustworthy and manipulative as they may perceive black people to be.

Furthermore, the novel challenges the idea that white people are morally superior by depicting violent acts committed by white characters. For example, when Colonel Sherburn kills Boggs despite Boggs pleading for his life: “Boggs throws up both of his hands and says, “O Lord, don’t shoot!” Bang! goes the first shot, and he staggers back, clawing at the air-bang! goes the second one, and he tumbles backwards on to the ground, heavy and solid, with his arms spread out” (Twain, p. 146). The fact that Sherburn shoots him without hesitation prompts readers to question the moral superiority of white people. Similarly, Buck’s violent behavior is evident in his explanation of a feud: “It’s a feud,” says he. “A feud is this way: A man has a quarrel with another man, and kills him; then that other man’s brother kills him; then the other brothers, on both sides, goes for one another; then the cousins chip in—and by and by it’s pretty much a free fight, and it spreads and spreads, and at last everybody does kill somebody else if they kin get a chance; and they keep this up till they’s a hundred ’n’ fifty ’n’ two hundred of ’em killed; and they don’t ever stop—’cept once in a while, like to-day, and eat a while” (Twain, p. 111). Buck’s participation in this senseless and irrational violence suggests that white people are capable of such behavior. These scenes imply that whites are not inherently more moral than blacks, and may even be more prone to violent behavior.

In addition to acts of violence, the novel depicts multiple instances of white people attending church and being taught about the significance of love and brotherhood. However, the novel also depicts white people as slave owners who treat black people harshly, highlighting the hypocrisy of white people’s supposed beliefs and actions. Twain notes the contrast in religious teachings and reality through characters like Miss Watson, who instructs Huck on the “good place” and “bad place” and then sells her slave Jim down the river, demonstrating a clear disparity between her professed Christian morals and her actions. Furthermore, Twain, through Huck, provides a critique of religious hypocrisy: “Then she [Miss Watson] told me all about

the bad place, and I said I wished I was there. She got mad then, but I didn't mean no harm. All I wanted was to go somewheres; all I wanted was a change, I warn't particular" (Twain, p.3). This critique of people's false superiority complex clearly reveals that their actions often contradict the values they claim to hold, prompting readers to consider how prejudice and discrimination continue to impact our society today.

Turning to the portrayal of black characters, it is notable that they are portrayed more positively than their white counterparts. This approach is grounded in the discourse of advocacy, which seeks to combat discriminatory attitudes and behaviors towards marginalized groups. Twain's use of positive portrayals of black characters works to challenge the widespread racial prejudices of his time and serves as a strong critique of the social and political systems that perpetuate such prejudices. This positive representation is exemplified by Jim, a black slave who travels with Huck. Jim is portrayed as a decent man who surpasses Huck's own father in terms of loyalty, trustworthiness, and protectiveness towards Huck. Jim's affection for his family compels him to flee from Miss Watson in order to avoid being separated from them; he not only desires his own freedom but also intends to free his family. The depth of Jim's feelings towards his family is expressed by Huck: "He was thinking about his wife and his children, away up yonder, and he was low and homesick; because he hadn't ever been away from home before in his life; and I do believe he cared just as much for his people as white folks does for their'n" (Twain, p. 158).

The novel's major theme of interracial friendship also suggests that the relationship between blacks and whites can be strengthened to bridge the racial divide. Huck and Jim's relationship exemplifies overcoming racial prejudices and cooperating for a better future. This theme is emphasized by Huck's realization that Jim, a black man, is just as good and moral as white people, and in some ways even superior. From two strangers who run away from their society, come across each other, grow their relationship, and finally become true friends, they trust each other despite their different races. Jim taught and cared for Huck as if he were a parent, and Huck trusted Jim as much as he trusted other white people. Twain illustrates this point when Huck reflects, "I knowed he was white inside, and I reckoned he'd say what he did say - so it was all right now, and I told Tom I was a-going for a doctor" (Twain, p.278).

By depicting black characters in a positive light, Twain challenges the pervasive racial prejudices of his time and offers a powerful critique of the social and political systems that uphold such prejudices. By doing so, he creates an anti-racist novel that encourages readers to reconsider their attitudes towards race and racism.

The positive portrayal of black characters is crucial in the novel's attempt to advocate the idea that whites are not inherently moral and blacks are not inherently immoral. Overall, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is an important literary work that confronts issues of race, prejudice, and discrimination, and continues to inspire critical thinking and discussion about these issues. Through the use of attack discourse and the positive portrayal of black characters, Twain effectively challenges the racial prejudices of his time, exposing the hypocrisy and immorality of a society that upholds racist ideologies.

## 5.2 The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn as a Racist Novel

The novel's portrayal of race and racism is multi-layered and complex. Although the novel seems to denounce racial prejudice, it also implies that racist ideologies have been deeply rooted in society and will persist in the future. By examining this novel through the lens of the assent discourse, it becomes apparent that two levels of racial ideology are at play: institutionalized racism and internalized racism. Institutionalized racism is manifest in the laws, policies, and practices that support racial discrimination while internalized racism refers to the internalization of racist attitudes and beliefs by members of marginalized groups. The experiences of black characters demonstrate how these two levels of racial ideology interact and perpetuate each other. Despite the fact that some readers may view the novel's depiction of institutionalized and internalized racism as typical of the genre, it is crucial to recognize the harmful impact that these beliefs may have on real people. The novel's depiction of race and racism can thus be seen as evidence of its status as a racist novel, revealing the accepted beliefs of society and the potential for such beliefs to sustain the status quo or convince readers that they are normal.

To illustrate the novel's institutionalized racism, it is worth exploring the restricted opportunities and discriminatory treatment of black individuals in society. Although the novel does not explicitly address the issue of education for blacks, it hints to their lack of educational opportunities. One example of this can be seen in Jim's superstitious beliefs and the way he interprets the world around him as he lacks the necessary knowledge to distinguish between fact and fantasy. This is illustrated when Jim believes that witches put him in a trance and rode him all over the state after Tom slips his hat off and ties him up while he's sleeping: "Jim was monstrous proud about it, and he got so he wouldn't hardly notice the other niggers. Niggers would come miles to hear Jim tell about it, and he was more looked up to than any nigger in that country....Jim always kept that five-center piece round his neck with a string, and said it was a charm the devil give to him with his own hands, and told him

he could cure anybody with it and fetch witches whenever he wanted to just by saying something to it” (Twain, p.7). Jim’s tendency to accept supernatural explanations for events highlights the oppressive nature of the society he lives in, where opportunities for growth and self-improvement are systematically denied to black individuals.

In addition, the novel shows how white characters often unknowingly supported a system that treated black individuals unfairly. This is clear when Aunt Sally casually dismisses a black person’s death when Huck recounts a steamboat explosion to Aunt Sally: “Anybody hurt?” “No’ m. Killed a nigger.” “Well, it’s lucky; because sometimes people do get hurt” (Twain, p.223). Aunt Sally’s response, finding it “lucky” that only a black person was killed, starkly illustrates a complete lack of concern for the value of black lives. Even if some black people fought to achieve freedom and professional success, society at large refused to acknowledge that black individuals were capable of aspiring to anything servitude. The novel includes a black professor in Ohio who enjoys privileges typically reserved for white people, but this concept is met with resentment from characters like Pap: “There was a free nigger there from Ohio; a mulatter, most as white as a white man... And what do you think? They said he was a p’fessor in a college, and could talk all kinds of languages, and knowed everything... They said he could VOTE when he was at home. Well, that let me out. Thinks I, what is the country a-coming to?” (Twain, p.28). This reveals the resistance of white characters like Pap resist the idea of racial equality, thus further emphasizing the theme of racial prejudice in the novel.

Moreover, institutionalized racism is present within justice system and this is evidently reflected in the character of Jim, who is immediately labeled a criminal, without any due process, simply because of his status as a runaway slave. In stark contrast, the white characters in the novel are rarely suspected of any wrongdoing, mainly because of their race. This systemic bias is exposed when Jim decides to run away after hearing Miss Watson’s plans to sell him. Instead of being treated as a man fearing separation from his family and desperately seeking freedom, Jim is automatically assumed to be a law-breaker. When Huck finds out that Jim has run away, he decides to keep it a secret, understanding the grave consequences Jim would face if caught: “I ain’t going to tell, and I ain’t going back there, anyways” (Twain, p.45). The readiness of society to label Jim a criminal for seeking freedom highlights the deeply entrenched racial prejudices of the time. Moreover, Jim’s continual state of fear and desperation emphasizes the oppressive reality of institutionalized racism: “I didn’ k’yer no’ mo’ what become er me en de raf’. En when I wake up en fine you back ag’in, all safe en soun’, de tears come, en I could a got down on my knees en

kiss yo' foot, I's so thankful..." (Twain, p.89). The novel, therefore, powerfully illustrates the endemic racial bias within the era's justice system and the profound impacts of such institutionalized racism.

Another aspect of the novel contributing to its racist messaging is its use of offensive language, which illustrates the extent of institutionalized racism. The frequent use of racial slurs, particularly the use of the n-word, is jarring and offensive, and serves to reinforce the pervasive racism of the novel's setting period. This language normalizes and perpetuates harmful stereotypes about black individuals, thus contributing to the larger systems of institutionalized racism. While some argue this language accurately reflects the era and character attitudes, the negative impacts it causes arguably outweigh any historical accuracy. Over the years, the novel's racially offensive language has sparked controversies, leading to recurring challenges and bans from school curriculums across the United States (Rani & Singh, 2018). Responding to this, a revised version of the novel was published in 2011 by New South Books, substituting the n-word with "slave" (Schultz, 2011). Despite these attempts, debates regarding Twain's novel and its appropriateness in educational settings continue, indicating the enduring complexities of representing race and racism in literature.

In addition to institutionalized racism, internalized racism manifests in the novel prominently in Jim's behavior and choices. This refers to the self-acceptance of beliefs of inferiority forced upon black individuals by a white-dominant society. Fearing the harsh conditions in New Orleans and the potential separation from his family, Jim decides to run away upon overhearing Miss Watson's plan to sell him. His choice reflects a perceived lack of power and agency to resist or challenge his white owner's decisions. As he confesses, "Well, you see, it 'uz dis way. Ole missus—dat's Miss Watson—she pecks on me all de time, en treats me pooty rough, but she awluz said she wouldn' sell me down to Orleans...I never waited to hear de res". I lit out mighty quick, I tell you" (Twain, p.45). Furthermore, his cautious measures to avoid detection, like traveling by night and hiding during the day, underscore his pervasive fear of being accused or captured. Therefore, through Jim, the novel portrays the systemic and internalized racism of the time that not only devalues and marginalizes black individuals but also instills in them a sense of powerlessness and diminished self-esteem.

Another instance of internalized racism in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is highlighted in Jim's interactions with Tom Sawyer during his captivity. Tom, drawing inspiration from the adventure novels he enjoys, devises an elaborate and unnecessarily complex plan for Jim's escape. In one part of the plan, Tom suggests



that Jim should maintain a flower garden while in captivity. Despite seeing the unreasonableness of this suggestion, Jim responds, “I doan know but maybe I could, Mars Tom; but it’s tolabable dark in heah, en I ain’ got no use f’r no flower, nohow, en she’d be a pow’ful sight o’ trouble” (Twain, p.265). While he notes the difficulties, he does not directly refuse. This incident demonstrates that Jim, influenced by the societal racism of his era, accepts his inferior position and feels that he cannot contradict a white boy’s instructions, regardless of how absurd they seem. This compliance clearly illustrates the extent of internalized racism that Jim, like many black individuals of that time, has absorbed.

In addition, internalized racism is manifested through Jim’s attitudes and behaviors towards Huck. During their time on Jackson’s Island, Jim expresses deep gratitude towards Huck for not turning him in as a runaway slave. He says to Huck, “Pooty soon I’ll be a-shout’n’ for joy, en I’ll say, it’s all on accounts o’ Huck; I’s a free man, en I couldn’t ever ben free ef it hadn’ ben for Huck; Huck done it. Jim won’t ever forgit you, Huck; you’s de bes’ fren’ Jim’s ever had; en you’s de only fren’ ole Jim’s got now” (Twain, p.92). His heartfelt appreciation, although genuine, implies that Jim has internalized the racial prejudices of his society, perceiving kindness from a white person as unusual and remarkable. This sentiment underscores his unconscious acceptance of the societal racial hierarchy. These various instances exemplify the profound effect internalized racism can have on the self-perception and interpersonal relationships of black individuals within a racially prejudiced society.

Overall, it is worth noting that while the novel may denounce racial prejudice in some instances, its overall portrayal of race and racism ultimately reinforces the status quo and perpetuates harmful beliefs and assumptions. By depicting black people as inferior and uneducated, the novel contributes to harmful stereotypes that continue to influence societal attitudes toward black people. Additionally, the use of racial slurs and language further normalizes and perpetuates harmful beliefs about black individuals. Ultimately, the novel’s status as a racist work highlights the pervasiveness of racism and the ways in which it can be perpetuated even in works that are intended to critique it.

## 6. Research Discussion

Analyzing *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* necessitates an exploration of the complex and dynamic interplay of racist and anti-racist ideologies within the text. Recent scholarship, such as Shalabi (2016), illuminates the novel’s strong social criticism, particularly regarding race and class. Echoing these insights, this current study

unveils the subtle and overt manifestations of racism, facilitated through complex discursive strategies. Different ideological stances employ distinct modes of discourse such as attack, advocacy, and assent, contributing profoundly to the textual portrayal of race and racism.

Anti-racist ideologies within the novel often utilize attack and advocacy discourses. The attack discourse reveals the devastating effects of racism, promoting a forceful critique of racial injustices. Concurrently, advocacy discourses support beliefs that challenge racial disparities, promoting equality. Contrastingly, racist ideologies subtly perpetuate racial biases through the assent discourse, subtly reinforcing discriminatory views and practices without overt endorsement or objection.

These nuanced discourses coexist within Twain's text, significantly influencing readers' engagement and interpretation. For instance, attack and advocacy discourses may resonate with readers inclined towards anti-racist ideologies, spurring them towards supporting equality-promoting initiatives. Conversely, the assent discourse may subtly affirm and perpetuate the racial prejudices of readers who harbor racist ideologies.

The exploration of these discourses, augmented by recent scholarship, enriches our understanding of the ideological complexity within *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Recognizing these variegated discursive strategies allows for a nuanced interpretation of the text's portrayal of race and racism, facilitating a comprehensive and critical engagement with Twain's seminal work.

## 7. New Knowledge Gained

Ideological Types	Modes of Discourse	Outcomes	Reader's Influence
Racist Ideologies	Attack	Not Prominent	
	Advocacy	Not Prominent	
	Assent	Prominent: Subtly perpetuates racial biases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Shaped Perceptions: Supports biases</li> <li>- Critical Engagement: Less likely</li> <li>- Promotion of Social Justice: Not promoted</li> </ul>

Ideological Types	Modes of Discourse	Outcomes	Reader's Influence
Anti-racist Ideologies	Attack	Prominent: Challenges racial biases	- Shaped Perceptions: Encourages critique - Promotion of Social Justice: Actively promoted
	Advocacy	Prominent: Promotes anti-racist views	- Critical Engagement: Encourages active questioning and reassessment of texts - Promotion of Social Justice: Actively promoted
	Assent	Not Prominent	

Racist Ideologies: These primarily use the assent discourse to subtly perpetuate racial biases.

Anti-racist Ideologies: These majorly apply attack and advocacy discourses to challenge racial prejudices and promote anti-racist views.

Interplay with Readers: Different modes of discourse under each ideological type influence readers differently, affecting their perceptions, level of critical engagement, and attitudes towards social justice.

## 8. Research Recommendations

### 8.1 Policy Recommendations

8.1.1 Educational Curriculum: Encourage the incorporation of diverse literary texts that provoke critical thought and discussion about racism and other social injustices in school.

8.1.2 Guidelines for Literary Analysis: Establish guidelines that promote a critical and analytical approach towards interpreting ideologies, including those related to race, within literary texts.

### 8.2 Implementation Suggestions

8.2.1 Teacher Training: Design and implement training programs for teachers that equip them with the skills and knowledge necessary to guide students in critically analyzing literary texts, particularly those addressing complex social issues like racism.

8.2.2 Student Engagement: Foster active student engagement in literary analysis by encouraging critical examination and questioning of ideologies presented in texts, creating an environment that supports open discussion and diverse viewpoints.

### 8.3 Suggestions for Further Research

8.3.1 Expanding Literary Analysis: Explore the application of ideological discourse analysis in the examination of other literary works across various genres and historical contexts in order to gain more comprehensive insights into how ideologies, especially related to race, are perpetuated or challenged through literature.

8.3.2 Interdisciplinary Approaches: Investigate the potential of combining literary analysis with insights from other disciplines such as sociology and psychology to attain a more nuanced understanding of the impact of ideological discourses on societal beliefs and attitudes.

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