
“Was Huck *Burak(k)u*?”: Reading and Teaching Twain in Asian Pacific World Literature

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Perhaps there is no greater test of contemporary value than the way a text stands up to the challenges of today’s students. In my classrooms in California, Guam, and Japan these past few years, Mark Twain’s work has met that challenge. For instance, including Twain in my freshman course taught at Berkeley in 2001, “Empires of Modernism,” surprised students who knew well the author of Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn stories; they had not known Samuel Clemens to be a contemporary of Joseph Conrad much less active in organizations advocating anti-imperialism in African and Asia Pacific regions. They had been taught their “Mark Twain” in such a way that they never imagined he might once have been at the heart of U.S. debates on the “darkness” of colonialism and capitalist expansion. Twain’s “King Leopold’s Soliloquy” (1905) and Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899) read together created a provocative dialogue, one furthered by bringing to the discussion Kipling’s “The White Man’s Burden” (1899) and the socio-political contexts of its various parodies and revisions.¹ Mark Twain’s political writings had the class questioning civilization and progress, and thinking more deeply about frontier theses and manifest destinies precisely because it was “Mark Twain,” frontier adventurer and world explorer, who authorized them to do so. Our academic exercises in literature and history took on considerably more somber, even divisive, meaning after Tuesday, 9/11: suddenly the relevance of our readings to our own historical moment became uncannily magnified. Many students found themselves learning a new vocabulary from old texts for discussing contemporary issues of war, imperialism, and religious conflict. Twainian satire provided a rhetorical mode appealing to students who wanted to express youthful idealism or sincere grief without discarding either critical thinking or cool-headed skepticism.

And then there was the year before: I had taught AP English at a high school

on Guam where we read Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885) as a canonical work. In that class, I urged my majority Asian Pacific Islander students to confront contemporary debates and censorship of the novel, aware that in a majority non-white class the representations of race and slavery in Twain’s novel would be tackled head on. Students engaged Twain’s story in the terms they knew best, those of their own Asian Pacific context and Guam’s history as a U.S. territory gained from the Spanish-American war, regained from Japanese Occupation, and presently still in status limbo (despite the UN’s advocating self-determination, as well as the abolition of territorial status under the 1962 Special Committee on Decolonization and the 1990-2000 International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism renewed in 2001). For these students, Huck’s resistance to “sivilizin” influences, as well as his final decision to “light out for the Territory,” already held transnational and postcolonial meanings. Believing I was faced with the task of making Twain “relevant” in classes such as these, I discovered Twain’s oft-untaught works did all the work for me. “To the Person Sitting in Darkness,” for example, bridged the gap between my students’ (mis)apprehensions regarding Twain in his times and for ours, and answered my own questions of how Twain brought his West to meet the East.

In this 1901 essay, Twain sympathizes with Chinese “patriots” and scathingly criticizes Christian European missionaries as mere mercenaries in the 1900 Boxer Rebellion; then, unexpectedly, he advances an argument focused on the United States and its betrayal of Filipino “patriots” such as Dr. Jose Rizal, Apolinario Mabini, Andres Bonifacio, and Emilio Aguinaldo fighting against Spanish colonial rule. Already well known to my Filipino and Chamorro students in Guam, the “Irreconcilables” including Aguinaldo (whom Twain mentions by name in his essay) were Filipino intellectuals and independence leaders who were exiled to Guam as prisoners of war.² In a striking passage, Twain’s essay brings together America’s shameful recent past of slavery with its contemporary moment of hypocrisy and imperialism in order to warn his country of taking a step back towards a feudalistic, European past instead of forward to strive for truly democratic American ideals. Twain writes of the colonized “Person Sitting in Darkness” who remains unpersuaded by the “enlightening” new deities the U.S. “Master” wants to sell him:

Now then, that will convince the Person. You will see. It will restore the Business. Also, it will elect the Master of the Game to the vacant place in the Trinity of our national gods; and there on their high thrones the Three will sit, age after age, in the people's sight, each bearing the Emblem of his service: Washington, the Sword of the Liberator; Lincoln, the Slave's Broken Chains; the Master, the Chains Repaired.³

For Twain, U.S. President McKinley had become a new “Master” and reforged the chains broken by his predecessors, thereby turning back real democratic progress in taking up “the Game” of expansionist trade and imperialism, lying and cheating for “Business” profit under the guise of Christian missionary values. Here we see Twain exposing the “backwardness” of imperial progress even as he links the misguided rationales of slavery (both King George III's and the U.S.'s own “peculiar institution”) with colonial and occupation policies. These “late Twain” writings are not mere anomalies in Twain's corpus, merely the works of a disillusioned and increasingly despairing old man, but rather they cast significant, meditative shadows on the writers' previous works; indeed, contemporary readers and writers all over the world now turn to Twain as much for active scholarship on his late and still emerging uncensored, re-edited literary works as for the new shape they lend to his overall corpus.⁴

Now in Osaka teaching American Studies courses in English to undergraduates (overwhelmingly male and Japanese) who are often indifferent — or else simply, and alarmingly, *unable* — to discuss either domestic or international matters of race and ethnicity in historical or social context, I find myself again turning to Twain in his transnational context for hints. In his 1994 Nobel acceptance speech, Oe Kenzaburo mentioned that Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* inspired him as a writer, and it has oft been noted that it is the moment when Huck Finn refuses to give up the runaway slave Jim and instead go to Hell — what Twain himself called the conflict between “a sound heart and a deformed conscience” — that particularly resonated for Oe.⁵ A prominent post-WWII writer in Japan, Oe himself has been alternately criticized and lauded as the voice and

conscience of his generation and, more recently, of Japan to the world. That generation was the postwar world of Japan emerging from the shadows of the defeat it embraced, as historian John Dower memorably puts it, one expected to reject its own traditions in favor of American-style democracy and freedom.⁶ This Twainian conflict at the heart of Japan’s modernity, then, is not only about the individual heart struggling against a deformed national or social conscience but also about issues of race and imperialism difficult to decouple from Japan’s relationship with the U.S., in particular. One hundred years after America exerted imperialistic pressure on Japan to open its borders to international trade and U.S. interests in Asia when Commodore Matthew Perry sailed into Tokyo Bay in 1853-4 with his military “black ships,” the U.S. after World War II established its military bases all over Japan to pressure and shape Japan’s demilitarization, its markets, and its democratization in a relationship dependent on U.S. militarization and protection. This arrangement was mutually beneficial to economic growth and trade expansion (especially during the Korean and Vietnam wars in Asia), and established Japan as the U.S.’s key Asian geopolitical partner with a seat at the world summit table. Scholar Naoki Sakai has detailed the “modernization theory” of Japan’s postwar tutelary role in democratizing Asia, in effect, the U.S. plan for Japan to wield an Americanized Asian influence over its neighbors.⁷ It is not my intent here to ignore Japan’s own imperialism, wartime atrocities, and national hubris by focusing more on U.S. hegemony and power over Japan; rather, I seek to emphasize how Japan’s tutelage in modernity, including some ideas about imperialism and race, was, and remains, very American, even as that modern history has served to obscure “traditional” Japanese prejudices and oppressive practices at home.

What could be more ironic than Commodore Perry returning to celebrate and enforce Japan’s opening of its borders to the U.S. in 1854 in a gunship named the *Powhatan*? Named after the great Algonquian Indian chief whose people had been befriended and later “removed” in the U.S.’s genocidal policies towards Native Americans, his name was memorialized along with the myth of his daughter Pocahontas to deploy the “noble savage” image for national edification, aptly symbolizing conquest and appropriation. And what about that other masking display of real race relations, Perry’s having created a minstrel troupe among his crew in order to entertain Japanese leaders?

Cultural anthropologist John G. Russell points out both these facts in his book *Nihonjin no Kokujinkan* (Japanese Views of Black People), contending that modern Japan has perpetuated racist representations of blacks based on ideas gleaned from the West ever since the first “southern barbarians” (*nanbanjin*) first appeared, the Portuguese and Spanish who brought slaves with them to Nagasaki and other ports in the sixteenth century.⁸ Prominent black intellectuals Marcus Garvey, Langston Hughes, and W.E.B. Du Bois attempted to establish ties of solidarity with early twentieth-century Japanese figures but links mostly crumbled as Japan’s “fifteen-year war” escalated and its wartime propaganda hyped racist caricatures of all Americans.⁹ From the postwar Occupation until today racist stereotypes in Japan have increasingly focused on African Americans, especially soldiers, as Russell and others taking up his research¹⁰ have shown. Turning to modern literature to argue the pervasiveness of racist stereotypes of blacks in modern Japanese culture, Russell considers writers such as Endo Shusaku, Murakami Ryu, Yamada Eimi — and Oe Kenzaburo. Which brings us back to Oe and Twain. When Oe begins in his early work to express the conflicts of his country’s modern times, perhaps it should not surprise us that he does so in a tale about a poor country boy and his relationship with a captive black American serviceman.

Oe’s Akutagawa Prize-winning novella, “Prize Stock” (*Shiiku*, 1958), appeared six years after the U.S.-led Allied Occupation ended and on the eve of violent U.S.-Japan Security Treaty (*Ampo*) protests. It is the story of an African American pilot who survives his plane crash only to be taken prisoner by poor Japanese villagers. A young boy, unnamed aside from the derogatory nickname of “Frog” given him and the other village children by the town “Clerk,” narrates the story. Responsible for guarding the black captive, the boy becomes physically and emotionally close to him over the idyllic summer in which they live together. In the eyes of the boy, the black “catch” is simultaneously a dirty and a magnificent strange animal. Repeatedly described through a peculiarly articulate if limited narration that focalizes events through the first-person perspective of the supposedly ill-educated boy, the black man is “kept like an animal” (*kau, doubutsu mitai ni; doubutsu no yo ni* 95, 113), and described as a “beast” or “like a beast” (*kedamono, kedamono no yo ni, kedamono douzen da* 95-96, 116), or “like

livestock” (*kachiku no yo ni*, 110, 117). Numerous characters, even some children, refer to him as “nigger” (*kurombo*). Physically, he is said to have “thick rubbery lips” and “smell like an animal” — among other derogatory, stereotypical images, as Russell points out; what Russell fails to note, however, is that the Japanese who capture the black soldier and control his destiny are also depicted as debased, weak, dirty animals, yet never praiseworthy like their “prize stock.”¹¹

In the end, the boy’s perspective is liminal, not quite like the other children’s or the adults’, as the above citations suggest. The boy’s growing fondness for, and humanizing view of, the captive as a “black soldier” (*kokujin heishi*) mediates others’ racist and ignorant conceptions of him by using similes such as “*like an animal.*” The boy’s affection for the “black soldier” gradually grows, to culminate in a graphic scene where he, his little brother, the soldier, and his father join to kill, skin, and cure weasels. After sharing this act together, the boy thinks: “At such times my brother and the black soldier and my father and I were united, as if in a single family, around my father’s weasel-curing technique” (Nathan 150-1). Throughout the story, the boy often reveals his self-consciousness of his, and his village’s, debased animality and inferiority, especially when around the townspeople; however, caring for and “raising” the black soldier extends to him and his family a sense of humanity, as if the lower status of the black man elevated their own social status at the same time that his significance to the town as an enemy combatant made them, for once, significant too. Moreover, the black soldier turns out to be a grateful and clever pet, one who appears to accept not only their superior relationship over him but also to recognize their proper “civilized” place above him. His admiration for the boy’s father’s “weasel-curing technique” is just such an admission of their advanced skills and superiority, in the boy’s view.

At times, Oe’s story is reminiscent of Tom and Huck’s cruel, if “innocent,” game of keeping Jim captive at the end of *Huckleberry Finn*; at others, it recalls Twain’s minstrel-like caricatures of Jim. The boy narrator in Oe’s novella is the black man’s best friend in the village and yet he participates in the “innocent” children’s games that function to further dehumanize the black captive. In one scene so disturbing for its sexual and racial explicitness that it did not appear in the first English translation and remained

toned down in the second, the laughing, innocent children try to get the black man to mate with a sheep.¹² Indeed, even the title of Oe's work proved to be a translation problem, perhaps because the story's emphasis and theme of native Japanese (not just foreigner) as non-human have been heretofore insufficiently considered by critics: Oe's original title *Shiiku* literally means the "cultivation and breeding of animals," suggesting not only the villagers' treatment of the black captive but also, I would argue, the *bildungsroman* of "raising" the boy narrator to manhood in this particular village.¹³

The story's turning point comes at summer's end when Clerk, the liaison figure between the town and the village, demands that the black soldier be turned over to authorities. Afraid of what this means, the boy runs to warn his "catch"; once before him, however, the boy finds he does not know what or how to communicate. But the black pilot guesses what is wrong. Seizing the boy, he takes him hostage in his cellar and threatens to kill him. In the long night of his stay with the black pilot, the boy's feelings change from love for his pet "catch" to angry feelings of betrayal, feelings complicated by humiliation and nausea for having been reduced for all to see as no more than an animal himself, like a weasel trapped and facing meaningless death. The next day the father breaks into the cellar and with his ax rushes the black man grasping his son, killing the soldier and crushing his son's hand in the process. Two days afterward the ill boy awakes from his feverish sleep, his arm swollen beyond recognition. When asked, he tells another boy that the terrible smell of what may be gangrene coming from his hand is not his own, but "that nigger's stink," an attempt to distinguish himself from the black man by way of racist epithets even as he reveals that their bodies have become mixed in the figure of the wound.

We might say that the boy's growth to manhood is exposed in this way as a personal wound, one linked to his blind adoption of adult views after this formative experience. Such racist views are the legacy of his contact with the "outside world" signified by the black American, corrupting him into a child-size mimicking of the adults' international and interracial "war." Here *Huckleberry Finn* comes to mind, particularly in the way that little Buck Grangerford (who is, in a sense, Huck's double in both age and name) unthinkingly inherits his family's hatred of the Shepherdsons and feeds the Shepherdson/Grangerford blood feud. Seeing "a Shepherdson" as marked by class and

blood with inferiority and hatefulness, Buck and his family are forced to recognize, then violently disavow, that originless discrimination when Sophie Shepherdson and Harney Grangerford defy their families to run off together, the marriage crisis so common in racial melodrama. The families seek to stop the marriage in a violent gunfight, and Buck is killed in the name of a “domestic war” whose founding hatreds defined him. In some ways like Buck, Oe’s boy narrator blindly adopts his father’s prejudices and his nation’s war, carrying on the vicious cycle of hatreds; however, in other ways, he is less like Buck than curiously situated in the doubled space of Huck/Buck, a point to which I will return momentarily.

Although Oe’s boy narrator claims to have grown up in the last pages of the story, the narrative traces a full circle from its opening at the burial pit where the village dead are cremated and ends there as well, suggesting that there has been more continuity than change. It is as if a dangerous innocence persists in the novella, rather than an innocence that gets altered by enlightened experience. This notion of dangerous innocence can be seen in the novella’s opening and closing insistence on play, as the story begins with the boy narrator and his brother rummaging in the burial pit’s ashes to find human bones for playthings and ends with the cremation of the black pilot there just as the adult Clerk joins in the childish game of sledding down a hill on a broken tail piece of the pilot’s plane only himself to crash and die suddenly. Adults participate in dangerous children’s games, we see, throwing into question both the boy’s growth out of innocence into manhood and adults’ superiority over children’s ways of knowing. In short, seemingly inflicted on him by his own father as the dramatic conclusion to a conflict initiated by the town “authorities” who represent the Law, the boy’s wound at the end of this story is, rather, repetitively self-inflicting, one that festers rather than heals.

Racial mixing in the figure of the festering wound implies multiple layers of representational mimicry: Huck Finn and Jim transposed onto a Japanese country boy and his beloved black “catch”; a Japanese writer creating a strikingly stereotyped African American character through the eyes of a poor Japanese village boy who has never seen a foreigner; adults playing at being children and children playing at being adults; human beings trying to rise above animals but constantly treated as animals. These layers of

cross-cultural and international representations are complicated further when we consider them in more domestic terms; that is, what does it mean that the “town” (in quotation marks throughout Oe’s text) treats the villagers as lower than dirty animals who must exist only outside their civilized boundaries? Here, again Twain is instructive. My students often appreciate Tom’s envy of Huck’s “freedom” and the humor of Twain’s treatment of women such as Annt Sally trying to “sivilize” Huck Finn yet they sometimes strangely overlook the fact that Huck is a poor country boy abused by an alcoholic and treacherous father, a boy whose complex bond with Jim stems from class as much as race relations. Despite these ties, of course, it is precisely Jim’s lower caste status as slave that allows Huck on many occasions to shore up his racial privilege to be more mobile and certainly more “civilized” and therefore more “human” than Jim. In “Prize Stock,” the boy’s bond with the black American is as complex.

The boy is a member of a remote unnamed village that Oe at rare moments refers to indirectly (if repeatedly) with the term *buraku*,¹⁴ which can mean simply a country village as does the most-often used term *mura*, or then again can designate the historically segregated villages of the former Japanese outcaste class, *burakumin*. Below the traditional samurai-farmer-artisan-merchant social hierarchy, *burakumin* were consolidated in the Edo Period into a class of ethnic Japanese treated as if they were non-Japanese and forced to live in designated *buraku* villages.¹⁵ For centuries designated by derogatory terms such as *hinin*, literally “non-human” or *eta*, meaning “polluted,” the resulting *burakumin* peoples have been discriminated against based not on race (they are ethnically Japanese and speak Japanese) but primarily due to their “unclean” occupations in a class-based manner. In “Prize Stock,” the human cremation pit that begins and ends Oe’s story, suggesting the village’s task of handling dead bodies; the skinning and tanning of animals — historically cows and horses — but in *Shiiku* weasels’ skins later taken to the town; the hunting and capture of wild dogs (*yamainugari*) as mentioned in the opening of the novella; and finally, as the title and story indicates, the raising and slaughter of livestock as well as the guarding of prisoners and criminals: all were the traditional work of Japan’s *burakumin* outcastes.¹⁶ Indeed, once we recall that Oe’s story is all about human animals and the “pecking order” among them, which brings to mind the derogatory short-hand

term of *yottsu*, or “four of them” (meaning “four legged” animal), used to indicate *burakumin* people, we begin to grasp a new significance in the novella’s exploration of war, discrimination, inter- and intra-racial encounters, and their effects.

Even though in the Meiji Period in 1871, discrimination against outcastes was made illegal and they were deemed “new citizens” (*shinheimin*), it marked less a progressive move to abolish discrimination than the creation of a newly problematic category of discrimination. Japan’s subsequent colonization efforts in Taiwan and Korea, whose populations were also called “new citizens” to distinguish them from Japanese, made this clear. Increasingly 20th-century activism resulted in the term *burakumin*, and oversaw improved socio-economic conditions for many as they lost their monopolies on certain occupations and were able to pass or relocate in some cases outside of designated *buraku* communities. Yet despite these “improvements” that had negative impacts too on the lives of *buraku* people, discrimination continued but in more furtive ways, as families and companies sought out detective agencies and secretly distributed *buraku* village registry lists in order to avoid marrying or hiring people from these communities. One can easily imagine that just as American blacks sympathized with, and even admired, the “colored race” of Japanese for defeating Russia in the Russo-Japanese war and later standing up to white America, that the *buraku* people too might well have wondered how their domestic situation as Japan’s segregated and “special” black race compared to that of an American colored person in the Jim Crow U.S.

However, it is less my contention that Oe intended in “Prize Stock” to write about *burakumin* than to draw attention to the resonant conventions this story shares with *burakumin* literature, particularly those works by non-*burakumin* writers that Edward Fowler in an important essay has described so thoroughly and so well. In Particular, Fowler notes the tendency to depict the arrival of outsiders, whose senses are bombarded by the animal-like smells and conditions, to *buraku* quarters. Indeed, to my mind, this story enacts a sort of “passing” in its critical reception, its “racial” markers going largely unremarked by critics, with even racist stereotyping of the African American pilot quickly glossed over, as if forgivable due to the villagers’ backward country ways. This critical “passing” is paradoxically apt; that is, *burakumin* are, of course, racially indistinguishable

from non-*burakumin* Japanese so readings to date of the novel as “Japanese” are correct. More correct than they know, I argue, because once we consider Japanese domestic discrimination against *burakumin* as part of Oe’s story of ignorance and racial wounding, we can better see how a long-running domestic feud without origins or basis that has been rendered as “invisible” as an open secret and without voice here gets ventriloquized or circumlocutiously represented via a black Other. When the irrepressibly talkative Huck witnesses the Shepherdson/Grangerford feud and covers up Buck’s dead face, his sudden silence creates a lacuna for an untold story: “I ain’t agoing to tell *all* that happened — it would make me sick again if I was to do that. I wished I hadn’t ever come ashore that night, to see such things. I ain’t ever going to get shut of them — lots of times I dream about them.... I cried a little when I was covering up Buck’s face, for he was mighty good to me.” Huck’s silence eloquently voices the domestic blood feuds that remain outside the bounds of respectable, genteel discussions in countries the world over, the increasingly unspoken class-based distinctions that give liberal democratic society’s elite their privileges and power; simultaneously, however, it recognizes in Buck’s face a special kinship. Perhaps we can say that Oe’s boy narrator becomes a doubled Huck/Buck by the end of the novella, voicing the still untold stories of Japan’s domestic discriminations, rendering visible its own “invisible minority,” the *burakumin*, through the mask of the black American pilot.¹⁷

In his brief appraisal of *Shiiku*, respected literary scholar and critic Eto Jun praised it for being the first of Oe’s works to reach maturity, demonstrating its author’s growth to literary manhood. He justifies his claim, saying Oe’s work is great “because it is a story in which a black soldier falls from the sky and forms a pastoral bond with a young boy who takes care of him like he was an ox, until suddenly the soldier become captive, his beloved ‘ox,’ is felled at the same time as the boy’s hand is crushed” (268). Eto finds the combination of cruel reality mixed with the beauty of the pastoral friendship between a boy and an animal truly powerful and exemplary as fiction. One cannot help but recall here all those laudatory reviews of *Huck Finn* as a simple pastoral tale of a great friendship between innocent Huck and the lovable if inferior slave Jim. But Eto goes on, suggesting that the historical background of the story is also significant for what it says about Oe’s

growth as a writer:

This literary work plays inside itself a fugue, so to speak, of the internal growth of ‘the war’ and the protagonist, both brought into accord in one fell swoop by the father’s hatchet. Logically speaking, the hatchet that crushes ‘my’ fingers and butchers the black soldier is a symbol of the will that severs the writer from his infantilism” (269).¹⁸

Leaving aside Eto’s main point — that Oe’s coming into his own as a writer parallels the boy in the story reaching manhood by getting wounded in the “war” brought home to him — I would instead point to Eto’s very casual use of the term *ushi* (ox, or cattle) to insist upon the boy’s pastoral ties to his beloved pet. After all, it seems a natural term to use considering the animal-like descriptions of the soldier, and yet when we note that the term is never used in the story it begins to appear as if Oe almost avoided it. In short, it is the simultaneous suggestion and then elision of the term that would mark the boy and the village most *stereotypically* in connection to *burakumin* — whose “unclean” occupations included the care and slaughter of cattle, as well as tanning of leather — that acts to form an unspoken or unconscious space in the fiction, one that shapes the humiliation and figurative language of human animals already so prevalent in Oe’s work.¹⁹

In a sense, Oe’s representing his own country’s outcastes in dialogue with America’s in “Prize Stock” is the creation of a transnational frame that adopts but then radically transplants and transforms Twain’s story that takes place on an American regional level between a poor country boy and an African American man. Both however rely on a sensitive boy’s point of view, one not yet devoid of innocence even as he faces the dangerous “darkness” of his progress to manhood, questioning how far down the river to sell his conscience along the way. When Oe speaks as the conscience of his generation in such works as “Prize Stock,” it strikes me that it is as a conscience forged in a matrix of distortions wrought as much by Japan’s own “pet” domestic discriminations as one influenced by those imposed by America. This matrix is one of conflict and negotiation, a still open wound festering between Japan and the U.S.: the myth of the perfect national

body (the imperial *kokutai*) that preserves a homogeneous “Japanese” identity and abjects difference from it hereby clashes and then mixes with U.S. cultural and political interventions that compel Japanese complicity in a mutually assured growth towards democracy and modernity, all the while rejecting any “mature” or independent divergences from U.S. paternal guidance.

And yet, I think Oe’s textual conscience attempts, and succeeds in, sounding out the individual heart, one’s own responsibility and agency both despite and within such a distorted world, precisely because he leaves us as readers with a wound rather than simple innocence to ponder at the end of his novel. And actually, this wound is foreshadowed earlier in the story when, on his way with his father to the “town” to report the pilot’s capture, the boy glances at the black soldier’s holding cell below his family’s home: “I stole a look at the cellar skylight yawning blackly open like a wound and I was gripped by terrific fear. The black soldier’s arm reaches through the skylight and extends to seize me” (Nathan 128). In a fantasy of a black wound (*kuroguro to kizu no yo ni*, 97) overlapping with the image of a place for receiving light, the boy’s fear of that place of darkness and what it holds foreshadows the last pages when the pilot seizes the boy. At the same time, the revelation of what that darkness holds implies a coming enlightenment or growth for the boy. Even more accurately, perhaps we can say that the boy’s fantasy here reveals a wound that pre-exists his physical wounding by his father and the death of the black soldier: the boy’s fear and sense of humiliated impotence is the wound of his excluded and despised social class, a humiliation he expresses time and again as an infection, a disease that is contagious between adults and children (106, 115).

Oe’s Japanese *buraku* / *burakku* / black Huck Finn²⁰ and minstrelized black captive pilot deromanticizes Twain’s Huck and Jim in order to insist on the pain of individual responsibility and complicity in Japan’s inhumane treatment of its own people; moreover, the black pilot as Twain’s Jim, appropriated and then murdered in Oe’s version, also unmasks a peculiar dark mimicry in Japan, one that exposes the deeply disturbing, even blinding “innocence” of shared racial or national identifications caught up in larger forces of representational Othering, war, and racism. New questions arise: If the black American pilot is a scapegoat, whose sins does he bear away in his sacrificial murder? If

the boy protagonist suffers a castrating wound, what new illusion of plentitude must now mask his loss? If Japan has to date consolidated its homogeneous identity at the expense of its minority groups, what happens when *burakumin* and Others take the center and look both inward and outward from Japan’s place in the world to locate and represent themselves? Will those be sutured-over representations of themselves *as Japanese* or will their identities emerge from some other location?

Oe’s festering wound describes a modern world — particularly that of Japan’s domestic differential relations in dialogue with the “infantilizing” one of U.S.-Japan relations — made up of modern subjectivities, one which the early Oe had viewed existentially but which Twain much earlier had described in terms of the state’s “lies of silent assertion.”²¹ With this turn of phrase, Twain virtually defines “hegemony” in Gramscian²² terms, noting the power of the state and its leaders to function as the truth, with little need of representations thanks to an effective manipulation of the invisible, silent ideology in which we as individuals recognize ourselves, our coherent humanity, our national belonging, and therefore to which we consent; that is, we “innocent” individuals become complicit in the unspoken lies of the state because those very “pet” fictions make up a large part of who we think we are, and going against them would threaten our own identities. Sounding out the individual voice raised against such great communal and mendacious silences, Mark Twain and Oe Kenzaburo try to discern, then write out of, that darkness in which we sit, dangerously innocent and often blind to our mingled — repetitively wounding — histories in world literature.

Notes

¹ Many key Twain texts and other primary documents, cartoons, and essays related to the Philippine-American War and imperialism in Africa are collected on Jim Zwick’s website, invaluable for researchers living overseas or on small islands in the Pacific where library collections may be meager. See <http://www.boondocksnet.com/twaintexts.html>.

² For fascinating discussions of Philippine-American political and cultural ties and conflicts, as well as Philippine-Japanese relationships, see Rafael. See Shaw and Francia, eds., for essays on the Philippine-American War, U.S. imperialism in Asia, and Guam.

³ Mark Twain, "To the Person Sitting in Darkness." On Zwick's website and in his work, *Mark Twain's Weapons of Satire: Anti-Imperialist Writings on the Philippine-American War*.

⁴ It has long been recognized that Twain biographer Albert Bigelow Payne, editor of the first authorized editions of Twain's collected works, censored and edited Twain's life and work to a degree unacceptable to contemporary scholars and readers; however, for his own contemporaries, including the Clemens family, such editing was not particularly out of the ordinary. The "authoritative" version of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* was published by the Twain Project at UC Berkeley first in 2001 based on the amazing 1990 discovery in a Los Angeles attic of some 663 missing manuscript pages. Another fascinating story of revised editing of Twain's work is L. Terry Oggel's critical text of "The United States of Lyncherdom," which provides insight into Twain's views of slavery. Besides Oggel's *Prospects* article, at BoondocksNet.com Jim Zwick's interview with Oggel on the restoration of this text explores the problems of Payne's willful censoring of Twain's political satires, among other writings, revealing how recoveries of original Twain texts continue to shape contemporary reading experiences of Twain in new ways.

⁵ In Twain's notebook #35, and reprinted in the 2003 University of California edition of *Huck Finn*. See also the seminal essay that analyzes the defeat of conscience by Henry Nash Smith, "A Sound Heart and a Deformed Conscience." Also see Oe Kenzaburo's essay "Huckleberry Finn and the Problem of the Hero."

⁶ John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1999.

⁷ Sakai, Naoki, "Modernity and Its Critique: The Problem of Universalism and Particularism." See also Harry Harootunian's essay "America's Japan / Japan's America."

⁸ Russell, 46-55.

⁹ See George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*, especially Chapter 9, "Frantic to Join...the Japanese Army": Beyond the Black-White Binary."

¹⁰ For a fascinating account of being black and the reception of blackness in Japan while trying to make sense of its popular culture valorization of African Americans, see Joe Wood's "The Yellow Negro." As his title suggests, Wood argues that contemporary Japan's love affair with black American culture is similar to 1950s white America's,

a disturbing blend of both blackface minstrelsy and what Norman Mailer in his 1957 essay called “The White Negro.” In the latter, Mailer argued that the Beats recognized white culture needed the revitalization of its more primitive and repressed aspects that black culture, never quite so “civilized,” offered. See also Sayoko Okada Yamashita’s “Ethnographic Report of an African American Student in Japan.”

¹¹ Russell, 58-71.

¹² The story has appeared in two collections under different titles and by different translators. The first story was entitled “*The Catch*” translated by John Bester while the second appeared as “Prize Stock” in *Teach Us to Outgrow Our Madness: Four Short Novels*, translated by John Nathan. The scene appears near the end of the novel, and in the Japanese original quite explicitly describes the black pilot as attempting to mount the sheep with the help of a boy called Harelip holding down the animal; he fails, which sends the children into hysterical laughter.

¹³ Translated first as “The Catch” and then as “Prize Stock,” both titles emphasize the black captive pilot over the villagers; moreover, the original Japanese title bluntly indicates the animality of the characters in terms of their basic physical and sexual needs, making the translation of the passage with the captive and the sheep even more crucial. It is no accident that this scene takes place at the turning point in the story, not only in the plot’s action but also in the boy’s emerging view of himself as a function of his “adult” racist reappraisal of the black man.

¹⁴ Frequently in the text the head of the village is called the *burakucho*, particularly in discussions with the representative Clerk from the town or on official business, as if the official title of the town leader (rather than the usual *soncho*) is more appropriate and respectful because this is an officially designated *buraku* village. That the boy and the narration most often use *mura* merely suggests, I would argue, that the boy uses the non-discriminatory language that he prefers, language that would not separate his village from any other village in Japan. Indeed, that the village is not made more explicitly *buraku* by emphasizing cattle rather than weasels, for example, merely emphasizes that the boy and his village are not, in essence, unlike other Japanese people or their villages and neither do they want to be treated as different.

¹⁵ The Buraku Liberation League prefers the term *hisabetsu buraku*, literally

“discriminated against buraku,” as part of its ongoing activist campaign to bring the plight of its people to popular consciousness as opposed to its current repressed and polite denial by the population at large. It is estimated that there are today a recognized one million *burakumin* in Japan but up to three million when passing and assimilation are taken into account, and some 6,000 or more *buraku* villages. Regarding *burakumin*, in English see Ian Neary’s “Burakumin in Contemporary Japan.” Neary details the modern political organization, social movements, and differences in meaning between *douwa* and *hisabetsu buraku*. For a *burakumin* writer’s work, see Eve Zimmerman’s translations of Nakagami Kenji’s fiction in *The Cape, and Other Stories from the Japanese Ghetto*. In Japanese, the monthly magazine *Buraku Kaiho* (Buraku Liberation) has a special expanded issue devoted to introducing and updating readers on the struggles of the *buraku* people in today’s Japan: *Buraku Kaiho / Jinken Nyumon 2004*. Michiko Niikuni Wilson analyzes Oe’s career and texts in detail, arguing that his work often treats marginalized people in Japanese society (American blacks, resident Koreans, Hiroshima *hibakusha*, and Okinawans, for example). Moreover, in her analysis of *The Silent Cry*, she notes that Oe brings together 1860 and 1960 as parallel moments in Japan’s modernity much as I suggest here that “Prize Stock” links Perry’s minstrel show and the U.S. Occupation legacies. See Tomotsune for an intriguing essay on *buraku* writer Nakagami Kenji, in which he argues that the pre-war and postwar identity politics of *burakumin* are different, with the latter revealing what Tomotsune calls “differentialist racism”: in short, Nakagami’s postwar vision of *buraku* identity is one that reinforces Japanese traditional national identity, even the emperor system itself, in insisting on its difference only within Japan and not from Japan/ese.

In Oshima Nagisa’s famous 1961 film version of Oe’s novella, the cremation pit does not open and close the story and coffins are used; the town is replaced by Tokyo so that the hierarchies within Japanese social structures are reduced to country and city; the adults control the narrative rather than the children; and besides the elimination of animal names for the Japanese characters, the words *mura* and *soncho* are used instead of *burakucho*.

¹⁶ I am indebted to Osaka’s Liberty and Human Rights Museum (*Osaka jinken hakubutsukan*) for its thorough historical exhibits and informative handouts on not only

hisabetsu burakumin but also other minority groups in Japan.

¹⁷ Japanese racist figuring of *burakumin* as having ugly black skin and smelling bad make for easy comparison to U.S. discrimination against American blacks in white society. Kenneth Strong in the “Introduction” to *The Broken Commandment* cites from De Vos and Wagatsuma’s *The Invisible Race* to point out that *eta* were deemed only 1/7 human (xi); needless to say, this evokes the 3/5 personhood status ascribed to African American slaves in the U.S. Constitution.

¹⁸ All translations are my own here.

¹⁹ Non-*burakumin* writer Shimazaki Toson’s famous novel, *The Broken Commandment* (*Hakai*), has a notable scene that describes the killing of the bull that killed the *burakumin* protagonist’s father. It is hit in the head with an ax in a manner strikingly similar to the murder of the pilot in Oe’s story, which highlights the intriguing aspects of Eto Jun’s review of the novel as well.

²⁰ See Millie Creighton for analysis of color symbolism and racial hierarchies within Japan relying on the research of DeVos, Wagatsuma, Donoghue, and Thorton. Of particular significance is her discussion of the “blackness” associated with *hisabetsu burakumin* scapegoated as a site of defilement, or *kegare* (pollution), to preserve whiteness and purity for superior classes, including the emperor and mainstream Japanese (226-232).

²¹ Mark Twain, “My First Lie and How I Got Out of It.” On Jim Zwick’s website at <http://www.boondocksnet.com/twaintexts/myfirstlie.html>. 1995-2004. Accessed February 15, 2004. Originally in Mark Twain, *The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg and Other Stories and Sketches*, 1900.

²² The definitions of “hegemony” Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci gives in *The Prison Notebooks* stress the reciprocal and balancing relationship between force and consent by rulers over their people, arguing that traditional models of domination by force have been replaced by more effective means: intellectuals and cultural leaders and institutions in civil society play an important role in representing the state ideology as “common sense” to the oppressed who then cannot help but find their own best options in the status quo, thereby “consenting” to their own subordination.

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