

Superstition in adventures of huckleberry finn



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

According to Sommerstein, superstition is a behavioral trait which implies that certain actions influence the future behavior of an individual. It is usually attributed to magical occurrences (45). However, critics posit that there is no practical reason that explains superstition and it is based on religious misconceptions. In the novel *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, the author uses superstitions on numerous occasions. Mark Twain relies on this form of stylistic device in an attempt to attribute the whole episode to its traditional setting. Although superstition is claimed to be backward and outdated form of belief, the author exemplifies its significance in intertwining the old tradition and the new.

In the first chapter, the author shows how superstitions play a key role in shaping an individual's perception of life. Huck sees a spider creeping on his arm, and he immediately flicks it off making it land on the candle's flame. Such belief tries to invoke fear to the community. Huck believes that it is a bad omen, and he becomes restless. He wears rags to purify himself and performs the rituals of tying a thread round a lock of his hair in order to keep away the witches. " You do that when you've lost a horseshoe that you've found, instead of nailing it up over the door, but I hadn't ever heard anybody say it was any way to keep of bad luck when you'd killed a spider" (Twain 5). Indeed, it is quite hilarious how Huck believes in superstitions as he is hardly himself until he has performed the rituals; though it is just a spider accidentally dropped on the candle flame. The significance of the superstition is to show that the society is cocooned in traditions and superstitions so much that even an everyday occurrence leads to performing peculiar purification activities.

Superstition is vital as it shows the relationship between the past and present life. This is demonstrated when Huckleberry pounces on the salt-cellar in the wee hours of the morning. According to the traditional beliefs, turning over a salt-cellar in the morning is a sign of bad luck. In the past, Greeks believed that salt was a repository of life, and it was deemed sacred due to its food-preserving property. In addition, it was used when preparing sacrifices to be offered to supernatural beings. Therefore, spilling the salt was a bad omen and signified danger in a relationship. Averting the bad luck is done by throwing the cellar containing the salt over one's left shoulder. However, when Huck wants to throw it, Miss Watson interrupts him. Huck believed that something terrible will befall him in the course of the day, in the form of either an accident or any other misfortune.

Consequently, superstition aims at providing an insight on the traditional beliefs in the society. A scenario where this is depicted is in Chapter X, where Jim says, " You said it was the worst bad luck in the world to touch a snakeskin in my hands" (Chapter 10). In the contemporary society, touching the skin of a snake was a bad omen, and people believed that it is attributed to misfortunes. Ideally, people used to believe that nobody was allowed to touch a snake, as it possessed nothing. Therefore, if you touched the snake then you would ultimately have nothing. Jim goes on to kill a snake when he was looking for tobacco. Unfortunately, at night, Jim is bitten by the snake's mate after Huck placed the dead snake on his feet. Huck says, " I made up my mind I wouldn't ever take a-holt of a snake-skin again with my hands, now I see what had come of it" (Twain 52). He goes on to say that, " Anybody that haven't believe yet, that it's foolishness to handle a snake-

skin, after all that that snake-skin done for us, will believe it now, if they read on and see what more it done for us” (Chapter 16). In averting the unfortunate incidence, Huck instructs Jim to undertake some rituals—the same way the traditional setting undertook their rituals.

The traditional beliefs are also demonstrated by Jim when he believes that when a brood of chickens goes out of a certain place, and one catches a chicken, one will die. Although this superstition is more of fiction than truth, it is believed that Jim’s father died because he caught one of them. His father had fallen sick and the grandmother speculated that he would not live long. This was because he had caught a bird when the lightning stroke. It is not logical to believe that his father died just because of this. In fact, the father might have eaten the raw chicken, or the chicken might have been infected. However, Jim could not be convinced of what killed his father after he had experienced the power of superstition having been bitten by a snake.

In addition, other superstitious believes are demonstrated in Chapter VIII, when Jim says “.... you mustn’t count the things you are going to cook for dinner, because that would bring bad luck” (Chapter 8). Jim believes that counting the ingredients while cooking lunch or dinner would bring bad luck to the family. Counting of food ingredients might cause stomach upset in those who consume the food. Women are not advised to count the foodstuffs, but cook what is available instead. The same misconception is also applicable when one shakes the tablecloth immediately after sunset. It implies that the family is chasing ancestral spirits that bring good luck to the family. Jim also believes that when a man owning beehives dies, people should inform the bees before the dawn. If they fail to do so, the bees will

migrate from the man's beehives. These fictional superstitions never come true in the real life. In my opinion, Jim's belief in these superstitions may be attributed to the lack of knowledge and understanding of the environment. In addition, the reason why he believes in these fatuous superstitions is his first-hand experience of superstition. The author's intention is to demonstrate how one's experience can impose some misconception on the way they understand and believe in some concepts.

Summary and Conclusion

In conclusion, the novel navigates across all forms of superstition that are popular in the society. It analyzes how Jim is engulfed in a cocoon of superstitions. He believes in the bad luck that is caused by a candle flame burning a spider, spilling salt and touching snake's skin among others. Although the current society is not inclined to some of these beliefs, the author challenges the society to embrace change.