Revue de Traduction et Langues Volume 15 Numéro 02/2016, pp. 64-68
Journal of Translation and Languages **مجلة الترجمة واللغات**
ISSN (Print): 1112-3974 **EISSN (Online): 2600-6235**

Unveiling the Huge Yearning for Generating: An Authentically American Literary Production

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To cite this paper:
Rentokil, S. (2016). Unveiling the Huge Yearning for Generating an Authentically American Literary Production. *Revue Traduction et Langues 15(2),* 64-68.

Abstract: *No wonder, every country strives for uniqueness and authenticity in what comes to its literary production. This paper involves exploring the way some American writers imitated and reproduced the European literary tradition for a long time and how they endeavoured tires sly to give birth to an original unique American literature. After following the Europeans for such a long time, some gifted American literary figures had a Strong yen for unique national American literary tradition. Needless to say that American literature passed through an eventful journey, thus it should possess European-like and authentic American literary products. To what extent can we say that some American literature was, at a particular period of time, nothing but an imitation of the European literary tradition?*
Key words*: imitation, authentic, American, national, tradition, original, literature.*
Résumé *: Sans aucun doute, chaque pays s'efforce pour l'unicité et l'authenticité en ce qui concerne sa production littéraire. Cet article consiste à explorer la façon dont certains écrivains américains ont imité et reproduit la tradition littéraire européenne pendant une longue période et comment ils ont œuvré sans relâche pour une littérature américaine originale et unique. En suivant l'exemple Européens pendant si longtemps, certaines personnalités littéraires américaines ont eu un Yen fort pour la tradition littéraire nationale américaine unique. Inutile de dire que la littérature* ***américaine a traversé un voyage mouvementé, pour enfin un produit littéraire*** *américain authentique. Ainsi, Jusqu'à quel point peut-on dire qu'une littérature américaine n'a été, à une époque donnée, qu'une imitation de la tradition littéraire européenne ?*
Mots clés : *imitation, authentique, américain, national, tradition, original, littérature.*

Before deepening the explanation for this current issue, one should gear the flow of ideas to the journey which American literature passed through. As it is known worldwide, groups of European people, among which there were the puritans, rushed to the New World which they believed was the Arcadia. In other words, they believe that this holy land is the land of opportunities. Most of the themes of their writings were about this new land, about nature, wilderness, and religion holds the lion's share in their writings. Actually they considered it as the Promised Land and themselves as the elected people.

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Almost all the ideas that they came with from Europe had a strict connection with the Bible. Among these themes, there is the theme of sin, the sacred land (New Eden), and redemption. If one is about to present some examples of writings about the new land and the plantations, the following works are among the best: Thomas Harriot wrote *A Brief and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia* (1588), in which he describes what he saw. George Percy wrote *Discourse on the Plantation* (1607), William Bradford's *of Plymouth Plantation* (1630-1650) which accounts as *Good News from New England* (1624) by Edward Winslow had helped Bradford to write it. John Winthrop wrote a number of journals which were later published as *History of New England from 1630 to 1649* (1825-1826).

With regard to the religious writings, John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* (1563) and Cotton Mather's *The Wonders of the Invisible World* (1693), in which he recorded the events of the witch trials, are examples of writings which have to do with religious themes. Those people wrote about those themes and afterwards generations of American people, particularly some writers, kept on writing about the themes which the first Europeans brought, chiefly the writers in the Transcendentalism Movement which itself is an American version of the European Romanticism; that is, it is nothing but an imitation, indeed. At that time the Americans' writings were nothing but an imitation of the Europeans' literary tradition. Among those writers, one may cite Nathaniel Hawthorne of the *Scarlet letter (*1830), Ralph Waldo Emerson who wrote *Nature* (1836), and Henry David Thoreau, the author of *Walden* (1854). The themes of sin and nature continued to exist at that time, and the cited pieces of works are a good testimony.

The other sphere in which the Americans reproduced the European tradition is that of the historical novels. It is widely known that Sir Walter Scott, the great British writer, is the one who established this genre. The Americans imitated this genre, as well, and the American literary figure which was renowned in this genre is James Fennimore Cooper with his work *History of the Navy of the United States of America* (1839). Moreover, this foremost writer wrote *Precaution* (1820) in which he emulated the British writer Jane Austen. Thus, an analyst can settle with the idea that some American writers did reproduce the Europeans in the literary terrain incalculably in fact, there was a growing consensus that most of the American literary writings were nothing but an imitation of European literature. This imitation was done consciously. Subsequently, there was a constant passion for a real American work. Noah Webster, the Lexicographer, was unremittingly calling for a unique American literature.

Some American authors did help the American literature to be unique. Mark Twain, whose real name is Samuel Langhorne Clemens, had enough audacity and courage to do so. In Gary Scharnhorst's essay "The maturation of American Fiction", he states that Ralph Waldo Emerson "announced that the Americans" have imitated the Europeans for such a long time, and he [Twain] "called" for different original national culture[1]. In 1941, his book (*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*) was called by V. S. Pritchett "America's first truly indigenous masterpiece"[2].

[1] Gary Scharnhorst, "The Maturation of American Fiction", in *A Companion to American Literature and Culture*, ed. Paul Later, pp. 364-376, (United Kingdom: Wiley-Blackwell, A John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, Publication, 2010), p. 364.

[2] R. Kent Rasmussen, op. cité., p. 199.

By means of employing the authentic American elements in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Twain succeeded in generating a work which is continually referred to as an original American novel. He used a genuine language, an original American setting, and authentic American themes. In this way, he could depart from the European form of writing. One has to bear in mind that it was quite a difficult challenge and risk for him to take that step and depart from the commonly known European literary tradition. He departed from the generally agreed language of writing literature as well. Using his unique and noteworthy techniques, he could reach his ambitions.

As it is known in the literary field, Twain is considered as a regional writer. The regional movement is often linked to what is original. The writers, Hélène Christo and Sylvie Math aver: "...it [the regional movement] was crucial in 'seize[in] and perpetuate[in]... the American cultural landscape' of this fifty year span of American history and helped its most gifted son, Samuel Clemens, become the nationally and internationally famous Mark Twain."[3] In his work, Twain reflected the genuine American landscape; hence, he created originality within the novel. Bliss Perry noticed a point which is extremely important concerning Mark Twain's writings and some other writers' works. The following lines show this:

> Canadian and Australian literatures have indigenous qualities of their own, but typically they belong to the colonial literature of Great Britain. This can scarcely be said of the writings of Franklin and Jefferson, and it certainly cannot be said of the writings of Cooper, Hawthorne, Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, Lowell, Lincoln, Mark Twain, and Mr. Howells. In the pages of these men and of hundreds of others less distinguished, there is a revelation of a new national type.[4]

In these lines, Perry endorses the fact that Twain's writings, undoubtedly, including *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and many other authors' writings, reveal the sense of a national work. Yet David F. Burg transcends this fact and reveals the fact that "the *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is not simply the first genuinely American novel, as Hemingway, Mencken, and Faulkner acknowledged it to be, but it is the first truly modern novel written by an American…and his story is the prototype of the American novel of black humor."[5] Patricia M. Mania defines black humor as "fiction that is simultaneously comic and sad."[6] Undeniably, it is the book that has lasted for years, and it is classified as one of the best world books of adventure. Besides, one can put a great deal of emphasis on the critic Lionel Trilling who referred to it, as well, as "one of the world's great books and one of the central documents of American literature."[7]

[3] Hélène Christo, Sylvie Mathé, op. cité. , p. 30.

[4] Bliss Perry, *The American Spirit in Literature: A Chronicle of Great Interpreters,* ed. Allen Johnson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1918), p. 265.

[5] David F. Burg, "Another View of Huckleberry Finn", p. 319.

[6] Patricia M. Mania, *Comic Pathos: black humor in Twain's fiction* (Jefferson, North Carolina, London: McFarland, 1991), vii.

[7] R. Kent Rasmussen, op. cité. , p. 199.

Conversely, there were other writers that attempted to create original American writings. Their literary productions reflect American themes and American issues. After imitating the Europeans, it was high time for James Fennimore Cooper to produce a work that reveals American themes. The work that can be called American is the series of *Leather-Stocking Tales.* This latter is made up of five books among which *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826) is very well-known. Indeed, this book, along with the other four books, conveys vivid images about the frontier life and the real American settings. In addition, Willa Cather, one of the outstanding American novelists, tried to portray the American life in the frontiers. She provides the reader with real images about the American landscape, and works as *O Pioneers!* (1913), *The Song of the Lark* (1915) and *My Antonia* (1918) can be good examples.

Edgar Allan Poe, one of the great American literary figures and one of the writers of the Romantic Movement, permitted America to have its unique literary tradition. He initiated the short story genre which; then, became one of the authentic American literary traditions. Also, he is the creator of the detective story genre. In short, he offered the American literature the opportunity to deviate from the European literary tradition.

Following this overview of originality and reproduction in the American literature, one ends up with more or less a clear view of the journey in which American literature witnessed a wave of imitation and; then, an obvious transference and movement toward authenticity. Moreover, the reader realizes that *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is one of the significant authentic American books, and, consequently, "America sees him [Mark Twain], with real affection, as the first of her writers to draw from the American soil the material for an original and lasting work."[8] Ernest Hemingway, along with Mencken, deems Twain's book as the first American novel, and Hemingway said overtly: "all modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*... But it's the best book we've had."[9] With his writings, and especially in this book of escapade, Twain offered his nation a truly American literature.

Following this point, one has to confirm the fact that this book had an impact on their writings, and one of these great writers is Ernest Hemingway. Henry Nash Smith endorses this point by stating: "American literature of the twentieth century owes a substantial debt to the author of *Huckleberry Finn*. Writers as different from one another as Sherwood Anderson and Ernest Hemingway have acknowledged the influence of this book on their prose"[10]. In 1915, Fred Lewis Pattie, the literary historian, recognized Mark Twain as the "original creator" of an accurately "national American literature"[11]. Ernest Hemingway also approves this point.

No wonder, the American writers imitated the European literary tradition for such a long time; however, they witnessed a period when there was a great passion for a real and

[8] Maurice Le Breton. "Mark Twain: An Appreciation", In *Mark Twain: A Collection of Critical Essays*, Henry Nash Smith, pp. 29-39, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall, INC, 1963), p. 39.

[9] Ernest Hemingway, *The Green Hills of Africa* (New York: Scribner's, 1935), p. 22.

[10] Quoted in Harry Hayden Clark, "Mark Twain", in *Eight American Authors*: *A review of research and criticism*, ed. James Woo dress, p. 319.

[11] Evan Carton, "Mark Twain and Literary Performance", in *A Cambridge Companion to Mark Twain*, ed. Forrest G. Robinson, pp. 153-173, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p 155.

a unique American literature, and as it is previously stated the lexicographer Noah Webster was one of the persons who called for that. Gradually, the American literature was stepping toward an independent and a distinctive tradition. For example, Cooper was reproducing the Europeans' writings; then, he deviated to the distinctive American literary productions. Twain's constant love for unconventionality and authenticity permitted him to produce literary pieces of work that are known for their originality and Americanos. In *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Twain was daring and audacious to depart from the Europeans' themes and wrote about authentic American themes. Furthermore, these American issues are written in genuinely American vernacular, also in an original setting (the Mississippi River). Notwithstanding, the presence of the key elements such as the American predicament, the frontier life, the American humor, and the real characters cannot be overlooked. They are used as tools for generating the authenticity.

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