The Moral Progression Of Huckleberry Finn Essay, Research Paper

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The main character of Mark Twain?s Huckleberry Finn undergoes a total moral

transformation upon having to make life defining decisions throughout his journey for a new

life. Huck emerges into the novel with an inferiority complex caused by living with a drunken

and abusive father, and with the absence of any direction. It is at this point where Huck is first

seen without any concept of morality. Fortunately, Huck is later assisted by the guidance of

Jim, a runaway slave who joins him on his journey and helps Huck gain his own sense of

morality. Throughout Huck?s adventures, he is put into numerous situations where he must

look within himself and use his own judgement to make fundamental decisions that will effect

the morals of which Huck will carry with him throughout his life.

Preceding the start of the novel, Miss Watson and the widow have been granted

custody of Huck, an uncivilized boy who possesses no morals. Huck looks up to a boy named

Tom Sawyer who has decided he is going to start a gang. In order for one to become a

member, they must consent to the murdering of their families if they break the rules of the

gang. It was at this time that one of the boys realized that Huck did not have a real family.

They talked it over, and they was going to rule me out, because they said every

boy must have a family or something to kill, or else it wouldn?t be fair and square

for the others. Well, nobody could think of anything to do? everybody was

stumped, and set still. I was most ready to cry; but all at once I thought of a

way, and so I offered them Miss Watson?they could kill her (17-18).

At this moment, Huck is at the peak of his immorality. A person with morals would not willingly

sacrifice the life of someone else just in order to be part of a gang. It is at this point where

Huck can now begin his journey of moral progression.

Huck encounters his first major dilemma when he comes across the wrecked

steamboat and three criminals. When Jim and Huck take the skiff for themselves, leaving the

three robbers stranded, Huck realizes that he has left them to die.

Now was the first time that I begun to worry about the men? I reckon I hadn?t

time to before. I begun to think how dreadful it was, even for murderers, to be in

such a fix. I says to myself, there ain?t no telling but I might come to be a

murderer myself yet, and then how would I like it? (76).

This is the first time that Huck questions the effects of what he has done on other people.

After he realizes that he could now be considered a murderer, he makes a plan to get a

captain to go investigate the wreck in order to save the men?s lives. Even though the men he

would be saving are murderers and robbers, he can not justify being responsible for their

death, and makes it a point to correct what he has done wrong. This is the first major step in

Huck?s moral progression. At that point, he establishes a set of standards that considers

leaving the men to die as immoral.

Throughout the book there is the recurring theme of Friend v. Society. This is a main

moral decision that Huck is forced to make a few times in his journey. Upon arriving at Cairo,

Huck must decide if he should go along with society and turn Jim in as a runaway slave, or

keep his promise to his friend, and see him through to freedom. Huck feels guilty not turning

Jim in when he hears him talking about hiring an abolitionist to steal his family. He does not

think it is right to help take away slaves from people that he doesn?t even know. To turn Jim in

for these reasons would be the influence of society on Huck. Huck?s decision on this matter

marks another major step in Huck?s moral progression, because he decides not to turn in Jim

on his own. This is the first time he makes a decision all on his own based on his own

morality. Both this incident and the Wilkes Scheme represent Huck?s ultimate realization and

rejection of society. To encapsulate Huck?s total moral progression through his decision to

help Jim, Huck states, ?I?ll go to hell? (207) to see Jim into freedom.

Huck?s moral progression can be traced throughout the book beginning from his total

lack of morals to being able to make the right decisions on his own. It is only with the help of

Jim as a moral guide that Huck is able to undergo this moral transformation to use his own

judgement and truly progress. The situation that Huck is encountered with about choosing

friend over society is the main dilemma that pushes Huck to establish his own standards of

morality, rather than accepting those that society has set forth.