

Huckleberry finn as a picaresque hero

Literature, American Literature



Picaresque — what a scary word. What can it mean? By definition, the word picaresque is an adjective, which describe a genre of prose fiction that depicts in realistic, often amusing detail about the adventures of a roguish hero of low social degree living by his or her wits in a lower class society. Within these novels, a picaresque hero is often a pragmatist that undergoes little or no psychological changes (Websters 449). But, in order to fully understand this definition one must be familiarized with a roguish hero. A roguish hero is a deceitful, undisciplined, playful, and mischievous character. After understanding these definitions it can be seen that Huck Finn from Mark Twains novel Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is a picaresque hero. The novel is told through Huckleberry Finns point of view and in his dialect. This gives the story a somewhat humorous tone, and inside look into Hucks mind. He is not educated very much and is from a lower class. Other examples of how he meets the criteria of a picaresque character is that he uses his own common sense while on his adventure, displays numerous dishonest actions, and by the conclusion of the story it is obvious that he has experienced few psychological changes. Throughout his adventure, Huck uses his own wit and common sense to get him through each day. For example, the very beginning of his adventure starts with Hucks personal tactics. He faked his own death by killing a pig and using its blood to make it seem like his own, smashed the door in with an axe and left a trail like a dead body had been dragged into the river (Twain 39-41). By doing this, he was successful at tricking all the town people into thinking that he had been murdered. These actions were not a set out plan for him; he used his own common sense and plotted his own death. Another portrayal of the way Huck uses his wit is

when he was hiding in the trees, and used a stick in order to get the bread from the river (46-47). Jim, who was also hiding at the time, did not get bread because he feared being seen (54). But, Hucks common sense allowed him to get the bread. Another illustration of his own use of reasoning is when he gets lost in the storm. Although he is scared because he cannot see through the fog and there are many snags, by morning he makes it safely out (100-102). These examples show how Huck meets the criteria of a picaresque character by using his own wit. Another characteristic of a picaresque character is one that uses dishonest actions. This can be seen in Huck several times within the novel. He lies many times in order to get his way. Faking his own death is substantial evidence for this. Also, when he went to St. Petersburg dressed as a girl and spoke with the woman, he lied to her and told her his name is Sara Williams. He tells her that he lives in "Hookerville, seven miles below. Ive walked all the way and Im all tired out," he says (68). He does this in order to get information on his death and what was going on as a result of it. Huck lies like this in order to get his way several times throughout the novel. Another example of his deceitful manners is when he lies to Jim about the storm. Jim had fallen asleep during the storm, and Huck tells him that it was all a dream (103-102). Huckleberrys untruthful actions fit the categorization of a picaresque hero. A picaresque character undergoes little or no psychological changes. However, the idea that Huck Finn did not undergo psychological changes is somewhat controversial. One can argue that Huck is not a picaresque hero because he or she believes that Hucks view of colored people had changed. However, this is not the case. From the beginning of the story, Huck displays actions

relating to the fact that he is aware that Jim is human. For example, he often speaks with Jim about various topics and respects Jim's authority when Jim tells him that his hairball was psychic (21). Throughout the story, he questions the idea of Jim's humanity, but by the end he sees Jim as more of a human and not much different than the whites. It is obvious, however, that this doubt of Jim's humanity was placed in Huck's mind as a result of societal norms. The society that he lived in was one that degraded colored people through slavery. But, Huck always slightly felt compelled to believe that Jim was human. So, Huck fully realizing that Jim is a human is not much of a change at all. Another debatable issue relating to this topic is the scene where he tells Mary Jane the truth about himself, the King, and the Duke (238-239). It can be argued that, at this point, Huck changed and stopped lying. However, this is not true either. The only reason he told Mary Jane the truth was because he liked her. Also, in the following scenes, Huck goes to Aunt Sally's and pretends to be Tom Sawyer (277). Therefore, he is lying again. Also, it is most probable that Huck will continue being deceitful in his future adventures. One thing that makes it obvious that Huck did not change in the end is the fact that he announces that Aunt Sally wants to adopt him. But, he says that he will continue on his adventures west because he did not like the civilized way of life. The points prove that Huck is picaresque in the sense that he did not undergo many changes psychologically. The idea of a picaresque hero is a character that is a pragmatist, that uses his own wit, is deceitful, and mischievous, is a very suitable definition of Huck's character. He displays many of these traits throughout the entire story. His street-smart, practical, and dishonest character did not experience many changes

by the end. Huckleberry Finn is a picaresque character. He will most likely continue his future adventures in the same roguish manner. Works Cited Twain, Mark. Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. Los Angeles: University of California Press. 2001. Websters Dictionary. New York: Shooting Star Press. 1995.