

Realism versus romanticism in huck finn



**ASSIGN
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Huck Rejects Romanticism In every man's life he faces a time that defines his maturation from boyhood to manhood. This usually comes from a struggle that the boy faces in his life. In Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Huck's defining moment of maturity is Huck's struggle with Tom in helping Jim escape. Tom sends Huck and Jim through a wild adventure to free Jim because of his Romantic thinking. Tom represents society and its Romantic ideals while Huck struggles to break away from these and become his own realist individual.

These Romantic ideas lead Huck into many dangerous situations that pit Huck and Jim as Realist individuals versus a society infused with Romantic ideals. Huck first begins to realize that he and Tom have different viewpoints before he leaves St. Petersburg. Huck joins Tom's gang of robbers, which Tom creates because of the Romantic types of books he reads. Huck originally is excited about joining the gang and contributing in its activities. He changes his mind though once Tom tricks them into thinking they are robbing "Spaniards and A-Rabs" (Twain 13) which turned out to be just a school picnic.

This is Huck's first moment where he begins to realize that maybe Tom's Romantic ideas are flawed. Huck tries to confront Tom on his adventures, but Tom defends his stance by saying it was in a book he read (Twain 13). This shows that Tom believes that because something is in a book it must be true ("The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn"). Huck does not necessarily see how this could be true. At the end of the chapter he says, "So then I judged that all that stuff was only just one of Tom Sawyer's lies" (Twain 14). This shows

how Huck is beginning to realize that Tom's Romantic ways are not as good as Tom thinks they are.

Huck tries to reason why Tom would believe in this stuff but cannot convince Tom he is wrong because what Tom believes is in books. Tom is able to return any of Huck's arguments by saying what he believes is true because society accepts it as truth. This part of the novel introduces the reader to the conflict between Huck's Realist ideals versus Tom's Romantic beliefs. Huck ends up getting himself and Jim into a lot of trouble with a group of robbers because of the influence of Tom's Romantic ideals. When Huck first encounters the robbers he is excited and wishes Tom was with him because this was something he would like (Twain 67).

In this part of the novel Huck represents the Romantic ideals because he is the one going out and looking for adventure, while Jim represents the realist because he does not see what good could come out of the situation. Huck convinces Jim to go along with him because he uses the Romanticized adventures of Christopher Columbus (Twain 67). Huck soon realizes though that this adventure gets a lot more real when he encounters the murders. When he realizes that they are real killers, Huck reconsiders the greatness of the adventure. He becomes scared once he realizes the dangers that the adventure presents.

Once Huck slips away from the murderers, he says, " Shut up on a wreck with such a gang as that! But it warn't no time to be sentimenting" (Twain 70). This shows how Huck's change of mindset from having beliefs influenced by a Romantic society into the realist idea of the dangers of the

adventure. This shows how Huck has changed and realizes the dangers this Romantic adventure could bring. Huck gets him and Jim into this dangerous situation because of the Romantic beliefs of Tom and society. Huck begins to change into a Realist after he encounters the murderers.

Huck and Tom are thinking up plans to find out where Jim is and this is when Tom begins to influence Huck with his Romantic ideals again. Huck came up with a good and safe plan to find out where Jim was. Tom, though, cannot go along with it because he thought it was too simple (Twain 232). His Romantic ideals lead him to think that to have a good plan, it had to be difficult and dangerous. His response to Huck's plan is, " Why, cert'nly it would work, like rats a-fighting. But it's too blame' simple; there ain't nothing to it. What's the good of a plan that ain't no nothing to it" (Twain 232)?

This shows how Tom's Romantic thinking will get Huck and him into trouble. Tom knows that Huck's plan would work but he is more concerned with the troubles that come along with the plan. This is influenced by literature's Romantic ideas. Huck realizes that Tom's plan is going to be trouble and more complex than his when he says, "...[A]nd I see in a minute it was worth fifteen of mine for style, and would make Jim just as free a man as mine would, and maybe get us all killed besides" (Twain 233). There is no reason for Huck and Tom to make a more elaborate plan because Huck's plan would work fine.

Huck even realizes this, but Huck just has his thinking to back up his idea. While Tom has read all these books that would back up his thinking that the escape must be as complex as possible. Huck does not even question Tom's

plan because he feels Tom's plan is just as good as his. This shows how Huck is dwarfed by society's Romantic ideals and does not even want to try to attack these ideas. Huck and Tom start to look around the cabin Jim was in and they get into another discussion about the plan. Huck finds a simple and easy way to get Jim out but Tom cannot settle for the easy way out.

He says to Huck, " It's as simple as tit-tat-toe, three-in-a-row, and as easy as playing hooky. I should hope we can find a way that's a little more complicated than that, Huck Finn" (Twain 234). Tom cannot and will not settle for the easy way out. His Romantic thinking forces him to look for the adventure in any way he can find. Tom's thinking will eventually lead Huck and him into a lot of trouble. Huck comes up with another plan, which Tom approves of because it is more Romantic. Huck is beginning to understand what Tom is searching for. He does not even try and challenge Tom on his reason.

Huck is beginning to become accustomed to the Romantic ways of Tom and society. Huck and Tom start back towards the house but Tom has to make this into a Romantic adventure too. When they were walking back to the house Twain writes: Then we started for the house, and I went in the back door—you only have to pull a buckskin latch-string, they don't fasten the doors—but that warn't romantical enough for Tom Sawyer, no way would do him but he must climb up the lightning-rod (Twain 234-235) This passage of the book shows how Huck is coming to realize the ways of Tom.

He still though chooses the realist way. Huck shows how he is able to ignore the Romantic ideas and make his own decisions. His realizing of Tom's need

for Romantics will prove to be important later in the novel. This shows how Huck as a realist knows of the Romantic influences around him but is able to reject them and make the realist decision. Twain also shows the dangers of this Romantic thinking because Tom almost hits his head by trying to climb up the tree (Twain 235). This will foreshadow the troubles that Tom's Romantic thinking will bring him, Huck, and Jim later in the novel.

Tom and Huck go out to search for light to dig when Tom goes on a rant on how easy it will be to rescue Jim. He names off multiple things that are wrong with the escape such as no watchman, Uncle Silas trusting everyone, and the lack of restraints on Jim (Twain 237-238). These all show his Romantic thinking. The books that Tom referenced in the beginning of the novel have all these complexities to the plot. Tom lives in this fantasy world where he expects life to be like these novels but real life is not like that. Huck as a realist understands that, but goes along with Tom because Tom can cite these Romantic books.

During Tom's rant he says, ““ Anyhow, there's one thing—there's more honor in getting him out through a lot of difficulties and dangers,”” (Twain 238). This is a perfect example of the effect of Romanticism on Tom. He works towards this honorable state portrayed in the Romantic books. He believes that the more dangerous the adventure is the more honorable it is (Davis). Tom quest for honor will end up causing him a lot of pain. The Romantic influence on Tom causes him to make Jim's escape much harder and complex than it should be. After Tom's rant he comes up with this elaborate plan to tie Jim up to make it a tougher escape.

Huck does not understand his reason because Tom just said how easy it would be to get Jim out of his restrains. Tom's reply to Huck was, " Why, hain't you ever read any books at all? —Baron Trenck, nor Casanova, nor Benvenuto Chelleeny, nor Henri IV. , nor none of them heroes? Who ever heard of getting a prisoner loose in such an old-maidy way as that" (Twain 238)? Tom uses the stories of these Romantic heroes to try to convince Huck that they need to have a complex and difficult escape plan. This shows how Tom believes that these Romantic books and tales happen in real life.

His sense of reality is flawed because of these books he tries to convince Huck what the right way is (Davis). Huck is beginning to understand that just because these books have these ideas does not make them true. Huck is pushing away from society's Romantic ways and becoming his own individual with realistic ideas. Tom and Huck begin to argue over some of Tom's ideas to rescue Jim. Tom brings up the idea of having a rope ladder for Jim. He states all these reasons, which Huck does not really understand why Jim would need a rope ladder.

Tom again convinces Huck that Jim needs one because all the other Romantic heroes had one. Huck is still skeptical but goes along with it. Huck is still beginning to realize that just because these Romantic heroes have wild adventures does not mean people in real life go through similar adventures (Byrne). He also starts to realize the dangers that may come with these Romantic adventures because at one point he says to Tom, "' Tom Sawyer—if we go to tearing up our sheets to make Jim a rope ladder, we're going to get into trouble with Aunt Sally, just as sure as you're born" (Twain 240).

Huck realizing the problems Tom's Romantic adventures is huge in Huck's development as a realistic individual. The quicker Huck realizes the dangers of Romantic thinking the safer his life will be. Huck starts to question Tom more and more on his Romantic ideas because he realizes Romantic thinking may not always lead to good. He again approaches Tom on this when they are talking about how to dig out Jim. Within their dialogue Huck challenges Tom twice about why they need to have these complex ways of rescue Jim. Huck is beginning to evolve into a realist because he is becoming able to reject society's Romantic influences.

Tom even cites the Romantic novels in his argument when he says, ““ And there ain't no other way, that ever I heard of, and I've read all the books that gives any information about these things”” (Twain 243). Even though Huck ends up going along with Tom's plan he still shows that he is changing into a realist. Tom cites the Romantic novels but that is not what sells Huck on Tom's plan. Huck is more focused on Jim being free and does not really care how he is freed. Huck again shows that he is not going to allow the Romantic novels and their ideas affect his way of life.

Huck is starting to shy away from Tom's adventurous ways of accomplishing tasks. All Huck cares about is the final product. Huck's influence on Tom can first be seen when Tom relents to using the picks to dig out Jim. Tom does not want to do this but realizes this is the only way to dig Jim out. Tom realizing the absurdity of using case-knives to dig out Jim shows how Huck's realistic thinking is changing Tom's thinking. Huck is formulating his own thoughts and this is the first instance where he really breaks away from Tom's beliefs.

He says to Tom, ““ When I start in to steal a nigger, or a watermelon, or a Sunday-school book, I ain’t no ways particular how it’s done so it’s done”” (Twain 245). Huck here is stating a core value of realism literature. In realism the character is more important than the plot while in romantic writing there is more focus placed on the plot than the development of the character. Huck is not allowing himself to be sucked in by Tom’s romantic way of thinking. He is making his own decisions and thoughts and breaking away from Tom’s influence on romantic ways.

Huck formulates his own ideas but he still cannot convince Tom. Huck begins to understand that no matter what he says or does will change Tom when they start to talk about Jim’s coat of arms. Tom insists on Jim having a coat of arms but Huck and Jim both agree that Jim does not need a coat of arms. Tom had to have the coat of arms because that is what all the romantic heroes he read about had. Tom chooses Huck and his motto but does not even know what it means all he knows is that it comes out of a book. Huck’s realist character causes him to want him to know what the motto means (Sawicki).

This shows the differences in Huck and Tom because Tom is content with believing it because it came out of a book but Huck needs to know what it means. Huck then tells the reader, “ That was just his way. If it didn’t suit him to explain a thing to you, he wouldn’t do it. You might pump at him a week, it wouldn’t make no difference” (Twain 258). Huck realizes that Tom will not explain his ideas because he cannot. He has nothing in reality to base his thoughts off. Tom just believes the stuff he does because he sees it in society but does not understand it.

Huck understands that there is little basis for Tom's thinking and Huck can actually explain his realistic thoughts. Not only is Huck sticking to his beliefs, he is also figuring out the problems with romantic thinking. Tom's quest for honor is led by his Romantic thinking. Tom tries to convince Jim why he needed to have snakes in his hut but Jim has no intentions of having snakes in his cabin. Tom has this unreal view of animals because he thinks Jim will just be able to tame the rattlesnakes (Twain 260). This thought again comes from the romantic society and the literature it produces.

Jim shares the same realistic views as Huck and shows this when he knows the idea of taming a snake is ridiculous. Tom does not care about the dangers though because he is so obsessed with the glory and honor of living with the snake. Tom tries to convince Jim by saying to him, "' A prisoner's got to have some kind of a dumb pet, and if a rattlesnake hain't ever been tried, why, there's more glory to be gained in your being the first to ever try it than any other way you could ever think to save your life'" (Twain 261). This shows Tom is so focused on achieving this honor that he would be willing to get hurt or killed to achieve it.

Tom's eagerness to achieve honor will come back to haunt him near end of the book. Jim is the realist in this scene and he realizes that doing something to achieve glory can be dangerous and stupid (" The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn"). Tom and Huck get into another debate over the reasons for having a warning letter to the citizens of the town. Tom feels the need to send a warning letter because that is what King Louis XVI did (Twain 266-267). Tom again is basing his reasoning off of romantic heroes that are glorified by society.

Huck though takes a much more realistic approach. He does not understand the reasoning of Tom. Huck sees no benefit in letting the people know who are trying catch them that they are stealing their runaway slave. Huck has pretty much completely broken away from Tom's romantic thinking and become his own realistic individual. He still goes along with Tom's plan because he is his friend and he trusts him. Huck still does not understand why they are doing what they are doing. Huck realizes what he is doing does not really make sense but does it because of his friendship with Tom.

He is still struggling to break away from Tom's ideas but he has almost fully involved into a full realist. Huck finally realizes the dangers of Tom's romantic thinking when he sees all the men waiting to stop him, Tom, and Jim from escaping. Huck describes the crowd as such, " My, but there was a crowd there! Fifteen farmers, and every one of them had a gun. I was most powerful sick, and slunk to a chair and set down" (Twain 271). Huck now realizes the dangers of Tom's thinking. He did not expect a whole crowd with guns trying to stop them when he first planned to rescue Jim.

He never wanted to get into all the adventures Tom wanted because of his realist thinking. He know sees how the culmination of Tom's little ideas into this dangerous situation they are now in. Tom though has a completely different approach towards the situation. He is excited with the thought of danger involved with the escape. Tom shows his excitement towards the situation when he says to Huck, "' No! —is that so? Ain't it bully! Why, Huck, if it was to do over again, I bet I could fetch two hundred dollars'" (Twain 273). Not only is Tom excited he loved the thought of having even more people there.

The Romantic influences on Tom have caused him to form this perception that going up against death is a great adventure and glorious thing. In reality though the situation Huck and Tom are in is very dangerous but Tom cannot realize that because of his romantic thinking. Huck finally breaks away from all the Romantic thinking after Tom Sawyer is shot. This scene shows the dangers of romantic thinking. Once they escape, Huck describes the situation as follows, “ We was all glad as we could be, but Tom was the gladdest of all because he had a bullet in the calf of his leg” (Twain 274).

Tom is glad to have been shot, even though it obviously puts him in a life-threatening situation. He is more concerned that the plan was full of glory and honor than that he was shot. He wants Huck and Jim to leave him because that is what they have to keep the escape honorable. Huck and Jim are fed up with following Tom’s romantic thinking and go and find him a doctor. Huck and Jim reject Tom’s idea because they know that they need to save Tom. They do not let society’s idea of honor affect their decision. They know what is right because they act as real humans would.

Twain shows how romantic thinking can lead to a person’s own demise.

Twain felt the Civil War was primarily caused by the South’s romantic lifestyle and society (Kearney). He uses Tom to represent this and all that was wrong with the Civil War. The Civil War was one of the deadliest wars in history and Twain feels that if the South would have been a more rational in its thinking, the Civil War would not have to have been as gruesome (Davis). If the readers of Huckleberry Finn can understand the dangers of romantic thinking, Twain hopes to stop the influence of Romanticism on American society.

Also Huck is able to make his own decisions and formulate his own unique thoughts. Twain is showing how people should not be afraid to go against society if they feel something is wrong. He tries to point out that just because something is accepted by society does not necessarily mean it is the right thing. Twain wants the readers to understand the dangers of Romanticism and to be able to reject the ways of society if they feel society is in the wrong. Mark Twain pits Huck Finn against Tom Sawyer to show the problems and troubles of Romantic thinking in society.

At the beginning Huck looks up to Tom and follows what he says no matter if Tom's reasoning makes sense. Throughout the novel Huck realizes though that Tom's thinking may not make that much sense. He believes Tom, though, because Tom uses the beliefs and literature of the society to convince him. At the end of the novel Huck is able to reject the Romantic ways of society and Tom to make the right moral decision. It was not easy as he had to go against all he had ever known. Huck rejecting the flawed thinking of society shows how he is becoming his own unique individual because he is not conforming to the ways of society.

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