

FRIENDSHIP AND MORALITY: INTERSECTING THEMES IN TWAIN'S NOVEL

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ABSTRACT

In Twain's novel, the themes of friendship and morality intersect to illuminate the complexities of human relationships and ethical dilemmas. Set against the backdrop of the Mississippi River, the story follows the adventures of two main characters, Huck Finn and Jim, as they navigate through the antebellum South. At its core, the novel reveals the evolving friendship between Huck, a white boy escaping his abusive father, and Jim, a runaway slave seeking freedom. Friendship emerges as a central theme, portraying the bond that develops between Huck and Jim despite the societal barriers that seek to divide them. Through their shared experiences and mutual trust, Twain places of interest the transformative power of genuine human connection, transcending racial and cultural divides. In contrast, Tom Sawyer's character embodies societal conventions and romanticized ideals. Tom's adherence to elaborate, often impractical schemes and his notions of heroism reflect a morality shaped by societal expectations rather than personal conviction. Through Tom, Twain critiques the hypocrisy and moral relativism inherent in conventional morality, showcasing the absurdity of blindly following social norms. The study employs a qualitative research methodology to analyze the intersection of friendship and morality. Textual analysis is the primary method used, examining key scenes, dialogues, and character interactions to uncover themes and moral dilemmas. Additionally, historical context analysis provides a deeper understanding of the social norms and racial subtleties influencing the characters' decisions and relationships.

Keywords: *Friendship, Morality, Mark Twain, Race relations, Ethical dilemmas.*

INTRODUCTION

Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is a quintessential American novel that represent themes of friendship and morality. Set in the pre-Civil War South, the novel follows the journey of Huck Finn, a young boy seeking freedom from societal constraints and moral ambiguity. Central to the narrative are Huck's relationships with Jim, a runaway slave, and Tom Sawyer, his adventurous friend. Through their experiences, the author reveals the complications of human relationships, the moral dilemmas inherent in a society divided by race and class, and the quest for personal integrity amidst social conventions.

Huck and Jim: Friendship Across Boundaries

At the heart of Twain's novel is the friendship between Huck and Jim, which transcends societal barriers. Huck, a white boy, forms an unlikely bond with Jim, a black slave, as they navigate the treacherous waters of the Mississippi River (Collins 1998). Their friendship defies the racial norms of the time and challenges Huck's ingrained prejudices. Through their shared experiences and mutual trust, Huck and Jim forge a deep connection rooted in empathy and understanding. Despite the risks involved, Huck chooses to stand by Jim, demonstrating loyalty and compassion in the face of societal condemnation. Initially, Huck embodies the societal values he has been taught, including the racist

attitudes prevalent in his community. His relationship with Jim begins on an unequal footing, as Huck views Jim through the lens of these biases. However, as they share experiences and hardships, Huck's perception of Jim evolves. The river becomes a space where societal rules and prejudices can be questioned and, at times, suspended. In this fluid environment, Huck and Jim's friendship grows from mere companionship to a profound connection based on mutual respect, trust, and empathy (Horn 2013).

Jim, on the other hand, emerges as a father figure to Huck, providing him with guidance, protection, and unconditional support. Their relationship subverts the traditional power dynamics of race and age, illustrating that true friendship can overcome deeply rooted societal divisions. Jim's humanity, dignity, and wisdom shine through, making him one of the most morally upright characters in the novel. His unwavering loyalty and care for Huck highlight the reciprocal nature of their friendship. Fiedler acknowledges that Mark Twain's depiction of Jim in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* deviates from the stereotypical portrayal of black men in American fiction. Typically, black characters are depicted as condescending and paternalistic figures who act as surrogate fathers to white children. However, Fiedler argues that Twain's portrayal of Jim is more nuanced and complex, preventing him from being reduced to a "stereotypical darkie." This complexity means Jim cannot be easily described as a substitute father. Instead, Fiedler suggests that Huck and Jim's relationship should be viewed within an earlier tradition of relationships that are more equal and loving, rather than the later sentimental tradition of "little children and big Africans. He states;

Sometimes he [Jim] seems more servant than father, sometimes more lover than servant, sometimes more mother than either!... Jim is all things to him [Huck]: father and mother and playmate and beloved, appearing naked and begowned and bewhiskered and painted blue. (pp. 352-353).

Twain uses Huck and Jim's relationship to critique the hypocrisy and moral corruption of a society that justifies slavery and racism. Through their interactions, Twain exposes the absurdity and cruelty of racial prejudice, advocating for a more just and empathetic worldview. The bond between Huck and Jim becomes a powerful symbol of the potential for human connection to transcend artificial boundaries imposed by society (Armengol 2010).

Ethical Dilemmas and Moral Growth

Throughout *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Huck Finn grapples with numerous ethical dilemmas that compel him to confront his own beliefs and values. These moral quandaries are central to his character development and serve as a vehicle for Mark Twain to explore themes of individual autonomy, moral agency, and the tension between personal integrity and societal conformity. The significant ethical dilemmas Huck faces is his decision to help Jim escape from slavery. Initially, Huck is conflicted because society has ingrained in him that aiding a runaway slave is wrong. Huck contemplates turning Jim in, reflecting the societal values he has internalized: "It was a close place. I took . . . up [the paddle] . . . I was a-trembling, because I'd got to decide, forever, betwixt two things, and I knowed it (67)." This moment highlights Huck's internal struggle between adhering to societal norms and acting on his growing sense of compassion and justice. Ultimately, Huck's choice to protect Jim marks the beginning of his moral evolution.

Another pivotal moment occurs when Huck and Jim encounter a group of men looking for runaway slaves. The men question Huck about Jim, and Huck is torn between betraying his friend and lying to the authorities. Huck lies, telling the men that his father is on the raft and has smallpox, which deters them from searching it. This decision, though morally ambiguous in its deceit, showcases Huck's loyalty and burgeoning sense of moral agency. He starts to see Jim as a human being deserving of freedom and respect, rather than merely property. Huck's moral struggle intensifies further when he and Jim are separated, and Jim is captured. On page 170, Huck writes a letter to Miss Watson to inform her of Jim's whereabouts, believing that returning Jim is the "right" thing to do according to the societal standards he has been taught. However, as he prepares to send the letter, Huck reflects deeply on his experiences with Jim and the kindness Jim has shown him. This introspection leads to one of the

novel's most famous passages: "All right, then, I'll go to hell" (170). Here, Huck decides to tear up the letter and help Jim escape, even if it means eternal damnation according to the moral code he has learned. This act represents the culmination of Huck's moral growth, as he prioritizes his personal sense of right and wrong over the corrupt values of society (Freedman 1997).

Throughout their journey, Huck also witnesses the hypocrisy and cruelty of the society around him. For instance, on page 128, Huck and Jim encounter the feuding Grangerfords and Shepherdsons, who attend church armed and ready for violence, despite the Christian teachings of peace and forgiveness. This incident starkly contrasts with the genuine friendship and loyalty between Huck and Jim, further solidifying Huck's disillusionment with societal norms. Huck's moral development is also evident in his relationship with Tom Sawyer. While Tom remains a symbol of childish adventure and adherence to societal expectations, Huck grows increasingly critical of Tom's romanticized and often cruel plans. On page 195, Huck reluctantly goes along with Tom's elaborate scheme to free Jim, despite recognizing its unnecessary complexity and potential harm. Huck's willingness to defer to Tom initially demonstrates his lingering deference to societal authority figures, but his internal conflict and eventual actions underscore his moral maturity.

Tom Sawyer: The Influence of Society on Morality

According to Martin Zehr, Mark Twain transcended his reputation as a mere humorist, emerging as a sharp social critic deeply engaged with the pressing issues of the Pre-Civil War Era, such as slavery, domestic violence, and societal norms. Twain's novels, notably "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" and "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer," serve as historical snapshots of nineteenth-century American society, offering realistic portrayals that question prevailing moral standards and critique societal norms. Zehr highlights Twain's remarkable ability to empathize with diverse perspectives, infusing his works with a profound sense of empathy. In his narratives, Twain humorously critiques societal violence against children, a common practice in the antebellum period, showcasing the absurdity of such behavior. Through characters like Huck's abusive father, Twain exposes the damaging effects of alcoholism and violence on familial relationships, offering a satirical commentary on the social norms of the time. Twain's use of satire emphasizes the tragic consequences of societal indifference towards child abuse to confront uncomfortable truths about the darker aspects of American society (Rogalo 2014).

Then they tucked the old man into a beautiful room ... and in the night some time he got powerful thirsty and clumb out on to the porch-roof and traded his new coat for a jug of forty-rod ... and towards daylight he crawled out again, drunk as a fiddler, and rolled off the porch and broke his left arm in two places, and was most froze to death when somebody found him after sun-up. (...) The judge he felt kind of sore. He said he reckoned a body could reform the old man with a shotgun, maybe, but he didn't know no other way. (Twain Finn 23-24)

In contrast to Huck's pragmatic approach to morality, Tom Sawyer embodies the influence of societal conventions and romanticized notions of heroism. Tom's adherence to the codes of chivalry and adventure, as well as his penchant for elaborate schemes, reflects a childlike idealism shaped by external influences. Twain uses Tom's character to critique the hypocrisy and moral relativism inherent in conventional morality, exposing the absurdity of social norms and expectations. Through Huck's interactions with Tom, Twain highlights the tension between individual conscience and collective morality, as well as the role of peer pressure in shaping moral behavior. In *Tom Sawyer* Mark Twain crafts a vivid portrayal of the influence of society on morality through the character of Tom Sawyer. Unlike Huck, who often relies on pragmatic reasoning to navigate moral dilemmas, Tom embodies the ideals and expectations imposed by societal norms, particularly those associated with chivalry, adventure, and heroism. Tom's character serves as a canvas upon which Twain illustrates the impact of external influences on individual moral development.

From the outset, Tom's actions are guided by a romanticized notion of heroism derived from adventure novels and tales of chivalry. His inclination towards grand gestures and elaborate schemes stems not

from genuine altruism, but rather from a desire to emulate the heroes of his imagination and earn admiration from his peers. Twain deftly exposes the folly of Tom's idealism, portraying it as a product of societal conditioning rather than genuine moral insight. Tom's adherence to social conventions is not driven by an innate sense of right and wrong, but rather by a desire to conform to external standards of behavior (Stahl 1994). Through Tom's character, Twain critiques the hypocrisy and moral relativism inherent in conventional morality. Tom's willingness to engage in deceit and manipulation, under the guise of noble intentions, underscores the absurdity of social norms and expectations. Twain challenges the notion of a fixed moral code, suggesting that morality is often malleable and subject to interpretation based on societal context.

Thereafter, Twain portrays the tension between individual conscience and collective morality through Huck's interactions with Tom. While Huck grapples with his own moral compass, often conflicting with societal norms, Tom represents the embodiment of societal expectations. The contrast between Huck's pragmatic approach and Tom's adherence to conventional morality highlights the complexities of moral decision-making in a society governed by conflicting values and beliefs (Lothe 2013). Besides, Twain underlines the role of peer pressure in shaping moral behavior through Tom's influence on Huck. Tom's charismatic personality and ability to rally his peers behind his schemes illustrate the power of social dynamics in influencing individual actions. Huck, torn between his own moral convictions and the desire for acceptance within his peer group, finds himself grappling with the consequences of conformity versus individual autonomy.

CONCLUSION

In the novel intertwining themes of friendship and morality form the backbone of a narrative that probes the complexities of human relationships and ethical dilemmas. At its core, the novel centers on the evolving bond between Huck Finn, a white boy seeking freedom from social constraints, and Jim, a runaway slave yearning for liberation. This friendship defies societal norms, representing the transformative power of genuine human connection in transcending racial and cultural divides. Through their shared experiences and mutual trust, Huck and Jim plot a route the treacherous waters of the Mississippi River, demanding to reconsider their preconceived beliefs and prejudices. The friendship between Huck and Jim dole out as a focal point for Twain's critique of social hypocrisy and moral relativism. While Huck's pragmatic approach to morality contrasts with Tom Sawyer's adherence to romanticized ideals, the author exaggerates the tension between individual conscience and collective morality. With Huck's interactions with Tom, the novel emphasizes the role of peer pressure in shaping moral behavior, prompting to reflect on the complexities of moral decision-making in a society governed by conflicting values and beliefs. In due course, the novel tempts to grapple with intense ethical dilemmas alongside its characters, demanding to confront their own biases and assumptions. All the way through Huck and Jim's friendship, Twain advocates for a more just and empathetic worldview, where human connection triumphs over artificial boundaries imposed by society. The novel's enduring relevance lies in its exploration of timeless themes urging them to question and challenge prevailing norms in pursuit of personal integrity and social justice.

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