



MARK TWAIN'İN HUCKLEBERRY FINN İSİMLİ ROMANINDA KİMLİK ARAYIŞI SORUNSALI:  
ÇOCUKLUKTAN YETİŞKİNLİĞE DOĞRU  
THE QUEST OF IDENTITY IN MARK TWAIN'S HUCKLEBERRY FINN; FROM CHILDHOOD TO  
MATURITY

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**Abstract**

Mark Twain's Huckleberry is regarded as a masterpiece in American literature; it is an outstanding example of bildungs novel. In a bildungs novel, readers focus on the adventures of the main character, the hardships and disappointing moments that the main character has had during this journey. However, this journey has a special function, our main character is growing and becoming a mature member of the society despite having all these difficult moments in his/her life. That's why, Twain's Huckleberry Finn is known as a real bildungs novel, because Twain intends to show the process that Huck is going through to become a mature being in the end of the novel. Throughout the novel, the readers recognize the identity transformation Huck after having lots of hardships and sufferings. The main aim of the novel is to make the readers witness the identity construction process of Huckleberry Finn. In this paper, I will be analyzing the quest of Huckleberry by giving specific examples and referring to some genuine examples from the novel itself in order to show Huck's identity transformation from childhood to maturity

**Keywords:** Identity, Maturity, Childhood, Suffering, Transformation.

**1. INTRODUCTION**

Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is one of the most well-known novels which is still being read by many people and taught in many literature departments as well. Briefly, it could be said that the novel only deals with the adventurous life of Huck Finn, however the reality behind those actions or the message which is carried by the book is not so easy to define or grasp. The novel as it is stated below starts with the adventures of Huck, also it could be classified as a continuation book of Tom Sawyer, because in the very beginning of the novel, Huck says: "You don't know about me without you have read a book by the name of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*; but that ain't no matter. That book was made by Mr. Mark Twain, and he told the truth, mainly." (Twain, 1947, 17) This novel could be known as adventure stories of a child named Huck Finn, however that is not the reality though. Throughout the book, readers witness the identity transformation of Huck, and also they realize that Huck is not a simple child, he is an important candidate of being an adult. The developing and changing identity of Huck in a two faced society is an important issue that is well worth focusing on. His attitudes as a child in the beginning of the novel change into the attitudes of an adult in the end of the novel.

**2. ADVENTUROUS LIFE OF HUCK FINN**

The novel takes place in the town of St. Petersburg, Missouri, which lies on the banks of the Mississippi River. The entire book mainly focuses on the adventures which Huck Finn experiences; the adventures he has while trying to rescue Jim from being a slave in a plantation or trying to escape from his malevolent father. However, all these experiences, one by one contribute to shape Huck's identity throughout the novel. The life of Huck becomes really touching for most of the people after they finish the whole novel. For example, Baldwin Hawes, the illustrator of *Huckleberry Finn* expresses his interest with these lines;

*About this book he says, "I first read Huck when I was about twelve. I've probably never read it straight through since, but I've read from it constantly. The older I get the more I get out of it. If I had to cut down to one book for the rest of my life, I believe it would be Huck Finn." (Twain, 1947, 9)*

These lines prove us that Huckleberry is not a simple childish story book showing the exciting life of a child. This book appeals to any type of people from anywhere in the universe, because a child or an adult does not matter, as individuals we all witness the identity transformation process of Huck Finn.

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### 3. IDENTITY FORMATION: FROM CHILDHOOD TO MATURE BEING

Identity is a special attribution which sets individuals apart from each other. In the universe, everyone should have his or her own identity in a way. Identity could be called as a process in which one finds out who he/she is and why he/she is here living in this universe. The main theme in the novel, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, is the search for identity. Huck, the main character of the novel gradually discovers his own identity while he also finds Jim's identity through the adventures they have together. In the very beginning of the novel, Jim is presented simply to him as an ordinary black slave, whose only duty is to be dominated by the others. John Alberti discusses this issue and comments by saying;

*The controversy over the use of "nigger" in Huckleberry Finn, however should make us question this assumption as well and ask why the word wasn't a "problem" before. After all, racism may be a problem for African-Americans, and other people of color, but it is problem of "white Americans." (Alberti, 1995, 922)*

And even Huck does not use their names to call them, but chooses to label them. In the second chapter, we see that Huck refers to black slaves as "niggers" and he says: "Niggers would come miles to hear Jim tell about it, and he was more looked up to than any nigger in that country." (Twain, 1947, 24) The word "nigger" is used to refer some African people in English spoken countries, but it is accepted as an insulting term. In chapter 24, Jim shows how insulting calling the blacks as niggers with these lines; "Well, if I ever struck anything like it, I'm a nigger. It was enough to make a body ashamed of the human race." (Twain, 1947, 216) We see that Huck as a child accepts Jim as he is presented to him. Jim is black and seen as a kind of good which is doomed to be bought and sold. Jim, as a separate individual does not have a private identity, his identity is in the hands of his dominants. The society divides people and labels some of them as "others". In his book titled, *Huckleberry Finn as Idol and Target: The Functions of Criticism in Our Time*, Jonathan Arac states his own opinion by saying; "... this Nigger Jim whose name embodies the very stuff of the slave system itself --- his name is not Jim but Nigger Jim." (Arac, 1997, 23) Although the majority of people are called by using their proper names, Jim does not have a proper identity, he is known with his black, nigger identity by the others. Jim is filled with the sense of superstitions and Twain shows us this by saying;

*Jim always kept that five-center piece round his neck with a string, and said it was a charm the devil gives to him with his own hands, and told him he could cure anybody with it and fetch witches whenever he wanted to just by saying something to (Twain, 1947, 24)*

His superstitions however, appear to be a reflection of the ignorance that develops from a life of slavery. Moreover, the slaves are supposed to be emotionless, but Huck some time later realizes that he shows some kind of emotions which are shown by the "whites" as well. After this moment, Huck notices that the color, or the labels imposed on the people are not the things which shape their identity. He senses a kind of whiteness as well, while he is going deeper into Jim's identity. Through the entire novel, Huck realizes that despite all the things being imposed on him about Jim and his status as a slave, Huck sees Jim as a heroic figure in a really hypocrite society which consists of liars, cheaters or merciless people for black people. Jim does not only think about his own self, he always tries to do the best and correct things, although it is said that black especially slaves are known emotionless, Jim is not. Jim shows empathy for all the people even for the one who do not show him any sign of mercy in his life. He even risks his life for Tom Sawyer when he was shot at the end of the novel. He shows his gratefulness by this way, and the conversation between Jim and Huck shows us that how ready Jim is to sacrifice his freedom for the people whom feel him mercy;

*Well, den, dis is de way it look to me, Huck. Ef it wuz him dat 'uz bein' sot free, en one er de boys wuz to git shot, would he say, 'Go on en save me, nemmine' bout a doctor f'r to save dis one'? Is dat like Mars Tom Sawyer? Would he say dat? You bet he wouldn't! Well, den, is Jim gwyne to say it? No, sah --- I doan' budge a step out'n dis place 'dout a doctor; not if it's forty year ! (Twain, 1947, 354-355)*

Tom and Huck want to save Jim from being a slave, and when Tom gets injured, Jim does not hesitate to risk his freedom to nurse him although he is very close to become a free man. This behavior shows us that Jim is not an emotionless being as it is said so, he is able to feel mercy and show his faithfulness to people who behave him in the same way. Moreover, when Tom is shot and gets injured, Huck looks at Jim and says; "now, old, Jim, you are a free man again, and I bet you won't ever be a slave no more." (Twain, 1947, 354). This scene shows us that Huck declares Jim's freedom, just as all the white people have their freedom, Jim is a free man too. Jim will no more be referred as "nigger" in his life. He is about to get rid of the chains of slavery, because he is forced to have this identity of slavery, that is not his own choice. Brook Thomas describes Jim situation; "Born a free man, Jim is forced to adopt the identity of a slave imposed upon him by society." (Thomas, 1982, 8) However, his freedom in that case is the most crucial thing for him, he does not think to sacrifice it for the sake of Tom.



When Huck witnesses all these events, he starts to question the identity of Jim which is determined by the society. Huck slowly starts to realize Jim's real identity and it is also very clear in the very beginning, although Huck cannot grasp his identity as a free man, Jim turns into a leader for their journey. A father figure, who can protect and lead him. He aims to protect Huck from the dangers and tries to show the way through their travel. In chapter 9, while they are in the river, they find a house and try to look inside it. But, they see a dead man who is shot two or three days ago, Jim does not want Huck to see this scene and tries to keep him away by saying: *"It's a dead man. Yes, indeedy; naked, too. He's been shot in the back. I reck'n he's ben dead two or three days. Come in, Huck, but doan' look at his face --- it's too gashly."* (Twain,1947, 81) Jim finds the corpse of the man and this is really scaring for him, as if he is a father figure or a leader trying to keep Huck from any kind of misfortune situation, he kindly warns him and keeps him out of danger.

#### 4. IDENTITY SEARCH OF HUCK AND JIM

Most of the time, Huck is not able to grasp Jim's real identity, he behaves him as the others behave him. Even, sometimes we see through the book, Huck misbehaves Jim, tries to bully him, tell lies and we can say that in these scenes, Huck is not different from the people who belittle Jim as a black identity. However, the moment when change starts in Huck is when Huck sees how much Jim loves and cares him, and tries to keep him away from the danger. In chapter 15, Huck wants to trick Jim and he pretends as if he has drowned on the river. He lays still without moving like a dead person, and he tries to convince Jim that he is dead. The only thing he wants is to fool Jim and make him look stupid. Huck describes how he tricks Jim; *"... I was floating along, of course, four or five miles an hour; but you don't ever think of that. No, you feel like you are laying dead still on the water."* (Twain,1947,121) He stays on the water motionless so that Jim can see him and think him dead. Then, Huck goes near Jim revealing that he is not dead. This moment leads to a change in Huck, because Jim shows his sincere feelings to Huck and shows him how pleased he is when he sees Huck alive.

*Goodness gracious, is dat you, Huck? En you ain' dead --- you ain' drowneded --- you's back ag'in? It's too good for true, honey, it's too good for true. Lemme look at you chile, lemme feel o'you. No, you ain' dead! You's back ag'in, 'live en soun' jis de same ole Huck --- de same ole Huck, thanks to goodness!* (Twain,1947,124)

Before this moment, Huck treats Jim in a way that we could expect from a white boy, as he is referred as an emotionless slave. However, those words that Jim use when he sees Huck is alive explicitly show his love for Huck. This event is a starting point in Huck's character, not totally but partly, he understands the real identity of Jim and he says;

*It was fifteen minutes before I could work myself up to go and humble myself to a nigger; but I done it, and I warn't ever sorry for it afterward, neither. I didn't do him no more mean tricks, and I wouldn't done that one if I'd 'a' knowed it would make him feel that way* (Twain,1947, 126)

As these lines suggest, his perspective begins to change and Huck begins to see Jim as a human being rather than simply regarding him as a slave. After this moment, Huck gets one step closer to see the whiteness under Jim's black identity and Huck gets to know Jim more and more deeply.

Despite trying to find the white beneath Jim's identity, Huck is also in a quest for his own identity. He is looking for his own self in a world that is created through the lies. Before moving to the search of Huck's identity, it is better to focus the formation of the society as well. Throughout the novel, Twain especially emphasises the society that surrounds Huck with their corrupted rules and defy logic. The society in which white people are majority are known as "civilized" one. However, Twain depicts this society is an example of hypocrisy of a civilized society. Brook Thomas also agree with Twain's description of the society and says; *"Throughout Huck tries to find his own way through a world of socially imposed lies."* (Thomas,1982, 7) It is known as civilized society where black people do not have any freedom or right on their own, black people are known as innate slaves and properties of white people. Even, when Huck's father "Pap" misbehaves Huck, the judge explains this attitude as a normal right over the custody of the child; *"He said He'd cowhide me till I was black and blue if I didn't raise some money for him. I borrowed three dollars from Judge Thatcher ... he said he was satisfied; said he was boss of his son, and he'd make it warm for him."* (Twain, 1947, 44) That is to say, it is impossible for such a society to be declared as civilized, they pretend to be a civilized society, however the truth is that they are only a society with their corrupted rules and morality and imposing these rules on their members too. Huck was born in that society, and tries to grow up here. The entire novel Twain tries to depict the transformation that Huck undergoes. As a poor, uneducated boy, Huck distrusts the morals and the intentions of the society where he was born, but which sees him as an outcast and fails to protect him from his father's abuse.



Huck's biggest struggle for identity is to decide whether he wants to act like a troubled child and cause problems for the others or he wants to behave on his instincts which are more moral and more civilized. In this situation, Huck experiences a personal identity struggle and he tries to find his own identity. Through the end of the book, Twain shows that Huck still cannot decide on his identity and; "... he turns out to be Tom Sawyer." (Thomas, 1982, 8) When aunt Sally sees him, she does not hesitate and believes that Huck is his nephew Tom Sawyer. She shares her joy with the household and says;

*"It's you, at last --- ain't it?"*

*I out with a "Yes'm" before I thought ... I'm so glad to see you! Dear, dear, it does seem like I could eat you up! Children, it's your cousin Tom! --- tell him howdy." (Twain, 1947, 287)*

Huck does not reveal the truth to the aunt and keeps this as a secret and behaves as if he is Tom. Huck is able to act in the place of other people easily. Since he cannot decide on how to act and he cannot determine his own identity yet, he resorts to tell lies and deceive people. This disguise is another deceit that Huck does. Sometimes, he strongly objects to the civilized world, at these times, we see that he could resort to cheat and tell lies to other people and does not want to grow up and become a mature being. While Twain presents Jim as a black slave, Huck is also presented as a white slave in a civilized society. That is why he is in search of his own identity. The key point of his quest is actually disobeying the imposed values of society for Huck, because he soon after realizes that if he follows these values, his behaviors will be shaped by the society, however he chooses to believe in himself, and care his own values. For example, when Jim runs away from their owners, he runs into Huck Finn, and begs him not to turn in him back to become a slave again. Jim begs Huck by saying;

*Well, I did. I said I wouldn't, and I'll stick to it. Honest injun, I will. People would call me a lowdown Abolitionist and despise me for keeping mum --- but that don't make no difference. I ain't a-going to tell, and I ain't a going back there, anyways. So, now, le's know all about it (Twain, 1947, 71)*

As a white person, what is expected from Huck is to bring Jim back to their owners, because he belongs to Miss Watson. This is what society orders him to do, but Huck rather than doing this prefer listening to his conscience, and does not denounce Jim or does not take him back to Miss Watson. At this point, Huck begins questioning the imposed values of the society and he partly realizes that he is not a part of this unity. He believes that following his conscience is much more important than following others' views and this becomes the first step to find his true identity. Another scene from the novel showing how Huck rejects the values of society and go against the society in which he lives, he decides to write a letter to Miss Watson telling her where Jim hides, because society orders this. He says in his letter; "Miss Watson, your runaway nigger Jim is down here two mile below Pikesville, and Mr. Phelps has got him and he will give him up for the reward if you send." (Twain, 1947, 279) However, just after writing this letter to Miss Watson, Huck gives up sending it to her, because, although this behavior is seen as the true one, this is not, this is not what Huck believes as true. Therefore, he tears the letter and decides to save Jim, and says;

*It was a close place. I took it up, and held it in my hand. I was a-trembling, because I'd got to decide, forever, betwixt two things, and I knowed it. I studied a minute, sort of holding my breath, and then says to myself; "All right, then, I'll go to hell" ---- and tore it up (Twain, 1947, 279- 280)*

This is another time when Huck behaves against the values of the society. What he thinks is to take Jim back to Miss Watson, however he again does not go after the rules of the society, he tears the letter up and lets Jim stay with him. This is another point which shows that Huck's identity is not determined by the imposed morals or values of the society.

Huck's level of maturity is not clearly displayed in the novel, therefore, his identity is not clearly determined either. Sometimes he acts as a naughty child, sometimes he behaves as if he is an adult. He does some childish jokes and makes fun of the people around him. In chapter 10, he places a rattlesnake and tries to fear Jim, but he does not consider the consequences beforehand;

*I went to the cavern to get some, and found a rattlesnake in there. I killed him, and curled him up on the foot of Jim's blanket, ever so natural, thinking there'd be some fun when Jim found him there. Well, by night I forgot all about the snake, and when Jim flung himself down on the blanket while I struck a light the snake's mate was there, and bit him (Twain, 1947, 84)*

Huck wants to enjoy by doing so, and make fun of poor Jim by fearing him, but then he even forgets the place of the snake, in that scene he behaves extremely reckless and behaves without considering the probable consequences of his act. This is not the first trick he does to scare Jim, he also acts as if he is dead, but then when he sees Jim's reaction to his death, he regrets for what he has done, and Huck says; "... I didn't do him no more mean tricks, and I wouldn't done that one if I'd 'a' knowed it would make him feel that way."



(Twain, 1947, 126) Huck makes another major step in forming his identity, he is getting closer to his maturity. He realizes that his behavior is completely wrong and how much his behavior hurts Jim, he promises not to do that again. Moreover, in several scenes, Huck resorts to telling lies and deceive the others, however then during his conversation with Mary Jane, he realizes that telling lies is not a good act, rather than telling lies, he believes telling the truth is better which will cause less problems, Huck says,

*I says to myself, I reckon a body that ups and tells the truth when he is in a tight place is taking considerable many risks though I ain't had no experience, and can't say for certain; but it looks so to me, anyway; and yet here's a case where I'm blest if I don't look to me like the truth I better and actually safer than a lie (Twain, 1947, 246)*

As it can be understood from these lines, Huck starts to give up his old habits, and becomes aware of the importance of things. He gives up scaring and making fun of people, he gives up telling lies and realizes that telling the truth is more important. All these things are part of his quest for his own identity, and directly contribute to his developing maturity.

Twain mainly symbolizes the internal struggle of Huck to find his own self, and the contribution of the events to the search, this struggle, inner struggle between one's self and one's conscience shows how much Huck is different from all livings in the same society, realizing this difference ultimately leads Huck to question his own identity and then find it. Leo Marx describes Miss Watson, owner of Jim and the American society by saying; "Miss Watson, in short, is the Enemy. If we except a predilection for physical violence, she exhibits all the outstanding traits of valley society. She pronounces the polite lies of civilization that suffocate Huck's spirit." (Marx, 1953, 427) As the novel goes further, Huck starts to question the society and his place in that society. He asks himself whether he is a part of this society or not, and says; "But I reckon I got to light out for the territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and civilize me, and I can't stand it. I been there before." (Twain, 1947, 377) These are last lines of the novel and shows that Huck does not want to go back to that society. Aunt Sally still lives in that society, and Huck distrusts and fears from the society, he does not want change himself or live according to the pre-determined values of this community. Now, he wants to civilize himself as he knows, his detachment from the society is complete, because during his journey, he witnesses and experiences many things leading him to question the values of the society. That is to say he succeeds in creating his own identity in the end, he wants to have the same freedom when he is on the raft and he believes that he is not a part of that society and he can never be as well.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Twain's novel could be seen as a story of childhood experiences, but actually this is not the reality indeed. When we go into deeper analysis, the entire novel dwells on the journey of Huck's search for identity, not only his own self but also Jim's real identity. When he sees Jim closer and spends time with him, he realizes that being black does not mean being inferior as the society declares. This becomes the first step for Huck to find his own identity; he changes his ideas and starts to question the values of the society. The second step is when Huck questions himself, his behaviors, his journey. In the end, he decides on not being a part this society, but he decides on his detachment and chooses his freedom to form his own identity and to find himself.

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