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Transcendentalism and Romanticism in Huckleberry Finn

Transcendentalism was a movement based on philosophical and religious grounds that took place during the early nineteenth century in the eastern part of the US. The followers of this movement believed that the human was initially born good, therefore he is corrupted by the institutions in the society. Several famous literary personalities were the followers of this movement, including Mark Twain, the writer of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

Mark Twain used the novel to portray the policy of Transcendentalism using the character of a young boy. To understand the concept, let us view the following passage from the novel:

“By and by it got sort of lonesome, and so I went and set on the bank and listened to the current swashing along, and counted the stars and drift logs and rafts that come down, and then went to bed; there ain’t no better way to put in time when you are lonesome; you can’t stay so, you soon get over it” (Chapter 8)

In this passage, we can observe that Twain is trying to express transcendentalist notions and ideas as he stands alone by himself next to the river bank. It can be seen that it is nature that draws him to this conclusion, which also happens to be the core belief of the movement in the first place. As the protagonist is surrounded by nature, we can observe as a reader that he is transformed into a Zen-like state while he does his daily chores near his father’s cabin. So, here we can see that the writer is trying to stress that it is the nature that returns us to our original state, which is the state of good, righteousness, and peace.

Apart from that, certain incidents of romanticism are portrayed by the author in the novel, which is used to confirm the realist underpinnings of the author. Let us take the incident in the novel where Finn manages to rescue a slave that had managed to escape to the northern states. While on a raft, Finn and the slave, Jim, share the romantic beliefs that focus on escaping society and enjoying their natural surroundings peacefully. When Finn says the following words, they show the romanization and contentment that he has begun to enjoy in the woods:

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| “It was kind of solemn, drifting down the big still river, laying on our backs looking up at the stars...” (Chapter 12) |

However, there is a catch when it comes to the expressions of romanization in this novel, as Twain reverses the whole romanization with the concept of realism in the novel. Twain also use thoughts of a romantic hero as he tries to mock the understanding of the reader through the use of sarcasm. Soon Finn falls the obligations that the society has imposed on him due to beliefs reinstated in him during his early years in foster care. He decides to hand over the slave back to the governing authorities as he begins to think that his subsequent hardships are the result of his attempt to break the rules of the society, a thought that begins to regret as he soon decides against returning him.

In short, we can see that there are certain underpinnings to this famous literacy piece. There, the protagonist believes in the good nature of the world, but he does not want to challenge the established social order to do so. The author also uses his unique blend of mixing realism with romanticism to show the reader that what is right may not be easy or socially acceptable.

# Works Cited

Twain, Mark. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Hartford, Connecticut, 1876. Ebook. <https://americanenglish.state.gov/files/ae/resource\_files/huckleberry-finn.pdf>.