

Bad Boys in 19th Century American Literature

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In 19th American Literature, the determination of how good or bad a child was mainly linked to how they responded to religion, education, and relation with others. Just like in the current society both the school and church are believed to be a source of values and skills that help model a child. Thus, the parents and guardians had to ensure that children developed an interest in both religion and education to obtain the necessary skills to handle life and relate with others in society. Unlike the current society where people are focused on privacy, child growth and development were viewed as communal and hence very few guardians allowed their children to associate with "bad boys". Tom, Dick, and Huck are considered "bad boys" in their respective societies as their connection with either religion or education are questionable. Additionally, drug abuse among teenagers was so rare to the extent that those using them were considered extremely spoilt "bad boys".

Even though Dick is anxious about turning over a new leaf and starts a new life many consider him spoilt as he occasionally drinks, smokes, and sleeps in the streets. As a result of the life, he lives religion to him is new and when he is introduced into it, he is completely surprised and confused. On the other hand, he possesses a very unique virtue that averts him from stealing under any circumstance and his determination towards success creates a chance for him to be accepted back into society (Nader, 2018). Tom, on the other hand, is an orphan who despite his young age adores having fun and would prefer it to anything else. He skips school to go swimming and utilizes reverse psychology on his agemates so that they can assist in doing his punishment by convincing them how enjoyable the activity was. He is not much into religion as he fails to answer basic questions about the scripture (Twain, 2020). Similarly, Huck falls under the same category as we find his guardian completely focused on teaching him religion. Despite

all the efforts, he finds religion and civilized life confining, and hence he is not ready to easily accept it.

Good characters are dependent on high upright moral values, and hence for a teen or a child to become a bad boy, there must be some missing values during their growth. Additionally, others develop a bad character as a result of those they associate with or live together with. Education plays a significant role in ensuring that children develop their abilities into something meaningful and aid them as they gain knowledge to distinguish what is best to benefit them and the society around them. Tom Sawyer's unadmirable character at such a tender age may be linked to the fact that he is an orphan and thus he may have missed the basic value that most children acquire from their parents as they grow. Additionally, his cunningness may have developed as he tries to fit into a society that he feels completely different from (Twain, 2020). Tom's action as well as his runaway adventure with Joe and Huck indicates that character development highly depends on the people around him. The success of our hero Dick is not only dependent on luck but also on the effort he puts in changing his life and character to become estimable. At just fourteen years, he works as a shoe shiner indicating that life was demanding more than he could offer (Nader, 2018). This may have changed his character into becoming a "bad boy" who occasionally uses drugs as a result of the environment he is exposed to. Additionally, lack of proper guidance and education results in people making mistakes as they do not have the required knowledge and skills to face the challenges but they opt to look for an easier solution in some cases resulting in drug abuse (Mijić, 2021). The theme of education is evident in most of Mark Twain's novel and the role it plays is evident and it is clear that Dick's success is achieved since his roommate offers to tutor him read and write.

Even though Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn are exposed to the same location and even spend most of their “bad boy” life together, there is a lot of difference between them. It is clear that as kids grow and mature the experiences, they are exposed to help them develop a moral and ethical identity that is unique (Twain, 2020). Thus, even though Tom and Huck share a common bond as they are both orphans and are good friends, Huck lives alone and has no home since his father is a total drunkard while Tom lives in a civilized household with his aunt. This brings a major difference into the type of bad boy each is as Huck has no responsibility. On the other hand, Tom attends school, and hence despite being a bad boy his view on some matter is different from that of Huck and this is evident from their first day on Jackson's Island. Since Tom lives in a civilized society, he together with Joe has a guilty conscience for stealing food and they are not able to peacefully sleep, unlike Huck who comfortably sleeps as he is used to that life (Twain, 2020).

Additionally, all imaginative schemes that Tom has about the things he would love to experience result from imagination from the adventure stories he reads. His civilization limits the things he can do despite the desires and hence he is realistic as he has to strictly conform to the regulations. On the other hand, Huck has a complicated life with no desire of becoming civilized and he is not therefore bound to any limits making him a lawless "bad boy" (Twain, 2020). This makes the two very different as one is a dreamer while the other is pragmatic.

The three novels have the elements of humor, satire, and social criticism and have remained among the top despite several critics that earlier juvenile literature was attacked. Additionally, the theme of education has been maintained as the difference in the three "bad boys" is only a result of the exposure that one has to knowledge. This, therefore, indicates that education and religion are a vital part of shaping a child's character. Additionally, schools and

churches help create an environment that encourages togetherness and helps develop the social skills of every individual. Notably, education helps people in learning the rules they have to follow to observe the welfare of one another ensuring that they do not overstep the freedom they have thereby protecting every individual's rights.

References

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