

Kara Russell

Mr. Bronkar

C.P. English 3 – Period 4

14 November 2003

Two Faces of Deception

Deception has long been a topic engulfed in whirling controversy and fiery opinions. The question of civil duty and moral justification of deception never ceases to spark debate. Many have come to formulate opinions on deception based on individual experience and beliefs. This is the case for Mark Twain's character, Huck. In Twain's novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Huck shows his maturity and moral growth as he deems deception that is imperative for survival acceptable, and in many cases necessary, and deception that harms others and is done out of avarice and materialistic gain as needless and disconcerting.

Huck deceives many people in the novel, including his father. At the start of the book, Huck concocts a plan to rid himself of his poor, abusive situation with his father. He forges his own murder, and dresses the scene with evidence of his supposed death (33). By doing this, he is able to run away from his unhealthy circumstances with his father, and not arouse any suspicions and searches. In the process of faking his death, Huck steals provisions, such as food and tools, from his father to use and consume until he acquires other means of food and the like (32). Although he has ultimately deceived his father, and his entire community including Miss Watson, he feels that it is for his own personal safety and well-being. For this reason, he is not disturbed by his acts. Huck considers all of this deception just and lawful, because he finds it necessary for survival and existence.

Later in the novel, Huck and Jim come across a deserted houseboat, and Huck devises a way to use the discarded things to their advantage. To Jim and Huck, taking any of the items for themselves is perfectly acceptable, as they consider them no longer possessions. Huck shows this as he says, while rummaging through the clothes and things on the houseboat, “The way things was scattered about, we reckoned the people left in a hurry and warn’t fixed so as to carry off most of their stuff” (51). To Jim and Huck, it does not matter if they take the things because the people left them behind, and are obviously not coming back, thus making it fair game. Huck decides to use one of the dresses to make himself up as a girl, so that he can get information from the outside world. He deceives a woman by pretending to be a girl seeking rest on her way to her relatives’ house, and proceeds to ask her questions about himself and Jim (56). As having a keen sense of what the outside world knows and thinks about he and Jim is important to their survival, Huck views his charade as nothing less than appropriate.

Huck not only lies and deceives to protect himself, but others as well. Huck witnesses a group of men arguing on a boat, and realizes that the raging storm outside is about to sink and kill them (70). He decides to help them and seeks aide from someone with the power to help them. Huck speaks with Jim on their way to get help and explains his plan, “...then I’ll go and fix up some kind of a yarn, and get somebody to go for that gang and get them out of their scrape” (72). Here, Huck shows early signs of maturity and moral growth, as he goes out of his way to help other people, strangers nonetheless. Huck uses his masterful art of deception to trick a ferryman, telling him that his family is stuck on a boat and they must be saved (74). Later, Huck deceives two men to protect Jim’s safety. When they inquire about Jim, Huck lies and tells them that he is his dad, and he has fallen with small pox (90). He does this so that they will not

take Jim and return him to slavery. He conceals Jim's identity as a runaway slave, but does it in Jim's interests as a human being.

Despite Huck's numerous acts of deception, he does not respect all forms of deception. On the contrary, he comes to despise and is repulsed by that done out of greed and selfishness, or that which harms other innocent people. The characters of the King and the Duke truly exemplify this abuse of deception. Right from the beginning of their introduction into the novel, Huck establishes that the men are bad people because of their deception. Reflecting on the days events and the first meeting with the King and Duke, Huck remarks, "It didn't take me long to make up my mind that these liars warn't no kings nor dukes, at all, but just low-down humbugs and frauds" (126). Huck finds their false identity sham petty and low, as their only goal is to get Huck and Jim to act as servants to them. After some time with the King and Duke, they eventually come across a man who tells them of the expected arrival of the deceased Peter Wilks' brothers. After the King and Duke discover that the brothers will be coming into great fortune, they decide to act as Peter and George so that they can take the money. Witnessing the teary scene before him, Huck is disgusted by the deception of the King and Duke, who are manipulating the crowd like true masters, as he states, "It was enough to make a body ashamed of the human race" (164). Huck is repulsed by the King and Duke's blatant trickery and lack of sympathy towards the poor town.

The King and Duke take their deception even further as they rob the poor daughters of Peter for all they are worth. Though the girls think the King and Duke are going to care for and invest it, they take the girls' money with the full intention of running away with it all. Huck cannot stand this utter deception and cruelty, as he hates that the girls are going to be hurt. He

decides to steal the money from the King and Duke and hide it in Peter's coffin for the girls to retrieve later. He, in effect, uses deception to protect the girls from the King and Duke's ruthless deception. Huck is so disturbed by the King and Duke's behavior that, as he tells Mary Jane of their scam, he admits, "It made my eyes water a little, to remember her crying there all by herself in the night, and them devils laying there right under her own roof, shaming her and robbing her..." (192). These feelings experienced by Huck, and his willingness to deceive for a good cause that does not benefit himself, shows genuine maturity and moral growth. He is able to make his own decisions and decide for himself what is moral and right, and uses any means he deems appropriate to best alleviate the situation. It is his genuine sympathy towards humans that leads Huck to so despise deception that harms others and is done out of greed. He has come to this sympathy through his experiences with the King and Duke and his direct witnessing of people being hurt and destroyed. The fact that he expresses this and feels such empathy towards good people shows the level of maturity he has reached.

Towards the end of the novel, Huck still remains head strong in his opinions on deception. He has to get supplies to break Jim out of prison, and although he is essentially stealing from Aunt Sally, it is for the rescue of Jim so he deems it just. As he reflects on what he has taken that day for Jim's escape he says, "...I borrowed a sheet and a white shirt off the clothes-line..." (243). The diction he uses denotes his attitude towards his thievery. He uses the term "borrowed," because he honestly does not see it as stealing. Huck also steals a watermelon out of the slaves' patch. Later that day, Huck says, concerning the bickering between him and Tom over whether it was stealing or not, "Tom said that what he meant was, we could steal anything we needed. Well, I says, I needed the watermelon" (244). To Huck, stealing the

watermelon is perfectly acceptable, because he is hungry, and thus needs to get food. Huck uses deception and stealing so that he, and others, can survive, and he finds this to be true and right.

Through his numerous experiences, Huck comes to the decision that deception that is carried out as means of survival is necessary and appropriate, but deception that ultimately brings harm to innocent people, or is done out of greed and selfishness, is unwarranted and disturbing. Huck reaches a level of great maturity and moral growth, and this helps to mold his opinions on deception. As in Huck's case, opinions and views most often stem from personal experience. Conclusions must be formulated independently and apart from others. The ability to think individually and develop opinions is the essence of the human race.