What distinguishes the men from the boys? This age-old question of maturation doesn’t have one universal answer. From a female’s perspective, I often wonder if this transformation is ever complete. The Oxford English Dictionary defines “separating the men from the boys” as “distinguishing (through a test or challenge of some kind) which members of a group are skilled or expert in something, or which are mature, fearless, etc..”¹ I don’t feel as though this encapsulates the transition from a boy to man. In forming a concrete definition of a man or a boy, something will inevitably be left out, as definitions are so restricting, especially those describing large groups of people. Instead, the question of when a boy becomes a man must be examined on an individual basis. The Finnish novel Seven Brothers by Aleksis Kivi observes the growth of seven brothers, and the journeys that bring their maturation. The brothers are all very different, and they mature together but in their own unique ways, and the novel addresses some features of maturation.

The most obvious characteristic associated with maturity is a person’s age, but there is not always a linear relationship between the two. At the beginning of Seven Brothers, the brothers are put to the task of learning to read, as that is the duty of every good Christian citizen. Juhani, the eldest of the brothers, states that “learning to read is impossible…I have such a thick skull.”² Although he is the eldest, he is not the most intelligent of the brothers, nor the most optimistic, both of which I view as qualities of maturity. Eero on the other hand is the youngest brother, and when all the brothers are learning to read, he is “the shining exception,” while the

¹ Oxford English Dictionary. s.v. “man.”
rest of the brothers have learned only a few letters, he has “gone beyond the alphabet and is
deftly working at spelling out words.”\textsuperscript{3} Being the youngest brother does not automatically make
Eero the most unintelligent by any means. So while a direct correlation cannot be made justly
between age and intelligence, what is the relation between intelligence and maturity? I would
argue that to be mature requires knowledge of the world as a whole and of ones self.

There are many other aspects of human life that influence ones maturity, overcoming
stress, experiencing the death of a parent, and triumphing over obstacles both physical and
emotional, but not all of these are experienced by all people at the same time, and some people
never experience them. One thing that every human being does, no matter how mature they are,
is to have certain views of themselves. In the early chapters of \textit{Seven Brothers} the brothers refer
to themselves as boys, sometimes in a demeaning way. In chapter one, Lauri is trying to
convince his brothers to go to the woods to live, and Juhani responds by saying “Has the devil
addled your brains, boy?”\textsuperscript{4} The way he adds “boy” at the end of the question makes it sound as
though he is talking down to an unintelligent youngster. To others they all refer to themselves as
boys, as though they don’t feel they deserve the title of “men” yet. The fact that they don’t
respect their actions enough to feel like men made me feel as though they had things to learn on
their journey toward becoming men.

At the end of the novel, the brothers return from their ten year journey back to their
families land. They learned many things over the course of their adventures, helping them to
become mature men. They realize this, as they start referring to themselves not as boys
anymore, but as men. In reflecting on their lives, Aapo calls himself and his brothers “happy

\textsuperscript{3} Kivi, 41.
\textsuperscript{4} Kivi, 10.
men, …changed men.””5 Another sign of their maturity at the end of the novel is their ability to reflect on their past, as Aapo does when he is reminiscing: “Thanks be to God who leads us, to ourselves, who chose wisdom while there was still time, and to our mother, who reminded us of God’s will and law in our childhood days.”6 He acknowledged their boyhood, and the reasons they were given the opportunity to mature successfully. A true sign of maturity is being able to look back on ones life and see progression and growth.

A good reflection of ones maturity is how others view and respond to you. People will most likely not call a young immature child an adult, as they can tell he is not responsible enough to be given that title. In the beginning of Seven Brothers the brothers are referred to as boys, brothers, fugitives, sons, and children by the people around them. Then, at the end of the novel as the brothers are putting on a homecoming party for people they met along their journeys, the sexton gives a speech referring to the brothers as “decent men, …men worthy of praise.”7 The fact that their elders who knew them as irresponsible boys years earlier now accepted them as “men” is a good measure of their growth, both as individuals and as the seven brothers.

At the end of the novel, the brothers acted differently toward their community than they did as young boys. Their maturity came with time and age, but also self realization of their abilities as responsible men of their community. Age alone does not bring maturity, awareness of ones growth and maturity and the communities acceptance of ones accomplishments brings maturity.

---

5 Kivi, 281.
6 Kivi, 283.
7 Kivi, 306.
Bibliography


Sharpness: 2.5/3

The paper is exceptionally well written. One consistent error that did mar the paper is the omission of apostrophes in uses of the possessive. It’s nitpicky to point this out, as you do a fine job with citations, titles, and sentence structure (the usual culprits). However, another pass to eliminate punctuation and typo hiccups would improve the paper.

Relevance: 3/3

You get at the heart of the novel, and complicate the discussion of it that we had in class. Your use of citations and comparisons that show the characters’ growth over the course of the novel is also fine work. You choose your examples well.

Freshness: 2.5/3

Your writing balances an inclusion of observation and textual analysis that makes your paper not only instructive to read, but enjoyable. While I really like the way you begin with a related citation, which you use skillfully to organize your paper, the dictionary is not the most original source to quote (although better OED than Webster’s, as the former is a far superior dictionary, which provides the variant historical uses of a word). Might you find a part of the novel that reflects on maturation to begin with, or another text we’ve read in class, which could serve as the launching pad for your paper? You do an excellent job with freshness, but you might revise by including a more thought-provoking consideration of “maturation.”

Other Comments: 1/1

Great start, with excellent analysis and fine writing.

Total: 9/10