Loss Of Freedom As Symbolized In Twain’s The Adventures Of Huckleberry Finn

Freedom is considered a basic human need which plays a crucial role in one's life. It is essential to enhance creativity, original thoughts, increased productivity, and an overall providential life. For an individual to develop over time, they need to have freedom of thought and speech as well as the ability to make changes in their lives without requiring consent from anyone. In the novel The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, symbolism is used effectively to reinforce the theme that freedom is essential for self expression and personal growth, which is seen through the raft, money, and the Mississippi River.

The novel The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is about two young boys Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer, who want to leave their current lives for a better future and live with freedom. Pap Finn is Huck's abusive, drunken father who does not provide for him but instead is dependent on him and constantly takes his money. On the other hand Jim is a black boy who at that time has to deal with harsh slavery and injustice amongst his society and is eventully going to be shipped to a different place away from his family.

Jim and Finn decide to travel on a raft which is very symbolic in the novel. The chosen vehicle is unique as the speed is entirely dependent on the river; it will be slow when the water is still and fast when rippling. But, the raft becomes a ‘no man land’ that seems to operate under different laws than solid ground. In a way it allows Jim and Huck to put their status and differences aside and interact with one another as two individuals rather than ‘master and slave’. As Huck mentions, “We said there warn’t no home like raft after all. Other places get do seem so cramped up and smothery, but a raft don’t. You feel mighty free and easy and comfortable on a raft” (Twain, 116). Explicitly stating Huck’s feeling about the raft, it demonstrates the importance it holds for his freedom and self-expression as he is momentarily able to live his life as he wishes, without interference of others. Unlike the restrictions of the society, the regulations of the raft are quite simple: respect each other's differences and support one another. As such, the raft becomes similar to an ideal society in which both characters can enjoy freedom unlike their past lives.. As a source also identified, “As the raft taking him and Jim downstream approaches the mouth of the Ohio River, Jim grows more and more excited because he believes that when he can head up the Ohio he will be out of slave, and therefore be free” (variety of publishers, 1985). This particular quote shows the importance of the raft for Jim’s sense of self growth because the raft has allowed him to travel from his unjust society to a place where he can escape slavery and be free for once and for all. Also this enables the readers to comprehend that the raft allows the characters to gain freedom, which they did not have previously.

In both Huck and Jim’s life money is a crucial part, though they have very different ideas about what money means. Money is a very important part for human survival and individuals that have more money tend to live more comfortably. But, that is certainly not the case for Huckleberry Finn. He loses his sense of self expression due to the wealth he has as his father attempts to constantly steal it from him to buy liquor, going as far as to kidnap him. However, for Jim it is the opposite as he is trying to escape slavery. As a result, he is not able to express his individuality and grow as a person. So he sees money as a path to freedom and he believes wealth would

allow him to achieve a respectable status in society. This is notable when Huck urges Jim to talk to a magical hairball to inform him about his missing father, but Jim counters that the magical hairball “wouldn't talk without money” (Twain, 19). When Huck proceeds to mention that he has a counterfeit quarter, Jim takes the money regardless as, in his perspective, money is equivalent to freedom. Furthermore, The Cambridge University Press mentioned in a article that “At the end of Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Nigger Jim is a free man. ‘Nothing More to Write’ Huck calls that final chapter. But for Jim, surely, it could only have been a beginning. Jim is now free to purchase his wife from that neighbouring plantation, as he had planned all along ‘saying how the first thing he would do when he got to a free state he would go to saving up money and never spend a single cent’ ” (Beaver, 1974). This shows how much Jim values money. As it allows him to express his individuality because in this society, the more money an individual has, the higher their status is. Thus, compelling him to save each and every penny. Not only that, with money he is able to free his wife from being a slave, thus allowing his wife to also gain the ability to express herself. Additionally, an article published by The Johns Hopkins University states, “Money gains our interest when we notice their repetition: Huck’s own fictionalizing his death to escape the obsessively capitalist pap” (Slattery, 1988). Huckleberry Finn plans to escape his father’s oppression since he is well aware that his father is only interested in his money and should he fail to escape, he will have to endure mental and physical abuse until his father does not confiscate all his money.

The Mississippi River is also a very important symbol in the novel. Jim travels via river to escape from slavery and from being sold as property to another ‘owner' away from his family and friends. For Huck the river represents his escape from his abusive father, the society, and his unstable life. The mutability is seen right at the beginning when the widow tried to influence him to become more religious and a kinder person. Once he had started to feel comfortable, his father came along and was the polar opposite. This was seen when Huck mentions “So in two seconds away we went a-sliding down the river, and it did seem so good to be free again and all by ourselves on the big river, and nobody to bother us” (Twain, 29). The river represents a life beyond the rules of society and it symbolizes Huck and Jim's transportation as it takes them from captivity (slavery and child abuse) to freedom in the state of Ohio. Huck uses the phrase “nobody to bother us” which foreshadows that in the past Huck was not in a pleasant state of mind now he is able to express his individuality without the interference or influence of others. University of Agder suggested that “Because of the wide range of symbolic connotations of the river, I claim that its possibilities are open for parallels to the human being independent of historical time” (Aas, 2008).

Freedom is essential for self-expression and personal growth, which is an important concept in the novel Adventures of Huckleberry Finn which is symbolised through the raft, money, and the Mississippi River. It serves as a common goal, something Jim and Huck want to obtain, for the two young boys freedom means happiness, a happiness away from the cruel society to a world of freedom.

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