Huck Finn: Freedom Essay, Research Paper

Freedom is a vital need and the ultimate goal in human culture and civilization as many societies aimed for various types of freedom throughout history. Freedom exists in many forms, including racial freedom, freedom of thought, freedom of religion, and freedom of expression. A prominent and important theme throughout The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is freedom from the societal institutions of religion, family, and prejudices. Huck toils through a paradoxical struggle with religion in defining right and wrong. In addition, Huck yearns for freedom from his personal relationships with the Widow Douglas and his father. Lastly, Huck aspires for freedom from the prejudices surrounding blacks that took place during the time in which the novel was written.

Throughout the novel, Huck travails with an internal moral dilemma between that which he feels is right and that which he learns is right, either through family or religion. Huck is possibly the only character in the story that operates solely on his own moral convictions. Impositions of the accepted rules of society, which are often corrupt in nature, conflict with these convictions and produce significant conflict. Huck’s brief experiences with organized religion, which consist of the teachings by the Widow Douglas of the pathways to heaven, often conflict with his own beliefs. When Huck attempts to conform to the Christian way, Miss Watson she took [him] in the closet and prayed, but nothing come of it. She told [him] to pray every day, and whatever [he] asked for [he] would get it. But it warn’t so. [He] tried it (Twain 9). However, Huck later reflects on this inability to be Christian and ponders that praying don’t work for [him], and [he] reckon[s] it don’t work for only just the right kind (Twain 33). As a result, Huck loses his desire for Christianity and readily rejects the imposition of organized religion, and, therefore, must often contend with the un-merited guilt that this insincere heresy places on him. Such is the case when Huck must decide to protect the location of Jim or when he must do the Christian motive and return Miss Watson her property. The reader can observe Huck s inner conflict when he contemplates to himself if he had

done right and give Jim up, would you felt better than what you do now? No, says I, I’d feel bad — I’d feel just the same way I do now. Well, then, says I, what’s the use you learning to do right when it’s troublesome to do right and ain’t no trouble to do wrong, and the wages is just the same? (Twain 82)

Although Huck ultimately decides not to return Jim to Miss Watson, he resolves that after this always do whichever come handiest at the time (Twain 82). As a result of Huck s afterthought, the reader is left with a sense that the issue is not completely displaced from Huck’s conscience, due to other confinements encompassing him such as family troubles.

Huck toils for freedom from his two unhealthy family ties; the first being the attempted civilization of Huck by the Widow Douglas, and the second being Huck’s desire to escape the wrath of his dangerously abusive father. Though the Widow Douglas tries to better Huck as a person relative to her belief of civilized behavior, Huck’s father tries to drag him down to his sub-civilized level of existence. Huck s father criticizes the Widows attempts at civilizing and educating Huck by screaming,

And looky here — you drop that school, you hear? I’ll learn people to bring up a boy to put on airs over his own father and let on to be better’n what he is. You lemme catch you fooling around that school again, you hear? Your mother couldn’t read, and she couldn’t write, nuther, before she died. None of the family couldn’t before they died. I can’t; and here you’re a-swelling yourself up like this. I ain’t the man to stand it — you hear? (Twain 17)

Due to these forces pulling Huck in opposing directions, he is forced to find freedom from each differently. Huck makes a valid attempt at conformity that signifies that he has some interest in becoming normal and, thereby, pleasing the Widow Douglas. Huck has a genuine gratitude towards the Widow Douglas for taking an interest in his well being, especially since she appears to be the only character doing so. However, given that his attempts are momentary, the reader can assume that Huck’s desire to adhere to his personal virtues overpowers his urge to become civilized or to please the Widow Douglas. In contrast, Huck appears to have no desire to have a relationship with his father. At one point in the story Huck does not know if his father is alive, and apparently does not care if he is dead. Due to his father’s alcoholism and unpredictable behavior, Huck easily achieves emotional freedom from him. However, it is the physical freedom from his father that Huck must accomplish. Due to his jealously of Huck, the father adopts the belief that Huck is attempting to make a fool of him. Consequently, Huck’s father uses the latter belief as justification to imprison Huck and use him for his own personal gain. Huck declares that [his father] kept [him] with him all the time, and [he] never got a chance to run off (Twain 21). For Huck, physical constriction is undoubtedly the most miserable condition in which he could be placed. Freedom from these family constrictions give Huck an excuse escape from them and discover the truth concerning racial prejudices.

The last and most important of Huck’s search for freedom is the struggle for freedom from the deep-rooted and well-established societal institutions of prejudice. Of all the societal lessons Huck fights to learn, the most damaging is that blacks are not people. This racially moral lesson is exemplified in several ways throughout the novel; one is through the constant referral of Jim, by others to Huck, as “property” (Twain, 195). The second and most disturbing way in which the lesson is learned is through the overheard conversation explaining the wreck of the steamboat into the raft, by which the question of whether or not anyone was hurt is answered with a “No m. Killed a nigger (Twain, 199). Undoubtedly, it would be easier for Huck to accept these beliefs had he not known Jim as a person and as a friend. Before Huck befriends Jim, Huck holds the same attitudes towards slaves as everyone else during the time. However, due to the friendship that develops with Jim, Huck once again is forced to find freedom, this time from the strongest of all oppressors of freedom–racism. Huck’s desire to continue his forbidden friendship and his desire for freedom from society’s racism proves to be Huck’s most difficult struggle. He quickly finds that he cannot simply ignore it as he did with the rules and teachings of the Widow Douglas, and he cannot simply run away from it as he did with his father. Huck eventually learns the lesson of racism that people even today must learn; racism will not retire and nobody can change it, just follow the heart and follow good moral values.

Throughout the novel Huck overcomes numerous obstacles and endures various negative repercussions to attain both emotional and physical freedom, thus unquestionably establishing freedom as a major theme in the novel. Twain’s implied lesson expressed within this theme is that true freedom is essential to happiness. Twain ends the novel with a frustrated Huck stating: Aunt Sally she’s going to adopt me and sivilize me, and I can’t stand it. I been there before (Twain, 263). Although the novel ends leaving the reader a sense that Huck is truly free, this concluding phrase subtlety, yet clearly, implies that the struggle for freedom is a never-ending battle.

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