

The sagacity of self-awareness essay sample



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Emma by Jane Austen, My Name is Asher Lev by Chaim Potok and The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain, are all novels which portray society of that particular period and their main characters who are occupying different positions in society. The protagonists possess unique qualities in their growth and development which can be traced through various literary devices in the novels. The novels follow the protagonists' journey to self-awareness and how they transform into new persons. Three of the writers are acclaimed as some of the leading amusing writers of the world.

They have produced some of the best works of their times. Their readers have long appreciated them for their classical interpretation of human morality and several critical thematic concerns of race and society but yet in a most humorous, easy and light hearted representation. Some of his most praised and entertaining works involve Roughing It (about his experiences in the western United States), The Gilded Age, The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, A Tramp Abroad, The Prince and the Pauper and many more. But The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is by far his best work.

A marvelous creation of Mark Twain, the masterpiece best reveals his blending of wit with humor. His personal and conversational style makes the reader involved in his tone and mood. He takes the reader into confidence through his easy and delightful pace. The story is in the form of a first person narration and the reader's perception of the story is through Huck's eyes. The analytical issue of the disgrace of racism and the hideousness of slavery is beautifully depicted with a humorous disposition. Mark twain describes Huck and Jim through a journey of discovering themselves.

Their endurance of miseries and hardships enhances their friendship and exposes Huck to the vagaries of the world. On the other hand, Emma's position in society vastly different from that of Huckleberry Finn, therefore, the course of her growth is in a different context. At the same time, in Asher's cast the theme of the novel centers around art and religion and how conflict between the two pulls the characters apart. Huckleberry Finn, the protagonist in the novel is the most adversely positioned in society as he belongs to the lowest class of the whites.

He dislikes the socially acceptable rules of society and rebels against them . As the novel progresses, so does Huckleberry's growth. He acquires a savvy nature which helps him in facing society. He can see beyond the facade and niceties of civilization with the eyes of a child who knows no hypocrisy. Society continually rejects and mistreats Finn which only emboldens him to keep separate from what society dictates and allows him to think for himself. He has no false notions of his own morality, but is able to justify lies here and there for the sake of his survival.

Huck resolves to disregard morality and do what is needed. Although Finn is somewhat manipulated by Big Jim, he makes a unilateral decision that slavery is wrong, thus not all of what society dictates is right. Miss Watson tries to explain that the heaven is a good place and that there is no chance that Tom Sawyer would end up in there; the reply is worth appreciating the boy's feelings for his beloved friend. This reflects the spirit within him that wants to create self awareness. Emma is introduced to us as handsome, clever and wealthy.

Emma's position in society vastly different from that of Huckleberry Finn, therefore, the course of her growth is in a different context. Emma has "the power of having rather too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself." (Austen, pg 14) This remark is significant as it sums up Emma's character in a major way because it is this trait that leads her to meddle in other people's lives ending, at times, with painful consequences. It is this trait that induces self awareness within her. In regards to Asher Lev, he comes from an exclusive Jewish community which has very strict religious beliefs and practices.

Asher, who has always had a passion for art, becomes torn between that passion and his duty toward his parents and his community. Asher suffers emotional turmoil and conflict which helps us trace his personal growth in the novel. "It seemed to me that we were brothers, he and I, that we both knew lands of ice and darkness." (Potok Chapter 1, p. 44) This paper will look into how three of the literary devices used in all three novels have aided and abetted in the protagonists' growth on the way to self-awareness. Each author uses various literary techniques to follow the main character's growth.

We will take up three of those techniques and describe their impact on the character. All three novels rely on the setting, characterization and theme to give an idea of the protagonists' character. The setting influences the emotional growth of Finn, Emma and Asher tremendously. Each of them is shown to be in conflict with society in their own way. Characterization is used to bring out the nuances of self-awareness of each protagonist. Themes are

used as backgrounds to illustrate the conflict between the main character and his/her surroundings.

The growth of the protagonist is identified through the main theme running throughout the novels. The themes act as the basis for internal change in the protagonists. Huckleberry Finn is set in the controversial era of slavery in America. Along with Finn's lowly position in society it serves to bring out the self-awareness which Finn develops as the novel progresses. Finn's character is highly critical of societal norms and regulations which he chooses to disregard most of the time, preferring instead to go with his own convictions.

In the case of slavery, Finn often finds himself in situations where he struggles with doing what society has deemed as right and doing what he feels is right. " " Quick, Jim, it ain't no time for fooling around and moaning; there's a gang of murderers in yonder, and if we don't hunt up their boat and set her drifting down the river so these fellows can't get away from the wreck, there's one of 'em going to be in a bad fix. But if we find their boat we can put all of 'em in a bad fix - for the Sheriff ' ll get 'em. " " (Twain Chapter 12, pg. 7)

" Conscience says to me ' What had poor Miss Watson done to you, that you could see her nigger go off right under your eyes and never say one single word? What did that poor old woman do to you, that you could treat her so mean?... ' I got to feeling so mean and so miserable I most wished I was dead. " (Twain Chapter 16, pg. 97) Finn's continual struggle to understand the preconceived notions of slavery is an indication of his independent

thinking and his willingness to want to do the right thing regardless of society's stand on issues.

Emma's setting is sharp in contrast to Finn's as she is affluent and regarded highly. Without the worries of money, food and shelter, Emma's superficial achievements are that of matchmaking. While her intentions are good, she is unable to see the arrogance with which she acts, causing grief, embarrassment and pain, none of which is felt by her. "I lay it down as a general rule, Harriet, that if a woman doubts as to whether she should accept a man or not, she certainly ought to refuse him.

If she can hesitate as to "Yes," she ought to say "No" directly. " (Austen Chapter 7, pg. 47) In the end, however, she is saved from her own foolishness and develops wisdom along with an ability to discover her own emotions. "Whatever you say is always right, and therefore I suppose, and believe, and hope it must be so; but otherwise I could not have imagined it. It is so much beyond anything I deserve. "(Austen Chapter 9, pg. 69) Refined society, too, has its set of strict rules of which Emma is only too happy to comply.

It is only in the end that she begins to regret her superficial nature. "Her character depends upon those she is with; but in good hands she will turn out a valuable woman. " (Austen Chapter 8, pg. 53) Asher Lev's setting is the most rigid and he experiences conflict because of his inclination towards art and his community's expectations of him in the religious field. "To kill a human being is to kill also the children and the children's children that might

have come from him down through all the generations. “ (Potok Chapter 2, p. 55) ”

Though his art leads him into conflict with his father (who believes Asher's art is “ from the other side. ”(Potok, p 49) and his community, Asher does not give up his art and this is important to his emotional development.

Characterization plays an important part in bringing out the full nuances of the protagonist's nature and we see that Finn's characterization is quite like no one else's. Finn chooses not to be imprisoned by society's rules and is able to guide himself whether rightly or wrongly. Subsequently, he learns from experiences and is able to “ see through” society.

This is obvious when Huck says, “ Mornings, before daylight, I slipped into corn fields and borrowed a watermelon, or a mushmelon, or a punkin, or some new corn, or things of that kind. Pap always said it warn't no harm to borrow things, if you was meaning to pay them back, sometime; but the widow said it warn't anything but a soft name for stealing, and no decent body would do it. ” (Twain Chapter 12, pg. 72) Ultimately, this does help Finn to develop a more conscientious morality and he can distinguish between a malicious lie and one told to save someone (Big Jim, the Black slave).

The aroma of the involved ironies in the theme can be sensed if we recall that throughout the book, “ Your newspapers call you a brave people so much that you think you are braver than any other people - whereas you're just as brave, and no braver. “(Twain Chapter 22, pg. 161) Twain presents Huck as a careless little illiterate yet sensible boy who hates teachers and lessons, no matter which form they came in and yet, by making Huck say, “

It made me so sick I most fell out of the tree. I ain't agoing to tell all that happened - it would make me sick again if I was to do that.

I wished I hadn't ever come ashore that night, to see such things . . . "(Twain Chapter 18, pg. 127), he creates immense anticipation in the reader and keeps him busy trying to catch a drop in a whirlpool. Emma's characterization is a bit more complex than Finn's because in the beginning she is shown to be revered by all and her word is taken as law. This gives her an arrogance and false superiority. " She did not always feel so absolutely satisfied with herself, so entirely convinced that her opinions were right and her adversary's wrong, as Mr.

Knightley. "(Austen Chapter 8, pg. 61) As the novel develops so does her personal growth and eventually Emma realizes that she is just as flawed as any other but is clever enough to learn from her mistakes and make amends. Asher's nature is simpler as basically he comes across as selfish because of his self-absorption with art. ' The Ribbone Shel Olom was late. Stalin should have died thirty years ago. "' (Potok, Chapter 3, p. 89)

He frequently appears to be on the edge of madness. "' You should make the world pretty, Asher. ' (Potok Chapter 1, p. 32)He is unable to balance his priorities and in the process he wounds his parents deeply. His characterization foreshadows the problems which will befall him throughout the novel secondary to his inability for self-introspection. It is only towards the end that he comes to terms with who he is and this is reflected in the maturity of his art. The themes in each novel used to propel the

protagonists' growth forward are different but are ultimately used as the background against which they discover their true selves.

In Finn's case, it is society's education which he rebels against. "I know what you'll say. You'll say it's dirty Low-down business; but what if it is? - I'm low down; and I'm agoing to steal him, and I want you to keep mum and not let on. Will you?" (Twain Chapter 33, pg. 248) His ride on the raft down the Mississippi river teaches him more than what he would have learned by staying within society's limits. Through self-teaching he becomes more logical and analytical. He chooses his own convictions and acts upon them.

In the end he decides to leave his hometown to create a life more suited to him. In "Emma", the theme is that of romance and matchmaking though not of the heroine's which comes only at the end. Rather, it is Emma's inclination toward meddling in other people's romance that ultimately makes her aware of her own love and to what she actually wants from life. In Asher's cast the theme of the novel centers around art and religion and how conflict between the two pulls the characters apart. Asher's love of art leads him to neglect his religious duties and alienates him from his community.

As he matures and prioritizes things in his life, it is his art, in the end, which comes out on top. His emotional and intellectual awakening in the end marks his growth as an individual throughout the novel. The internal growth and development of the three characters could not have been etched out with so much clarity without the support of the three above-mentioned literary devices. They helped to bring out the "why's" and the "why not's" of the

protagonist's natures and the rollercoaster of their emotional as well as intellectual development.

They can be seen and felt concisely because of the clever use of these literary devices. The books however are masterpieces of great authors who most beautifully incorporate life and its better and worse aspects into writing. The specialty of Samuel Longhorne Clemens lied in his graceful interpretation of the society of his time. From the eyes of a young left out boy, he takes the reader to a journey back to his time when the world was a difficult place to life for those whose skins were black.

And in doing so, he maintains a supreme calmness in his pace that is garnished with humor and adventure. doing just what she liked; highly esteeming Miss Taylor's judgments, but directed chiefly by her own. The real evils, indeed, of Emma's situation were the power of having rather too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself.... " (Austen Chapter 1, pg. 3)All the while, the picture that Jane Austen shows of Emma, is that of a female protagonist, a modest young woman with a clean heart and an honest soul. She presents her as also a free logical thinker; a philosopher who defies the unnecessary assumptions and standards of the society of the period.

And in doing so, she maintains a supreme calmness in her pace that is garnished with humor and adventure. "' Jews in Europe are starving for the Torah ... These are Jewish lives, Asher. Nothing is more important in the eyes of the Master of the Universe than a Jewish life. "' (Potok Chapter 4, p. 107) On the other hand, the reality that Chaim Potok brings to light not only

gestures at the authority, status and power of dictatorship but also implicates the present society where crafty people exploit the innocence of the docile and submissive ones.