Heather Waldo

Professor Brett Hursey

English 215

14 November 2018

Term Paper

When people think of the word “freedom”, many different thoughts come to mind. Like most ideologies, everyone has their own definition of freedom. Some view freedom as the American dream or even hotdogs and hamburgers being served before a Friday night football game. However, freedom definitely surpasses hotdogs and hamburgers. Freedom is all about having choices and control over one’s destiny. However, as one will be able to see, one’s environment also greatly impacts their sense of freedom.

Having freedom doesn’t always bring about positive outcomes all of the time. Sometimes when people have too much freedom, they become power hungry and self-destructive. On the other hand, not having enough freedom results in people either feeling helpless in their situation, or they become angered by the fact that they don’t experience freedom and long too. For example, in William Faulkner’s *A Rose for Emily*, the setting of the story offers a unique sense of freedom. When most people think of being wealthy and successful, they most likely imagine having a spacious, elaborately decorated home to show off their success. Along with their extravagant home, most would assume that the wealthy home owner could maintain the overall pleasing appeal to the home by keeping up with the needed maintenance and being able to afford the house’s utilities and property taxes. Be that as it may, that wasn’t the case in *A Rose for Emily.* The story depicts Emily’s passed down home as a means of almost a prison, incasing and restricting her freedom. Emily is trapped within the bounds of her household because of how she was raised as a child and how that affected her into adulthood. In Faulkner’s story, it is a good reminder that not all that glitters is gold and very few things can last forever. Moreover, Faulkner isn’t the only author to depict a rather ironic sense of freedom.

In Stephen Crane’s *The Open Boat,* the setting is one of the most freeing and vast places a person could ever be, the ocean. The ocean is viewed as being free because it’s so massive and open to anyone who wants to venture into it. That being said, not all freeing things are particularly safe, the ocean defiantly isn’t. When individuals make the decision to go into the ocean, they are relinquishing their personal safety and putting it directly into the ocean’s hands. In most stories depicting the typical “lost at sea” scenario, any type of land is extremely beyond reach and the people are left stranded. However, Crane offers a different scene in his story, the crew members can see land from where they are. The ocean as the setting creates an interesting viewpoint of freedom, the characters in the story are in the most freeing part of the world anyone could possibly be in, but they are also trapped by nature and experience having their freedom restricted, much like how freedom is depicted in *A Rose for Emily.* From the surface, it appears that these people would be completely free because of their location, but because of their extremely freeing location they are trapped within it, struggling to get out.

A common theme among these stories is that freedom comes with some sort of cost to the recipient, that they have to release something from themselves in order to truly experience freedom. Furthermore, that theme continues in Washington Irving’s *Rip Van Winkle.* The setting of this story is yet another, on the surface, seemingly free location, the woods. The woods, much like the ocean from *The Open Boat,* is wide and voluminous and is available for all people to explore it. The woods described in *Rip Van Winkle* are most likely different than the typical, inviting, birds singing, animals frolicking type of woods most people think of. The story is told during the romantic period, which drastically changes the outlook and perspective of the woods as the setting. During the romantic period, hanging out in the woods was one of the last things anyone wanted to do. The woods were have said to have supernatural creatures in it, like witches and even the devil. Making this setting of the woods both free but also very unsafe to its undertakers, again comparable to Crane’s story. In *Rip Van Winkle*, the main character is aware of these supernatural beings said to be lurking in the woods but decides to venture out anyhow, and because of this, his sense of freedom changes. Also, in Irving’s story, he offers another different perspective of freedom not mentioned in the other stories. While telling his story of Rip, he also describes freedom in a sense of politics, describing the differences one faces regarding their freedom in different political systems. While examining all three of these stories one will be able to see how they all have a common, ironic theme of freedom but also have factors that differentiate themselves.

As previously mentioned, in *A Rose for Emily* by William Faulkner, Faulkner creates an ironically sad sense of freedom. Most people’s outlook on the upper class includes them thinking they have everything, when really that isn’t true. In Faulkner’s *A Rose for Emily*, Emily’s house is described as “It was big, squarish frame house that had once been white, decorated with cupolas and spires and scrolled balconies in the heavily lightsome style of the seventies, set on what had once been our most select street.” (Faulkner William, handout). As one can see from the description of Emily’s house, it sounds elaborate but also aging at the same time, and not ageing particularly well at that. Key phrases like “once been white”, “style of the seventies” and “had once been our most select street”, indicate that the house was originally built in good, elaborate fashion at the time, but is now aging and not being well taken care of. One could even compare the house to the south, meaning what was once grand and beautiful is now decaying and aging like many things after the Civil War. By Emily being trapped within the bounds of her spacious house, she is also trapped by her assigned social status. Since Emily came from a prominent wealthy family within her community, that assigned social status remained with her and had major effects on her lifestyle. During Emily’s time, women typically didn’t work and weren’t expected to, if they were wealthy enough. Since Emily came from a wealthy family, she was never expected to work, even after her father’s passing when she wasn’t left any money, just his massive house. This directly impacts how the house ages and how Emily ages within it. Emily is also said to hold onto things dear to her in the story, literally. In fact, Emily even tries keeping her father’s dead corpse in the house and the husbands in the town are forced to go and get his corpse to bury him (Faulkner William, handout). These small details about Emily are also telling of the setting. Emily feels compelled to stay within her home, even though she can’t afford to live there, because she feels the need to hold onto things that have value to her. Faulkner depicts a sad reality of freedom, that one can seem to have everything handed to them on a silver platter their whole life but at the same time, be incredibly lonely and trapped within the walls they built around themselves.

In Stephan Cranes, *The Open Boat*, Crane also depicts an ironically sad sense of freedom, much like the one illustrated in *A Rose for Emily.* Crane too creates a scene of, on the surface, a freeing setting. However, with further evaluation, one can tell that the setting appearing free is actually trapping the characters within it, again, much like in Faulkner’s story. On the surface, the setting of the ocean would appear to be free, it is open for anyone. That being said, when one makes the decision to venture into the ocean, they are in turn giving up part of their freedom. The ocean has total control over one’s destiny. The ocean could also be compared and contrasted to the settings of *A Rose for Emily* and *Rip Van Winkle* in how their settings appear to be free but are instead restricting them*.* Also*,* in *The Open Boat* the story is told during the realistic time period, meaning things just are what they are. To further explain, according to the realistic point of view, the ocean just does what the ocean does, it isn’t out to get its undertakers its just acting according to nature. Speaking of nature, Crane creates an example of nature versus man in his story. He tells a tale of how one cannot fight nature and win. An example of this is when Billie decides to swim towards land instead of hanging onto the capsized boat like the other crew mates did. According to Crane, Billie was the only member of the crew to have perished, all because he fought against nature and lost. “In the shallows, face downward, lay the oiler. His forehand touched sand that was periodically, between each wave, clear of the sea.” (Crane 1507). As one can see, Crane tells a sad tale of how one of the most freeing places can be one of the most destructive. In *The Open Boat* the characters experience nature restricting their freedom and are faced with the ultimate challenge of whether to fight against nature or let nature take its course, each character choosing their fate.

In Washington Irving’s *Rip Van Winkle,* the setting, as previously stated, is the woods. Since in the romantic time period, the woods were have said to be extremely dangerous, full of witches and Satan, greatly impacts the setting. However, Irving doesn’t just describe one important setting in his story. The town is also an important aspect of the story and impacts Rip’s sense of freedom. This aspect of Irving’s story could be compared to *A Rose for Emily* in how the town Emily was in greatly impacted her sense of freedom as well.To begin, the woods is a freeing environment, comparable to the other stories mentioned. That being said, the characters Rip encounters in the woods, in turn change the course of his life and some could say, limit his freedom. Since Rip was passed out for so long, he missed out on a substantial portion of his life and woke up trapped in a different time period. Much like how Emily is trapped in the past within her aging house. Upon Rip waking up, life as he knew it had completely changed. To illustrate, Rip observes changes in his town upon his awakening “The red coat was changed for one of blue and buff, a sword was held in the hand instead of a scepter, the head was decorated with a cocked hat, and underneath was painted in large characters, GENERAL WASHINGTON.” (Irving 411). As one can infer that this sign on a building indicates it is now after the Revolutionary War, meaning Rip fell asleep a colonist and woke up a free American. The names of the businesses in the town represent how the times have changed, much like in Faulkner’s story how the towns people changed around Emily and she refused to accept reality. Upon Rip’s awakening, Irving mentions how he is more accountable for himself, reflecting the changing setting and in turn effecting Rip’s sense of freedom.

In conclusion, as one can see, freedom can take many forms. As illustrated in all three of the stories mentioned, one could infer they all have one aspect of their settings in common. That is, a person can be in the most freeing environment possible, but still have their freedom restricted. As seen in *A Rose for Emily*, how she is trapped mentally and physically in her own mansion. Or in *The Open Boat*, how the ocean, as vast and freeing as it may be, in turn trapped the characters and pinned them in a fight against nature. Lastly, how in *Rip Van Winkle*, the woods in turn altered Rip’s sense of freedom and changed his life forever. The settings differed but all indicated freedom comes with some sort of cost.

Works Cited

Faulkner, William. Handout. 2018.

Crane, Stephen. “The Open Boat.” *Works in an Anthology*, edited by George McMichael, Leonard, Pearson Education, Inc., 2011, 1507.

Irving, Washington. “Rip Van Winkle.” *Works in an Anthology*, edited by George McMichael, Leonard, Pearson Education, Inc., 2011, 411.

Word Count: 2100