Huckleberry Finn | Realist vs. romanticist

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The University of Montana

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HUCKLEBERRY FINN: REALIST VS. ROMANTICIST

by

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INTRODUCTION

Mark Twain was very much aware of the two traditions of American thought, realism and romanticism, and of the differences between them. He wrote a book called *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* in which he pointed out some of the characteristics of the romantic, youthful spirit. Then he wrote *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, which is the story of a boy who grew to responsible manhood through seeing and rejecting the romantic irresponsibility of his world in favor of a more realistic philosophy of his own.

I wish to consider *Huckleberry Finn* in the light of these two lines of thought. Because Huck and Tom appear also in *Tom Sawyer* and in *Tom Sawyer Abroad*, I shall refer to these two additional works also. I am placing particular emphasis upon the concluding section of *Huckleberry Finn*, the events at the Phelps farm.

The purpose of this paper is to show that Huck Finn's practical realism and individuality cannot live and grow in Tom Sawyer's world of romance and conformity. Huck, the realist, confronts romanticism in the fullest possible way in the person of Tom at the Phelps farm over the issue of Jim's freedom. Here the entire system of romantic social morality and values comes to a summation in the person of Tom. Huck finally sees that the social code of the civilized world is not for him and he decides to leave it all behind as he "lights out for the territory."

The river journey, which finally brings freedom to both Huck and Jim, shows civilized life in all its conformity, horror, and hypocrisy.
Tom's life of romantic escapism and foolish nonsense convinces Huck that his dearly-bought freedom is not safe in "civilization." Huck cannot remain alive and himself in the social milieu which Tom represents.
Chapter I

ON A RAFT ON THE RIVER

Huck Finn, our most famous American boy, portrays a nostalgic return to the kind of life any boy would like to have. He floats leisurely down the Mississippi River, having all sorts of exciting adventures, and ends up by going west. He is accompanied on the river trip by a runaway slave, Jim. The ostensible purpose for the journey is to take Jim to freedom. Huck has "murdered" himself to escape from his pap; hereafter he becomes many different persons at different points along the river.

This false murder is probably the most vital and crucial incident of the entire novel. Having killed himself, Huck is "dead" throughout the entire journey down the river. He is indeed the man without identity who is reborn at almost every river bend, not because he desires a new role, but because he must re-create himself to elude the forces which close in on him from every side. The rebirth theme which began with Pap's reform becomes the driving idea behind the entire action.¹

As we shall see, the rebirth of Huck in various roles finally convinces him that he can be no one other than Huck Finn.

Huck's disguises and his experiences give him a detailed knowledge of the life of his day. He enters into every solution which his society has to offer to the questions of what man is and how he is to act. Huck reasons and feels his way to moral maturity as he responds

¹ James M. Cox, "Remarks on the Sad Initiation of Huckleberry Finn," Sewanee Review. LXII (Summer 1954), 395.

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to the experiences which are presented initially to him as the general and usual attitudes and actions of the world around him and which are made personal to him in the attitudes and actions of his idol, Tom Sawyer.

Huck lives in a world of extreme contrasts. On the one hand, it is a cruel world:

You'd see a muddy sow and a litter of pigs come lazing along the street and whollop herself right down in the way, where folks had to walk around her, and she'd stretch out and shut her eyes and wave her ears whilst the pigs was milking her, and look as happy as if she was on salary. And pretty soon you'd hear a loafer sing out, "Hi! so boy; sick him, Tige!" and away the sow would go, squealing most horrible, with a dog or two swinging to each ear, and three or four dozen more a-coming; and then you would see all the loafers get up and watch the thing out of sight, and laugh at the fun and look grateful for the noise. Then they'd settle back again till there was a dog-fight. There couldn't anything wake them up all over, and make them happy all over, like a dog-fight -- unless it might be putting turpentine on a stray dog and setting fire to him, or tying a tin pan to his tail and see him run himself to death.2

On the other hand, this world is sentimental, even about a suspected murderer. Injun Joe, the most feared person in Tom Sawyer, is greatly pitied by the sentimental women of the village:

This funeral stopped the further growth of one thing -- the petition to the Governor for Injun Joe's pardon. The petition had been largely signed; many tearful and eloquent meetings had been held, and a committee of sappy women been appointed to go in deep mourning and wail around the governor, and implore him to be a merciful ass and trample his duty under foot. Injun Joe was believed to have killed five citizens of the village, but what of that? If he had been Satan himself there would have been plenty of weaklings ready to scribble their names to a pardon

petition, and drip a tear on it from their permanently impaired and leaky waterworks.®

Huck's world allows itself to be duped by anyone who cares to make the effort. The Duke and Dauphin make their living by concentrating their efforts on foolish persons and those governed by sentiment. The king hears about a camp-meeting, "got the directions, and allowed he'd go and work that camp-meeting all it was worth." Weeping, he announces his conversion and shares with those at the camp-meeting his plans to go back to convert the rest of the pirates. The persons present join in his tears and take up a collection for his work. "When we got back to the raft and he come to count up he found he had collected eighty-seven dollars and seventy-five cents. . . . The king said, take it all around, it laid over any day he'd ever put in in the missionarying line. He said it warn't no use talking, heathens don't amount to shucks alongside of pirates to work a camp-meeting with." (HF, p. 170). At the home of the Wilks orphans, the Duke wants to leave while the leaving is good. The king points out to him, "'.. . Hain't we got all the fools in town on our side? And ain't that a big enough majority in any town?'" (HF, p. 226). The society which permits the activities of these two has only itself to blame when it is cheated by them.

One of the solutions the world offers to the problems which a man faces is that of religion. Judge Thatcher expresses the properly religious viewpoint in his commendation of Tom for his hard work in memorizing scripture verses:

"That's it! That's a good boy. Fine boy. Fine, manly little fellow. Two thousand verses is a great many -- very, very great many. And you never can be sorry for the trouble you took to learn them; for knowledge is worth more than anything there is in the world; it's what makes great men and good men; you'll be a great man and a good man yourself, some day, Thomas, and then you'll look back and say, It's all owing to the precious Sunday-school privileges of my boyhood -- it's all owing to my dear teachers that taught me to learn -- it's all owing to the good superintendent, who encouraged me, and watched over me, and gave me a beautiful Bible -- a splendid elegant Bible -- to keep and have it all for my own, always -- it's all owing to right bringing up! That is what you will say, Thomas -- and you wouldn't take any money for those two thousand verses -- no indeed you wouldn't. . . ." (TS, 37)

The Judge and his companions obviously fail to realize that Tom Sawyer has gained the necessary tickets by trading for them, rather than by earning them. Nor does the Judge realize the misfortune of the "boy of German parentage" who "once recited three thousand verses without stopping; but the strain upon his mental faculties was too great, and he was little better than an idiot from that day forth." (TS, 32).

Some religious exercises can be destructive.

Religious teachings and principles do not fit too well into the every-day world. Even the tone of a man's voice changes when religious subjects are being discussed. The Sunday school superintendent "was very earnest of mien, and very sincere and honest at heart; and he held sacred things and places in such reverence, and so separated them from worldly matters, that unconsciously to himself his Sunday-school voice had acquired a peculiar intonation which was wholly absent on week-days." (TS, 33).

The Widow Douglas and Miss Watson illustrate the difficulty found in seeking a common solution in terms of religion. Their contrary views of God and His demands or expectations are too difficult for Huck to
reconcile. His practical nature cannot wholly accept either view.

Sometimes the widow would take me one side and talk about Providence in a way to make a body's mouth water; but maybe next day Miss Watson would take hold and knock it all down again. I judged I could see that there was two Providences, and a poor chap would stand considerable show with the widow's Providence, but if Miss Watson's got him there warn't no help for him any more. I thought it all out, and reckoned I would belong to the widow's if he wanted me, though I couldn't make out how he was a-going to be any better off then than what he was before, seeing I was so ignorant, and so kind of low-down and ornery. (HF, 15)

Another area of religious belief and action comes with the gun-packing church attendance of the feuding Grangerfords and Shepherdsons. Their faith and actions do not fit into the religious ideas of either the Widow or Miss Watson. Huck does not state this difference in any conscious way, nor does he verbalize the discrepancy between the ideals and the actions of the Grangerfords as they discuss the morning sermon and then completely ignore its message later in the day as they continue the feud.

It was pretty ornery preaching -- all about brotherly love, and such-like tiresomeness; but everybody said it was a good sermon, and they all talked it over going home and had such a powerful lot to say about faith and good works and free grace and preforeordination, and I don't know what all, that it did seem to me to be one of the roughest Sundays I had run across yet. (HF, 141).

The religious expression of Preacher Phelps, and the kind of person he is, presents another facet of the religious life in which Huck finds no help.

He was the innocentest, best old soul I ever see. But it warn't surprising; because he warn't only just a farmer, he was a preacher, too, and had a little one-horse log church down back of the plantation, which he built him­self at his own expense, for a church and schoolhouse, and never charged nothing for his preaching, and it was worth it, too. (HF, 288).
Mr. Phelps is innocent, absent-minded, loyal to his religious convictions, and largely ineffective. He is kind to others but is as eager to restore a runaway slave to his owners as anyone else is.

Local and community mores also fail to solve the problems of the Mississippi world. At the Grangerford-Shepherdson scene, two young persons in love with each other have no use for the moral code they each have been taught and so they run off together rather than carry on the feud of their respective families. The code which demands the life of a murderer in payment for his crime is set aside when Colonel Sherburn courageously faces the mob and refuses to let its members victimize him. Huck's code of behavior for himself and for others, based upon what the citizenry of St. Petersburg believe is right, breaks down further and further as he experiences companionship with Jim, shared dangers and joys, a common goal, and respect for him as a man. Huck's socially inherited belief that slavery is right and that Negroes are less than persons cannot stand up under the accumulation of his experiences, and he gradually and deliberately puts himself outside the mores of his world in regard to Jim.

One of the reasons people give for upsetting what their social code demands of them appears when Jim is being returned in heavy chains to imprisonment on the Phelps farm. Huck is painfully aware of the load of the chains and of the emphasis upon his friend, Jim, as salable property. He learns from this experience that civilized man cares more for his money than for the moral code by which he says he lives.
The men was very huffy, and some of them wanted to hang Jim for an example to all the other niggers around there, so they wouldn't be trying to run away like Jim done, and making such a raft of trouble, and keeping a whole family soared most to death for days and nights. But the others said, don't do it, it wouldn't answer at all; he ain't our nigger, and his owner would turn up and make us pay for him, sure. So that cooled them down a little, because the people that's always the most anxious for to hang a nigger that hain't done just right is always the very ones that ain't the most anxious to pay for him when they've got their satisfaction out of him. (HF, 362, 363).

The codes of civilization are supposedly the most complete expression of the experience of the race for the governing of relationships between men; when there is a choice between upholding the code and the instinct of self-preservation or the urge to take a mate or the building of a permanent tie between two men or payment for a slave who ought to be lynched, the moral code is set aside by many, including Huck.

Huck has also seen culture and tradition in the sense of education and refinements above the average of his St. Petersburg environment. The Grangerfords have carpets on their floors and other household items that show their love for good things, including a clock that strikes one hundred and fifty when it is in good working order. But their level of culture does not help them to avoid killing their neighbors and being killed by them in a feud, the origin of which is at best a hazy memory. Their courage and culture uphold a tradition of killing a Shepherdson on sight; for them, life based on the past is only destructive of self and others. The traditional and cultural values of the Grangerfords are nicely symbolized by the fruit basket on their table:
On the table in the middle of the room was a kind of a lovely crockery basket that had apples and oranges and peaches and grapes piled up in it, which was much redder and yellower and prettier than real ones is, but they warn't real because you could see where pieces had got chipped off and showed the white chalk, or whatever it was, underneath. (HF, 129, 130).

The Phelps family, too, has its traditional and cultural background. Uncle Silas, of course, carries on the Christian tradition of "preach the word; be urgent in season and out of season." When he is confused by the explanation of the events which have been happening on his farm, "he didn't know nothing at all the rest of the day, and preached a prayer-meeting sermon that night that gave him a rattling reputation, because the oldest man in the world couldn't 'a' understood it." (HF, 369, 370). The Christian tradition has not resolved his problems.

As Huck and Tom are experimenting on the best way to make the witch-pie, they find an old warming-pan in the garret.

We didn't cook none of the pies in the washpan -- afraid the solder would melt; but Uncle Silas he had a noble brass warming-pan which he thought considerable of, because it belonged to one of his ancestors with a long wooden handle that come over from England with William the Conqueror in the Mayflower or one of them early ships and was hid away up garret with a lot of other old pots and things that was valuable, not on account of being any account, because they warn't, but on account of them being relics, you know . . . (HF, 327).

"Relicts" can be used, as this brass warming-pan is used, when the need arises. Otherwise, they might as well be consigned to the garret because they are of no account. Huck has found that too many "relicts" are being kept out in the living room and are used as prestige and class signs, doing away with the need to think and act in terms with the real world.

4 The cultured and courageous Colonel Sherburn, however, is admirable; he is perhaps the best illustration Huck sees of complete self-confidence and self-assurance, in his control not only of his own life but also of the lives of those around him.
The anti-social psychology depicted in the Duke and the Dauphin is not a possibility for Huck, either. He assists these two scoundrels only because of his desire for self-preservation and in order to help Jim. However, he takes as little part as possible in their schemes and even manages to thwart them occasionally as he does when they are trying to bilk the Wilks orphans out of their money and property.

Huck had been exposed to nearly every solution which society seemed to offer. Religion had no answer, certainly not the religion which tried to frighten him to approved behavior with threat of hell-fire. Pride, tradition, cleverness which becomes chicanery -- none of these things which he had known on the river satisfied him. Huck was a decent person, honest and forthright. . . . He reacted in the right way to the right things, when they were called to his attention.5

Huck has found a world full of contradictions. Its citizens are able to give lip-service to the message of the church which preaches love and forgiveness; at almost the same moment, they are selling each other, continuing a meaningless feud, placing money and power above even the accepted codes of the community. Community ideals and mores are unavailing when basic problems arise that demand a solution. Religious beliefs bring confusion in some cases or are so far away from every-day life as to be something to be discussed without ever being applied. Reliance upon the past and its suggestions or traditions cannot bring satisfactory and full lives to the persons Huck meets. "The conflict between what people think they stand for and what social pressures force them to do is central to the novel. It is present to the mind of Huck and, indeed, accounts for his most serious inner conflicts."6

5 Lewis Leary, "Tom and Huck: Innocence on Trial," Virginia Quarterly Review. XXX (Summer, 1954), 427, 428.

6 Leo Marx, "Mr. Eliot, Mr. Trilling, and Huckleberry Finn," American Scholar. XXII (1952-1953), 436.
Huck's inner conflicts arise because he cannot be like those he meets along the river who believe one thing and practice another. However, he does not want to cut himself off from the community he has known; his final attempt to maintain some kind of satisfactory relationship with that world takes place as he faces Tom Sawyer at the Phelps farm. In Tom the false answers are given a romantic and enticing appearance.
Chapter II

TOM SAWYER, ROMANTICIST

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer has as its hero a boy full of good spirits, keenly desiring adventure and excitement, highly imaginative. He turns the whitewashing job into work for all his friends by maintaining an imaginative pleasure in the job:

"Like it? Well, I don't see why I oughtn't to like it. Does a boy get a chance to whitewash a fence every day?"

That put the thing in a new light. Ben stopped nibbling his apple. Tom swept his brush daintily back and forth -- stepped back to note the effect -- added a touch here and there -- criticized the effect again -- Ben watching every move and getting more and more interested, more and more absorbed.

Tom gave up the brush with reluctance in his face, but alacrity in his heart. And while the late steamer Big Missouri worked and sweated in the sun, the retired artist sat on a barrel in the shade close by, dangled his legs, munched his apple, and planned the slaughter of more innocents. There was no lack of material; boys happened along every little while; they came to jeer, but remained to whitewash. (TS, 21, 22).

Tom's imagination provides him with plenty of fuel for the various tricks which he plays on everyone possible. He even includes the cat in his practical jokes:

So Tom pried his mouth open and poured down the Painkiller. Peter sprang a couple of yards in the air, and then delivered a war whoop and set off round and round the room, banging against furniture, upsetting flowerpots, and making general havoc. . . . Aunt Polly entered in time to see him throw a few double somersets, deliver a final mighty hurrah, and sail through the open window, carrying the rest of the flowerpots with him. (TS, 85).

Tom's first appearance in Huckleberry Finn is as the leader of Tom Sawyer's Gang. He is still concentrating on romantic ideas about exciting
and imaginative adventures. He sets the rules for membership in his Gang and very seriously intends to carry these rules out, at least imaginatively.

So Tom got out a sheet of paper that he had wrote the oath on, and read it. It swore every boy to stick to the band, and never tell any of the secrets; and if anybody done anything to any boy in the band, whichever boy was ordered to kill that person and his family must do it, and he mustn't eat and he mustn't sleep till he had killed them and hacked a cross in their breasts, which was the sign of the band. And nobody that didn't belong to the band could use that mark, and if he did he must be sued; and if he done it again he must be killed. And if anybody that belonged to the band told the secrets, he must have his throat cut, and then have his carcass burnt up and the ashes scattered all around, and his name blotted off the list with blood and never mentioned again by the gang, but have a curse put on it and be forgot forever. (HF, 10).

The proceedings at the initiation are mysterious, binding, blood-curdling, and, perhaps even more important, according to the best authorities, Tom does not see the contrast between his romantic demands and the sense of reality of the boys. Huck, an almost objective observer reporting the formation of the Gang, sees some of this contrast:

Some thought it would be good to kill the families of boys that told the secrets. . . . They talked it over, and they was going to rule me out, because they said every boy must have a family or somebody to kill, or else it wouldn't be fair and square for the others.

Ben Rogers said he couldn't get out much, only Sundays, and so he wanted to begin next Sunday; but all the boys said it would be wicked to do it on Sunday, and that settled the thing. They agreed to get together and fix a day as soon as they could. (HF, 10, 13).

During the initiation episode, after the oath is signed in blood and some of the excitements of being a robber are being discussed, Huck reports:

Little Tommy Barnes was asleep now, and when they waked him up he was scared, and cried, and said he wanted to go home
to his ma, and didn't want to be a robber any more.

So they all made fun of him, and called him crybaby, and
that made him mad, and he said he would go straight and tell
all the secrets. But Tom give him five cents to keep quiet.
(HF, 13).

Tom, in common with many boys, has many romantic dreams of far-
away places and exotic adventures:

What if he turned his back, now, and disappeared mysteriously?
What if he went away -- ever so far away, into unknown coun-
tries beyond the seas -- and never came back any more? How
would she feel then? The idea of being a clown recurred to
him now, only to fill him with disgust. For frivolity and
jokes and spotted tights were an offense, when they intruded
themselves upon a spirit that was exalted into the vague au-
gust realm of the romantic. No, he would be a soldier, and
return after long years, all warworn and illustrious. No --
better still, he would join the Indians, and hunt buffaloes
and go on the warpath in the mountain ranges and the track-
less great plains of the Far West, and away in the future
come back a great chief, bristling with feathers, hideous
with paint, and prance into Sunday school, some drowsy summer
morning, with a bloodourdling war whoop, and sear the eyeballs
of all his companions with unappeasable envy . . . (TS, 61).

Much later, following Huckleberry Finn, Tom is still searching for ex-
citement. He decides to go on a Crusade; Huck and Jim are unable to see
his justification for the Holy War and finally make Tom so disgusted that
he gives up his plan.

But he wouldn't hear no more about it -- just said if we had
tackled the thing in the proper spirit, he would 'a' raised
a couple of thousand knights and put them in steel armor
from head to heel, and made me a lieutenant and Jim a sut-
lcer, and took the command himself and brushed the whole
paynim outfit into the sea like flies and come back across
the world in a glory like sunset.7

Tom's love life follows the same line of romantic idealism. The
first time he sees Becky Thatcher, "the fresh-crowned hero fell without

7 Samuel L. Clemens, Tom Sawyer Abroad; Tom Sawyer, Detective; and
hereafter cited in the text as TSA.
firing a shot. A certain Amy Lawrence vanished out of his heart and left not even a memory of herself behind. He had thought he loved her to distraction, he had regarded his passion as adoration; and behold it was only a poor little evanescent partiality . . . here in one instant of time she had gone out of his heart like a casual stranger whose visit is done." (TS, 24, 25). In his discussion with Becky about being engaged, Tom says, "'Like? Why it ain't like anything. You only just tell a boy you won't ever have anybody but him, ever ever ever, and then you kiss and that's all. Anybody can do it.'" Becky says, "'Kiss? What do you kiss for?'" Tom replies, "'Why, that, you know, is to -- well, they always do that.'" (TS, 57).

During Becky's illness Tom pines away romantically. "She was ill. What if she should die! There was distraction in the thought. He no longer took an interest in war, nor even in piracy. The charm of life was gone; there was nothing but dreariness left. He put his hoop away, and his bat; there was no joy in them any more." (TS, 83). Finally, however, he takes stock of his illness and, prompted by the numerous cures Aunt Polly inflicts upon him, decides that "it was time to wake up; this sort of life might be romantic enough, in his blighted condition, but it was getting to have too little sentiment and too much distracting variety about it." (TS, 84).

But Tom's life is not made up just of imagination and romance. He is the most complete synthesis of the whole of the culture from which Huck is fleeing. All the attitudes Huck has found along the river are expressed in Tom.

Tom attends church and Sunday school regularly, although unwillingly:
Tom girded up his loins, so to speak, and went to work to “get his verses.” Sid had learned his lesson days before. Tom bent all his energies to the memorizing of five verses, and he chose part of the Sermon on the Mount, because he could find no verses that were shorter. .. Two of the children /Mary and Sid/ always remained for the sermon voluntarily, and the other always remained too — for stronger reasons. (TS, 29, 31).

The Sunday on which the Thatchers visit Sunday school provides Tom with the incentive for trading his accumulated worldly goods to his friends for the tickets which they have received for memorizing scripture verses. The Sunday school superintendent and his cohorts spend a great deal of busy effort “showing off” before the visitors, who are in turn “showing off” for the assembled Sunday school.

There was only one thing wanting, to make Mr. Walters’ ecstasy complete, and that was a chance to deliver a Bible prize and exhibit a prodigy. Several pupils had a few yellow tickets, but none had enough — he had been around among the star pupils inquiring. .. And now at this moment, when hope was dead, Tom Sawyer came forward with nine yellow tickets, nine red tickets, and ten blue ones, and demanded a Bible. This was a thunderbolt out of a clear sky. Walters was not expecting an application from this source for the next ten years. .. It was the most stunning surprise of the decade .. The boys were all eaten up with envy — but those that suffered the bitterest pangs were those who perceived too late that they themselves had contributed to this hated splendor by trading tickets to Tom for the wealth he had amassed in selling whitewashing privileges. These despised themselves, as being the dupes of a wily fraud, a guileful snake in the grass. (TS, 35, 36).

Tom’s memory work on the Beatitudes (“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven . . . Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted . . .”) has meant only memorizing words which are meaningless to him.

When Huck, Tom, and Joe Harper are on Jackson’s Island, the latter two had more difficulty in getting to sleep. They said their prayers inwardly, and lying down, since there was nobody there with authority
to make them kneel and recite aloud; in truth, they had a mind not to say them at all, but they were afraid to proceed to such lengths as that, lest they might call down a sudden and special thunderbolt from Heaven." (TS, 94). They pray because they are afraid not to; the life of faith and good works is little more than superstition to them.

In addition, those of their peers who are especially religious are also especially obnoxious. Sid, Tom's half-brother who likes to go to church, is a tattle-tale who delights in getting Tom into trouble. The Model Boy of the village is even worse. "And last of all came the Model Boy, Willie Mufferson, taking as heedful care of his mother as if she were cut glass. He always brought his mother to church, and was the pride of all the matrons. The boys all hated him, he was so good." (TS, 38).

The point of this emphasis upon Tom's religious background is that Tom, like the adults of his world, is outwardly religious but inwardly un-religious, if not anti-religious. His life shows the wide discrepancy found in others between what his Sunday school and church have tried to teach him and the daily life he leads.

Tom's relationship to the accepted community mores is highlighted in both books. He excuses his stealing from Aunt Sally by maintaining that what he does is all right as long as it is to help a prisoner escape.

Along during the morning I borrowed a sheet and a white shirt off of the clothes-line; and I found an old sack and put them in it, and we went down and got the fox-fire, and put that in too. I called it borrowing, because that was what pap always called it; but Tom said it warn't borrowing, it was stealing. He said we was representing prisoners; and prisoners don't care how they get a thing so they get it, and nobody don't blame them for it, either. It ain't no crime in a prisoner
to steal the thing he needs to get away with, Tom said; it's his right; and so, as long as we was representing a prisoner, we had a perfect right to steal anything on this place we had the least use for to get ourselves out of prison with. (HF, 308).

Tom's moral standard shifts with the changing circumstances, which is the same phenomenon Huck has found along the river.

The anti-social psychology of the Duke and Dauphin also comes to a climax in Tom. These three persons have one concern in common, which is to get all they can for themselves, regardless of the cost to others.

The Duke and Dauphin want money.

The king rips out and says:

"What! And not sell out the rest o' the property? March off like a passel of fools and leave eight or nine thou'sn dollars' worth o' property layin' around jest sufferin' to be scooped in? -- and all good, salable stuff."

The duke he grumbled; said the bag of gold was enough . . . Well, the king he talked him blind; so at last he give in, and said all right, but said he believed it was blamed foolishness to stay . . . (HF, 225, 226).

Tom wants the excitement and the thrill of an audience. In his daydreams he sees himself "at the zenith of his fame, how he would suddenly appear at the old village and stalk into church, brown and weather-beaten . . . and hear with swelling ecstasy the whisperings, 'It's Tom Sawyer the Pirate!' . . ." (TS, 61). After Tom has returned from setting Jim free, he lives gloriously for a while. But soon a change comes:

Well, by and by Tom's glory got to paling down gradu'ly, on account of other things turning up for the people to talk about -- first a horse-race, and on top of that a house afire, and on top of that the circus, and on top of that the eclipse; and that started a revival, same as it always does, and by that time there wasn't any more talk about Tom, so to speak, and you never see a person so sick and disgusted. (TSA, 13).
The Duke and Dauphin deliberately play upon the gullibility of others. "The Royal Nonesuch," advertised as a tragedy to which ladies and children are not admitted, dupes part of the town the first night and the rest of the town the second night. On the third night, Huck reports that

the house was crammed again -- and they warn't new-comers this time, but people that was at the show the other two nights. I stood by the duke at the door, and I see that every man that went in had his pockets bulging, or something up under his coat -- and I see it warn't no perfumery, neither, not by a long sight.

«•••«•

aboard the raft we lit up and had a supper, and the king and the duke fairly laughed their bones loose over the way they'd served them people. The duke says:

"Greenhorns, flatheads! I knew the first house would keep mum and let the rest of the town get roped in; and I knew they'd lay for us the third night, and consider it was their turn now. Well, it is their turn, and I'd give something to know how much they'd take for it ..." (HF, 195, 196).

Tom's taking advantage of the superstitious gullibility of the Negro serving-man, Nat, is just as unkind. The hounds come rushing into Jim's room through the lean-to door that Tom and Huck had forgotten to fasten. Nat, who wears thread tied around little bunches of his hair to keep the witches away, cries "Witches!" and faints. After Tom gets the dogs out, he "went to work on the nigger, coaxing him and petting him, and asking him if he'd been imagining he saw something again. . . . Tom says: 'Well, I tell you what I think. What makes them come here just at this runaway nigger's breakfast-time? It's because they're hungry; that's the reason. You make them a witch pie; that's the thing for you to do.'" (HF, 317, 318). Tom uses Nat, then, to carry the witch pie with its rope-ladder filling to Jim, unkindly adding to the load of superstition and fear of the Negro slave.
Tom's stealing from the Phelps household ("Next day Tom stole a pewter spoon and a brass candlestick in the house, for to make some pens for Jim out of, and six tallow candles* [HF, 314] is no better and no more justified than the attempt by the Duke and Dauphin to steal money from the orphans. Property has very little meaning for Huck because he has never owned anything, but Tom's attempted justification for taking what he wants at the moment is as reprehensible as the similar activities of the two scamps earlier in the book.

Paradoxically, Tom, the romanticist, is also the most tradition-bound person in the whole book. He substitutes ideas gleaned from books for the individuality of the true romantic. We have already noted his views on love and engagement in which every part of the experience is firmly grounded on what the books say ought to be done. In the formation of his Gang, the following conversation occurs:

"... Some authorities think different, but mostly it's considered best to kill them -- except some that you bring to the cave here, and keep them till they're ransomed."

"Ransomed? What's that?"

"I don't know. But that's what they do. I've seen it in books; and so of course that's what we've got to do."

"But how can we do it if we don't know what it is?"

"Why, blame it all, we've got to do it. Don't I tell you it's in the books? Do you want to go doing different from what's in the books, and get things all muddled up?" (HF, 11, 12).

Tom subjects Jim to an overwhelming amount of trouble and foolishness because the prisoners in romantic novels escaped through such activities as he prescribes for Jim.

"Well, if that ain't just like you, Huck Finn. You can get up the infant-schooliest way of going at a thing. Why, hain't you ever read any books at all? -- Baron Trenck, nor Casanova, nor Benvenuto Chelleeny, nor Henri IV., nor none of them heroes? Who ever heard of getting a prisoner loose in such an old-maidy way as that? No; the way all the best
authorities does is to saw the bed-leg in two, and leave it just so, and swallow the sawdust, so it can't be found, and put some dirt and grease around the sawed place so the very keenest seneskal can't see no sign of its being sawed, and thinks the bed-leg is perfectly sound. . . ." (HF, 304).

... Jim ... found so much fault with ... the work and bother of raising the mullen, and jew's harping the rats, and petting and flattering up the snakes and spiders and things, on top of all the other work he had to do on pans, and inscriptions, and journals, and things, which made it more trouble and worry and responsibility to be a prisoner than anything he ever undertook, that Tom most lost all patience with him; and said he was just loadened down with more gaudier chances than a prisoner ever had in the world to make a name for himself, and yet he didn't know enough to appreciate them, and they was just wasted on him. (HF, 336).

Tom's reliance on book knowledge is carried to its extreme point in his description of the coat of arms for Jim:

"On the scutcheon we'll have a bend or in the dexter base, a saltire murrey in the fess, with a dog, couchant, for common charge, and under his foot a chain embattled, for slavery, with a chevron vert in a chief engrailed, and three inverted lines on a field azure, with the nombril points rampant on a danseet indented; crest, a run-away nigger, sable, with his bundle over his shoulder on a bar sinister; and a couple of gules for supporters, which is you and me; motto, Maggiore fretta, minore atto. Got it out of a book -- means the more haste the less speed." (HF, 329).

All of these attitudes and actions (religious, moral, anti-social, conformity to tradition) are Tom's attempts to handle the basic issues and situations which he faces, including that of freedom. The search by Huck and Jim for freedom is answered by Tom in terms of romantic escapism and of conformity to book knowledge. His solution to the problem of individual freedom "may even be read as one of the reasons why Huck, who finally had his fill of such make-believe contrivings, threw up his hands and retreated to complete non-conformity."8

8 Leary, p. 427.
Chapter III

HUCK FINN, REALIST

The first words the reader finds about Huck Finn are these:

Shortly Tom came upon the juvenile pariah of the village, Huckleberry Finn, son of the town drunkard. Huckleberry was cordially hated and dreaded by all the mothers of the town, because he was idle and lawless and vulgar and bad -- and because all their children admired him so, and delighted in his forbidden society, and wished they dared to be like him. . . . Huckleberry came and went, at his own free will. He slept on doorsteps in fine weather and in empty hogsheads in wet; he did not have to go to school or to church, or call any being master or obey anybody; he could go fishing or swimming when and where he chose, and stay as long as it suited him; nobody forbade him to fight; he could sit up as late as he pleased; he was always the first boy that went barefoot in the spring and the last to resume leather in the fall; he never had to wash, nor put on clean clothes; he could swear wonderfully. In a word, everything that goes to make life precious, that boy had. (TS, 46).

Before he reads very far, the reader can begin to characterize Huck as he stands in contrast to Tom. One of his most noticeable traits is that his sympathies are consistently with the weak and with those who need help. In Tom Sawyer, he found value even in those whom others despised. About Muff Potter he said,

"... He ain't no account; but then he hain't ever done anything to hurt anybody. Just fishes a little, to get money to get drunk on -- and loafs around considerable; but lord, we all do that -- leastways most of us -- preachers and suchlike. But he's kind of good -- he give me half a fish, once, when there warn't enough for two; and lots of times he's kind of stood by me when I was out of luck." (TS, 146).

Later Huck expresses his approval of a Negro friend:

"... He lets me sleep in the barn, and so does his pap's niggerman, Uncle Jake. I tote water for Uncle Jake whenever he wants me to, and any time I ask him he gives me a little
something to eat if he can spare it. That's a mighty good nigger, Tom. He likes me, becuz I don't ever act as if I was above him. Sometimes, I've set right down and eat with him. But you needn't tell that. A body's got to do things when he's awful hungry he wouldn't want to do as a steady thing." (TS, 173).

Lights in the village late at night mean "where there was sick folks, maybe." (HF, 9). After leaving the murderers on the Walter Scott, Huck thinks, "Now was the first time that I begun to worry about the men -- I reckon I hadn't had time to before. I begun to think how dreadful it was, even for murderers, to be in such a fix. I says to myself, there ain't no telling but I might come to be a murderer myself yet, and then how would I like it?" (HF, 93). Later, about the same men, he says, "... I couldn't rest easy till I could see the ferry-boat start. But take it all around, I was feeling ruther comfortable on accounts of taking all this trouble for that gang, for not many would 'a' done it. I wished the widow knowed about it. I judged she would be proud of me for helping these rapscallions, because rapscallions and dead-beats is the kind the widow and good people takes the most interest in." (HF, 97).

Huck finds a point of contact with the widow's life where her religious expression parallels his sense of concern for the outcasts. He has already rejected her admonitions that he pray for what he wants but he realizes a kindred concern with her for those who have no proper place in society. His thinking the widow would be proud of his actions at this place is an after-thought; however, some of her faith in humanity which is redeemable even though apparently lost is meaningful to Huck when he shows mercy. Her actions in all probability stem from her
religious faith. Huck's pity and sympathy come from his own natural instincts.

Huck's sympathy is not limited in any way. When he visits the circus, he is completely taken in by the drunk man who insists on riding one of the horses. Huck observes that all the people watching are "shouting and laughing till tears rolled down." Then he says, "It warn't funny to me, though; I was all of a tremble to see his danger." (HF, 191).

The depth of Huck's compassion is fully reached when his feeling of pity takes precedence over his rather natural desire to see those who had done him the most wrong, the Duke and Dauphin, suffer in full for their wickedness. As the unscrupulous pair are eventually caught with one of their own tricks and are tarred and feathered and ridden out of town on a rail, Huck, who has suffered inwardly from their schemes more than anyone else has, comments sadly, "Well, it made me sick to see it; and I was sorry for them poor pitiful rascals, it seemed like I couldn't ever feel any hardness against them any more in the world. It was a dreadful thing to see. Human beings can be awful cruel to one another." (HF, 294).

Huck takes the appropriate action whenever he can do so, for he cannot mouth platitudes nor ignore the feelings of others. After Huck and Jim become separated in the fog and Huck finally finds the raft with Jim asleep on it, he awakens Jim and tells him that the whole experience was only a dream. Jim is convinced this is so until Huck points to the pile of trash on the raft and asks Jim to interpret what that means. Jim's castigation of Huck is so searing that Huck is left completely upset and says, "It made me feel so mean I could almost
kissed his foot to get him to take it back. It was fifteen minutes
before I could work myself up to go and humble myself to a nigger; but
I done it, and I warn't ever sorry for it afterward, neither. I didn't
do him no more mean tricks, and I wouldn't done that one if I'd 'a'
knowed it would make him feel that way." (HF, 111).

All the way down the river, and most completely at the Phelps
farm, Huck is consistently and steadfastly skeptical of the facades
behind which people hide, whether those false fronts bear the title of
morality or religion or tradition. The epitome of hypocrisy is found
in the Duke and Dauphin. These masters of deceit know nothing of loyalty
nor of pity. Huck recognizes their rascality but does nothing about it,
allowing them to work on the gullibility of everyone they meet until he
is personally involved somehow in what they are doing. He says nothing
at the camp meeting when the Dauphin collects money from the people
there for work among the pirates. He offers no protest to the "Royal
Nonesuch" nor does he ever think of exposing the two. But when the
Wilks orphans are kind to him, he does what he can to thwart the plans
of the Duke and Dauphin, turning their falseness right back on them.
When they sell Jim, Huck gets them to send him out of town on a three-
day trip for the purpose of getting Jim back. When Huck sets his mind
to it, he easily repays the Duke and Dauphin in their own coin, but
never maliciously.

One difference between Huck and the rest of the world is that he
treats persons as persons, not as things to be manipulated for his
pleasure or benefit. His cleverness is for self-preservation, not for
acquisition of property or wealth. Huck has the ability to fit himself
into the world as he meets it while always retaining a reserved objectivity about what occurs in that world. He finally gets so he can stand living at the Widow’s house and going to school. After Pap takes him off to the woods, he finds that he enjoys that life except for the beatings he receives. He likes living on the island with Jim and very satisfactorily accommodates himself to the experience of helping Jim to freedom. He answers Mrs. Loftus, after she has penetrated his disguise, in the manner which she expects. He finds no difficulty in living with the Grangerfords.

Huck’s philosophy about his association with other persons is to give the greatest amount of happiness possible to them as long as this does not force him to compromise with what he thinks is most important for his own ends. He voices this feeling soon after the Duke and Dauphin come aboard: "... it would 'a' been a miserable business to have any unfriendliness on the raft; for what you want, above all things, on a raft, is for everybody to be satisfied, and feel right and kind towards the others. ... If they wanted us to call them kings and dukes, I hadn’t no objections, 'long as it would keep peace in the family." (HF, 160).

Huck is practical, realistic, and a non-conformist. He questions the assertions others make. When Miss Watson takes him "in the closet and prayed. ... nothing come of it." He tests her belief that he can get whatever he asks for by praying for it: "I tried it. Once I got a fishline, but no hooks. It warn’t any good to me without hooks. I tried for the hooks three or four times, but somehow I couldn’t make it work. ... I set down one time back in the woods, and had a long think
about it. I says to myself, if a body can get anything they pray for, why don't Deacon Winn get back the money he lost on pork? Why can't the widow get back her silver snuff-box that was stole? Why can't Miss Watson fat up?" (HF, 14, 15).

When Tom tries to convince Huck of the existence and activities of the genies, Huck gets a lamp and a ring "and went out in the woods and rubbed and rubbed till I sweat like an Injun, calculating to build a palace and sell it; but it warn't no use, none of the genies come. So then I judged that all that stuff was only just one of Tom Sawyer's lies. I reckoned he believed in the A-rabs and the elephants, but as for me I think different. It had all the marks of a Sunday-school." (HF, 19).

Huck does not divulge the fraudulency of the Duke and Dauphin to Jim because of his practical concern. "It didn't take me long to make up my mind that these liars warn't no kings nor dukes at all, but just low-down humbugs and frauds. But I never said nothing, never let on; kept it to myself; it's the best way; then you don't have no quarrels, and don't get into no trouble . . . it warn't no use to tell Jim, so I didn't tell him. If I never learnt nothing else out of pap, I learnt that the best way to get along with his kind of people is to let them have their own way." (HF, 160).

Up to a point, Huck's relation to Tom is to let him have his own way. But after Huck has seen what Tom's way is, Huck goes his own way, leaving his friends behind. The relationship between the two boys changes finally, although not in the way that Professor Gullason sees the change:
For, with Chapter XXXIV, Huck is no longer the lieutenant who blindly submits to his leader's romantic schemes—which are not harmless ones now because Jim's life is at stake. For every exaggerated plan Tom proposes in the final episode (each one proves he is sinning against Jim), Huck comes up with a practical one in such a way that the reader realizes that he is challenging Tom's previously unquestioned authority.9

Gullason somewhat overstates his case in his statements about Huck's finally coming to challenge Tom's previously unquestioned authority, for Huck was no mere follower before. In Chapter II Huck speaks of Tom's attempts to play tricks on Jim: "When we was ten foot off Tom whispered to me, and wanted to tie Jim to the tree for fun. But I said no; he might wake and make a disturbance, and then they'd find out I warn't in. Then Tom said he hadn't got candles enough, and he would slip in the kitchen and get some more. I didn't want him to try. I said Jim might wake up and come. But Tom wanted to resk it, so we slid in there and got three candles."(HF, 7, 8). The first time Tom and Huck are shown together in Tom Sawyer, Huck is the leader in the expedition to the cemetery. Each boy leads in the areas in which he has more knowledge and imagination than the other. Huck's revolt, if it might be termed that, occurs at the very end of the book and results in his decision to get away from Tom's way.

As Gullason says, Huck offers counter-proposals to Tom's suggestions. And, when Tom's sense of romance hits against solid reality, Huck's practical solutions are sought and followed:

When I got up-stairs I looked out at the window and see Tom doing his level best with the lightning-rod, but he couldn't come it, his hands was so sore. At last he says: "It ain't no use, it can't be done. What you reckon I better do? Can't you think of no way?"

"Yes," I says, "but I reckon it ain't regular. Come up the stairs, and let on it's a lightning-rod."
So he done it. (HF, 314).

Huck has tried to assimilate the values which others hold but has never succeeded. He takes some of Pap's values, some of the Widow's, some of Tom's. On the surface he accepts the values of the Duke and Dauphin as he assists them in their expeditions to shore. All along the river he proceeds within the framework of values given to him by his society, values which he cannot ultimately claim as his own until he has tried them all and found most of them inadequate. He is not pleased with himself until he has gone through the sorrow of trying to live up to the standards of other persons. Huck sees that no one, including himself, can be like someone else without losing an integral part of his own identity. The only worthwhile standards are those which come to him independent of, and oftentimes contrary to, the standards he sees around him. For, no matter how well particular standards for action and living work for others, Huck must test them before he can accept them.

Huck makes various attempts to compromise what society suggests as the proper mode of life with his compelling sense of what is right for him. He finds that growth to maturity is a hard, lonely process. Part of the reason for his slowness in realizing that he can have no part in the world around him is that he makes several mistakes about the relation of social morality to ultimate morality. In addition, he makes one or two serious mistakes about Tom Sawyer.
The major error charged against Huck is that he assumes he is wrong and the rest of the world is right in ultimate moral decisions. Along with this, he assumes that the world is consistent in its decisions.

Humbling himself to a Negro or eating with one is reaching the depths of degradation, according to the world in which Huck lives. His famous decision that he will go to hell rather than betray Jim points up this feeling most clearly. He discovers that helping others, whether it is the murderers on the Walter Scott, or the Wilks orphans, or Jim himself, is a satisfying experience regardless of the merit of those whom he wants to save from the results of their perfidy or weakness and regardless of the way the rest of the world views such concern. The conflict between his traditional conscience and his desires produces a psychological encounter with himself which is almost frightening in its intensity. He speaks of the moment of choice in this way: "It was a close place. I took it up, and held it in my hand. I was a-trembling, because I'd got to decide, forever, betwixt two things, and I knowed it. . . ." (HF, 273). But the crucial battle had begun earlier when he realized that floating down the river with Jim is one thing but helping him to escape from the Phelps farm is another:

That's just the way: a person does a low-down thing, and then he don't want to take no consequences of it. Thinks as long as he can hide, it ain't no disgrace. That was my fix exactly. The more I studied about this the more my conscience went to grinding me, and the more wicked and low-down and ornery I got to feeling. And at last, when it hit me all of a sudden that here was the plain hand of Providence slapping me in the face and letting me know my wickedness was being watched all the time from up there in heaven, whilst I was stealing a poor old woman's nigger that hadn't ever done me no harm, and now was showing me there's One that's always on the lookout, and
ain't a-going to allow no such miserable doings to go only just so fur and no further, I most dropped in my tracks I was so scared. (HF, 270, 271).

After he decides to steal Jim back out of slavery no matter what the consequences, Huck tries once more to compromise with what his world believes in through his idol in society, Tom and his "style."

Originally, Huck and Tom are in full agreement with each other about Tom's desire that whatever is being done be done with proper style. Upon several occasions Huck has looked back on his actions thinking that Tom would approve of what he has done. After executing the "murder" of himself, he says, "I did wish Tom Sawyer was there; I knewed he would take an interest in this kind of business, and throw in the fancy touches. Nobody could spread himself like Tom Sawyer in such a thing as that." (HF, 44). After arranging to upset the plans of the Duke and Dauphin at the Wilks place, Huck says, "I felt very good; I judged I had done it pretty neat -- I reckoned Tom Sawyer couldn't 'a' done it no neater himself. Of course he would 'a' threwed more style into it, but I can't do that very handy, not being brung up to it." (HF, 248). When Tom has proposed a plan for freeing Jim, Huck speaks favorably about it, "I see in a minute it was worth fifteen of mine for style, and would make Jim as free a man as mine would, and maybe get us all killed besides." (HF, 297).

At this point all is well with Huck. Later reflection, though, brings him concern about Tom's participation in the scheme. In fact, one of the most astonishing ideas to come from one of the members of the world around Huck is Tom's decision to help free Jim. In thinking about the matter, Huck cannot help but express his surprise:
Well, one thing was dead sure, and that was that Tom Sawyer was in earnest, and was actually going to help steal that nigger out of slavery. That was the thing that was too many for me. Here was a boy that was respectable and well brung up; and had a character to lose; and folks at home that had characters; and he was bright and not leather-headed; and knowing and not ignorant; and not mean, but kind; and yet here he was, without any more pride, or rightness, or feeling, than to stoop to this business, and make himself a shame, and his family a shame, before everybody. I couldn't understand it no way at all. It was outrageous, and I knewed I ought to just up and tell him so; and so be his true friend, and let him quit the thing right where he was and save himself. And I did start to tell him; but he shut me up. . . (HF, 295).

Huck makes several mistakes about Tom in this characterization of his friend. Compared with Huck, Tom is not "bright" in matters that really count because Tom is willing to sacrifice Jim's well-being to his own selfish "leather-headed" romantic ideas. He is not kind, for he has no consideration for others. Tom's shame is his self-righteous pride, not his helping to free Jim. When the real reason for Tom's efforts to set Jim free come out at the end of the book, that is, in order to "have adventures plumb to the mouth of the river," Huck is finally satiated with what Tom is and does.

After Huck notes what he considers Tom's good points, he goes through a certain kind of self-torture in his thought that Tom is doing wrong, is out of character. When Tom gets on the wrong side of the moral fence, Huck is upset. The possibility that Tom has come to the same sort of decision about Jim that Huck has is unthinkable to Huck; Tom cannot be this serious about Jim. Huck's mental anguish comes because he feels that Tom, through his unthinking inconsistency, is unwittingly damning himself. Not until Huck discovers that Jim has been free all the time does he feel secure again in his view of the world: "and so,
sure enough, Tom Sawyer had gone and took all that trouble and bother to set a free nigger free, and I couldn't ever understand before, until that minute and that talk, how he could help a body set a nigger free with his bringing-up." (HF, 370). By this time the damage has been done and Huck realizes exactly what Tom is and does. Huck cannot bear to wait for Tom to head out for the territory; the boy who has always been alone has become the man who knows he must go it alone. Tom and his life of romance -- his playing at living -- cannot be included in Huck's life. The pleasures of the imagination do fine for Tom, but Huck cannot fool himself into "letting on" as Tom does. Huck is no dabbler in what are to him real experiences.

The sharpness of the contrast between the two boys can be seen clearly in similar situations involving Aunt Polly and Aunt Sally. The first takes place in Tom Sawyer. Tom, Huck, Joe Harper have run away to the island. Tom has sneaked back into town and into the house where he listens to Aunt Polly and the family discussing what they assume to be his death:

But this memory was too much for the old lady, and she broke entirely down. Tom was snuffling, now, himself -- and more in pity of himself than anybody else. He could hear Mary crying, and putting in a kindly word for him from time to time. He began to have a nobler opinion of himself than ever before. Still, he was sufficiently touched by his aunt's grief to long to rush out from under the bed and overwhelm her with joy -- and the theatrical gorgeousness of the thing appealed strongly to his nature, too, but he resisted and lay still . . .

Aunt Polly knelt down and prayed for Tom so touchingly, so appealing, and with such measureless love in her words and her old trembling voice, that he was weltering in tears again, long before she was through. (TS, 103, 104).

In Huckleberry Finn, Aunt Sally is sitting by the window watching for
Tom to come home. Huck slides down the lightning-rod and sees her there:

But she was on my mind and Tom was on my mind, so I slept very restless. And twice I went down the rod away in the night, and slipped around front, and see her setting there by her candle in the window with her eyes towards the road and the tears in them; and I wished I could do something for her, but I couldn't, only to swear that I wouldn't never do nothing to grieve her any more. And the third time I waked at dawn, and slid down, and she was there yet, and her candle was most out, and her old gray head was resting on her hand, and she was asleep. (HF, 360).

Tom's center of reference is himself and his effect on the audience; Huck tries to make the path as smooth as possible for as many persons as possible. Tom plays with the lives of other persons in order to give himself as much satisfaction as possible; Huck seriously considers the meaning of his life. "Because Huck completely lives his rituals, because he participates to the tips of his fingers in a struggle for survival, and because his whole world and all its values are at stake, he transcends the empty rituals of Tom Sawyer's universe and achieves mythic significance." 10

Through the entire book, Huck's life is building up to one point; he cannot be in society nor can he be opposed to it. The full realization of this does not come until the experiences with Tom at the Phelps farm have reinforced and confirmed all the lessons learned on the river.

10 Cox, p. 400.
Chapter IV

THE ENCOUNTER AT THE PHELPS FARM

In his intriguing commentary on Huckleberry Finn, Cox finds the ending of the book logical and, with T. S. Eliot, inevitable. However, he considers it "flat":

There is an inexorable and crushing logic inherent in the ending of Huckleberry Finn. T. S. Eliot . . . remarked the inevitability of the final chapters, but failed to enlarge upon the generalization. Most critics agree that the ending is much weaker than the rest of the book, as indeed it is, but often they mistakenly gauge that weakness. Certainly Tom's reappearance itself does not weaken the ending. Any comprehensive vision of the book will, it seems to me, consider Tom's presence at the end not only vital but inevitable. The flatness of the ending results from Tom's domination of the action and the style. Tom's seizure of the style damages the tenor of the novel. It is a stylistic rather than a structural flaw, a failure in taste rather than in conception.

As is usually the case in value judgments, the standard by which an individual critic or observer measures a particular piece of work may vary a great deal from that by which another measures the same work. Perhaps the flatness or non-flatness of the book is due to the age and romanticism of the reader. Twain's contention that the book was written to be read by boys finds a more than adequate expression in Tom's imaginative adventures. What an opportunity for a boy! To free a slave according to the best traditions from the days of the knights! To a boy, the highly imaginative and exciting period on the Phelps farm may easily be the highlight of the entire book. This is part of the cry

11 Cox, pp. 404, 405.
Twain is raising against romanticism: it is too imaginative and too exciting. However, especially to a boy, this section of the story is the one major happening which has more of a feel of realness than do any of the other, more real, events. Few boys know much about feuds or the kind of rascallions the Duke and Dauphin are or the "moral might makes right" of Colonel Sherburn. Many boys know the fun of Cops and Robbers or Cowboys and Indians with the excitement of escaping from the enemy under his very nose.

More to the point, even the adult reader may not necessarily consider the ending "flat." There is a shift in tone here, but then, each episode in the book has shifted in tone somewhat as Huck's experiences have moved from one kind of life to another. The tone at the Widow's is one of decreasing frustration as Huck learns not to fight so hard against what the Widow Douglas wants him to do. His life with Pap produces a tone of unhappiness. His experiences on the river itself are lyrical and almost religious as he and Jim are away from all pressures except those of a growing respect and friendship with each other and a sense of unity with nature. At the Grangerford scene, the hopelessness of the feud dominates the tone. The presence of the Duke and the Dauphin brings a growing feeling of disgust and dismay, especially when Jim and Huck cannot get away from them. Tom's romanticism at the Phelps farm is, at the surface level, a pleasant change from the darkness of the Duke and Dauphin. However, if anything, the tone deepens and becomes increasingly serious as the two concepts of life exemplified in Tom and Huck face each other for the final denouement.

Cox enters another area of censure when he says that "the substi-
tution of Tom's humor for Huck's vision indicates that Mark Twain, though aware of the two sets of values, could not keep a proper balance between them because of his fascination with Tom Sawyer. Marx expands on this statement by defining more closely the two sets of values as social orders:

Clemens had presented the contrast between the two social orders but could not, or would not, accept the tragic fact that the one he had rejected was an image of solid reality and the other an ecstatic dream. Instead he gives us the cozy reunion with Aunt Polly in a scene fairly bursting with approbation of the entire family, the Phelpses included. Presumably, Marx defines Huck's values as the "image of solid reality" which Twain had rejected. If this statement be true, the charge must be leveled against the entire book that Twain began with an idea which he did not carry through to its logical conclusion. Twain's rejection of Huck's values would mean that the whole journey and experience had had no meaning and the book might better not have been written. For Huck's growth into maturity, his acceptance of intelligent and consistent values for his activity, is the purpose for the book; if this is rejected finally by the author, very little remains.

On the other side, Gullason tells us:

Mark Twain had a very definite plan in the final episode which depends on repetitions and variations of themes presented earlier in the novel. His primary objective in the "fatal" last chapters is to ridicule, in the manner of Don Quixote, the romantic tradition as exemplified by Tom Sawyer, who lacks character, who is full of purposeless fun; and to win final sympathy for the realistic tradition and its hero,
Huck, who has achieved a sense of responsibility and a meaningful vision of life.\(^1\)

The crux of the problem lies in the characterization and meaning of Huck and Tom, what they mean to each other and what they represent totally.

Tom's appearance at the Phelps farm and his efforts to free Jim according to the book is a continuation of what Tom has always been and, as we noted in *Tom Sawyer Abroad*, what he will continue to be. "He returns at the end because, like Huck, he is a major character who needs to be set in a final position. . . . Tom remains the child of the first chapters and, try as he may, he cannot pass himself off as the hero of the last episode because he toys inhumanly with Jim."\(^1\)

The final position in which Tom is placed is an especially damning one as he lets Huck and Jim continue to assume that Jim is still a slave. Tom is sacrificing everyone and everything to his own desire for excitement. He even voices a suggestion for cutting off Jim's leg because "'some of the best authorities has done it.'" He gives up the idea because "'There ain't necessity enough in this case; and, besides, Jim's a nigger, and wouldn't understand the reasons for it, and how it's the custom in Europe.'" (HF, 305). He has no thought that Jim ought not to be mistreated because he is a man of emotion and senses and personality; the examples Tom has found in the romantic novels are sufficient authority for him to do whatever he thinks is most fun.

Marx is of the opinion that Twain's "problem, therefore, was to invent an action capable of placing in focus the meaning of the journey

\(^1\) Gullason, p. 87.

\(^1\) Gullason, pp. 89, 90.
down the Mississippi . . . [But the ending] jeopardizes the significance of the entire novel. To take seriously what happens at the Phelps farm is to take lightly the entire downstream journey. What is the meaning of the journey?16

The episode at the Phelps farm must be taken seriously. For one reason, it is the serious continuation in the minds of both Jim and Huck of their effort to free Jim from slavery. Tom, as usual, is playing to the audience: "'What's the good of a plan that ain't no more trouble than that? It's as mild as goose-milk. Why, Huck, it wouldn't make no more talk than breaking into a soap factory.'" (HF, 297).

We have already seen that Huck has always thought Tom's style of doing things is much to be admired. He has not known before that the style is only that — style — and has no depth of human concern or value to it. Therefore, it is dishonest and false.

Tom allows Huck and Jim to think of Jim's freedom as something still to be obtained, although he knows that Jim has been free for two months. Tom's lying, which includes his emphasis upon style, is for the sake of lying or to provide himself with entertainment; Huck's lying is to avoid difficult explanations, to protect himself, to gain some important goal. In fact, the one time Huck is called upon to lie in order to defend the Duke and Dauphin, the lawyer excuses his attempt by saying, "'Set down, my boy; I wouldn't strain myself if I was you. I reckon you ain't used to lying, it don't seem to come handy; what you want is practice.'" (HF, 253). Not until Huck realizes that Tom's "life has been a continuous lie," and that "it is this final harmful

16 Marx, p. 426.
lie in a serious adult situation . . . that epitomizes his romantic nonsense\textsuperscript{17} can he see that freedom is meaningless to Tom who has never realized the weight of the chains he wears. Tom, no doubt, considers freedom a fine idea or ideal, but it is only something to play around with.

Huck's ostensible reason for freedom is from his father and the fear of continued imprisonment and mistreatment. Had he known his father was dead, he would not have needed to go farther than the empty house. Jim's desire is for freedom from being sold down the river by Miss Watson. Had he known Miss Watson had freed him, he would not have needed to make the trip and he could have been with his wife and children. Ironically, Jim, knowing of the death of Huck's father, did not tell him and Tom, knowing of Jim's freedom, did not tell him. A comparison of motives for their remaining silent shows Tom in as bad a light in relation to Jim as he is in relation to Huck. Jim's silence is that of a father who loves his children and knows they love him; he only reluctantly discloses Pap's death, feeling compassion for the fatherless boy. Tom, however, rejoices in his knowledge of Jim's freedom and proclaims this fact exultingly. If Tom had shared this knowledge earlier, Huck and Jim would not have entered so whole-heartedly into the spirit of his fun. Only at the end of the book do the persons concerned find out about their respective freedom. This knowledge must wait until Tom has run the full gamut of his cruel scheming; if told prematurely, Huck would not have the great and decisive push that makes him see he cannot live in Tom's world.

\textsuperscript{17} Gullason, p. 90.
Marx finds that

The most obvious thing wrong with the ending, then, is the flimsy contrivance by which Clemens frees Jim. In the end we not only discover that Jim has been a free man for two months, but that his freedom has been granted by old Miss Watson.

Had Clemens given this episode dramatic emphasis appropriate to its function, Miss Watson's bestowal of freedom upon Jim would have proclaimed what the rest of the ending actually accomplishes -- a vindication of persons and attitudes Huck and Jim had symbolically repudiated when they set forth down-stream.

Moreover, the most serious motive in the novel, Jim's yearning for freedom, is made the object of nonsense. The conclusion, in short, is farce, but the rest of the novel is not. However, Jim's freedom is not the most serious motive in the book. His desire for freedom is parallel with and symbolic of Huck's search for the freedom to be himself. The only way that Huck can see the horrors of Tom's romanticism is through a confrontation of Tom's way of life in an area of high emotional importance to Huck. The conclusion, rather than being farce, comes close to being tragedy as Huck is almost overwhelmed by Tom's foolishness.

Another reason why the episode at the Phelps farm must be taken seriously is that several important events take place in these last chapters that could not very well be left out because they reflect on Huck and Jim importantly. One is that Jim's voluntary return to slavery through helping the doctor with Tom increases his value as a person to everyone who knows what he has done. Up to this point Jim has been an escaping slave, a wise and patient one to be sure, but still a slave. With his return to aid in Tom's care, Jim counts himself in on the

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18 Marx, pp. 426-428.
general stake which humanity holds in treating another as a brother.

One more important occurrence after Huck has arrived at the Phelps farm is the expansion of Huck's natural sympathies to include those who have done him the most harm -- the Duke and the Dauphin. His conclusion to his pity for them is

So we poked along back home, and I warn't feeling so brash as I was before, but kind of ornery, and humble, and to blame, somehow -- though I hadn't done nothing. But that's always the way; it don't make no difference whether you do right or wrong, a person's conscience ain't got no sense, and just goes for him anyway. If I had a yaller dog that didn't know no more than a person's conscience does I would pison him. It takes up more room than all the rest of a person's insides, and yet ain't no good, nohow. Tom Sawyer he says the same. (HF, 294).

I have already noted Huck's return from the chase after the escaping Jim and the extension of his sympathy to Aunt Sally: "I wished I could do something for her, but I couldn't only to swear that I wouldn't never do nothing to grieve her any more." So the growth process has not stopped with Huck's assumption of Tom's name nor with Jim's temporary return to slavery.

As a conclusion to Huck's search for meaning and self-hood, he is given Tom's name. For a moment he knows only relief: "it was like being born again, I was so glad to find out who I was." (HF, 285). However, he soon sees that this is not who he is. This disguise is perhaps the most galling and the most important of all the disguises Huck has assumed. It is not a disguise he has sought; it is given to him by someone else.

There is bitter irony in Huck's assumption of Tom's name because the values of Tom Sawyer are so antithetical to the values of Huck Finn; in the final analysis, the two boys cannot exist in the same world. When Huck regains his own
identity at the very end of the novel he immediately feels the compulsion to "light out for the territory" because he knows that to be Huck Finn is to be the outcast beyond the paling fences.19

Properly, Huck's final disguise within the episode at the Phelps farm is that of a girl, which is the disguise with which he began his journey. In both cases, the disguise is worthless. Mrs. Loftus sees through to the boy beneath the dress and no one except Tom and Jim sees Huck dressed as a serving girl. Now that Huck has completed the full circle of disguises, he can finally be only himself, free from the need for sham or pretense.

Marx refers to the final portion of the book, as a return to the mood of the beginning, in these terms:

I submit that it is wrong for the end of the book to bring us back to that mood. The mood of the beginning of Huckleberry Finn is the mood of Huck's attempt to accommodate himself to the ways of St. Petersburg... The return, in the end, to the mood of the beginning therefore means defeat — Huck's defeat; to return to that mood joyously is to portray defeat in the guise of victory.20

The St. Petersburg mood is definitely present in the ending of Huckleberry Finn. The difference is that Huck now realizes why he can never accommodate himself to that mood. Were Huck not faced again with the St. Petersburg mood, the certainty of his inability to enter into that mood would not be fully established. Now that he has become a man, he can leave all that he had formerly known and loved: St. Petersburg, Tom, Jim, the river-womb or river-god. Huck has found a rational core

19 Cox, p. 401.

20 Marx, pp. 433, 434.
for his life which is not imposed upon it from outside but which has
grown inside. He has transcended the St. Petersburg world, has gone
through the mental and spiritual suffering it has offered him, has come
out beyond civilization to the realization that a man must stand alone
guided only by his surest and most basic instincts.

It is only in the last chapters that Huck completely rejects
both Tom's romantic irresponsibility (which he first sus­
pected in Chapter II) and society's cruel nature. It is
only here that he understands Jim's true worth, after batt­
ing his conscience through many chapters. Finally, it is
the honest and humble way in which he faces and then re­
solves each of the above-mentioned conflicts that shows
Huck's developing strength of character.21

Huck has been confirmed in his understanding of the moral universe.
He has discovered that he can't pray a lie, that he can risk the truth
with some persons, that a particular doctor was what he had thought
him to be: "... I was mighty thankful to that old doctor for doing
Jim that good turn; and I was glad it was according to my judgment of
him, too; because I thought he had a good heart in him and was a good
man the first time I see him." (HF, 365). Huck has discovered that
some persons ought not to be mistreated because they really are good,
kind, nice persons such as the Phelpses, and that others ought not to
be too badly mistreated even if they deserve it. He has also dis­
covered that no part of civilization is for him; even the river is no
longer appealing. If T. S. Eliot is correct in considering the river
a god to Huck, it is rather strange that Huck does not return to the
river upon which his most satisfying and ecstatic moments have occurred.
Instead he lights out for the territories.

21 Gullason, p. 91.
Huck has not tried to generalize from his specific experiences. He has not formulated a statement or belief nor is he trying to force others to believe in what he has discovered. He has come to a degree of personal understanding of the universe outside of himself. He has found his own ideas to be practical and satisfying; because he can respect himself without being self-centered, he can also respect the personality of another.

I am, therefore, in agreement with Lionel Trilling's thoughts about the conclusion of the book:

In form and style Huckleberry Finn is an almost perfect work. Only one mistake has ever been charged against it, that it concludes with Tom Sawyer's elaborate, too elaborate, game of Jim's escape. Certainly this episode is too long -- in the original draft it was much longer -- and certainly it is a falling off, as almost anything would have to be, from the incidents of the river. Yet it has a certain formal aptness. . . . It is a rather mechanical development of an idea, and yet some device is needed to permit Huck to return to his anonymity, to give up the role of hero, to fall into the background which he prefers, for he is modest in all things and could not well endure the attention and glamour which attend a hero at a book's end. For this purpose nothing could serve better than the mind of Tom Sawyer with its literary furnishings, its conscious romantic desire for experience and the hero's part, and its ingenious schematization of life to achieve that aim.22

Chapter V

CONCLUSION

Professor Gullason says that "With Huckleberry Finn, Twain tries to 'kill' romanticism. He suggests this obliquely by recording the fate of two ships prior to the last episode of the novel: the Lally Rock (a reference to Thomas Moore's romantic poem, Lalla Rohk) blows up ... and the Walter Scott becomes a 'wreck' ... "23

Romanticism often assumes the form of escape into a world that never was and never will be. It takes various forms and becomes varied in meaning to different persons. "It is escape through avoidance of what one wishes to avoid by creation of values of one's own which transcend reality because they seem finally more real than reality ... escape to a world of his own."24

Religious escape varies from the "pie in the sky by and by" other-worldliness of Preacher Phelps to the "hell-fire and damnation" concept of Miss Watson's strict and sour eternity. In either case, the forms must be adhered to -- church attendance, nightly prayers, memorization of scriptures for the eventual reward of a Bible. The heart of the Christian gospel, love for others, is largely ignored or is only partially considered, giving way before racial discrimination, feuds, general unconcern for the feelings and personalities of others.

The emphasis upon the glorious past as carried into the present through romantic novels or through family tradition indicates that the

23 Gullason, p. 73.
24 Leary, p. 428.
years gone by were more exciting and more wonderful than the present days are. Men of yore did not apparently have to put up with the minor difficulties and irritations of today.

The alarming aspect of the modern ego is not that it wants to create order or adopt a discipline or accept talented rulers, but that it is walking forward with its head turned back in fear and longing. This, and not its affectations, is the signal of distress. It marks it . . . as an artificial survival of the last phase of romanticism . . .

In the glorious traditional past, two neighbors quarrelled and so the Grangerfords and Shepherdsons carry on the quarrel, losing young men as well as old. Attics and garrets are given over to storing remnants of the exciting lives of ancestors. The thrilling tales of escaping prisoners give proper examples of what present-day prisoners must do in order to escape in the right manner, even though all the problems have to be manufactured, and the prisoner and his helpers have to lose all dignity in accepting the discipline which mere legend imposes.

The romanticist's pleasure in anti-social behavior pits him against the world in a battle which he loses sooner or later. He may be tarred and feathered and ridden out of town on a rail; he may lose all respect for others through losing his own self-respect; he may force the most valuable person in his life to pull out for the territories, leaving him behind.

Carried to an extreme, any of these forms of romanticism are inhuman and dangerous. The romanticist is, at least, a hypocrite because

his assumptions are based in a world which exists only in his own ima-
agination and which cannot be allied successfully to the world which is
peopled by real persons who have real needs and lives.

Tom Sawyer, for all his charm, subtly personifies many of the de-
fects of the romantic spirit which seeks pleasure for the sake of self,
which finds its authority for desired activities outside itself inter-
preted by a self-centered imagination. Jim and Huck are finally freed
from the chains that have bound them; Tom is still enslaved to a set of
false values from which he will never escape.

The realistic mind, on the other hand, looks carefully at the
world in which it lives. It tests the premises that members of that
world hold about themselves and their relationships to others. With
the religious world it finds a bond in genuine sympathy and concern
for all, regardless of race or class or attitudes. It discovers the
usefulness of a "relict" when an occasion arises which demands such a
use. The realist stands ready with practical suggestions for the ro-
manticist when the imagination of the latter cannot solve his own
problems. The realist intelligently, and yet with an understanding
heart, tries the moral code and sometimes finds that code lacking be-
cause it is too limited in scope. The realist may eventually have to
leave the world into which he was born because that world will crush
and maul him beyond restoration.

Huck represents the realistic mind. He seeks for positive values
in everyone, even finding Tom's "style" good, temporarily. For a while
he is persuaded to become like those who have been most dangerous to
him and most inhuman in their pursuit of selfish enjoyment and pleasure
despite the unhappiness of others. In other words, Huck, the norm and standard, becomes like other persons in wanting to be acceptable to those whom he admires and respects, little realizing at first that those persons, with the possible exception of Colonel Sherburn and the Widow Douglas, are not worthy of his respect. From the complete commitment of himself to his own way or to the full experience of lining up totally with Jim against the world, he falls back temporarily, but humanly, into the pit of conformity. But his attempt to escape himself is useless, and he soon decides that any compromise with the majority is self-destructive. The force of the attack on romanticism comes in the understanding of the depth to which Huck is submerged in it before he finally struggles free.
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