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Full Text:

FORTUNATELY, TOM GOT SHOT. It may be lovely to live on a raft, but only when you can live high, hogging watermelons without having to "chaw" over a lot of Tom's "gold-leaf distinctions." Had the grand evasion gone as planned, had Tom, Huck, and Jim made it to the raft safely, the beauty and simplicity of raft life would have been diminished by Tom's insistence that they leave off "borrowing" the occasional chicken or cantaloupe from local farms. Tom can't even purloin a few candles without leaving five cents on the table for pay. Lighting out for the territory ahead of the rest may be a bittersweet ending to a bittersweet novel, but it beats having to share a raft on the southern Mississippi with Tom.

In his 1966 article "Thief and Theft in Huckleberry Finn," Robert Vales demonstrates that thievery is a major theme in Huckleberry Finn, appearing in virtually every major episode. Vales argues that the theft motif helps unify the book, as well as justify the much-maligned "evasion" ending. Vales's observations are astute, for the predominance of thievery in the novel does serve to bind many of the episodes of the novel together around a recurring plot device. Theft, however, serves as much more than a simple, if ingenious, plot device or character trait. In fact, Huck's role as a thief in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* provides a means of observing his growth and change. As the narrative progresses, the succession of thefts performed by Huck--from the imaginary "julery" and "ingots" stolen by Tom's harmless band of robbers, to the very real act of slave-stealing on the Phelps's farm--chart Huck's growing moral depth and awareness. What one witnesses in Huck is a willingness to engage in increasingly serious acts of thievery, coupled with an expanding awareness of the moral implications connected to these same acts.

With the promise of relentless robbery and murder, Tom's band of robbers seems a likely candidate for adventure and general mayhem. But, in the series of fanciful raids led by Tom, the theft is imaginary. The highlight of Tom and Huck's brief career as highwaymen is an aborted raid on a Sunday School picnic; they nearly made away with some doughnuts and jam, a rag doll, and a hymn-book, but, as Huck tells us, the "teacher charged in and made us drop everything and cut" (15). With these essentially innocuous boyhood pranks, neither Huck nor Tom faces any significant moral dilemmas. There is no moral content to an imaginary theft of invisible diamonds; there is no need to reconcile deed with conscience. With little at stake, either materially or morally, Tom's hapless band of robbers soon dissolves.

The early exploits of the band of robbers was but a prelude to greater thefts to come. With his flight from Pap and St. Petersburg, Huck leaves Tom and the band of robbers far behind, and, at the same time, Huck leaves behind a bit of his boyhood. As he takes to the raft with Jim, Huck not only drifts south, into the somber heart of the Southern slave system, but psychologically, Huck also begins to drift into the somber territory of moral awareness. The change is simple at first, expressing itself in a need to justify his acts of petty theft and assuage his conscience. For example, soon after fleeing Jackson's Island, Huck explains how he found food: "Every night, now, I used to slip ashore, towards ten o'clock, at some little village, and buy ten or fifteen cents' worth of meal or bacon or other stuff to eat; and sometimes I lifted a chicken that warn't roosting comfortable, and took him along" (79). To leave the explanation here would indicate that Huck's conscience bothered him little, if any. Instead, however, Huck explains why it was okay for him to steal chickens: "Pap always said, take a chicken when you get a chance, because if you don't want him yourself you can easy find somebody that does, and a good deed ain't ever forgot. I never see pap when he didn't want the chicken himself, but that is what he used to say, anyway" (79). The tone in this passage suggests that Huck knows that there is something disingenuous about his father's altruism. In the passage that follows, however, Huck reveals that his conscience was actually bothering him about his acts of petty theft.

Mornings, before daylight, I slipped into corn fields and borrowed a watermelon, or a mushmelon, or a punkin, or some new corn, or things of that kind. Pap always said it warn't no harm to borrow things, if you was meaning to pay them back, sometime; but the widow said it warn't anything but a soft name for stealing, and no decent body would do it. Jim said he reckoned the widow was partly right and pap was partly right; so the best way would be for us to pick out two or three things from the list and say we wouldn't borrow them any more--then he reckoned it wouldn't be no harm to borrow the others. So we talked it over all one night, drifting along down the river, trying to make up our minds whether to drop the watermelons, or the camelopes, or the mushmelons, or what. But towards daylight we got it all settled satisfactory, and concluded to drop crabapples and p'simmons. We warn't feeling just right, before that, but it was all comfortable now. (79-80)

By ruling out crabapples and p'simmons (an act, curiously, that shows the same disingenuous spirit as Pap's chicken-borrowing theory) Huck is able to rationalize his thievery and assuage his slightly bothered conscience. The chief difference between the band of robbers and chicken-lifting lies in the consequences involved: with the imaginary thefts of Tom's band there were no consequences, hence no moral implications; with the theft of chickens and melons come certain consequences, such as the farmer's loss of product (and, more importantly, the Widow Douglas's disapproval); thus, Huck is bothered by the moral implications of his theft.

Around this same time Huck and Jim happen upon the wreck of the *Walter Scott*. A potential goldmine, Huck can't pass by the wreck without first giving it a good "rummaging" in search of the captain's five-cent "seegars" (81). Huck wasn't the only one interested in giving the *Walter Scott* a

good rummaging, however. As he hides in the stateroom, Huck gets another lesson in "morals" as he listens to two of the three roughs on the ship discuss the fate of the third. After giving the ship a thorough rustling, suggests one, they will "shove for the shore and hide the truck." Then they will wait the ship to break up and wash down the river, drowning the captive Jim Turner. "He'll be drowned," argues the robber, "and won't have nobody to blame for it but his own self. I reckon that's a considerable sight better'n killin' of him. I'm unfavorable to killin' a man as long as you can git around it; it ain't good sense, it ain't good morals. Ain't I right?" (84). The reasoning in this argument could have come straight out of Pap's own ethics manual: as long as they feel they aren't the immediate cause of Jim Turner's death, then Bill and Jake feel absolved of guilt. Upon hearing this plan, Huck swiftly decides to cut their boat loose, trapping all three on the ship, then to report them to the local Sheriff.

Both Huck and the robbers desire the same thing: to give the sinking ship a good rummaging. But while the robbers try to figure out how to commit murder without having to feel guilty about it afterwards, Huck, after he and Jim escape from the Walter Scott in the robbers' boat, needs to alleviate the feelings of guilt he feels after leaving the robbers stranded. "Now was the first time that I begun to worry about the men," Huck tells us; "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?" (87). And, after convincing the ferryman to go rescue the robbers, Huck tells us that "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 rapsSCALLIONS, because rapsSCALLIONS and dead beats is the kind the widow and good people takes the most interest in" (91). The unfortunate irony is that Huck does become a murderer of sorts: by stealing their canoe Huck does--presumably--condemn the robbers to death, for the Walter Scott soon breaks up and sinks. When the sinking ship floated by Huck, he could "see in a minute there warn't much chance for anybody being alive in her." This leaves Huck a "little bit heavy-hearted about the gang, but not much, for I reckoned if they could stand it, I could" (91). The key difference between the Walter Scott robbers and Huck is that Huck shows genuine concern for the safety of the robbers, while their concern lies only in rationalizing their way out of guilt over the proposed killing. In a strange twist of events, although Huck seems to have condemned the robbers to death by stealing their canoe, what he learns from the robbers is how not to be murderous himself by showing a genuine concern for the well-being of others.

How "not to be murderous" was only one of several lessons for Huck. In another lesson, Huck learns not to take advantage of the innocent. In the latter half of Huck Finn, Huck's thievery takes on new heights. No longer dealing solely with chickens and mushmelons and five-cent "seegars" in a Captain's stateroom, Huck decides to steal six thousand dollars. The "Royal Nonesuch" and other cons pulled by the King and the Duke were one thing, but claiming to be the English relatives of the deceased Peter Wilks seemed to Huck an all-time low. It was, Huck remarks, "enough to make a body ashamed of the human race" (210). Stealing the bag of money from the King and the Duke entailed serious consequences: for the Wilks, their livelihood was at stake; for Huck, the threat of harm at the hands of the King and the Duke was a real one. Moreover, should the King and the Duke seek retaliation in some manner, Jim would be in danger. Stealing the Wilks's money back from the King and the Duke was fraught with risk, and this translated into moral wrangling for Huck. At first, the risk of unwelcome entanglements with the King and the Duke kept Huck in line, but as Huck becomes more impressed with the kindness and goodness of the Wilks sisters his desire to help them outweighs his instinct to self-preservation. Huck remarks: the sisters "all jest laid their selves out to make me feel at home and know I was amongst friends. I felt so ornery and low down and mean, that I says to myself, My mind's made up; I'll hive that money for them or bust" (225). Because there was no easy way to let the sisters in on the scam without alerting the King and the Duke, Huck comes to the conclusion that "I got to steal that money, somehow; and I got to steal it some way that they won't suspicion that I done it" (226). Huck steals the money, hiding it in Peter Wilk's coffin, and plays the guilt off on the Wilks's slaves, who had already been sold, and thus were clear of revenge at the hands of the King and the Duke. Ultimately, Huck steals the money because he has come to terms with the gravity of stealing money--and a hefty pile of it, too--from the innocent and well-meaning Wilks family. Thus, by observing the immoral actions of the King and the Duke, Huck's own moral nature grows stronger.

Imaginary "julery," chickens and watermelons, loot aboard the Walter Scott, the Wilks's inheritance--these pale in comparison to Huck's final act of thievery. Huck's decision to steal Jim from captivity on the Phelps's farm threatened the severest consequences, thus requiring the strictest moral conviction, and producing the greatest moral growth. Stealing a slave was so serious because it undermined the whole Southern plantation system. Stealing a slave not only affected the owner's pocketbook--a slave such as Jim would be worth eight hundred dollars or more--it also asserted that slaves were worth stealing, not because they were a commodity (abolitionists did not steal for the purpose of resale), not because they were humans with an inherent right to freedom. Moreover, slave stealing, as Huck is only too aware, automatically aligned the stealer with the North and the abolitionist program, blatant affronts to the Southern slave-holding community. Huck doesn't have to think nearly as hard about stealing the six thousand dollars as he does about stealing Jim. Stealing chickens and cigars does not necessarily lead to hellfire. But stealing Jim requires a firm commitment, and an acceptance of the consequences, which, for Huck, means accepting damnation.

No easy decision, Huck's growing awareness of the consequences of his actions can be seen in a comparison of Huck's resolve in chapter thirty-one to steal Jim out of slavery with Huck's reaction earlier in the novel to Jim's plan--once free--to hire an "Ab'litionist" to steal his own children out of slavery if he can't purchase them outright (124). When Huck hears of Jim's plan, he remarks:

It most froze me to hear such talk. He wouldn't ever dared to talk such talk in his life before. Just see what a difference it made in him the minute he judged he was about free.... Here was this nigger which I had as good as helped to run away, coining right out flat-footed and saying he would steal his children--children that belonged to a man I didn't even know; a man that hadn't ever done me no harm. I was sorry to hear Jim say that, it was such a lowering of him. (124-25)

Here Huck's conscience bothers him so much at the thought that Jim might steal someone else's property that he decides to "paddle ashore at the first light, and tell." Huck doesn't carry this plan through, however, because Jim impresses upon Huck that he is "de only fren' ole Jim's got now" and the "on'y white genlman dat ever kep' his promise to ole Jim" (125). In this case, Jim's pleas keep Huck from relieving his conscience by handing Jim over to the authorities. The lesson begun here deepens and magnifies in chapter thirty-one, where Huck, remembering the earlier occasion on the raft when he came perilously close to turning Jim in, allows the loyalty of friendship to outweigh his social and religious convictions. He decides to "work and steal Jim out of slavery again; and if I could think up anything worse, I would do that, too; because as long as I was in, and in for good, I might as well go the

whole hog" (271). This decision brings both the novel and Huck's growing moral awareness to a climax; the succession of greater and more serious acts of thievery themselves charting Huck's moral growth.

Huck fully understands the seriousness of his decision. This awareness is not only illustrated in his resolute decision to "go to hell," it is also illustrated in Huck's astonishment at Tom's decision to help him steal Jim out of slavery.

"I know what you'll say. You'll say it's dirty low-down business; but what if it is?--I'm low-down; and I'm a-going to steal him, and I want you to keep mum and not let on. Will you?" His eye lit up, and he says: "I'll help you steal him!" Well, I let go all holts, then, like I was shot. It was the most astonishing speech I ever heard--and I'm bound to say Tom Sawyer fell, considerable, in my estimation. Only I couldn't believe it. Tom Sawyer a nigger stealer! (284; c.f. page 292)

The reintroduction of Tom Sawyer into the novel in chapter thirty-three has been cause for chagrin by many readers of Mark Twain's text. The intellectual, moral, and social strides taken by Huck during his journey down the river seem to disintegrate under the influence of Tom's domineering personality. Contemporary debate over the "evasion" ending originated with Leo Marx's response to the defenses of the ending set forth by T. S. Eliot and Lionel Trilling. A fine introduction to more recent (circa 1980s) criticism of the evasion ending is that of Gary Henrickson, who surveys dozens of critical responses to the ending of the novel, developing the argument that as Twain critics continue to invent ever more ingenious defenses of the evasion ending, Twain scholars are turning up more evidence that suggests Twain's genius was not suited for devising such complex narrative structures (for an extensive treatment of the issue post-Marx, but pre-1980s, see James M. Cox *Mark Twain: The Fate of Humor*). In fact, when confronted with the vast body of Twain scholarship in the past fifty years, one need exaggerate only a bit to assert that since the 1940s it has been difficult to find a sustained examination of Huckleberry Finn that does not engage debate over the relative merits of the evasion ending.

Although certain criticisms of the "evasion" ending seem justified it is too long, the burlesque too exaggerated and drawn out--it seems somewhat unjust to fault Twain, and the ending of the novel, merely for the reintroduction of Tom into the narrative, or even for Huck's seeming intellectual and moral reversals. Structurally and thematically, the reintroduction of Tom into the narrative during the "evasion" sequence not only lends to the narrative a certain roundness or wholeness--what Lionel Trilling referred to as "a certain formal aptness" (cf. John Gerber's treatment of the symmetry of the novel, and Richard Adams's and Frank Baldanza's arguments for the unity of the novel based on the principle of repetition and variation)--it also allows Twain to highlight Huck's moral growth. The real interest in the evasion ending is in the clash of Tom the Thief with Huck the Thief. Tom acts as a yardstick with which to measure Huck's moral and intellectual development. During the days of Tom's band of robbers, Huck, Tom, and the other boys engaged in harmless, imaginary acts of theft with no moral content. A summer and a trip down the Mississippi River later, Tom and Huck once again engage, in tandem, in an act of thievery. Although they both seek the same objective--to "steal" Jim--this act of thievery has drastically different moral implications for the two would-be thieves. For Tom, stealing Jim is of no more consequence than the exploits of the band of robbers; knowing that Jim has already been legally freed by Miss Watson, "stealing" Jim is just another boyhood game with no moral weight and no possible repercussions to consider. Tom has not changed: he is the same boy he was at the beginning of the novel. For Huck, the situation is entirely different. Not knowing that Jim has already been freed, Huck views his act of theft as a real and punishable offense that could lead to jail or a lynching on earth, and hellfire in the hereafter. Thus, stealing Jim is of great consequence and possesses a deep moral significance. As for the artistic value of the much maligned evasion ending, it is a testament to Twain's literary craftsmanship that he is able to create a scene in which the same action--stealing Jim--can so vividly illustrate the moral gulf that separates Tom and Huck at the end of the novel.

Aside from illustrating the dynamic nature of Huck's character in the novel (as opposed to Tom's static character) the moral gulf between Tom and Huck during the evasion ending has another dimension. Tom is not amoral or immoral; he simply holds a vastly different moral system than Huck. Huck expresses a moral system based not on absolute principles, but on character and situation. This system stands in opposition to the more dogmatic and rule-based morality of Tom. Much has been made of the Huck-as-realist/Tom-as-romantic contrast, and the conflicting moral systems of the two characters can be seen as stemming from their broadly different philosophical perspectives. Huck holds to an ethic where honest desire and a pragmatic approach to a situation stands for something; his is a very human and subjective ethic. "Honest desire," however, is far too simple a proposition to play any large role in Tom's complex web of authorities and principles. This contrast is writ large throughout the evasion ending, and can be seen clearly in Tom and Huck's debate over what instrument to use to dig a tunnel. According to Tom's "authorities," the proper tool for the job is the highly impractical, if not absurd, case-knife. Huck, the moral pragmatist, prefers the utility of the pick. When Tom decides that case-knives simply won't get the job done, he has to somehow reconcile using a pick with the dictates of his authorities. He remarks: "I'll tell you. It ain't fight, and it ain't moral, and I wouldn't like it to get out--but there ain't only just the one way: we got to dig him out with the picks, and let on it's case-knives" (307). Hearing this, Huck replies: "Now you're talking! ... your head gets leveler and leveler all the time, Tom Sawyer...."

"Picks is the thing, moral or no moral; and as for me, I don't care shucks for the morality of it, nohow. When I start in to steal a nigger, or a watermelon, or a Sunday school book, I ain't no ways particular how it's done, so it's done ... and if a pick's the handiest thing, that's the thing I'm a-going to dig that nigger or that watermelon or that Sunday school book out with; and I don't give a dead rat what the authorities thinks about it, nuther."

"Well," responds Tom, "there's excuse for picks and lettinon, in a case like this; if it warn't so, I wouldn't approve of it, nor I wouldn't stand by and see the rules broke--because right is right, and wrong is wrong, and a body ain't got no business doing wrong when he ain't ignorant and knows better" (307).

Tom's inflexible deference to authorities and Huck's more pragmatic reliance on character and situation is also highlighted when Huck wonders why Tom insists that he dress like a servant girl in order to deliver the "nonnamous letter" in the middle of the night. Nobody would see him anyway, notes Huck. Tom responds: "That ain't got nothing to do with it. The thing for us to do, is just to do our duty, and not worry about whether anybody sees us do it or not. Hain't you got no principle at all?" (333).

Within this ongoing contrast between Tom's morals of "principle" and Huck's morals of "situation" seems to be a submerged religious satire. Huck's more earthly and subjective moral system is ridiculed by the dogmatic Tom. Tom bases his moral system on a series of principles derived from a set of texts--gothic, medieval, and historical romances. This corresponds with the Church's reliance on biblical principle. Tom's deference to "authorities" is critiqued through the myriad absurdities Tom foists upon Huck and Jim during the evasion sequence (swallowing sawdust? writing

in one's own blood?) Tom's domineering personality and his insistence that they follow the dictates of the "authorities" mirrors the towering presence of the Church, and helps explain why Twain, symbolically, allows Huck--during the evasion ending--to be swallowed up by Tom's vision and personality. One need not--as critics like Leo Marx do--read Huck as reverting back to an earlier moral state: Jim would still be freed, simply not in an efficient, reasonable manner. Instead, one can read the Huck/Tom relationship at the end of the text as Twain's critique of the Church's role in Western culture. This association of Tom's "authorities" and the nineteenth-century Church is suggested by Huck when Tom condemns him for stealing a watermelon. A thief, according to Tom, is a "mean ornery person." But, if the thief is stealing because he is "representing a prisoner," then he has a right to steal (according to the examples established by textual authority, of course). The watermelon, says Tom, was not stolen for the benefit of the prisoner; thus, taking the melon was an act of immoral thievery. Hearing this, Huck remarks:

Tom said that what he meant was, we could steal anything we needed. Well, I says, I needed the watermelon. But he said I didn't need it to get out of prison with, there's where the difference was. He said if I'd a wanted it to hide a knife in, and smuggle it to Jim to kill the seneskal with, it would a been all right. So I let it go at that, though I couldn't see no advantage in my representing a prisoner, if I got to set down and chaw over a lot of gold-leaf distinctions like that, every time I see a chance to hog a watermelon. (303)

Rather than have to muddle through a series of "gold-leaf distinctions," Huck prefers a moral system based on honest desire and a pragmatic approach to individual situations. If a tunnel can be dug most efficiently with a pick, then dig it with a pick, regardless of the dictates of authority.

Perhaps Twain is not so much critiquing biblical principle itself as he is targeting the type of obtuse, legalistic interpretation of biblical principle metaphorically engaged in by Tom. Rather than focus on the larger principles underlying the specific situations described in his textual authorities, Tom legalistically adheres to the idiosyncratic particulars of the situations described by the authorities. If a prisoner in a castle tower writes a journal in blood, then all prisoners must keep a journal in their own blood, no matter that the prisoner in the story didn't have access to any other writing implement. This legalistic focus often results in a very real cruelty (for treatments of the cruelty theme in Huck Finn, see John Gerber and Henry Nash Smith). Historically, one can see it in the horrors of the Inquisition and other dark moments in religious history; in Twain's text one can see it in Tom's cruel treatment of Jim during the evasion ending. "Human beings can be awful cruel to one another" notes Huck as he watches the tarred and feathered King and Duke "astraddle of a rail" (290). Knowing Jim was legally free, and nevertheless subjecting him to days of living with rats, spiders, and snakes, eating sawdust, writing in his own blood, and so forth, goes beyond mere boys-will-be-boys pranks. One laments that Huck allows Tom to put Jim through this nonsense, but Huck, at least, believed it was all anterior to a higher purpose: stealing a slave out of captivity. Tom, knowing Jim had been freed by Miss Watson, was simply using Jim for sport. Tom's attitude toward Jim is no different than it was back in the days of the band of robbers. In chapter two, when Huck and Tom are sneaking away from the Widow's house late at night, Tom can't pass up an opportunity to have a little fun at Jim's expense. After Tom and Huck have stolen several candles (Tom, we recall, leaves five cents on the Widow's table for pay), Tom decides to play a prank on Jim: "I was in a sweat to get away; but nothing would do Tom but he must crawl to where Jim was, on his hands and knees, and play something on him" (7). On this early occasion the prank is harmless enough: he hangs Jim's hat on the bough of a tree. Jim uses this episode to construct a tale of witchery. At the end of the book, with Jim held captive in the darkness of the Phelps's shack--a darkness both real and figurative, for Jim had no idea Miss Watson had freed him--Tom's "pranks" take a decidedly cruel turn.

Tom's brand of "principled" or "legalistic" morality is ultimately doomed to backfire, for in its attempt to set idealistic goals it fails to account for the simple realities of individual situations. This failing is underscored in a passage at the beginning of chapter forty-one. Huck has gone to fetch a doctor to attend to Tom, wounded in the calf by a bullet during the attempt to free Jim. Thinking himself an abolitionist now, Huck is loath to reveal the reason Tom lies wounded, so he constructs another of his many stories:

I told him [the Doctor] me and my brother was over on Spanish island hunting, yesterday after noon, and camped on a piece of a raft we found, and about midnight he must a kicked his gun in his dreams, for it went off and shot him in the leg.... "Who is your folks?" he says. "The Phelpses, down yonder." "Oh", he says. And after a minute he says: "How'd you say he got shot?" "He had a dream," I says, "and it shot him." "Singular dream," he says. (343)

Tom's unrealistic, narrow, idealistic morality of authorities and "gold-leaf" distinctions is the stuff of dreams, and, for Twain, these idealistic dreams will eventually turn upon the dreamer. Ironically, it is Huck's moral nature that proves superior to the tarnished morality of Tom and most of the other characters in the narrative. Early in the novel, Huck, frustrated in his attempts to make sense of Miss Watson's religious platitudes, seeks counsel from the Widow Douglas, who explains that what one could get from praying was "spiritual gifts." What this meant was that Huck must "help other people, and do everything I could for other people, and look out for them all the time, and never think about myself" (13). Curiously, although he dismisses the advice at the time because of its apparent impracticality, Huck, of all the major characters in the novel, comes closest to keeping this golden rule advice.

Huck's famous declaration in chapter thirty-one that he would "go to hell" if it meant stealing Jim out of slavery was not the first time Huck had determined to forego the rewards of Heaven for a more earthly alternative. It was the second. The first time occurs in the novel's opening chapter. Miss Watson, having scolded Huck for putting his feet on the furniture and sitting improperly, threatens Huck with fears of hellfire:

Then she told me all about the bad place, and I said I wished I was there. She got mad, then, but I didn't mean no harm. All I wanted was to go somewheres; all I wanted was a change, I warn't particular.... Now she had got a start, and she went on and told me all about the good place. She said all a body would have to do there was to go around all day long with a harp and sing, forever and ever. So I didn't think much of it. But I never said so. I asked her if she reckoned Tom Sawyer would go there, and she said, not by a considerable sight. I was glad about that, because I wanted him and me to be together. (3-4)

In this passage, Huck elects to go to hell without any particular regard for what such a decision implies. In chapter thirty-one, Huck makes the same decision, only this time he does so in complete awareness of the gravity of such a choice.

These dual decisions lend a certain symmetry to the novel as they illustrate Huck's deepening moral awareness. So too does the contrast of Huck and Tom in the opening and closing frames of the novel. In fact, re-introducing Tom into the narrative during the evasion ending brings full-circle a pattern of contrast established early in the work. Throughout the novel, Huck's acts of thievery are set against comparable acts of thievery by others. The cycle begins with Tom's band of robbers. Then, early in the novel, Huck's thievery is set against the exploits of Pap and the Walter

Scott ruffians. Later, Huck's more "moral" thievery is set in contrast to the deceitful and immoral chicanery of the King and the Duke. Finally, on the Phelps's farm, with his greatest triumph of thievery, Huck is again teamed with Tom, whose "dream" shoots him.

Late in the novel, Tom deduces Jim's location on the Phelps's farm when he sees a man bringing food to the "hut down by the ash-hopper." Huck had seen the man deliver the food--which included a slice of watermelon--but had not drawn the inference that the food was for Jim; the food, thought Huck, could easily have been intended for a dog. When Tom tells Huck of his discovery, Huck replies: "Well, it does beat all, that I never thought about a dog not eating watermelon. It shows how a body can see and don't see, at the same time" (291). If ever Twain dropped a clue to interpreting his novel, this is it, for the idea of "seeing and not seeing" at the same time is the key to many of the novel's mysteries. It helps set the circus scene, in which Huck watches as a bumbling drunk gradually sheds a series of costumes, transforming himself into a skilled acrobat, into context. It also is the key to understanding the complexity of Jim's character: Huck sees Jim, but does not see him--does not see through the minstrel mask worn by the beleaguered runaway slave (cf. Forrest Robinson's treatment of Jim). It may also be a clue to Huck's own character, as Twain asks us to see beyond Huck's surface roguishness at the moral development his acts of thievery indicate.

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ERIC CARL LINK establishes that while Huck Finn progresses from petty to grand theft, he becomes aware of the moral issues such behavior entails and of the moral dimension of society around him. Link teaches American literature at North Georgia College and State University. He has published articles on Robert Frost, Henry David Thoreau, Mark Twain, Thomas Pynchon, Walker Percy, William Gilmore Simms, and Frank Norris, and is co-author of *Neutral Ground: History, Politics, and Ideology in American Romance Theory*.

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