

“THERE’S MORE HONOR”: REINTERPRETING TOM AND THE EVASION IN HUCKLEBERRY FINN

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When Leo Marx, in 1953, published his landmark essay, “Mr. Eliot, Mr. Trilling, and *Huckleberry Finn*,” he could not have anticipated the avalanche of scholarly reactions to his critique that would proliferate during the next fifty years and that would help make *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* the most controversial book in American literature. Marx’s essay attempted to undercut existing defenses of the ending of *Huckleberry Finn* by describing that part of the text as an evasion, on the author’s part, of the moral responsibilities created by the experiences Huck and Jim share on the river. According to Marx, to avoid the pain of the ending that would logically have developed (presumably, Huck hanged and Jim sold down the river), Twain has Tom Sawyer re-enter the narrative and assume command. Tom, a representative of romanticized Southern society, is responsible for subjugating Huck and subjecting Jim to farcically inhumane treatment. It is an ending, Marx argues, that betrays Huck and Jim and exposes Twain’s “glaring lapse of moral imagination” (435).

Ever since Marx’s essay, critics by the hundreds have weighed in on the controversy over the ending, attacking or, more often, defending it on the basis of consistency of characterization, aesthetic form, historical or cultural representation, or a host of other approaches.¹ The discussion of the novel’s ending has consumed so many of us in academia that critics have adopted Tom’s language in order to discuss the ending, drawing on one of his many explanations to Huck about why their freeing of Jim must use such unnecessary and painful histrionics. “When a prisoner of style escapes, it’s called an evasion. It’s always called so when a king escapes, f’rinstance. And the same with a king’s son; it don’t make no difference if he’s a natural one or an unnatural

one" (335). "Evasion" has come to stand not only for the ending of the novel but also for the question of whether Twain evaded dealing with the very touchy issues his own story raised, and that question has spawned the "evasion" cottage industry and books like *Satire or Evasion? Black Perspectives on Huckleberry Finn*.

Despite the variety of these judgments, however, the critical consensus on Tom's role in the ending of *Huckleberry Finn* has been steadfastly singular; he is insensitive, malicious, and racist (either personally or representationally).² Defenses of the ending, historicist or otherwise, usually depend, at least in part, on discussion of its satiric power, with Tom's romantic construction of Jim's confinement read as an attack on the Southern (white) mind. The basis for reading the end as a critique, of course, rests on Tom's actions, which Shelley Fisher Fishkin describes as "insane" (199) and Jocelyn Chadwick-Joshua calls "perverse" (118). Even Richard Hill, the most enthusiastic defender of the ending, moderates his description of Tom as "brilliant" and "brave" by adding that he "becomes drunk on romanticism and endangers Huck and Jim unnecessarily" (505). Critics have been motivated to condemn, question, or defend the ending because of the discomfort felt by readers when Huck and Jim's journey on the river comes to an end and their narrative primacy is lost. Tom is held responsible for all of this. What his presence has done, in Marx's words, is to turn Jim from an individual into a "submissive stage negro" (430). Put simply, Tom is a bad boy.

As the critical view of Tom has grown increasingly negative, interestingly, the critical view of Jim has become steadily more complex and positive, elevating him from stage prop to active participant, even during the evasion. Jim has evolved from the stereotypical minstrel "darker" to Marx's tragic hero to the current critical view, promoted most persuasively by Forrest G. Robinson, of a fully realized but concealed character. Robinson takes us "behind the mask" to reveal Jim as a character more adroit at deception and concealment than anyone else in the novel, whose actions constitute a careful "maneuvering for survival," and who uses his carefully constructed and maintained minstrel mask to his own advantage (378, 390).³ The implicit condemnation of Tom begun in Marx's essay survives in Robinson's, despite their many differences; Marx's Tom is Twain's excuse for two-dimensionalizing Jim, while Robinson's Tom creates the necessity for Jim to two-dimensionalize himself. Both of these views, as well as all later views, imply a failure, be it a moral failure of the author, a failure of form, or a failure of the society that imposes cultural stereotypes. But, of course, Tom is the primary catalyst of the ending, and if there is a failure in or of the ending, then the failure is Tom's; he is almost universally blamed for the torture and subjugation of Jim.

The critical dislike of, or at least discomfort with, the ending is largely caused by the re-entrance of Tom onto the stage and the havoc that ensues. We dislike what we view as a "new" Tom; we dislike the way he treats Jim, which

seems manifestly racist; and we dislike the effacement of the personalities of the two main characters of the novel.⁴ The very narration conspires with our reactions to distance us from Tom. In *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, Twain's third-person narration gives us access to Tom's thoughts and motivations, and he is made fully human despite his radical egotism. In *Huckleberry Finn*, however, we know little of Tom's inner self. Our view of Tom is through Huck, whose view of Tom is what the rest of St. Petersburg's must be; Tom is the town champion, its "unpromising hero," and its main source of adventure and entertainment (see Regan 89-90, 107-30; Robinson, *In Bad Faith* 19-28). When Tom creates the evasion, then, we judge him only from the outside. If our view of Huck were also limited only to what can be observed from the outside, which is Jim's situation, we might be as suspicious of him—of his wavering, his obvious calculations, and his long absence from Jim at the Grangerfords—as critics like Robinson have shown Jim to be. However, my purpose here is not to provide a defense of Tom or his actions on a human level. Tom certainly is racist; there is no textual evidence that Tom ever questions or is even uncomfortable with the structures of slavery. Racism, however, provides an inadequate explanation for Tom's actions during the ending. Another powerful ideology guides Tom—though it is used ironically—and that is Southern honor, or, rather, his understanding of it.

Therefore, if we are going to be fair in our examination of Tom, if we are going to temper our moral indignation toward his actions with a judicious understanding of *his* social construction, then we must use the same methodology that Robinson uses in explicating Jim; we need to see Tom in Tom's world. Tom has none of Huck's concerns. Operating from a position of power and manipulating the antebellum South's societal structures in a highly systematized way, he enjoys the freedom within society that Huck aspires to outside of society. Most important, Tom has the luxury of being a boy; he can play. Huck enjoys no such luxury and is ill acquainted with play for its own sake. For Huck, marginalized as he is, play has been the interface with which he manages—and often takes advantage of—the dominant class. His first act of play (of Tom's sort) outside of St. Petersburg backfires when he places the dead rattlesnake in Jim's blanket. The dead snake's mate bites Jim (70), who, as Robinson observes, exploits the incident to manipulate Huck through guilt for the rest of the novel. During the rest of *Huckleberry Finn*, Huck's skills of play are productive only when used for survival, while Tom is able to dedicate his play skills entirely to the purpose of adventure and self-gratification.

Unlike Huck's experience of play and of life in general, Tom's sort of life, what I will call the "boy-play world," could only exist *within* the society Twain is critiquing. Yet, describing Tom's play as self-gratifying should not suggest that it must necessarily work to a negative effect or function solely as critique (though critique is surely one of its narrative purposes). The world Tom inhabits is the Southern, Walter Scott-influenced, socially-accepted, boy-

play world; it is a world of honor, where things have to be "done right" in order to have meaning. Of course, the phrase, "done right," suggests the process-oriented ideology of Southern honor that Tom aspires to, a socially inscribed performance that cements social control within the hands of moneyed white men. Women, the lower class, and, especially, blacks have, by definition, no access to this ideology. So when Huck decides to rescue Jim or when Jim sacrifices his freedom for the wounded Tom, their behavior is genuinely moral and ethical, while Twain sees the South as using its system of "honor" often to *avoid* behaving ethically. Despite the hegemonic aspects of honor, however, judging Tom and his boy-play world simply as negative or positive raises barriers to an understanding of their importance as narrative catalysts and as devices employed as part of the novel's critique of a Southern culture that holds itself to standards of (Southern) honor while justifying slavery and, after Emancipation, the suffering caused by the Black Codes and Jim Crow laws. Tom's performance of honor, through his boy-play world, shows a dedication to internal consistency (though a great flexibility with reality) that is not evident in its adult counterpart, and it is in the subtle differences between Tom's boy-play world and the social performances of Southern honor that Twain's critique of the post-Civil War South may be discerned.

In this essay, I suggest a rereading of Tom consistent with his boy-play world, a reading that illuminates not just a more complex view of Tom, but that also suggests new possibilities in reevaluating the ending of the novel—not as an "evasion" but as a direct address to the mechanisms of Southern racism and a suggestion for "honorable" means of circumventing them.

Tom says at the end of *Huckleberry Finn* that he would have "waded neck-deep in blood" for an "adventure" as epic as that of the ending (358), and, in Tom's boy-play world, adventure, process, goal, and meaning are all inextricably bound together. Adventure is reality for Tom. There really are Arabs and elephants and magicians ready to face him in dire battle—his construction of reality requires it. From the white-washing con in *Tom Sawyer* to the ending of *Huckleberry Finn*, Tom transforms, through play, the reality he finds into the romance he prefers. James Cox laid the foundation for this argument in 1966: "Tom's play *defines the world as play*, and his reality lies in his commitment to play, not in the involuntary tendencies which are often attributed to him" (140; also see Oriard and Rabin). Cox perceptively describes Tom as committed, for Tom's devotion to the rules and conventions of play is meticulous.

For Tom, the fastidiousness of his play is nearly a matter of survival. The Tom of the first seven chapters of *Tom Sawyer* merely foreshadows the Tom to come. This early Tom has yet to decide upon his approach to reality. His only use of role-playing is the mock battle of dirt clods in which Tom generals the winning troops (19). In addition, Tom spends these chapters learning the usefulness of both truth and deception. Tom learns that truth is undependable

and has little connection with reality when he is punished for Sid's breaking the sugar bowl (22), and when Tom uses truth subversively, to be seated next to Becky Thatcher (53), it is at the cost of another whipping. In chapter seven, truth mars Tom's carefully constructed wooing of Becky when he accidentally lets slip his previous "engagement" to Amy Lawrence (61). Truth is volatile in Tom's world, a potent force to be controlled and used like other tools.

Here, Robinson's concept of "bad faith" strongly informs my analysis. Robinson defines bad faith as "the reciprocal deception of self and other in the denial of departures from public ideals of the true and the just" (*In Bad Faith*, 2). Bad faith is the glue that holds St. Petersburg together, allowing its inhabitants to ignore reality (i.e., slavery) while maintaining their self-promoting self-deceptions. Tom, because of his early experiences, has been initiated into the culture of bad faith that he will soon command. After receiving Becky's rebuff, Tom contemplates leaving St. Petersburg and its inhabitants, an option that he rejects. This is a quiet but decisive turning point for Tom. He exchanges what could have been a "good faith" rejection of St. Petersburg for "bad faith" rejections (which, of course, are not rejections at all). Vowing to leave the next day, he reverses himself a paragraph later when, while "collecting his resources" from their buried site, he recites the incantation: "What hasn't come here, come! What's here, stay here!" (65). At this point, Tom's bad faith self-denial is firmly in place, and opens up to him new ways of being. Tom will "stay here" in St. Petersburg, but he will transform it into the world he desires, and the town, in turn, will "reject" his actions but be happily entertained by them. In his bad faith rejection of the town's bad faith—which is really an acceptance, one that allows Tom the pleasure of the rejection without losing the comfort of the acceptance—Tom will become the town prodigy, the "sanctioned rebel" (Fetterly, "The Sanctioned Rebel"), the uber-boy of bad faith. This allows him to play the role of rebel and thorn in the side of the social order while actually being its representative.

Tom immediately acts upon his resolution to fill his boy-play world with Robin Hood fantasies, adopting the role of Robin and "go[ing] it lively" with Joe Harper (67). This episode introduces the reader to the irony of the boy-play world—that there is very little *play*, or flexibility, in Tom's play. When Joe's Guy of Guisborne refuses to acquiesce and be "slain," preferring that Tom/Robin fall instead, Tom informs him, "I can't fall; that ain't the way it is in the book. The book says, 'Then with one back-handed stroke he slew poor Guy of Guisborne.' You're to turn around and let me hit you in the back" (67-68). In order to accommodate both Joe and the conventions of play, reality is transformed and re-transformed, with the boys taking turns being Robin and the victor, or adopting other roles that permit other outcomes (68). Although Tom does allow himself to be repeatedly killed, he *authors* it. He establishes how it may be done and demonstrates mastery of the rules and conventions of play. When Joe forgets a line, Tom is able to supply it. For

Tom, the correct process is an imperative in the boy-play world, *the sine qua non* of any personal victory or any particular outcome, and he derives the rules for that process from romantic stories like *Robin Hood*, creating a code that he will maintain consistently throughout *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*. By the time of the evasion, then, Tom does not see what others see. Others see a pick, Tom sees a case-knife. Others see a shed, Tom sees a dungeon. Others see a runaway slave, Tom sees an imprisoned nobleman. Tom's visions are, of course, youthful versions of the bad faith mechanisms adults use in his community every day. He does not actually see the case-knife, but he must *act* consistently as though he does in order to maintain the coherence of his boy-play world.

Much occurs between the Robin Hood episode and the episodes of play that fill the opening pages of *Huckleberry Finn*. Tom's commitment to play, however, only deepens. He assembles a gang that lasts but a month, collapsing under the weight of Tom's fastidious maintenance of the conventions. Huck and the rest of the boys resign, though no mention is made of Tom resigning, because, of course, he cannot. The Sunday-school picnic/Arab and Spaniard army episode signals the gang's downfall. The raid yields no *concrete* rewards, which is not a problem to the process-driven Tom, for whom the goal seems secondary. Yet in another respect, the goal is neither secondary to Tom nor even separate from the process. Tom does not desire more gold, or even doughnuts. The goal of Tom's play (by which I mean both the climax of the adventure and the spectacle it creates) is merely the final stage of the process, and none of the stages retains meaning without the correct performance of each of the others. The result of a successful achievement of this goal-inclusive process is the highly systematized spectacle that forms Tom's bad faith agreement with the community, what Robinson calls his "masterful mimicry of adult strategies" intended to serve both his interest in glory and the community's interest in entertainment (26).⁵ The rest of the boys do not have Tom's sophisticated and intuitive understanding of bad faith and fail to see the boy-play world as a kind of training for participation in the adult community. Tom's commitment to the conventions of play runs counter only to the social values the community openly claims, not to those that its bad faith accommodates.

The text of *Huckleberry Finn*, however, does question Tom's commitment to the town's system of self-deception; Ben Rogers escapes essentially unharmed after describing Tom's plan as foolishness, and Huck concludes that Tom's boy-play world "had all the marks of a Sunday school" (20). In addition, Tom descends to ad hominem attacks in defense of his process of play, deriding those who oppose his ideas as ignorant or sap-heads (19). Here, while Tom's desperation contrasts with his nonchalant command in *Tom Sawyer*, it does not derive from some new turn in his character, but because of his absolute consistency. While Huck and the others may question the veracity of Tom's boy-play world, Huck recognizes Tom's commitment to it: "[Tom] never could

go after even a turnip-cart but he *must have* the swords and guns all scoured up for it; though they was only lath and broom-sticks" (17; emphasis added). From Huck's perspective, Tom has no choice but to follow his own rules.

Huck's understanding of Tom illuminates another episode of *Huckleberry Finn*, one in which Tom Sawyer participates only by proxy. When Huck and Jim come across the wrecked *Walter Scott*, Huck demonstrates that his assessment of Tom and his play as a "Sunday school" does not necessarily constitute a negative judgment on his part.

Stick a candle in your pocket; I can't rest, Jim, till we give her a rummaging. Do you reckon Tom Sawyer would ever go by this thing? Not for pie, he wouldn't. He'd call it an adventure—that's what he'd call it; and he'd land on that wreck if it was his last act. And wouldn't he throw style into it?—wouldn't he spread himself, nor nothing? Why, you'd think it was Christopher C'lumbus discovering Kingdom-Come. I wish Tom Sawyer was here. (86)

Victor Doyno suggests that the *Walter Scott* episode was written late in the composition of *Huckleberry Finn* and inserted near the beginning to "prepare for Huck's attitude of deference to Tom Sawyer, despite the boy's foolishness" (383). Doyno views the episode as laying the groundwork for Twain's eventual critique of Tom's dependence on European literary conventions (383). Although I come to a different conclusion regarding the purpose of Tom's "foolishness" than does Doyno, Huck's imposition of Tom's perspective onto the episode does suggest that, while Huck may doubt Tom's veracity, nevertheless he admires Tom's style (equated with process), his courage, his competence, and the internal consistency of his world, all of which have made Tom the picture of social success. Huck does not accept Tom's world as his own, but he respects its functionality and attempts to access its authority when he wants some adventure. As usual, Huck's attempt to inhabit the boy-play world proves dangerous for him and for Jim; their attempt to counter social conventions is in earnest, unlike Tom's, and the resultant near-disaster re-emphasizes Huck's basic incompatibility with Tom's conventions of play. The sinking of the *Walter Scott* does prefigure the critique implicit in the ending, although, I will argue, not in the way Doyno suggests. The passage explicitly links Tom and his boy-play world to *Walter Scott*, whom Twain loathed and considered responsible for the Southern attraction to "sham grandeurs, sham gauds, and sham chivalries of a brainless and worthless long-vanished society," transforming it, partially, into a "Walter Scott Middle-Age sham civilization" (327). This link extends implicitly to the kind of "honor" displayed by the criminals who argued over the "moral" and "right" way to kill Jim Turner, echoing Tom's defenses of his boy-play conventions when he discuss the "right" and "regular" was of digging Jim out of his cell with "case knives" (306). This linkage suggests a negative reading of Tom, his boy-play world, and the attendant sense of honor-through-process. I seek here to contextualize it and to highlight it for reconsideration later in this essay. In

fact, finding Jim locked up, Tom immediately casts him in the role of the hero in one of the romantic narratives with which he is so familiar and that provide the script for his boy-play world. The most telling comparison is Jim as the prisoner in *The Man in the Iron Mask*, a man imprisoned because of his face, a powerful metaphor for the place of African Americans after the Civil War. In that novel, Alexandre Dumas' hero, Philippe, has the same face as the king. This similarity threatens the king, so the similarity between the protagonist's face and the king's must be concealed—behind a mask of iron. Similarly, the river portion of *Huckleberry Finn* demonstrates Jim's similarity and frequent superiority to the "king." (Though the metaphor is directed at white society generally, it is interesting that a "king" appears in the story and that Jim implies his superiority to the grifter.) White society responds by hiding that similarity behind a minstrel mask that conceals Jim's identity as effectively as would one of iron. When white culture looks at Jim, it can only see its own conception of blackness, and this traps Jim much more effectively than the shack in which the Phelps house him. This is the larger bad faith to which Robinson directs his argument.

Importantly, while Twain hated the fiction of Sir Walter Scott, he deeply enjoyed and respected the work of Dumas. In a sketch written for a San Francisco newspaper, the *Alta California*, Twain called Dumas "the great Mulatto in the Iron Mask" (*Travels* 170), and he specifically places Jim in the title role of Dumas' novel when he defends having Jim write on a tin plate by exclaiming, "the Iron Mask always done that" (*Huckleberry Finn* 304). He purchased multiple volumes of several of Dumas' works, including *The Man in the Iron Mask* and *The Count of Monte Cristo*, and in early 1885 writes himself an encouragement to buy "the rest of Dumas," no small number of books (see Gribbin 206; Twain *Notebooks* 143). In an 1877 letter to his wife, Twain wrote that reading Dumas when he was deeply troubled made him "serene and content" (*Love Letters* 194). Critics, most recently Chadwick-Joshua, have read the end as an attack on the Walter Scott-influenced values of the South, as exemplified by Tom (118), but Twain's appreciation for these two works by Dumas infuses the evasion more so than does his antipathy toward Scott, a shift in perspective important for my reading of the ending.⁶ During his explanation about the necessity for "case knives," Tom uses an allusion to *The Count of Monte Cristo* to help Huck understand the need for difficulty in the process: "Why, look at one of them prisoners in the bottom dungeon of the Castle Deef, in the harbor of Marseilles, that dug himself out that way; how long was he at it, you reckon?... *Thirty-seven year*—and he come out in China" (*Huckleberry Finn* 306). Tom's story is a reference to the Chateau d'If, which housed the fictional Edmund Dantes (who becomes the Count of Monte Cristo) before his escape and which Twain had visited and written about in *Innocents Abroad* (102-04). Much is made in *Monte Cristo* of the physical torments Dantes suffers (Chapters 8-19), torments that anticipate Jim's, and Tom's

knowledge of Jim's technical freedom adds an odd, retroactive poignancy to his comparison of Jim to a white European nobleman, falsely imprisoned, by doubling the reason that his escape be done in the way Tom believes is "right." In both cases, Tom, the author or American translator, places Jim in the role of the hero, one of royal blood, in this case—an "unnatural" son of a king (*Huckleberry Finn* 335; see Blair). Meanwhile, it is the suffering of the character he has created that moves Tom, not that of Jim, and while this hardly provides a defense of Tom, it shows the depth of his commitment to the process of play and to the rules that guide it. Intellectually and emotionally, he exists within that world.

Twain's appreciation for Dumas and his use of the Dumas type—the unjustly imprisoned nobleman who is freed and finds "justice"—problematizes any reading of the ending as being necessarily or only a condemnation of Tom and what he represents. Why would Twain find such stories useful in his awkward satire? One answer can be found in the fact that Dumas was himself a common man who rose to the highest levels of society on his own talent, a description Twain considered fitting for himself and is often true of his protagonists. That Dumas was, by American standards, a black man, also contributes.⁷ The sinking of the "Walter Scott," then, might be seen less as a foretelling of some critique the ending may pose than as a presaging of the movement away from Scott's conception of honor and Romance and toward that of Dumas. His Count's original goal, of wreaking havoc on the lives of his tormentors, is found to be unfulfilling and pyrrhic, and the end of the novel reveals the false satisfaction of violence and retribution. The Count's pain and loss simply is, and cannot be cured; rather, his life can only be improved by setting the crimes committed against him aside. Indeed, the Count finds that the only relief from his horrors is to be found in mutual acceptance and human connection. These values, I will argue, also play a significant role in explaining the evasion.

Interrogating the whitewashing episode in *Tom Sawyer*, Robinson suggests the importance of process to Tom: "At one level, the elegance and boldness of the scheme strongly suggest that Tom takes as much pleasure from the conception and execution of the elaborate plot as he does from its spectacular denouement. Much of the fun, it appears, is in the doing" (25). Robinson goes on to suggest that Tom's actions emplot the novel, creating an order for its episodes. When Tom's play comes in the form of role-playing, his process does more than merely provide "much of the fun" or even the structure of *Huckleberry Finn*, though, of course, it does these. The fastidiousness of Tom's process of play infuses adventure with honor and provides meaning to reality, at least for Tom. His willingness to privilege process over personal victory, or, rather, to see the successful completion of process as his personal victory creates a subtle tension between the boy-play world and adult bad faith that opens up the evasion for reinterpretation.

When Tom reenters the narrative of *Huckleberry Finn* in chapter 33, he co-opts Huck's and Jim's narratives, and it is unsettling. Our discomfort resides in our reaction to Tom. Tom subjugates Huck so soon after Huck's grand moral triumph in chapter 31 that we are shaken by Huck's general and seemingly voluntary retreat. We do not want Jim in Tom's hands; at this point, we still generally *like* Tom, but we also *know* him. Huck, we know, finally has Jim's interests at heart, while Jim finds himself faced with Tom's chamber of horrors, an unwilling actor in an excruciating play. Tom is guilty of all this, yet an examination of Tom's actions from the perspective of his boy-play world reveals a very different ending from what critics have depicted.

Before Tom even arrives at the Phelps's farm, he finds that the evasion is already in place. Huck is masquerading as him, and Jim is locked in a ridiculously flimsy prison. According to Huck, Tom was excited, "And he wanted to know all about it right off; because it was a grand adventure, and mysterious, and so it hit him where he lived" (*Huckleberry Finn* 286). Critics are disingenuous when they expect Tom to resist this opportunity for an adventure—it literally has his name written on it. This adventure also provides him with an opportunity for spectacle on a scale he has not enjoyed since revealing Huck's newfound prosperity and producing the stolen Murrel loot at the end of *Tom Sawyer* (see Peck). Since process makes meaning, process on a large scale has even greater potential.

Several critics (e.g. Bell, Woodward and MacCann, and Lester) have read Tom's actions in these chapters as racist or as evidence of Twain's racism. *However, Tom does not use Jim because he is black, but because he is available.* Inherent in the argument that the evasion is racist is the idea that Tom treats Jim poorly either because he is black or because Jim's blackness frees Tom to treat him any way he likes. But Tom uses everyone—white or black, young or old, male or female—in his adventures as tools for his own pleasure and glorification and to fit his grand scheme of the way things should be done. Tom objectifies Jim and his experience, but neither more nor less than anyone else who might serve his purposes. The character he projects onto Jim has no stated race, though Tom imagines him as a white victim in some European epic. Jim is literally a captive audience and captive actor, presenting Tom with an opportunity to be in complete control of the adventure from the moment of his appropriation of it. To be sure, Tom's racism is not in question; he would not have helped "free" Jim had Jim not already been free. In this instance, however, his motivation is not racism, *per se*. Tom is merely callous—on a grand scale.

Tom's callousness is the price those close to him—Huck, Aunt Polly, the boys, and the town—pay for choosing him as their leader/emblem/entertainer. In *Tom Sawyer*, Tom leaves Muff Potter in jail until finally deciding to tell the truth during the trial. Had he spoken sooner, Muff would have been spared physical suffering and the uncertainty over whether he was guilty or not.

Granted, fear of Injun Joe's revenge served as a motivator, but the risk Tom took would have been no greater earlier than during the trial. Tom imposed on the town, and on Aunt Polly and Mrs. Harper especially, the terror of thinking that he and his friends were drowned during the Jackson's Island episode. The discomfort Tom visits upon Jim during the ending is extreme, and certainly he could have accomplished the escape more efficiently and with less pain, but all he needed to do to save Aunt Polly her anguish was to leave an already prepared piece of bark with his message announcing, "We ain't dead—we are only off being pirates" (*Tom Sawyer* 136). While Tom does not enjoy the suffering of others—he alleviates it when he can, even if after the fact—he is nevertheless willing to subordinate his own and others' suffering to the conventions of the boy-play world. Tom is necessarily callous to those he uses, all those he uses, because his devotion to the process demands that philosophy take precedence over people.

This is not to say that racism, the familiar charge, plays no part in Tom's approach to the construction of the evasion. His willing participation in a racist culture allows him to consider treatment of Jim that he considers for no other player in his spectacular dramas. When Tom muses to Huck that he wishes they could play at the evasion "all the rest of our lives and leave Jim to our children to get out" (*Huck Finn* 312), what he is considering perpetrating on Jim is a confinement that only Tom knows would be a *re*-enslavement—a consideration of astoundingly casual cruelty. His privileged position, his withheld knowledge in a novel of withheld knowledges, is his racist act. And when Tom wakes up at the Phelps', after being shot but before realizing the evasion has failed, Tom's main concern is with the integrity of the process, not the fact that Jim, ignorant of his manumission, is running away alone and believing himself an escaped slave rather than a free man. Tom would have to know the danger Jim would face in this situation, yet he evinces no conscience-driven reconsideration as he did even with Muff Potter. Hill is only partially correct, then, in arguing that Tom "never really pulls rank (or race) on Jim," but Tom's racism is enacted *before* he enters the boy-play world and is immediately evident when he steps out of it (505). When Tom—and any other character—is transformed by his immersion in the boy-play world, however, even racism must bend to the dictates of process, which highlights the most important tension between the boy-play world and the adult system of Southern honor.

Tom understands that there are limits to how far he can go in his adventures. His seeming consideration of an amputation of Jim's leg, to serve his adventure, repeats the logic of the oath sworn by the members of Tom Sawyer's gang to kill the families of boys who reveal secrets. Just as he derives an "honorable" excuse for allowing Huck in the gang despite his lack of family, a bridge between his boy-play world and the real one, he finds a reason to dispense with the literary tradition of amputation. Rather than being exceptions or evidence of a wavering commitment to the boy-play world, these

seeming breaks in Tom's process-logic show the lengths to which Tom will go to protect the integrity of his process, depending on bad faith agreements with the constraints of reality—"letting on," which is in this case a self-deception more than a reciprocal one with Huck—in order to continue his presence in the boy-play world. Indeed, as I will argue later, Tom's method for accommodating such challenges is essential for Twain's purposes.

Tom's and Huck's different understandings of the use of "letting on" provide a useful entry into their approaches to getting Jim free. When Tom realizes that he cannot stage the evasion with all the process it would require—thirty-seven years' worth—he suggests to Huck, "We can *let on*, to ourselves, that we was at it thirty-seven years." Huck responds, "Now there's sense in that.... Letting on don't cost nothing; letting on ain't no trouble; and if it's any object, I don't mind letting on we was at it a hundred and fifty year" (*Huck Finn* 307). Letting on, at this moment, becomes a microcosm of bad faith and how the two boys perceive and make use of it. For both Tom and Huck, letting on is a facilitator, or a mediator, between the boy-play world and reality. Earlier in the novel, when Huck and Jim decide that "borrowing" what they need is ethical, they are responding to the fact that they "warn't feeling just right" about their thefts, letting on to themselves, but the dominant purpose for their adoption of the structures of bad faith is to protect themselves physically (85). Letting on and play are overlapping concepts for both boys, though not necessarily overlapping in the same way. During the evasion, Huck uses letting on to facilitate Tom's movement toward an efficient escape for Jim, protecting reality from fantasy, while Tom uses letting on to protect his fantastic construction of the spectacle, and his vision of himself, from the encroachment of reality. The coherence of the boy-play world must be protected, and it is, through process, even if the process involves some letting on.⁸

Tom's failure to participate in the climax of the adventure, being on the raft and heading down river, is unfortunate but acceptable to Tom because his escape from the Phelps is not necessary for the process to be complete. Jim's freedom is necessary, however, and the honor of the process is clouded when Tom learns that Jim has not been freed, but is again a freed man unjustly in bondage, again assuming the position of the imprisoned white nobleman. This time, Guy of Guisborne defeats Robin Hood. His response is the often-quoted announcement of Jim's freedom, "They hain't no right to shut him up! Shove!—and don't you lose a minute. Turn him loose! he ain't no slave; he's as free as any cretur that walks this earth!" (357). Just as blaming Tom's treatment of Jim on racism is inadequate, Tom deserves no credit for egalitarianism here either. Tom's effort to "free" Jim is not a protest against racial enslavement, since it is only Jim's previous manumission that enables it. Jim's incarceration is, however, a challenge both to the structure of romance as he sees it—the maliciously imprisoned free man—and to his process, and he means to storm the castle, at this point, to maintain them. For his process to retain its meaning,

the last step, the elevation of the freed nobleman—he plans a parade for Jim—needs to be fulfilled as well.

Guided as he is by the rules, Tom sees no effective difference between Jim and other free men when it comes to the treatment he should receive from society. The seeming inconsistency of this position, considering he has just finished subjecting Jim to inhumane treatment, suffices for Tom because Jim's suffering is meant to be temporary, making it as acceptable as Aunt Polly's. Indeed, Jim's poor treatment is precisely the point, as it intensifies the drama, certifies his status as a nobleman, and heightens the need for him to be treated well now. Chadwick-Joshua argues that Tom perverts the South's self-image of honor, its "pride, rightness, filial loyalty, honesty, and salvation" (120). But for Tom, none of these values are single acts or even attitudes. Each of them exists as the expression of a process given greater meaning by every one of its tortuous steps. "Rightness"—such as the immediate freeing of Jim—is not rightness if it is easy. If the town deals with Jim harshly, however, the boy-play world—Tom's process, the values it represents of honor gleaned from overwrought romances, and all his dedication and work—will be made empty because the rules will be shown not to work. The use of Tom in the evasion, then, is powerfully ironic. The same Tom who berates his friends, imposes on Jim terrible privations, subjects Aunt Polly and the town to emotional turmoil, and who, as Robinson argues, flouts the community's values only superficially while mimicking its mechanisms of bad faith, also issues a strong challenge to the community with his "honor."

Once Tom is aware of the situation at the Phelps's, he jumps at the chance to aid Jim, surprising and disappointing Huck to no end. Huck's disappointment at Tom's willingness to break the law, and his relief when he finds out that Tom has not, is the surest signifier of Tom's allegiance to his society and Huck's appreciation for Tom's negotiation of it. That allegiance is complex, however, and while it generally conforms to the bad faith structures of adult society, it also takes seriously the "rules" in ways the adult community does not. The rules, here, are guided by (though not expressed in the same way as) those of Southern honor, which Bertram Wyatt-Brown defines as "the cluster of ethical rules...by which judgments of behavior are ratified by community consensus" (xv), evaluations guided by cultural possessions like family integrity and position within the social hierarchy and by physical traits like race, gender, bloodline, and physique—all of which were connected in the Southern mind to the characters and imagery of European romances (22-23). While Wyatt-Brown's exhaustive study provides a catalogue of the many expressions of Southern honor and describes them as the "cement that held regional culture together" (xv), Kenneth S. Greenberg investigates precisely how that glue worked. He argues that honor was a performative language, the lexicon of which was enacted on the surfaces, in "the world of appearances" (3). As Greenberg describes it, Southern honor was a separate ideology

from the racism with which it coexisted, functioning primarily to order the relations between white men, but he demonstrates how the two ideologies often overlapped, how white men used honor—most notably, the ability to duel with those who insulted them—as a mechanism to differentiate themselves from their slaves and to maintain constructions of blackness that served Southern society's purposes (33-35). Greenberg's view of Southern honor parallels much of Robinson's discussion of bad faith, which is also about maintenance of surfaces, often a creative use of honor to cover dishonorable or unpleasant realities, such as slavery.

In his analysis of Twain's approach to representing the cowardice that keeps a society from facing evils like slavery or lynching, Robinson argues that Twain's characters "contrive in bad faith to submerge it in the social order, or in the leadership of 'one daring man'" (152). Tom's position in this complex of ideologies is an ambivalent one. His acculturation into the community's bad faith, with its overlapping discourse of racism, is complete enough that he sees Jim as particularly useful for (or vulnerable to) his adventures. Once inside the boy-play world, however, Tom does not use bad faith to submerge his cowardice, but to enlarge the spectacle and his sense of honor; he is one daring boy, though the courage of his convictions are applied not to morality or (directly) to social change, but to the spectacle and the process that creates it. This allegiance does not always work toward society's advantage, as his consistent and idealistic performance of the rules of honor, as he has learned them from both the culture's self-descriptions and the literature it loves, can conflict with the community's use of honor as a cover for its self-serving aims. The difference between his application of bad faith and that of the community distinguishes itself here. In the boy-play world, bad faith serves the process and the meaning and honor it creates, while in the adult community, honor is often the tool of bad faith agreements that serve more concrete ends, such as the maintenance of white supremacy. And while Tom certainly likes supremacy himself, even that must give way to process.

The nature of Tom's honor, and its relation to Southern honor, provides the entry into a new understanding of the ending. If we step outside of both Tom's boy-play world and the text itself, following the lead of critics like Robinson, Cox, Holland, and Nilon, and view the novel as a satire on or representational critique of Southern society and its values, especially after the end of Reconstruction, we see the significance of Tom's vision. That Tom takes over at the end only makes sense, since, as the representative of the un-Reconstructed South, he is the actor of the day while Huck and Jim are necessarily passive. Huck was attempting to free a slave, but Tom "went through all that trouble and bother to set a free nigger free" (359). After the Civil War, all African Americans were, like Jim, technically free, but their treatment and opportunities were still far from true citizenship. In Nilon's view, the scenes at the "Phelps farm and the surrounding community are a

microcosm of the way the South treated "The Negro Problem," the South's problem of how to handle its newly freed blacks. Nilon identifies in Tom the "same arbitrary, selfish assurance the South" possessed when it decided the fates of "freed" blacks (62-65).⁹ Of course, Tom is arbitrary and selfishly assured, but Nilon's reading is merely descriptive, while my reading of Tom suggests a more prescriptive interpretation. Representationally, Tom argues that though the process may be tortuous, it is time for the dominant, white culture "to set the free nigger free."

Jim's and Huck's reactions to Tom are consistent within this reading of Tom's actions as part of his boy-play world. From Huck's perspective, Tom is distinguished by several traits. Tom is a leader whose plans always have *style*, which we can read as process, and Tom's adventure-laden plans *work*. His past is filled with near perfect success. Before Tom arrives, Huck slips happily into the role of "Tom" at the Phelpses because inhabiting "Tom" empowers him in his quest. Because, as I have shown, Huck also uses bad faith, or "letting on," to protect his and Jim's lives, his becoming Tom Sawyer gives him access to and permission to use all the tools of adventure (such as deception and theft) to accomplish his very real goal, though his use of these tools would likely have been notably different had Tom not arrived on the scene. If, for Tom, Huck is a tool to be used for the process of play, for Huck, Tom is a tool to be used for the extraction of Jim. What Huck is responding to, however, is Tom's superior navigation of the bad faith structures of Southern culture. Read representationally, Huck's acquiescence to Tom is less about some devaluation of his moral transformation than the reality of Huck's inability to understand or successfully employ a cultural system—Southern honor—whose rules Tom has mastered. As Margolis's argument suggests, Huck's individual moral triumph is unlikely to translate into the kind of relief Southern blacks, as a group, desperately need, but Tom represents the culture that could supply that relief—if acted upon using the values the culture claims to hold. Huck spends the evasion wishing for more expedient means to free Jim, but he believes, when he acquiesces to Tom, that if success is his goal, Tom is the most certain means, if not the most expedient. For Huck, Tom *is* the pick-ax he wishes for.

Jim's acceptance of Tom's treatment is also consistent, if more complex, and, read representationally, more significant. If Jim wanted to escape, before or after Tom's arrival, he could do so at any time merely by lifting the bed and freeing his leg and pushing the board off the window. But Jim does not escape. If, as Robinson suggests, running away with Huck will do no good, when Tom arrives, Jim's choices and prospects actually increase ("Characterization of Jim" 388). Tom will either succeed or fail in his endeavor. If Tom succeeds, Jim is free and on the run again, same as before except with the possible addition of Tom; if Tom fails, Jim has at least connected himself to the well-known and wealthy town prodigy of St. Petersburg. For Jim, an alliance with

Tom Sawyer is a strategic one. Jim knows that should things go badly, Tom's presence could blunt the potentially deadly consequences. Tom, after all, has a reputation for going off on adventures and leaving others in the lurch, so Jim may well be reasoning that becoming part of Tom's adventure could at the very least provide him cover. Jim acquiesces, then, to Tom's melodrama, but neither happily nor completely. Chadwick-Joshua notes that Jim, unlike the others, makes decisions not only for himself but for his wife and children as well, a commitment that would surely constrain his desire to rebel more openly (127). When Huck and Tom visit Jim during the night, Jim wants to leave immediately, but realizes he is up against Tom's need for adventure, or process (311). There is little for Jim to do but make the best of what Tom's presence means.

Jim's reasons for not abandoning Tom when he gets shot are similar. If he leaves Tom, he is a runaway slave who is responsible for the possible death of Tom Sawyer, celebrity. If he helps Tom, his stock can only rise for the same reasons. Again, he is cleverly navigating a dangerous situation. Describing Jim's actions in this instance as only practical, however, hardly suggests a reading of him as either a complex or a humane person. Largely unacknowledged by critics is the fact that the evasion *has* succeeded. Jim could easily choose freedom at this point, albeit a tenuous one. Chadwick-Joshua argues that Jim's decision to stay with Tom is a moral response to Tom's own sacrifice, and that his "heroic" act raises him to "parity with the other characters" (128). Jim's humanity and his survival logic need not conflict. In Jim's actions, then, Twain's view of how blacks would respond to an "honorable" Southern treatment finds form. Not only would Southern blacks participate in even a tortuous process, "honorably" applied, of attaining actual freedom, but the removal of the yoke of oppression would allow blacks the chance to demonstrate their desire to live with Southern whites—as moral equals. This also implies that the failure of the South to follow its own rules of honor structurally disallows blacks the ability to demonstrate their humanity. Jim's rise would not mean the death of Southern honor but the participation with it—a powerful suggestion that Twain could envision an ideology of honor disentangled from white supremacy.

Yet, if Tom's vision is so consistently upheld in the novel, why do we get the feeling that Tom's approach is also consistently being undercut, his philosophy punctured? During the process so valuable to Tom, Huck consistently challenges Tom's plans either openly or to himself, and we share his frustration. Why not use a pick-ax? Or pull the board off the window? Or slip the chain from under the bed leg? The reader sees Tom as an impediment to the desired goal, Jim's freedom, continually slowing down what should be an easy process, while Huck's efforts still work toward Jim's freedom.

Tom's escape plan seems at first a debacle, and it is literally punctured when he is shot. Tom's reactions to the wound prove the completeness of

his commitment to the process, for the bullet in his leg is the unplanned but welcome *coup de grace* of his adventure. It is a real wound, though, one even Tom would know is serious, but he has "freed" Jim and the wound only gives Jim's freedom added meaning to Tom. That he now shares in the suffering and sacrifice of the adventure makes the successful completion of the process even more necessary. Though ridiculous, Tom does put his safety after that of Jim, although it is Jim's necessary role as the living final stage of the process that he is truly protecting. Later, even when he is delirious, he tries to maintain the coherence of the adventure, threatening the doctor against "chalking his raft" (*Huck Finn* 354). The wound, read representationally, also takes on important meanings. The process of freeing in actuality those freed only technically, is risky, but worth it, and should be undertaken by a society, Tom's example supposes, that follows its own rules.

Tom's evasion suggests, then, that ending the oppression of freed slaves, officially through the Black Codes and unofficially through the terrorism of lynch law, *would* wound the South, but it is a wound that – fatal if untreated – is survivable. Moreover, it is the very process that is important; the goal—a moral treatment of the freedmen—could be seen as secondary, the hopeful outcome of the correct application of a process that honors, at least, its own rules. The forty dollars that Tom gives Jim is a likely reference to the forty acres and a mule promise, as Margolis suggests, but the payment is in direct response to his own actions, his own subtly acknowledged mistreatment of Jim. The damage Tom inflicts and receives is a direct, boy-play world response to the damage Jim has received all his life; a painful process in answer to a legacy of oppression. Margolis argues that a national, political response was called for, and it certainly was, but for Twain the South's fatal commitment to a false honor stood in the way of any such answer (339). The structure Twain suggests here may have required a nationally organized effort, but it would need to have been motivated by a coherent, if silly and face-saving, commitment to Tom's brand of honor. Indeed, just as Tom's plans for post-evasion celebrations of Jim, such as the parade, would have been self-serving spectacle, the South would be well positioned, were it to live up to its own codes, to tout the magnanimity of the Southern people—and to use this image of a reformed and generous South politically.

The South can be said to have lived up to its own legal rules, at least after those rules were adapted to fit the culture's bad faith, in the shape of the Black Codes. Other rules and conventions, however, were at least as important for the South as these laws, and much of *Huckleberry Finn* is dedicated to exposing those conventions. Miss Watson's faux religion, the Grangerfords' Southern hospitality and sense of honor, the farcical nobility of the Duke and the King, Colonel Sherburn's harangue directed toward the South's false ideas about its best qualities—these and other episodes expose the South's conventions and rules as silly, hypocritical, and unevenly applied. Tom and his boy-play world,

however, apply the conventions of honor consistently and suggest a South that could do the same. Indeed, the example of honor Tom provides, in this novel about post-Reconstruction Southern failures of humanity, is of adherence to the established *antebellum* codes of honor, in which racism thoroughly entwined itself. Tom's honor-driven play, during the evasion, dismantles these various aspects of Southern culture and reassembles them without the failures of form—or process, rather—that allow “honorable” citizens to perpetuate the Black Codes and Jim Crow laws.

If, as critical consensus suggests, Huck is the anti-moral, anti-social view manifest (in the sense that his actions go against conventional views of morality), he presents a role model for individual change. Tom, however, is Twain's proposal for the pro-moral, pro-social view manifest (in a system within which the “moral” and the “social” good are intertwined with self-serving ideologies). This view supports, if not an overtly humane treatment of Jim and the African Americans he represents, at least treatment consistent within the society's own stated rules (see Cox and Regan). The conscience Twain invokes, of course, concerns itself not with issues of humanity but a reiteration of the codes of honor with which the South claimed to define itself. The ending then, does provide the satire on white values that critics have traditionally discerned, but ironically finds the answer to that criticism in the very values being critiqued. Twain, through Tom, demonstrates a Southern honor that accommodates Southern racism and shows that, though clunky and foolish, it can finally be honorable in a real and measurable way and despite its own traditional uses.

Twain's invocation of honor as an answer to post-Reconstruction horrors is notable on a personal level. Twain himself believed in life as lived through honor. In late 1884, as *Huckleberry Finn* was being prepared for distribution, Twain's correspondence with his “Dear Howells” included his comment that man's *first* duty is to his own conscience and honor—the party & the country come second to that & never first” (*Twain-Howells* 240-41). More telling may be what developed years later, when Twain returned to America from Europe in late 1900, and his fame was magnified by dozens of news stories extolling the honor of Twain for paying off massive debts that he could have legally evaded. This new part of his image became a source of great pride to him and put him in a position similar to Tom's in that his personal sacrifice gave the process and the result meaning (Kaplan 358-62). Twain's party affiliations cost him friends and his exertions to pay off debts cost him physically and in many other ways. The process took its toll, but these moments in his life demonstrate not only that he never completely abandoned the romanticism of honorable action, but also that he understood honor as an act of philosophical consistency, often requiring a dear price both for himself and for the country. Notably, this view of honor more closely resembles that expressed in the Dumas novels, an honor of self-sacrifice, accommodation, and the valuation

of humanity, than it does that of Scott's novels with its privileging of service to God and country. The honor Twain invokes during the evasion has little of the clarity of Twain's own actions, and those who pay the price are not given a choice, but it does result in Jim's actual freedom. Let Jim be free to create the life that he envisions for himself, of self-worth, self-determination, and family. Read this way, *Huckleberry Finn* is, ironically, a book about and supportive of honor. It introduces the reader to a host of personifications of Southern honor, and finally suggests one it can live with, Tom's, the honor that, though often foolish, lives up to its own conventions and rules.

Much has been made of Ernest Hemingway's famous critique of the ending of *Huckleberry Finn*, "If you read it you must stop where the Nigger Jim is stolen from the boys [chapter 31, presumably]. That is the real end. The rest is just cheating" (22). If *Huckleberry Finn* had ended there, the dark, open ending might have gratified Hemingway's modernist and our post-modernist sensibilities. Yet what we would be left with would be a simple exposition of Southern hypocrisies and the small story of one boy's burgeoning awareness. An important theme would have been developed, but narrowly—the acceptance of the humanity of the "other," a limited reform to be accomplished individually. What the actual ending offers is a broader possibility, one that provides an alternative for the late-nineteenth-century reader who cannot make the moral leap Huck proposes. The Tom of the ending does not have to accept Jim—morally, spiritually, individually—the same way that Huck does. Tom accepts the *fact* of Jim and the *fact* of his freedom. At the very least, the evasion suggests, society can live up to its promises and its claims of honor and "set the free nigger free."

ELIZABETHTOWN COLLEGE

NOTES

¹ In defense, see Cox, Hill, Holland, Fetterly, Fishkin, Chadwick-Joshua, and Margolis.

² See Cox 175, Holland 71, Fetterly 385-86, Beaver 351, and Nilon 69.

³ Ralph Ellison was the first to suggest that Jim was operating behind a mask. Other scholars have also based their arguments on Jim's double consciousness, but none have developed the concept as fully as Robinson.

⁴ Tom's "newness" is much more in relation to *Tom Sawyer* than to his presence in the beginning of *Huckleberry Finn*. Critics have generally seen Tom as consistent within *Huckleberry Finn*, but displaying a cruelty only implied in *Tom Sawyer*; Fetterly is the strongest proponent of this view.

⁵ The community's enjoyment, or use, of Tom as provider of spectacle is given a dark reinterpretation when the Arkansas loafers make "use" of stray dogs and pigs, and, of course, the reenactment of the death of poor Boggs.

⁶ Near the beginning of the evasion, as Tom introduces Huck to the plan, he mentions four other characters who would not have escaped through easy means: "Baron Trenck, nor Casanova, nor Benvenuto Chelleeny, nor Henry IV." When Tom begins to formally structure Jim's activities, however, he references the Dumas stories most consistently (301-06).

⁷ Alexander Dumas was somewhat less popular in the South than Scott, likely due to his mixed race. Dumas was a touchstone for abolitionists before the war and for elite black culture throughout the nineteenth century, who used him as evidence of black genius. Not surprisingly, many Southern critics found Dumas's work less than successful.

⁸ Again, my analysis here owes much to Robinson's discussion of the same scene in *In Bad Faith*, 175-77.

⁹ See also Schmitz. While Nilon believes the ending to be a purposeful representation of the Reconstruction South, Schmitz suggests that it is more an example of the Reconstruction's failure to come to terms with blacks than a representation of that problem.

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