

1989

"Away From Home and Amongst Strangers":
Domestic Sphere, Public Arena, and Huckleberry
Finn"

Randall Knoper, *University of Massachusetts - Amherst*

"Away from Home and Amongst Strangers": Domestic Sphere, Public Arena, and Huckleberry Finn

RANDALL KNOPER

DESPITE MARK TWAIN'S SITUATING the story "forty to fifty years ago" and in a rural river valley, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* closely engaged daily dilemmas and concerns of a Northern, urban, middle-class audience. As Carolyn Porter has argued, the familiar comprehension of American fiction as fantasies of escape from society and history, as authorial efforts to light out for the territory, needs to be dislodged by a sensitivity to such writings as acute responses to their immediate context – a developing industrial and capitalist society and culture.¹ Although Huck's world may appear cut off from the landscape and society of bourgeois city dwellers of the 1880s, and although there are not explicit references to industrialization or urbanization, the novel reproduces and addresses new features of daily life, alterations and stresses in private and public behavior and interaction that were being precipitated by the accelerated economic and demographic changes of the late 19th Century.

Huckleberry Finn is enmeshed especially in the 19th-Century separation (well established by 1884 in ideology, if not surely in fact) between the workplace and the home and the system of differences that accompany it – between public and private realms, market and hearth, open behavior for crowds of strangers and intimate revelation. As various histories of the 19th Century explain, the middle-class home in the antebellum years lost its place as a worksite for the whole family and acquired the ideological status of a separate private sphere, a retreat from the cunning and self-interest of the marketplace, and a relief from the masks of public interaction.² This opposition continued through the late 19th Century to have special currency in Northern, urban, middle-class mythology, which used its historically idiosyncratic versions of such related oppositions as exterior–interior and public–private to make coherent the apparent chaos of the industrializing city, to mark off a controlled and controllable

enclosure, and to give order to contradictions and problems of class difference and sexual difference.³ The urban middle class tried to separate sharply the privacy of the genteel home from the crowds in the streets and from the vulgarity of working-class and unemployed male subcultures. This safe enclosure also marked a containment of women bound by the ideologies of mother, wife, and domestic sphere, and charged to guard intimacy and sincerity in the home against incursions of dissimulative public behavior and the calculated self-interest of the male marketplace.⁴ Such tensions of industrialization, class, and gender manifested themselves in everyday relationships and behaviors; their symptoms were felt in moments of distrust and tenderness, calculation and sincerity.

Because *Huckleberry Finn* grappled with issues of private and public behavior, and rehearsed common, persistent, but difficult efforts to order the 19th-Century world by distinguishing and negotiating between public and private realms, the novel resonated the experience of an emergent middle class faced with the new difficulties of living in an urban mass culture. But, importantly, the novel rehearses the very *difficulties* of trying to comprehend and dominate a disorderly world on the basis of oppositions and, in particular, from the matrix of the outside-inside, public world-domestic haven opposition. As it fulfills a desire to reconstitute sectors of domestic tranquillity hollowed out from confusion, the novel continually retraces the boundary lines between public and private and between other related oppositions. And it does so with disordering effect by playing out at their boundary lines the vexing problems of keeping these organizing pairs intact, properly aligned, and stabilized.

Huck himself invites such preoccupations with ordering because he suits so well the profile of one of the symbolic figures that best embodied 19th-Century middle-class fears about the disorder of the city and the world "out there." Young males like him – on their own, outside the confines of the home – became, as Carroll Smith-Rosenberg has written, symbols of a multitude of anxieties about eroding social controls.⁵ Changes in commerce and patterns of migration were decimating the traditional agricultural village, and with it were going long-cherished sources of stability, sources of stability that became, in their loss, nostalgically magnified – the guidance exerted by the village churches, the deference granted to the elders of the community, the vocational management provided by the apprenticeship system, the controlling strength of family ties and networks of kin. The male adolescent outside of the home and village – exchanging, in many cases, the rural town for the big city – crystallized these anxieties, for, in addition to being unfixed as an adolescent (in a liminal state of transition between boyhood and manhood, dependence and independence), he was geographically mobile, contributing to urbanization, escaping from family guidance, and likely to replace family hierarchy with seemingly chaotic peer relationships.⁶

Huck, though he is not headed for the city, nonetheless acts in ways liable to arouse such anxieties. He actively discounts religion and the

church, goes to school only when it suits him, is not part of a conventional family, rebels against his father and depicts Pap to us as an inadequate parent unworthy of respect, leaves the village, and rejects his female guardians to forge his closest bond with a fugitive slave. Living in the village but seemingly outside its systems of control, Huck foregrounds the limits and fragility of the rural order. When he leaves St. Petersburg, he enters the wild, masculine world of rivermen, raftsmen, con men, gamblers, murderers – which raised fears that closely matched those of the city. Moreover, Huck wants to escape to the river or the territory (embodiments of fluidity and boundarylessness) in order to be the perennial adolescent, always liminal and marginal, forever wild and loose, outside the family.

But while Huck, particularly in his relationship with Jim, may at first glance appear to fall quite outside the middle-class family and its order – because he has a homosocial attachment that avoids mature male–female relationships (as Leslie Fiedler would have it),⁷ or is part of a disorderly bonding of black and white, liminal adolescent and marginal slave – he and Jim also fall inside, as they preserve on their raft a central group of values associated in the 19th Century with the middle-class home: quietness, intimacy, tenderness, emotional transparency, sympathy. In other words, while Huck may represent an adolescent outside the explicit social controls of home, he still clings to the idea of a home as a safe interior, a domestic circle, an idea quite compatible with notions of home current in the sentimental culture that he appears to escape. He clings, that is, to an idea of home as a refuge that resembles common 19th-Century notions of the home as a haven from the heartless world. As Huck says when he leaves the Grangerfords, “I was powerful glad to get away from the feuds, and so was Jim to get away from the swamp. We said there warn’t no home like a raft, after all. Other places do seem so cramped up and smothery, but a raft don’t. You feel mighty free and easy and comfortable on a raft.”⁸ Here home is a relief from the outside. Similarly, in the “raftsman” section (excluded from most editions of the novel but included in the now definitive Iowa–California edition), Huck spends some time on an un-homelike raft, and after this chaotic and frightening foray into the world of the coarse, rough, and competitive raftsmen, he is “mighty glad to see home again” (p. 123).

Huck and Jim’s cozy raft duplicates the division that marked the home off from the workplace and from the public world in general (including both the city and the frontier). For just as the home became in middle-class myth a privileged site of intimate relationships and sincere expression, the raft becomes a sanctified place of trust separate from the disguise and duplicity assumed by nearly everyone in the public realm. Just as the home was separated from the business world and market relations, Jim and Huck’s raft becomes a place free of the lies and manipulations fostered by the calculation, cunning, distrust, and self-interest of commodity exchange. While Huck and Jim, then, arouse anxieties about eroding

social controls by evoking the uncontrolled sectors outside the home and on the margins of genteel society, their raft world sustains the association of the home with refuge and security and contains the worry that Huck and Jim pose. This is the first of the dynamic tensions between security and change, control and release, which are embedded in Mark Twain's guiding opposition between home and the public world, and which Huck and Jim, and their raft, come to represent.

An important set of these tensions clusters around oppositions between intimate disclosure and theatrical display, private self-absorption and acute social embarrassment, unconscious self-revelation and self-control. Home in the 19th Century became associated with women;⁹ thought by nature and role to be creatures of the heart and of the private realm, "true" women were considered sincere, transparent in their emotions, incapable of disguise, and therefore well-suited to preserve the home as a realm of intimate and open communication. However, other people on the margins of society – or anyone, perhaps, without a firm place in the contentious and duplicitous spheres of market relations and public discourse – could have an aura of sincerity and transparency. The innocent eyes of children and the supposed simplicity of blacks qualify Huck and Jim to fashion their own sphere of intimacy. Particularly through contrast with the duke and the king – harsher representatives of a chaotic male world, of vulgar (homo)sexuality, and of marketplace cheating – Huck and Jim radiate the aura of family, of the feminine sphere, of affectionate (and passionless) husband and wife. The domestic shading of their relationship is stressed especially by the nature and continual circulation of their roles (protector, coddler, homebody); Mark Twain's readiness to dress both of them in women's clothes accentuates this.

Huck's relationship with Jim further resembles the intimate life sheltered by the walls of home because of its basic *secrecy*. Their life is not open to the prying eyes of heartless, cruel strangers. Indeed, Huck lies to the outside world (where everyone must lie) primarily in order to conceal and preserve his private life, his secret home life with Jim. Importantly, when Huck's lies violate the trust of the domestic sphere, disaster comes – when he plays the practical joke with the snake, and especially when he dupes Jim into thinking that the difficulty in the fog was a dream, and he badly hurts Jim's feelings. While this life is not for the hostile eyes of people on the Mississippi shore, it is revealed to us, as readers. This very revelation – inasmuch as it is intimately for us, and apparently without the "stretchers" that a grown man like Mark Twain would feel compelled to tell – conspiratorially celebrates and resanctifies the secret domain, carves out and preserves a place away from the hustle-bustle of the Mississippi shore. Huck's un-self-conscious narration colludes with a tradition of the novelistic – that it is a female domain (as Ian Watt tells us) of private experience – to preserve the idea of home as a psychological haven from the public world of disguise, the site for the expansion of

privacy, interpersonal intimacy, and personal consciousness.¹⁰ Or perhaps it is more accurate to say that Huck's intimate act of telling us his story mimics the intimate revelations exchanged at home, and the personal consciousness thus created is a psychological interior hollowed within the domestic interior.

This sphere exists, however, only in opposition to a public world, a world that demands self-control and makes self-revelation a dangerous business, a world everywhere intrusive in Mark Twain's novel. Huck, "away from home and amongst strangers," as he puts it (p. 191), carried the full cultural weight of anxieties about negotiating the outer world. His river world, like the emerging Northern metropolis, was characterized by its mobile populations. The new cities and the river frontier were fluid worlds of strangers, where people did not occupy fixed social positions, in which one could easily pass oneself off as someone else, and where legends about con men kept this anxiety to the fore. In contrast to the home, sincerity here was a risk, a handle for manipulators; as Huck tells us, it is usually unsafe to utter the truth (p. 239). Inadvertent self-exposure, moreover, was shameful, and the possibility of unwittingly betraying oneself was a cause for much anxiety. Not only was there the embarrassment of revealing oneself as inexperienced, uneducated, and uncultivated, there was also the danger of exposing oneself to the manipulations of swindlers watching for the rube with his guard down. Huck, especially in his guiding desire to avoid "trouble," and in his typical posture of silence, wariness, watchfulness, and masking – all to help insure personal safety – displays all of these concerns in one way or another.

In the public, male arena, Huck is usually resolved to remain inconspicuous, a spectator, to avoid trouble and to avoid being taken advantage of – by keeping quiet. His reflex is to obey the admonitions of the duke and the king to "keep your head shet, and mind y'r own affairs – if you got any" (p. 237), and to "keep a tight tongue in your head and move right along, and then you won't get into trouble with *us*, d'ye hear?" (p. 274). He had learned already that, in the world of rough males like Pap, the duke, and the king, "it's the best way" to "never [say] nothing, never let on, [keep] it to myself," because "then you don't have no quarrels, and don't get in no trouble" (p. 165). His next worry is to be watchful, to observe others carefully in order to catch and properly interpret the clues they give off to their "character," status, and intention – an imperative undergirded in 19th-Century America by the general belief that, in a public world made up of performances, the most trustworthy indices were incidental gestures, un-self-conscious revelations, tics of manner and gait, or any other expressions that might be involuntary, might escape performative control.¹¹ When Huck, for example, on the morning after he hides the money in Peter Wilks's coffin, observes the mourners, he looks for signs that someone has discovered the bag: "I watched their faces to see if anything had been happening, but I couldn't tell." That day, after

the burial, Huck "went to watching faces again – I couldn't help it, and I couldn't rest easy. But nothing come of it; the faces didn't tell me nothing" (pp. 233–34). Despite this disappointment, Huck displays the basic faith (and fear) that a face cannot be so effectively controlled in public that it will not occasionally broadcast unintended revelations.

In *Huckleberry Finn*, as in 19th-Century ideologies in general, the ability to control one's face, to avoid unintended revelations, and therefore to cope adequately in the public world, is delineated according to gender. Mary Jane Wilks, for example, in accord with the Victorian conception of women as helplessly at the mercy of their emotions and therefore unsuited for the risks of the public arena, is transparent, constitutionally incapable of lying. When, out of sympathy for the Wilkses, Huck first decides to "blow on these frauds" and betray the king and the duke, he wonders, "Shall I go, private, and tell Mary Jane? No – I dasn't do it. Her face would give them a hint, sure" (pp. 225–26). When he finally does tell Mary Jane about them, he asks her to go to the Lothrop's *before* breakfast, "because you ain't one of these leather-face people. I don't want no better book than what your face is. A body can set down and read it off like coarse print." She would give herself away when the duke and the king came to kiss her good morning, or when she greeted her sisters, or if she saw *anyone*, because "if a neighbor was to ask how your uncles is this morning, your face would tell something" (p. 242).

Huck, a male, is not as transparent as this female, but as an adolescent (quite close to being a child) and as a somewhat feminized boy, neither is he a master of his behavior as a mature con man might be. Take, for example, the scene in which Huck decides to leave the private and secret home he has established with Jim on Jackson's Island to scout happenings on shore – the public world. He decides, significantly, to disguise himself as a girl. But, rehearsing in a dress, Huck betrays his gender, as Jim points out, because he walks like a boy and because he keeps pulling up his gown to get at his britches pocket (p. 67). Huck realizes, too, that his voice could easily betray him, and that he must not "forget I was a girl" (p. 67). He must pay continual, conscious attention to maintaining his disguise. His diligence fails, however, and Huck finally exposes himself on shore by forgetting his assumed name (p. 71) and by unconscious movements which Judith Loftus says are typical of boys – he catches a hunk of lead between his knees (rather than spreading them to make a lap), he throws the lead sidearm, he brings a needle's eye to the thread, rather than poking at it (pp. 72–74). In Huck's anxious care to keep up his front and in his unwitting self-betrayal, there are echoes of 19th-Century anxieties about public life – of fears about unconscious self-betrayal through habitual gestures or through revealing details that slip momentarily outside of even the most careful disciplining of action and feeling. That is, we see the concern with the rigors of self-presentation to strangers, the need to exercise control even in trifles – posture, gait, consistency of behavior, clothes – since every

detail of conduct and appearance was a clue to identity. And we see the conviction that inadvertent gestures, manner, and incidental expressions were the most truthful and revealing, or exposing and betraying, because they were unconscious.¹²

While the novel works to preserve, or at least works with, common distinctions between the fearful public world and the homelike interior, masculine impassivity and female expressivity, silent observation in public and intimate revelation in private, we must also see Huck here as a boundary confounder – a boy dressed up like a girl, who has an impulse to dissimulate but a propensity for self-betrayal, who dresses as a female to enter the male public world, whose girl-like unconscious self-revelation shows he is a boy, who jostles the borders between male and female, adult and child, home and public. And Huck persists in such jostling. If in the Loftus episode he goes out to dissimulate and betrays himself, in his first attempt to betray Jim, he goes out to tell the truth and ends up lying. More important, his lying consists of feigned self-betrayal. Having changed his mind about turning Jim in, he suggests to the slave hunters, through what looks like unintended revelation, that his pap is back on the raft with smallpox (p. 124). This fabrication, as Jim says, is “*de smartes’ dodge!*” (p. 128) – the very smartest dodge, because the badge of truthful expression, the apparently unconscious slip, turns out to be calculated. The system of oppositions shows itself to be vulnerable at every point. When expression is “unveiled” as dissimulation and exposure turns out to be disguise, when female traits slide over into the male, when the fluidity of the river becomes the tenuous site for the security of home, the sliding distinctions confound the stability of each other; the pairs designed to protect each other through their fixity instead disturb each other through their linkages. So Huck worries overlapping boundaries, not only those of child and adult, male and female, home and thoroughfare, but also the boundaries between the sincere and feigned, exposure and disguise, unconsciousness and calculation, the truth and lies. Along the shifting axis of the public-private division, Huck complexly raised, sometimes laid to rest, but sometimes perversely aggravated intense anxieties.

The kind of control that Huck tries to exercise in public over his face and over unconscious self-revelation, the kind of self-control that would help him keep his mouth shut and his nose out of other people’s business, promised safety not only for the lone and vulnerable individual in the public arena. John Kasson convincingly argues that, to promote a general social order in public environments where the controls that guaranteed smooth social functioning in the village and the home seemingly had dissolved, the respectable bourgeois propagated new kinds of *internalized* controls on behavior – rules about minding your own business, not making trouble, not interrupting the peace of your neighbor. Huck is reassuringly obedient to the new, 19th-Century regulations erecting silence as a rule of respectable behavior and proscribing minor irritations (public self-engrossment,

excessive emotional display, anger) as well as overt threats to social order (loud, boisterous, group behavior). He also superbly represents the operation – and concomitant problems – of embarrassment, guilt, and conscience, all of which were newly stressed in the 19th Century as portable instruments of social discipline and regulation.¹³

Indeed, Huck provides some reassuring parables about the powers of conscience and guilt as controls over wayward young men. True, in a way undoubtedly worrisome for some Victorian moral custodians, he is affected very little by the hidings he gets at school for playing hooky; they “done me good and cheered me up” (p. 18), made his regular rhythm of school and hooky easy, but never moved him to resolutions about reform. Punishment, or the threat of punishment, from Pap similarly has little effect on Huck’s behavior. But when Widow Douglas refrains from punishing or scolding Huck after his nighttime adventure with Tom, and simply “cleaned off the grease and clay and looked so sorry,” Huck decides, “I would behave a while if I could” (p. 13). The widow’s attitude of patient suffering, designed to elicit Huck’s guilt and shame, also has a stronger effect than Miss Watson’s sharp scolding. Happily, from the point of view of reformers, such shame and guilt is more efficient than physical or verbal punishment also because it does prove portable, and inescapable. Huck is sensitive to whether the widow is ashamed of him (p. 18). And he has internalized the Widow Douglas as a guide to his behavior to the point that he feels “rather comfortable” about taking the trouble to help the murderers on the *Walter Scott*, and he wishes “the widow knowed about it,” for he judges “she would be proud of me for helping these rapscallions” (p. 91).

The dictates of Huck’s conscience when he struggles with the question of turning Jim in are of course the most familiar cases of internalized controls on behavior, of agonizing guilt. And they tellingly illustrate the special problem of maintaining, or extending, the order rooted in the village and the home out into the new public realm. Specifically, they engage the problem of extending an order based on public shaming into a world that was anonymous – where the visibility of one’s sins, heightened though it might be, had less bite. And they tell how the behavior of an errant young male, living apart from his family and with plenty of opportunities to engage in otherwise shameful behavior quite out of range of reproving eyes, could be controlled. Specifically, Huck’s struggles with conscience deftly show a way to transform the very model of home and village control – based on familiarity and visibility, on supervision – into an internalized control over a privatized, anonymous, mobile population.

As he thinks about helping Jim to get his freedom in Chapter 31, Huck initially worries about what the people in St. Petersburg would think. That is, the older, village model of guaranteeing social control through communal shaming occupies his thoughts at first. He quickly realizes, however, that because he is outside of and far away from the village, that system makes few claims on his behavior:

It would get all around, that Huck Finn helped a nigger to get his freedom; and if I was ever to see anybody from that town again, I'd be ready to get down and lick his boots for shame. That's just the way: a person does a low-down thing, and then he don't want to take no consequences of it. Thinks as long as he can hide it, it ain't no disgrace. That was my fix exactly.

Happily for the social order, this very difficulty had already been confronted by the cultural guardians and social reformers. Concerned about the lost power of villagers' and parents' watchful eyes, reformers cautioned frequently, as John Harvey Kellogg did in 1877, that "Man may not see these mental adulteries, he may not perceive these filthy imaginings; but One sees and notes them." Any coverings that one could adopt for vices in the city – secrecy, anonymity, sins in thought or in the heart – were no barrier to the extremely effective eye of God. He could see into your secret self and make you ashamed. He would display your transgressions for all to know on the Judgment Day.¹⁴ Huck obediently realizes this:

The more I studied about this, the more my conscience went to grinding me, and the more wicked, and low-down and ornery I got to feeling. And at last, when it hit me all of a sudden that here was the plain hand of Providence slapping me in the face and letting me know my wickedness was being watched all the time from up there in heaven, whilst I was stealing a poor old woman's nigger that hadn't ever done me no harm, and now was showing me there's One that's always on the lookout, and ain't agoing to allow no such miserable doings to go only just so fur an no further, I most dropped in my tracks I was so scared. (p. 268-69)

Significantly, it is *visibility* that is Huck's main worry; as we know, hellfire and damnation are not concrete enough to be daunting. The village operations of shaming and embarrassment, rendered ineffective in the anonymous scenes of the city (and on Huck's river) are recouped. What he had thought was secret and invisible turns out to be seen, and Huck must once again behave for Another, alter his behavior to meet the approval of Authority's gaze.

But, as Huck says himself, this runs him into another close place. For there was an ideological system left over from midcentury sentimental culture which decreed that true virtue was a "natural" matter, upwelling from the heart, not artificially imposed by custom or authority. Imposed virtue was a matter of surfaces, apparent, not true – which is precisely the message of Huck's failure to "pray a lie" (p. 269). Just as young men in the city might be affected contradictorily by the exhortation to control their faces in public and by the influence of the sincere ideal from home –

and would then veer unsteadily in their behavior between hypocrisy and vulnerability – Huck is caught between the righteous strictures of the community and that other source of virtue, his heart. This close place posed a particularly vexing problem because conscience, supposedly a stand-in for “home,” for fatherly and motherly eyes, ought to have aligned itself with heart against the artificiality and evil of the outside world. But this apparently insoluble ideological problem is engaged and finessed by *Huckleberry Finn*. The contest is transformed into one between “public” morality and the home, between exterior force and the family feeling of being Jim’s “honey” (p. 270) and “de ole true Huck” (p. 125). Conscience is jettisoned from the interior into the realm of false public convention, and home, heart, nature, and Jim win. Huck may have provided here a partial solution to a problem of 19th-Century genteel culture: If the “character” or “conscience” for governing proper behavior outside of the older village controls involved a cultivation and molding that seemed unnatural, artificial, or incongruent with the ideals of sincerity and heart, what better solution than to slough it off into the public world of forms and rediscover a natural moral gyroscope, a home-grounded or innate guide with a foresight sure enough to proceed in freeing a slave? This reaffirms the aligned public–private, artificial–natural oppositions just as they teeter on confusion, restates the belief that private experience is morally superior to public life, and must have offered some reassurance – that even a marginal young man, a figure loaded with anxieties about dissolving social controls, had an inner mechanism of “heart” that would protect and preserve the social order growing out of the home.

One manifestation of adolescence that made young men (including Huck, as we shall see) profound symbols of disorder and foci of anxiety was the pubertal disruption of physical and psychic economies. The adolescent *body*, with its upsurging desires and sexual impulses, served metaphorically to condense more general resonances of disorder – epitomizing the liminality of the transition from boyhood to manhood, symbolizing a general loss of control, flaunting the toppling of regulation and hierarchy. The adolescent body also foregrounded more particular concerns – for example, that precisely at the time when a young man lost control over his “baser” nature, the crumbling artisanal system and the forces of urbanization were placing him outside the guardianship of family, kin networks, community, and religion, opening up spaces of solitude and recklessness for the uncontrolled pursuits of adolescent sexuality – masturbation, illicit liaisons, prostitutes. As Smith-Rosenberg writes, the literature of advice and concern about bodily control and purity – which burgeoned in the 19th Century in books and tracts written by reformers for young men – articulated anxieties about larger social changes and cultural tensions, especially worries about institutional and family fragmentation.¹⁵

Although Mark Twain could not write directly about Huck’s worrisome adolescent body (and emerging sexuality) and still hope for respect-

able publication and a broadly defined audience, Huck's body, its secretions, and its unruliness appear remarkably often, and they appear in significant opposition to the constraints associated with the home and the self-control to be exercised outside of it. When Widow Douglas puts Huck in properly ordered, new clothes, he "couldn't do nothing but sweat and sweat, and feel all cramped up" (p. 2); as the liquid defies control and the dirty sweat defiles starched purity, the problems here of disorder and contamination echo the cultural concerns voiced by sex reformers in their anxieties about the bodies of male adolescents and the loss of parental power. Later, while lying close to Tom and nearly touching Jim, Huck has to exercise all of the self-control that he can to avoid scratching his nose and betraying his presence; as he observes, "if you are anywheres where it won't do for you to scratch, why you will itch all over in upwards of a thousand places" (p. 6), an aggravation caused by an unruly body inclined perhaps to more than entirely innocent itches in the nose. Huck, moreover, is prone to private excitements that lead to bodily convulsions. He cannot control himself when, alone at night in his room at the widow's, he kills a spider and his frightened body "most shook the clothes off of me" (p. 4). He has no relief until, in the dark and "a shaking all over," Huck guiltily "got out my pipe for a smoke; for the house was all as still as death, now, and so the widow wouldn't know" (p. 5).

The significance of this private remedy increases not only in light of the commonplace sexual symbolism of the pipe, but also when we consider the sexually stimulating qualities attributed to tobacco by writers of advice manuals. Huck's impulse to "scratch" his "nose" in places "where it won't do for you to scratch," like his secret solution to bodily convulsions, also serves as a thinly disguised allusion to a literature – for example, the long-popular advice books such as William Alcott's *The Young Man's Guide* (1833) or Sylvester Graham's *Lectures to Young Men on Chastity* (1834) – which represented the maturing male body as subject to impulses that swept over it stormily and volcanically, bringing an agitation and disorganization that led to a fearful loss of self-control, a surrender of reason to passion and to low and brutish satisfactions.¹⁶ Huck here represents the typical male adolescent in the 19th-Century imagination: undisciplined at conservation and subject, because of changes at puberty, to enervations and excesses that discomfited and depleted his entire physical and psychic systems.¹⁷

Huck also raises more general concerns over order, purity, and contamination, concerns not far removed from worries about the adolescent body. A general linking of cleanliness and social order appears in Miss Watson and Widow Douglas's fastidiousness and propriety, as well as in Huck's pointed rejection of being "cramped up and sivilized" (p. 31) and having "to wash, and eat on a plate, and comb up, and go to bed and get up regular," and so on (p. 30). Huck's rejection of all this in order to turn his clothes finally into "all rags and dirt" (p. 30), and to get back to cussing, had a symbolic dimension as a transgression of culturally stipulated pu-

rity regulations and as profanity. Huck may have provided a metaphor linking this more general concern for purity and regulation to the more particular and sexual worry about the free excretion of bodily juices when he objected to the widow's cooking each part of a dinner "by itself": "In a barrel of odds and ends it is different; things get mixed up, and the juice kind of swaps around, and the things go better" (p. 2). The juice swapping around among the odds and ends is both an orgasmic figure and a metaphor of contamination, linking and violating both cleanliness and continence in a way well suited to Huck's boundary-crossing, liminal status.

The unruly body of the adolescent, his liminal status, and his escape from community and family controls paradoxically meant both a threat to individual, unitary identity and an exaggeration of personal, private being at the expense of community and commerce. The most extreme adolescent symptom, masturbation, signified a lack of "character" and a disruption of ego-order, for the kind of convulsions that Huck experienced in private, far from exemplifying a flow of vital fluids that would shore up a vigorous spirit and a controlling will, showed a dissolution of the moldings and fortifications of character.¹⁸ Masturbation also signified an extreme of personal freedom and autonomy, an extreme individualism that bordered on antisocial, or asocial, selfishness. Huck as a representative of male adolescence therefore posed double affronts: through bodily unruliness to the autonomous and rational individual that the economy needed (he does not think that he has a "character," though he knows Tom does), and through radical autonomy to sociality and social order.¹⁹ Huck's comment about his guilty impulse when surprised by the king and the duke – that "it's kind of natural to hide under the bed when you are up to anything private" (p. 226) – brings together, in a veiled reference to disordering masturbation, privacy and autonomy as well as antisocial secrecy and rebellion toward elders.

Any other form of complete self-engrossment could hold some of the same social threats as masturbation – as an indulgence careless about self-regulation, a self-involvement improperly negligent of custom, propriety, and sociality. But in the case of Huck, perhaps one of the most self-engrossed figures in American literature, states of absorption take on a different face as we turn from the threats to identity and society posed by a lack of conscious self-control and look instead at threats to identity posed by the public realm. Indeed, paradoxically, the very aspects of the body whose indulgence and excess formed part of the threat to psychic economy could become securities. Self-absorption, with its lack of consciousness of self and other, offered a refuge from features of public life repellent to the 19th-Century American cult of sincerity – the problem of socially dispersed selves, the demand for multiple public personae, the false faces adopted for interaction with strangers. Huck's body serves again and again as a vehicle for a self-absorption that forestalls or heals the fragmentations of identity concomitant with fabricating lies, performing for others, telling a story.

One important aspect of this is simply that, while self-absorption may involve indulgence to the point of dangerous excess, it also means privacy and, in its quieter forms, suggests an interiority that blends over into homeyness. Thus, Huck's typical bodily absorption – feeling “powerful lazy and comfortable” and “dozing off again” on Jackson's island (p. 45); munching the store-bought bread, smoking in his cozy spot, and “having a good enough time” seeing the ferry hunt for his body (p. 47); sitting later “by my camp-fire smoking, and feeling pretty satisfied” (p. 48); lolling after breakfast with Jim in the grass on Jackson's Island (p. 52); floating on the river, “laying on our backs and looking up at the stars” or “listening to the stillness” (p. 157); “lazy[ing] along” and “lazy[ing] off to sleep” (p. 157) time and time again – works to re-create home away from home and to turn sites of escape and outlawry into refuges of familiar coziness.

Such physically satisfied and indulgent moments also evince an inwardness – the personal consciousness that expands to fill the safe enclosure of the home. The linkage between absorption and the values of privacy, personal consciousness, and interiority is further deepened by Huck's general somnolence and by his un-self-conscious absorption in his activities and thoughts. Huck is a character who lives much of his life on the border of sleep, a state he succumbs to sometimes in the most unlikely circumstances. He falls asleep while he's watching over Pap with the rifle (pp. 36–37), and they go to sleep again after breakfast (p. 39). On Jackson's Island he has “a nap before breakfast” and is “dozing off again” just before he hears the hunting party for his body (pp. 44–45). He falls asleep in the canoe off Jackson's Island shortly after his harrowing discovery of Jim's campfire (though it is a fitful sleep, disturbed by the fear of being caught by the neck) (p. 50). He sleeps like a “dead” person shortly after the men on the *Walter Scott* drown (p. 92), and he falls asleep after he has been separated from Jim in the fog (p. 102). And he sleeps, once deeply (p. 344), once restlessly (p. 350), while Tom is shot and missing. This somnolence resembles other states of un-self-conscious absorption – for example, while he sits in Pap's skiff, between trips to the cabin toting supplies, and thinks about escaping: “I got so full of it I didn't notice how long I was staying, till the old man hollered and asked me whether I was asleep or drowned” (pp. 32–33).

Asleep or “drowned,” unconscious or dead, a body will not be inclined to dissimulate, to put on a front for a public. What emanates from such states and from the state of self-absorption, Mark Twain suggests, has not been altered by a calculating consciousness for public consumption. Huck's somnolence and absorptions, then, gain a large importance because they issue assurances about his sincerity and transparency that mesh with the intimacy of his narration. Michael Fried has written of 19th-Century French painting that, in order to avoid the theatricality that had tainted historical painting – theatricality that seemed to preclude the possibility of immediate representation and expression – artists such as Courbet painted figures completely absorbed in their bodily states, absorbed to the

point of apparent unconsciousness of their viewers.²⁰ This, I would argue, is precisely what Mark Twain does with Huck. Huck's inclination to dwell in his physical body, in his bodily sensations and their immediacy, with a full absorption displays a basic un-self-consciousness that helps certify Huck's narration as equally absorbed and therefore sincere and truthful. Because this discounts the possibility of Huck's telling lies to us, and helps guarantee that his voice is not spoken from different masks and personae, Huck's absorption also functions to fix a basic bodily security and integrity whose constancy tends to override fragmentations of Huck's identity. Yet these self-engrossments dangerously drift toward disturbing extremes of self-absorption, indulgent extremes of privacy and carelessness for self-control that culminate in the threat to sociality and ego-order of masturbation. Framing and negotiating such tensions constitutes a primary cultural service of *Huckleberry Finn*.

Mark Twain sets up his territory in this novel with topographical correspondences to the urban landscape, dividing it up in terms similar to the Northern middle class's divisions of the city into the comforts of home and the anxieties of the market, the private and the public, the female and the male, sectors of truth and of dissimulation. Into these ordering divisions – with their attendant oppositions of expression and masking, disclosure and display, release and self-control – he thrusts Huck. As a liminal adolescent, Huck represents boundarylessness in general and, through his words, his actions, and his body, he foregrounds and crosses a host of more particular boundaries, boundaries whose fragility – exacerbated by industrialization and urbanization – was a focus of 19th-Century cultural anxieties. The domestic space that Huck constructs with Jim and the bodily integrity emphasized by Huck's absorbed states move in the opposite direction, reconstructing both a social order and a bodily order. This contest over control and disorder, with its several interlocking frames, confers significance on moments of private and public behavior that might otherwise pass beyond notice. A moment of revelation, a moment of silence, a lie – all become places for the 19th-Century middle class of symbolic conflicts that called into play both anxieties about modernization and impulses for order. Thus *Huckleberry Finn* met the need to address worries about the emerging modern world through a text which, in its diverse moments, in its reassuring recontainments and in its constant and therefore worrisome confounding and redrawing of oppositions and boundaries, could be read as a heightening of anxiety or as a promise of compensatory control.

NOTES

1. Carolyn Porter, *Seeing and Being: The Plight of the Participant Observer in Emerson, James, Adams, and Faulkner* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1981).

2. Although focusing on life in Paris, Walter Benjamin wrote that, during the early 19th Century, "the private citizen was born" and "for the first time the living space became distinguished from the space of work." See *Charles Baudelaire* (London: New Left Books, 1973), p. 167. Also see Eli Zaretsky, *Capitalism, the Family, and Personal Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), passim; and Howard Gadlin, "Private Lives and Public Order: A Critical View of the History of Intimate Relations in the United States," *Massachusetts Review* 17 (1976): 306.

3. Richard Sennett writes, "The 19th Century bourgeois family attempted to preserve some distinction between the sense of private reality and the very different terms of the public world outside the home. The line between the two was confused, often violated, it was drawn in the erotic sphere by a hand impelled by fear, but at least an attempt was made to maintain the separateness and complexity of different domains of social reality. . . . There was an effort – diseased and destined to collapse, to be sure – to make distinctions between realms of experience, and thus to wrest some form out of a society of enormous disorder and harshness." See *The Fall of Public Man: On the Social Psychology of Capitalism* (New York: Random, 1978), p. 11.

4. Laura Mulvey helpfully discusses these ideas in "Melodrama In and Out of the Home," in *High Theory/Low Culture: Analyzing Popular Television and Film*, ed. Colin MacCabe (New York: St. Martin's, 1986), pp. 82–83, 88–90.

5. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 91.

6. See Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830–1870* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982), pp. 20–21, 27.

7. See "Come Back to the Raft Ag'in, Huck Honey!" in Fiedler's *An End to Innocence: Essays on Culture and Politics* (Boston: Beacon, 1955), pp. 142–51.

8. *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1988), p. 155. Page numbers for further references to the novel appear parenthetically in the text.

9. The point, of course, is well established, but see the influential essay by Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood," *American Quarterly* 18 (1966): 151–74.

10. Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1957), especially ch. 6, "Private Experience and the Novel." Also see Halttunen, *Confidence Men*, p. 56; and Gadlin, "Private Lives and Public Order," p. 306.

11. John Kasson, "Civility and Rudeness: Urban Etiquette and the Bourgeois Social Order in Nineteenth-Century America," *Prospects* 9 (1984): 152. Peter Brooks also has some useful comments to make about 19th-Century ideas that gesture and the language of the body were the most immediate and trustworthy communicators; see *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976), pp. 78–79.

12. Kasson, "Civility and Rudeness," pp. 157, 152; and Halttunen, *Confidence Men*, pp. 40–41.

13. Kasson, "Civility and Rudeness," pp. 155–57. Sennett also stresses the emergence in the 19th Century of silence as a principle of urban social order; the idea is important throughout *The Fall of Public Man*, but see, for example, p. 128. Carol Zisowitz Stearns and Peter N. Stearns write of the tendency in the 19th-Century urban environment to rely less on public shaming as a control, and more on individual conscience and a sense of guilt – fully portable controls that could be carried even into secret places of sin. See their study of *Anger: The Struggle for Emotional Control in America's History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 21.

14. Kellogg's comments appear in the useful collection of writings by 19th-Century sex reformers, *Primers for Prudery*, ed. Ronald Walters (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1974), p. 60. Halttunen, *Confidence Men*, p. 49; and Kasson, "Civility and Rudeness," p. 153; also refer to the reformers' spreading the idea that God could see the sins of even the most isolated and anonymous city dweller.

15. Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct*, p. 91; and "Sex as Symbol in Victorian America," *Prospects* 5 (1980): 57–59.

16. See the writings in Walters, *Primers for Prudery*, for example, pp. 33–34.

17. On the relation in 19th-Century thought between sexual and spiritual energy, and physical and psychological economies, see Joseph F. Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America 1790 to the Present* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), p. 134; also see G. J. Barker-Benfield, "The Spermiatic Economy: A Nineteenth-Century View of Sexuality," *Feminist Studies* 1 (1972): 46–47; and Charles E. Rosenberg, "Sexuality, Class, and Role in Nineteenth-Century America," *American Quarterly* 25 (1973): 151.

18. On the necessity of hoarding energy and controlling base emotions and passions in order to develop and mold one's "character," see Rosenberg, "Sexuality," p. 137; and Kett, *Rites of Passage*, pp. 105–6, 108.

19. See Gadlin, "Private Lives and Public Order," p. 314, for a discussion of this paradox in 19th-Century cultural thought.

20. Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980); "The Beholder in Courbet: His Early Self-Portraits and Their Place in His Art," *Glyph 4: Johns Hopkins Textual Studies* (1978): 85–129; and "Representing Representation," in *Allegory and Representation*, ed. Stephen J. Greenblatt (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), pp. 94–127.