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The Lonesomeness of Huckleberry Finn

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WHAT DOES "lonesomeness" MEAN TO HUCKLEBERRY FINN? IN RECENT YEARS AT LEAST THREE CRITICS HAVE ADDRESSED THIS QUESTION DIRECTLY—OR WOULD SEEM TO HAVE DONE SO. TWO OF THEM ANALYZE HUCK'S UNHAPPY RELATION TO SOCIETY; ONE, HIS SUPPOSED EMOTIONAL INSTABILITY. THE THREE CRITICS ALL MAKE REFERENCE TO SEVERAL INDISPENSABLE PASSAGES, REPRINTED JUST BELOW, IN WHICH HUCK HIMSELF SPEAKS OF "LONESOMENESS." NEVERTHELESS, AS IF THEIR EARS WERE TOO FINELY TUNED TO IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS TO REGISTER PLAINER MEANINGS, THE THREE ADOPT AND DEVELOP IDEAS OF LONESOMENESS THAT HAVE LITTLE IF ANY CONNECTION WITH HUCK'S WORD. THESE IDEAS DO NOT LACK INTEREST OR VALUE, BUT SO INTELLIGENT A NARRATOR AS HUCK DESERVES TO BE UNDERSTOOD ON HIS TERMS AS WELL AS ANALYZED ON OURS; IF WE ARE TO DISCUSS HIS LONESOMENESS, WE MUST BEGIN WITH HIS WORDS AND THE MEANINGS HE SEEMS TO GIVE THEM. WE SHALL DISCOVER, IF WE BEGIN THERE, THAT "LONESOMENESS" HAS LESS TO DO WITH SOCIETY OR NEUROSIS THAN WITH NATURE; THAT IT HAS A SIGNIFICANT THOUGH PERHAPS RECONDITE RELATION TO A PLAY BY SHAKESPEARE; AND THAT IT CAN HELP US TO A NEW UNDERSTANDING OF ANOTHER IMPORTANT WORD IN HUCKLEBERRY FINN: "FREEDOM."

Three "Lonesomeness" Passages

I. At the Widow's

I felt so lonesome I most wished I was dead. The stars was shining, and the leaves rustled in the woods ever so mournful; and I heard an owl, away off, who-whooing about somebody that was dead, and a whippowill and a dog crying about somebody that was going to die; and the wind was trying to whisper something to me and I couldn't make out what it was, and so it made the cold shivers run over me. Then away out in the woods I heard


that kind of a sound that a ghost makes when it wants to tell about something that’s on its mind and can’t make itself understood, and so can’t rest easy in its grave and has to go about that way every night grieving. I got so down-hearted and scared, I did wish I had some company.

II. On the River

A little smoke couldn’t be noticed, now, so we would take some fish off of the lines, and cook up a hot breakfast. And afterwards we would watch the lonesomeness of the river, and kind of lazy along, and by-and-by lazy off to sleep. Wake up, by-and-by, and look to see what done it, and maybe see a steamboat coughing along up stream, so far off towards the other side you couldn’t tell nothing about her only whether she was stern-wheel or side-wheel; then for about an hour there wouldn’t be nothing to hear nor nothing to see—just solid lonesomeness. . . . So we would put in the day, lazying around, listening to the stillness.

III. At the Phelps Farm

When I got there it was all still and Sunday-like, and hot and sunshiny—the hands was gone to the fields; and there was them kind of faint dronings of bugs and flies in the air that makes it seem so lonesome and like everybody’s dead and gone; and if a breeze fans along and quivers the leaves, it makes you feel mournful, because you feel like it’s spirits whispering—spirits that’s been dead ever so many years—and you always think they’re talking about you. As a general thing it makes a body wish he was dead, too, and done with it all.2

In the second passage above, Huck speaks of the river’s “lonesomeness,” not his own; and in the third passage, the droning of bugs and flies makes “it seem” (not “you feel”) “lonesome”: in both places Huck evidently means the words “lonesome” and “lonesomeness” to describe not a state of mind but a quality of Nature. As we read these passages, we may at first want to accuse Huck, as one critic does, of “projecting” his feelings onto Nature, of mistaking his own aloneness for an emanation from the circumjacent world.3 Perception can never go on wholly independent of emotion, of course, and at times, as in the Widow Douglas passage, the two may well be inseparable. But it cannot be right to say that Huck sees only what he feels, for surely he never feels less alone than when, on the raft with Jim, he senses “the lonesomeness of the river.” On the

2 Clemens, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, ed. Sculley Bradley, Richmond Croom Beatty, and E. Hudson Long (New York: Norton, 1961), pp. 8–9, 96, 171. Subsequent references, included in the text, are to this edition.

3 Tatham, p. 49.
river Huck passes beyond subjectivity to the apprehension of something external and real. A few excerpts from Clemens's autobiographical *Life on the Mississippi* (1883) will verify Huck's objectivity. "We met two steamboats at New Madrid," begins Chapter XXVII. "Two steamboats in sight at once! An infrequent spectacle now in the lonesome Mississippi. The loneliness of this solemn, stupendous flood is impressive—and depressing." Chapter XXVII goes on to present descriptions of the Mississippi from five English visitors to America, at the end of which Clemens summarizes, "The tourists, one and all, remark upon the deep, brooding loneliness and desolation of the vast river." Finally, a few chapters later Clemens says this of Mississippi sunrises: "They are enchanting. First, there is the eloquence of silence; for a deep hush broods everywhere. Next, there is the haunting sense of loneliness, isolation, remoteness from the worry and bustle of the world." In each of these instances "loneliness" is primarily a property of place, a thing outside and independent of its observers. The word does indeed imply a relation between perception and emotion, but the very opposite of that contained in the term "projection"; the *Oxford English Dictionary* makes clear the real relation in its definition of "lonesome": "Causing feelings of loneliness, making one feel forlorn." Clemens and Huck perceive a quality in the natural world which induces in them a mood to fit. For Huck, the word "lonesomeness" apparently describes both the reality without and the mood within.

Huck is as sensitive and precise a recorder of impressions as any narrator in literature, so when he calls the Phelps farm "lonesome," we may assume he has been struck there by the same quality that impressed him on the river, a quality that is more clearly than ever—in its present connection with sunshine, insects, wind, and leaves—an effect of Nature as much as of population. Yet the moment we equate the "lonesomeness" of the farm with that of the river, we face a problem. Why should the one make Huck wish he "was dead . . . and done with it all," while the other evokes a kind of lazy contentment? We meet a similar problem in *Life on the Mississippi*, where the loneliness of the river is by turns "depres-

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singing” and “haunting” according as it distresses or enchants Clemens. But Clemens’s adjectives begin to solve our problems with Huck. If we take them for emblems of Huck’s two reactions to “lonesomeness”—“depressing” aptly describes the farm, and “haunting” is consistent with Huck’s depiction of the river—a provocative similarity arises between what at first seemed radically different experiences. For in disheartening Huck, the Phelps farm turns his mind to spirits, suggesting the presence, in this “depressing” setting, of something palpably “haunting.” It may be, then, that Huck’s responses to the farm and river have a buried kinship as important as their superficial differences. Until we can sort the elements that unite from those that divide these two responses, we obviously remain far from an understanding of “lonesomeness”; and we shall get no closer before we have looked in greater detail at Huck’s position in the natural and human worlds.

The “lonesomeness” of the Widow Douglas’s and the Phelps farm, associated as it is with sadness, death, and ghosts, bespeaks a kind of malevolence in Nature; and malevolent indeed, very often, is the natural world of Huckleberry Finn. It is tempting to believe that Huck and Jim, so close to Nature, are at one with it. But proximity need not imply harmony. Jim’s intimacy with Nature has given him a knowledge of its signs, yet as Huck complains and Jim concedes, the signs almost always signify bad luck. Worse, they prove true with ominous consistency, because in Huckleberry Finn superstition, however silly, acknowledges reality: bad luck is a sort of natural law, something you can count on; sooner or later the snake-skin is bound to “do its work.” Leo Marx has discussed this threatening aspect of Clemens’s Nature in “The Pilot and The Passenger: Landscape Conventions and the Style of Huckleberry Finn.”

Between “Old Times on the Mississippi” and Huckleberry Finn, Clemens made various attempts to portray the terrors of Nature alongside its beauties. In “Old Times,” Marx points out, the conflict between two visions—romantic and realistic—of the river, resulted in the conquest of the former by the latter: in a famous passage Clemens laments that when one really knows a river—as a steamboat pilot must—one no longer sees its surface beauties, only the dangers beneath. However, in Huckleberry Finn, argues Marx, the two

5 American Literature, 28, No. 2 (May 1956), 129–45.
visions came at last into accord. Even as Huck details the river's glories he remarks, without anxiety, a monitory "streak on the water which you know by the look of the streak that there's a snag there in a swift current which breaks on it and makes that streak look that way" (p. 96). "Now at last," Marx writes, "through the consciousness of the boy, the two rivers are one"; and consequently *Huckleberry Finn* is "a book, rare in our literature, which manages to suggest the lovely possibilities of life in America without neglecting its terrors." I have related Marx's argument at some length because I intend to propose for it, presently, a slight but significant modification; for now, though, what matters is the presence of terror, of malevolence, in Clemens's *Nature*. In Marx's words, "To him the landscape, no matter how lovely, concealed a dangerous antagonist. He knew that nature had to be watched, resisted and—when possible—subdued."⁶

Odd as this will sound, in its frequent malevolence the natural world of *Huckleberry Finn* has much in common with that of *King Lear*. Jim, of course, appears costumed as Lear at the very beginning of Chapter 24, after he has shown Huck, at the very end of the previous chapter, the remorse he felt and still feels at having once mistreated his daughter in a rage. The storm on Jackson's Island and the cave in which Huck and Jim take shelter also evoke *Lear*, and are for our purposes even more significant parallels. Kent, on the heath in *Lear*, declares: "Since I was man,/Such sheets of fire, such bursts of horrid thunder,/Such groans of roaring wind and rain, I never/Remember to have heard" (III, ii, 45-48). Huck's idiom is hardly the same, but his meaning is similar:

Directly it begun to rain, and it rained like all fury, too, and I never see the wind blow so. It was one of these regular summer storms. It would get so dark that it looked all blue-black outside, and lovely . . . and next, when it was just about the bluest and blackest—*fist*! It was as bright as glory . . . dark as sin again in a second, and now you'd hear the thunder let go with an awful crash and then go rumbling, grumbling, tumbling down the sky towards the under side of the world. . . .

(p. 43)

Admittedly, what horrifies Kent makes Huck's blood rush; but just now the stimulus—for both, the extreme violence of Nature—means more than any difference in response. We must remember, moreover,

⁶ Marx, pp. 140, 143, 142.
that on Jackson's Island Huck has just begun his education, so when he reaches for some more fish and hot corn-pone, turns to Jim, and says contentedly, "I wouldn't want to be nowhere else but here," Jim properly admonishes him: "Well, you wouldn't a ben here, 'f it hadn't a ben for Jim. You'd a ben down dah in de woods widout any dinner, en gitt'n' mos' drownded, too, dat you would, honey" (p. 43). In large measure, then, Huck owes his aesthetic enjoyment of the storm to the warmth and dryness of the cave. In Huckleberry Finn as in King Lear, "unaccommodated man" is but a "poor, bare, fork'd animal" (III, iv, 106-8), and much more vulnerable than accommodated man generally wishes to acknowledge.

I do not suggest that Clemens patterned any part of Huckleberry Finn rigidly or consistently after King Lear; but the play may well have influenced that part of his imagination which was working out an attitude to Nature, a conception of "lonesomeness," and the implications of these things for the novel's central human relationship. We do not know that Clemens read King Lear, though we know that he saw it—around 1878, in a German production—and that during three hours of unintelligible language he "never understood anything but the thunder and lightning . . ."7 His book Is Shakespeare Dead? (1909) defends the view that Bacon, rather than the Stratford Shakespeare, probably wrote the Plays; but whoever did write them was, according to Clemens, "equipped beyond every other man of his time with wisdom, erudition, imagination, capaciousness of mind, grace and majesty of expression"; and his works, we are assured, "will endure until the last sun goes down."8 Robert Gale maintains that Clemens undoubtedly read "numerous Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights, including Shakespeare," during his extensive preparations for The Prince and the Pauper; from this and other compelling evidence Gale argues the influence of Lear on that book.9 Edward Mendelsohn has aptly remarked the similarity between Romeo and Juliet and the Granger-

7 Clemens, A Tramp Abroad, ed. Charles Neider (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), p. 50 (Chap. 9). Even the thunder and lightning, Clemens adds, were "reversed to suit German ideas, for the thunder came first and the lightning after."
ford episode in *Huckleberry Finn*. And Chapter 21 of the novel gives us the Duke’s brilliantly garbled soliloquy, composed of fragments from *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *Richard III*. So it cannot be unreasonable to treat *King Lear* as one impetus to, or a loose referent of, Huck’s and Jim’s relation to each other and to Nature.

In *King Lear* the words “unaccommodated man” deepen in meaning to suggest not only homeless and robeless, but friendless man—as if human company were the most important form of protection demanded by a hostile natural world. In a setting whose “lonesomeness” outdoes anything else of the sort in literature, isolation becomes the worst form of exposure: Lear errs tragically in banishing Cordelia precisely because her love, as he discovers too late, was essential to his survival. Indeed it might have sheltered him from all, he learns, might even have removed the need for clothing and a roof. Having at last recognized the necessity and power of love, Lear pleads with Cordelia:

Come let’s away to prison:
We two alone will sing like birds i’ th’ cage;
... So we’ll live,
And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues
Talk of court news; and we’ll talk with them too—
Who loses and who wins; who’s in, who’s out—
And take upon ’s the mystery of things
As if we were God’s spies; and we’ll wear out,
In a wall’d prison, packs and sects of great ones,
That ebb and flow by th’ moon.

(V, iii, 8–18)

The idyllic life Lear envisions is, ironically, one of absolute freedom in imprisonment; and in its outline it closely resembles Huck’s and Jim’s life on the raft between Huck’s flight from the Grangerfords and the invasion of the Duke and King—the short but exquisite stretch of their journey which Huck will later remember in words that recall Lear’s: “and we a floating along, talking, and singing, and laughing” (p. 167). In fact, too little attention has been paid to the sense in which Huck and Jim, practically speaking, are imprisoned.

on the river: two birds, as it were, in a cage. They do not take to it by choice, they cannot leave it in safety, and neither of them returns to it at the story’s end. Yet as they “lazy along” downstream, farther and farther from any chance at the freedom Jim set out after, surrendering themselves to the current, abandoning all obligation or purpose, they achieve, against the background of the river’s “lonesomeness,” that unity in love—that more authentic kind of freedom—which Lear longs for with Cordelia. Liberated, as it seems, from time and space, for a moment they inhabit eternity. The great world ebbs and flows while Huck and Jim pause to take upon them, in Lear’s words, “the mystery of things”: “We had the sky, up there, all speckled with stars, and we used to lay on our backs and look up at them, and discuss about whether they was made, or only just happened—Jim he allowed they was made, but I allowed they happened . . .” (p. 97).

In Huckleberry Finn as in Lear, then, life needs, above all, other life. Therein, surely, lies the pathos of Huck’s character: he is a fugitive from society who cannot be alone. When he is, the “lonesomeness” of Nature goes malevolently to work on him. Outside his room at the Widow’s (see the first passage above), Nature speaks of death and the dead speak through Nature—and Huck would rather die himself than have to listen. The depressing concert of leaves and owl and whippowill and dog and wind makes him “so down-hearted and scared, I did wish I had some company.” As if in answer to this wish, company and comfort arrive in the form of Tom Sawyer; but as soon as Huck leaves town for Jackson’s Island and independence, he runs into his old problem: “When it was dark I set by my camp fire smoking, and feeling pretty satisfied; but by-and-by it got sort of lonesome . . .” (p. 35). (As in the Phelps farm passage, Huck’s use of the impersonal form—“it got . . . lonesome”—allows his adjective to describe at once his surroundings

Huck originally plans to take to the woods (pp. 25–26); and once he finds a canoe, he does not plan to stay on the river any longer than he has to (p. 29).

Soon after they have passed Cairo, Huck and Jim decide that when a chance arises, they will “buy a canoe” in which to paddle back upstream (p. 77); but when later Huck actually happens on a canoe, he simply paddles off “to see if I couldn’t get some berries” (p. 97), making no mention of the earlier plan. There is no better evidence that at this point Huck and Jim either do not remember or do not care that they are floating farther all the time from the free states.
and his state of mind.) To cheer himself Huck now sits on the bank, listens to the wash of the current, watches the sky and river: “there ain’t no better way to put in time when you are lonesome,” he asserts with momentary faith in Nature’s curative power; “you can’t stay so, you soon get over it” (p. 36). His faith here is the Romantic one typified in William Cullen Bryant’s “Thanatopsis” (1821), which declared that Nature “glides/Into [man’s] darker musings, with a mild/And healing sympathy, that steals away/Their sharpness ere he is aware.” But we have already seen that Clemens’s romanticism was always met, if not overpowered, by his inescapable sense of the real. In Huckleberry Finn, Nature’s mild and healing sympathy proves finally a poor substitute for human companionship. After three days alone, Huck rejoices to find Jim on the island: “I was ever so glad to see Jim. I warn’t lonesome, now” (pp. 37–38).

Huck’s next attack of “lonesomeness” comes with his first separation from Jim on their trip downriver—a separation for which they have Nature, in the forms of a fog and a swift current, to thank. “If you think it ain’t dismal and lonesome out in a fog that way, by yourself, in the night,” Huck advises us, “you try it once—you’ll see” (p. 68). His last attack (that recounted in the third passage above) follows Jim’s betrayal by the Duke and King, at a moment when separation seems finally irrevocable, and Huck, for the first time since Jackson’s Island, finds himself utterly alone. The resemblance between the Widow Douglas and Phelps farm passages has often been noted; but no one seems to have remarked that the two passages bracket Huck’s close friendship with Jim—the one preceding it, the other following what appears to Huck, for the present, to be its end. The positioning of these passages indicates the importance of Jim’s presence or absence to Huck’s experience of “lonesomeness.”

What Jim gives Huck is shelter from that something in Nature which speaks mournfully of, even urges Huck towards, death—that isolating quality of the landscape which is to Huck, we said, the primary referent of the word “lonesomeness.” Jim has no power to alter Nature: its “lonesomeness” remains palpable on the river and seems to maintain even there—in the water’s perfect stillness, in the sense of languor and sleepiness, in effects like those which Clemens, in his own sunrise account, calls “enchanting” and “haunting”—its
connection with death and spirits. But Jim’s company does transform Huck’s experience of Nature, just as the cave on Jackson’s Island does when it makes a storm seem “lovely”—seem not benevolent, but gorgeous in its malevolence, exciting in its power to do harm to anything but Huck himself. In the cave and on the river, what is terrifying in Nature becomes beautiful because it has ceased to be really dangerous; or, to put it more accurately, freedom from immediate danger allows Huck to see a beauty in natural malevolence that has been there all along. The river evokes in Huck the same sense of isolation he felt at the Widow’s and on the Phelps farm—like the tourists in Life on the Mississippi he seems affected by the “deep, brooding lonesomeness and desolation of the vast river”—but now, precisely because Huck is not isolated; because, in Jim’s company, he cannot be lonely, the sense has become delicious to him, and “lonesomeness” has become an object of aesthetic contemplation. (One might indeed suggest—without urging it—that death itself has been disarmed, if not made hazily attractive, by the sense of safety Jim’s loving companionship provides.) If it is a paradox for Huck to be “lonesome” but not lonely, it is not a paradox beyond the reach of common experience. At one time or another, most of us have openly embraced an hour of melancholy solitude that would certainly have held no charm had we been threatened with absolute and inevitable solitariness; and like Huck, many of us have made this paradoxical gesture most readily in the paradoxical situation of a shared aloneness. Certainly Huck’s century acknowledged a paradox like his own in the mingled awe, terror, and pleasure it relished—from positions of safety—as “sublime.” So we may at last qualify Leo Marx: in Huckleberry Finn, Clemens managed to depict not only the beauty and terrors of Nature, but the beauty of its terrors to those who, freed of them, are able to view them with aesthetic detachment.

The critics with whose views our examination began treat Huck’s lonesomeness as a response to the human world, or as a psychological phenomenon independent of Nature or humanity. But however alienated Huck may be from the society that rejects him and that he rejects in turn, the mood he calls “lonesomeness” is in fact—as I have tried to show—a reaction to the natural world, perhaps at bottom to the fact of death as it manifests itself in Nature. This
mood and its cause link the river passage to the other "lonesomeness" passages; Jim, we have just seen, sets it apart from them. With Jim, Huck can bask in the very mood that makes him, when alone, almost wish for death. Tom Sawyer, Aunt Sally, the Widow—almost one of Huck's companions can cause the mood to vanish; Jim alone, however, can make it a thing of beauty, perhaps because Jim alone makes no attempt to restrict or regulate Huck, but demands of him only what he can himself offer: love.

For in the generally bleak world of Huckleberry Finn, love is as necessary and as powerful as it is in King Lear. At moments in both works, it would seem proof not only against "lonesomeness" but against far more violent natural assaults. When Huck and Jim first board the raft, they bring their cave along in the form of a "snug wigwam to get under in blazing weather and rainy" (pp. 54-55); but they no longer need it by the time the Duke and King arrive, because they now have the superior shelter of their bond. Their new companions usurp the wigwam; a fierce storm blows up; yet Nature is once again as beautiful, in its hostility, as it was on Jackson's Island. And though Huck teases us by making us momentarily fear that a "regular ripper" of a wave will do him harm, the only real danger, as he spills overboard, is that Jim will die laughing at him, or he at us (p. 104). Their safety has become, for the present, as inviolable as their love.

Unfortunately love, however powerful, cannot overcome Huck's antipathy to the "sivilized" world. When Jim finally accepts a place in that world, as surely he must, Huck—as he must—refuses to follow. All we have said, however, makes Huck's decision to "light out for the Territory" the saddest moment of the book. In lighting out Huck preserves his independence but also commits himself once more to isolation; he renews his vulnerability to Nature's malevolence, and to "lonesomeness" especially. If he is independent, he is not quite free. The need for freedom, Leo Marx has suggested, is the central theme of Huckleberry Finn, so we must not ignore anything that our discussion of "lonesomeness" might reveal about it.18 Marx himself believes that "freedom in this book specifically means freedom from society and its imperatives," and without entirely

18 "Mr. Eliot, Mr. Trilling, and Huckleberry Finn," The American Scholar, 22, No. 4 (Autumn 1953), 425-26.
refuting this definition, we can now refine it considerably.\textsuperscript{14} For \textit{Huckleberry Finn} presents us with at least three different kinds of freedom. Huck leaves for Jackson's Island on a quest for his kind of freedom: freedom from restriction on the one hand and cruelty on the other—from the ways of Miss Watson and those of pap. There he meets Jim, who is seeking a different, if related kind of freedom, freedom from the legal institution of slavery. When men come from town to search the island, Huck’s freedom is as much jeopardized as Jim’s, since discovery would no doubt force Huck back into the custody of either the Widow or pap. “They’re after us!” Huck shouts (p. 53), and from mutual sympathy, not an identity of ends, he and Jim join forces and begin their journey downriver. Their quests, similar as they will at times appear, are not the same, and the final chapters will make this point twice. As the two hit the raft after the mixed-up and splendid rescue from the Phelps farm, Huck sings out, “\textit{Now, old Jim, you’re a free man again}, and I bet you won’t ever be a slave no more” (p. 212). But in his excitement Huck has here confused Jim’s kind of freedom with his own, for Jim, who has never yet been a free man in the legal sense, is deeper in slave territory and farther from legal freedom than ever. The irony is soon inverted, and the difference in quests underscored once more, when a piece of paper gives Jim his freedom at last, and Aunt Sally threatens to re-enslave Huck. At this hour of celebration we must suddenly make terms with a deflating truth, that Huck’s quest for a life permanently free from cruelty and restriction has not, like Jim’s quest, ended. Indeed, it may well have no end, since as Roy Harvey Pearce has pointed out, “even in the Territory, he will be only one step ahead of the rest . . . dukes and dauphins, Aunt Sallies, Colonel Sherburns, and Wilkses—civilizers all.”\textsuperscript{15}

Still, if Huck and Jim begin and end their voyage with their eyes on two different freedoms, they discover, en route, a third and common one. “You feel mighty free and easy and comfortable on a raft,” says Huck the moment he and Jim shove off from the Grangerfords’ (p. 95); and later, when the two seem for an instant to have shaken the Duke and King, Huck has just enough time, before their hopes die, to tell us that “it \textit{did} seem so good to be free

\textsuperscript{14} Marx, p. 436.

\textsuperscript{15} “The End, Yours Truly, Huck Finn’: Postscript,” \textit{Modern Language Quarterly}, 24, No. 3 (Sept. 1963), 256.
again and all by ourselves on the big river and nobody to bother us” (p. 161). The freedom of those two or three days between the Grangerfords and the first arrival of the Duke and King, the freedom we barely have a chance to remember before their second arrival, is a freedom neither Huck nor Jim sets out to find; but it is the only freedom they ever share. It is a freedom achieved in imprisonment, the freedom of solitude in loving company. In the odd way that has been described, it is also a freedom from Nature—which is only to say, really, the freedom to see beauty in Nature’s entire aspect, even in its terrors, even in “lonesomeness.” Though it might not, in itself, make the journey a success; though it cannot last; and though Huck is wise enough not to try to recapture it by returning to the river alone, that freedom marks the very highest point in the novel.