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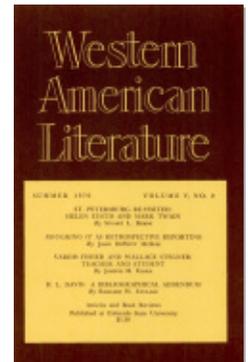
## St. Petersburg Re-Visited: Helen Eustis and Mark Twain

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## St. Petersburg Re-Visited: Helen Eustis and Mark Twain

When Helen Eustis' *The Fool Killer* appeared, early in 1954, reviewers disagreed widely about its literary merit.<sup>1</sup> Harrison Smith, writing for *The Saturday Review*, commended it as "the only American novel concerned with the physical and emotional life of a boy that . . . can be compared with J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*."<sup>2</sup> At the other extreme, Anthony West, reviewing the novel in *The New Yorker*, panned it unmercifully.<sup>3</sup> Between these extremes stood a number of reviewers, expressing varying degrees of cautious acclaim and disapprobation. On one point, however, all agreed. Almost every review began by comparing *The Fool Killer* to one or both of Mark Twain's classics—*Tom Sawyer* or *Huckleberry Finn*.

That they should have done so is not at all surprising, inasmuch as the comparison was first suggested by the author herself. On the dust jacket of the novel, Mrs. Eustis is quoted as saying that "*The Fool Killer* was written in deliberate and devoted imitation of a certain kind of novel I can describe best as the sort addressed to adults and children equally." She then specifically mentions Twain's novels as being representative of the type she has imitated.

The opening paragraphs of *The Fool Killer* reveal beyond doubt that Mrs. Eustis has indeed been deliberately and devotedly imitative:

When I come home I knewed the Old Crab was waiting for me, and I would catch it. I kicked around the yard a time, but it was cold out there . . . so I give up and went inside. She was by the stove stirring something; I tried to sneak past, but she reached out and caughted me by the ear.

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<sup>1</sup>Helen Eustis, *The Fool Killer*. (New York, 1954). Page numbers cited in the text hereafter will refer to this edition.

<sup>2</sup>*The Saturday Review*, XXXVII (February 13, 1954), 20.

<sup>3</sup>"Arcadia Run to Seed," *The New Yorker*, XXX (March 20, 1954), 120.

"Where you think you're going, pray?" she says, and I knowed I was in for it. When she'd call me "sir," mostly it was a clout on the ear, but when she'd say "pray," it was a licking sure and certain. (11)

The situation here is decidedly reminiscent of the initial scene in *Tom Sawyer* where Tom, equally guilty, and just as afraid of his "Old Crab," Aunt Polly is seized "by the slack of his round-about," and threatened with a whipping. Similarity of incident on this scale extends from the opening paragraph of *The Fool Killer* to the end, where George Mellish, like his prototype Huck Finn, expresses a desire to "light out for the territory": "Then I get a awful restless feeling . . . and I oftentimes think that if it wasn't for Uncle and Auntie needing me here, I'd probly hit the road again, come spring." (219)

There is enough similarity between *The Fool Killer* and the earlier Twain novels that the casual reader might be forgiven for thinking that Mrs. Eustis' hero is little more than a pale replica of Huck and Tom. Like Tom, George Mellish runs away after having been punished for a relatively minor offense; and his picaresque journey from that point on, makes him kin to Huck. Again like Huck, George tells his own story and, as the quotations above indicate, speaks with a similar dialect. He is an adept liar who pragmatically recognizes (as did Huck also) that "the best lies is the ones which has most truth in them." (15) George is twelve years old and thus stands midway between Tom and Huck in age.<sup>4</sup> Further examples only elaborate the fact of Mrs. Eustis' indebtedness to Twain and to the tradition of the Bad Boy who hates baths, gets into fights, runs away from home, and is generally a kind of adorable nuisance.<sup>5</sup>

But while on the surface *The Fool Killer* appears closely to resemble these earlier novels, it is actually a much more modern "Story of a Bad Boy." To be sure, it has a similar episodic structure, and George Mellish appears to possess all the stereotypical characteristics. However, a closer examination elicits some rather important differences—differences which, because of the surface

<sup>4</sup>That is, between the ten year old Tom of the earlier novel, and the fourteen year old Huck of the sequel.

<sup>5</sup>One thinks of Thomas Bailey Aldrich's *The Story of a Bad Boy*, Booth Tarkington's *Penrod*, and George Peck's *Peck's Bad Boy*. The christian name of the hero of the latter is he same as that of the hero of *The Fool Killer*.

similarities, dramatize the novel's more modern and more tragic handling of the theme of initiation.

The opening pages of *The Fool Killer* take their cue from a widely-recognized pattern. Like Tom Sawyer, Huck Finn, dozens of Alger heroes, and a ragged mob of characters in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Men*, George Mellish is a misunderstood and maltreated orphan. His foster parents, the Old Crab and the Old Man, epitomize the worst kind of tyranny—parental and religious authority, respectively. Together they make George's life so miserable that he contemplates flight: "*What's the use to stay? I'd only be him praying over me and her licking me to Judgment Day.*" (15)<sup>6</sup>

But in conjunction with the stereotype, there is a note of ambiguity in this first section of the novel. George is *guilty* of the offense for which he is whipped, deserving of the punishment he gets. In this sense he is no angelic Oliver Twist, helplessly submissive in the face of Fagin's brutalities. As he remarks: "The worst of it all was I knowed it was a fool thing I done myself, and I was ashamed." (14) George runs away, not, like Tom Sawyer, from injustice, but, like Huck Finn, from the restraints imposed by an ordered society. More importantly, he runs away because he feels unneeded and unwanted: "*What's the use fooling around? I thought. I ain't no use to them, and I got no use for them. They took me in when I was a orphan . . . thinking I'd grow up useful—but I ain't, and I hate the both of them, so what's the use to stay?*" (14-15) George is acutely conscious that he is an orphan—that, strictly speaking, he has no home. When the Old Crab punishes him for leaving some unidentified object worth \$15.00 out in the road for "your pa to run over with the wagon," George's first reaction is not to deny the offense, but to deny the implied parental relationship: "I dropped my head . . . and I says, 'He ain't my pa.'" (12) As the novel develops, it becomes increasingly apparent that George is searching for a home, rather than running from one. A typical adolescent, he desires both security and independence; at the same time, he is willing to adopt anyone who will adopt him. He is more than a rebellious Bad Boy; he is a lonely orphan, searching for a father.

Despite this hint of a serious theme in the early part of the novel, George's first encounter with the outside world is remi-

<sup>6</sup>Mrs. Eustis uses italics to register her protagonist's internal monologue. Unless otherwise noted, all passages in italics are the author's.

niscent of the older pattern of the comic picaresque. Dirty Jim Jelliman, George's first father-avatar, is a creature out of some frontier tall tale: "He was a old, old codger, with a long beard which would of been white if he hadn't been the dirtiest old man I ever seen. Everything about him was so dirty it was almost green, excepting his blue, blue eyes." (21) Jim, like George, has escaped from a woman's tyranny. His extravagant manner of demonstrating his freedom dwarfs George's typical adolescent irresponsibility and aversion to cleanliness and work. Following his shrewish wife's death, Jim had returned from the funeral intent on beginning a new life:

"I looked at this here house, and it was neat as a pin. I stood smack dab in the middle of the parlor, and I says my own name out loud. 'Jim,' I says. 'Jim.' Like that. And I ain't done a thing I didn't want to since. . . . Ain't had a bath since the night I was drunk and fell in the creek . . ." (23)

Appropriately, it is this fantastic character who tells the tale that haunts George Mellish. The Fool Killer, according to Jim, is a figure who combines the characteristics of Death and Father Time. Traditionally, he is a "great tall feller," has a long beard, and carries a scythe for "chopping fools." While George does not really believe the tale, it does catch his imagination. And while Jim's story is grotesquely comic, it ushers an ominous element into the novel. At the moment Jim begins, George has a fleeting premonition of disaster: "A cloud come over the sun, turning that dirty old kitchen all dark and gloomy, while at the same time a shiver run down my spine from a goose walking on my grave." (26) This incident, of course, clearly foreshadows George's encounter with Milo Bogardus.

Nevertheless, George's brief sojourn with Dirty Jim Jelliman is a kind of Jackson's Island idyll. In contrast to the tyrannic atmosphere of his foster home, life with Jim is Arcadian even if anarchic: "With Jim, a body couldn't hardly get in any trouble if he tried, because Jim, he never done nothing he didn't want to, and he expected others to do the same." (31) But just as Jackson's Island has its snake, so does Arcadia have its own form of poison: "Jim's victuals made me admire the Old Crab for something of a cook;" "and once I snatched a bunch of poison ivy out just as he was throwing it in to boil." (31) In short, George learns that too much freedom can not only be dangerous, but that it too can

be restrictive. Jim is essentially as much a fanatic as the Old Crab and Old Man had been. He lives not so much an easy, as a defiant, life, ritually oriented toward staying dirty. He is as much a slave to fetish as were the Old Crab and the Old Man.

Thus, by the time George is "rescued" by Mrs. Fanshawe, he is somewhat disillusioned about a life of unrestrained freedom. Furthermore he is plagued by Jim's legacy-story of the Fool Killer—although only in his dreams. The narrative, meanwhile, develops along parallel lines—comic on the surface, ominous in its implication. On the one hand, Henry and Ova Fanshawe present a decidedly comic appearance. Henry is a "kind of dried-up little feller with a bushy red mustache, thick eyebrows, like he'd growed another mustache on top of his eyes, and a bald head;" (64) Ova "was about the fattest human being I ever seen. You heard the expression big as a house—well, she was big as a house with a piazza all the way round." (53) On the other hand, their goodness poses a threat. Henry Fanshawe, like Twain's Silas Phelps, is a well-meaning individual who mistakenly assumes that social custom acts out a mandate of morality and justice. His chief concern is to return the runaway to his proper home. Not having found the home he seeks, George decides "*I got to get away.*" (68) But the verb here is significant: he continues his picaresque flight reluctantly. Unlike Huck who represents the adolescent as rebel, George represents the adolescent as seeker after that security that resides somewhere between tyranny and anarchy. Both boys are outcasts by circumstance; only the former by choice. Even the security and sociability of prison life momentarily appeal to George in preference to continued flight: *Why, I thought, I wouldn't much mind going to jail, if only they'd keep me there. There'd be folks to talk to, and they'd have to feed me.* (65)

George escapes from the Fanshawes and again repeats the pattern by taking up with the first person he encounters thereafter. But if the pattern of the novel is repetitive, the tempo is not. Up to this point, the tone of the narrative, distinguished by hyperbolic descriptions and dialectal malapropisms, is essentially comic. But, when George meets Milo Bogardus, the novel takes the already foreshadowed turn towards tragedy. Milo's tale of his "death and resurrection" during the Civil War is no less incredible, as far as details are concerned, than the stories Dirty Jim told; but the tone is restrained rather than overtly hyperbolic and not conducive

to laughter. George's description of Milo Bogardus—when it is compared to his previous descriptions of Jim Jelliman and the Fanshawes—clearly foreshadows the change:

I could make out he was a tall lanky feller. His face was kind of long and crooked, part covered over with sandy color beard, and running acrost his forehead from one eyebrow into his hair was a big angry-looking red scar, like he must of like to had his head busted open one time. . . . What give me a queer feeling about this feller's face that night . . . wasn't the scar at all, but the way his eyes was set so deep back in his face that they wasn't nothing but shadows where you'd expect them to have been. (76)

At first, George seems to have found a father in Milo. When the veteran, after his initial threatening gesture, rocks the terrified boy in his arms, George thinks: "Why, this must be how a person's folks would feel." (107) But the relationship, although idyllic on the surface, conceals a portentous undercurrent of disaster. On the one hand, they live the ideal life that George has dreamed of: wandering along, camping out, avoiding towns, and enjoying almost unlimited freedom. On the other hand, their relationship is decidedly ambiguous: George looks upon Milo as a father, but Milo thinks of George as his brother. In other words, while George superficially realizes independence, he is potentially as insecure as ever.

His insecurity displays itself in the form of a recurring nightmare about the Fool Killer. In part, this is due to the fact that Milo so closely resembles the Fool Killer, as Jim Jelliman had described him. But George has conscious reason for fearing the man who has befriended him. A veteran of the Civil War, Milo does not even know which side he fought for. Picked up on the battlefield, his "clothes all tore off . . . by the blast of a shell," (85) he had recovered his life, but not his memory, in a Union hospital. A total amnesiac he becomes, upon his recovery, literally a new man, re-christened with a new name: "When the feller in the bed next to me died, the folks in the hospital just taken his name and give it to me for mine." (84) He is literally a man with no history, "never bore of woman at all, but come straight from God's hand, a finished man, but unknowing as a infant." (86) In Eustis' novel the *man* not the boy is the true child of nature. Like the Fool Killer whom he so closely resembles, Milo is ageless. He has no conception of right and wrong, only an abiding conviction that all men are his brothers, and an equally strong distrust of

crowds and cities. He resolves these two seemingly contradictory convictions with the foreboding rationalization that Cain and Abel were also brothers. (69)

Milo, then, is a kind of lunatic mystic. Like Jim Jelliman, who represented an exaggerated exemplification of George's adolescent aversion to cleanliness, Milo is an exaggerated exemplar of George's aversion to authority. Violently anti-social, having no established identity himself, he is indeed a sinister and paradoxical father figure: alternately an angel of mercy and an agent of doom, a mystic healer and a lunatic destroyer.

Small wonder, then, that whenever Milo talks or acts strangely, George inevitably brings the Fool Killer into the conversation. From the first, George's feelings of guilt and unease have been transformed into a disturbing belief in and fear of the Fool Killer; and after Milo's terrible bout with insanity, George's subconscious fears are consciously articulate. During the frenzy of the camp meeting revival, he identifies Milo with the Devil who will betray him to the Fool Killer. For George, the Reverend Spott's sermon is especially terrifying, because it seems to confirm his heretofore only half-conscious and uneasy belief in the Fool Killer:

I begun to wish he wouldn't mention that about the Lord saying to sinners they was also fools. That was the first time it ever struck me foolishness was anything to do with sinning, and, between that and him talking about hearing footsteps and waking in the night, it all took me back to them awful dreams I had at Jim's about the Fool Killer. (123)

Terrified, he escapes from Milo's restraining hand, and rushes to the safety of the mourners' bench. (127)

The camp meeting revival, followed by the murder of the Reverend Spotts and the disappearance of Milo, violently concludes the ambiguously idyllic and sinister portion of George's *Odyssey*. When the preacher is found the next morning, chopped to death with his own ax, George's association of sin, guilt, and the Fool Killer is permanently established. Complicating his situation is his subconscious awareness of what consciously he refuses to acknowledge—that Milo is the murderer. Even before he learns the exact details of the preacher's death, he hides Milo's blood-stained blanket, so it will not be found by the camp meeting crowd. (132) In addition, he is tormented by guilt, haunted by the idea that he

has somehow been the instrument that has precipitated the disaster. And in a sense he *is* guilty, albeit inadvertently. He had cajoled Milo into attending the camp meeting, against the latter's wishes. Once there, the noise and frenzy of the battle for the Lord plunges the ex-soldier into one of his fits of insanity. But George is even more fundamentally involved; unconsciously he has suggested to Milo the role of the Fool Killer. In short, George finds himself innocently involved in a situation that over-taxes his adolescent powers of comprehension. Thus, when he learns that the camp meeting crowd intends to hang an innocent man for the crime, his confusion reaches a limit beyond endurance, and he falls back upon the already established pattern of evasion of responsibility and escape from reality:

Then I headed for the creek again, but . . . when I was out of the trees it made me feel too out in the open some way; I run for a clump of willows down the bank *like something was at my heels* . . . I crept under them, and they covered me like a house. (136)  
[The italics are mine.]

George is not aware of all the subtle ramifications of his guilt feelings, nor does he consciously understand why he has run away. He attempts to suppress his guilt of having shirked responsibility by convincing himself that it is Milo who is in danger. Basically, he rejects his newly-acquired knowledge of Milo's sinister character, and clings to his earlier conception of the persecuted mystic, beset on all sides by enemies. By so doing, he avoids facing up to the horrifying evil of reality and to the equally horrifying recognition of his own involvement in it. His escape in this instance takes the form of psychological regression. Faced prematurely with the knowledge of evil, he attempts to deny its existence altogether.

Hal Borland, in his review of *The Fool Killer*, has commented that "George is Huck Finn prematurely mature."<sup>7</sup> Although Mr. Borland is speaking pejoratively, and although he does not elaborate on the remark, he has stated an essential truth that defines the conflict of the novel. It has already been noted that the opening scene of *The Fool Killer* closely resembles the initial scene in *Tom Sawyer*, and that the closing scene parallels that of *Huckleberry Finn*. The parallels are important because of their sequence. In the few months during which the events of the novel are set forth, George Mellish is forcibly transformed from a state of childhood

<sup>7</sup>*The New York Times Book Review* (February 7, 1954), 5.

innocence such as Tom epitomizes at the beginning of Twain's earlier book, to a condition of disillusioned maturity similar to that which Huck Finn derives from his journey down the Mississippi River. When one stops to consider that Tom is ten and Huck fourteen, the severity and the rapidity of George's initiation is vividly illustrated.

George Mellish is Huck Finn prematurely mature. But this fact is not a defect in the novel; it is the theme. That maturity, which involves a recognition of the complexities of adult experience, is forced upon him. A comparison of Tom's and George's respective encounters with violence illustrates clearly the difference between the simple and the complex experience. Tom observes a brutal murder in the graveyard, but he is not thereby involved in any moral dilemma. Injun Joe is obviously a villain deserving punishment; Muff Potter is innocent and, in addition, is innately good, a fact signified by his record of being kind to children. The moral issue is unambiguous, clearly delineated in black and white. And while Tom's fear of Injun Joe's probable vengeance is natural, there is no question in his (or the reader's) mind as to what he should do. George, on the other hand, does not merely witness, but participates in the camp meeting murder. In addition, Milo Bogardus combines the evil qualities of Injun Joe and the good qualities of Muff Potter in his own character. Like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Milo is alternately respectable and monstrous, a child of nature and a child of the Devil. Tom Sawyer has only to choose between good and evil; George Mellish must choose in a situation that challenges his immature conception that good and evil are separate and distinct absolutes.

George's alternating belief and disbelief in the Fool Killer provides a barometer for measuring his fluctuating advance toward maturity. When Jim Jelliman tells him "that the Lord made cats for killing mice, . . . and the Fool Killer for killing fools," George is visibly uneasy: "I wished he hadn't of brought the Lord in. Folks don't call the Lord's name when it's just a tale." (27) His belief in the Fool Killer becomes proportionately more fixed, as his moral dilemma becomes more complex. Just as, traditionally, the fool attempts to escape the Fool Killer by running, so George attempts to escape his moral responsibilities by ignoring, suppressing, or running from them; and just as, traditionally, the Fool

Killer always catches the fool, so George eventually has to face up to the complex ambiguities of reality.

Following the camp meeting murder, George tries to evade reality by taking refuge in idle fantasies in which the details are conveniently vague. Always however, responsibility has been assumed by Milo, who is no longer the ambiguous figure George knows him to be, but the comforting and caring father he has hoped to find:

Ever night, after I got in bed, I used to think of Milo, and imagine he was alive somewheres, and would come back after me. I didn't know how he'd go about finding me, but I'd pass over that some way, and there he'd be some fine day; he'd tell me how he'd been obliged to leave me that time on account of having to flee from his enemies, but now he'd licked em all and didn't have to worry no more; how all the time he'd been keeping track of me secret-like, and now he was ready to travel on once more. . . . Then we'd go off again and have adventures and see the Pacific Ocean and not be parted no more the rest of our lives. (168)

But the knowledge he has repressed continues to torment his subconscious: "Also them dreams I used to have of the Fool Killer come back to me from time to time, all mixed up with the preacher being chopped up, and blood, and gore; sometimes it turned out 'twas me done the murder, and I'd wake up feeling terrible, like I'd really done it." (169)

George's dilemma is additionally complicated, because he has at last found the home he has been searching for. Having been taken in by the Galts, he exchanges his independence for a more restricted security with an eagerness that vividly illustrates his reluctance to come to terms with reality. He regresses to his earlier role of the Bad Boy, hating baths, getting into fights, stealing candy—in short, rejecting initiation and retreating into the security of childhood innocence.

But because he has been forcibly and prematurely initiated into the knowledge of evil he cannot so easily deny the effects of his encounter with reality. To continue an earlier analogy, George chooses to remember only Milo as Muff Potter, as the companion who had taught him to make a willow whistle; he refuses to acknowledge Milo as Injun Joe, the monster who had spells of insanity and murdered the camp meeting preacher. By attributing

to the Fool Killer all the real evil he has witnessed, he *realizes* (in the root sense of the word) the Fool Killer in Milo.

Thus, when Milo returns, George is caught in a dilemma that he can escape from only by maturing. He faces the alternative of either surrendering his newly-acquired security, or rejecting Milo. The discovery that Milo not only had deserted him, but has also forgotten him in the meantime, shatters his illusory dream of having found a father in his former companion. (190) Instinctively he understands that life with Milo would involve a pointless, perpetual cycle of wandering. More importantly, George subconsciously recognizes that, if he casts his lot with Milo, he will have to face up to his knowledge of the monstrous side of his companion's nature. In short, he will have to acknowledge the reality of evil.

George reacts to this dilemma in his usual fashion—by pretending it does not exist. He entertains the notion that Milo could “*build a place of his own off from the town . . . and I could visit back and forth between him and Uncle and Auntie different times.*” (194) Even when he recognizes the impossibility of this scheme, he postpones the inevitable choice by inviting Milo to dinner with the Galts. But his procrastination initiates the final catastrophe from which there is no escape. The subject of the camp meeting murder arises during the conversation at dinner and George, in desperation, retreats altogether into the fantasy world he has created without heretofore completely acknowledging: “Now for a long time I'd got over thinking of the Fool Killer, excepting as a tale made up to scare babies with. . . . But now it seemed to me like I kind of had to make out I'd meant it, so I started in telling it again the way Jim told me, and while I was telling, it even begun to sound kind of likely.” (203)

Just as he did before the camp meeting murder, George suggests to Milo the role he is to play. By refusing initiation into the knowledge of evil, he precipitates an even more evil consequence. Milo returns that night and tries to murder the Galts with an ax. George tries simultaneously to rescue his Aunt, and to save Milo from the wrath of his Uncle, but his last desperate attempt at compromise fails. He can only stand helplessly by, calling to his former companion, while the latter clammers to the top of the house and suicidally plunges to his death.

The shock of coming face to face with evil is too much and George suffers a psychic relapse into temporary insanity. When he does eventually recover, his original innocence has been qualified by the knowledge that evil is both inexplicable and unavoidable.

*The Fool Killer*, then, postulates the theme of forced initiation. Structure and theme are mutually reinforcing—the repetitive pattern of escape paralleling the theme of flight from the responsibilities of maturity. *The Fool Killer* is, of course, not the only novel to portray the adolescent shrinking from the encounter with experience. Resistance to initiation is an emergent theme in the post World War II novel of adolescence. Among modern novelists, there is an implicit acknowledgement that initiation also involves what Leslie Fiedler has called a “Fall into maturity,” an eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge with accompanying consequences of guilt and punishment.<sup>8</sup>

For while Tom Sawyer, through his initiation, became the hero of both the juvenile and the adult community, George Mellish, following his encounter, becomes more isolated from both. He is separated by his experience from his schoolmates. And while he maintains a close relationship with the Galts, he recognizes that they are foster parents only. Tom becomes a hero because he triumphs over villainy. As a result of his triumph, he receives a tangible reward—a fortune in buried treasure. In other words, his childish fantasies become actualities once he “put[s] away childish things.” Tom achieves a successful initiation through his own actions, overcoming evil (on the witness stand) and protecting Becky’s innocence (in the cave). George Mellish, on the other hand, receives no palpable reward. In fact, his successful initiation demands the relinquishment of immature dreams, such as going “West, searching for gold . . . come back a rich man, able to pay off all I owed them and not be beholden any more.” (14) He achieves maturity by learning—what Tom seemingly knows all along—that evil is not phantasmal, but real; at the same time he discovers that evil quite often cannot be overcome, that it must, instead, be accepted as a tangible part of life. Milo Bogardus dies, but the *Fool Killer*—that shadowy and subconscious residue of guilt that accumulates due to the necessity for a man’s making absolute moral decisions in ambiguous situations—remains.

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<sup>8</sup>Leslie Fiedler, *No! in Thunder*, (Boston, 1960), 279.

Thus, while *The Fool Killer* pays "deliberate and devoted . . . homage to Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn . . ." it combines the thematic qualities of both in its (perhaps) more realistic depiction of what initiation—into knowledge, into society—involves. In *Tom Sawyer* Twain presents an adolescent who is only ostensibly a rebel. But by mounting to the stand to witness against the evil and outcast Indian, and by, more importantly, saving the chief citizen's daughter-in-distress, Tom foreshadows his ultimate role of upholding the values of whatever society he is a part of. In *Huck Finn*, Twain has given us the exact opposite portrait of a boy who, however much he may conform when it is expedient or necessary to do so, is essentially an indefatigable rebel against authority of any kind. The difference between the two boys is dramatically manifest in their respective motives for "stealing" Jim from the Phelps: Tom aware that his actions, apparently "bad," will have ultimately no revolutionary social significance; Huck assuming and accepting the fact that he is acting criminally. Granting that one theme of *Huckleberry Finn* is that of the search for a father, one must also grant that there is no suitable father for Huck. And it does not so much matter whether we identify this father as Pap, whose only apparent drawback is that he is too often given to emulating society's function of "getting and spending", or whether we identify him as Natty Bumppo; both are dead.

Nine years after the publication of *Huckleberry Finn*, President Cleveland opened up the Cherokee Strip and the last unsettled segment of "the territory ahead" vanished. That Twain vaguely realized the futility of Huck's flight from "Sivilization" is suggested by the ill-conceived and abortively-abandoned *Tom and Huck Among the Indians*. But the ambiguous conclusion of *Huckleberry Finn* is even more indicative. For what Huck has found at the Phelps is St. Petersburg reincarnate: the same traditions, the same families—witness Aunt Sally and Tom—even the same "double log house" which Twain, as he tells us in his autobiography, had "moved" from Florida, Missouri. The future for Huck holds no promise but rather the certainty of repetitive flight from a series of burgeoning and depressingly similar St. Petersburgs.

Perhaps because she had the advantage of retrospect, Helen Eustis faces squarely the fact that Mark Twain hinted at but backed away from: that there can be no escape from society. For George Mellish at the end of *The Fool Killer* is back in St. Petersburg

again. Just as Aunt Sally is a less-than-ideal improvement over Miss Watson, so are the Galts a less-than-ideal improvement over the Old Crab and the Old Man. The difference is that whereas Huck rejects anything less than absolute freedom, George Mellish reluctantly accepts the compromise of freedom and social responsibility that maturity thrusts upon him. Mark Twain wrote two novels of extremes—one rejoicing in conformity, the other repudiating the slightest vestige of it. Helen Eustis' novel strikes a mean between the two. But it is with *Huckleberry Finn* that *The Fool Killer* finally merits comparison. For if Huck's final gesture is tragically heroic, George's is no less tragically realistic. And it is precisely due to the author's uncompromising delineation of a tragic necessity that this modern sequel to Twain's nineteenth century classic merits our serious attention.

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