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THE DIS-CLOSURE OF *HUCKLEBERRY FINN*.
NATURA NATURATA VS. *LUMEN NATURALE*,
LIGHthing OUT VS. *LICHTUNG*¹

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ABSTRACT

Against the popular frontier-wilderness discourse, the paper offers to discuss one of the most celebrated lines in all American literature, Huck Finn's closing resolution to light out ahead of the rest, as an adverbial-existential rather than as a categorical-territorial affair. Drawing on Heidegger's notion of "resoluteness", it is argued that the novel discloses at the very end – 'lights out' – a mode of presencing rather than of disappearing. More broadly, this is to show that the received image of Huck as a maverick dodger, incorrigible vagabond and, most emphatically of all, as a celebrant of Nature is not borne out by the reality of the text and is informed instead by the dynamics of cultural (auto-)stereotyping.

In its own right a piquant if unintended cultural trans-action and trans-mission, Hemingway's famous attribution in *Green hills of Africa* (1935: 22) of quintessential, originary Americanness in the realm of letters to *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885) certainly does not communicate today as succinctly as it used to. Nonetheless, even if indeed no integrated monolingual mythos and culture inform the country any longer, in the popular domain Twain's work certainly still projects a tally of cogent, vibrant and appealing figurations associated with the popular story of America: dissent, separation, risk-taking, movement, confrontation with the wilderness, resourcefulness, adaptability, tenacity, expediency, practical idealism, rugged individualism.

It is a well-recognized human tendency in the face of inadequacy or uncer-

¹ In a quasi-Twainian manner, this discussion forms a(n anti-) sequel to the (p)re-view "De same ole Huck" (Semrau 2006). In a like fashion, it is also dedicated to "de same" Professor Andrzej Kopcewicz – *studentium totiusque generis humani amico*.

tainty of identity in time to rely upon spatial means of coming to terms with the complexities of existence and with one's own self. The stated classic purpose of geography is the explanation of the landscape, appreciation of land in terms of distributions and relationships of particular (more or less) static 'scapes', portions of land the eye can absorb 'at a glance'. In America, however, it includes much more conspicuously an active personal component or rather projection: a topography of not so much belonging as of dream and desire, a significant modification (Americanization) of what Smith (2003: 136) calls in a larger context "ethnoscape".² DeVoto (1977: 309) claims exclusive distinctiveness for and about Huck Finn as a wonder inseparable from the continent: "With him goes a fullness made and shaped wholly of America. It is only because the world he passes through is real and only because it is American that his journey escapes into universals and is immortal". In the final analysis the popular reading of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* rests on one of the United States' most cherished and trusted (natural, moral, cultural, geopolitical) assumptions, that of the uniqueness of its land or territory, paired with the fantasy about the magic of liberation from the regime of things ossified, muted and gray towards a renewal of a rewarding (ultimately redemptive) rapport with things lush and green. The first intimate detail a beleaguered protagonist of a contemporary multilayered narrative chooses to reveal about herself (Florey 2001: 5) reads: "The only thing she could quote from Mark Twain was the last sentence of *Huckleberry Finn* about lighting out for the territory".³ As Groover (1999: 193) for example limns it: "[B]eyond the Mississippi River valley lies the seemingly endless wilderness of the Territory, with its seductive promise of quest, freedom, and adventure". If, as one of the greatest twentieth-century English authors once remarked, almost all novels tend to get feeble towards the end, Twain's most famous work is admittedly feebler than most. Still, ostensibly winding down to a banal, conventional closure ("and so there ain't nothing more to write about" [Twain 2001: 362]⁴), its very final words construct a robust and serviceable design, perceived across the board as the book's crowning, apparently timeless triumph. Clearly, the ending of Twain's novel constitutes an important datum in the registry of

² Quite specifically historically, the origins of the phrase "the American dream" is not the (Tocquevillian) delectable charm of anticipated sumptuous material rewards, but the later epic formulation "that dream of a land" (Adams [1947]: 374). As Hemingway (1950: 123) broaches the issue: "We live by accidents of terrain, you know. And terrain is what remains in the dreaming part of your mind".

³ The heroine's existential situation and motivation at this juncture will be readily recognized as part of the Huck Finn legacy: "The main thing was to escape her parents and Roddie Smith and everyone else she knew and the cold city and the sidewalks full of dead brown leaves. The main thing was to chuck everything and start over" (Florey 2001: 5).

⁴ All references to *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* are to this edition and are henceforth cited parenthetically in the text by page number only.

American thought and imagination. According to T. S. Eliot the book's last words are the only ones possible (1977: 335), for LaHood Huck's closing statement orchestrates the most logical move there is (1966-67: 12), Cox considers it a near perfect ending, one that leaves the reader in a state of greater approval than at any other point in the novel (1973: 228).⁵

Never confused with the ideology of the 'soil', to begin with, in the popular parlance 'territory' does not get exactly naturalized in its formal (past) inclusionary-exclusionary meaning of a geographically and administratively circumscribed extent of the U.S. domain given limited self-government, usually preparatory to Statehood. Rather, it denotes an ideation-location earmarked forever as both nobody's and everybody's general property/asset. A matter of self-definition in and through movement and space, 'territory' is very broadly used as a catchword evoking the dynamics of personal as well as national signification, even if Americans do not have any obvious collective image of themselves as a people. As Frost ([1967a]: 211) poeticizes it, it is a polyvalent, imagination-freeing concept for practically any use – "where man leaves off and nature starts./ And never over-stepped". As a discursive construction as well as construal of (cultural) reality, an-other (alternative) mode or more properly zone of thinking, it engenders nuanced and apparently infinite metonymic and metaphoric permutations, commingling of meanings, and general indefinability. Sometimes a point, sometimes a line, and sometimes a space, 'territory' can flexibly betoken release, vista, direction, passage, frontier, garden, haven, exilium, penumbra, vanishing point, finally and most capaciously: all-purpose elsewhere-ness. Mass-audience publication *1,003 great things about America* features pithily and proudly very near top of the list the announcement: "We still

⁵ For the sheer presence of Huck's resolution in the contemporary American lexicon across genres see, by way of example, Wright Morris's literary study *The territory ahead* (1958), Ralph Ellison's collection of essays *Going to the territory* (1986), Daniel Duane's (counterculture and mountaineering) memoir *Lighting out* (1994), Ronald Wardall's poem "Lighting out for the territory" about men-women relationships (2000), Laurie Anderson's track "Lighting out for the territories" from her 2000 album *Talk normal*, Virginia Scharff's human-geography article "Lighting out for the territory: Women, mobility, and western place" (1999), the beginning of Richard Louv's travelogue *Fly-fishing* (2000: 13): "On a Saturday before lighting out for the territories, I stopped at ...", or the beginning of a recent book on American politics: "[T]he history of America is contained in that vision of being able to 'light out for the Territory'" (Roper 2002: 2). Discussing the intensity of the religious calling among Puritans, Colacurcio (2006: 508) talks about "setting out for the territories a step or two ahead of the rest". An introduction to the screenplay of *Easy rider* refers to a broad spectrum of "territory-ahead travellers" (Hardin – Schlossberg 1969: 36); "Lighting out for the territories" is the title of the concluding chapter of a best-selling book on digital market strategies (Downes – Mui 2000: 213). Also, *The Territory Ahead* happens to be the name of a well-established California outdoor-clothing company that, in the words of its vice-president of marketing and advertising, "want[s] people to feel as if they're on their own personal journey" ([Womenswear Articles 2000]).

own territories" (Birnback, Hodgman and Marx 2002: 1). The ultimate practical definition must be the one quoted in the recent popular study *American nomads*: "[M]y territory is as far as I can travel" (Grant 2003: 104). As for the actual physical reach, even though characteristically it is likely to be "nowhere in particular" (Dos Passos [1980]: 366), it is always bound to be "Pretty far" (Dos Passos [1980]: 404).⁶

A famous Anglo-American poet, playwright and literary critic is reported to have insisted that he simply could not bear to read a mystery novel if it was not set in an English village in the mid-thirties, and a well-known Southern author (reputed to have occupied the same plain bedroom upwards of seventy years) would argue that a given literary work is bound to project a very different story and be unrecognizable as a piece of art if it placed its characters somewhere else. Whatever the immediate or larger general rationale, the contemporary reading of Twain's classic is for one certainly (over-) in-scribed or (over-) determined by the most distinctive facet of its (projected) setting. To some people Huck is the American Ulysses, to others his journey from the back-alley barrel to the territory ultimately resembles that of the biblical Moses from the ark of bulrushes to the wilderness; in his book on NASA, Klerkx (2004: 3) divulges that each of the many times he has read *Huckleberry Finn* he has always imagined that in another life and in another time the hero "would have wanted to be an astronaut". When all is said and done, however, the present stereotype proves unmistakably indigenous. Twain's precocious and wayward protagonist is hailed as a depositary and a hierophantic flag-bearer of the broad frontier-territory-wilderness ethos. The youngest of the pantheon, he is naturally expected – in the diction of *Gatsby*'s famous closing peroration – to run faster and stretch out arms farther towards the coveted green light. In the course of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* the single most obdurate problem confronting most characters on top of quite routine forgetting where things are seems to be imperfect sense of orientation, direction and of ultimate destination. A vast majority

⁶ In *The selfish gene*, Dawkins ([2006]: 192-201, 322-331) offers a quasi-scientific explanation of the phenomenon with his meme theory. A meme is any readily reproducible cultural item (any of the cultural bits, snatches, trivia floating around), and as such is a basic unit of broad cultural transmission. Much as genes "leap" from generation to generation, from one body to the next, memes (not unlike computer viruses, to bring the argument more up to date) are transmitted from brain to brain, with the minimum of choice and control. Dawkins quotes such examples as icons, clothes fashions, tunes, jokes, and catch-phrases. In the light of this theory, the shibboleth 'I got to light out for the Territory ahead of the rest' looms as an obvious meme, a line that gets into people's minds and very simply stays lodged there, often growing in its resonance with the passage of time, as is the case, to cite three thematically related examples, with Owen Wister's defiant and assertive "When you call me that, SMILE!", Marlon Brando's challenging "Whaddaya got?" from *The wild one*, or James Dean's dramatic "You're tearing me apart!" from *Rebel without a cause*; a self-apparent modern example is Joseph Heller's catchy and catching 'catch-22'.

of readers, nevertheless, manage to circumnavigate or meander the book towards a harbour of self-congratulatory manu-mission: "Escape, or lighting out, is finally Huck's only theme" (Mackethan 1984: 247), "Huck strikes out for an absolute freedom" (Jehlen 1995: 97), "Huck decides that he will go west, into the American frontier" (Toutonghi 2004: 227).⁷ It seems to be Huck Finn's ultimate cultural mission to keep alive the ultimate American safety-valve fantasy, as articulated for instance by Shepard's shaman-artist of *Angel city*: "If one of us escapes, we all escape" (1980: 28).

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Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is recognized as a great testimony to the discourse of naturalness and the art of improvisation. It appears to be governed in its entirety (inception, execution, resolution) by the logic of happenstance, bricolage, and accretion. To all appearances, the only development given full run of intentionality, meticulous planning, resolute implementation, and successful outcome, in other words the only sustained *tableau vivant* of cause and effect, of past-present-and-future, is Huck's escape from Pap's cabin. The original scenario features down the road a paradigmatic nomad life: "I guessed I wouldn't stay in one place, but just tramp right across the country" (32), which seems to prefigure the ending of the story and appears to confirm the protagonist's iconic codification as a born vagabond, one who has never had a proper home. However, the presumed scintillating wilderness agenda deconstructs itself effectively right away, even before it has any chance to get under way, in/to darkness and nowhere, i.e., nothingness, since Huck proposes to travel night-times, and his objective is to get so far away that they could not "ever"

⁷ Even if the historical frontier is of course long no more, in *Go for it!* Kleinfeld (2003: 26) reported enthusiastically that according to a recent issue of *American Demographics* one-quarter of the area of the United States still met the Census Bureau's formal definition of frontier territory. Importantly: "Mere land space does not create a frontier. A driving spirit creates a frontier. A restless imagination creates a frontier" (Kleinfeld 2003: 29). At about the same time another reporter traveled 30,000 miles of what he identified as the contemporary American frontier – 132 counties in 14 Western states with indeed fewer than 2 persons per square mile: "'It's quite a world,' [one local woman] said ... 'I've been a pioneer all my life'" (Duncan 2000: 28). To most Americans about one-third of the present area of the United States means "unambiguous West" (see Nugent 2001: 6).

Prefiguring the iconic movie *Thelma & Louise* (1991), Tom Robbins – himself launched as a major novelist by (yet) *Another roadside attraction* (1971) – correctively (as well as highly imaginatively) points out that this whole discourse is not gender-specific. It is by no means obvious (privileged and exclusionary) macho adventurism and escapism since *Even cowgirls get the blues* (1976); it proved to be a proposition no lesser figure than Thomas Pynchon would welcome as one of those special books – "a piece of working magic" that "you just want to ride off into sunset with" (Blurb for the 1977 Bantam edition)

find him “any more” (32). It is only morbidly fitting that when the escape plan eventually distills itself into the feigning of his own death (existential doldrums and spine-tingling images of mortality haunt the story from the very beginning), the hero should get enveloped in a spectral (un)reality, with tramping itself identified, albeit by Pap, as an ominous march of death. What adds a crucial touch to the whole sequence (and ultimately to the whole novel) is the fact that since the present action takes place right on the Illinois shore, the contemplated trudging across the country inevitably points to the East (interestingly, taken at face value, i.e., executed in and as a straight-forward way – “right across” [32] – this itinerary would have likely taken Huck to Washington, D.C., of all places). Of far greater consequence, both immediate and ultimate, is obviously the fact that Huck should pretty soon give up the idea altogether. When, quite fortuitously, a drift-canoe presents itself to him he envisages quick-wittedly a very different *modus vivendi*: “I judged I’d hide her good, and then, ’stead of taking to the woods when I run off, I’d go down the river about fifty mile and camp in one place for good, and not have such a rough time tramping on foot” (38). It is only schematically that Huck could be made to fit Melville’s exemplary definition of a good traveler (quoted in Sealts 1957: 182) as somebody who is “young, carefree, and gifted with generality and imagination”. Some twenty years prior to the writing of his most famous novel Twain himself might have pledged to be always “so situated (*unless* I marry), that I can ‘pull up stakes’ and clear out whenever I feel like it”⁸, but as far as Huck is individually concerned, contrary to the spirit of the vivacious quixotic stereotype, the locus of vagabond desires that he has come to embody (or rather that has been hyped and imposed on him), he is given so much more to sedentary rather than pedestrian impulses. For him, to echo Emerson’s well-known sentiment (1884: 281), the uses of travel seem to be merely occasional and definitely short.⁹ He is very different bag of marbles from a classical *peregrinus* or *homo viator*, incurable itinerant, transient, or drifter, compulsive wonderer, notorious rambler, habitual rover, dedicated stroller, enthusiastic saunterer, inveterate globetrotter, bird of passage, rudderless airhead, or netscape navigator. It is certainly tempting, especially with the prissy and sanctimonious Miss Watson as a perfect intratextual trope, to inscribe Huck into the disparaging (Blakean) appreciation of prudence as an old maid courted by incapacity (admittedly, an insight from an impossible

⁸ Mark Twain, letter to mother and sister, 25 Oct. 1861 (quoted in Steinbrink 1991:1). For a corrective view of Twain as a homebody, product of his culture and as siding with the orthodoxy, see Krauth (1999).

⁹ As Emerson argues elsewhere ([1983g]: 278): “Travelling is a fool’s paradise. Our first journeys discover to us the indifference of places. At home I dream that ... I can be intoxicated with beauty, and lose my sadness. I pack my trunk ... embark on the sea, and at last wake up ... there beside me is the stern fact, the sad self, unrelenting, identical, that I fled from”.

hindsight). However, notwithstanding all the toing-and-froing, twists-and-turns that make up much of the story, admirably ambidextrous and nimble at getting out of scrapes, tight corners, quirky predicaments and unwanted liaisons, mercurially swift of foot as Twain’s protagonist naturally is, he is not, even with his high boredom and ennui susceptibility, a hothead or tearaway, does not act by fits and starts, is not driven hither-and-thither, higgledy-piggledy, hurry-scurry, by every passing whim. Granted, Huck takes his chances where he finds them, but his particular area of interest and indeed of expertise and gumption seems to be simply getting by: “I don’t want nothing, sir. I only want to go along” (132). Far from taking life by the scruff of the neck and shaking it, he avoids dissipation and seems to be convinced that the easiest way of life is the best. If he were confronted with the famous (Shakespearean) dilemma, he would in all likelihood choose to be consumed in due course with rust rather than getting scoured to nothing with perpetual motion. His whole comportment is a testimony to the classical philosophical recognition that motion necessarily completes itself in rest, and that rest always presupposes a quality of presence. On a lighter note, Huck entertains a healthy corporeal and postural stance by subscribing to the variously transliterated and attributed popular creed (ergonomics) of quiescence (disparagingly dubbed ‘catism’): Don’t run, if you can walk; don’t walk, if you can stand still; don’t stand, if you can sit; don’t sit, if you can lie down; and don’t stay awake if you can take a nap.

The human body is not just an instrument or a means, not just the essential anchorage, but a fundamental communication, in its own right a most visible form of our present intentions and all future and larger agendas. Walking, let alone running, is premised as much on the solidity of the ground as on the will-iness of the feet. Meanwhile, and somewhat embarrassingly if the whole truth be told, reclining is Huck’s preferred posture, napping his favourite break, and putting up feet something of an impolitic and indecorous personal trademark, an out-standing manifestation of the corporeality, tangibility and emplacement of the body. Metaphorically, Twain’s hero defies the peculiarly American distemper of “itchy feet, antsy pants, white-line fever” (see Grant 2003: 16). Stranded early in the book in a situation whereby he dare not make a slightest move for fear of making a noise, Huck manages to overcome by sheer will-power a particularly bad itch: “Seemed like I’d die if I couldn’t scratch. ... I was itching in eleven different places, now. I reckoned I couldn’t stand it more’n a minute longer, but I set my teeth hard and got ready to try ... and then I was pretty soon comfortable again” (6-7). Having feigned in Chapter 7 his death in order to avert the peril of being followed (and caught), when he is all but ready to clear out, Huck gives his escape one more twist: “I took a bite to eat, and by and by laid down in the canoe to smoke a pipe and lay out a plan” (41). Leaving behind two conspicuously marked (mapped) trails pointing out directly opposite,

though equally void lines of possible investigation into his disappearance, Huck gets satisfied that any posse is bound to fatigue pretty soon “and won’t bother no more about me” (41). Given the freedom of (canoe) mobility now, he experiences at last a sense of release: “All right; I can stop anywhere I want to [now]” (41). What he decides next does not merely qualify, but quite literally re-verses or re-draws the anticipated territorial compass of the story. Entirely of his own volition, without any external bearing of happenstance, situationism, or fast-moving action, Huck finally chooses as his port of call, in fact as his *sanctum sanctorum*, the liminal but rock-solid anchorage of an I-land: “Jackson’s Island is good enough for me; I know that island pretty well ... then I can paddle over to town ... and pick up things I want. Jackson’s Island’s the place” (41). This is how – a possible parallel to how against prior arrangements the new town-judge opines that the law must not sever natural (birth) ties – Huck existentially rather than disposition-ally or situation-ally abrogates (annuls) the original trans-action by radically altering the spatial terms of his unavoidable confrontation with America from the formidable continental vista to the directionality, adjacency, referentiality, and predictability of a two-and-a-half-mile radius of local territory.¹⁰ Having a personal-bond-to-a-particular-place (“you couldn’t start a face in that town that I didn’t know” [67]) is of course diametrically as well as concentrically different from the discourse of which-ever-place (wherever I sit, there I might happily live, cf. Thoreau [1975c: 298]). The prospect of an entirely arbitrary spatial distribution in any random location and *Sitzung* spells out disconnectedness and noncomprehension, in a word the *un-heimlich*. Even though ‘home’ can mean rather different things to different people, even though technically Huck is homeless to begin with, he persuasively demonstrates that home is where involvement, patterns of activity and structures of time are implied and internalized, where personal identity is forged, where one finds the world at least to some degree explained, where one knows one can stay, and where one instinctively feels one would rather be, especially when the goings get tough. Huck’s naturalization of the adjacent Jackson’s Island–St. Petersburg territory tallies with Levinas’s philosophical appreciation of at-homeness: “The ‘at home’ [Le ‘chez soi’] is not a container but a site where *I can* ... In a sense everything is in the site, in the last analysis everything is at my

¹⁰ Typically, this moment gets overlooked or curtailed; sometimes it gets distorted to fit the stereotypical readings of the whole story, e.g., “Huck arrives on the Island convinced he will be able to abandon civilization and refashion himself in a world of his own” (Kravitz 2004: 3); “[Huck] hides out on a nearby island, intending to take off after his neighbors stop searching for his body” (Claro 1984: 7); “Huck decides further to spurn the town from which he has come” (Toutonghi 2004: 226). In reality, when after a couple of weeks Huck flees the island it is only because of a very real prospect of not so much getting caught as getting bizarrely and undeservedly exposed, shamed, and in all likelihood punished as a racial and gender conspirator and transgressor.

disposal, even the stars ... Everything is here, everything belongs to me; everything is caught up in advance with the primordial occupying of a site, everything is com-prehend” (1969: 37-38). Huck offers also an apt illustration of what Wallace calls in another context (1993: 181) “unwandering wandering”, moving out and yet returning, by virtue of focusing at all times on the home from which one departs. It transpires often enough, as Hawthorne for instance acknowledges it, that one leaves one’s home-town apparently for good and yet one keeps returning, as if it were the inevitable centre of the universe ([1983a]: 129).¹¹ (It is worth pointing out that Huck generally identifies understanding and meaning with down-to-earth situatedness and embeddedness rather than with penumbral or adventitious provisionality, ongoing speculation, or supplementation.) Having arrived at his resolution concerning Jackson’s Island affords Huck in itself such equanimity and repose that the next thing he is (barely) conscious of is drifting peacefully off to sleep, a development all the more remarkable for the fact that his escape is obviously a dramatic race against time and at this point everything still hangs precariously in the balance. (Significantly, on some other occasions we see Huck unable to sleep “for thinking”, and his comportment appears generally to be regulated by a personal existential clock rather than the metronomic pendulum of nature.) In Chapter 8, against all the odds, he affirms in the course of the next couple of days his resolve when after seeking very briefly greater security on the Illinois shore he returns intuitively to Jackson’s Island, now identifiable even more readily in terms of “the old place” (50). This blast from the past, or more properly from the previous novel, is a perfect testimony to one of the (few) truly profound recognitions of *A week on the Concord and Merrimack rivers*: “The frontiers are not east or west, north or south; but wherever a man *fronts* a fact ... Let him build himself a log house with the bark on where he is, *fronting* IT” (Thoreau [1975a]: 195).

Pap’s infamous hideout is where the timber is so thick that “you couldn’t find it if you didn’t know where it was” (29); however, it is actually but three miles (of father-land) up the river, and it does prove traceable (a man is eventually sent over to bring Huck back to town, but Pap manages to drive him off with his gun). It is the prospect of getting stowed deeper in the woods where they might search till they dropped and they still would not find him – as his father defiantly proclaims – that finally prompts Huck to run away. As a matter of fact, on Jackson’s Island later on, Huck himself does succumb briefly to the impulse of seeking refuge in the far(the)st verge of the green earth before the encroachment of the civilized order. After three days, in the manner of Robinson Crusoe, he criss-crosses the island and claims it all for himself. This impe-

¹¹ One is reminded here of Hölderlin’s wistful reflection: “Reluctantly/ that which dwells near its origin departs” (quoted in Heidegger 1971: 78).

rial-Virgilian insular ambiance – as Thoreau luxuriates in it in *Walden*: “I am monarch of all I *survey*./ My right there is none to dispute” ([1975c]: 299)¹² – is shattered when Huck stumbles upon fresh campfire ashes. Very nearly petrified, he hastily covers his tracks and scrambles up a tree (which is incidentally how Crusoe gets to spend his first night in the wild, the land extending to him a more frightful prospectus than the sea, with the scene invoking also the [in]famous ancient stylites, by the way). Even though in the course of the next couple of hours Huck likewise develops all kinds of fantastic premonitions, he eventually realizes that he could not stay up there forever: “By and by I says to myself, I can’t live this way; I’m going to find out who it is that’s here on the island with me; I’ll find it out or bust. Well, I felt better, right off” (50).¹³ The guise/life/vocation of a druid, dervish, anchorite, troglodyte, dendrite, or simply tree-hugging hermit (or eco-environmentalist, to acknowledge also a more topical, contemporary appreciation) cannot be a viable proposition, if only because Huck has in a manner of speaking been “there” – and has unequivocally rejected it – before. When in the previous volume (the scene takes place on the very same island) Joe Harper contemplates (as an act of anarchic filial disobedience) turning a hermit and gets to discuss with Tom some of the occupational hazards and practical challenges it poses (such as standing out in the rain, sleeping on the hardest place, living on crusts in a remote cave), Huck, although he does not really take part in the discussion, instinctively and without the slightest equivocation interjects: “Dern’d if I would” (Twain [1982a]: 90).¹⁴ Inimitably,

¹² Without referencing his proclamation, Thoreau is obviously quoting William Cowper’s *Selkirk*.

¹³ This resolution is a further echo of Crusoe’s strange and – to do justice to the full title – surprising adventures: “I cou’d not persuade my self fully ... till I should go down to the shore again, and see this print of a foot, and measure it by my own” (Defoe [1945]: 116). Huck’s panic-driven dramatic lunge to the ultimate reach of tactile reality to evade (the onslaught of) the civilized order is itself (quasi mythologically or surreally) duplicated (this time in a terra-queous setting) by a plunge eight chapters on. “I dived – and I aimed to find the bottom, too, for a thirty-foot wheel [of the bulging steamboat] had got to go over me and I wanted it to have plenty of room. I could always stay under water a minute; this time I reckon I staid under water a minute and a half”. Even more obviously now, Huck could not stay down there forever: “I bounced for the top in a hurry, for I was nearly busting. I popped out to my arm-pits and blowed the water out”. When on resurfacing the hero seeks the nearest stretch of *terra firma*, an interesting coda is orchestrated by the fact that he should eventually get diverted from the Western to the Eastern shore: “I made out to see that the drift of the current was towards the left-hand shore; which meant that I was in a crossing; so I changed off and went that way” (130-131).

¹⁴ When Tom subsequently tries to press upon him the apparent irresistibility (of the convention) of being a hermit, Huck’s even more resolute: “Why I just wouldn’t stand it. I’d run away” relegates him out of the discourse altogether: “Run away! Well you *would* be a nice old slouch of a hermit. You’d be a disgrace” (Twain [1982a]: 91). The whole discussion can be quite directly referred to some of Thoreau’s exploits in *A week on the Concord and Merrimack rivers*: “I have stood under a tree in the woods half a day at a time, during a heavy rain in the summer, and ... I can fancy that it would be a luxury to stand up to one’s chin in some retired swamp a whole

Huckleberry Finn is not only a bricoleur, but a natural who in his own words goes a good deal on instinct and who can apparently adapt to all climates and to all seasons. However, and most emphatically, the suggestiveness of his name notwithstanding,¹⁵ he is not a *Naturmensch*. His instinct, to re-phrase Melville’s well-known autobiographical disclosure, is not out with (the romance) of the wild. Neither does he cultivate a Spartan-like life style. Beauty and romance are obviously in the eye, mind and heart of the beholder, and it is the (native) audience who romanticize – wildernize and Spartanize – Huck’s story. (Anderson, by way of example, pushes it so far as to wildernize Twain himself: “I believe he wrote that book in a little hut on a hill” [1953: 33].¹⁶) The single most sustained immediate corrective is the book’s culinary index. At the very beginning, Huck makes a point of introducing himself as a connoisseur of mixed-up and juicy homely cauldron cuisine, and things gustatory remain high on the agenda throughout. Later, as against the anticipated gleaner or hunter-gatherer plot informed by sanguinary, scavenger or ravenous instincts¹⁷, he projects very

summer day” ([1975a]: 192); “[N]ot having any blanket to cover me ... as it drew colder towards midnight, I at length encased myself completely in boards, managing even to put a board on top of me, with a large stone on it, to keep it down, and so slept” ([1975a]: 142).

¹⁵ For Colwell (1971: 76), and he is not the only one to take up the issue, “the botanic huckleberry’s preference for the wilder reaches of the American woods nicely parallels that same inclination on the part of the literary Huckleberry”. Thoreau’s fascination with huckleberries and huckleberrying is revealing, too: “Blueberries and huckleberries deserve to be celebrated, such simple, wholesome, universal fruits ... Berry of berries. On which men live like birds. Still covering our hills as when the red men lived here. Are they not the principal wild fruit?” (Thoreau [1949], IV: 158-159).

¹⁶ Powers in his recent biography of Twain (2005: 7) offers: “The prairie in its loneliness and peace: that was what came back to him toward the end of his life”. Sundquist (1994: 4) draws a parallel between Huckleberry Finn’s “lighting out” for the territory and Samuel Langhorne Clemens’s own “fleeing” the Civil War in favor of prospecting, gambling, carousing, and writing in the far West. Arthur (2002: 3-4) makes a direct link between Clemens’s desertion as a militiaman and the ending of *Huckleberry Finn*: “Sam Clemens, leaving behind not civilization but war, lit out in 1861 for the territory of Nevada”. Even more imitatively as well as conventionally, Krauth (1999: 17) talks of how Clemens fled the Civil War by “lighting out” for the West, where by “default, chance, and design” he literally made himself – “a hit-and-miss enterprise, for he was as unsteady as the tumbleweed”. Equally instructively, Everett Emerson in his literary biography of Twain (2000: 3) emphasizes the fact that as a child his behaviour was often eccentric (de-centered), and that he had a tendency to “wander away from home”. Cf. also Michelson’s (2006: 234) package characterization of Twain: “Small-town wayward boy, apprentice and journeyman printer, steamboat pilot, militiaman, gold-rush prospector, Wild West correspondent, anonymous prankster, traveling stand-up comic”.

As far as Anderson’s specific comment, it is well known that Twain wrote the bulk of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (and actually finally managed to finish it) in a rather privileged social and intellectual enclave, namely in the ambience of the Gilded Age splendor of Hartford, Connecticut, amidst perfectly satisfying personal (financial and emotional high-tide) circumstances.

¹⁷ Cf. the exemplary *unguibus et rostro* animality in “ranging the woods, like a half-starved hound, with a strange abandonment, seeking some kind of venison” (Thoreau [1975c]: 384).

clearly and consistently (a near *bon vivant*) propensity, or sheer visceral gut-feeling, for quality (none of the low-down) food stuffs, such as baker's bread, coffee, sugar, bacon, pork, chicken – legally purchased or less legally “borrowed” if need be – as well as flaunting a healthy appetite for cooked, hot and, last but not least, shared meals (“there ain’t nothing in the world so good” [154]). Unlike Thoreau who would not use tea, nor coffee, nor butter, nor milk, and offered to avoid all trade and barter so far as his food supply was concerned, an experiment emulated and transcribed recently by Kingsolver as *Animal, vegetable, miracle* (2007), Huck never gets tempted (if only for experiment’s sake) to anarcho-primitivistically devour a woodchuck, taste rock-tripe, or to prostrate himself on the ground to savour water held in spring-like tracks that would have been impressed in the forest soil by horses.¹⁸ Generally, Huck is no sage or savant of plain (low) living and grand (high) thinking. Although in a different context he recognizes quasi-philosophically that sometimes one has to do things when awfully hungry that one would not want to do as a steady thing (Twain [1982a]: 170), he nevertheless fails to appreciate any element of Hobson’s choice about Jim’s solitarily induced natural meager diet (berries and such), and disdainfully, prejudicially, calls it “rubbage” (51-52).

As D. H. Lawrence observes in the introductory essay of his classic *Studies in classic American literature*, it is useful, sometimes essential, to break the spell of the time-honored mastery, “the old IT” ([1965]: 6); besides, classically scatologically-speaking, at some point or other, “the bubble” has to burst (Sartre 1988: 25). Admittedly, for Huck’s most enthusiastic fans, to pastiche his celebrated soliloquy in Chapter 31, these might be awful thoughts and awful words, nevertheless they ought to stay said. Even if this might invite a bitter Keatsian complaint about the insensitive unweaving of the rainbow, the truth of the matter (its historical time marked coincidentally by the Great Disappointment of 1831-44) is that Huck is not a dedicated student of nature, neither in the philosophical nor in the perfectly ordinary sense of it. Put bluntly, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* does not espouse any wilderness agenda to speak of, neither in the narrow-soft (simple) nor in the wide-hard (complex) version. When still in St. Petersburg, Huck would occasionally go to the woods when he needed to think something over or when he badly needed a day’s rest, but the narrative does not exercise any *facultas fingendi*, and there is not a shred of evidence of

¹⁸ Showing generally no interest in palaeobotany or palaeoecology, at one point we do see Huck develop a humbling-redemptive interest in the semiotics of the ground when in an extraordinary scene of multiple meanings in its own right, by the way, he gets intrigued by (actually concerned about) palimpsestual human footprints, “somebody’s tracks” in the snow in Chapter 4: “It was funny they hadn’t come in, after standing around so. I couldn’t make it out. It was very curious, somehow. I was going to follow around, but I stooped down to look at the tracks first. I didn’t notice anything, at first, but then I did” (19).

any magnetism, chemistry, let alone enchantment, beatitude, or pantheistic reverie along these lines. The book develops neither a sense of the grand scale of the harmony, fecundity, plentitude, utility, spirituality, the vaulting sublime totality, nor of the texture of the plume and tinsel, tapestry, delicacy, exquisiteness, inimitability of the minutiae of the natural world. While *natura vexata* empiricism is part and parcel of the very air Thoreau breathes, Huck is neither a self-appointed inspector or steward of the elements and the seasons, nor does he enter any special rapport with various kinds of butterflies, cobwebs, pine needles, or grains of sand. Rather disappointingly from the point of view of aficionados, devotees, amateurs, collectors and buffs, the story is not annotated with any systematic, classificatory, indexing, specific, Linnaean bio-eco-terminology. There is no itemizing, no cataloguing, no naming of parts here. There are no magnifying-glass observations of battling ants, no mesmerizing reflections on the leaf-like spread of the body’s veins, or on the mushroom being the protective elf of all plants. When he gets finally displaced for good and riparian nature becomes perforce his *Alma Mater*, Huck learns to idealize, in fact idolize, the ambiance of the raft (viewed pragmatically, though, he simply learns not to rock the boat, so to speak), but he continues taking nature *per se* largely for granted. As he describes it, the raft itself bears many hallmarks of convivial domesticity (plenty of grub and an easy life, as it gets summed up [165]) rather than of primitive bivouac rusticity, and the memorably appreciative “there warn’t no home like a raft” (155) in itself clearly celebrates placeness and belongingness rather than boundlessness and separateness. It is precisely in this sense – to sub-vert Howe’s schematic reading – that (even) “a few rickety boards nailed together” (1986: 73) can provide a semblance of home-ly h(e)aven. Huck certainly does not turn himself, as Trilling would famously argue, into a neophyte servant of the river-god who comes close to being aware of the ineffable/sublime divinity of the being under whose spell he allegedly falls (1977: 320). To use, with a respectful and meaningful nod to Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, the terms of the classic discourse of the aesthetic, while there is an ordinary sense of nature-*Erfahrung*, there is hardly any sense of nature-*Erlebnis* and (consequently) no real (possibility of) any extra-ordinary Nature-inspired-*Erhabene* here. Figuratively, and to extend the pun, what obtains here instead is the Wittgensteinian (epistemological and ideological) sense of drama, that “besteht darin, daß sich der Baum nicht biegt, sondern bricht”.¹⁹

The passage most often quoted in support of the popular wilderness agenda is the opening of Chapter 19 depicting daybreak on the river. The description (one is instantly reminded of the exhilarating and phenomenally popular “Morning has broken” by Eleanor Farjeon/Cat Stevens) is typically advertised as a

¹⁹ “You get tragedy where the tree, instead of bending, breaks” (Wittgenstein 1984: 1, 1e).

preview of the natural, physical as well metaphysical, landscape of Huck's journey, and indeed as a formula of how, on any level, in the words of T. S. Eliot's contribution to this appreciation, "it is and was and always will be" (1977: 333). What gets overlooked is the fact that this barely two-page littoral snippet does not inform the rhythm of the whole journey but merely "two or three days" (156) at a particularly sensitive (read: weak) juncture in the narrative, between two disparate, truly gargantuan developments. The beginning of Chapter 19 is not, as is insistently suggested, a visual threshold to a self-evolving ultimate adoration of and commitment to the beauty, mystery, power, and glory Nature. It is a self-contained, structurally motivated vignette, the only stretch of narrative in the entire book where the processes of the natural environment may be said to comprehensively and of themselves compose and focalize ongoing action. An isthmus of sorts, it suggests a narrative threshold, so much more a formal link than a natural bridge, separating and con-joining as it does the dramatic Grangefords-Shepherdsons saga and the King-Duke seemingly interminable sequence. What likewise escapes critical commentary is the fact that on aggregate no more than just over a third of the novel's bulk consists of live action taking place out in the open, and that no more than just about ten out of the total forty-three chapters can be said to be consistently using natural setting *par excellence*. It is only occasionally that we may see Huck actually standing on the bare ground, with his head in blithe air, uplifted into infinite space. Most of the significant action takes place indoors and much of it actually transpires *in camera*, behind closed doors to boot. This is where we are treated, by the way, to an astounding wealth and acuity of interior references and residential detail. This ploy is functional insofar as it informs Huck's amazing optimal or rather maximalist foraging – and it is essential to read this merchandising spree and commodity fetishism of sorts against his formal subscription to voluntary poverty earlier on²⁰ – for randomly distributed (albeit curiously not always utilitarian) civilizational tropes, resources, and accretions (including for example all manner of bric-a-brac and paltry haberdashery items). Moreover, Twain's open spaces are a far cry from the classic Whitmanesque exuberant appropriate and immersive out-reaching comprehensiveness of sweep. Even the celebrated sunrise scene does not extend beyond "a kind of dull line – that was the woods on t'other side – you couldn't make nothing else out" (156).²¹ For Thoreau the contracted view from his Walden hut certainly did not eclipse

²⁰ "I won't be rich" (Twain [1982a]: 213), "I signed it, and left" (20); among the many pictures displayed on the walls at the Grangefords' Huck specifically identifies "one called 'Signing the Declaration'" (137).

²¹ To borrow from Heaney ([1990a]: 17), in *Huckleberry Finn* there are certainly "no prairies/ To slice a big sun at evening".

the undulating expanse of the larger world: "There was pasture enough for my imagination. The low shrub oak plateau to which the opposite shore arose stretched away toward the prairies of the West and the steppes of Tartary, affording ample room for all the roving families of men" ([1975c]: 302).²² On closer examination, it turns out that only with blatant sacrifice to convention could *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* be ever related to nature writing and that it does not lend itself readily to traditional picturesque landscape painting either; in fact, to transcribe a line from Melville ([1984a]: 636), it proves surprisingly deficient in what landscape painters would be prepared to call 'life'. Merleau-Ponty explains that in "normal" vision "I direct my gaze upon a sector of the landscape, which comes to life and is disclosed, while the other objects recede into the periphery and become dormant, while, however, not ceasing to be there ... The horizon, then, is what guarantees the identity of the object throughout" ([2002]: 78). In the world under discussion there are really no sustained panoramic perspectives and no verbal frescos of nature to speak of. The broadest and farthest single vista is a nondescript "pale streak over the treetops" (50)²³, the horizon is never even mentioned, there is hardly any enveloping natural luminosity (certainly stars and shadows "ain't good to see by" [76]), colours tend to be darkened or muted, and a couple of times the picture gets completely blanked out by dense white fog (also with the evening "gray and rather thick, which is the next meanest thing to fog [y]ou can't tell the shape of the river, and you can't see no distance" [130]). As for adjacent continuous scenery or backdrop, the text features what is essentially an impenetrable façade – lugubrious and often foreboding stretches of sameness. Nature, as the Great Romantics for instance teach us, communicates immediately by the impressions of surfaces on the eye and only through the eye allows for individual appropriation, signification, and gestation of meaning. The present narrative/camera eye glides consistently, dispassionately and with little variation along walls of heavy solid timber and/or high rocky bluffs on both banks of the river – "you couldn't see a break in it, hardly ever, or a light" (106) – a venue more appropriate for a journey to the heart of darkness rather than to the epiphanic origins of the world. In the woods, it is more often than not solemn, dismal, and eerie rather than numinous: "[T]rees with Spanish moss on them, hanging down from the limbs like long gray beards" (265); "I could see the sun out at one or two holes, but mostly it

²² Cf. an earlier passage: "I looked between and over the near green hills to some distant and higher ones in the horizon, tinged with blue. Indeed, by standing on tiptoe I could catch a glimpse of some of the peaks of the still bluer and more distant mountain ranges in the northwest, those true-blue coins from heaven's own mint" ([1975c]: 302).

²³ This particular image bears resemblance to Crane's uncanny poetic recognition: "There is a grey thing that lives in the tree-tops/ None know the horror of its sight/ Save those who meet death in the wilderness" ([1984a]: 1346).

was big trees all about, and gloomy in there amongst them" (45). In terms of forest ecology, instead of the conventionally expected differential floral environment, against the very idea of the ever-desirable biodiversity, this is extending the condition of a large stand of a single species, *Duroia hirsuta*, known by the forbidding name of the devil's garden believed to be cultivated by nefarious spirits. A significant extension of the (European) Romantic teaching, Thoreau himself explains in an essay: "There is just as much beauty visible to us in the landscape as we are prepared to appreciate, – not a grain more. ... We cannot see anything until we are possessed with the idea of it, take it into our heads, – and then we can see hardly anything else. ... A man sees only what concerns him" ([1975b]: 709).²⁴ In "Experience" Emerson also argues that Nature belongs only to the eyes that can actually see it – we actually see only what we ourselves animate ([1983b]: 473) – and takes the point usefully further: "As I am, so I see; use what language we will, we can never say anything but what we are" ([1983b]: 489).²⁵

While on entering his local natural environment Thoreau instantaneously perceives it as an amphitheatre for an unspecified grand sylvan spectacle ([1975c]: 372-373), for Huck the single "splendidest" experience he registers in the course of his journey proves to be an indoor circus-show – fun-fair, *Jahr-markt*, and people's assembly all in one – a powerful fine sight: "I never see anything so lovely" (192), "it can have all of *my* custom, every time" (194). Instructively, our hero gets all but equally enraptured by the artifice, circuitry, and the sheer performance of "a clock on the middle of the mantel piece with a picture of a town painted on the bottom ... sometimes when one ... scoured her up and got her in good shape she would start in and strike a hundred and fifty before she got tucked out" (136). What is missing probably most conspicuously from Twain's

²⁴ Cf. the opening description of Raban's contemporary travelogue *Old glory*: "It is as big and depthless as the sky itself. You can see the curve of the earth on its surface as it stretches away for miles to the far shore. Sunset has turned the water to the color of unripe peaches. There's no wind. Sandbars and wooded islands stand on their exact reflections. The only sign of movement on the water are the slightly scratched lines which run in parallel across it like the scores of a diamond on a windowpane. ... It is called the Mississippi, but it is more an imaginary river than a real one" (1998: 11).

²⁵ It is relevant to quote here at some length Twain's facetious distancing preamble to his 1892 novel *The American claimant* (based on a play he co-authored in 1883): "Many a reader who wanted to read a tale through was not able to do it because of delays on account of the weather [nature]. Nothing breaks up an author's progress like having to stop every few pages to fuss-up the weather. Thus it is plain that persistent intrusions of weather are bad for both reader and author. ... The present author can do only a few trifling ordinary kinds of weather, and he cannot do those very good. So it has seemed wisest to borrow such weather as is necessary for the book from qualified and recognized experts—giving credit, of course. This weather will be found over in the back part of the book, out of the way. See Appendix. The reader is requested to turn over and help himself from time to time as he goes along" (Twain [2002a]: 459).

supposed pastoral prospectus are the coveted mellifluous sounds and salubrious fragrances of nature. Rather callously, before one can properly savour the sole bucolic olfactory proposition of an early morning breeze (in Chapter 19) – "so cool and fresh, and sweet to smell" – it gets abruptly qualified or more properly spoiled by a radical shift, a miasmatic put-down: "[B]ut sometimes not that way, because they've left dead fish laying around, gars, and such, and they do get pretty rank" (157).²⁶ While *Walden* celebrates the whole gamut of vocal pirouetting of wildlife, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* registers in loosely comparable terms the desultory "only sometimes the bull-frogs a-cluttering, maybe" (only in Chapter 19; [156]), downgraded further on to the garbled and nondescript "you wouldn't hear nothing for you couldn't tell how long, except maybe frogs or something" (158). Idealistically, fishing from a boat by moonlight, Thoreau has no difficulty convincing himself that he is being serenaded to by the neighbourhood owls and foxes. When Huck picks up voices of owls, wolves or dogs away in the woods the sensation comes across as "terrible" (4) and sends "cold shivers" running over him (36). A whippoorwill (one of Thoreau's favourites) does not exactly usher in the night in Huck's world, instead, it is identified as ominously summoning up somebody about to die. A couple of times mournful cadences are alarmingly heard even in the sound of quivering foliage, a sharp contrast to how Thoreau's breath is ecstatically taken away by the most delicious sympathy with the flutter of leaves.

T. S. Eliot's recognition of the river in "The Dry Salvages" ([1969a]: 184) as a strong brown god – "sullen, untamed and intractable./ Patient to some degree" is believed to be directly informed by his native St. Louis, as is Teasdale's: "Hushed in the smoky haze of summer sunset,/ ... I saw my western city/ Dream by her river./ Then for an hour the water wore a mantle/ Of tawny gold and mauve and misted turquoise" ([1996a]: 122). Images such as these are evoked to validate the popular appreciation of *Huckleberry Finn*'s Mississippi as majestically august, impervious, continuous, impassive, impersonally neutral, beyond good and evil. "The river becomes symbolic of Huck's more peaceful, natural life. The description is important, because it underscores the serenity of the river and of nature in general" (Bruce 2000: 34).²⁷ In reality, however, Twain's river is full of capricious drifts, treacherous snags, host to unexpected fogs, gales, rains, storms, as well as subject to uncontrollable overflows. It looms above all "monstrous big" (102), for the most part it is "a big straight

²⁶ By contrast, Thoreau offers: "Am I not partly leaves and vegetable mould myself?" ([1975c]: 336), and declares: "I love the rank smell of the swamp, its decaying leaves" (quoted in Porte 1966: 142).

²⁷ According to Mailer (2004: 258), Twain delineates "the best river ever to flow through a novel, our own Mississippi, and in the voyage down those waters of Huck Finn and a runaway slave on their raft, we are held in the thrall of the river".

river" (80), its waters muddy and awash not only with driftwood but also with "pieces of limbs and such things floating down" (37). One could hardly think of a more dramatic contrast to Walden's luminous blue-green surface magically refracting and redistributing sun-rays, or to the whole aesthetics of the (bombastic) Hudson River School of painting. Later in the novel we are shown how a typical frontier town is forced to be "always moving back, and back, and back, because the river's always gnawing at it" (183)²⁸ – whereas Thoreau, reclining on the bank of the Merrimack (the historical time of the two stories in this case is a perfect match, by the way), would rapturously sound the whirling and lapsing current as actually "kissing" the shore (1975a: 210). In fact, instead of a life-enhancing principle, the river in *Huckleberry Finn* proves close in spirit for instance to Carver's gruesome short story "So much water so close to home" (1989a). From the very beginning the Mississippi spells oblivion and quite literally death-by-water²⁹ – "You wants to keep 'way fum de water as much as you kin, en don't run no resk" (22) – with the total record of about a dozen fatalities and near-fatalities. All-too-vividly, the steamboat that in Chapter 16 critically rams down Huck's raft is rendered in its gory glory in terms of natural imagery as a sinister and actively hostile animalistic Other – "looking like a black cloud with rows of glow-worms around it ... big and scary, with a long row of ... teeth" (130). Twain's larger natural setting – where Thoreau offers to make a comparison between a squirrel and a gracefully dancing girl, for example – proves charged with rather familiar, pathetically fallacious, dis-gracefully frenzied animation: "[I]t rained like all fury, too ... and set the branches to tossing their arms as if they was just wild ... and then go rumbly, grumbly, tumbling" (59); "My souls, how the wind did scream along! And every second or two there'd come a glare ... and the trees thrashing around in the wind; then comes a H-WACK!" (168). While Thoreau, rather heterodoxically, delighted in soaking rain, squalls, frost, and cold weather³⁰, Huck's response to the animus of nature from inside a caboose-like shelter is conventional enough: "I wouldn't want to be nowhere else but here" (60).

The river valley itself is hardly a *locus amoenus*, pleasure-ground, or habitat

²⁸ Cf. a typical modern mythologizing look back on "that ... wilderness whose edges were being constantly and punily gnawed at by men with plows and axes ... [who] swarmed and hacked at [it] in a fury" (Faulkner [1954a]: 229).

²⁹ In its second reference to the Mississippi, the book quotes in Chapter 3 a discovery of a drowned woman dressed in man's clothes: "[The body] was ragged, and had uncommon long hair ... but they couldn't make nothing out of the face, because it had been in the water so long it warn't much like a face at all" (14).

³⁰ This proved to be literally an all-consuming passion with him, the most uncomfortable truths about the famed bachelor of nature being that he contracted bronchitis, as well as losing earlier all his teeth, and died of consumption, arguably some 30-40 years before his time.

of delight. It proves to be a natural territory and safe haven for gangs of prowlers, robbers, slave hunters, cutthroats, cheats and confidence men of all persuasions, an ambiance footnoted by an eerily appropriate horror or degeneracy chamber found drifting in its very midst (Chapter 9). As a matter of fact, instead of and against the expected pastoral impulses, nature seems to unleash a whole range of crude or outright predatory instincts as well as common vices, such as disingenuity, indifference, callousness, arrogance, malice, derision, bragging, mischief, or plain bad temper.³¹ The myth of the ennobling influence of Nature (*Natur-Geist*) on the individual gets most comprehensively debunked by the individual and rather special case of Huck's father. A reprobate drunk and a most distrustful, negligent, rapacious, exploitative, abusive, gratuitously cruel parent, with full vent of indignation Pap is recognized across the board as the most iniquitous, degenerate, worthless, unforgivable, despicable character of the novel.³² However, what does not get properly acknowledged is the fact that of all the characters he is the one living by far the closest to the natural state – "[one] would a thought he was Adam, he was just all mud [*adama*]" (33) – which seems to concur with the fundamentalist 'natural' dissemination of everything beginning with the body of the father/mother-earth. In terms of most immediate, practical intents and purposes, Pap is a self-styled trapper, hunter, backwoodsman – *Naturmensch* (his is the same palimpsestual signature as Queequeg's, by the way). However, when he first emerges from his own unspecified territory-ahead-of-the-rest in Chapter 5 after more than a year's absence ("you can't never find him" [10]), his portraiture is nowhere near bucolic, let alone Edenic. A far cry from Rousseau's Noble Savage (everybody remembers the recommendation that nothing is avowedly more gentle in the primitive state), it unmistakably flaunts the formidable discourse of the wild. Pap seems to issue forth, in fact, from a horror-rousing heart of darkness: "His hair was

³¹ When, in one of the novel's most baffling minor episodes, Huck approaches a man in a skiff to ask a perfectly innocent question regarding the nearest town, he hears: "If you stay here botherin' around me for about a half a minute longer, you'll get something you won't want" (129). Cf. also Huck's references to some peculiar behaviour patterns on the river: "I shot head first off of the bank ... for the [drift] canoe. I just expected there'd be somebody laying down in it, because people often done that to fool folks, and when a chap had pulled a skiff out most to it they'd raise up and laugh at him" (37-38); "[Steamboat crews] try to see how close they can come [to a raft] without touching; sometimes the wheel bites off a sweep, and then the pilot sticks his head out and laughs, and thinks he's mighty smart" (130). On the river, even Jim proves susceptible to a crude and malicious sense of fun at somebody else's expense: "[A]ll of a sudden along comes a regular ripper [wave], and washed me overboard. It most killed Jim a-laughing" (168). As Raban notes in a somewhat different context (1968: 34), the mobile ambience of the river is based on "appearance alone; truth has been replaced by plausibility and survival depends on the ability to deceive successfully".

³² Clinch's highly praised graphic novel *Finn* (2006) is an apt reflection of this (inevitable) appreciation.

long and tangled and greasy, and hung down, and you could see his eyes shining through, like he was behind vines. It was all black; no gray; so was his long, mixed-up whiskers. There warn't no color in his face where his face showed, it was white; not like another man's white, but a white to make a body sick, a white to make a body's flesh crawl – a tree-toad white, a fish-belly white" (23).³³ After an abortive temperance and resocialization attempt, one chapter on we see Pap, back in the woods, sur(real)/(ritual)istically re-merge with, or get re-claimed by, a literally howling, demonic wilderness, projecting a literal fit of the devil's grip, or near lycanthropy. At the drop of a hat, to pun on the de(con)struction of his civilizational head-gear earlier on³⁴, all creation, all nature, all wrath get loose all around him. With reference to his background, Pap seems to unwittingly recognize the anathema – to borrow from Christopher Marlowe – that (his moribund) life is a veritable hell; nor is he out of it.

[A]ll of a sudden there was an awful scream, and I was up. There was Pap, looking wild and skipping around every which way and yelling about snakes ... hollering "Take him off! take him off! he's biting me on the neck!" I never see a man look so wild in the eyes. Pretty soon he was all fagged out and fell down, panting; then he rolled over and over, wonderful fast, kicking things every which way, and striking and grabbing at the air with his hands, and screaming, and saying there was devils ahold of him ... and he see me and went for me ... he laughed *such* a screechy laugh, and roared and cussed, and kept on chasing me ... soon he was all tired out and dropped down ... put his knife under him, and said he would sleep and get strong, and then he would see who was who (36).

Given his reclusiveness, sloth, ignorance, negativism, turpitude, depravity, wildness and ferocity, Pap must appear a close kin to what Crèvecoeur ([1998]: 50) identified as the peculiar American "mongrel" breed of half civilized, half savage wilderness back-settlers or squatters, a forlorn hope, and as such a poignant counterpoint to Turner's ideal ([1976]) of the valiant frontiersman. Also, his ramshackle cabin of most primitive rudiments and utter squalor, figurative and literal *locus horridus*, bears uncomfortable resemblance to the "wretchedest" human habitation encountered by Madam Knight on her famous

³³ Also when we first see Jim after his sojourn alone on the bosom of Nature he appears defamiliarized and in fact deindividuated; ultimately, he looms as an alien, bovine and possibly sinister (voodoo) Other: "[T]here laid a man on the ground. It most give me the fan-tods. He had a blanket around his head, and his head was nearly in the fire" (50). Cf. Ralph Waldo Emerson's sobering observation in his discussion of "Spiritual laws" that people are not any better just for watching the sun and the moon, the horizon and the trees ([1983h]: 313).

³⁴ "I says, look at my hat – if you call it a hat – but the lid raises up and the rest of it goes down till it's below my chin, and then it ain't rightly a hat at all" (33).

early eighteenth-century backwoods journey in America ([2004]: 23). The thesis that the closer one gets to the wilderness, the less cultivated one becomes, informs an interesting caustic remark quoted by Edward Waldo Emerson in his memoir *Henry Thoreau, as remembered by a young friend*: "Very seductive are the first steps from the town to the woods, but the end is want and madness" (1917: 106).³⁵

Huck's own very first (nocturnal) ad-venture into the natural domain in the present novel is itself far from propitious. Tiptoeing gingerly among garden trees, he is repeatedly forced to stoop to avoid getting scraped on the head, and the whole escapade nearly falls through before it gets properly under way when he clumsily falls over a protruding root and makes incriminating noise. In fact, it all turns into an obstacle course of sorts, making the boys thoroughly miserable having to crawl in caves for hundreds of yards, getting all damp, sweaty and cold, emerging perfectly bedraggled, greased up and "dog-tired" to boot (12). This fundamental, if seemingly inconsequential, situation-confrontation gets all but duplicated on Jackson's Island. The day Huck and Jim meet the island gets flooded and they go in a canoe winding in and out amongst the trees – "and sometimes the vines hung so thick we had to back away and go some other way" (60). As Huck principally, if defensively, explains at the end of *The adventures of Tom Sawyer*, he likes the woods and the river and hogheads, but this distribution indicates once again the immediate adjacent compass of town-territory rather than the expanse of the wilderness, let alone of the continent at large. When Huck appears for the first time ever he might be memorably protruding a dead cat (anecdotal cure for warts, re-categorized in the present volume as a weapon of miasmatic mob-vengeance), but he is generally less than enthusiastic about various representatives of the wild and lower orders of creation, dead or alive. The first truly significant scene of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (in Chapter 1) introduces, as though in direct response to the protagonist's disconsolate "I did wish I had some company" (4), a spider crawling up his shoulder. Reminiscent of Jonathan Edwards's famous image of sudden and unexpected damnation (a spider or some loathsome insect held over the fire), Huck flips it off and the spider ends up shriveling in the candle flame, which in turn sparks off an awed, feverish, but obviously inadequate reflection on signs and predestination.³⁶ Later, as regards generally the behaviour, processes and language of nature, Jim (equipped with a very keen sense of smell, for

³⁵ For topical validity of Emerson's observation, cf. the recent case of the notorious forest-shack dweller Ted Kaczynski, for a specific discussion see Oleson (2005).

³⁶ The killing of the spider can be interpreted in different ways, also as Huck's 'original sin' for which he gets banished and brought to a chilling recognition: "[T]here ain't no telling but I might come to be a murderer myself, yet" (87).

instance) proves a far more responsive, knowledgeable and profound interpreter (a self-styled *homo magus* of sorts), whereby at least on three occasions he is functionally assisted by natural objects (as the Romantics would idealize it) in the expression of particular, often complex, meanings.³⁷ However, as against Emerson's sarcastic reminder (addressed specifically to Thoreau, by the way [Howe 1986: 34]) that a man was not made to live like a frog, what demeans Jim's rapport with nature is the fact that when left to his own devices he first lives pathetically rough for a couple of days on Jackson's Island and then right through the Grangefords-Shepherdsons sequence dwells apparently quite contentedly precisely in the midst of a swamp.

Before long, in the setting of the supposed *arcadia*, the story's pent-up oppositions explode into outright *discordia*. Still by himself on Jackson's Island, Huck goes exploring in the deep woods when he nearly steps on a snake: "[I]t went sliding off through the grass and flowers, and I after it, trying to get a shot at it" (48). Next time round, when he chances upon a rattlesnake (one of the most recognizable, iconic fixtures of the American wilderness) Huck makes a very short job of it. However, the portentous order of the wild strikes back – "[T]he snake's mate was there ... the varmint curled up and ready for another spring" (64). Jim miraculously survives a most venomous bite, but in the course of his ordeal (even) he goes nearly insane from anguish and pain. This near-fatal mishap dramatizes Huck's inadequate rapport with nature insofar as the incident is a direct result of a violation of its sacred code and lore: "That all comes of my being such a fool as to not remember that wherever you leave a dead snake its mate always comes there" (64). Henceforth – to pastiche *Leviticus* 11: 43 – the hero seems to recognize it as a self-evident truth about the human condition that one shall not make oneself abominable with any creeping thing that creepeth, neither shall one make oneself unclean with them, so as to avoid getting defiled thereby. The narrative takes up the whole theme again at the very end where cumulatively, if admittedly somewhat less gravely, it excites a near paroxysmal disgust with the slimy assortment of spiders, bugs, frogs, caterpillars, snakes and still "one thing or another" (329) that Tom romantically visits on Jim's cabin. At one point, the snakes manage to get out of the bag stashed for a time in the house and, even though this time it is common garter snakes, they choreograph a veritable pandemonium:

³⁷ The simplest example reads: "Chickens knows when it's gwyne to rain, en so do de birds, chile" (60). (Much more significantly, Jim can translate the language of nature into a human ethical code, as when in one of the most famous scenes he invokes nature's "rubbish" (leaves, dirt, trash) as a metaphor of moral degeneration. At an earlier juncture: "We used to watch the stars that fell, too, and see them streak down. Jim allowed they'd got spoilt and was hove out of the nest" (158-159).

[T]here warn't no real scarcity of snakes about the house for a considerable spell. You'd see them dripping from the rafters and places, every now and then; and they generly landed in your plate, or down the back of your neck, and most of the time where you didn't want them. ... [A]unt Sally, she despised snakes, be the breed what they might, and she couldn't stand them ... it didn't make no difference what she was doing, she would just lay that work down and light out (330).

Meantime, Thoreau would beatifically marvel over a striped snake, would transfixedly watch languidly circling hawks for the embodiment of his intimate thoughts amongst the clouds, could easily enter amiable, rewarding physical closeness with the sunfish or the bream (suffering them to nibble his fingers harmlessly), and would quite routinely invite a wild-mouse to run along his arm and sit in the palm of his hand. When Jackson's Island stays near-apocalyptically flooded for a couple of days rabbits, turtles and "such things" appear on every broken-down tree, "so tame, on account of being hungry, that you could paddle right up and put your hand on them if you wanted to" (*obiter dictum*, there is no trace anywhere in the novel of the coveted Thoreauvian icons of wildness: the loon, the moose, or the beaver). Huck is satisfied that he "could a had pets enough" (60), but somehow – his spells of intense, sometimes quite morbid loneliness notwithstanding – he is never really tempted to reach out (the most one can say for it is that the whole assortment elicits a kind of collective benign neglect on his part). This void is later specifically pointed out through a narrative device, Huck's 'natural' counterpart Buck, exciting the image of "a blue jay and a young rabbit he had caught in the woods day before yesterday, and he asked me ... 'Do you own a dog? I've got a dog'" (135).³⁸ In Huck's world, on a different occasion, an encounter with a pack of hounds issues forth both as a chilling menace and a common nuisance:

[F]irst one hound and then another got up and went for me, and of course I stopped, and faced them, and kept still. ... [T]heir necks and noses stretched up towards me, a-barking and howling; and more a-coming ... A nigger woman come tearing out of the kitchen, with a rolling-pin in her hand ... she fetched first one and then another of them a clip and sent them howling (277).

³⁸ What offers another telling comparison is *The scarlet letter's* famous romantic projection of Pearl's special, sublime rapport with the natural world: "A wolf ... came up, and smelt of Pearl's robe, and offered his savage head to be petted by her hand. ... [T]he mother-forest, and these wild things which it nourished, all recognized a kindred wildness in the human child/ And she ... became a nymph-child, or an infant dryad, or whatever else was in closest sympathy with the antique wood" (Hawthorne [1983a]: 294-295). While *Huckleberry Finn* does not develop any positive poetics of Nature, it is routinely pointed out that Nature extends in *The scarlet letter* a rich spectrum of intentional and profound (symbolic) significations.

As for significant otherness (cf. Haraway 2003), it is provided for Huck neither by a fox nor a rabbit, and a live dog proves no better prospect than a dead lion.³⁹ Instead of actually employing any large specimens of wildlife, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* features the follicularly challenged “King” in the preposterously salacious and vulgar prologue to his nonesuch theatrical “a prancing out on all fours, naked; and he was painted, all over, ring-streaked-and-striped, all sorts of colors, ... it was just wild”, with Huck projecting as pointedly and censoriously as nowhere else in the book his distaste at “the shines that old idiot cut” (196). On another occasion, both the “King” and the “Duke” are ridiculed by being compared to a nonsinusoidally hopping bipedal marsupial when “in another village they started a dancing school; but they didn’t know no more how to dance than a kangaroo does” (265).

Literally for all the world to see, the only one thing that Huck leaves behind when he steals out of Pap’s cabin is the axe. As for the other emblematic Western artifact and genre-marker, the rifle, we see him actually using it only once, still at Pap’s, rather specifically as an essential part of the elaborate strategy to masquerade his own death. Afterwards our protagonist effectively decommissions as a hunter, and the ill-gotten rifle – never a central entity, let alone requisite – inexplicably disappears from the story altogether (furthermore, when Huck gets later immersed in honour-and-gun culture at the Grangerfords’ he does not show any interest in firearms either; it is Tom who ends up vaingloriously displaying a bullet around his neck on a watch-guard).⁴⁰ Even though in the course of the story fishing inevitably becomes an irreducible part of Huck’s practical rapport with daily life, he is likewise far from highlighting, glamorizing, or centralizing it in any way. He never goes into its technicalities or lore, and he certainly does not register any Thoreauvian mystical vibrations along the line and does not speculate on any deep, esoteric (epiphanic) truths one might hope to retrieve from beneath the surface of the water. The only catch described in any detail is that of a kingfish, “as big a fish as was ever caught in the Mississippi”; however, it is not discoursed as a marvel of nature but rather surprisingly “as a man, being six foot two inches”; moreover, in the mode of Poe’s purloined letter, Huck literally turns the fish inside out and transcribes and re-directs its content into a different, more home-ly realm: “We found a brass but-

³⁹ Confirming beyond peradventure Huck’s uneasy rapport with man’s supposed most significant ‘animal other’ is another stand- and send-off earlier in the story: “[A] lot of dogs jumped out and went to howling and barking at me and I knowed better than to move another peg” (131).

⁴⁰ Not only does the story render the arch-iconic frontier paraphernalia expendable, but it also eschews one of the most rambunctiously and sensationally appealing elements of its folklore and of the formulaic Western plot – “real lynching’s going to be done, it will be done in the dark” – on which Huck in a perfectly matter-of-course way simply turns his back with the lapidary: “I could a staid, if I’d a wanted to, but I didn’t want to” (191).

ton in his stomach, and a round ball ...[with] a spool in it” – “He would a been worth a good deal, over at the village” (65-66).⁴¹

Twain’s incorrigible hero does not develop any intimate participatory closeness or even obviously sympathetic nextness to the natural world; he simply will not merge with the landscape, either with the immediate scenery or with some ultimate territory, nor is he ever likely to fantastically fall/slip through a rabbit hole. Huck cannot be subsumed under any of the categories of backwoodsman and hunters in Melville’s cliché-ridden confidence survey (even given the prospect of “still keener hunters after all these hunters”) – parodied as the dashing and all-fusing spirit of the West, with the Mississippi itself as its avatar ([1984b]: 848).⁴² He resembles neither Faulkner’s emblematic Ike McCaslin (1954) mesmerized by the wall of pristine wilderness ahead he hopes to penetrate in order to earn a name for himself, nor the runaway mushroom-picking visionary adolescent protagonist of Guterson’s contemporary *Our lady of the forest* (2003). In terms of real-life discourse, Huck certainly does not link with the likes of “Yankee Tarzan” Joseph Knowles of the celebrated 1913 experiment *Alone in the wilderness*, the mysteriously disappeared (in 1934) legendary vagabond for natural beauty Everett Ruess, Ripley’s “Ridgerunner” (of early 1940s, fictionalized in 1986), the elusive loner of the Idaho wilderness who wanted to emulate the life of a coyote, the even more foolhardy Chris McCandless of Krakauer’s bestseller *Into the wild* (1997) obsessed with exploring the nation’s last untrammelled frontier in Alaska, or with the preternaturally gifted ecologist, hunter and horseman Eustace Conway, *The last American man*, as dubbed by Gilbert (2002). As far as Huck is individually concerned, he appears to come instead amazingly close to the stance of Melville’s quaint philosopher Babbalanja: “All vanity, vanity, Yoomy [Jimmy (?)], to seek in nature for positive warranty to these aspirations of ours. Through all her provinces, nature seems to promise immortality to life, but destruction to beings. ... [I]f not against us, nature is not for us” ([1982a]: 872). Even more comprehensively and practically, Huck’s story synchronizes also with Emerson’s repeated warnings: “Nature is not just what it seems. The cloud-rack, the sunrise and sunset

⁴¹ Interestingly, we never learn whatever actually happens to the two-hundred pound fish, instead, indicative of his general orientation and predilections, the hero speculates about it some more (has a bigger fish to fry) in terms of the civilized order of the day: “They peddle out such a fish as that by the pound in the market house there; everybody buys some of him; his meat’s as white as snow and makes a good fry” (66). By comparison, Thoreau would register a caught pickereel in its stately natural “yellow and brown on the sides, becoming at length almost a clear golden yellow low down, with a white abdomen and reddish fins” ([1949], XI: 383).

⁴² At another point Melville ridicules the eccentric look, ursine aspect and Spartan sentiments of a Missouri bachelor – “sporting a shaggy spencer of the cloth called bear’s-skin; a high-peaked cap of raccoon-skin, the long bushy tail switching over behind; the raw-hide leggings; grim stubble chin; and to end, a double-barreled gun in hand” ([1984b]: 953).

glories, rainbows, and northern lights are not quite so spherical as our childhood thought them; and the part our organization plays in them is too large” (1983d]: 1116); “Nature, as we know her, is no saint ... She comes eating and drinking and sinning” ([1983b]: 481); it is “no sentimentalist – does not cosset or pamper us ... is rough and surly, and will not mind drowning a man or a woman ... like a grain of dust” ([1983c]: 945). The entire present-day wilderness discourse, as Oelschläger (1991) for instance argues lengthily, might indeed be indebted to *Walden* as an urtext of environmental writing, but *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* can be hardly thought of as precipitating the trend. Even though Huck is a natural autodidact equipped with a superbly observant, insatiably curious and extra-ordinarily reflective mind, he does not seek wisdom, guidance, solace or synchronicity in and with nature writ large or small. He is not driven to seek the earth’s sympathetic eye to measure the length and breadth, height and depth of his character, or to sound any mysterious undulations, coves, inlets and outlets of his personal space. This is certainly not a relation of idealistic, harmonizing (metaphysical) reciprocity, leaving him as it does with a disconcerting sense of incompleteness and lonesomeness. Nature fails to articulate for him any functional identity, a viable ‘Me’. It does not present itself to Huck as a shadow of the soul, or other ‘me’ whose attributes reputedly unlock one’s thoughts and make one properly acquainted with oneself. Neither does it inspire him to any specific nobler, higher, ameliorative, transformative, or redemptive actions. It is contributive to his sense of who he is only insofar as it extends a noncommittal NOT ME, literally all that is separate from ‘me’ (cf. Emerson [1983a]: 60, [1983e]: 8). Mocked for their conventionality and indeed ineffectuality – respectively in “*Bartleby*” and *The scarlet letter* – such popular eco-logical exhortations as: “Look, there is the sky, and here is the grass” (Melville [1984a]: 669), “[I]nto the wilderness, less plainly to be seen at every step; until ... thou art free!” (Hawthorne [1983a]: 288) simply do not apply here. Huck’s story lends support instead to the thesis D. H. Lawrence advances in his discussion of the Leatherstocking tales, namely that when one comes to America one discovers there is always a certain slightly devilish resistance in the landscape: “The American landscape has never been at one with the white man. ... Cooper, however, glosses over this resistance ... He *wants* the landscape to be at one with him” ([1965]: 52-53) – further to which, in the essay on Whitman, Lawrence cautions: “Over the precipice, blue distances, and the blue hollow of the future. But there is no way down. It is a dead end” ([1965]: 62).⁴³

⁴³ In a contemporary cultural study of the Western genre, Tompkins articulates this kind of appreciation perfectly matter-of-factly: “To go west, as far west as you can go, west of everything, is to die” (1992: 24). Less trenchantly, a recent Pulitzer Prize winner talks the need to understand that “striking out for the territory is inherently a sad enterprise, though the fact is often

Huck’s is a paradigmatically free spirit, but it is anything but paradigmatically romantic, peripatetic, wild, or Western. His psychological, cognitive, and existential make-up cannot sustain a viable frontier thesis and does not warrant any specific geographical speculations. The famed “Territory” (not unlike Kafka’s transcontinental, boundless and elusive “Theater of Oklahoma” at the heart of his *Amerika* [1962]) is Tom’s surreal construct or more accurately aberration, to begin with. It confirms for the hundredth time his hoity-toity constitution. It is only consistent with his distinctive grandiloquent, effusive, cavalier, self-infatuated, hornswoggling, meretricious dilettante scope and outlandishness. His geographical presumptions and pretensions extend here not just “plumb” to the mouth of the river (360), but all the way to China (304) – certainly one helluva-fence to paint and dig under. Tom’s Territory, or more properly his *Tom-err-itorium*, cannot reference any materiality of space, proves unlocatable, and as such cannot provide any viable sense of causal closure. Huck’s whole characterological make-up is best summarized by the single quality of not being particular (opposite of squeamish, fastidious, and uncompromising), his great no-frills adage (above all things) is for everybody to be satisfied by having their own way: “Any way that suits you suits me” (332). At the critical juncture, however, though evidently caught by surprise (on the wrong footing), the coast-hugging Huck immediately/instinctively dodges and in effect obviates (out-twains) his best buddy and supposed mentor’s romantic agenda. He counters Tom’s final (encore) hortatory, literally bootstrapping loquacious salvo to slide out one night, get an outfit, and go for howling adventures – with a subterfuge, a double *ad hoc* excuse: “I ain’t got no money for to buy the outfit, and I reckon I couldn’t get none from home” (361).⁴⁴ In terms of overall delineation there is something perversely appropriate about this (non-)move. To wit: it proves to be a perfect repartee riposte inasmuch as our hero is not characterologically equipped, can boast no characterological out-fit, for some such venture. In socio-geographic discourse, all speculations about the nature of space necessarily take into account how the individual mind constructs and

neglected in the adventure tales we tell” (Caldwell 2006: 36).

⁴⁴ To face the privations and hardships of frontier life, a standard outfit would consist of – as Coyner describes it in his mid-nineteenth century classic *The last trapper* ([1995]: 7) – “a rifle, together with as much powder and lead as it was supposed would last for two years ... six traps, which were packed upon an extra horse with which each man was furnished. Pistols, awls, axes, knives, camp kettles, blankets, and various other essential little articles, also made a part of the equipage”. Describing his own voyage to Hawaii in 1866 Twain records scrupulously how the minimal “traveling outfit confirmed upon me began with a naval uniform, continued with a case of wine, a small assortment of medical liquors and brandy, several boxes of cigars, a bunch of matches, a fine-tooth comb and a cake of soap, and ended with a pair of socks” (1975: 4). Early in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* the protagonist is actually advised by the most down-to-earth and practical character of the book: “[N]ext time you tramp take shoes and socks with you” (75).

applies its own individual cognizance of space. Huck's is certainly a spatial sensibility, but it is marked by immediacy, tangibility, connectivity, groundedness, situatedness, referentiality and connectivity – as against tangentiality, extendedness, mobility, distanciality, boundlessness and vastness. Principally, in order to be able to dispose things spatially there must be a real possibility of placing them differently, “some at the right, others at the left, these above, those below, at the north of or at the south of, east or west of, etc.” (Durkheim [1976]: 11).⁴⁵ In *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, even if there always seems to be something just around the corner, there is no sense of a viable *Hinterland*. Huck tends to look and think *infra*: sideways, athwart, around and below rather than *supra*: ahead, beyond and above. He never broods over the mystery of some ultimate outward reach, he is not even really curious about where-ever the road might lead or what-ever might lie behind the next line of trees. The present narrative eye, to use a well-known line from *Troilus and Cressida*, falls squarely on the present object here. Seeing involves light just as certainly as it does the apparatus and conduit of many cerebral pathways, the mind participating truly in the being of truly sympathetic entities only. Huck's practical topographical awareness and his American geography are informed by the North-South axis, pre-eminently as well as more practically by the ‘up’ and ‘down’ the river, with the troubled/ing awayness from home-(town), the individually constructed true *genius loci* of the book at the back of his mind throughout. It is only seemingly nonsensically that the issue should be poignantly invoked almost exactly midway through the book by the errant Boggs, himself a character who blows into town apparently out of nowhere: “Whar'd you come f'm, boy?” (184). It is critically important to recognize that the West does not have any place or permanent (let alone positive) association in Huck's mind whatsoever and that it never enters his diction and his otherwise ongoing busy dialogue with the world at large. At no point does Twain's hero entertain the stereotypical posture and vantage of the classic American protagonist who “stands upon a hill above the town he has left, yet does not say ‘The town is near,’ but turns his eyes upon the distant soaring ranges” (Wolfe [1957]: 522). Instead of ‘elsewhere’, Huck keeps casting his eyes in the opposite direction. He appears to subscribe to the logic of Socrates's well-known apology concerning a particular dis-advantage: “[L]andscapes and trees have nothing to teach me – only the people in the city can” (Plato 1995: 6), an appreciation articulated in strikingly similar terms also in Huck's own time: “[N]o grace I find/ Taught me of trees./ Turn I back to my kind, .../ There, now and then, are found/ Life-loyalties” (Hardy [2001a]: 65). It

⁴⁵ “By themselves, there are neither right nor left, up nor down, north nor south, etc. All these distinctions evidently come from the fact that different sympathetic values have been attributed to various regions” (Durkheim [1976]: 11).

is worth pointing out that Huck and Jim's journey is navigationally, existentially, as well as by plot definition all East (read: Civilization) oriented (against the combined forces and eddies of Nature – “way up the Ohio amongst the free States” [99]⁴⁶). The idea of escape West *per se* gets thoroughly compromised by the apocalyptic mayhem and carnage accompanying the ostentatiously romantic, reckless elopement across the river of the bucolically (over)named Harney Shepherdson and Sophia Grangerford. Also, it bears emphasizing that at the pivotal point in their geographical quest, Huck and Jim are defeated precisely by the combined recalcitrant and finally treacherous forces of Nature: rattle-snake, fog, and muddy waters (“So it was all up ... We didn't say a word for a good while. There warn't anything to say. We both knowed well enough” [129]). The (over) optimistic American cultural bid to light out for the territory ahead of the rest proves to be akin to the notorious modern economic anomaly known as the winner's curse, featuring paradigmatically natural offshore assets: the more bidders there are, the more likely it is that they will have rapaciously overestimated the bid's value, turned all of a sudden into pyrite, or fool's gold.

When at the very end Huck once again evokes ‘territory’, this time as a formal excuse to close the book, immediately there is really nothing more to write about because, taken literally – just like the tantalizing, manifestly alien/foreign and forever elusive (though in terms of the immediate story critically important) Cairo, St. Jacques, and Lafayette earlier on – the Territory looms as an impossible mirage, an abstract, cipher-like, void signifier. The conclusion of the novel establishes beyond peradventure Huck's unenviable status as *nullius filius* [nobody's son]. It is, however, not only a bogus happy-clappy triumph over adversity but also a blatant cultural fallacy to be extending by way of a (rather dubious) compensation the malapropic prospectus of *terra nullia* [no man's land subject to appropriation] in front of him. Certainly the popular American nineteenth-century territorial discourse does not apply here. Insofar as Huck is individually concerned, it betokens not so much in-natured *terra phantasma* as denatured *terra nulla* – land that does not exist.⁴⁷ As Stein famously quipped

⁴⁶ When Huck and Jim are forced off Jackson's Island in Chapter 12, before they even formulate any plan at all, they know that they will want to “break for the Illinois shore” should they be threatened in any way, and then they consistently keep close to and learn to depend on “the Illinois side” (77).

⁴⁷ Miller in his detailed survey “Geography and structure in *Huckleberry Finn*” argues that prior to the Grangerfords-Shepherdsons episode the narrative is characterized by spatio-temporal verisimilitude but afterwards the presence of realistic geographical detail and specification of travel time drops sharply and finally “virtually disappears” (1980: 192). With its lurching point-to-point navigation, the itinerary of the journey can be seen as projecting the kind of artificial environment established by the railway – “which knows only of departure and arrival points, turns cities into *points* ... connected to the diagrammatical railway network that is now the territory ... It is a space that recognizes only points and directions” (Colomina 1994: 50). To extend the ar-

(upon returning East from a visit to her one-time hometown in California) – there is no “there” there (1935: 218). To steal also from James Howard Kunstler (1993), in the course of the narrative the present geography deconstructs ultimately as a geography of “nowhere”. With Jackson’s Island abortive tree experiment as inter-text, the deconstruction or exhaustion of the whole territorial-frontier-wilderness discourse can be more directly appreciated through Emerson’s mock-heroic animation of the “western roads, which opened stately enough, with planted trees on either side, to tempt the traveler, but soon became narrow and narrower, and ended in a squirrel-track, and ran up a tree” ([1983b]: 478). Fundamentally at odds with the logic of the story and the armature of the text, a proposition rather close to the six impossible things before breakfast of Alice’s wonder-lands adventures, “Territory” proves to be a combined red-herring, will-o-the-wisp, and wild-goose-chase all in one.⁴⁸ It spells out a false

argument, it is possible to apply here the notion of “geographical monogamy”, in contradistinction to the expected “geographical promiscuity” (see Morley 2000: 16).

⁴⁸ The larger reality of the time of the story does not support on the ground any viable Territory thesis either. Interest in scenic beauty was but a Romantic gloss on the historical period that certainly from the 1830s through 1850s was a time when the United States national boundaries were in a state of turmoil, warfare and violent transformations, and when the country was completing its program of forced Indian relocations. Also, as is well known, the myth of the garden in the West was at that time challenged by the conceptualization of the Great American Desert used to identify uninhabitable plains beyond the Mississippi valley up to the Rocky Mountains. In fact, Emerson, who famously was not ‘at home’ in the wilderness, would acknowledge that it was already at the Mississippi that the Western romance faded into “a reality of some grimness” (quoted in Cabot 1887, II: 754). In his 1843–44 fictionalized venture into the American interior by way of the river (interestingly, orchestrated by the “Eden Land Corporation” of Cairo on the Mississippi) Dickens describes it as a journey into “the grim domains of Giant Despair” ([n.d.]: 407). In *Roughing it* ([1962]: 121) Twain indicates he had a rather good idea of “the fearful suffering and privation” of the early emigrants to California. In a strictly historical sense, in the nineteenth century ‘Territory’ was not synonymous with freedom at all, for many it was a token of despotic power exercised with almost unquestioned sway by the U.S. Congress over common people.

Also, doing a simple geographical and projecting Huck, as many readers do, into the (immediate) Indian Territory (future Oklahoma) is overlooking a rather important biographical clue. It is well documented that life in the West did not appeal to Mark Twain. Also, he read avidly Cooper’s novels as a boy, but as an established writer he famously castigated his whole idea of fiction writing; in particular, he scathingly criticized Cooper’s romantic portrayal of Indians, calling them (in *The innocents abroad*) a tribe that never existed, appended with the infamous: “I would gladly eat the whole [Indian] race if I had a chance” (Twain 1984: 162) (for a focused discussion of Twain’s attitude to Indians see Revard [1999–2000]). Furthermore, Pearce (1963) argues that writing *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* the author was cognizant of the negative developments in the Indian territories (established in 1834, the Indian Territory by the time of the writing of the book was virtually under erasure; even if its actual historical time is rather ambiguous, the novel itself does contain at least one indicative reference to “cutthroats from over in the Ingean Territory” [334]). McMurtry’s *Lonesome Dove* (1986: 360) features a graphic warning: “If you’d kept on going west into the Territory, the dem Indians would have got you and et your testicles off”, footnoted with: “[T]here were plenty of white men in the Territory who were just as

lead, transcribes a wrong track, transliterates the impassable thicket of a *Holzweg*: “In the wood there are paths, mostly overgrown, that come to an abrupt stop where the wood is untrudden. ... Woodcutters and forest keepers know these paths. They know what it means to be on a *Holzweg*”.⁴⁹ In general terms of travel writing (cf. Scott 2004: 6), *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is neither a passage to the *real*, one that might stimulate a substantial reassessment and broadening of experience, nor to the *ideal*, one that might open up new, heightened or original meanings. As far as the key lexical constituent of the novel’s closing statement is specifically concerned, it is not enough to conclude wistfully that dictionaries have little to report concerning what words actually say. “Territory” seems to deserve Faust’s vigorous, near-expletive riposte: “Ich kann das Wort so hoch unmöglich schätzen./ Ich muß es anders übersetzen” – if one wishes to be properly “erleuchtet”, that is (Goethe [1984]: 104).⁵⁰

dangerous as Indians” (1986: 754). In Twain’s time (from 1820’s, in fact), especially in the South-East, the real escape mantra was the phrase “Gone to Texas” (abbreviated as G.T., G.T.T or GTT), painted, chalked, carved or scrawled across doors of abandoned homesteads (in lieu of, or rather mocking, the very idea of a forwarding address) by those on the lam from the authorities, the draft, unhappy love affairs, and most typically from creditors (Texas would indeed become famous for its exceedingly lenient treatment of debtors, with permanent bankruptcy laws enacted in the U.S. only at the close of the century). For Olmstead (2004: 123), G.T.T. was a potential “slang appendage, within the reader’s recollection, to every man’s name who had disappeared”; Fehrenbach (2000: 570) recognizes it as “a favorite entry, closing a case, in hundreds of American sheriffs’ books”.

There is circumstantial evidence to suggest that Twain was not fully aware of all the intricacies, subtleties, vibrancy and implications of Huck’s ontological and existential condition, nevertheless he certainly intuited his protagonist’s unique integrity and inviolability. Everett Emerson points out that “[a]lthough he fantasizes about how he will ‘light out for the Territory,’ in none of the sequels [cf. especially the abortive “Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer among the Indians”] can the author show Huck exercising [this kind of] freedom” (2000: 152). Poirier argues that “Huckleberry Finn became for Mark Twain a kind of obsession, appearing in the years that followed in various sketches and sequels to the novel. ... And yet each version only further disfigures [him]” (1966: 207).

⁴⁹ Prolegomenon to *Off the beaten track* (Heidegger 2003); cf. the original: “Im Holz sind Wege, die meist verwachsen jäh im Unbegangenen aufhören. ... Holzmacher und Waldhüter kennen die Wege. Sie wissen, was es heißt, auf einem Holzweg zu sein” (Heidegger 1980); cf. also a Polish rendition: “W lesie są drogi, które często zarastają i kończą się nagle chaszczami, w których nie postąpiła ludzka noga. ... Drwale i leśnicy znają te drogi. Wiedzą, co to znaczy znaleźć się na drodze lasu” (Heidegger 1997). When all is said and done, for the present purposes the most useful meaning of the phrase ‘auf dem Holzweg sein’ is probably the colloquial ‘to be on the wrong track’, ‘to be off the track’, and/or ‘to get hold of the wrong end of the stick’.

⁵⁰ “I cannot grant the *word* such sovereign merit./ I must translate it in a different way/ If I’m indeed illuminated” (Goethe 2001: 34). For a radically fresh perspective, Emerson advocates a peculiar camera obscura exercise: casting one’s eyes literally upside down by “looking at the landscape through your legs” (1983e: 34). Less extravagantly, Hawthorne promotes a momentarily arrested reversed vantage-point for “a sense of change about the familiar”, such as “affects us all, when, after a separation of months

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Signing up for his three-year sojourn aboard the “Pequod” away from the vicissitudes and depredations of urban life, Ishmael explains to Captain Peleg that what takes him voyaging is his inordinate desire to see the (green meadows, pastures, fields, prairies, valleys of the larger) world. Peleg bids him peep over the weather-bow at the expanse of the sea – “‘Well, what’s the report?’ .../ ‘Not much,’ I replied, ‘nothing but water’” – only to mock him in his rough voice, in a master-stroke of irony: “Do ye wish to go round Cape Horn to see any more of it, eh?” (Melville [1983a]: 871). Martin Heidegger’s famous mountain-slope timber-shingled *Hütte* (a ‘hut’; in reality, a three-room family country house) might have contributed to the mythologization of Schwarzwald as a place of ideal(istic) retreat from civilization, but the German philosopher actually consistently teaches that when nature – and this is not to be really taken literally in terms of measurable and surveyable distances – is only a casually occurrent, distanced, and nondescript presence-at-hand (*vor-*, tableaux-like, out-there), as against ready-to-hand aroundness (*um-zu-*, toward-which, as concurrent availability, serviceability and totality of involvements), then it features non-circumspectively, poses resistance to meaning, and gets ultimately reduced to mere dimensions.⁵¹ Generally, all entities and things appear and loom (truly) meaningful to us only in terms of their contingent use, premised on our circumspective concern, or *Sorge*. To recall the standard argument exposing the human tendency to take things for granted: a hammer is a hammer not on account of its hammerhood, something emergent out of the very name and/or some abstract and inherent, idealized (hammer-like) attributes, but first and foremost through the particular care of handling, on account of being actually used for what is practically recognized as hammering.⁵²

Obviously, a hammer would never be a hammer unless there were somebody to propose, for whatever particular reason, driving nails with it in the first place. As humans we are who and what we are in the positive projection and ongoing affirmation of our existence in and through the actual performance of inten-

or years, we again see some hill or lake, or work of art, with which we were friends, of old” ([1982a]: 294).

⁵¹ “‘Nature’ itself can be discovered and defined simply in its pure presence-at-hand. But when this happens, the Nature which ‘stirs and strives’, which assails us and enralls us as landscape, remains hidden” (Heidegger 1962: 100). Also, only the ready-to-hand is something we can come across and ascertain “as having form and direction” (Heidegger 1962: 145). As for the famous hut itself, Heidegger (indirectly) explains that “the Black Forest farm in no way means that [everybody] should or could go back to building such houses” (1971: 160).

⁵² “[T]he less we just stare at the hammer-Thing, and the more we seize hold of it and use it, the more primordial does our relationship to it become, and the more unveiledly is it encountered as that which it is” (Heidegger 1962: 98).

tional acts. Heidegger’s conceptualization of anxiety-driven individualizing venture into cleared personal space can be applied here as a sort of exercise in provocation in order to inquire how Huck’s well-known and supposedly obvious resolution might be really inspired and how it actually transpires. This is to suggest that in a mode of a final dis-closure, the ending of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* invites a phenomenological reading rather than a literally locative reading. Instead of a smooth territorial affair, a physical clearing-out, it seems to indicate a more profound dynamic, a more funda-mental affair, an existential clearing “not through any other entity, but in such a way that [one] *is* [one]self the clearing” (Heidegger 1962: 171). This proposition is to be contemplated in terms of a disclosive phenomenological *Licht-ung* (light-ing-out, *wy-ja-snie-nie*), natural human openness and luminosity, or more traditionally *lumen naturale*. It is a common human urge to be illuminated, to appear in an appropriate light, to have access to and be part of a spectrum of clarification and meaningfully structured human situations. In simplest practical terms, one is most comfortable when hidden, but at the same time one constantly yearns to be discovered and to be seen, as much as possible. Immediately against *Verdecktheit*, or covered-up-ness, and ultimately as well as punningly against (the danger or abyss/*Ab-grund* of) *Nichtung*⁵³ – *Lichtung* is a condition that obtains in dealing truly circumspectively with one’s own-most environment. In his forward to Jammer’s *Concepts of space*, Einstein observes that when any two people use the words ‘red’, ‘hard’ or ‘disappointed’, for example, it can be assumed that they mean approximately the same thing; however, in the case of words relating

⁵³ Even in the immediate realistic terms of the actual events in the story, Huck is certainly no stranger to the danger. A marginalized, pariah figure, on top of the numerous disguises he is forced to wear, and besides having to (routinely) travel nights and sleep daytimes, at least on three occasions he is all but literally driven into the darkness of the underworld (Chapter 2 and 16). It comes as no surprise, therefore, that he should be instinctively attracted to luminosity – from the candlelight guiding him to his room in Chapter 1 to the three or four lights twinkling at night down in the village in Chapter 2, from a single light in a little shanty that had not been lived in for a long time that navigates him across the river in Chapter 10, from an occasional spark later on during the journey off a candle in a cabin window, to the festival of a wonderful spread of lights at St. Louis in Chapter 12, to the sky all speckled with stars in Chapter 19 – with the word ‘light(s)’ used over sixty times in the text. (This is where Huck seems to prefigure a later famously displaced narrator, the revealingly-named “pathfinder” Nick Carraway, also exceedingly intrigued by candlelight, and wandering the streets of New York at night as an enchanted watcher of “yellow windows” high above the city [Fitzgerald 1953: 36].) A case of mere childish bantering, the following exchange in the middle of the book deserves in this context the recognition of a major minor dramatization: “[H]e asked me where Moses was when the candle went out. ... [Y]ou can guess, can’t you? It’s just as easy. / ‘Which candle?’ I says. / ‘Why, any candle,’ he says. ... ‘Why he was in the *dark!* That’s where he was!’” (135). In the context, the beginning of Chapter 19 can be seen as a celebration of light/*mata-hari* in itself: “[A]nd next you’ve got the full day, and everything smiling in the sun” (157), an apparent transcription of *Ecclesiastes* 11:7 – “Truly the light *is* sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun”.

to place and space there instantly develops a far reaching uncertainty of meaning (Malpas 1999: 19). Where Tom, as he characteristically (constant gargoyle procrastinator and irritant) “talked along, and talked along”⁵⁴, would propose to stealthily slide out one of these nights and go for howling adventures amongst the Injuns, over in the Territory (361), Huck’s offer is a significant modification. It radiates a different wave-length, and is not, as it might appear at first, a simple situational echo, or tautological semantic sleight-of-hand. “I reckon I got to light out for the Territory ahead” (362). This schism goes back to Huck’s early self-reflexive in-dividuating recognition of what he calls the stuff of Tom Sawyer’s lies: “I reckoned he believed in the A-rabs and the elephants, but as for me *I think different*” (17, emphasis added). Existentially, the stance projected by Huck depends on creating a space of inner orientation in and for oneself and creating oneself as space of outside negotiation. Though not a moment of epiphanic and/or complete knowledge, what emerges is a liberating openness at the center of identity, a super-ordinate cognitive construct, a method of relating most appropriately-propitiously to the world on one’s terms. “In the midst of beings as a whole an open place occurs. There is a clearing, a lighting. Thought of in reference to what is, to beings, this clearing is in a greater degree than are beings” (Heidegger 1971: 53). Sheehan transcribes *Lichtung* as “the open that opens things up, the clearing that clarifies them, the ever-present presence that allows things their current meaning” (2005: 202). In more practical terms, the discourse of lighting-out is premised on the proposition that as long as one is, there is always something out-standing, something ahead that one can still be and will be (Heidegger 1962: 276).⁵⁵

A texture of conflicting impulses and conflicting interpretations, the overall situation masterminded-masqueraded by Tom at the very end of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* proves to be a peculiar festival of dysfunctionality. With an awful lot happening in a dense environment all at once, looking constantly towards what is coming next confuses the sense of the near and the distant, of the authentic and the inauthentic, of the significant and the insignificant. The misbegotten, absurd (underdercover) occidental artifice of the Evasion continues as open run-of-the-mill discourse in the guise of (over)excitement, verbiage, prattle, curiosity, distraction, irrelevance, triviality, and groundlessness. On display are: fantasizing, clowning, image-peddling, heckling, not-abiding, concealment,

⁵⁴ Cf.: “Speaking at length [Viel-sprechen] about something does not offer the slightest guarantee that thereby understanding is advanced. On the contrary, talking extensively about something, covers it up and brings what is understood to sham clarity” (Heidegger 1962: 208).

⁵⁵ However unfashionable it may appear today, it is worth recalling in the context Hassan’s observation (1961: 325) concerning a special quality present in some works of earlier American literature, one that strikes a special chord in modern consciousness: “The manner may be called existential, and it is predicated on a sense both of the nudity and the terrifying aspiration of the Self”.

ambiguity, being everywhere-and-nowhere (as against authenticating *Gelassenheit*, it looms as self-invalidating *Aufenthaltslosigkeit* likening finally Tom to Peter Pan in Never-Never Land⁵⁶), last and certainly not least pontificating as well as histrionic and schematic over-civilizing. As far as Huck is concerned, this fallenness, immersion and dispersal in the hurly-burly publicness of “they” spells out estrangement, uncanniness, and not-at-homeness. It is reflected in the penultimate chapter by a rather desperate sally, namely seeking a good enough place under a bed. Eventually, Huck appears to realize that he must stand his own ground, must clear out and claim more resolutely a more integrative personal space, that of authentic, autogenous and ownmost I-land. This is what prompts him to en-lighten his existence and to energize his true be-longing. As his own Chief of Ordnance now – see the opening paratextual *corrigendum* – by identifying and overcoming falsities, obscurities and absurdities he discloses and affirms his non-dispersive Da-sein. It is in fact already in the previous volume that he indicates he does not wish to have “only just a given name, like a nigger” (Twain [1982a]: 152). To re-emphasize, “one is not necessarily fleeing whenever one shrinks back in the face of something or turns away from it” (Heidegger 1962: 230).⁵⁷ The present story is no escapist fantasy, it does not constitute a declaration of some ultimate independence, it is really about *status integritatis*, about “find[ing] out who I was” (282). The classical *ad populum* oration on leaving, absconding, escaping, and disappearing (*abii, excessit, evasit, erupit*) does not apply here. To repeat, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* does not thematize a renunciation of social reality in favour of a solitary communion with nature, does not herald a triumph of nature over culture (randomly, cf. Lee 1987: 6, Matterson 2003: 4, Howe 1986: 73). In “Illusions”, drawing on his own exposure to the phantasmagoric (tourist) attractions of the Mammoth Cave in Kentucky, Emerson warns that whatever games are played with us, we must play no games with ourselves. Against what he calls the charivari of duplicity and disguise, against estimates that are loose and floating, Emerson promotes (an intriguing intertextual link) the stance of a certain exemplary “sad-eyed boy” who might appear physically only “now and then”, but who proves determined – as a matter of fact afflicted with an urge – to transcend the circumstance and embrace the real quality of existence ([1983d]: 1122). As against the popular reading of liberation and independence simply in terms of unfettered

⁵⁶ For Heidegger, one of the hallmarks of inauthentic existence is idle curiosity. In itself, Tom’s suggestion to go for a howling escapade over in the territory, made before he recovers from the previous adventure, is a testimony to how in curiosity one is so little devoted to the present, that when one obtains the slightest inkling or sight of anything new, one is already looking (“leaping”) away to what might becoming next (1962: 398).

⁵⁷ “Aber nicht jedes Zurückweichen vor ..., nicht jede Abkehr von ... ist notwendig Flucht” (Heidegger 1979: 185; ellipsis in original).

arbitrariness or the random proclivity to do as one pleases on the spur of the moment, the exercise of existential freedom is a *recto-verso* dynamic. It is useful to recall here Heidegger's elementary reminder that dis-closedness always and with equal primordially pertains to the entirety of being-in-the-world, that existential interpretation is characteristically circular, and that locative adverbs offer a signification that may be primarily existential rather than nominal or categorical. Da-sein is proximally "never here but yonder; from this 'yonder' it comes back to its 'here'" (Heidegger 1962: 142); even if it should in any manner explicitly come away from anything, "it can never do more than come back to the world" (Heidegger 1962: 107). To match an unlikely pair – *A week on the Concord and Merrimack rivers* and *Studies in classic American literature* – "The true liberty will only begin when ... [you] discover IT, and proceed possibly to fulfil IT. IT being the deepest *whole* self of man, the self in its wholeness, not idealistic halfness" (Lawrence [1965]: 7). As Jim (in Chapter 14 where he declares he would rather have no more adventures⁵⁸) syllogistically invalidates King Solomon's judgment: a dispute cannot be about half a child, but about a whole child, and those who think they can "settle a'spote 'bout a whole chile wid a half a chile, doan know enough to come in out'n de rain" (95).⁵⁹

The present existential *Ereignis*, a leap/run ahead of the rest (*vorlaufende Entschlossenheit*), gives the protagonist a chance to bring himself in his characteristic start-stop, back-and-forth rhythm from a sense of lostness to himself again. It is obviously not an event in any usual/common sense, it is perceived in terms of facticity (*Faktizität*) rather than factuality (*Tatsächlichkeit*), and as a caesura rather than a *Scheidung*, finally as *Ent-* rather than *End-schluss*. Neither sacred nor secret, this conceit can be appreciated in the literal sense of *entfernendes In-Sein* – de-severant Being-in, or out-standing standing-within.⁶⁰ It is about running ahead in order to return to one's genuine 't/here' in the existential territory of the mind, as a solicitous being alongside that which is ready-to-hand in one's world. Prefigured in the present story by Huck's de-distancing restitutive move after being made to abscond from the world of St. Petersburg,

⁵⁸ "I told Jim all about what happened ... and I said these kinds of things was adventures; but he said he didn't want no more adventures. ... Well, he was right" (93).

⁵⁹ Emerson's voice can at this point help also throw light on Huck's obstinate limitation as a supposedly humorous character, ultimately holy fool or divine idiot. Emerson talks of comic "halfness", which obtains over "a non-performance of what is pretended to be performed", especially if accompanied by "loud pledges of performance"; furthermore, in any specific context, when you separate a particular bodily man from the connection of things at large and contemplate him alone he appears instantaneously comic and nothing can rescue him in the longer run from the ludicrous (Emerson 1885: 115-116). Cf. also Colonel Sherburn's contemptuous unmasking of the prevalent "*part* of a man" and "*half* a man" mentality (189-191).

⁶⁰ As a formula it reads: "[A]head-of-itself-Being-already-in (the world) as Being-alongside entities which we encounter (within-the-world)" (Heidegger 1962: 293).

it is an ethos informed by the concept of authenticating repetition, a reciprocal rejoinder to the possibility of existence that has already 'been', i.e., one's original factual thrownness. "The authentic coming-towards-oneself of anticipatory resoluteness is at the same time a coming-back one's ownmost Self, which has been thrown into its individualization. This ecstasis makes it possible for Dasein to be able to take over resolutely that entity which it already is" (Heidegger 1962: 388).⁶¹ Importantly and abidingly: "Resoluteness, as *authentic Being-one's-self*, does not detach Dasein from its world, nor does it isolate it so that it becomes a free-floating 'I'. And how should it, when resoluteness as authentic disclosedness, is *authentically* nothing else than *Being-in-the world?*" (Heidegger 1962: 344).⁶²

Understandably, existential call of conscience and phenomenological Illumination do not manifest themselves very well amidst hustle and bustle. Those who expose themselves to, engage in, and understand nothing but loud idle talk, cannot register and report any call (Heidegger 1962: 343). A much more genial mode is that of concentrated mindfulness and, ultimately, stopped time. "What does the conscience call to him to whom it appeals? Taken strictly, nothing. The call asserts nothing, gives no information about world-events, has nothing to tell" (Heidegger 1962: 318). Nevertheless, the call discloses: it discloses "that which has been currently individualized and which belongs to that particular Dasein" (Heidegger 1962: 326). Allowing for a little wrinkle in time, it is useful to remember that *Huckleberry Finn* is borne out of frustration with the inadequacies of its Siamese companion *Tom Sawyer*. Being uniquely understanding, accommodating, and agree-able, Huck does not (over)dramatize the point and is in fact prepared to forgive the author ("I never seen anybody but lied, one time or another" [1]).⁶³ Nonetheless, like a fully rounded (read: trou-

⁶¹ To Heidegger authenticity means to be most appropriately what one already is, or rather what one has been all along. "The repeating of that which is possible does not bring again [Wiederbringen] something that is 'past' ... Rather, the repetition makes a *reciprocal rejoinder* to the possibility of that existence which has-been-there. But when such a rejoinder is made to this possibility in a resolution, it is made in a *moment of vision*" (Heidegger 1962: 437-438).

Adverse, as bears repeating, to superfluous turning and whirling, back-tracking is in the literal sense something of a survival instinct with Huck, as when he needs for instance to evade the inquisitorial Mrs. Loftus: "I went up the bank about fifty yards and then I doubled on my tracks and slipped back to where my canoe was" (75). The logic of the present design can be also seen prefigured at another point in the story when Huck out-smarts the "Duke" who deviously tries to dispatch him from 'here' to a nonexistent 'there': "I didn't look around, but I kinder felt like he was watching me. ... I went straight out into the country as much as a mile, before I stopped; then I doubled back through the woods" (274).

⁶² According to Toussaint (1977: 180), resoluteness does not project Dasein into a new world; rather, it presents the world in a new light.

⁶³ It is pertinent to recall in passing Frost's fundamental recognition that to be really social is to be forgiving ([1967b]: 219), as well as the fact that the most unforgiving character in the world of

bled) modern(ist) protagonist, Huck remains dissatisfied with the way his life has been told (read: appropriated) by somebody else, “with some stretches, as I said before” (1). In the world of the story, in terms of immediate motivation, even the impenetrable and mystifying Sherburn might have bizarrely had more reason to shoot in cold blood the ineffectual and harmless (unarmed) Boggs than Huck might have to commit himself wholeheartedly to the task of churning out a full-fledged book now. Ostensibly, a much more logical gesture at this juncture would have been the kind of clarion-call trumpeted by Whitman at the close of his iconic open-road paean to leave the books on the shelf “unopen’d” and the paper on the desk “unwritten” ([1982a]: 307). Twain nevertheless sets his hero writing, suggesting reductively even the alien- or anarchic-hand syndrome (tyrannical prehension, for choice) relentlessly pushing the pen rather than sporting a gun, wielding a dead cat, or protruding a fishing rod. To indulge a double pun: it turns out that Huck is literally and literarily, efferently and aesthetically, informed by *natura naturans*, i.e., creative nature in the personal sense of the term, rather than *natura naturata*, or created Nature at large – effecting a rather amazing “correlation between being, word, gathering, hand, and writing” (Heidegger 1998: 84). In a quieter, more contemplative mode we may comprehend, or at least intuit, why he has been impelled to renegotiate and transcribe (write-right) his story himself, in a sense all over again. (The opening: “You don’t know about me” [1] reads in this sense as a statement of intent.) *Ars scribendi* is in the bloodstream and at the fingertips of the present narrative. The obvious immediate disclosure available at the end of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is that the narrative asserts itself finally not as a ‘book of Nature’, but rather re-asserts itself (page first [1] and last [362]) fundamentally (“know”, “knewd”) as “a book”. Besides drawing attention to the written medium through the fully intentional-unintentional misspellings, self-apparently, even if not always perfectly verisimilarly, the story features in its inter-course an astounding plethora of references to signs, codes, tattoo-marks, hieroglyphics, paleography, vocabularian dilemmas, handwriting, “properly writing” (254), paper, notes, missives, letters, documents, printing, newspapers, handbills, poems, and books (from a scrap-book to a dictionary to the Bible). Far from trying to beat or out-tom Tom Pan at his game (an altogether different, “nonnamous”, mischief-maker, filibuster genre)⁶⁴, the end of the story sees Huck perfectly stationary. To borrow from Auster’s contemporary *Travels in the scriptorium* – the room is his world now (2007: 141).⁶⁵ By pretty obvious implication, the

the novel is the *Naturmensch* Pap.

⁶⁴ In a somewhat different context, Lynch (2006: 177) offers: “Tom does not become anything in *Huck Finn*; rather, he remains a one-horse man of literature”.

⁶⁵ In his metafictional meditation “White spaces”, Auster talks of how in the beginning he

mind and the hand in the manner of the body, the hero anchors in irredentia of sorts, an epistolarium (rather than a herbarium), ensconced and peering into the space of the page, the true path and field of disclosedness of one who in a self-begetting mode is written (about) and who himself is actually writing now (it is relevant to note that the novel’s first working title was *Huck Finn’s autobiography*). Figuratively, this *mise en scène* is ultimately not unlike Atwood’s papyrus tent with walls of paper to write on, set up quite specifically against a “vast and cold outside, ... a howling wilderness” (2006: 143). Self-consciously, though commendably without falling into self-absorption, self-indulgence or self-pity, as much a grown man as a child (a *puer senex* rather than a *puer aeternis* logos), characteristically self-deprecatingly, Twain’s protagonist tells us about the travails accompanying the making of a book, just short of a familiar self-reflexive disclosure beyond the purely fictional frame of reference. Technically, as well as epigrammatically, against the putatively freely flowing *scriptura continua* or *ephemera* (transcribble outpouring of bagatelle impressions, sensations, sallies, and ruminations) – “the people that ma[k]e the books knows what’s the correct thing to do” (11). Even if writing is not always a labour of love, steeped as it is in solitude, bracketed by asceticism, and often borne out of frustration and opposition, it is by definition a gesture of involvement in the world. If only because it presupposes reading, it is always an act of acquiescence, a disclosive submission to the world, a literal readiness-of-and-to-hand, effecting sooner or later a taking-up and perceiving, a pronounced ‘between’ and often ‘among’. In this sense, it is always a bringing together, a reciprocity, a *Mit-teilung* and inevitably intimacy of sorts. The determined *manu scriptus* stance of describer, articulator, transcriber, communicator, negotiator, correspondent, addresser, and consigner self-apparently contradict those of putative abrogator, repudiator, separator, disappearer, or effacer.⁶⁶ His personal manner might be perceived as uncouth, crass, and generally awkward, nevertheless we are invited now to picture Huck Finn, the Penman, scrupulously and reservedly as well as respectfully and complementarily composing an extended epistolary address (illustrated in the first American edition with a selva image of the protagonist bowing exceedingly decorously to the audience). In this sense, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is a particularly pronounced and insistent reaching out; metaphorically, to

wanted to speak “of jumping up and down, of bodies tumbling and spinning, of enormous journeys through space, ... stretching farther than the eye can see”, only to admit: “Reluctantly, I abandoned all my witty stories, all my adventures of far-away places, and began, slowly and painfully, to empty my mind. Now emptiness is all that remains: a space, no matter how small, in which whatever is happening can be allowed to happen” (1990a: 86).

⁶⁶ For a typical reductive view cf. Tanner (1971: 28): “Thus at the end of *Huckleberry Finn*, in an intuitive move to hold on to some basic innocence and integrity, Huck gives up language altogether and makes for a mythical wordless West”.

borrow from Hawthorne ([1983a]: 121), it is tantamount to the act of seizing the public by the button.⁶⁷ Enabling him to re-gain control over his proper name, “YOURS TRULY HUCK FINN” (362) could hardly be viewed as a trademark of naïve subjectivity or of tom-foolery, for that matter; neither is it a calligram or cartouche of abnegation, abdication, decommissioning, or of any subversive agenda. Huck is no secret agent or star likely to explode or implode under the weight of the self-generated gravitational field. His communiqué is no conspiratorial compact with himself, and even if (unlike the amiably one-dimensional visage of Mary Jane Wilks) it does not lend itself to simply reading off like smooth print, it is an open public address, with the distinctive (struggling, homespun) language itself part of the message. We do not see Huck openly worry, as W. B. Yeats at more or less the same literary time would: “Where my books go”; it is nonetheless clear that all the words he utters and all the words he writes are also meant to “spread out their wings untiring./ And never rest in their flight./ Till they come” (Yeats: [1922]: 863) – to reach all the significant/relevant (possible) others. A book being always a tacit claim to acquaintance with all humanity, Huck’s self-authorization is a re-inscriptive, apostrophic letter or more accurately *epistle* to the world – the world that never really wrote to him thus far. “The writer belongs to the work, but what belongs to him is only a book, a mute collection of sterile words, the most significant thing is the world” (Blanchot 1989: 23). As the saying goes, it is always the last word (the trump card) that actually gives the itinerary its shape. Projecting a focalizing in-scape rather than a diffusive *res extensa* land-(e)scape, “lighting out” does not excite a devil-may-care spirit of territorial abandon and rowdy adventure as discloses, opens up, illuminates (*wy-ja-śnia*) conscious human Be-ing, understood fundamentally as life-enhancing potentiality-for-Being. It is a natural running ahead (*Sich-vorweg-sein*) not so much towards any one particular possibility, as towards one’s overall (existential) possibilities. “Dasein awaits its potentiality-for-Being-in-the-world; it awaits it in such a manner that it ‘reckons’ *on* and ‘reckons’ *with* whatever has an *involvement* for the sake of this potentiality-for-Being” (Heidegger 1962: 465).⁶⁸ This conceptualization tallies perfectly with one of Huck’s defining characteristics, namely his supreme *praktische Vernunft*.

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⁶⁷ It is tempting to draw here also an intratextual parallel with a confidence-hype early in the novel: “Look at it, gentleman and ladies all; take a-hold of it; shake it ... It’s a clean hand, now; shake it – don’t de afeard” (27).

⁶⁸ For Heidegger reckoning means not so much calculation as bringing together; “I think” means “I bind together” (1962: 367). Even if Huck thinks “different”, he does so evidently in terms of *Zusammenhang*, i.e., interconnectedness.

In terms of the actual situation on the ground, Emerson and especially Heidegger being both dauntingly a-representationalist, had Huck read his Cervantes (he is at one point actually advised to) he would certainly espouse the Old Master’s critically important clarification from near the beginning of his *magnum opus* that even the most quixotic of exploits are about crossroads rather than about insulars.⁶⁹ In *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* the ultimate issue on the ground in terms of live experience – Twain being interested in exploring not only human nature but also very much the nature of human situations – is articulated early on by one Ben Rogers: “Here’s Huck Finn, he hain’t got no family – what you going to do ‘bout him?” (10). An essential part of Huck’s story depends on his status as (half-)orphan and even if immediately there is almost a danger of compassion-fatigue setting in, the issue deserves to be comprehensively addressed. It is a discussion that might be mottoed by the recognition offered in a larger context that men are free when they ‘belong’ – when are cultivating what their deepest self needs, and not when they are escaping to some wild west.⁷⁰ As Sherlock Holmes would enlighten his faithful good-natured assistant and chronicler Dr Watson, once the impossible has been exposed (and invalidated), whatever remains, however implausible on the face of it, cannot help but be true. Regarding the discourse of literature, the famous detective and amateur connoisseur of art would very likely give full endorsement to Calvino’s discursive recognition (1999: 3-9) that a careful (re-)reading of a classic is bound to surprise us, particularly against the image we might have had of it before.

⁶⁹ Heidegger’s conceptualization of existential incandescence opening up like a most welcome glow in the midst of darkness in the forest appears as a literal visualization-illumination in Hemingway’s “The battler”, a minimalist story about a life-enhancing albeit short-lived and apparently grotesque meeting of two completely un-like but finally additive figures Nick Adams and Ad Francis: “[Nick] cut into the woods to come up to the fire through the trees. ... [A]s he walked between the trees [t]he fire was bright now ... There was a man sitting by it. Nick waited behind the tree and watched. The man looked to be alone. He was sitting there with his head in his hands looking at the fire. Nick stepped *out* and walked *into* the firelight (Hemingway [1993a]: 124, emphasis added). For a large-scale modern conceptualization, cf. Walter De Maria’s famous piece of land-art *The lightning field* (1977).

⁷⁰ D. H. Lawrence ([1965]: 6): “Men are free when they are in a living homeland, not when they are straying and breaking away. Men are free when they obeying some deep, inward voice ... Men are free when they belong ... Not when they are escaping to some wild west. The most unfree souls go west, and shout of freedom. ... Men are not free when they are doing just what they like. The moment you can do just what you like, there is nothing you care about doing. Men are only free when they are doing what the deepest self likes”.

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