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DE SAME OLE HUCK – AMERICA'S *SPECULUM MEDITANTIS*. A (P)RE-VIEW

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This essay is dedicated to Professor Andrzej Kopcewicz, on his retirement from full-time teaching, in celebration of a long academic service of unparalleled dedication and personal generosity.

ABSTRACT

By common agreement, Huckleberry Finn is not only the most American boy in literature, but is also the character with whom American readers of all ages tend to identify most readily and most intimately. Against ready-made assumptions, the paper investigates the protagonist's unique constitution, *modus operandi*, and existential appeal. As a *passe-partout* to the text, it is suggested that Huck is at one and the same time, and as a primary rather than a secondary phenomenon, a small boy as well as a full-grown man. An apparent repository of classically definable un-necessary desires, informed by a combined Carlylean-Melvillean-Whitmanesque discourse of the (magical) mirror, Twain's figure in the carpet emerges as a nuanced negotiation and transposition: *speculum meditantis* – mirror of one meditating, *speculum vitae humanae* – mirror of human life, *speculum totis paria corporibus* – mirror equal to the body of the country at large, and ultimately hyperbolically as utilitarian *speculum humanae salvationis*.

> It is by no means an easy matter, at this late day, to say anything new or fresh about Huckleberry Finn.
> Laurence Hutton (1896)

As regards fame, Seneca notes pedantically that as against for instance love or friendship the opinion of one does not suffice (*ad gloriam non est satis unius opinio*); Arendt, for her part, offers that *Fama*, that powerful and much coveted goddess of fountains – not unlike *Moneta*, the goddess of mnemonics – sports a great many faces, of various sorts and sizes (cf. Arendt 1968: 1-3). Be all that as it may, William Styron makes no bones about it, according to him all one ever

need do to achieve immortality is neither more nor less than simply write a book like *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (see Brewer 2002). To pastiche Yeats's awe-inspiring oxymoronic national chant, towards the end of a peculiarly restless, nervous, bustling American century, amidst much clamor and publicity, a terrible (literary) beauty was born – marked by a twain (pun intended) title, venue and date – after an excruciating eight-year plus delivery, a challenge to the earlier largely genteel and largely meaningless words and worlds.

> "Come slow; push the door open, yourself – just enough to squeeze in," ... I took one slow step at a time, and there warn't a sound, only I thought I could hear my heart … [then] unlocking and unbarring and unbolting. … [I] pushed it a little and a little more, till somebody said, "There, that's enough – put your head in." I done it … and there they all was, looking at me … [t]hey held the candle and took a good look at me … [at last] the old lady says: … "get the wet clothes off from him and dress him up in some of yours" (Twain 2001: 133-134).[1]

Apparently impervious to the formidable verve and flourish of power relations, culture wars, de-gradation, stigmatization, templatization, canon revision and canon formation,[2] Mark Twain garners the highest popular (visage and name) recognition of all American writers (despite his mere 5'8" eclipsing even such commanding figures as Whitman or Hemingway), and the amount of critical commentary generated by the work on which his fame rests is estimated to be in the range of judicial interpretation accorded to the Constitution of the United States. Anecdotally, fifty years ago to date, in the wake of his ill-fated short essay "Why *Huckleberry Finn* is not the great American novel", Van O'Connor (1956: 108) admitted somewhat wryly that to criticize Mark Twain is as irreverent and sacrilegious as to criticize Mother's Day.[3] Also, as Skandera-Trombley

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

Thoreau would have actually wanted "not to live in this restless, nervous, bustling, trivial Nineteenth Century, but stand or sit thoughtfully while it goes by" (Thoreau 1975b: 463); Whitman's response, on the other hand, was "from first to last, to put *a Person*, a human being (myself, in the latter half of the Nineteenth Century, in America) freely, fully and truly on record" (Whitman 1982a: 671). Cf. W. B. Yeats, "Easter 1916".

Twain started writing his most famous novel in July of 1876, it was first published on December 10, 1884 in England as *The adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and on February 18, 1885 in America as *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.*

[2] Cf. Emerson's topical comment: "It is as when a conflagration has broken out in a great city, and no man knows what is safe, or when it will end. There is not a piece of science, but its flank may not be turned to-morrow; there is not any literary reputation, not the so-called eternal names of fame, that may not be revised and condemned" (Emerson 1983a: 407).

[3] Cf. Budd's authoritative overview (1995: 1): "That Mark Twain parades on as a prominent American icon is obvious – visually, audibly, and palpably".

(1994 [1997]: 1) specifically points out apropos of biographical criticism, writing about Samuel Langhorne Clemens has proved to be a near obligatory rite of passage for a whole legion of eminent Americanists.

A rather special combination of voice, dramatis personae, place, and event, though not exactly a passport to exquisite culture, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is reputed to be the most insinuating and the most compelling of all American novels. Moreover, it is probably the only proposition over which the confirmed highbrows and the lowbrows, the upstairs and the downstairs, the toffs and the toughs would be ever likely to come close on the clappometer. Although it is difficult to appraise with accuracy something as nebulous as general impact, it is impossible not to note Huck's versatile signifying presence today, extending as it does from the field of social psychology and cultural politics to the world of entertainment and outdoor fashion, to electricity supply, information technology and e-commerce. The phenomenon can be conveniently dubbed after the eponymous coinage from the first realm as the "Huck Finn Syndrome", in its own right, to borrow from William Carlos Williams, a pure product of America, root and branch, bona fide genuine stuff. Notwithstanding the shifting ideological and outright political agenda brought to bear upon the reading of the novel, notwithstanding the long shadow of the ongoing, often impassioned and acrimonious race controversy surrounding it, notwithstanding the occasional hue-and-cry it raises (or maybe also very much on account of it), Cox's sweeping assessment (1973: 225) is not likely to lose its currency any time soon: "[W]e know that Huckleberry Finn will be part of our future as much as it will have been a part of our past. … There is really no other American book like it".[4]

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[4] Miller's (1967: 229) well-known rhetorical question is not likely to lose its resonance either: "Can Americans imagine what they would take themselves to be if … *Huckleberry Finn* were expunged from the national recollection?". Cf. Hearn's contemporary appreciation (2001: clxv): "*Huckleberry Finn* continues to challenge readers for what it reveals about the American character". Schlesinger, Jr. (1998: 34) has no doubts that *Huckleberry Finn* is a piece of imaginative writing which best expresses the spirit of America: "A strong case can be made for Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*, for Walt Whitman's *Leaves of grass*, for Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The scarlet letter*. But in the end one is compelled to go for *Huck Finn*". Cf. also some recent broader comments: "Mark Twain has indelibly shaped our view of who and what the United States is as a nation and who and what we might become" (Fishkin 1996: 7); "[W]e most need wisdom about who we are and what we stand for, and nobody gave us a better going over than Twain" (Jones 2002: 55).

Besides influencing, more or less directly, such writers as Sherwood Anderson, Ring Lardner, Ernest Hemingway, James T. Farrell, Jerome Weidman, Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, Saul Bellow, J. D. Salinger, John Updike, Russell Banks, Toni Morrison, Cormac McCarthy, Tobias Wolff, Ken Wells, or Alice Greenway, and besides originating something of an American sub-genre of what may be termed the picaresque-grotesque with a succession of works more or less consciously modeled on it, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* has stimulated quite literal continuity and emulation with such different books as Clement Wood's *More adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1940), John Seelye's *The true adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1970), Greg

Smith (1965: 72) is not alone in his appreciation that it is specifically the protagonist's personal attributes and character-traits that make the work a unique, cherished, proud possession of the American people. Unsurprisingly, when Huck is set up by the tandem of Europhile rapscallions, the "King" and the "Duke", to pass himself off for a valet from Sheffield, England, the preposterous, ignominious sham renders him uncharacteristically extremely ill-at-ease and the whole scheme is all but literally laughed out of town: "'Are *you* English, too?' / I says yes; and him and some others laughed, and said, 'Stuff!'" (252). Even if its origins and meaning are somewhat dubious, the charge: "I am not *an* American. I am *the* American" is one of the most widely circulated Twainisms today (see Duncan 2001/2). On first meeting Huckleberry in *The adventures of Tom Sawyer* the image we are offered, with the *fillius terrae* tang of home turf and native soil compensating for legitimacy deficit, is that of a gaudy romantic outcast, happy-go-lucky interloper, artful dodger, free-rider, simple-lifer, do-it-yourself-er, feel-gooder. We learn that he does not have to obey anybody and as his own master apparently has ready access to everything that goes to make life precious; it is hardly surprising that all harassed, hampered, respectable boys should admire and envy Huck, wishing they dared to be just like him. It is precisely this wishing to be like him that seems to be the foundation of Huck's hyper-canonization, of his

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Matthews' *The further adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1983), Steve Cameron's *Brett Favre*: *Huck Finn grows up* (1997), Stephen Stewart's *Huck Finn & Tom Sawyer collaboration; the sequel to*: *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (2002), or Ferrel Glade Roundy's *Huck Finn goes West*: *Memoirs of the legendary American folk hero* (2004). Cf. also the narrative poem "Huck Finn at forty-one" by Jeffrey Franklin (2001), the dramatic monologue "Huck Finn at ninety" by James Schevill (1978), Bernard Sabath's play *The boys in autumn* (1981) featuring Huck and Tom as middle-aged men in the Roaring Twenties, Lee Smith's *The last girls* (2002) subtitled by one reviewer "Huckleberry Fin de Siecle", and Nancy Rawles's nuanced critical dialogue with Twain's work, a retelling of the story of Jim from the point of view of his wife, *My Jim*: *A novel* (2005). Generally, any modern American novel written as a colloquial monologue gets almost automatically associated with Huck Finn, especially if it employs a teenage narrator (also if it be female). Rexroth's comment (1986: 205) is straightforward enough: "*Huckleberry Finn* sets the tone and pattern for hundreds of American novels after it"; cf. also Peck's more specific (1993: 554): "Huckleberry Finn never dies, and our books feature Hucks of both sexes, and often suburban". Owing to its rather many artistic im-perfections, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* proves finally to be a work that could not be possibly ever duplicated by imitators (see Gribben 1988: 16); (this is where it might be perceived as a clearing of the ground for the graceless genius of Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* [1900], a book recognized as the worst-great American novel). In a wider perspective, it is well worth recalling at this point Arendt's (1968: 3) astute appreciation of Kafka's art, a comment that can be applied also to a more recent inimitable American prodigy, Donald Barthelme: "Innumerable attempts to write a la Kafka, all of them dismal failures, have only served to emphasize Kafka's uniqueness, that absolute originality which can be traced to no predecessor and suffers no followers". For the discursive embeddedness of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in American culture at large cf. Wolfson's (2003: 19) broad intertextual appreciation: "Huck and Mark Twain have stolen their material from Fred Allen, Jack Benny, Groucho Marx, Lenny Bruce, Steve Martin, and Mel Brooks, to name a few".

talismanic status as an all-American icon, potent cultural signifier, and object of near personality cult. A popular early-twentieth-century Huck Finn song is not so much about a boy by the name of Huckleberry Finn as about a grown man wishing he were that very boy:

> If I were Huckleberry Finn;
> I'd do the things he did, I'd be a kid again.
> You'd always find me fishin' beside a shady pool;
> Wishin' there never was a school;
> If I were only Huckleberry Finn,
> In ev'ry mischief I'd be in;
> …
> How I wish I were him.[5]

The extent of Huck's seductive appeal is probably best indicated by the paradoxical admission made by Ellison (1958: 222), one of the most distinguished, high-profile African-American figures of the twentieth century: "I could imagine myself as Huck Finn … but not, though I racially identified with him, as Nigger Jim", arguably an ultimate proof that "[t]here is a bit of Huckleberry Finn in all of us" (Hanford – Snarey 2001: 293). This is how, to twist Mark Twain's own words into a prophetic albeit totally coincidental line: "H[uck] still lives; or rather, *they* live" (Clemens 1977: 286) – the successive generations of Americans discovering, requisitioning, and indefatigably reinventing him anew, in terms of most immediate response trying to emulate (if only as vicarious fantasy) the bravado, the jauntiness, the rough-and-tumble, the defiance, the boisterousness, the abandon, the hardiness, the wittiness, the freedom, the licentiousness, the fun, the laziness, the delinquency.[6] Owing to Huck, America still

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[5] It is a ragtime tune by Joe Young with words by Sam M. Lewis and Cliff Hess (cited in Fadiman 1962: 63); the year the song was written – 1917 – happens to be the date of the first screen appearance of a character named Huckleberry Finn; the first full-fledged movie adaptation of the novel dates 1920.

[6] A considerable part of Huck's appeal clearly depends on the spirit of the American errant outlaw. Some of his adventures seem to echo the exploits of a representative, as Thomas Wentworth Higginson describes him, eighteenth-century trickster Henry Tufts, whose whole life was spent either in eluding pursuers or in giving society reason to pursue him anew: "His system of living reached a singular perfection. When he needed food he took it, wherever he found it … as when he stole a beehive and carried it some distance … When he needed a pair of boots, he looked out for a shoemaker's shop, and contrived to be near it at nightfall. In respect to linen, for him the land seemed covered with clothes-lines" (Higginson 1888: 606). Huck-Finn-life-style perceived in this spirit is emulated by Jack Crossie's *Bad boy*: *Growing up wild in the American West during the Great Depression of the Thirties* (2000). Cf. also R. Kent Rasmussen's (1995) compilation of essays, sketches and stories about "the joys of misbehaviour" *Mark Twain's book for bad boys and girls.*

looms or rather beckons, in the words of Kesey's unambiguous reference (1964 [1971]: 227), as "a land for childhood frolic" where one can "trade rats and capture beetles", and where one can entertain, as Garland had earlier (1899 [1961]: 423) idealized it, "all the other now vanished pleasures of boy life".[7]

It was Thomas Bailey Aldrich who in 1869 formally introduced into American literature the "bad boy", such as you might have admittedly met anywhere in New England, "I did not want to be an angel and with the angels stand" (Aldrich 1996: 1-2), a counterpoint to the pathetic heroine of Maria Susanna Cummins's massive bestseller of 1854 *The lamplighter*, "No one loved her, and she loved no one", "eight years old and all alone in the world" (Cummins 1988: 2). Charles Dudley Warner's 1877 *Being a boy* opens with the assertion that this condition-position is one of the most delectable things in the world imaginable, the only disadvantage being that "it does not last long enough" (Warner 2002: 3). A *bon diable* rather than a *bon camarade* affair, this communication depends on the assumption that "the bad boy is the norm, and that for all his badness he is still lovable" (Macaigne 1983: 326). Randolph in Henry James's *Daisy Miller* seems to be a logical development down this line of juvenile abandon, identified intertextually in terms of the anthropological fantasy of pre-settlement (pre-agricultural) "'romp[ing] on from day to day, from hour to hour, as they did in the Golden Age'" (James 1878 [1985]: 66). Etched against the backdrop of well-behaved European (rather incredulously, Polish) boys strolling about in the Trois Couronnes gardens with their governors, Randolph, equipped by nature with bright, restless, penetrating little eyes, appears as a perfect American urchin. He is effervescent, precocious, assertive, adventurous, recalcitrant, for all intents and purposes establishes himself as his own master, and rambunctiously stands (up) for the spirit of his country. However, Randolph tends to get condescendingly naturalized as one-dimensional type, a literal *enfant terrible*, an obstreperous parody of (young) America, ineffectual comic relief, or simply an unavoidable minor nuisance, and as such does not support the larger thesis. When out of a total, determined, sleepless opposition to the alien ambiance and the whole adult society Randolph (sporting knickerbockers, red stockings, a provocative cravat, and brandishing an oversize sharp alpenstock to boot) cries (specifies) in his hard, truculent little voice for all the world to hear: "'I'm going up the Alps!'" – "'This is the way!'" (James 1878 [1985]: 7), the announcement, very simply, just because he is just a child, does not impress anybody in the slightest. Implicitly, the additional unpropitious circumstance is the very suggestion of a departure from the solidity of the surface. As Henry David Tho-

[7] For a discussion of the general subject see Steven Mintz's (2004) wide ranging study *Huck's raft*: *A history of American childhood*; also, cf. Don Brown's (2003) illustrated book for children *American boy*: *The adventures of Mark Twain*.

reau (1975a: 520) concluded over his own abortive climbing expedition: "The tops of mountains are among the unfinished parts of the globe", "[t]his ground is not prepared for you". It has been observed more than once that the whole of human history proves to be rooted in the earth, but it is Americans who are believed to be peculiarly Antaean, or geotropic, they expect daily to be shown tangible matter so that they might come directly into contact with it: "the *solid* earth! the *actual* world! the *common sense*!" (Thoreau 1975a: 525).[8] Charles Olson (1947: 114) explains famously that "only in touch with the land and water of the earth do we keep our WEIGHT, retain POTENTIAL".

With his two feet firmly on the ground, in no danger of slipping/falling through the rabbit hole, Huck's special appeal is not a case of a mere infantile infatuation, capricious autobiographical longing to be a little child again for one bright summer-day, habitual nostalgic childhood throwback, or boys-will-always-be-boys logic. Reminiscing, given the unique advantage of hindsight, most people do at one time or other wish they were children once more (sun-baked leaves wishing to be green with youth again), but hardly anybody would be actually prepared to give up their hard-won experience, entitlements, allowances, habits, regimens, allurements, pleasures, wisdom, and generally social status as adults. When, in a broader context and with a somewhat different emphasis and overall intent, Bercovitch (2002: 118) dramatizes the rapport between the hero of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and his fans as: "Huck belongs *only to us*. We adopt him; we take him into our hearts; we interpret him in our likeness; … we appropriate Huck as the child-in-us", this is really missing a larger point. This appreciation seems to be but echoing a conventional outsider/stranger response in Chapter 11, namely the inadequate coaxing, patronizing, adoptive, finally insincere: "'You just tell me your secret, and trust me. … Tell me all about it, now – that's a good boy'" (73), of and to which Huck remains appropriately enough suspicious and unresponsive to the very last. While (on Alfred Kazin's authority) it is impossible to imagine Tom Sawyer as anything but a boy, the projection made imaginatively available by Huck's story is

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[8] To the highly acclaimed nature writer Edward Abbey "walking uphill … [is] not only unnatural but so *unnecessary*" (2000: 304). At the outset of his official handbook *Boy Scouts of America* (1910: 1), Ernest Thompson Seton announces: "Those live longest who live nearest to the ground". To quote some random voices for good measure, recalling his first encounter with America a contemporary narrator identifies it as "another kind of place entirely": "Everybody was on the surface of the country, flat on his feet" (Saroyan 1988: 2); indeed, Updike's (1962: 168) Kern-*land* protagonist is reassured and made proud by "the sight of bare earth that has been smoothed and packed firm by the passage of human feet"; finally, in a postmodernist nouvella, French visitors immediately upon arrival start savouring (tasting as well as testing) the local groundedness, situatedness, and surfaceness; soon, they are able to confirm the exhilarating difference: "This is America, he exultantly tells Jill. Feel it, feel it … doesn't the surface feel different…" (Abish 1975: 35, ellipsis in original).

much more "strange and unregular" – "[you] never see nothing like it" (239).[9] Most emphatically, however, it is a product of so much more than simply his paradigmatically liminal nominal age of "thirteen or fourteen or along there" (134), which is indicated doubly conjecturally, indirectly, inferentially, apropos of somebody else and only well into the story at that. The present case seems to be a different can of beans and a different ball-game, so to speak. As Huck puts it straightforwardly in the earlier volume: "'I ain't everybody'" (Twain 1982: 212). The classical blanket theme of initiation believed to be central to the book does not apply here classically at all since the protagonist is not exactly an abecedarian, neophyte, initiate or liminar poised on the precipice of an inevitable trans-figuration. His is not what James Fenimore Cooper calls "the hobbledehoy condition" when one has lost the graces of childhood without having yet attained the finished form of man (cf. Cooper 1845 [1962]: 368). While there is, as at all times and everywhere, an element of ongoing *pathe mathos*, setting out on his journey Huck is anything but a a lump of soft wax, empty cabinet or *tabula rasa*.[10] He is in no need of any specialized patronage, tutelage, and toughening up since he has effectively, to use his famous words, "been there", meaning through practically everything, before (the one real exception is possibly "a real bully circus … the splendidest sight that ever was" [191]). Besides being effectively an orphan and having to deal with all the nitty-gritty all by himself, in the previous volume alone Huck's brush or rather face-on encounter with the raw stuff of life includes grave-robbery, suspected necrophilia, murder, death of starvation, blackmail, court trial, as well as advice on how to best get revenge on a woman: "'[Y]ou don't kill her – bosh! You go for her looks. You slit her nostrils – you notch her ears, like a sow's!'" (Twain 1982: 176).

Huck's uniqueness may to a better effect be appreciated in terms of Ray Bradbury's classic (quasi-gothic) fantasy of aging and de-aging set in the emblematic Mid-Western Green-Town, *Something wicked this way comes* (1962). Actually, what comes even closer to the marrow of the present matter, so to speak, is the early postmodernist school-boy fantasy in Donald Barthelme's

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[9] See Kazin (1984: 193); actually, Kazin's overall perspective proves to be ultimately also reductive since he believes that both Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn "never grow up" (Kazin 1984). Huck's "unregularity" seems to be really a case of systemic (quid pro quo) somersaulting or literal volte-facing prefigured for example by the story the hero tells Mrs. Loftus of how he would (before it actually establishes itself as *modus operandi* of the journey down the river) supposedly travel nights and sleep daytimes.

[10] Classically, Huck's great near-contemporary John Stuart Mill (estimated to have boasted the IQ close to 200) did not know how to tie his shoe laces until he was twelve, and he never learnt to play cricket, though he would receive tutoring in the art of fencing when he was sent to France at the age of fourteen. Equally paradigmatically and equally famously, Theodore Roosevelt resolved to re-make his puny, frail and sickly body into a strong, vigorous frame exactly at the age of fourteen.

"Me and Miss Mandible" (published originally in 1961 as "The darling duckling at school"), where a thirty-five-year-old man is formally recognized as an eleven-year-old boy. Not only does he get to (re)experience from a privileged bench(mark) the sixth-grade-classroom culture but, given his unchanged six-foot-one, baritone voice and "hair in the appropriate places", in due course he also unashamedly gets to enjoy in the cloakroom, during recess, Miss Mandible's (the homeroom teacher's) "naked legs in a scissors" around his waist (the reader is actually advised that once learned, the "matter" of sex is something that can never be forgotten) (see Barthelme 1982: 34-35, 28-29). Abstractly, Huck's seems to be precisely a case of fantastic double-helix age (and status) hybridity, allotropism, and cross-wiring. Facetiously, it is certainly possible, in fact tempting, to see the present condition in terms of Baron Munchausen's horse cut in two by the portcullis or, to use Twain's own intertextual reference, "'dat chile dat [King Salomon] uz gwyne to chop in two'" (94). But the real point, actually a real *passe-partout* to the text is that the author's figure in the carpet proves to be at one and the same time, and as a primary rather than a secondary phenomenon, a small boy as well as a full-grown adult.[11] To borrow from Whitman (1982b: 203, 191), Huck's is a case of "a child as well as a man, / Stuff'd with the stuff that is coarse and stuff'd with the stuff / that is fine" – "[e]xactly the value of one and exactly the value of two". Obviously, commonsensically, some such proposition is a concoction of parts that do not match, that make no positive *ensemble* (cf. James 1878 [1985]: 9). It is finally feasible only as a legerdemain, see-saw, ventriloquist, supernumerary sleight-of-hand-and-mouth that belongs properly with the carnivalesque *Wunderkammer*. Descartes constructed his magisterial philosophical system on the principal indivisibility of the mind and Locke would later insist it is an empirical absurdity to suppose that man might have two separate identities. It takes a very *Strange case* indeed to propose, as Scottish-English author Robert Louis Stevenson did in 1886, that man is not truly one but truly two, and it is likely only in *An imaginary life* of Publius Ovidius Naso (courtesy of David Malouf, 1978) that one may simultaneously move about in two different worlds, against humanness and animalness at that.

Conceptually, when we hear from the author that Tom Sawyer is a combination of characteristics, and as such belongs properly to the composite order of architecture (see Twain 1982: 3), this actually seems to be identifying the ontological condition of Huck. This extra-ordinary condition is dramatized for everybody to appreciate by Huck's peculiar trademark, namely his picturesque,

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[11] Under normal circumstances, as James Fenimore Cooper (1828 [2001]: 6) invokes the two figures/concepts in a larger context, this is setting up a self-invalidating twit: "What should we think of the boy whose intellect, and labours, and intelligence, were drawn into bold and invidious comparison with those of aged and experienced men!".

oversized, Chaplinesque, rhizomorph attire, a livery of sorts, and as such a flashy, bombastic sartorial communiqué. Most of the time, people conceal themselves in a myriad ingenious ways, but at the same time, more or less advertently, though at all times constitutively rather than gratuitously, each and everybody displays innumerable signs by which we may note, remember, recognize, and know them. Conspicuously hiding in plain sight, so to speak, when we first encounter Huck, in full public view, we learn that he would be preadaptively "always dressed in the cast-off clothes of full-grown men, and they were in perennial bloom and fluttering" (Twain 1982: 45). It is a rather special case of Quintilianian *vestis virum reddit*/*facit* [it is the clothes that make the man]. Importantly, however, Huck is not simply a tatterdemalion, and his is certainly not the well-known Odyssean motivation to sport threadbare clothes of an old man as part of a specific goal-oriented design. Fantastically resourceful and enterprising as he is (cf. note 6), Twain's punk picaro surprisingly matter-of-factly, neither apologetically nor ruefully, concedes: "'I ain't got none but these'" (Twain 1982: 91) – "my old rags" – "'I ain't got no … outfit'" (1, 361).[12] Huckleberry Finn or, to use a recent coinage of *Newsweek*'s Malcolm Jones, "Huckness" (uncannily close to "hucksterism") is such an intriguing proposition not really on account of the masquerades, shape-shifting, tit-tat-to, trente-et-quarante, all kinds of games we all play all the time. For a start, he is certainly a far cry from the charlatan, quack, conjurer, shaman, changling, body artist, braggart, buffoon, or court jester; neither does he enact the indigenous half-horse, half-alligator superhuman stance, nor the humble holy fool or the divine idiot disposition (Wordsworth's idiot boy would have been a perfect model). Twain merges, to reverse a well-known classical aphorism, two human

[12] As Lurie (2000: 16) notes, personal identification necessarily involves "both the human body and its adornment and clothing"; Stanley Cavell extends Wittgenstein's reflection that "a man's style is a *picture* of him" into a whole discourse of the image of the human body as a picture of the human soul (see Mulhall 1996: 388-389).

When the Widow Douglas dresses Huck appropriately to his age and size Huck feels all "cramped up" ("'it don't work'", "'[i]t ain't for me'", "'them blamed clothes that just smothers me … don't seem to any air git through 'em'"); when he finally runs away from the "dismal" regularity of his new situation the first thing he does is to get into his "old rags": "'Now these clothes suits me, … and I ain't ever going to shake 'em any more'" (Twain 1982: 212). Huck might ostentatiously let on that he does not "go much on clothes" (158), but several times he projects exacting descriptions of people's attire and at one point in the story he actually draws our attention to "how clothes could change a body" (204). In Chapter 20, when the "Duke" casts the seventy-odd-year-old "King" in the Shakespearean role of "Juliet" (in the original not yet fourteen, as everybody will readily recall) he assuages him: "'No, don't you worry … you'll be in costume, and that makes all the difference in the world'" (169). Anderson (1947: 70) might well have had Huck in mind when he wrote in his "Chicago" chant: "I am mature, a man child, in America, in the West, / in the great valley of the Mississippi. … / There are no clothes made that fit me".

souls in a single body, whereby it looms as a discourse both imaginary and real, though independent of any sensational feats of divine or magical intervention. Existentially, the real point is that in and through it/him it is uniquely possible, to indulge Janus-faced (Patulcius/Clusivus), *bonum et malum* childhood innocence without having to give up, compromise or even suspend adult bearings and coordinates (and *vice versa*, of course). The child in Huck is spontaneous, sensitive, impressionable, literal-minded, gullible, imitative, inquisitive, inventive, mischievous, forgetful, sheepish, dopey and plain silly ("'[A] perfect sap-head'" – "'[A] blame' fool'" – "'You do beat all, for natural stupidness'" (17, 129, 246). As for the adult facet of Huck, even if our hero clearly lacks what Dr Johnson perceived as the mature person's intricacies and elegancies of knowledge, he proves cerebral, observant, discerning, prescient, self-reliant, assertive, reserved, circumspect, calculating, thrifty and judgmental, he can engage rational discourse, ponder abstract values, recognize and censor "the ignorantest kind of words and pictures" (61), and, quite beside himself, summon up indignation: "I *couldn't* understand it, no way at all. It was outrageous" (292-93). Huck can master not only a determined tone but also a flawlessly pragmatic resolve: "'When I start in … I ain't no ways particular how it's done, so it's done'" (307).[13] He can handle a gun, can appreciate a prime cigar, is something of a bricoleur and a flaneur (Jack-o'-all-trades but a slave to no game). Twain's maverick hero entertains not just puppy love but, somewhat in defiance of the actual biomechanics of emotions, with a full set of hormones projects both sublime romantic feelings ("*flash* comes the light in Mary Jane's window! and my heart swelled up sudden, like to bust" [258]) and sheer erotic energy ("in my opinion she had more sand in her than any girl I ever see … she lays over them all" [244]). Last but not least, and this is where he speaks most directly and poignantly to adults about the challenges, vicissitudes and tribulations of the adult world, he proves susceptible to anxiety and depression, as well as acknowledging the darkest-most existential reach of human nature: "I says to myself, there ain't no telling but I might come to be a murderer myself, yet" (87). (In fact, as an idea for a possible sequel, in 1891 Twain jotted in his notebook: "Huck comes back, sixty years old, from nobody knows where – and crazy … life has been a failure" [Twain 1979: 606]). Many great minds have resignedly concluded that there is finally no understanding the impulses of humans, a point dramatized poignantly as well as cynically by Diogenes wandering around in broad daylight with a lit lantern looking in vain for a "real" human being. On a more positive note, Samuel Johnson offers in his philosophical Abyssinian ro-

[13] This is where Huck can be said to emulate even such a paradigmatically magisterial character as James Joyce's old mother Grogan: "– When I makes tea I makes tea, ... And when I makes water I makes water. / – By Jove, it is tea, Haines said" (Joyce 1922 [1986]: 11).

mance *The Prince of Abissinia*. *A tale* (1759) that while inconsistencies cannot by definition be both right, imputed to man they may very well both prove true. However, it is only with Whitman (1982b: 246) that the openly antithetical personal stance is given unambiguous endorsement: "Do I contradict myself? / Very well then I contradict myself, / (I am large, I contain multitudes)". Reflective of the polarity of the human spirit, a near-Faustian challenge to the physical bounds of existence, such stuff as tempestuous uncensored dreams are made on/of, duality or two-ness/doubleness ("'Maybe I am, maybe I ain't'" [24]) is Huck's quotidian, very nearly substantive and existential constitution throughout, his very special habitat, constituency and range.[14] Rather intriguingly, also in the realm of letters; to use a perfect if in all likelihood perfectly random Shem-Shaun insight from *Finnegans wake* (Joyce 1939 [1963]: 455), this is arguably "Mark Time's Finist Joke".[15] A largely ignored (unsung) aspect of the text, of the narrative, and of the story is that Huck is both a semi-literate and a full-fledged literatus, Finn the Penman (self-apparently, even if not always entirely verisimilarly, the narrative features an astounding plethora of references to signs, codes, hieroglyphics, writing, printing, books, and letters: "'What letters?' / '*Them* letters. I be bound'" [359]).[16] This super-natural, nearly tera-

[14] It is a matter of record that *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* was not Twain's most favourite work (at least not right away – *Joan of Arc* was), and he might not have been fully aware of all the intricacies, subtleties, vibrations and implications of the protagonist's ontological and existential condition, nevertheless he certainly intuited its unique integrity and inviolability. Several times, the writer actually contemplated developing Huck into full-fledged adulthood, but he finally found it impossible. The liminal conclusion of *The adventures of Tom Sawyer* features a rather obvious clue: "So endeth this chronicle. It being strictly a history of a *boy*, it must stop here; the story could not go much further without becoming the history of a *man*" (Twain 1982: 215). In *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* the hero's childishness is most conspicuously, in fact rather embarrassingly exposed when he decides to try Aladdin magic: "I thought all this over for two or three days, and then … I got an old tin lamp and an iron ring, and went out in the woods and rubbed and rubbed till I sweat like an Injun, calculating to build a palace and sell it" (17). On the other hand, the "adult" Huck demonstrates experience, wisdom, sound judgment and foresight: "I never seen anybody but lied, one time or another" (1); "Human beings *can* be awful cruel to one another" (290); "It was enough to make a body ashamed of the human race" (210); "I ain't opposed to spending money … but there ain't no use in *wasting* it" (191). Ostentatiously indifferent to the lure of money as such, Huck applies most astutely the last maxim at the beginning of the book when Jim unashamedly requests money to activate his (highly dubious) magic – "I told him I had an old slick, counterfeit quarter … I reckoned I wouldn't say nothing about the dollar I got from the judge" (21).

[15] There is obviously no shortage of jokes in the book, from the innocent and silly childish bantering about where Moses was when the candle went out – "Why he was in the *dark*" (135) – to the "awful funny" crude and obscene adult prank of "THE ROYAL NONESUCH!!!" (195-196), against which the "literacy" joke must appear finally very fine and/or subtle indeed.

[16] This is where no lesser writer than Robertson Davies misses the point or the joke, if you will, when he has his protagonist Dunny Ramsay roundly denounce the credibility of Huck's literary disposition by calling it "false as harlots' oaths": "I have always sneered at autobiographies and

tological condition is informed by a semi-spectral vision of two angels early on: "'One uv 'em is white en shiny en t'other one is black", further to which "[d]ey's two gals flyin' 'bout … One uv'em's light en t'other one is dark'" (22).[17] This impression is reinforced by the conspicuously "twain" structural properties of the whole book. Appropriately and emotively enough, Huck responds in kind and takes it all in stride: "I liked the old ways best, but I was getting so I liked the new ones, too" (18), even though sometimes it feels "pretty comfortable all down one side, and pretty uncomfortable all up the other" (282). (Two-ness is also projected by the appreciation of Huck's past experiences: "[T]he widow was partly right and pap was partly right" [80].) When at a critical dis-juncture in the story an unequivocal, irrevocable, one-sided commitment is expected of him, it threatens the very foundations of his world: "I was full of trouble, full as I could be; and didn't know what to do" – "I was a trembling, because I'd got to decide, forever, betwixt two things" (269, 270). With all the symmetries and regularities qualified by a-symmetries and irregularities, it is only fitting that Huck should announce early on: "I don't take no stock in mathematics, anyway" (18).

Defying the radical "no more mirror" (cf. Baudrillard 1993, 1994, 2002) skepticism that everything is screened out and nothing is truly reflected any more (even in the perspectival and panoptic, let alone the abyssal realm), Huck doubloon[18] – like mirrors back to the identity-sensitive Americans their double, apparently incongruous nature/self, as it has been for instance succinctly, if also rather casually, articulated by a British classical scholar and poet – as a mixture of incorrigible innocence and diabolical cunning; more extensively, a very similar appreciation has been offered by a Russian-born political scientist and editor: "Americans are generous and niggardly, sympathetic and unfeeling, idealistic and cynical, visionary and practical".[19] Mark Twain seems to have obliquely

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memoirs in which the writer appears at the beginning as a charming, knowing little fellow, possessed of insights and perceptions beyond his years, yet offering these with a false naiveté" (Davies 1970: 15).

[17] Still further, early on: "Sometimes the widow would take me one side and talk … but maybe next day Miss Watson would take hold [of me] and knock it all down" (14).

[18] The Spanish golden *excelente* was called a doubloon both because its nominal value was two ducats, and because it featured a double portrait of the Royal pair, Ferdinand and Isabella. Doubloons were also the first gold coin minted in the U.S.; rare collector items now, a 1787 "E. B. Doubloon" (the initials are of silversmith Ephraim Brasher) was auctioned in 2005 for nearly three million U. S. dollars.

[19] A. E. Housman: "'In every American there is an air of incorrigible innocence, which seems to conceal a diabolical cunning'" (cited in Prokosch 1983: 66); "'America is this', says one observer of American life. 'America is that', says another. It is likely that America is both, because America is a highly polarized field of meaning, but that neither can be fully understood except in relation to the other and to the whole intricate civilization pattern. The study of American civilization becomes thus the study of the polar pattern itself, not a search for some single key" (Lerner 1970:

15, 19-20). Cf. Henry James's perception of the essence of Americanness as "an extraordinary mixture of innocence and crudity" (1878 [1985]: 37). One might also want to invoke here the following exultant exclamation from a later novel by Mark Twain himself: "[W]hat a jumbling together of extravagant incongruities; what a fantastic conjunction of opposites" (Twain 1889 [1988]: 162).

Ever since the Devil for the very first time manifested to mankind its *modus operandi*, diabolical craftiness has been associated with the Serpent. In what presents itself as an intricate intertextual transaction, Huck's, i.e., America's, true nature (as transcribed by A. E. Housman) is fully exposed in *Alice's adventures in Wonderland*. This transpires in a scene of interrogation in Chapter 5 which can be read as a supplement to the opening of Chapter 17 in *Huckleberry Finn* (featuring as its high point Huck's plea of innocence "'I'm only a boy'"): "'W'ell! *What* are you?' said the Pigeon. 'I can see you're trying to invent something!' / 'I – I'm a little girl,' said Alice, rather doubtfully, as she remembered the number of changes she had gone through … / 'A likely story indeed! said the Pigeon … No, no! You're a serpent; and there's no use denying it'" (Carroll 1982: 56).

As a matter of fact, to qualify a point made earlier, Huck's very introduction (in *The adventures* of *Tom Sawyer*) is perfectly antithetical: within a single sentence we learn that he elicits both admiration (from other boys) and condemnation (from their mothers); what adds an interesting rhetorical, oxymoronic, *mise en abyme* is that the parental stance is itself phrased antithetically: "Huckleberry was *cordially hated*" (Twain 1982: 45, emphasis added).

The gist of the present argument happens to coincide with D. H. Lawrence's appreciation of the general condition and indeed spirit of American art; while on the surface it might appear "as nice as pie, goody-goody and lovey-dovey" (mere childishness), a closer look will likely reveal "the inner diabolism"; not a little awed, Lawrence actually calls classic American writers serpents: "Look at the inner meaning of their art and see what demons they were" (Lawrence 1924 [1965]: 78). The thesis is certainly borne out by Whitman's both strikingly candid and rather chilling admission: "I am not the poet of goodness only, I do not decline to be / the poet of wickedness also"; "The pleasures of heaven are with me and the pains of hell / are with me" (Whitman 1982b: 209, 207). For a popular appreciation of American doubleness cf. a comment in Steinbeck's *East of Eden* (1952 [1970]: 570).: "[W]e're overbrave and overfearful – we're kind and cruel … We're overfriendly and at the same time frightened of strangers. We boast and are impressed. We're oversentimental and realistic". Randomly, the American mind-set of dividedness, fascination with polarity and acceptance of disparity can also be seen reflected by the abiding interest in the Beauty and the Beast, the Hip and the Square, Marilyn Monroe's larger-than-life blend of infantilism-innocence and voluptuousness-seductivness, or by the dogged adherence to two-party politics, as well by the paradoxical conjunction of equally strong federalism and presidentialism. It is also worth noting the co-occurrence of crudity and low kitsch, as well as of refinement and high tech in practically every sphere of American life. What presents itself in the context as a telling cultural artifact is Thomas Cole's "The oxbow" (coterminous with the historical time of Huck's story, by the way); this celebrated iconic painting is organized dividually in terms of broken diagonals rather than symmetries and within a compact configuration merges, or rather meanders, the mountains and the lowland, the thunderstorm and the sunshine, the cultivated and the uncultivated. As Tanner, for example, observes in *The American mystery* (2000: 178), Americans tend to "oscillate" between extremes; for Moore (1964: 9), "swinging violently" from one extreme to another is the gist of the American experience. On a different plane of discourse, as articulated by Row (2000: 3), American's interpretations of themselves as a people are informed on the one hand by a powerful imperial drive and an equally potent anti-colonial sentiment on the other hand, specifically: "U.S. writers from the early days of the republic to the present testify diversely to the imperial heritage of the United States and a strong intellectual tradition of challenging the imperialism of the United States along with other global powers".

identified this condition when he spoke about the conflict between a sound heart and a deformed conscience in his hero. As for the real historical person behind it all, Samuel Langhorne Clemens is famous for his volatile ego, his performing self, his many authorial personas (before settling for "Mark Twain" he had tried five other nom de plumes, and afterwards he continued for a time signing his more serious pieces as "S. L. Clemens"), as well as his abiding fascination with freakishness, displacement, mixed blood, twins, composite identities, and quid pro quo.[20] (In his literary portraiture, Edgar Lee Masters describes Twain as "overbelieving, yet skeptical"; "he loved the beautiful, but he was vulgar", he felt "affection for his fellows, yet he distrusted and even despised them" [see Klein 1978: 749]). The central presence of an enchanted mirror or, to explore the Melvillian-Whitmanian analogy further, of a magician's glass which to each and every one speaks at once wisely and foolishly, harshly but truly seems to be precisely what is "'so killing wonderful'" (cf. Melville 1983: 1255) about *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. "I am of old and young, of the foolish as much as the wise" – "the unseen is proved by the seen, / Till that becomes unseen and receives proof in its turn" (cf. Whitman 1982b: 203, 190) – "'call that wise or foolish, now; if it be really wise it has a foolish look to it; yet, if it be really foolish, then has it a sort of wiseish look to it'" (cf. Melville 1983: 1257). Figuratively, contrasted with the perfectly naive and beautiful, read one-dimensional, profile and countenance of Mary Jane Wilks ("'A body can set down and read it off like coarse print'" [242]), an encounter with Huck is both a thrill and a challenge. "[F]or a body to look in and see my face was like looking down a joint of stove-pipe" (66-67). Pantomimically, when after a spell of separation Tom gets to see Huck again, the sensation is so compelling that, literally (a possible case of) agape, "his mouth opened up like a trunk, and staid so" (283). At first this appears to pose a *par excellence* Poesque kind of problem, namely "that '*er lasst sich nicht lesen*'" (cf. Poe 1984a: 396), seems to induce face-blindness (*prosopagnosia*), imply paucity of delineation and vision, or lead to ultimate epistemological despair: "I know him not, and never will" (cf. Melville 1983: 1198). In reality the present proposition links very neatly with Thomas Carlyle's figurative appreciation of the reflective and constitutive properties of the human face: "[A] mirror both scientific and poetic; or, if you will, both natural and magical; – from which one would so

[20] There is no shortage of peripheral intelligence informing this state of affairs, such as the fact that "[t]wo people dominated the early years of Samuel Clemens, one a warm presence [the mother], the other a cold absence [the father]", or the fact that Twain would publicly identify himself (in an after dinner speech in 1901) as "a member of a firm of twins" (see Kaplan 2003: 5, 290). Two-ness or doubleness informs also Mark Twain's own amazing popular personal appeal, quintessentially that of "the ordinary man – plus genius" (Powers 2005: 8). Last and certainly least, the depth of two fathoms regarded as sufficient depth of water for navigation known as "mark twain" is actually the point at which the safe and the dangerous meet.

gladly draw aside the gauze veil; and, peering therein, discern the image of his own natural face, and the supernatural secrets that prophetically lie under the same!" (Carlyle 1839-1869: 52). Significantly, detail-oriented as it overwhelmingly is, the narrative does not feature any word-picture of Huck's countenance.[21] To draw on the logic of Moby-Dick's whiteness, it is only functional that since "face he has none", the face should remain "unpainted to the last" (cf. Melville 1983: 1198, 1077).[22] De-void of conventional signs, shapes and capes, this self-effacing visage invites also the navigational/cartographic appreciation interjected in(to) the course of Lewis Carroll's portmanteau sn(ake-sh)ark hunt: "'[W]e've got our brave Captain to thank'" – "'that he's brought *us* the best–/ A perfect and absolute blank!'" (cf. Carroll 1982: 683). As such, free of any suggestive *tic douloureux*, Huck's face makes ultimately a classical, or more correctly medieval, *speculum meditantis* – literally the mirror of one meditating/ contemplating.[23] Related to Huck "no more than a rabbit", it is Aunt Sally who most propitiously, appetitively and deliberatively (if obviously totally inadvertently), theatricalizes the point:

> "I don't care for that, I'm *so* glad to see you! Dear, dear," …
> [S]he set me down in a split-bottomed chair, and set herself down on a little low stool in front of me, holding both of my hands, and says:
> "Now I can have a *good* look at you; and laws-a-me, I've been hungry for it a many and a many a time" (278-79). [24]

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[21] To offer a perfectly trivial example, the narrative might to a good effect use the following customizable description of a Bobby Button countenance: "He has quite a big head. His eyes protrude and have all the air of saucers. His chin retreats. His mouth is depressed at the corners. He wears a perpetual frown of contemplation" (see Poe 1984b: 461). As far as Huck's visage and physique are concerned, Twain seems to have intuitively subscribed instead to Melville's notorious maxim: "There are some enterprises in which a careful disorderliness is the true method" (cf. Melville 1983: 1180).

For a specific discussion see Beverly R. David, "The pictorial *Huck Finn*: Mark Twain and his illustrator, E. W. Kemble" (*American Quarterly* 26/4: 331-351). Twain was rather disappointed with the first batch of illustrations for the novel, among other things he was displeased with the fact that Huck's face got rendered "'more Irishy than necessary'"; generally "for Mark Twain, the purpose of the illustrations was to diminish the reality of characters and not to represent their personality" (*American Quarterly* 26/4: 334-35).

[22] "True, one portrait may hit the mark much nearer than another, but none can hit it with any considerable degree of exactness. So there is no earthly way of finding out precisely what the whale really looks like. And the only mode in which you can derive even a tolerable idea of his living contour, is by going a whaling yourself" (Melville 1983: 1077).

[23] John Gower's didactic poem by this title was originally called *Speculum Hominis*, corresponding to its French title *Mirour de l'Omme* (1376-79); considered lost, the poem was discovered in 1895 in the Cambridge University Library.

[24] Cf. "'Of course they wasn't brother and sister no more than a rabbit'" (Hemingway 1939 [1993]: 130). The meeting with Aunt Sally is a classic case of mistaken identity, a comical quid

Circumstantially befitting women of their respective ages in front of a mirror, Mrs. Loftus with her shiny eyes was "looking at me pretty curious, and smiling a little" (70), while the Widow Douglas "she cried over me" (2).

To echo the ending of "Song of myself", it is finally all but impossible to know with any degree of certainty who the hero is and what he means. "I answer that I cannot answer" – "[t]here is that in me I do not know what it is – but I know it is in me" (Whitman 1982b: 242, 246). In a larger sense, the book invariably leaves us with the uneasy (existential) feeling that we might have missed something, that very likely there is something larger at stake there; in this sense it looms as an un-put-downable dysfunctional narrative, one we cannot very well leave, one that cannot be pigeonholed or shelved. As everybody knows, it is exceedingly rare for American scientists, intellectuals, and writers to be able to reach effectively any wider audience outside the academia. Even though Huck is not exactly an inspirer, is in fact so much more a common troublemaker than a trouble shooter, he nonetheless proves to be "good health", nutritive "filter and fibre" to Americans (cf. Whitman 1982b: 88), and certainly not pre-eminently on account of the underdog theme his story so richly and emotively entertains.[25] It is the irresistible hypnotic pull of the peculiar mirror Huck sets up, one of magical but also of perturbing powers, one invoking visceral doubts and intuitions present in every man – "'I look, you look, he looks; we look, ye look, they look'" (cf. Melville 1983: 1258) – that informs this unique rapport and intimacy. It explains how with their individual experiences and concerns, anxieties and fantasies the (American) readers standing before, or more properly in front of, *Huckleberry Finn* seem more often than not transfixed, caught in an intense exercise of self-examination, explains how the novel satisfies so many age groups, how it ensures that one can read it at ten and then annually ever after, explains why there is apparently something for every member of the audience in it, and explains how one is more than likely to return sooner or later for another look (cf. Trilling 1977: 319; Sattelmeyer – Crowley 1985: xi; Budd 1986: 18; Robinson 1988: 390).[26] This is then how, appropri-

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pro quo. However, it is possibly instructive that on first seeing Huck, notwithstanding the obvious non-recognition, she should insistently want to relate to him: "'It's *you, … ain't* it?'" (277); in contrast, when Tom Sawyer turns up at the front gate she ventures just as insistently: "'Why, I do believe it's a stranger'" (285).

[25] The popular image of Huck captured by the song lyrics quoted at the beginning of this paper can be legitimately replaced with one of Carl Sandburg's existential reflections "Persons half known" (1970: 101): "I saluted a nobody. / I saw him in a looking-glass. / He smiled – so did I. / He crumpled the skin on his forehead, / frowning – so did I. / Everything I did he did. / I said, 'Hello, I know you.' / And I was a liar to say so. / Ah, this looking-glass man! / Liar, fool, dreamer, play-actor, / … He locks his elbow in mine, / I lose all – but not him". Cf. also Nathaniel Hawthorne's early short story "Monsieur du Miroir".

[26] Cf. Kazin's comment (1981: 287): "[B]oys can read *The adventures of Huckleberry Finn* as

boys and then grow up to read it as an epic of life that adults can identify with"; also Morrison (1996: xxxiii) sees it as a story which pleases Americans as novice readers, and which does not disintegrate as they grow older. Opening with a celebration of a teenage reading of *Huckleberry Finn* as an "extraordinary rush of liberation", Jones's essay on Mark Twain (2002: 54-55) concludes with the recognition: "I am roughly the same age as Twain when he published 'Huck,' [and I find] I agree more and more with my adolescent self". Even though the gist of Santayana's thesis is the prevalence of conflict, his definition of the United States can in itself be usefully related to the present argument (1998: 39): "[It is] a country with two mentalities, one … the beliefs and standards of the father, the other … the instincts, practices, and discoveries of the younger generations"; elsewhere, Santayana identifies America more openly antithetically as "the greatest of opportunities and the worst of influences" (1936: 187). Cf. also E. M. Forster's observation of a more general nature (1951 [1977]: 333): "America is rather like life. You can find in it what you look for".

The recognition of Huck's hybridity might answer the occasional charges that he is not a fully autonomous, rounded, consistent, convincing character (e.g., "[Huck's] psychological and moral nature cannot be fixed and mapped"; "[he is] profound at one moment and trivial the next" [Michelson 1995: 125-128]), and lay to rest the arguments that his story is "impossibility followed by implausibility and linked together by unlikelihood" (Quirk 1993: 100). This is ultimately addressing also the Evasion, i.e., the final sequence, controversy. Stirred originally by DeVoto's perception of the putative "abrupt and chilling descent", Hemingway's "cheating", Marx's "great flaw", it has been kept alive by vigorous, exfoliating but really obfuscating debates since (as Hearn [2001: clxiii] notes: "More seems to have been written about the 'evasion' than any other portion of the novel"). When after the tension, drama and indeed trauma of the preceding events Huck is mistakenly taken for Tom, he simply welcomes the respite of being officially just a child for a change: "[I]t was like being born again … Being Tom Sawyer was easy and comfortable" (282). This, naturally enough, suspends (at least for the time being) the paramount questions of human dignity, loyalty, morality, right and wrong, and (re)establishes instead the ambiance of "howling adventures" which distill themselves before long into utter, ostensibly hilarious, silliness (e.g., "[It was] getting hotter and hotter, and the butter [I was smuggling under my hat] beginning to melt and run down my neck and behind my ears; and pretty soon … aunt Sally she see it, and turns white as a sheet, and says: / 'For the land's sake what *is* the matter with the child! – he's got the brain fever as shore as you're born, and they're oozing out!'" [337]). Curiously unnoticed by most critics, subjecting Jim to gratuitous suffering and humiliation proves to be a classical case of *reductio ad absurdum* or self-de(con)struction since Tom and Huck ultimately prove to set snares for themselves. In the absurd Theater of Cruelty (easily emulating William Hogarth's four stages of vicious cruelty) which the two comrades set up for Jim, the whole sick dream-scheme quite literally backfires as vindictive punishment when Tom gets shot: "'He had a [Western] dream … and it shot him'" (343), or literally shoots himself in the foot masterminding it. Self-reflexively, one is tempted to relate this rather macabre scenario back to the prefatory note by the "Chief of Ordnance" warning that persons attempting to find a plot will be shot. This is how the book seems to project a self-regulating and thus self-validating conscious design (whatever the actual self-consciousness of the author) rather than a lopsided structure for which it is often taken. There appears little need to be adopting a high moral stand of (outside) condemnation. There is more than a little justice in the fact that Huck the abettor and accessory not only gets on his part a cake of butter in/all over the face for his complicity, but also gets verbally ridiculed ("'It ain't no use to try to learn you nothing, Huck'" [305]), to be finally exposed and shamed ("'Come out from under that bed, Huck Finn.' / So I done it. But not feeling brash" [358]). It should be also borne in mind that playing ever so callously with Jim as he does ("[I]f he only could see his way to it we would keep it up all the rest of our lives and leave Jim to our children to get out" [310]), Tom taunts Huck nearly in kind by making him free a free man,

ately articulated by Irving Howe (cited in Bercovitch 2002: 120), "Huck is not only the most American boy in literature, he is also the character with whom most American readers have most deeply identified". He looms quite literally (courtesy of Joseph Campbell) as a hero with a thousand faces or, to extend the medieval analogy, as *speculum vitae humanae* [mirror of human life]. To cut a long story short, Huck proves all-inclusively to be a man for all seasons, a cauldron of plenty,[27] or ultimately all things to all men (I Corinthians 9: 22). While it emerges that even Jim is capable of turning "mighty particular" (fastidious and uncompromising),[28] Huck's characterological makeup is best summarized by the simple statement of fact: "I warn't particular" (128, 4). His great no-frills adage (above all things) is "for everybody to be satisfied" (165). Consequently, to all and sundry he comes across, communicates, appeals precisely as is: *talis quails – semper idem*. Logically, unstuck in time, featuring more than a full bag of marbles, Huck need not age, unfold or develop. In the abstract, his condition can be finally best appreciated in terms of the Aristotelian metastability of *entelecheia*: completeness-in-continuity, sameness-in-change, or being-at-work-staying-itself (cf. Sachs 1995). As Jim in his inimitable manner, in an interjection quite worth the whole book, enthusiastically lauds him: "'[I]t's too good for true. Lemmie look at you, chile, … jis' de same ole Huck – de same ole Huck, thanks to goodness!'" (103).[29]

In the broader context of communication and mass culture, Lefebvre (1991: 416) argues that nothing and no one can avoid "trial" by space, something he calls the modern world's counterpart to the judgment of God and the classical conception of fate. In socio-geographic discourse, all speculations about the nature of space necessarily take into account how the individual mind constructs and applies its own individual cognizance of space (cf. Hiller – Hanson 1984: 30). Huck's is certainly a spatial sensibility, but it is marked by immediacy, tangibility, groundedness, situatedness, referentiality and connectivity – as

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whose captivity, out of his innate sense of guilt ("[I was feeling] humble, and to blame … that's always the way" [290]), makes him nearly worry himself to death ("[I]t makes a body wish *he* was dead, too, and done with it all" [276]).

[27] Cf. Huck's quasi-philosophical reflection on the merits of a culinary "barrel of odds and ends" in which "things get mixed up, and the juice kind of swaps around, and the things go better" (2).

[28] Only apparently a mere exchange of witticisms, when Huck advances the argument that it is only "'natural and right for a Frenchman to talk different from us'", Jim dismisses it out of hand: "'*Well*, den! Dad blame it, why doan he *talk* like [us]? – you answer me *dat!*' / I see it warn't no use … So I quit" (97-98). Actually, in keeping with the quid pro quo logic of the book, Jim is later made to experience the discourse of cultural otherness and negative national stereotyping himself specifically in the guise of an alien subject (sick Arab) imposed upon him by the "Duke", which for a time deprives him of human speech and allows only "a howl or two like a wild beast" (204).

[29] "[H]e undergoes no transformation from the beginning of the novel to the end. Huck's goals, character, and attitudes undergo no noticeable change" (Hoffman 1988: 56).

against tangentiality, extendedness, mobility, distantiality, boundlessness and vastness. Durkheim (1915 [1976]: 11) argues principally that in order to be able to dispose things spatially there must be a real possibility of situating them differently, very simply, more or less methodically, placing "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., etc".[30] 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. It is only highly schematically that Huck could be (and is) made to fit exemplary definitions of "a good traveler" as somebody who is "young, carefree, and gifted with generality and imagination" (Melville cited in Sealts 1957: 182). Some twenty years prior to the writing of his most famous novel Twain himself might have pledged in a private letter: "I always intend to be so situated (*unless* I marry), that I can 'pull up stakes' and clear out whenever I feel like it" (cited in Steinbrink 1991: 1),[31] 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 imposed on him, literally a case of a name become a definition), he is given so much more to sedentary rather than pedentary impulses. Exposing the emperor's nakedness is always an unavoidably awkward affair; also, it is a popular sentiment to hold in contempt those who deliberately destroy (too many) illusions (cf. Emerson 1983b). When asked how traveling through the country or going to Europe would suit him, the (other) most famous nineteenth-century (fellow) (philosophical) scrivener argues cogently: "'Not at all. It does not strike me that there is any thing definite about that. I like to be stationary. But I am not particular'" (cf. Melville 1984: 667). Even if a stereotype is a stereotype is a stereotype, it bears emphasizing that Huck is anything but a classical *peregrinus*, incorrigible itinerant, compulsive wonderer, notorious rambler, habitual rover, dedicated stroller, enthusiastic saunterer, inveterate globe-trotter, bird of passage, or netscape navigator. Notwithstanding all the toing-and-froing, twists-and-turns that make up much of the story, admirably adroit and nimble at getting out of scrapes, tight corners, quirky predicaments and unwanted liaisons, mercurially swift of foot as Huck naturally is, he is not a hothead or tearaway, does not act by fits and starts, leaps and bounds, is not driven hither and thither, higgledy-

[30] "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" (Hoffman 1988: 56).

[31] Letter to mother and sister, 25 Oct. 1861. For a corrective view of Twain as a homebody, product of his culture and siding with the orthodoxy, see Lendal Krauth (1999) *Proper Mark Twain*.

piggledy, hurry-scurry, by every passing whim. Also, what escapes critical commentary is the fact that no more than just over a third of the novel's bulk consists of live action happening actually out in the open, and that no more than just about ten out of the total forty-three chapters can be said to consistently employ natural setting *par excellence* (most of the significant action is not only place-bound but takes place indoors and much of it actually transpires *in camera*, behind closed doors to boot).[32] In a paper on psycho-analysis of space, Schilder (1935: 274) indicates that not enough attention has been paid to the elementary fact that "there is not only a space outside of the body but also a

[32] In his detailed survey "Geography and structure in *Huckleberry Finn*", Michael G. Miller (1980: 192) points out that prior to the Grangefords-Shepherdsons episode the narrative is characterized by spatio-temporal verisimilitude but afterwards (about two-thirds of the bulk) the presence of realistic geographical detail and specification of travel time drops sharply and finally "virtually disappears". As a matter of fact, the geography of the journey seems to project finally the kind of artificial environment established by the railway – "which knows only of departure and arrival points, [which] turns cities into *points* … connected to the diagrammatical railway network that is now the territory" (cf. Colomina 1994: 50).

None-too-fortuitously, the conclusion of the novel establishes beyond peradventure Huck's unenviable status as *nullius filius* [nobody's son]. It is a cultural fallacy, however, bordering on utopian myth-making, to be extending by way of a rather dubious compensation the 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 *terra phantasma* as *terra nulla* – land that does not exist. Just like the tantalizing, forever elusive, blatantly alien/foreign (though to all practical intents and purposes critically important) Cairo earlier on, the famed territory ahead of the rest looms as an impossible mirage, an abstract, void signifier. I believe the shibboleth "to light out for the Territory ahead of the rest" (362) to be informed by the discourse of cultural mis-appropriation; it is a combined red herring, will-o-the-wisp and wild goose chase all in one, and as such is fundamentally at odds with the reality of the text. This point deserves of course a separate discussion, a task which goes beyond the scope of the present paper. Suffice it to note here that Huck's practical topographical awareness as well as his American geography are informed by the "up" and "down", North-South axis, 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 essential to realize that the West does not have any place or permanent/positive association in his mind and it never enters his diction (the idea of escape West *per se* is thoroughly compromised by the apocalyptic and totally gratuitous carnage accompanying the paradigmatically romantic elopement across the river of Harney Shepherdson and Sophia Grangerford, by the way). "Territory" (very nearly like Kafka's trans-continental and limitless "Theater of Oklahoma" at the heart of *America*) is Tom's fanciful construct to begin with rather than a strong form of narrative causal closure: "And then Tom he talked along, and talked along, and says, le's … go for howling adventures amongst the Indians, over in the Territory". The coast-hugging Huck immediately/instinctively counters this proposition with a double (albeit conventional and therefore lame) objection: "I ain't got no money … and I reckon I couldn't get none from home" (361). Tom's final grand idea confirms for the hundredth time his hoity-toity con-stitution. It is only consistent with his distinctive grandiloquent, effusive, cavalier, self-infatuated, hornswoggling, meretricious dilettante scope and sheer out-landishness extending not just "plumb to the mouth of the river" (360), but all the way to China (304).

space which is filled by the body". Lefebvre (1991: 407) goes so far as to accuse the whole Western philosophy of having betrayed, abandoned and outright denied the human body per se. It was only relatively recently that the critical thought at last re-discovered "the primacy of the body and the hand" (see Althusser 1994: 215). In their different ways Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Eugene Gendlin, for instance, have persuasively argued for the substantiality and immediacy of the body, indicating that however conspicuously distinct from the world it might appear, it is really never separate from it; the body is not just an instrument or a means, not just the essential anchorage, but a fundamental human communication, in its own right a most visible form of our intentions. Huck entertains a healthy corporeal and postural agenda by subscribing to the variously transliterated and attributed popular creed of quiescence, somewhat disparagingly called "catism": don't run if you can walk, don't walk if you can stand still, don't stand if you can sit down, don't sit if you can lie down, and don't stay awake if you can take a nap. Temperamentally and, if the whole truth be told, not a little embarrassingly, reclining is Huck's preferred posture, napping his favourite break, and putting up feet something of an impolitic personal trademark, an out-standing manifestation of the materiality and emplacement of the body. It ought to be stressed, however, that for all this Huck is no idler. With a circular *riverrun* nod to the opening "You don't know about me, without you have read a book" (1), the end of the story, reminiscent of a certain studious Hawthornian protagonist, sees the hero poised in an unspecified scriptorium, irredenta of sorts, with a pen between his fingers, self-consciously, if also conventionally self-deprecatingly, manufacturing (tackling the making of) a book out of the vast tract of *scriptura continua* behind him.

The logic, ethics, and appeal of the composite pre-position out-away-towards (the step beyond, or *pas au-dela*) is irresistibly superior to the logic, ethics, and appeal of the hum-drum "at" (any one station, or *Setzung*). By this late moment (cf. Alter 2005: 6) in this day and age of postmonotheistic, antipatriarchal disequilibrium, otherness, skepticism, detachment, doubt and suspicion, given systematized, for instance academic, modes of ratiocination and discursive practices, sufficient readiness and eagerness of speech, as well as adequate pressure, pretty much everything, particularly values and judgments, can be decentered, disaggregated, deterritorilialized, re-contextualized, rendered perspectival, prejudicial, and relative (ultimately ruinous and sepulchral). Twain's single most famous creation is an autopoietic protean transposition, transmigration, transmutation, oscillation, meditation, conveyance, juncture, nexus, convergence, and accretion. Operating between the parochial and the universal, it elasticates and links different routes, itineraries, agendas and destinations, but, *nota bene* [mark well], it communicates a superpositional condition of a tangible, embedded comportment rather than one of putative originary deficiency, intrac-

table subterranean conflicts, absent-presence-within-traces-of-non-being, continual slippage, aporetic deferral, penumbral diffusion, ongoing adventitious supplementation, infinitesmality, oppressive contradictions, provisionality, or simply general incommensurability. While, understandably and regrettably enough, Jim is vulnerable to depredations of ontological volatility, proves all but literally out of phase with himself: "'Is I *me*, or who *is* I? Is I heah, or whah *is* I?'" (103), Huck, despite the dizzying array of aliases he goes through, despite appearing on two occasions as a ghostly apparition and on another one as a girl, keeps happily re-asserting himself: "I was so glad to find out who I was" (282), projecting a Witmanesque robustness and resilience throughout. This is, incidentally, the great quintessentially American paradox about the figure of Huckleberry Finn (and, certainly to the acolytes, pundits, and enthusiasts, the figuration of the country's genius, or its grand design). A suspected case of attention deficit, hyperactivity and multiple personality disorder, a feared instance of *globus hystericus*, marred by some fundamental, deeply entrenched fault lines, ostensibly divided against itself, facet against facet, fact against fact, not only does it nonetheless incongruously, inexplicably crystallize and cohere but, with minimal risk of overstatement, proves to work like a charm. In nascent postmodernist diction, Gass (1968: 186) might have intuited in *In the heart of the heart of the country* an uncanny "dissonance of parts and people", even earlier Bell (1952: 3) might have posited that "[t]he chief threat to America comes from within America", but time and again it turns out to be a discourse of inverted bifurcation; quite resolutely: sedimentation more than fluidization, compacting more than refracting, converging more than diverging, expanding more than contracting, progressing more than regressing, finally, or is it consequently, actuality as much as possibility. *Obiter dictum*: Derrida's often-quoted pronouncement that America itself is deconstruction certainly does not warrant literal reading; it was most likely inspired by Heidegger's (negative) cavalier political equation of Americanness with measurelessness, and was actually meant as a deferential personal tribute to de Man (cf. Derrida 1986, 1987).

By way of reiterating the central argument of this paper, Huck's special hold on reality and his remarkable personal magnetism, "I was a kind of a hub of a wheel, as you may say" (277), can be, metafictionally, appreciated as projected in Chapter 8 by the *tableau vivant* party peering into the waters of the Mississippi in search of his corporeal body: "Most everybody was on the boat [children, grown-ups, old aunt Polly], and plenty more. … They all crowded up and leaned over the rails, nearly in my face, and kept still, watching with all their might" (47).[33] As

[33] That it can be perceived as a dramatization of America's search for identity is intertextually suggested by a similar scene in *Moby-Dick*: "[C]rossing the deck from the scuttle, Ahab leaned over the side; and watched how his shadow in the water sank and sank to his gaze, the more and

Melville offers at the very beginning of his *magnum opus*, the meaning of some such scene goes much deeper than the standard two fathoms, apparently that same image we ourselves see in all rivers and oceans: "It is the image of the ungraspable phantom of life; and this is the key to it all" (cf. Melville 1983: 797)

In more specific terms of issue-, attitude- and value-driven cultural discourse, aspirationally, ideologically, dispositionally, declaratively, tactically, as is always the case, the case of the unprecedented purchase Huck has on popular imagination, though by no means an orderly choir practice in a jeweller's shop, to use an Orwellian locution, is an altogether more manifest affair, one that has engendered more than adequate response. This is how, as has been noted more than once, all discussions of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* do indeed turn sooner or later into topical discussions of America itself, a construct, as bears repeating, founded on a set of beliefs. This is where Huck's final dis-closure sets up a much larger mirror, *speculum totis paria corporibus*, mirror equal to the body of the country at large; ultimately, to recall Frantz Fanon's classic conceptualization, as "the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify, and praise the action through which that people has created itself" (cited in Berlant 1991: 21).[34] When Pap lengthily and sound-

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the more that he strove to pierce the profundity" (Melville 1983: 1372-1373). In *Huckleberry Finn* there extends an additional mirror-dimension to the search-party scene; it obtains when, hidden in the foliage, Huck gets from his vantage the benefit of a see-through mirror: "I could see them first-rate, but they couldn't see me" (47). Earlier, Pap's critical assessment of Huck's room at the widow Douglas's offers within the space of two consecutive lines: "'*Ain't* you … a look'n-glass'" (24), which happens to be the only reference to a real mirror in the entire book. The whole doubloon analogy is traceable in the episode of the (compensation) nickel Tom leaves behind for Jim early on: "Jim always kept that five-center piece around his neck with a string and said it was a charm the devil give to him with his own hands and told him he could cure anybody with it … Niggers would come from all around there and give Jim anything they had, just for a sight of that five-center piece" (8). Instructively, the novel does not allow for any mirror rapport between Jim himself and the outside world; after he runs away, when he is ostensibly his own man ("'[N]ow; come to look at it. I owns myself'" [57]) we first see him on Jackson's Island as an alien 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. Queequeg's (lack of) response to to the doubloon in *Moby-Dick*: "No: he don't know what to make of the doubloon; he takes it for an old button off some king's trowsers" (Melville 1983: 1257).

[34] Taylor ([1992]: 4) calls it a logos of "strong evaluation", as informing social and cultural determinations which do not really reflect our personal inclinations, desires, values or choices. It is a transaction whereby one ceases to act oneself and perceives and judges like another or like the collective Carlylean "swarmery", or the more contemporary "they" in the "publicness" of mass media and broadly speaking cultural mores ("we find 'shocking' what *they* find shocking" [cf. Heidegger 1962: 164-165]). Ideologically, it is not exactly the protagonist's special ontology that makes the work a special, coveted possession of the American people. Americans are said to (re)read the story to assuage bothered conscience and generally to make themselves feel better. This is how Huck can be said to take on the guise of *speculum humanae salvationis* [mirror of human salvation]. This brings into the equation the perennial (national) American fantasy-

meditation of humility, peace, moral honesty, equality, sensitivity, generosity and gratitude, the egalitarian creed of what is best and oldest in man, in other words a precious (lost) blueprint for a rewarding living. In the essay "Paradox and dream" (2002: 338), Steinbeck offers: "[We] hope we may be: wise, just, compassionate, and noble. The fact that we have this dream at all is perhaps an indication of its possibility". Along with the inordinate desire, in Calvin Coolidge's words, "to be supremely American" (see Michaels 1995: 3), Americans "generally want to think of [them]selves as good people" (Hunter 1994: 14). According to Mailer (1984: 37), *Huckleberry Finn* is such an enduring, ongoing treasure precisely because it enables Americans to think freely that there is "more good than bad in the sum of us and our workings". Harold Bloom (1986: 1) explains that the novel harbours a story which most Americans anxiously want to believe is a true representation of the overall way things "were, are, and yet might be"; the story gets ultimately transcribed, as Arac (1997: 62) puts it, as "a talisman of self-flattering American virtues". With a historicist focus, Myers (1998: 557) posits it is legitimate to speculate that "in his innocent, un-self-conscious way, Huck both continues and corrects the work of the American revolutionaries". The fundamental(ist) thesis (a kind of moral gyroscope, and a vocal challenge to the Manichean heresy) excited towards the book's end is uncompromisingly and refreshingly clear: "'It ain't right, and it ain't moral, … – because right is right, and wrong is wrong, and a body ain't got no business doing wrong when he ain't ignorant and knows better'" (307). The high ideological and moralistic (turning) point of the novel, celebrated as arguably the greatest single meritorious moment in all American literature, is when Huck seems to finally overcome the demons of racism and as "antidote to hate" (cf. Wolfson 2003) heralds, even at the expense of his own after-life, the compassionate, compensatory, curative, redemptive resolution to "go to work and steal Jim out of slavery again" – "as long as I was in, and in for good, I might as well go the whole hog" (271). Rising from the lowest of the low to the highest of the high, a sort of philosopher's stone or a rejected stone become the cornerstone, Huck promulgates and indeed warrants the fundamental-most, indispensable American belief: "Most human beings [Americans] always strive to do the 'right thing'" (Bowers 2005: 5). This is also where *Huckleberry Finn* answers the discourse of the recent broadly representative socio-cultural study *America's crisis of values* by Wayne Baker, whose solemnly declared main concern reads: "[*M*]*oral values* – fundamental values about right and wrong, good and evil, noble and base – that live in the hearts of people" (Baker 2005: 3). As Schildkraut (2005: 5) points out, there is no shortage of evidence to support the thesis that the way Americans define themselves as individuals constitutes an important influence on how they feel about specific political issues. It is still fresh memory how, with the shield of righteousness and the sword of truth, Ronald Reagan would announce global war "between right and wrong and good and evil" (cited in Jewett – Lawrence 2003: 4), a rhetoric central to the post-9/11 politics of George W. Bush. For a wider discussion see e.g., Andrew Delbanco (1999) *The real American dream*: *A meditation on hope* and Anatol Lieven (2004) *America right or wrong*: *An anatomy of American nationalism*.

Consensus among scholars is obviously a contradiction in terms. Besides, most audibly, the Pulitzer Prize-winning author Jane Smiley (particularly relevant in the context for her 1998 counter-proposition *The all-true travels and adventures of Lidie Newton*, though elsewhere she is careful to stress she holds no grudge against Huck himself), one of the few sobering voices is that of Arac (1999: 770), who cautions generally that *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* "means too much to too many people, and they want it to do too much". In the essay "The crowded raft and its critics", author J. C. Furnas was probably the first to actually expose the massive over-interpretation of the novel, with the academic wear-and-tear as his specific target; however, as a self-declared Finnophile, Furnas himself inflates Huck into an archetypal "atomic, incorrigible maverick" (1985: 517-524). Even though Huck is not a star likely to collapse under the weight of its own gravitational field, it is certainly worth acknowledging Budd's (1983: 240-241) seasoned observation that "[m]aking *Huckleberry Finn* carry so much of Twain's essence has put it under inhuman

lessly, read greedily, feasts his eyes appraising (his frustrated civic and pecuniary claims to) Huck, the image the scene projects is worth more than the proverbial thousand words: "I stood … [and] he set there a-looking at me, with his chair tilted back … He kept a-looking me all over" (23). To draw one more time on *Moby-Dick*'s *excelente* sapientia and eloquentia for a final glance:

> [T]his doubloon was of purest, virgin gold, raked somewhere out of the heart of gorgeous hills, whence, east and west, over golden sands, the head-waters of many a Pactolus flow … [T]hough placed amongst a ruthless crew and every hour passed by ruthless hands, and through the livelong nights shrouded with thick darkness which might cover any pilfering approach, nevertheless every sunrise found the doubloon where the sunset left it last. For it was set apart and sanctified (Melville 1983: 1253).[35]

Post terminum, a rather fundamental caveat seems in order. No mystery, no revelation, and no communication will ever obtain within a looking glass until someone shall elect to look truly attentively into it, and the same holds *a fortiori* true for even the most renowned and the most sublime works of art.[36] Moreover, it is not exactly exclusive to the nature of the (written) sign that it should prove inherently capable, always, of not arriving (cf. Derrida 1987: 444). As Huck in his disposition and station as a "sad-eyed boy" (cf. Emerson 1983b: 1117) and a "motionless young man", who is always "*there*" (cf. Melville 1984: 641, 648), notes: it happens frequently enough that "'a [particular] body can see and don't see, [really]'" (291).

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pressure and isolated it with a now deadening reverence that prejudices his other writings".

[35] In *Moby-Dick* the doubloon's nominal value is estimated to be in the range of twenty dollars; hyperbolically, the coin can be seen as doubled in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in the guise the two twenty-dollar gold pieces Huck (rather incredulously) gets off two slave-hunters in Chapter 16. Huck splits the bounty equally with Jim and treasures his coin so carefully that (even more incredulously) it survives both the apocalyptic collision with the steamboat and the no-less violent turmoil of the Grangefords saga (we never learn how Jim actually handles and whatever happens to his share, by the way). Advertently or not, this deposit, "my twenty-dollar gold piece", is endowed with even greater significance when Huck reckons he had "better save it, because there ain't no telling how soon you're going to need it … [y]ou can't be too careful … there ain't no use in *wasting* it" (191); cf. also latter part of note 14. (Historically-wise, born of the California Gold Rush, the twenty-dollar gold piece, known affectionately as the Double Eagle, is the largest and most impressive of all U.S. coins; since a face-lift in 1907 it has been recognized by many as the most beautiful coin ever minted; in 2002 a double eagle dated 1933 was auctioned off for over seven million U.S. dollars; to compare: the 36-meter scroll on which Jack Kerouac wrote his cult open-road classic fetched in 2001 a literary world record bid of $ 2.4 million.).

[36] Cf. Goddard (1960: 331); Goddard's specific conceptualization happens to illuminate a pivotal argument of the present paper: "Then, though it remains the same glass, it presents a different face to each man who holds it in front of him" (Goddard 1960: 331).

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