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

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

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

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1 In a quasi-Twainian manner, this discussion forms an anti-sequel to the (p)re-view “De same ole Huck” (Semrau 2006). In a like fashion, it is also dedicated to “de same” Professor Andrzej Kopcewicz – studentium totiusque generis humani amico.
tainty of identity in time to rely upon spatial means of coming to terms with the complexities of existence and with one’s own self. The stated classic purpose of geography is the explanation of the landscape, appreciation of land in terms of distributions and relationships of particular (more or less) static ‘scapes’, portions of land the eye can absorb ‘at a glance’. In America, however, it includes much more conspicuously an active personal component or rather projection: a toponography of not so much belonging as of dream and desire, a significant modification (Americanization) of what Smith (2003: 136) calls in a larger context “ethnoscape”.

DeVoto (1977: 309) claims exclusive distinctiveness for and about Huck Finn as a wonder inseparable from the continent: “With him goes a fullness made and shaped wholly of America. It is only because the world he passes through is real and only because it is American that his journey escapes into universals and is immortal”. In the final analysis the popular reading of Adventures of Huckleberry Finn rests on one of the United States’ most cherished and trusted (natural, moral, cultural, geopolitical) assumptions, that of the uniqueness of its land or territory, paired with the fantasy about the magic of liberation from the regime of things ossified, muted and gray towards a renewal of a rewarding (ultimately redemptive) rapport with things lush and green. The first intimate detail a beleaguered protagonist of a contemporary multilayered narrative chooses to reveal about herself (Florey 2001: 5) reads: “The only thing she could quote from Mark Twain was the last sentence of Huckleberry Finn about light out for the territory”.

As Groover (1999: 193) for example limns it: “[B]eyond the Mississippi River valley lies the seemingly endless wilderness of the Territory, with its seductive promise of quest, freedom, and adventure”. If, as one of the greatest twentieth-century English authors once remarked, almost all novels tend to get feeble towards the end, Twain’s most famous work is admittedly feeble than most. Still, ostensibly winding down to a banal, conventional closure (“and so there ain’t nothing more to write about” [Twain 2001: 362]), its very final words construct a robust and serviceable design, perceived across the board as the book’s crowning, apparently timeless triumph. Clearly, the ending of Twain’s novel constitutes an important datum in the registry of American thought and imagination. According to T. S. Eliot the book’s last words are the only ones possible (1977: 335), for LaHood Huck’s closing statement orchestrates the most logical move there is (1966-67: 12), Cox considers it a near perfect ending, one that leaves the reader in a state of greater approval than at any other point in the novel (1973: 228).

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

\[3\] For the sheer presence of Huck’s resolution in the contemporary American lexicon across genres see, by way of example, Wright Morris’s literary study The territory ahead (1958), Ralph Ellison’s collection of essays Going to the territory (1986), Daniel Duane’s (counterculture and mountaineering) memoir Lighting out (1994), Ronald Wardall’s poem “Lighting out for the territories” from her 2000 album Talk normal, Virginia Scharff’s human-geography article “Lighting out for the territory: Women, mobility, and western place” (1999), the beginning of Richard Louv’s travelogue Going to the territory (2000: 13): “On a Saturday before lighting out for the territories, I stopped at …”, or the beginning of a recent book on American politics: “[T]he history of America is contained in that vision of being able to ‘light out for the Territory’.” (Roper 2002: 2). Discussing the intensity of the religious calling among Puritans, Colacurcio (2006: 508) formulates “that dream of a land” (Adams [1947]: 374). As Hemingway (1950: 123) broaches the issue: “We live by accidents of terrain, you know. And terrain is what remains in the dreaming part of your mind”.

The dis-closure of Huckleberry Finn

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

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

6 In The selfish gene, Dawkins ([2006]: 192-201, 322-331) offers a quasi-scientific explanation of the phenomenon with his meme theory. A meme is any readily reproducible cultural item (any of the cultural bits, snippets, trivia floating around), and as such is a basic unit of broad cultural transmission. Much as genes “leap” from generation to generation, from one body to the next, memes (not unlike computer viruses, to bring the argument more up to date) are transmitted from brain to brain, with the minimum of choice and control. Dawkins quotes such examples as icons, clothes fashions, tunes, jokes, and catch-phrases. In the light of this theory, the shibboleth “I got to light out for the Territory ahead of the rest” looms as an obvious meme, a line that gets into peo-ple’s minds and very simply stays lodged there, often growing in its resonance with the passage of time, as is the case, to cite three thematically related examples, with Owen Wister’s defiant and assertive “When you call me that, SMLLE!” Marlon Brando’s challenging “Whaddaya got?” from The wild one, or James Dean’s dramatic “You’re tearing me apart!” from Rebel without a cause, a self-apparent modern example is Joseph Heller’s catchball and catching “catch-22.”
find him “any more” (32). It is only morbidly fitting that when the escape plan eventually distills itself into the feigning of his own death (existential doldrums and spine-tingling images of mortality haunt the story from the very beginning), the hero should get enveloped in a spectral (un)reality, with tramping itself identified, albeit by Pap, as an ominous march of death. What adds a crucial touch to the whole sequence (and ultimately to the whole novel) is the fact that since the present action takes place right on the Illinois shore, the contemplative trudging across the country inevitably points to the East (interestingly, taken at face value, i.e., executed in and as a straight-forward way – “right across” [32] – this itinerary would have likely taken Huck to Washington, D.C., of all places). Of far greater consequence, both immediate and ultimate, is obviously the fact that Huck should pretty soon give up the idea altogether. When, quite fortuitously, a drift-canoe presents itself to him he envisages quick-wittedly a very different modus vivendi: “I judged I’d hide her good, and then, ‘stead of taking to the woods when I run off, I’d go down the river about fifty mile and camp in one place for good, and not have such a rough time tramping on foot” (38). It is only schematically that Huck could be made to fit Melville’s exemplary definition of a good traveler (quoted in Seals 1957: 182) as somebody who is “young, carefree, and gifted with generality and imagination”. Some twenty years prior to the writing of his most famous novel Twain himself might have pledged to be always “so situated (unless I marry), that I can ‘pull up stakes’ and clear out whenever I feel like it” 8, but as far as Huck is individually concerned, contrary to the spirit of the vivacious quixotic stereotype, the locus of vagabond desires that he has come to embody (or rather that has been hyped and imposed on him), he is given so much more to sedentary rather than pedan
tary impulses. For him, to echo Emerson’s well-known sentiment (1884: 281), the uses of travel seem to be merely occasional and definitely short.9 He is very different bag of marbles from a classical peregrinus or homo viator, incurable itinerant, transient, or drifter, compulsive wanderer, notorious rambler, habitual rover, dedicated stroller, enthusiastic saunterer, inveterate globetrotter, bird of passage, rudderless airhead, or nautical navigator. It is certainly tempting, especially with the prissy and sanctimonious Miss Watson as a perfect intratextual trope, to inscribe Huck into the disparaging (Blakean) appreciation of prudence as an old maid courted by incapacity (admittedly, an insight from an impossible 

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

9 As Emerson argues elsewhere ([1853]: 278): “Travelling is a fool’s paradise. Our first journeys discover to us the indifference of places. At home I dream that ... I can be intoxicated with beauty, and lose my sadness. I pack my trunk ... embark on the sea, and at last wake up ... there beside me is the stern fact, the sad self, unrelenting, identical, that I fled from.”
though equally void lines of possible investigation into his disappearance, Huck gets satisfied that any posse is bound to fatigue pretty soon: “and won’t bother no more about me” (41). Given the freedom of (canoe) mobility now, he experiences at last a sense of release: “All right; I can stop anywhere I want to [now]” (41). What he decides next does not merely qualify, but quite literally re-verse or re-draws the anticipated territorial compass of the story. Entirely of his own volition, without any external bearing of happenstance, situationism, or fast-moving action, Huck finally chooses as his port of call, in fact as his sanctum sanctorum, the liminal but rock-solid anchorage of an I-land: “Jackson’s Island is good enough for me; I know that island pretty well … then I can paddle over to town … and pick up things I want. Jackson’s Island’s the place” (41). This is how – a possible parallel to how against prior arrangements the new town-judge opines that the law must not sever natural (birth) ties – Huck existenti-ally rather than disposition-ally or situation-ally abrogates (annuls) the original trans-action by radically altering the spatial terms of his unavoidable confronta-
tion with America from the formidable continental vista to the directionality, adjacency, referentiality, and predictability of a two-and-a-half-mile radius of local territory.10 Having a personal-bond-to-a-particular-place (“you couldn’t start a face in that town that I didn’t know” [67]) is of course diametrically as well as concentrically different from the discourse of which-ever-place (wherever I sit, there I might happily live, cf. Thoreau [1975c: 298]). The prospect of an entirely arbitrary spatial distribution in any random location and Sitzung spells out disconnectedness and noncomprehension, in a word the un-heimlich. Even though ‘home’ can mean rather different things to different people, even though technically Huck is homeless to begin with, he persuasively demon-
strates that home is where involvement, patterns of activity and structures of time are implied and internalized, where personal identity is forged, where one finds the world at least to some degree explained, where one knows one can stay, and where one instinctively feels one would rather be, especially when the goings get tough. Huck’s naturalization of the adjacent Jackson’s Island-St. Petersburg territory tallies with Levinas’s philosophical appreciation of at-
homeness: “The ‘at home’ [Le ‘chez soi’] is not a container but a site where I can … In a sense everything is in the site, in the last analysis everything is at my disposal, even the stars … Everything is here, everything belongs to me; everything is caught up in advance with the primordial occupying of a site, everything is com-prehend” (1969: 37-38). Huck offers also an apt illustration of what Wallace calls in another context (1993: 181) “unwandering wandering”, moving out and yet returning, by virtue of focusing at all times on the home from which one departs. It transpires often enough, as Hawthorne for instance acknowledges it, that one leaves one’s home-town apparently for good and yet one keeps returning, as if it were the inevitable centre of the universe (1983a: 129).11 (It is worth pointing out that Huck generally identifies understanding and meaning with down-to-earth situatedness and embeddedness rather than with penumbral or adventitious provisionality, ongoing speculation, or supplementa-
tion.) Having arrived at his resolution concerning Jackson’s Island affords Huck in itself such equanimity and repose that the next thing he is (barely) con-
scious of is drifting peacefully off to sleep, a development all the more remark-
able for the fact that his escape is obviously a dramatic race against time and at this point everything still hangs precariously in the balance. (Significantly, on some other occasions we see Huck unable to sleep “for thinking”, and his com-
portment appears generally to be regulated by a personal existential clock rather than the metronomic pendulum of nature.) In Chapter 8, against all the odds, he affirms in the course of the next couple of days his resolve when after seeking very briefly greater security on the Illinois shore he returns intuitively to Jack-
son’s Island, now identifiable even more readily in terms of “the old place” (50). This blast from the past, or more properly from the previous novel, is a perfect testimony to one of the (few) truly profound recognitions of A week on the Concord and Merrimack rivers: “The frontiers are not east or west, north or south; but wherever a man fronts a fact … Let him build himself a log house with the bark on where he is, fronting IT” (Thoreau [1975a]: 195).

Pap’s infamous hideout is where the timber is so thick that “you couldn’t find it if you didn’t know where it was” (29); however, it is actually but three miles (of father-land) up the river, and it does prove traceable (a man is eventu-
ally driven out and yet returning, by virtue of focusing at all times on the home from which he has come) (Tsoungthi 2004: 226). In reality, when after a couple of weeks Huck flees the island it is only because of a very real prospect of not so much getting caught as getting bizarrely and undeservedly exposed, shamed, and in all likelihood punished as a racial and gender conspirator and transgressor.

10 Typically, this moment gets overlooked or curtailed; sometimes it gets distorted to fit the stereotypical readings of the whole story, e.g., “Huck arrives on the Island convinced he will be able to abandon civilization and refashion himself in a world of his own” (Kovitz 2004: 35). “[Huck] hides out on a nearby island, intending to take off after his neighbors stop searching for his body” (Claro 1984: 7). “Huck decides farther to spurn the town from which he has come” (Tsoungthi 2004: 226). In reality, when after a couple of weeks Huck flees the island it is only because of a very real prospect of not so much getting caught as getting bizarrely and undeservedly exposed, shamed, and in all likelihood punished as a racial and gender conspirator and transgressor.

11 One is reminded here of Hildebrandt’s wistful reflection: “Reluctantly … which dwells near its origin depart” (quoted in Heidegger 1971: 78).
Huckleberry Finn is not only a boor, but a natural who in his own words goes a good deal on instinct and who can apparently adapt to all climates and to all seasons. However, and most emphatically, the suggestiveness of his name notwithstanding, he is not a Naturmensch. His instinct, to rephrase Melville's well-known autobiographical disclosure, is not out with (the romance) of the wild. Neither does he cultivate a Spartan-like life style. Beauty and romance are obviously in the eye, mind and heart of the beholder, and it is the (native) audience who romanticize—wildenize and Spartanize—Huck's story. (Anderson, by way of example, pushes it so far as to wildenize Twain himself: "I believe he wrote that book in a little hut on a hill" [1953: 33].) The single most sustained immediate corrective is the book's culinary index. At the very beginning, Huck makes a point of introducing himself as a connoisseur of mixed-up and juicy homey ciderous cuisine, and things gustatory remain high on the agenda throughout. Later, as against the anticipated gleaning or hunter-gatherer plot interpolated by sanguinary, scavenger or revengent instincts, he projects very summer day" ([1975a]: 192); "[N]ot having any blanket to cover me ... as it drew colder towards midnight, I at length excised myself completely in boards, managing even to put a board on top of me, with a large stone on it, to keep it down, and so slept" ([1975a]: 142).

12 Powers in his recent biography of Twain (2005: 7) offers: "The Prairie in its loneliness and peace: that was what came back to him toward the end of his life." Sundquist (1994: 4) draws a parallel between Huckleberry Finn's "lighting out" for the territory and Samuel Langhorne Clemens's own "fleeing" the Civil War in favor of prospecting, gambling, carousing, and writing in the Far West. Arthur (2002: 3-4) makes a direct link between Clemens's desertion as a militiaman and Anderson's own "fleeing" the Civil War in favor of prospecting, gambling, carousing, and writing in the Far West.

13 As far as Anderson's specific comment, it is well known that Twain wrote the bulk of Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (and actually finally managed to finish it) in a rather privileged social and intellectual enclave, namely in the ambience of the Gilded Age splendor of Hartford, Connecticut, amidst perfectly satisfying personal (financial and emotional high-tide) circumstances. Without referencing his proclamation, Thoreau is obviously quoting William Cowper's Selkirk.

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

As D. H. Lawrence observes in the introductory essay of his classic Studies in classic American literature, it is useful, sometimes essential, to break the spell of the time-honored mastery, “the old IT” ([1965]: 6); besides, classically scatologically-speaking, at some point or other, “the bubble” has to burst (Sartre 1988: 25). Admittedly, for Huck’s most enthusiastic fans, to pastiche his celebrated soliloquy in Chapter 31, these might be awful thoughts and awful words, nevertheless they ought to stay said. Even if this might invite a bitter Keatsian complaint about the insensitive unweaving of the rainbow, the truth of the matter (its historical time marked coincidentally by the Great Disappointment of 1831-44) is that Huck is not a dedicated student of nature, neither in the philosophical nor in the perfectly ordinary sense of it. Put bluntly, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn does not expose any wilderness agenda to speak of, neither in the narrow-soft (simple) nor in the wide-hard (complex) version. When still in St. Petersburg, Huck would occasionally go to the woods when he needed to think something over or when he badly needed a day’s rest, but the narrative does not exercise any faculatas fingendi, and there is not a shred of evidence of any magnetism, chemistry, let alone enchantment, beatitude, or pantheistic reverence along these lines. The book develops neither a sense of the grand scale of the harmony, fecundity, plentitude, utility, spirituality, the vaulting sublime totality, nor of the texture of the plume and tinsel, tapestry, delicacy, exquisiteness, inimitability of the minutiae of the natural world. While natura vexata empiricism is part and parcel of the very air Thoreau breathes, Huck is neither a self-appointed inspector or steward of the elements and the seasons, nor does he enter any special rapport with various kinds of butterflies, cobwebs, pine needles, or grains of sand. Rather disappointingy from the point of view of aficionados, devotees, amateurs, collectors and buffs, the story is not annotated with any systematic, classificatory, indexing, specific, Linnæan bio-eco-terminology. There is no itemizing, no cataloguing, no naming of parts here. There are no magnifying-glass observations of battling ants, no mesmerizing reflections on the leaf-like spread of the body’s veins, or on the mushroom being the protective elf of all plants. When he gets finally displaced for good and riparian nature becomes perforce his Alma Mater, Huck learns to idealize, in fact idolize, the ambiance of the raft (viewed pragmatically, though, he simply learns not to rock the boat, so to speak), but he continues taking nature per se largely for granted. As he describes it, the raft itself bears many hallmarks of convivial domesticity (plenty of grub and an easy life, as it gets summed up [165]) rather than of primitive bivouac rusticity, and the memorably appreciative “there warn’t no home like a raft” (155) in itself clearly celebrates placenessness and belongingness rather than boundlessness and separateness. It is precisely in this sense — to sub-vert Howe’s schematic reading — that (even) “a few rickety boards nailed together” (1986: 73) can provide a semblance of home-ly h(e)aven. Huck certainly does not turn himself, as Trilling would famously argue, into a neophyte servant of the river-god who comes close to being aware of the ineffable/sublime divinity of the being under whose spell he allegedly falls (1977: 320). To use, with a respectful and meaningful nod to Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, the terms of the classic discourse of the aesthetic, while there is an ordinary sense of nature-Erfahrung, there is hardly any sense of nature-Erlebnis and (consequently) no real (possibility of) any extra-ordinary Nature-inspired-Erhabene here. Figuratively, and to extend the pun, what obtains here instead is the Wittgensteinian (epistemological and ideological) sense of drama, that “besteht darin, daß sich der Baum nicht biegt, sondern bricht”.

The passage most often quoted in support of the popular wilderness agenda is the opening of Chapter 19 depicting daybreak on the river. The description (one is instantly reminded of the exhilarating and phenomenally popular “Morn-ing has broken” by Eleanor Farjeon/Cat Stevens) is typically advertised as a
preview of the natural, physical as well metaphysical, landscape of Huck’s journey, and indeed as a formula of how, on any level, in the words of T. S. Eliot’s contribution to this appreciation, “it is and was and always will be” ([1977]: 333). What gets overlooked is the fact that this barely two-page littoral snippet does not inform the rhythm of the whole journey but merely “two or three days” (156) at a particularly sensitive (read: weak) juncture in the narrative, between two disparate, truly gargantuan developments. The beginning of Chapter 19 is not, as is insistently suggested, a visual threshold to a self-evolving ultimate adoration of and commitment to the beauty, mystery, power, and glory Nature. It is a self-contained, structurally motivated vignette, the only stretch of narrative in the entire book where the processes of the natural environment may be said to comprehensively and of themselves compose and focalize ongoing action. An isthmus of sorts, it suggests a narrative threshold, so much more a formal link than a natural bridge, separating and con-joining as it does the dramatic Grangefords-Shepherdsons saga and the King-Duke seemingly interminable sequence. What likewise escapes critical commentary is the fact that on aggregate no more than just over a third of the novel’s bulk consists of live action taking place out in the open, and that no more than just about ten out of the total forty-three chapters can be said to be consistently using natural setting par excellence. It is only occasionally that we may see Huck actually standing on the bare ground, with his head in blithe air, uplifted into infinite space. Most of the significant action takes place indoors and much of it actually transpires in camera, behind closed doors to boot. This is where we are treated, by the way, to an astounding wealth and acuity of interior references and residual detail. This ploy is functional insofar as it informs Huck’s amazing optimal or rather maximalist foraging – and it is essential to read this merchandising spree and commodity fetishism of sorts against his formal subscription to voluntary poverty earlier on20 – for randomly distributed (albeit curiously not always utilitarian) civilizational tropes, resources, and accruements (including for example all manner of bric-a-brac and paltry haberdashery items). Moreover, Twain’s open spaces are a far cry from the classic Whitmanesque exuberant appropriative and immersive out-reaching comprehensiveness of sweep. Even the celebrated sunrise scene does not extend beyond “a kind of dull line – that horizon is never even mentioned, there is hardly any enveloping natural luminosity (certainly stars and shadows “ain’t good to see by” [76]), colours tend to be darkened or muted, and a couple of times the picture gets completely blanked out by dense white fog (also with the evening “gray and ruther thick, which is the next neatest thing to fog”) you can’t tell the shape of the river, and you can’t see no distance” [130]. As for adjacent continuous scenery or backdrop, the text features what is essentially an impenetrable façade – lugubrious and often foreboding stretches of sameness. Nature, as the Great Romantics for instance, teach us, communicates immediately by the impressions of surfaces on the eye and only through the eye allows for individual appropriation, signification, and gestation of meaning. The present narrative/camera eye glides consistently, dispassionately and with little variation along walls of heavy solid timber and/or high rocky bluffs on both banks of the river – “you couldn’t see a break in it, hardly ever, or a light” (106) – a venue more appropriate for a journey to the heart of darkness rather than to the empathic origins of the world. In the woods, it is more often than not solemn, dismal, and eerie rather than numinous: “[T]rees with Spanish moss on them, hanging down from the limbs like long gray beards” (265); “I could see the sun out at one or two holes, but mostly it

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

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

22 On closer examination, it turns out that only with blatant sacrifice to convention could *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* be ever related to nature writing and that it does not lend itself readily to traditional picturesque landscape painting either; in fact, to transcribe a line from Melville ([1984a]: 636), it proves surprisingly deficient in what landscape painters would be prepared to call ‘life’. Merleau-Ponty explains that in “normal” vision “I direct my gaze upon a sector of the landscape, which comes to life and is disclosed, while the other objects recede into the periphery and become dormant, while, however, not ceasing to be there... The horizon, then, is what guarantees the identity of the object throughout” ([2002]: 78). In the world under discussion there are really no sustained panoramic perspectives and no verbal frescos of nature to speak of. The broadest and farthest single vista is a non-episode “pale streak over the treetops” (59), the horizon is never even mentioned, there is hardly any enveloping natural luminosity (certainly stars and shadows “ain’t good to see by” [76]), colours tend to be darkened or muted, and a couple of times the picture gets completely blanked out by dense white fog (also with the evening “gray and rather thick, which is the next neatest thing to fog”) you can’t tell the shape of the river, and you can’t see no distance” [130]. As for adjacent continuous scenery or backdrop, the text features what is essentially an impenetrable façade – lugubrious and often foreboding stretches of sameness. Nature, as the Great Romantics for instance teach us, communicates immediately by the impressions of surfaces on the eye and only through the eye allows for individual appropriation, signification, and gestation of meaning. The present narrative/camera eye glides consistently, dispassionately and with little variation along walls of heavy solid timber and/or high rocky bluffs on both banks of the river – “you couldn’t see a break in it, hardly ever, or a light” (106) – a venue more appropriate for a journey to the heart of darkness rather than to the empathic origins of the world. In the woods, it is more often than not solemn, dismal, and eerie rather than numinous: “[T]rees with Spanish moss on them, hanging down from the limbs like long gray beards” (265); “I could see the sun out at one or two holes, but mostly it
was big trees all about, and gloomy in there amongst them” (45). In terms of forest ecology, instead of the conventionally expected differential floral environment, against the very idea of the ever-desirable biodiversity, this is extending the condition of a large stand of a single species, *Duroia hirsuta*, known by the forbidding name of the devil’s garden believed to be cultivated by nefarious spirits. A significant extension of the (European) Romantic teaching, Thoreau himself explains in an essay: “There is just as much beauty visible to us in the landscape as we are prepared to appreciate, – not a grain more. … We cannot see anything until we are possessed with the idea of it, take it into our heads, – and then we can see hardly anything else. … A man sees only what concerns him” ([1975b]: 709).24 In “Experience” Emerson also argues that Nature belongs only to the eyes that can actually see it – we actually see only what we ourselves animate ([1983b]: 473) – and takes the point usefully further: “As I am, so I see; use what language we will, we can never say anything but what we are” ([1983b]: 489).25

While on entering his local natural environment Thoreau instantaneously perceives it as an amphitheatre for an unspecified grand sylvan spectacle ([1975c]: 372-373), for Huck the single “splendidest” experience he registers in the course of his journey proves to be an indoor circus-show – fun-fair, *Jahr-markts*, and people’s assembly all in one – a powerful fine sight: “I never see anything so lovely” (192), “it has all of my custom, every time” (194). Instructively, our hero gets all but equally enraptured by the artifice, circuitry, and the sheer performance of “a clock on the middle of the mantel piece with a picture of a town painted on the bottom … sometimes when one … scoured her up and got her in good shape she would start in and strike a hundred and fifty before she got tucked over” (136). What is missing probably most conspicuously from Twain’s supposed pastoral prospectus are the coveted mellifluous sounds and salubrious fragrances of nature. Rather callously, before one can properly savour the sole baculic olfactory proposition of an early morning breeze (in Chapter 19) – “so cool and fresh, and sweet to smell” – it gets abruptly qualified or more properly spoilit by a radical shift, a niasmatic put-down: “[B]hat sometimes not that way, because they’ve left dead fish laying around, gars, and such, and they do get pretty rank” (157).26 While Walden celebrates the whole gamut of vocal pinoquetting of wildlife, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* registers in loosely comparable terms the desultory “only sometimes the bull-frogs a-cluttering, maybe” (only in Chapter 19; [156]), downgraded further on to the garbled and nondescript “you wouldn’t hear nothing for you couldn’t tell how long, except maybe frogs or something” (158). Ideallistically, fishing from a boat by moonlight, Thoreau has no difficulty convincing himself that he is being serendipity to the by the neighbour- hood owls and foxes. When Huck picks up voices of owls, wolves or dogs away in the woods the sensation comes across as “terrible” (4) and sends “cold shivers” running over him (36). A whippoorwill (one of Thoreau’s favourites) does not exactly usher in the night in Huck’s world, instead, it is identified as ominously summoning up somebody about to die. A couple of times mournful cadences are alarmingly heard even in the sound of quivering foliage, a sharp contrast to how Thoreau’s breath is ecstatically taken away by the most delicious sympathy with the flutter of leaves.

T. S. Elliot’s recognition of the river in “The Dry Salvages” ([1969a]: 184) as a strong brown god – “sullen, unamed and intractable,/ Patient to some degree” is believed to be directly informed by his native St. Louis, as is Teasdale’s: “Hushed in the smoky haze of summer sunset/ … I saw my western city/ Dream by her river/ Then for an hour the water wore a mantle/ Of tawny gold and mauve and misted turquoise” ([1969a]: 122). Images such as these are evoked to validate the popular appreciation of *Huckleberry Finn*’s Mississippi as majestically august, impervious, impassive, impersonally neutral, beyond good and evil. “The river becomes symbolic of Huck’s more peaceful, pretty rank” (157). Because they’ve left dead fish laying around, gars, and such, and they do get spoilit by a radical shift, a niasmatic put-down: “[B]ut sometimes not that way, because they’ve left dead fish laying around, gars, and such, and they do get pretty rank” (157). While Walden celebrates the whole gamut of vocal pinoquetting of wildlife, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* registers in loosely comparable terms the desultory “only sometimes the bull-frogs a-cluttering, maybe” (only in Chapter 19; [156]), downgraded further on to the garbled and nondescript “you wouldn’t hear nothing for you couldn’t tell how long, except maybe frogs or something” (158). Ideallistically, fishing from a boat by moonlight, Thoreau has no difficulty convincing himself that he is being serendipity to the by the neighbour- hood owls and foxes. When Huck picks up voices of owls, wolves or dogs away in the woods the sensation comes across as “terrible” (4) and sends “cold shivers” running over him (36). A whippoorwill (one of Thoreau’s favourites) does not exactly usher in the night in Huck’s world, instead, it is identified as ominously summoning up somebody about to die. A couple of times mournful cadences are alarmingly heard even in the sound of quivering foliage, a sharp contrast to how Thoreau’s breath is ecstatically taken away by the most delicious sympathy with the flutter of leaves.

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of delight. It proves to be a natural territory and safe haven for gangs of prowlers, robbers, slave hunters, cutthroats, cheats and confidence men of all persuasions, an ambiance footnoted by an eerily appropriate horror or degeneracy chamber found drifting in its very midst (Chapter 9). As a matter of fact, instead of and against the expected pastoral impulses, nature seems to unleash a whole range of crude or outright predatory instincts as well as common vices, such as dishonesty, indifference, callousness, arrogance, malice, derision, bragging, mischief, or plain bad temper. The myth of the ennobling influence of Nature (Natur-Geist) on the individual gets most comprehensively debunked by the individual and rather special case of Huck’s father. A reprobate drunk and a most distrustful, negligent, rapacious, exploitative, abusive, gratuitously cruel parent, with full vent of indignation Pap is recognized across the board as the most iniquitous, degenerate, worthless, unforgivable, desplicable character of the novel. However, what does not get properly acknowledged is the fact that of all the characters he is the one living by far the closest to the natural state – “one would a thought he was Adam, he was just all mud [adamna]” (33) – which seems to concur with the fundamentalist ‘natural’ dissemination of everything beginning with the body of the father/mother-earth. In terms of most immediate, practical intents and purposes, Pap is a self-styled trapper, hunter, backwoodsman – Naturmensch (his is the same palimpsestual signature as Queeg’s, by the way). However, when he first emerges from his own unspecified territory-ahead-of-the-rest in Chapter 5 after more than a year’s absence (“you can’t never find him” [10]), his portraiture is nowhere near bucolic, let alone Edenic. A far cry from Rousseau’s Noble Savage (everybody remembers their arms as if they was just wild … and then go rumbling, grumbling, tumbling” [59]; “My souls, how the wind did scream along! And every second or two there’d come a glare … and the trees thrashing around in the wind; then comes a H-WACK!” [168]. While Thoreau, rather heterodoxically, delighted in the recommendation that nothing is avowedly more gentle in the primitive wilderness whose edges were being constantly and punily gnawed at by men with plows and axes … (that) Hudson River School of painting. Later in the novel we are shown how a typical frontier town is forced to be “always moving back, and back, and back, because the river’s always gnawing at it” (183) — whereas Thoreau, reclining on the bank of the Merrimack (the historical time of the two stories in this case is a perfect match, by the way), would rapturously sound the whirling and lapsing current as actually “kissing” the shore (1975a: 210). In fact, instead of a life-enhancing principle, the river in Huckleberry Finn proves close in spirit for instance to Carver’s gruesome short story “So much water so close to home” (1989a). From the very beginning the Mississippi spells oblivion and quite literally all death-by-water29 — “You wants to keep ‘way fum de water as much as you kin, en don’t run no risk” (22) – with the total record of about a dozen fatalities and near-fatalties. All-too-vividly, the steamboat that in Chapter 16 critically rams down Huck’s raft is rendered in its gory glory in terms of natural imagery as a sinister and actively hostile animalistic Other – “looking like a black cloud with rows of glow-worms around it … big and scary, with a long row of … teeth” (130). Twain’s larger natural setting – where Thoreau offers to make a comparison between a squirrel and a gracefully dancing girl, for example – proves charged with rather familiar, pathetically fallacious, dis-gracefully frenzied animation: “[I]t rained like all fury, too … and set the branches to tossing their arms as if they was just wild … and then go rumbling, grumbling, tumbling” (59); “My souls, how the wind did scream along! And every second or two there’d come a glare … and the trees thrashing around in the wind; then comes a H-WACK!” (168). While Thoreau, rather heterodoxically, delighted in soaking rain, squalls, frost, and cold weather30, Huck’s response to the animus of nature from inside a caboose-like shelter is conventional enough: “I wouldn’t want to be nowhere else but here” (60).

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

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

Given his reclusiveness, sloth, ignorance, negativism, turpitude, depravity, wilderness and ferocity, Pap must appear a close kin to what Créveceur ([1998]: 50) identified as the peculiar American “mongrel” breed of half civilized, half savage wilderness back-settlers or squatters, a forlorn hope, and as such a poignant counterpart to Turner’s ideal ([1976]) of the valiant frontiersman. Also, his ramshackle cabin of most primitive rudiments and utter squalor, figurative and literal locus horridus, bears uncomfortable resemblance to the “wretchedest” human habitation encountered by Madam Knight on her famous early eighteenth-century backwoods journey in America ([2004]: 23). The thesis that the closer one gets to the wilderness, the less cultivated one becomes, informs an interesting caustic remark quoted by Edward Waldo Emerson in his memoir Henry Thoreau, as remembered by a young friend: “Very seductive are the first steps from the town to the woods, but the end is want and madness” (1917: 106).

Huck’s own very first (nocturnal) ad-venture into the natural domain in the present novel is itself far from propitious. Tip-toeing gingerly among garden trees, he is repeatedly forced to stoop to avoid getting scraped on the head, and the whole escape nearly falls through before it gets properly under way when he clumsily falls over a protruding root and makes incarcerating noise. In fact, it all turns into an obstacle course of sorts, making the boys thoroughly miserable having to crawl in caves for hundreds of yards, getting all damp, sweaty and cold, emerging perfectly bedraggled, greased up and “dog-tired” to boot (12). This fundamental, if seemingly inconsequential, situation-confrontation gets all but duplicated on Jackson’s Island. The day Huck and Jim meet the island gets flooded and they go in a canoe winding in and out amongst the trees—and sometimes the vines hung so thick we had to back away and go some other way” (60). As Huck principally, if defensively, explains at the end of The adventures of Tom Sawyer, he likes the woods and the river and hogsheads, but this distribution indicates once again the immediate adjacent compass of town-territory rather than the expanse of the wilderness, let alone of the continent at large. When Huck appears for the first time ever he might be memorably pro-truding a dead cat (anecdotal cure for warts, re-categorized in the present volume as a weapon of miasmatic mob-vengeance), but he is generally less than enthusiastic about various representatives of the wild and lower orders of crea-tion, dead or alive. The first truly significant scene of Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (in Chapter 1) introduces, as though in direct response to the protagonist’s disconsolate “I did wish I had some company” (4), a spider crawling up his shoulder. Rumin suited of Jonathan Edward’s famous image of sudden and unexpected damnation (a spider or some loathsome insect held over the fire), Huck flips it off and the spider ends up shrieking in the candle flame, which in turn sparks off an awhed, feverish, but obviously inadequate reflection on signs and predestination. Later, as regards generally the behaviour, pro-cesses and language of nature, Jim (equipped with a very keen sense of smell, for...
instance) proves a far more responsive, knowledgeable and profound interpreter (a self-styled homo magus of sorts), whereby at least on three occasions he is functionally assisted by natural objects (as the Romantics would idealize it) in the expression of particular, often complex, meanings. However, as against Emerson’s sarcastic reminder (addressed specifically to Thoreau, by the way [Howe 1986: 34]) that a man was not made to live like a frog, what denotes Jim’s rapport with nature is the fact that when left to his own devices he first lives pathetically rough for a couple of days on Jackson’s Island and then right through the Grangeford-Shepherdsons sequence dwell apparently quite contentedly precisely in the midst of a swamp.

Before long, in the setting of the supposed arcadia, the story’s pent-up oppositions explode into outright discordia. Still by himself on Jackson’s Island, Huck goes exploring in the deep woods when he nearly steps on a snake: “[I]t went sliding off through the grass and flowers, and I after it, trying to get a shot at it” (48). Next time round, when he chances upon a rattlesnake (one of the most recognizable, iconic fixtures of the American wilderness) Huck makes a very short job of it. However, the portentous order of the wild strikes back – “[T]he snake’s mate was there … the varmint curled up and ready for another spring” (64). Jim miraculously survives a most venomous bite, but in the course of his ordeal (even) he goes nearly insane from anguish and pain. This near-fatal mishap dramatizes Huck’s inadequate rapport with nature insofar as the incident is a direct result of a violation of its sacred code and lore: “That all comes of my being such a fool as to not remember that wherever you leave a dead snake its mate always comes there” (64). Henceforth – to pastiche Leviticus 11: 43 – the hero seems to recognize it as a self-evident truth about the human condition that one shall not make oneself abominable with anything thing that creepeth, neither shall one make oneself unclean with them, so as to avoid getting defiled thereby. The narrative takes up the whole theme again at the very end where cumulatively, if admittedly somewhat less near-apocalyptically flooded for a couple of days rabbits, turtles and “such common nuisances” appear on every broken-down tree, “so tame, on account of being hungry, that you could paddle right up and put your hand on them if you wanted to” (obiter dictum, there is no trace anywhere in the novel of the coveted Thoreauvian icons of wildness: the loon, the moose, or the beaver). Huck is satisfied that he “could a had pets enough” (60), but somehow – his spells of intense, sometimes quite morbid loneliness notwithstanding – he is never really tempted to reach out (the most one can say for it is that the whole assortment elicits a kind of collective benign neglect on his part). This void is later specifically pointed out through a narrative device, Huck’s “natural” counterpart Buck, exciting the image of “a blue jay and a young rabbit he had caught in the woods day before yesterday, and he asked me … ‘Do you own a dog? I’ve got a dog’” (135). In Huck’s world, on a different occasion, an encounter with a pack of hounds issues forth both as a chilling menace and a common nuisance:

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

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

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[There wasn’t no real scarcity of snakes about the house for a considerable spell. You’d see them dripping from the rafters and places, every now and then, and they generally landed in your plate, or down the back of your neck, and most of the time where you didn’t want them …] Aunt Sally, she despised snakes, be the breed what they might, and she couldn’t stand them … it didn’t make no difference what she was doing, she would just lay that work down and light out (330). Meantime, Thoreau would beatifically marvel over a striped snake, would transfixedly watch languidly circling hawks for the embodiment of his intimate thoughts amongst the clouds, could easily enter amiable, rewarding physical closeness with the sunfish or the bream (suffering them to nibble his fingers harmlessly), and would quite routinely invite a wild-mouse to run along his arm and sit in the palm of his hand. When Jackson’s Island stays stuck in the woods day before yesterday, and he asked me … ‘Do you own a dog? I’ve got a dog’” (135). In Huck’s world, on a different occasion, an encounter with a pack of hounds issues forth both as a chilling menace and a common nuisance:

[F]irst one hound and then another got up and went for me, and of course I stopped, and faced them, and kept still. … [T]heir necks and noses stretched up towards me, a-barking and howling; and more a-coming … A nigger woman come tearing out of the kitchen, with a rolling-pin in her hand … she fetched first one and then another of them a clip and sent them howling (277).
As for significant otherness (cf. Haraway 2003), it is provided for Huck neither by a fox nor a rabbit, and a live dog proves no better prospect than a dead lion.9

Instead of actually employing any large specimens of wildlife, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn features the folically-challenged “King” in the preposterously salacious and vulgar prologue to his nonesuch theatrical “a prancing out on all fours, naked; and he was painted, all over, ring-streaked-and-striped, all sorts of colors, … it was just wild”; with Huck projecting as pointedly and censurously as nowhere else in the book his distaste at “the shines that old idiot cut” (196). On another occasion, both the “King” and the “Duke” are ridiculed by being compared to a nonsinusoidally hopping bipedal marsupial when “in another village they started a dancing school; but they didn’t know no more how to dance than a kangaroo does” (265).

Literally for all the world to see, the only one thing that Huck leaves behind when he steals out of Pap’s cabin is the axe. As for the other emblematic Western artifact and genre-marker, the rifle, we see him actually using it only once, still at Pap’s, rather specifically as an essential part of the elaborate strategy to masquerade his own death. Afterwards our protagonist effectively demmissions as a hunter, and the ill-gotten rifle – never a central entity, let alone requisite – inexplicably disappears from the story altogether (furthermore, when Huck gets later immersed in honour-and-gun culture at the Grangerfords’ he does not show any interest in firearms either; it is Tom who ends up vaingloriously displaying a bullet around his neck on a watch-guard).40

Even though in the course of the story fishing inevitably becomes an irreducible part of Huck’s practical rapport with daily life, he is likewise far from highlighting, glamorizing, or centralizing it in any way. He never goes into its technicalities or lore, and he certainly does not register any Thoraeuan mystical vibrations along the line and does not speculate on any deep, esoteric (epiphanic) truths one might hope to retrieve from beneath the surface of the water. The only catch described in any detail is that of a kingfish, “as big a fish as was ever caught in the Mississippi”; however, it is not discourse as a marvel of nature but rather surprisingly “as a man, being six foot two inches”; moreover, in the mode of Babbalanja’s purloined letter, Huck literally turns the fish inside out and transcribes and re-dicts its content into a different, more home-ly realm: “We found a brass but-

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

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

41 Interestingly, we never learn whatever actually happens to the two-hundred pound fish, more (has a bigger fish to fry) in terms of the civilized order of the day: “They peddle out such a

42 He resembles neither Faulkner’s emblematic Ike McCaslin (1954) mesmerized by the wall of pristine wilderness ahead he hopes to penetrate in order to earn a name for himself, nor the runaway mushroom-picking visionary adolescent protagonist of Gutserson’s contemporary Our lady of the forest (2003). In terms of real-life discourse, Huck certainly does not link with the likes of “Yankee Tarzan” Joseph Knowles of the celebrated 1913 experiment Alome in the wilderness, the mysteriously disappeared (in 1934) legendary vagabond for natural beauty Everett Ruess, Ripley’s “Ridgerunner” (of early 1940s, fictionalized in 1986), the elusive loner of the Idaho wilderness who wanted to emulate the life of a coyote, the even more foolhardy Chris McCandless of Krakauer’s bestseller Into the wild (1997) obsessed with exploring the nation’s last untrammeled frontier in Alaska, or with the preternaturally gifted ecologist, hunter and horseman Eustace Conway, The last American man, as dubbed by Gilbert (2002). As far as Huck is individually concerned, he appears to come instead amazingly close to the stance of Melville’s quaint philosopher Babbalanja: “All vanity, vanity, Yoomy [Jimy (?)], to seek in nature and he certainly does not register any Thoreauvian mystical vibrations along the line and does not speculate on any deep, esoteric (epiphanic) truths one might hope to retrieve from beneath the surface of the water. The only catch described in any detail is that of a kingfish, “as big a fish as was ever caught in the Mississippi”; however, it is not discourse as a marvel of nature but rather surprisingly “as a man, being six foot two inches”; moreover, in the mode of Babbalanja’s purloined letter, Huck literally turns the fish inside out and transcribes and re-dicts its content into a different, more home-ly realm: “We found a brass but-

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The dis-closure of Huckleberry Finn

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

In a contemporary cultural study of the Western genre, Tompkins articulates this kind of appreciation perfectly matter-of-factly: “To go west, as far west as you can go, west of everything, is to die” (1992: 24). Less trenchantly, a recent Pulitzer Prize winner talks the need to understand that “striking out for the territory is inherently a sad enterprise, though the fact is often neglected in the adventure tales we tell” (Caldwell 2006: 36).

66 To face the privations and hardships of frontier life, a standard outfit would consist of – as Coyote describes it in his mid-nineteenth century classic The lost trapper – “a rifle, together with as much powder and lead as it was supposed would last for two years…six traps, which were packed upon an extra horse with which each man was furnished. Pistols, awls, axes, knives, camp kettles, blankets, and various other essential little articles, also made a part of the equipment.” Describing his own voyage to Hawaii in 1866 Twaam records scrupulously how the minimal “traveling outfit confirmed upon me began with a naval uniform, continued with a case of wine, a small assortment of medical liquors and brandy, several boxes of cigars, a bunch of matches, a fine-tooth comb and a cake of soap, and ended with a pair of socks” (1975: 4). Early in Adventures of Huckleberry Finn the protagonist is actually advised by the most down-to-earth and practical character of the book: “[M]ust you time you tramp take shoes and socks with you” (75).
applies its own individual cognizance of space. Huck’s is certainly a spatial sensibility, but it is marked by immediacy, tangibility, connectivity, groundedness, situatedness, referentiality and connectivity – as against tangentiality, ext- tendedness, mobility, distastfulness, boundlessness and vastness. Principally, in order to be able to dispose things spatially there must be a real possibility of placing them differently, “some at the right, others at the left, these above, those below, at the north of or at the south of, east or west of, etc.” (Durkheim [1976]: 11).

In *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, even if always there seems to be something just around the corner, there is no sense of a viable Hinterland. Huck tends to look and think infra: sideways, athwart, around and below rather than supra: ahead, beyond and above. He never broods over the mystery of some ultimate outward reach, he is not even really curious about where-ever the road might lead or what-ever might lie behind the next line of trees. The present narrative eye, to use a well-known line from *Troilus and Cressida*, falls squarely on the present object here. Seeing involves light just as certainly as it does the apparatus and conduit of many cerebral pathways, the mind participating truly in the being of truly sympathetic entities only. Huck’s practical topographical awareness and his American geography are informed by the North-South axis, pre-eminently as well as more practically by the ‘up’ and ‘down’ the river, with the troubled/ing awayness from home-(town), the individually constructed true genius loci of the book at the back of his mind throughout. It is only seemingly nonsensically that the issue should be poignantly invoked almost exactly midway through the book by the errant Boggs, himself a character who blows into town apparently out of nowhere: “What’d you come from, boy?” (184). It is critically important to recognize that the West does not have any place or permanence (let alone positive) association in Huck’s mind whatsoever and that it never enters his diction and his otherwise ongoing busy dialogue with the world at large. At no point does Twain’s hero entertain the stereotypical posture and vantage of the classic American protagonist who “stands upon a hill above the town he has left, yet does not say ‘The town is near,’ but turns his eyes upon the distant soaring ranges” (Wolfe [1957]: 522). Instead of ‘elsewhere’, Huck keeps casting his eyes in the opposite direction. He appears to subscribe to the logic of Socrates’s well-known apology concerning a particular dis-advantage: “[L]andscapes and trees have nothing to teach me – only the people in the city can” (Plato 1995: 6), an appreciation articulated in strikingly similar terms also in Huck’s own time: “[N]o grace I find/ Taught me of trees,/ Turn I back to my own times, …/ There, now and then, are found/ Life-loyalties” (Hardy [2001a]: 65). It is worth pointing out that Huck and Jim’s journey is navigationally, existentially, as well as by plot definition all East (read: Civilization) oriented (against the combined forces and eddies of Nature – “way up the Ohio amongst the free States” [99]46). The idea of escape *per se* gets thoroughly compromised by the apocalyptic mayhem and carnage accompanying the ostentatiously romantic, reckless elopement across the river of the bucolically (over)named Harney Shepherdson and Sophia Grangerford. Also, it bears emphasizing that at the pivotal point in their geographical quest, Huck and Jim are defeated precisely by the combined recalcitrant and finally treacherous forces of Nature: rattlesnake, fog, and muddy waters (“So it was all up … We didn’t say a word for a good while. There warn’t anything to say. We both knewed well enough” [129]). The (over) optimistic American cultural bid to light out for the territory ahead of the rest proves to be akin to the notorious modern economic anomaly known as the winner’s curse, featuring paradigmatically natural offshore assets: the more bidders there are, the more likely it is that they will have rapaciously overestimated the bid’s value, turned all of a sudden into pyrite, or fool’s gold.

When at the very end Huck once again evokes ‘territory’, this time as a formal excuse to close the book, immediately there is really nothing more to write about because, taken literally – just like the tantalizing, manifestly alien/foreign and forever elusive (though in terms of the immediate story critically important) Cairo, St. Jacques, and Lafayette earlier on – the Territory looms as an impossible mirage, an abstract, cipher-like, void signifier. The conclusion of the novel establishes beyond peradventure Huck’s unenviable status as *nullius filius* [no body’s son]. It is, however, not only a bogus happy-clappy triumph over adversity but also a blatant cultural fallacy to be extending by way of a (rather dubious) compensation the malapropic prospectus of *terra nulla* [no man’s land] subject to appropriation) in front of him. Certainly the popular American nineteenth-century territorial discourse does not apply here. Insofar as Huck is individually concerned, it betokens not so much in-natured *terra phantasma* as de-natured *terra mula* – land that does not exist.47 As Stein famously quipped

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

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

47 Miller in his detailed survey “Geography and structure in *Huckleberry Finn*” argues that prior to the Grangefords-Shepherdsons episode the narrative is characterized by spatio-temporal verisimilitude but afterwards the presence of realistic geographical detail and specification of travel time drops sharply and finally “virtually disappears” (1980: 192). With its lurching point-to-point navigation, the itinerary of the journey can be seen as projecting the kind of artificial environment established by the railway – “which knows only of departure and arrival points, turns cities into points … connected to the diagrammatic railway network that is now the territory … It is a space that recognizes only points and directions” (Colomina 1994: 58). To extend the ar-
(upon returning East from a visit to her one-time hometown in California) – there is no "there" there (1935: 218). To steal also from James Howard Kunstler (1993), in the course of the narrative the present geography deconstructs ultimately as a geography of "nowhere". With Jackson’s Island abortive tree experiment as inter-text, the deconstruction or exhaustion of the whole territorial-frontier-wilderness discourse can be more directly appreciated through Emerson’s mock-heroic animation of the "western roads, which opened stately enough, with planted trees on either side, to tempt the traveler, but soon became narrow and narrower, and ended in a squirrel-track, and ran up a tree" (1838b: 478). Fundamentally at odds with the logic of the story and the armature of the text, a proposition rather close to the six impossible things before breakfast of Alice’s wonder-lands adventures, "Territory" proves to be a combined red-herring, will-o-the-wisp, and wild-goose-chase all in one.48 It spells out a false gument, it is possible to apply here the notion of "geographical monogamy", in contradistinction to the expected "geographical promiscuity" (see Morley 2000: 16).

The larger reality of the time of the story does not support on the ground any viable Territory thesis either. Interest in scenic beauty was but a Romantic gloss on the historical period that certainly from the 1830s through 1850s was a time when the United States national boundaries were in a state of turmoil, warfare and violent transformations, and when the country was completing its program of forced Indian relocations. Also, as is well known, the myth of the garden in the West was at that time challenged by the conceptualization of the Great American Desert used to identify uninhabitable places beyond the Mississippi valley up to the Rocky Mountains. In fact, Emerson, who famously was not at home in the wilderness, would acknowledge that it was already at the Mississippi that the Western romance faded into "a reality of some grittiness" (quoted in Cahot 1887, II: 754). In his 1843-44 fictionalized venture into the American interior by way of the river (interrogating, orchestrated by the "Eiden Land Corporation" of Cairo on the Mississippi) Dickens describes it as a journey into "the grim domains of Giant Despair" (l.d.: 407). In Roughing it (1862): 121 Twain indicates that he had a "shocking good idea" of "the fearful suffering associated" to the early emigration to California. In a strictly historical sense, in the nineteenth century "Territory" was not synonymous with freedom at all, for many it was a token of despotic power exercised with almost unquestioned sway by the U.S. Congress over common people.

Also, doing a simple geographical and projecting Huck, as many readers do, into the (im)possible Indian Territory (future Oklahoma) is overlooking a rather important piece of fiction writing; in particular, he scathingly criticized Cooper’s romantic portrayal of Indians, as far as the key lexical constituent of the novel’s closing statement is specifically concerned, it is not enough to conclude wistfully that dictionaries have little to report concerning what words actually transcribe a wrong track, transliterates the impassable thicket of a Holzweg: "In the wood there are paths, mostly overgrown, that come to an abrupt stop where the wood is untenodden. . . . Woodcutters and forest keepers know these paths. They know what it means to be on a Holzweg."49 In general terms of travel writing (cf. Scott 2004: 6), Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is neither a passage to the real, one that might stimulate a substantial reassessment and broadening of experience, nor to the ideal, one that might open up new, heightened or original meanings. As far as the key lexical constituent of the novel’s closing statement is specifically concerned, it is not enough to conclude wistfully that dictionaries have little to report concerning what words actually say. "Territory" seems to deserve Faust’s vigorous, near-explicative riposte: "Ich kann das Wort so hoch unmöglich schätzen,/ Ich muß es anders übersetzen" – if one wishes to be properly "erleuchtet", that is (Goethe [1984]: 104).50

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Signing up for his three-year sojourn aboard the “Pequod” away from the vicissitudes and depredations of urban life, Ishmael explains to Captain Peleg that what takes him voyaging is his inordinate desire to see the (green meadows, pastures, fields, prairies, valleys of the larger) world. Peleg bids him peep over the weather-bow at the expanse of the sea — “Well, what’s the report?” “Not much,” I replied, ‘nothing but water’ — only to mock him in his rough voice, in a master-stroke of irony: “Do ye wish to go round Cape Horn to see any more of it, eh?” (Melville [1983a]: 871). Martin Heidegger’s famous mountain-slope timber-shingled Hütte (a ‘hut’; in reality, a three-room family country house) might have contributed to the mythologization of Schwarzwald as a place of ideal(istic) retreat from civilization, but the German philosopher actually consistently teaches that when nature — and this is not to be really taken literally in terms of measurable and surveyable distances — is only a casually occurred, distanced, and monodiscursive presence-at-hand (vor-, tableaux-like, out-there), as against ready-to-hand aroundness (um-zu-, toward-which, as concurrent availability, serviceability and totality of involvements), then it features non-circumspectively, poses resistance to meaning, and gets ultimately reduced to mere dimensions. Generally, all entities and things appear and loom (truly) meaningful to us only in terms of their contingent use, premised on our circumspective concern, or Sorge. To recall the standard argument exposing the human tendency to take things for granted: a hammer is a hammer not on account of its hammerhood, something emergent out of the very name and/or some abstract and inherent, idealized (hammer-like) attributes, but first and foremost through the particular care of handling, on account of being actually used for what is practically recognized as hammering.22

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

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

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

... [The less we just stare at the hammering-Thing, and the more we seize hold of it and use it, the more primordial does our relationship to it become, and the more unvelied is it encountered as that which it is” (Heidegger 1962: 98).
to place and space there instantly develops a far reaching uncertainty of meaning (Malpas 1999: 19). Where Tom, as he characteristically (constant gargoylery procrastinator and irritant) “talked along, and talked along”55, would propose to stealthily slide out one of these nights and go for howling adventures amongst the Injuns, over in the Territory (361), Huck’s offer is a significant modification. It radiates a different wave-length, and is not, as it might appear at first, a simple situational echo, or tautological semantic sleight-of-hand. “I reckon I got to light out for the Territory ahead” (362). This schism goes back to Huck’s early self-reflexive in-dividuating recognition of what he calls the stuff of Tom Sawyer’s lies: “I reckoned he believed in the A-rabs and the elephants, but as for me I think different” (17, emphasis added). Existentially, the stance projected by Huck depends on creating a space of inner orientation in and for oneself and creating oneself as space of outside negotiation. Though not a moment of epiphanic and/or complete knowledge, what emerges is a liberating openness at the center of identity, a super-ordinate cognitive construct, a method of relating most appropriately-propitiously to the world on one’s terms. “In the midst of beings as a whole an open place occurs. There is a clearing, a lighting. Thought of in reference to what is, to beings, this clearing is in a greater degree than are beings” (Heidegger 1971: 53). Sheehan transcribes Lichtung as “the open that opens things up, the clearing that clarifies them, the ever-present presence that allows things their current meaning” (2005: 202). In more practical terms, the discourse of lighting-out is premised on the proposition that as long as one is, there always something out-standing, something ahead that one can still be and will be (Heidegger 1962: 276).55

A texture of conflicting impulses and conflicting interpretations, the overall situation masterminded-masqueraded by Tom at the very end of Adventures of Huckleberry Finn proves to be a peculiar festival of dysfunctionality. With an awful lot happening in a dense environment all at once, looking constantly towards what is coming next confuses the sense of the near and the distant, of the authentic and the inauthentic, of the significant and the insignificant. The mis-happenings, absurd (undercover) occidental artifice of the Evasion continues as open run-of-the-mill discourse in the guise of (over)excitement, verbiage, prat-tle, curiosity, distraction, irrelevance, triviality, and groundlessness. On display are: fantasizing, clowning, image-peddling, heckling, not-abiding, concealment, ambiguity, being everywhere-and-nowhere (as against authenticating Gelassenheit, it looms as self-invalidating Aufenthaltslosigkeit likening finally Tom to Peter Pan in Never-Never Land56), last and certainly not least pontificating as well as histronic and schematic over-civilizing. As far as Huck is concerned, this fallenness, immersion and dispersal in the hurly-burly publicness of “they” spells out estrangement, uncanniness, and not-at-homeness. It is reflected in the penultimate chapter by a rather desperate sally, namely seeking a good enough place under a bed. Eventually, Huck appears to realize that he must stand his own ground, must clear out and claim more resolutely a more integrative personal space, that of authentic, autogenous and ownmost I-land. This is what prompts him to en-lighten his existence and to energize his true be-longing. As his own Chief of Ordnance now – see the opening paratextual corrigendum – by identifying and overcoming falsities, obscurities and absurdities he discloses and affirms his non-dispersive Da-sein. It is in fact already in the previous volume that he indicates he does not wish to have “only just a given name, like a nigger” (Twain [1982a]: 152). To re-emphasize, “one is not necessarily fleeing whenever one shrinks back in the face of something or turns away from it” (Heidegger 1962: 230).57 The present story is no escapist fantasy, it does not constitute a declaration of some ultimate independence, it is really about status integritatis, about “find[ing] out who I was” (282). The classical ad populum oration on leaving, absconding, escaping, and disappearing (abrit, exsisti, evasist, eruptist) does not apply here. To repeat, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn does not thematize a renunciation of social reality in favour of a solitary communion with nature, does not herald a triumph of nature over culture (randomly, cf. Lee 1987: 6; Matterson 2003: 4; Howe 1986: 73). In “Illuminations”, drawing on his own exposure to the phantasmagoric (tourist) attractions of the Mammoth Cave in Kentucky, Emerson warns that whatever games are played with us, we must play no games with ourselves. Against what he calls the charivari of duplicity and disguise, against estimates that are loose and floating, Emerson promotes (an intriguing intertextual link) the stance of a certain exemplary “sad-eyed boy” who might appear physically only “now and then”, but who proves determined – as a matter of fact afflicted with an urge – to transcend the circumstance and embrace the real quality of existence ([1983d]: 1122). As against the popular reading of liberation and independence simply in terms of unfettered

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

56 However unfashionable it may appear today, it is worth recalling in the context Hassan’s observation (1961: 325) concerning a special quality present in some works of earlier American literature, one that strikes a special chord in modern consciousness: “The manner may be called existential, and evaluation (1961: 325) concerning a special quality present in some works of earlier American literature, one that strikes a special chord in modern consciousness: “The manner may be called existential, and

57 “Aber nicht jedes Zurückweichen vor …, nicht jede Abkehr von … ist notwendig Flucht” (Heidegger 1979: 185; ellipsis in original).
arbitrariness or the random proclivity to do as one pleases on the spur of the moment, the exercise of existential freedom is a peco-dyno dynamic. It is useful to recall here Heidegger’s elementary reminder that dis-closedness always and with equal primordiality pertains to the entirety of being-in-the-world, that existential interpretation is characteristically circular, and that locative adverbs offer a signification that may be primarily existential rather than nominal or categorical. Da-sein is proximally “never here but yonder; from this ‘yonder’ it comes back to its ‘here’” (Heidegger 1962: 142); even if it should in any manner explicitly come away from anything, “it can never do more than come back to the world” (Heidegger 1962: 107). To match an unlikely pair – A week on the Concord and Merrimack rivers and Studies in classic American literature – “The true liberty will only begin when ... [you] discover IT, and proceed possibly to fulfill IT. IT being the deepest whole self of man, the self in its wholeness, not idealistic halfness” (Lawrence [1965]: 7). As Jim (in Chapter 14 where he declares he would rather have no more adventures)58) syllogistically invalidates King Solomon’s judgment: a dispute cannot be about half a child, but about a whole child, and those who think they can “settle a spute ‘bout a whole child wid a half a child, doan know enough to come in out’n de rain” (95).59

The present existential Ereignis, a leap/run ahead of the rest (vorlaufige Entschlossenheit), gives the protagonist a chance to bring himself in his characteristic start-stop, back-and-forth rhythm from a sense of lostness to himself again. It is obviously not an event in any usual/common sense, it is be perceived in terms of facticity (Faktizität) rather than factuality (Tatsächlichkeit), and as a caesura rather than a Scheidung, finally as End- rather than End-schluss. Neither sacred nor secret, this conceit can be appreciated in the literal sense of entfernendes Ein-Sein – de-severant Being-in, or out-standing standing-within)60. It is about running ahead in order to return to one’s genuine ‘there’ in the existential territory of the mind, as a solicitous being alongside that which is ready-to-hand in one’s world. Prefigured in the present story by Huck’s de-distancing restitutive move after being made to abscend from the world of St. Petersburg, it is an ethos informed by the concept of authenticating repetition, a reciprocative rejoinder to the possibility of existence that has already ‘been’, i.e., one’s original factical thrownness. “The authentic coming-towards-oneself of anticipatory resoluteness is at the same time a coming-back one’s ownmost Self, which has been thrown into its individualization. This ecstasis makes it possible for Dasein to be able to take over resolutely that entity which it already is” (Heidegger 1962: 388).61 Importantly and abidingly: “Resoluteness, as authentie Being-one’s-self, does not detach Dasein from its world, nor does it isolate it so that it becomes a free-floating ‘I’. And how should it, when resoluteness as authentic disclosedness, is authentically nothing else than Being-in-the-world?” (Heidegger 1962: 344).62

Understandably, existential call of conscience and phenomenological Illumination do not manifest themselves very well amidst hustle and bustle. Those who expose themselves to, engage in, and understand nothing but loud idle talk, cannot register and report any call (Heidegger 1962: 343). A much more genial mode is that of concentrated mindfulness and, ultimately, stopped time. “What does the conscience call to him to whom it appeals? Taken strictly, nothing. The call asserts nothing, gives no information about world-events, has nothing to tell” (Heidegger 1962: 318). Nevertheless, the call discloses: it closes “that which has been currently individualized and which belongs to that particular Dasein” (Heidegger 1962: 326). Allowing for a little wrinkle in time, it is useful to remember that Huckleberry Finn is borne out of frustration with the inadequacies of its Siamese companion Tom Sawyer. Being uniquely understanding, accommodating, and agreeable, Huck does not (over) dramatize the point and is in fact prepared to forgive the author (“I never seen anybody but said he didn’t want no more adventures. … Well, he was right” (93)).

58 “I told Jim all about what happened ... and I said those kinds of things was adventures; but he said he didn’t want no more adventures. ... Well, he was right” (93).
59 Emerson’s voice can at this point help also throw light on Huck’s obstinate limitation as a supposedly humorous character, ultimately holy fool or divine idiot. Emerson talks of comic ‘halftness’, which obtains over “a non-performance of what is pretended to be performed”, especially if accompanied by “loud pledges of performance”; furthermore, in any specific context, when you separate a particular bodily man from the connection of things at large and contemplate him alone he appears instantaneously comic and nothing can rescue him in the longer run from the ludicrous (Emerson 1885: 115-116). Cf. also Colonel Sherburn’s contemptuous unmasking of the prevalent ‘part of a man’ and ‘half a man’ mentality (189-191).
60 As a formula it reads: “[A]head-of-itself-Being-already-in (the world) as Being-alongside entities which we encounter (within-the-world)” (Heidegger 1962: 293).
In his metafictional meditation "White spaces", Auster talks of how in the beginning he altogether and makes for a mythical wordless West".

Huck Finn

For a typical reductive view cf. Tanner (1971: 28): "Thus at the end of Huckleberry Finn, in an intuitive move to hold on to some basic innocence and integrity, Huck gives up language; rather, he remains a one-horse man of literature".

In the world of the story, in terms of immediate motivation, even the impenetrable and mystifying Sherburn might have bizarrely had more reason to shoot in cold blood the ineffectual and harmless (unarmed) Boggs than Huck might have to commit himself wholeheartedly to the task of churning out a full-fledged book now. Ostensibly, a much more logical gesture at this juncture would have been the kind of clarion-call trumpeted by Whitman at the close of his iconic open-road paean to leave the books on the shelf “unopen’d” and the paper on the desk “unwritten” ([1982a]: 307). Twain nevertheless sets his hero writing, suggesting reductively even the alien- or anarchic-hand syndrome (tyrannical prehension, for choice) relentlessly pushing the pen rather than sporting a gun, wielding a dead cat, or protruding a fishing rod. To indulge a double pun: it turns out that Huck is literally and literally, effently and aesthetically, informed by natura naturans, i.e., creative nature in the personal sense of the term, rather than natura naturata, or created Nature at large – effecting a rather amazing “correlation between being, word, gathering, hand, and writing” (Heidegger 1998: 84). In a quieter, more contemplative mode we may comprehend, or at least intuit, why he has been impelled to renegotiate and transcribe (write-right) his story himself, in a sense all over again. (The opening: “You don’t know about me” [1] reads in this sense as a statement of intent.) Ars scribendi is in the bloodstream and at the fingertips of the present narrative. The obvious immediate disclosure available at the end of Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is that the narrative asserts itself finally not as a ‘book of Nature’, but rather re-asserts itself (page first [1] and last [362]: funda-mentally (“know”, “knowed”) as “a book”. Besides drawing attention to the written medium through the fully intentional-unintentional misspellings, self-apparently, even if not always perfectly verisimilarly, the story features in its inter-course an astounding plethora of references to signs, codes, tattoo-marks, hieroglyphics, paleography, vocabularian dilemmas, handwriting, “properly writing” (254), paper, notes, missives, letters, documents, printing, newspapers, handbills, poems, and books (from a scrap-book to a dictionary to the Bible). Far from trying to beat or out-tom Tom Pan at his game (an altogether different, “nonnamous”, mischief-maker, filibuster genre) to craft a much more logical gesture at this juncture would have been the kind of clarion-call trumpeted by Whitman at the close of his iconic open-road paean to leave the books on the shelf “unopen’d” and the paper on the desk “unwritten” ([1982a]: 307). 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Far from trying to beat or out-tom Tom Pan at his game (an altogether different, “nonnamous”, mischief-maker, filibuster genre), the end of the story sees Huck perfectly wanted to speak “of jumping up and down, of bodies tumbling and spinning, of enormous journeys through space... stretching farther than the eye can see”, only to admit: “Reluctantly, I out a full-fledged book now. Ostensibly, a much more logical gesture at this juncture would have been the kind of clarion-call trumpeted by Whitman at the close of his iconic open-road paean to leave the books on the shelf “unopen’d” and the paper on the desk “unwritten” ([1982a]: 307). Twain nevertheless sets his hero writing, suggesting reductively even the alien- or anarchic-hand syndrome (tyrannical prehension, for choice) relentlessly pushing the pen rather than sporting a gun, wielding a dead cat, or protruding a fishing rod. 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In terms of the actual situation on the ground, Emerson and especially Heidegger being both dauntingly a-representationalist, had Huck read his Cervantes (he is at one point actually advised to) he would certainly espouse the Old Master’s critically important clarification from near the beginning of his *magnum opus* that even the most quixotic of exploits are about crossroads rather than about insulars. In *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* the ultimate issue on the ground in terms of life experience – Twain being interested in exploring not only human nature but also very much the nature of human situations – is articulated early on by one Ben Rogers: “Here’s Huck Finn, he hain’t go no family – what you going to do ’bout him?” (10). An essential part of Huck’s story depends on his status as (half-)orphan and even if immediately there is almost a danger of compassion-fatigue setting in, the issue deserves to be comprehensively addressed. It is a discussion that might be mooted by the recognition offered in a larger context that men are free when they ‘belong’ – when are cultivating what they like. Men are only free when they are doing what the deepest self likes”.  

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Heidegger’s conceptualization of existential incandescence opening up like a most welcome glow in the midst of darkness in the forest appears as a literal visualization-illumination in Hemingway’s “The butter”, a minimalist story about a life-enhancing albeit short-lived and apparently grotesque meeting of two completely un-like but finally additive figures Nick Adams and Ad Francis: “[Nick] cut into the woods to come up to the fire through the trees. … [Ad] he walked between the trees [the fire was bright now …]. There was a man sitting by the fire. Nick stopped out and walked into the firelight (Hemingway [1993a]: 124, emphasis added). For a large-scale modern conceptualization, cf. Walter De Maria’s famous piece of land-art *The lightning field* (1977). 67 D. H. Lawrence ([1965]: 6): “Men are free when they are in a living homeland, not when they are straying and breaking away. Men are free when they obeying some deep, inward voice … Men are free when they belong … Not when they are escaping to some wild west. The most unfree souls go west, and shout of freedom. … Men are not free when they are doing just what they like. The moment you can do just what you like, there is nothing you care about doing. Men are only free when they are doing what the deepest self likes”.
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