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THE RIVER AND THE MARGINS:

MARGINALITY AND EXCLUSION IN MARK TWAIN'S OLD SOUTH

por

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Truth is stranger than fiction, but it is because Fiction
is obliged to stick to possibilities. Truth isn't.

Mark Twain

To my parents

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ABSTRACT

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Three of Mark Twain's major works are set in small antebellum Southern towns: *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson*. I analyze the three stories giving special importance to the marginal characters and to their relation with the rest of the community. My hypothesis is that the study of the marginal characters in Twain's fiction makes it possible to understand the functioning of the whole community, for the marginal characters are the ones who define the center; by being rejected for disobeying certain rules, they make most clear what are the rules that should be obeyed. When such characters attempt a "transgression of borders", by disobeying the rules or by trying to leave their marginal status, they expose the contradictions of the system. In the Introduction, I give a general panorama of the

question marginality versus center in the context of Twain's work. In Chapter II, I study *Tom Sawyer*, analyzing the marginal characters and their relation with the community, how Tom assimilates the rules, and the narrative options that emphasize questions of marginality versus center. In Chapter III, I study *Huckleberry Finn*, starting with a study of the protagonist and other marginal characters; Huck's transgression of borders, represented by his friendship with Jim; Huck's language. In Chapter IV, I study *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, analyzing the main characters and the community; the transgression of borders, represented by the exchange of a black and a white baby, and its consequences; the narration. In the Conclusion, I demonstrate that the exclusion or marginalization of certain characters shows a society based on an unjust social order, racial prejudice and intolerance, and that there is an evolution in the description of the community and the social processes of marginalization from one book to the next.

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RESUMO

Três dos mais conhecidos trabalhos de Mark Twain se passam em pequenas cidades do Sul antes da Guerra Civil: *As Aventuras de Tom Sawyer*, *Aventuras de Huckleberry Finn* e *A Tragédia de Pudd'nhead Wilson*. Eu analiso as três histórias dando especial importância para as personagens marginais e suas relações com o resto da comunidade. Minha hipótese é que o estudo das personagens marginais na ficção de Mark Twain torna possível a compreensão do funcionamento da sociedade como um todo, pois os marginais são os que definem o "centro"; sendo rejeitados por desobedecer certas normas, eles deixam claro quais são as normas que devem ser obedecidas. Quando tais personagens tentam uma "transgressão de fronteiras", desobedecendo normas ou tentando abandonar seu status de marginal, mostram as contradições do sistema. Na Introdução, eu apresento um panorama geral da questão marginalidade versus centro no contexto da obra de Twain. No Capítulo II, eu estudo *Tom Sawyer*, analisando as personagens marginais e suas relações com a comunidade, como Tom assimila as regras, e as opções de narrativa que enfatizam questões de marginalidade versus centro. No Capítulo III, eu estudo *Huckleberry Finn*, começando com uma análise do protagonista e outras personagens marginais; a transgressão de Huck, representada por sua amizade por Jim; a linguagem de Huck. No Capítulo IV, eu estudo *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, analisando as principais personagens e a comunidade; a transgressão, representada pela troca de um bebê negro por um branco; a narrativa. Na Conclusão, eu demonstro que a exclusão ou marginalização de certas personagens mostra uma sociedade baseada numa ordem social injusta,

discriminação racial e intolerância, e que há uma evolução na descrição da comunidade e os processos sociais de marginalização de um livro para o outro.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Acceptance versus rejection and marginality versus center

Mark Twain's portrayal of Southern towns, based on the town of Hannibal in which he spent his childhood, describes a huge set of richly drawn characters. His account is very colorful and interesting, yet never complacent or partial. As Louis D. Rubin Jr. points out, in *The History of Southern Literature*, what made Twain's stories different from other local-color tales of the day was "the author's artistic vision, which was too truthful to delete from memory the darker aspects of the experience being remembered and recreated" (236). So truthful was the picture that the Southern town, described ultimately by Twain as a dysfunctional organization, became an essential part of his fiction that would later influence all Southern literature. As Robert F. Kiernan points out, in "The New Southern Novel: A Bibliographical Assay":

> In an era when the fabled ability of the southern family to subsume retainers, eccentric neighbors, and miscellaneous waifs-of-the-storm has lost a measure of sociological credibility, other social organisms sometimes serve the novelist as quasi-familial units. The most frequent of these is the small town. It should be said, however, that the small town serves often today to evoke a tradition of humor that finds its prototype less in the family than in the Mississippi towns of Mark Twain. In novels of the tradition, towns are dysfunctional organisms populated with rubes who embody the fundamental drives of humankind. (21-22)

The community that we see in Twain's fictional towns and that would become the archetype of the southern small-town antebellum community is, in fact, divided and full of contradictions. Although it may seem united and happy at a first glance, it is a society

based on exclusion and marginalization, and it is defined exactly by such exclusion. This is not surprising, for it is only by the examination of the "marginal" that we can identify what's at the "center", the "respectable" people - and what is constitutive of the notion of "respectability". It is possible to assume that this process happens in every society, with every individual, since in order to identify ourselves and to know "who we are", we need, first of all, to find out who we are *not*. We need, in other words, to look at the "other."

The concept of "otherness" has been explored by several authors, and is a fundamental issue in Psychoanalysis. For Lacan, for instance, "The Self is referent to the Other. It is constituted in relation to the Other" (63). Thus, this first division between the Self and the Other is the source of our own identity. And it is not only the source of our individual identity, but of the social one. As stated by Freud, "a more restricted cultural group offers the great advantage of permitting the satisfaction of this instinct [of aggression] by means of the hostility to the ones that have been excluded of that group" (3047), for the aggressive tendencies help to produce an easier "cohesive union of the members of a community" (3048).

The concept of "otherness" has also proven very useful in literary criticism. For Derrida and the deconstructionists, the concept of "otherness" is fundamental, because their reading of a literary work is done by opposing different and contradictory ideas in the text -- the figurative and the literal meanings, the central production and the marginal ideas. The same concept of "différance", a combination of the two senses of the French word "*différér*" (to defer or to postpone), reflects a thinking in terms of "otherness": "'Différance' also designated that kind of economy which brings the radical otherness or the absolute exteriority of the outside into relation with the closed, agonistic, hierarchical

field of philosophical oppositions" (Derrida 5). For the deconstructionists, the concept of "otherness" is important because their reading of a literary work is done by opposing different and contradictory ideas in the text - the figurative and the literal meanings, the central production and the marginal ideas. According to Derrida's concept of "différance", words are defined by what they are not, by how they differ from one another. Yet, such other words are themselves defined by yet other words, and so on; so we forever defer a definitive explanation (Childes 83), which, in essence, means: the Other defines the One, *ad infinitum*.

In the context of social relations, the opposition between the "self" and the "other" is of great importance. The "other" can be identified as a social group, which is opposed to the main group (the accepted ones) that forms any given community. Yet, there is a sort of paradox here. For the main group to achieve or maintain its status, its members must turn their "others" into outcasts; such outcasts are, then, exactly what makes it possible for the values of such society to be perpetually confirmed. But, if the marginals do not stay in their "proper places", they may become a danger to society. So the marginal characters are, at once, the ones that indirectly help to maintain the status quo, and also the ones that might disrupt it. Thus marginality and respectability, acceptance and rejection, individual freedom and social responsibility keep on clashing, and it is in the tension between these two almost unreconcilable forces that society exists. Leslie Fiedler, in an analysis of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in his book *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1969), suggests that this conflict appears on the social as well as on the individual level:

> having grown up on the edge of civilization, he [Huck] has always known, even before the indoctrination by Miss Watson, the ethical precepts of her world. No more free-thinker than savage, he not only knows, but, in an

> abstract way, believes in these codes, by which he could not survive for an instant in the lawless sub-society in which he inhabits. There is, therefore, a constant disjunction in his mind (very like irony - and exploited by Twain for irony's sake) between what he considers he *ought* to do, and what he is aware that he *must* do; and it is this disjunction which underlies the moral crisis of the book. (458)

Although Thomas Blues, in his *Mark Twain and the Community* (1970), does not contrast marginality and "status quo", but rather individuality versus collectivity, his main idea is that there is a conflict between the individual and the community to which he belongs, and that such conflict is, in a way, necessary for the survival of the community itself. As he states:

> at the center of Mark Twain's consciousness as a novelist was a vision of an idealized relation between the individual and the community, in which an independent individual could freely challenge the community's values, disrupting its sense of order, and yet somehow retain his identity as a conventional member of it. An impossible dream, no doubt, and fraught with tensions that Mark Twain could not ultimately control. (ix)

Similarly, Forrest Robinson, in *In Bad Faith: The Dynamics of Deception in Mark Twain's America* (1992), further investigates this point, affirming that the society that Mark Twain described rests on "the reciprocal deception of self and other in the denial of departures from public ideals of the true and the just" (2), meaning that the values professed by the citizens were not always obeyed by them, and that the conflict between the individual and the community, although not always consciously acknowledged, is essential to the functioning and preservation of social roles.

Susan Gillman, in *Dark Twins: Imposture and Identity in Mark Twain's America* (1989), further emphasized the problems of exclusion and identity, exploring the thematic of doubles and twins:

> Although Mark Twain writes obsessively about twinness, doubling for him was always less a literary than a social issue. Whether these lookalikes are random and contingent (such accused innocents as Muff Potter; the prince mistaken for a pauper; Huck Finn "born again" as Tom Sawyer) or willful and exploitative (the unexposed criminal Injun Joe; all Twain's confidence men), they raise a fundamental question: whether one can tell people apart, differentiate among them. Without such differentiation, social order, predicated as it is on division - of class, race, gender - is threatened. (5)

The authors mentioned above, however, have not focused their studies on the marginal characters in their position as "marginals" relative to a "center", or on the process of interdependence between the marginal or outcast character and the rest of society; or on how the "other", acting as a distorted mirror, can help to create and maintain the identity of the whole community. Their focus is on the problematic of the individual, not necessarily marginal, and his relation with the rules of the community. Yet, since "Twain's normal point of view is that of the invader, the outsider, the traditional trickster of folk literature" (Fisher 639) -- therefore, a marginal character -- the study of that specific marginal characters and their relation with the rest of the community will tell us much about the functioning of the processes of exclusion and acceptance in that community.

Twain has presented descriptions of antebellum Southern towns in three major works: *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson*. In all three stories we have marginal characters and a society based on exclusion. The main process of exclusion is the one that left a whole race out of normal social relations: I am talking, of course, of slavery. Slavery is, indeed, the major problem of the South, the "peculiar institution" (Simpson 173) that turned the region into a different place and which is so pervasive in Twain's fiction, even when hardly

mentioned, as in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. Yet, we must note that the black slaves cannot be properly considered "marginals", for they are not subject to the same rules as whites -- they are even considered, by some characters in Twain's fiction, not only below society, but also below "humanity". The marginal characters, the ones that are really at the margin of society, yet never fully out or fully in, are characters like Muff Potter, Injun Joe, the duke and the king, Pudd'nhead Wilson, and, of course, Huckleberry Finn. Their relation to slaves, however, is important; not only in the case of Injun Joe, whose "half-breed" Indian status indicates a marginality also based, as slavery, on racial grounds, but specially in the case of Huckleberry Finn, who establishes a subversive friendship with a runaway slave, and Pudd'nhead Wilson, who has to detect a slave disguised as "free man" in order to be accepted by the community. It is exactly the movement of these characters, from marginality to center (in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*), or from center to marginality (in *Huckleberry Finn*), that makes most clear the division inherent to the community exposing its contradictions: freedom versus slavery, whiteness versus blackness, center versus marginality.

The discussion about the contradictions of a slaveholding society could only appear once slavery was abolished. After the Civil War, readers of the North became interested in tales of "local- color" coming from the South. The most successful Southern literature practiced in Twain's time, that is, just after the war, was the so-called "plantation fiction". It consisted of an attempt to review the Old South in a sentimental and nostalgic view rather than in a critical one. If in the antebellum literature, writers as William Gilmore Simms created in their fiction a view that slavery was a proper ordering of men in society, portraying generous farmers with thankful slaves, in the plantation

fiction the tone was not much more critical. Yet, once slavery was over, the black characters achieved a more central position. As Lucinda Mackhethan states, in *The History of Southern Literature*,

> the plantation literature that arose from the ashes of the past had as its primary quality a tone of nostalgia evoking, without questioning, an aura of Camelot. What appeared was a vision of order and grace to communicate a new myth of a lost cause. For writers turning to the antebellum scene, the item second in importance to the nostalgic glow was the voice of the black slave, brought forward to authenticate a version of the plantation system as a tragic Eden. Irwin Russel's banjo-picking darkie dancers, Thomas Nelson Page's uncles, and Joel Chandler Harris' Remus told their stories in convincing dialect to both a North and South ready to see slavery, once abolished, in a light that would facilitate reconciliation and make the Negro once again the Southerner's problem. (211)

The other important type of fiction that is known to have influenced Twain was the so-called "southern humor", or sometimes labeled "southwestern humor". Descended from the oral tradition, it was characterized by the use of vernacular language, with the description of dialects on the printed page, the interest in regional peculiarities and the use of local types as characters. Among its many representative writers we can mention Davy Crocket, Artemus Ward and G.W. Harris (Wimsatt 154). If, as the writers of "plantation fiction", Mark Twain also looked back at the pre-war South, he differed from them in that his use of humoristic techniques served to portray a more critical view of those "old times". Social satire and a critical tone are present in all his books, including the more nostalgic *Tom Sawyer*, and grows more and more aggressive, becoming more negative in *Huckleberry Finn,* until in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* there seems to be nothing to redeem the small village of Dawson's Landing.

This thesis intends to study the marginal and excluded characters in these three books by Mark Twain -- their relation to other characters in the context of a small community; the social mechanisms that keep them apart; how the definition of the marginal also defines the central values; how the transgression of social and/or racial borders constantly menaces the community; and, finally, how there has been an evolution in Twain's presentation of the southern community (meaning a more critical and accurate account of the social processes) from *Tom Sawyer* to *Huckleberry Finn* to *Pudd'nhead Wilson.*

1.2 Mark Twain's work

Mark Twain's interest in the antebellum South was not immediate. He started writing humorous sketches for newspapers, ranging from parodies of gossip columns to journalistic hoax stories. His writings, which were squarely within the tradition of frontier Southwestern humor, were being read and admired in the East (Rubin 234). The text that brought Twain nationwide fame was "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" (1865), which used a vernacular type as a narrator (and, eventually, as butt of the joke). In fact, the story has two narrators: it starts with a frame narrator, an educated man (supposedly Mark Twain himself) that asks a man about a certain person. This man does not know such person, but is reminded of another person with a similar name, and, as a second narrator, starts to tell the main story in vernacular speech. It is the story of a man that has a frog named Dan'l Webster, which, supposedly, could jump farthest than any other. A stranger comes and bets that he can make another frog jump higher than Dan'l. When Dan'l's owner is distracted, the stranger fills the mouth of Dan'l with shot,

and it becomes so full that it cannot jump; the stranger, then, wins the bet. The narrator proceeds to tell a story about a cow, but is interrupted by Twain, who decides to go away. What most calls the reader's attention is, in fact, not the plot in itself (just a simple anecdote of a man playing a trick on another), but the way in which it is told, with a vernacular type narrating the story, and the narration of the educated narrator serving as a "frame". As S.J. Krause explains, the story, with its double narration, is more important than it could appear, for it reveals "the traditional conflict between eastern and western values – or, more precisely, between the values of a gentle, civilized class and those of the frontier" (562), and "blends the political satire perfected in Down East humor with the framework and oral techniques perfected in Old Southwestern humor" (563).

In 1869 Twain wrote *The Innocents Abroad*, a hugely successful travel book, and *Roughing It* (1872), a memoir of his years in the West. In 1875, he moved backward in time to discover what Rubin calls his "great subject: the experience of his boyhood and young manhood, as seen in the light of his adult knowledge of change, growth, and loss" (235). He wrote "Old Times on the Mississippi" (1875), an autobiographical account published in the "Atlantic Monthly" in seven installments, and later incorporated in his book *Life on the Mississipi* (1883). Then, in 1876, he published *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. Described by Twain himself as a "hymn to boyhood", it tells the story of a very imaginative, if somewhat mischievous boy, and his adventures in a little antebellum village inspired on Hannibal, called St. Petersburg. Its plot, actually a series of different adventures, could be divided into episodes, all related to the central idea of the freedom of boyhood and the process of growing up and entering society. For, if Tom at first

appears to be breaking the rules, we find out that he ends by accepting his fate as one of St. Petersburg's future leading citizens.

In the first episode, which functions as an introduction to the characters, Tom Sawyer enters in conflict with his rigid but ultimately sweet Aunt Polly, with whom he lives, and with his righteous and annoying brother Sid Sawyer. He performs several tricks on the villagers, for instance, the famous white-washing episode, in which he makes his friends paint a fence for him by pretending that he was having fun in doing it. Later, together with his comrade Huckleberry Finn, outcast boy son of the village drunkard, Tom witnesses the attempt of grave-robbery by Dr. Robinson, who is helped by the drunk but harmless Muff Potter and the evil "half-breed" Injun Joe, two other marginal figures. After a discussion about the payment, they fight, and Injun Joe kills Dr. Robinson and puts the knife in the hands of the knocked-out Muff Potter. When he gets up and finds the knife, Joe tells him that it was him who committed the crime in a drunken fit. Muff Potter is therefore accused of murder and arrested. Only Tom and Huck know the truth. Afraid that Injun Joe might kill them, they make a solemn oath that they will not tell it to anyone. In the trial, however, Tom breaks his oath with Huck and sensationally reveals the truth; Injun Joe runs away. After the trial, Tom is hailed as the hero of the town, in an expression of adult approval that foreshadows his final acceptance as a leading member of the community.

Later, Tom and Huck decide to hunt for the hidden treasure, and, coincidentally enough, they find it -- and with it, Injun Joe, now established as the main enemy of the town. They hear that Joe will hide the money somewhere. Later, following Injun Joe and his mate, Huck finds out that they intend to take revenge on old Widow Douglas, on

account of a punishment imposed on Joe by her late husband -- a punishment for "vagrancy" that reveals Joe's previous exclusion. The boy, however, in a first step towards collaboration with the community, alerts a neighbor, and so the revenge is not consummated.

The final episode happens in a cave in which Tom and Becky get lost. Separated from their friends, the young couple can't find their way back. They walk for hours; at one point, Tom spots Injun Joe in the cave, but is not seen by him. Without food or water, they fear that they will die. At the last minute, however, Tom finds a way out. Afterwards, knowing, by Injun Joe's presence, that the treasure is in the cave, Tom returns there to get the money. He gets back to town and impresses the villagers with a bag full of gold coins. The cave is sealed, and, when it is later opened, Injun Joe is found dead inside it - the dangerous marginal has finally been eliminated. Tom is hailed, once again, as the hero of the town. He and Huck are rich, their money being administered by Judge Tatcher, and Huck is adopted by the Widow Douglas, who will try to make of him a "civilized boy".

The end of the story is perhaps the most revealing part. Tom is accepted as a member of the community, even a potential leader ("you will be a good soldier or lawyer some day", says one character) and Huck, the marginal character, is offered the chance to enter society too - given that he accepts the rules. It is interesting to note that it is Tom Sawyer himself who most insists that Huck should become "regular". According to Leslie Fiedler, in the end there is not much difference between Tom and his "good brother" Sid: "the Good Bad Boy and the Good Good Boy are not so different, after all - mother's boys, both of them. Tom will become a lawyer, a banker, a senator, at best - maintaining

even into adulthood his permitted good-badness - a writer, which is to say, Mark Twain!" (*Love and Death in the American Novel* 285-286).

Tom Sawyer portrays the process of "growing up" of a boy, and his entrance into respectable society. Although Tom is a somewhat conflictive boy, playing tricks on the authority figures of the town, he never actually questions or challenges the status quo. By the end of the story, he is even trying to convince Huck to accept society as well. So his conflict with the community is resolved in the most pacific way: after a "rite of passage" (Robinson 90) that assures that he will follow the rules, Tom is accepted in St. Petersburg and is ready to become an adult. In *Tom Sawyer*, centrality is a safe territory, and all dangerous outcasts must be eliminated, in one way or another - Huck is adopted, Injun Joe killed. The romantic "marginality" imagined by Tom in his games replaces the real marginality of Huck and Injun Joe. Although the story happens within a closed community, the question of centrality versus marginality is present (1) in the small but fundamental role of the marginal characters, the ones that start and maintain the plot; and (2) in Tom's relation to them, which hints at the contradictions of the system. Besides plot, the language of the narrator is also revealing of social contradiction, such as in the description of the marginal characters, their comments revealing what Tom or the narrator would perhaps prefer to conceal -- the inhumanity and pervasiveness of slavery, to mention just one fact. My analysis of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, in Chapter II, will be concerned mainly with the characterization and actions of the three marginal characters -- Muff Potter, Injun Joe and Huckleberry Finn -- and their relation to the main hero, Tom Sawyer, who represents the central figure approved by the community, as opposed to the marginal characters who are disapproved or disregarded.

In 1884, Mark Twain published what is certainly his masterpiece, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.* It started right after the publication of *Tom Sawyer,* and was supposed to be a continuation of the former story. However, it became much more than that. The main difference between this book and *Tom Sawyer* is that now the story is narrated by Huck Finn himself, using his semi-illiterate vernacular speech. As a consequence, not only is the language different, but the point of view as well, and, without the condescending tone of a nostalgic narrator, society is revealed in a much more critical manner. Through Huck's voice, Twain is free to satirize the community in a way that he was not able to do in the previous book -- for it is not an external narrator who is writing, but "Huck Finn".

The story starts where *Tom Sawyer* ends. Huck is adopted by the Widow Douglas and her sister, Miss Watson, and, against his wish, has to live obeying several rules. In his spare time, he plays with Tom, although he does not quite believe in the other boy's adventurous and exaggerated fantasies. However, just when Huck seems to be adapting to his new life, Pap Finn, his drunk and mean father, reappears in town, asking for his part of the money. He abducts Huck and takes him to a cabin in the woods. Huck pretends to have been murdered and runs away. Everybody thinks he is dead, when in fact he is free. In the nearby Jackson's Island, Huck meets the slave Jim, who, afraid that he might be sold down the river, has run away from Miss Watson. So, escaping from persecutors, and transgressing the social and racial borders imposed by society, both get on a raft and start their trip down the river, during which they pass through several adventures - they find a dead body in an abandoned house, but Jim doesn't let Huck see it; Huck tries (in vain) to help a gang of robbers trapped in a wrecking boat; they discuss about King Solomon and the French language; they handle snake skins; Huck (although harassed by his conscience)

eludes slave hunters to save Jim; and so on. In this first part of the story, a clear dichotomy river-shore is defined, where the river is "good" and the shore is "bad".

At this point, however, new characters come aboard, and the story changes direction. The distinction between the river and the shore is blurred, and now the men in charge of the raft are the duke and the king, who are actually two impostors that live profiting by other people's credulity. The two men conduct several tricks. First the king goes to a camp meeting and pretends to be a repented pirate asking for money to convert his fellows. Then the duke sets up the "Royal Nonesuch", a faked spectacle attended by the whole village of Bricksville. Then the two frauds pretend to be the heirs of a deceased villager. It all goes well until Huck, to help the innocent victims, steals the money but, without the chance to hide it somewhere else, puts it in a coffin, together with the corpse of the deceased man whose inheritance the two rascals were claiming. The real heirs come along, and after some discordance about tattooed marks on the body of the dead man, the villagers go out together to exhume the corpse. The bag of money is found, and taking advantage of the confusion Huck runs away. The two con men run away too, and get back on the raft. But this time they seem to be out of luck, and their tricks do not work. Without money, and unknowingly to Huck, they sell Jim to the farm of Silas Phelps. They go on to try the "Royal Nonesuch" again (after which they will eventually be caught), and Huck decides to find Jim. Sad and alone, he is stricken by a new conscience crisis: should he tell the Widow Douglas where Jim is, and thus get him back to his "rightful" owner, or try to rescue him and face the consequences? After a long inner struggle, Huck decides that he'll "go to hell" for his friendship, thus deciding to rescue Jim out of slavery. This is considered the "moral climax" of the story: a struggle between a "sound heart and a

deformed conscience", to use Twain's own words. And it is also the point in which Huck must make a decision: whether to remain a marginal and act by his own rules, or accept the rules of the "status quo" and be, himself, accepted by society. This is a crucial point in my analysis, for it better exposes the contradictions of society.

Just after that scene comes the final part, which is considered by most critics as the poorest in the novel. Arriving at Uncle Silas and Aunt Sally's farm, Huck is believed by them to be Tom Sawyer, whom, incredibly enough, they were expecting for a visit. Then the real Tom appears. When Huck tells him the story, he pretends to be Sid Sawyer. Huck tells him that he intends to rescue Jim, and, to his surprise, Tom says that he will help. From then on it is Tom who controls the action, inventing a delirious and unnecessarily contrived plot, taken from romantic stories, to "rescue" Jim forcing him into several humiliations. Huck, mysteriously, rarely complains, and usually follows Tom's orders. The three finally manage to escape; persecuted by armed farmers, Tom is hit in the leg by a bullet. Jim stays to take care of him until the doctor arrives and ends up being caught. When Tom recovers, he tells that Jim was actually already free - he had been legally freed by Miss Watson in her will. Huck then understands how Tom could consent in helping to "free" a slave: it was only a game, after all. Jim, on his turn, tells Huck that the dead body that they had seen at the beginning of their journey was that of his evil father. Aunt Sally decides to adopt Huck, but he finishes the book by saying that he plans to "light for the territory" because he can't stand being "sivilized". This final sentence indicates an option of Huck's in the direction of marginality; although the circular structure of the book does not give us a definitive answer, making Huck seem to be perpetually running away.

Huck Finn's behavior in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is more problematic than it was in *Tom Sawyer*; but, here, at least, the question of marginality versus centrality is far more evident. Since Huck himself is a marginal character, he has, first of all, to be taught the rules and modes of civilization. Yet, he resists it. His flight down the river with Jim is, more than anything, an exercise of individual freedom and an escape from a society that Twain saw less and less benevolent. Yet, at the end of the book he returns to society's bosom, and although he assures us that he will "light out for the territory", there is no guarantee that this time his escape will succeed. In fact, despite the "happy ending", Huck's quest for individual freedom is finally shown as a failure. Not only did his escape with Jim end (and was in fact useless, since Jim was already "free"), but he is not convincingly freed from his own conscience, a conscience that makes him believe that the rules of the town (concerning, for instance, slavery) are right, and his feelings are wrong. His conflict with the community, in this sense, is not fully solved: we do not know what will happen to him, if he will finally accept (and be accepted by) the community, or if he will become a pariah like his father or the duke and the king. His wish to "light for the Territory ahead of the rest" indicates the second option. Centrality, after all, is not the safe haven it seemed in *Tom Sawyer*, but it's revealed as a source of danger and chaos, and marginality is a possibility of freedom, if only momentary.

The analysis of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, in Chapter III, will be centered, first, on a study of Huckleberry Finn as a marginal character and his relation to the community; second, on a study of the other marginal characters, Pap Finn and the duke and the king. Later, I will analyze the relationship of Huck and Jim and the crossing of borders that it represents, from a first moment of unity, to the moral crisis in which he

decides to "go to hell", to the final part in which Tom comes back to lead the "rescue". Finally, I will study the narrative option -- after all, the story is told by a marginal character -- and how such peripheral view emphasizes the question of marginality versus centrality.

After *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Twain's major novel is *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889), the story of a man that receives a blow in the head and is transported to the feudal age in England. With his superior knowledge, he tries to reform that primitive world, but all he achieves is a holocaust. Twain would go back to the Southern setting of his childhood only in *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894), a story originated from an earlier and incomplete plot about Siamese twins, *The Comedy of Those Extraordinary Twins*.

The story of *Pudd'nhead Wilson* takes place in Dawson's Landing, an apparently quiet slave-holding antebellum southern town. The young David Wilson arrives from the North, decided to be a successful lawyer. However, because of an unhappy remark about a half-dog, he is ostracized. ("I wish that I owned half of that dog", says Wilson about a dog that does not stop barking. "Why?", ask the villagers. "Because then I would kill my half", he answers. The villagers, portrayed as ignorant and literal-minded, can't understand the joke, and think that Wilson is a fool, labeling him a "Pudd'nhead".) More or less at the same time, a mulatto slave named Roxy, who actually looks like a white woman, being only "one-sixteenth black", is afraid that her son might be eventually sold down the river, to the cotton plantations in New Orleans where toil was harder and punishment more severe. So she changes her baby in the cradle for another baby -- the son of her master, of whom she was taking care. Since her son is only one thirty-two parts black, nobody

knows or notices the difference. Yet, Wilson, who has the strange hobby of collecting fingerprints, has collected the prints of the two babies before the exchange.

The children grow up. Tom Driscoll (actually Valet de Chambre, or Chambers) grows up to be a mean and selfish boy, and treats his mother, now a free, yet poor, black woman, badly. Chambers (in fact the real Tom) grows meek and humble as all slaves. Tom is bound to receive the fortune of his uncle, who adopted him, for his father has died earlier in the beginning of the story. Yet, because he gambles and misbehaves, his uncle several times threatens to disinherit him. Becoming a robber to pay his debts, Tom gets into a situation that becomes more and more complicated. Roxy, feeling mistreated by Tom, tells him the truth: she is her mother, and he is legally a "black" man. Meanwhile, two Italian twins come to town and become the center of interest. After a criminal career that starts with gambling, and ends in the selling of his own mother to slavery, Tom, pressed by debts, fears that his uncle will disinherit him forever. So he decides to rob him to pay his creditors. However, his uncle wakes up with the noise. Tom stabs him with the dagger that belonged to the Italian twins, who end up being accused of the murder. Wilson takes their defense. After examining the fingerprints, he finds out that the murderer is Tom -- and more, he finds out that Tom is not really Tom, but the slave Chambers. Resolving the case, Wilson becomes the new hero of the town, Roxy all but dies of sorrow, and "Tom", being actually a slave, is not hanged, but sold down the river to pay his creditors. Thus the dream of belonging to the white community cannot be fulfilled.

In *Pudd'nhead Wilson* what happens is a process totally opposite to the one seen in *Huckleberry Finn*: here, instead of an outcast who runs away, we have Wilson, a stranger, who wants to be accepted but is ostracized by the community, because he does

not obey or understand the norms. When he finally accepts the rules, and more than that, reinforces them by setting the black and the white characters in their "proper places", he is accepted by the community, becoming even a leader figure in it. However, the irony is that the community is presented as a town of fools, so that Wilson's achievement is at least dubious. Individual freedom, and even individuality, seems impossible: Wilson, who was an individual with his own ideas at the beginning of the story, joins the ignorant masses at the end. Instead of a character that wants to reform society and fails, as in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, we have the story of a man successfully reformed by society. Also, Roxy's dream of having a black son among the whites -- and thus, becoming herself part of white society -- is revealed as a dead-end illusion. There is no possibility of equality or peaceful understanding between blacks and whites; she will never escape her condition. Centrality is dangerous and criminal, but marginality (meaning a higher freedom and independence from the social consensus) is not an option.

In the analysis of *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, in Chapter IV, the main concern will be with the study of the community and its rules: the process by which David Wilson is first marginalized and later accepted as a major citizen. I will study the crossing of racial and social borders, represented by Roxy's exchange of babies, and how the final fate of Roxy and her son shows the contradictions of a society based on an exclusion determined by imaginary rules, "fictions of law and custom" (*Mississippi Writings* 925), as well as the problem of nature versus nurture in the construction of identity. Some questions raised by the narration will also be explored, specially the contrast between Pudd'nhead Wilson's Calendar, at the beginning of each chapter, and the story itself -- a narrative division that is another instance of the dichotomy that pervades the whole novel.

A comparative analysis of the three stories shows that Twain's portrayal of Southern towns was becoming, at each rendering, more pessimistic. What was an idyllic place in the first book became a dangerous and uneven territory in the second, and a desolated and dark place in the third. Society was seen with less and less confidence, and the individual as having no possibility of freedom or even independent thought -- "training is everything". Still analyzing the changes from one book to the next, it is possible to perceive that there is an evolution in the direction of higher criticism in the presentation of the Southern town, as well as a growing awareness of a conflict between what we might call two different worlds. In *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, Tom oscillates between "respectability" and association with marginals (Huck Finn), displaying a lighter form of social disobedience, but choosing respectability in the end -- or, rather, revealing that he was "respectable" all the way. In *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, however, the gap opens: Huck has two opposite and self-excluding choices: the river or the shore. That is, either life with Jim on the raft or the "regular" life at St. Petersburg; he cannot have both. Yet, whites and blacks, outcasts and "respectable people" are not totally separated: there is at least one link between those worlds, which is Huck himself. In *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson*, however, those two groups become estranged. In fact, the main plot describes nothing less than an attempt, by Roxy and the false Tom Driscoll, to enter into white aristocratic society -- and what we see, at the end, is its total failure. This work, examining the stories in a more symbolic way, foregrounds the three stories' emphasis on the disobedience of social rules, or what I have named "transgression of borders", whether racial, social, or both -- representing a conflict between the marginalized individual and the community to which he belongs.

We can view all the three stories, in fact, as having basically the same central idea: the clash between acceptance and rejection, represented by attempts of social transgression. In *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, Tom, with his childish play, seems always to be breaking some rules; yet, after a process of growth in which he learns the "correct" values, he ends up being accepted in the town. In *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, the community, which has always rejected Huck, finally gives him a chance to become "respectable". Yet, not fully convinced that "respectability" is a good deal (for it would mean the end of his independence), and compelled by the circumstances, Huck runs away. Yet, he is constantly haunted by his conscience, and, moreover, he soon finds out that there is no safe refuge outside the community. Therefore, although the end of the book suggests that he will be adopted (only to run away again, in an eternal circular motion), we know that he must face a final choice: either acceptance (and therefore he will be "reg'lar" as Tom) or rejection (and he will become a homeless pariah).

But it is in *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson* that we have perhaps the most elaborate parable about acceptance and rejection. On one side, there is David Wilson, a Northern whose biggest dream is to be accepted into the society of Dawson's Landing. Opposite to him we have Roxy, the mulatto slave woman who, as we have seen, by means of an exchange of babies, tries to make her son a part of the same white society. Needless to say, Wilson is only accepted in the Southern village when he discovers the "farce" and identifies the "usurper" that tried to enter white society by "illegal" means. Yet, in the process, he covers another, deeper "farce": the farce of a slave-holding society pretending to be caring and humane.

Although its etymology is uncertain, the term "farce" was originally applied to a theatrical genre: a type of "low" comedy, based on physical more than on verbal humor, in which the main aim is simply to entertain the viewer or, according to the Encyclopedia Britannica, "a comic dramatic piece that uses highly improbable situations, stereotyped characters, extravagant exaggeration . . . generally regarded as intellectually and aesthetically inferior to comedy in its crude characterizations and implausible plots, but it has been sustained by its popularity in performance and has persisted throughout the Western world to the present" (IV, 53).

Soon the use of the word "farce" was used in several other literary forms: Mark Twain himself, for instance, described many of his works as "farces". One of the main characteristics of farce is that its characters are usually types, without psychological complexity, and that the humor derives basically from the improbable situations in which such characters find themselves. Among such situations we find that of "substitutions", in which a character, knowing or unknowingly, assumes other character's place. That is why, perhaps, the word "farce" has acquired another meaning: it can be applied to anything that is either ridiculous or simply false, anything that pretends to be something that it is not: a "deception".

Mark Twain, having produced several examples of "farcical" humor, be it in his humorous sketches, short stories or novels, has nevertheless achieved some of his best writing demonstrating another kind of farce: the social farce of the southern villages, in which the towns appeared as perfectly happy and content, and yet one needed only to scratch at the surface to find out that nothing was as it appeared. In *Tom Sawyer*, the calm village hides social tensions that a crime stirs up. In *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*,

the aristocratic sensibility of the Grangerfords and Shepherdsons soon gives way to savage murders; in *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson*, the quiet southern village described at the beginning is only a cover for racism, oppression, stupid duels and violence.

If a society, as a river, is defined by its margins, then also the "Southern citizen" of that time, as seen by Twain, is defined by the outcast character that he leaves out, exactly the one that cannot become a "citizen." The study of the marginal character is, then, fundamental for the comprehension of Twain's fiction, and Twain's fiction is of major importance for a proper understanding of the society of the American South. Marginality and centrality oppose and complement each other, holding together a community that only becomes unstable when the "marginal" collides with the established central authority or tries to escape from its underprivileged situation. The "marginal" characters and what happens to them -- why they are not accepted, in the first place, and how the community treats them -- is essential to the comprehension of the community as a whole. The study of the marginal and excluded characters in Twain's books that take place in the slaveholding South is sure to bring illuminating insights into those questions.

CHAPTER II

THE ADVENTURES OF TOM SAWYER

2.1 The community and its marginal characters

Mark Twain was always a sharp observer of society. If *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* was considered by himself as a hymn to boyhood, it is also true that it showed an accurate portrait of an antebellum Missouri village, without forgetting the negative aspects. An acute observer, Twain took note not only of the natural landscape and typical characters he met in his childhood, but, perhaps most important of all, he was able to scrutinize the structure of society and the relations of power inside it.

If we look closely at St. Petersburg, we will find a highly rigid society. In the community of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, norms are to be respected and obeyed, even when they may seem ridiculous. Although the importance given to social pressures stature is not as great as in the Dawson's Landing of *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, most characters in St. Petersburg are concerned in some way with what others might think of them. Each one has his assigned place in society. Money, social high ranks and the capacity to "show off" are accepted as high values, and no one challenges or questions them. "Rather, they assert themselves through public display of conspicuously mastery of their roles. The necessity of spelling and spectacles is never questioned; thus the clear objective is to be the best speller, to wear the most fashionable spectacles" (Robinson 20). The narrator ridicules some of the norms, as he says of the habit of reading notices at church: "the less

there is to justify a traditional custom, the harder it is to get rid of it" (*Mississippi Writings* 38). But the "regular" characters never question the norms, for doing so could jeopardize their secure social position. They accept the rules of the game proudly, even if they are doing damage to themselves, as they are for the boy of "German parentage" that recited three thousand verses lines without stopping and "was little better than an idiot from that day forth" (*Mississippi Writings* 31).

There are, however, outcasts in St. Petersburg who do not quite follow the established rules, but who are also fundamental to the story and, in a way, to the functioning of society itself. They are Muff Potter, Huckleberry Finn and Injun Joe.

Muff Potter, the village drunkard, is in a marginal position because of his habits -- drunkenness, lack of proper manners -- but he is tolerated by the community to a certain extent. He is, after all, fundamentally harmless, thus serving as the laughing stock of the town. However, his marginal position puts him in an unsafe ground, and when an scapegoat is needed, he will certainly be the first. That is exactly what happens when Dr. Robinson is killed: nobody doubts that he is guilty, except, of course, Huck and Tom, but only because they have witnessed the crime and know who the real murderer is. "His implication in the murder is plausible enough, and his hapless degeneracy is thorough enough, that the townspeople feel no compunctions about rushing prematurely to a verdict" (Robinson 73).

Muff Potter is characterized as "drunk, same as usual" (*Mississippi Writings* 66) by Huck. The fact that he was found washing himself and then running away characterized "suspicious circumstances, especially the washing, which was not a habit with Potter" (76). Yet, he is also kind and generous, and is often presented by the narrator as a victim -

mentioned as "poor fellow" (77) or "poor Potter" (145). The boys see him as a good person, despite his drunkenness:

> "Don't you feel sorry for him, sometimes?"
>
> "Most always -- most always. He ain't no account; but then he hain't ever done anything to hurt anybody. Just fishes a little, to get money to get drunk on – and loafs around considerable; but lord, we all do that -- leastways most of us -- preachers and such like. But he's kind of good -- he give me half a fish, once, when there warn't enough for two; and lots of times he's kind of stood by me when I was out of luck."
>
> "Well, he's mended kites for me, Huck, and knitted hooks on to my line. I wish we could get him out of there." (*Mississippi Writings* 143)

Muff Potter, indeed, is presented by the narrator in a favorable light because Huck and Tom must feel remorse for not having told the authorities what they know. When he is in prison and the boys visit him, his kindness and humanity somehow prefigures Jim's in *Huckleberry Finn*:

> "You've been mighty good to me, boys - better'n anybody else in this town. And I don't forget it, I don't. Often I says to myself, says I, 'I used to mend all the boys' kites and things, and show'em where the good fishin' places was, and befriend'em what I could, and now they've all forgot old Muff when he's in trouble; but Tom don't, and Huck don't - they don't forget him', says I, 'and I don't forget them. . . . Shake hands - yourn'll come through the bars, but mine's too big. Little hands, and weak - but they've helped Muff Potter a power, and they'd help him more if they could." (*Mississippi Writings* 144)

Just as happens with Huck in *Huckleberry Finn* after his talks with Jim, the result of the talk is a greater remorse in Tom's guilty conscience: "Tom went home miserable, and his dreams that night were full of horrors" (*Mississippi Writings* 144). Such horrid remorse, of course, results in action towards undoing the wrong, and so, the very next day, Tom confesses the truth at the trial.

When Injun Joe is presented as the real murderer, the town "took Muff Potter to its bosom and fondled him as lavishly as it had abused him before." (*Mississippi Writings* 148). This, of course, will be only temporary, for the world is "fickle" (*Mississippi Writings* 148), and Muff will certainly resume his marginal position pretty soon. Yet, what is important to note here is that the law has credibility to establish differences between the individuals, and thus is actually solving a problem of identity (Gillman 5). Muff Potter becomes "innocent" only because Tom determines who the new "guilty" one is, the real enemy of the community: Injun Joe (not coincidentally, another marginal character). It is not by chance that the "respectable" characters are not considered suspicious, or as having any degree of guilt in the whole process. For instance, Dr. Robinson himself, who was a man with a high position in society, as his title indicates, is never investigated in his participation in the initial grave-robbing, which was, ultimately, the cause of his death, for if he had not hired Injun Joe and Muff Potter to rob the grave, nothing would have happened. But the town silences on that puzzling fact.

Since the trial determines without hesitation that the real enemy is Injun Joe, all that is left to do is to capture him. However, the problem is that everybody fears Injun Joe, to the point that, having had the chance to put him in court before for grave-robbing, no one had the courage to indict him. Tom (together with Huck, but the emphasis was on the main character's actions) was the only character who knew about Muff's innocence, and thus had to carry the guilt of the whole town on his shoulders; now he is the only one directly menaced by Injun Joe's freedom, and thus carries the fear the whole the community. As Forrest Robinson states:

> As a witness to the murder of Dr. Robinson, Tom knows that Muff is not guilty. But his fear of Injun Joe causes him to hesitate until the last minute in coming forth with the saving evidence. The villagers respond by treating Tom as a hero, and there is no mention made, even by Muff Potter, of the strange delay. This enigmatic silence is not the result of a failure of perception, or of a charitable desire to let Tom off the hook; rather, it is a residual manifestation of the villagers' own fear of Injun Joe. They know that drawing attention to Tom's weakness would serve as a reminder, by clear and direct implication, of their own. (51)

Injun Joe is a threat to the town for several reasons. First of all, of course, because he is a criminal, accused at least of grave-robbing. Yet, more specially, because he cannot be attacked for being a criminal: "The villagers had a strong desire to tar-and-feather Injun Joe and ride him on a rail, for body-snatching, but so formidable was his character that nobody could be found that was willing to take the lead" (*Mississippi Writings* 79). The community, indeed, fears him so much that it cannot get rid of him, but prefers just to look away. He, on the other hand, has a great resentment towards the community, specially for some high-positioned members who accused him of vagrancy: "He had me horsewhipped!", complains at one point Injun Joe of the widow Douglas's deceased husband who punished him. "Horsewhipped in front of the jail, like a nigger!" (*Mississippi Writings* 176). The comparison with a "nigger" is interesting: after all, the prejudice against Injun Joe seems to precede his career of crimes -- perhaps he has even been led to that aggressiveness for the fact that he was already ostracized. Before anything happened, he was already condemned for being a "half-breed", an impure race. The fact that he is a "half-breed" has some unexplained link with his violence, and the fact that he is part Indian makes a difference to the town, as the old Welchman says to Huck when he reveals that the man who was near the widow's house was Injun Joe: "When you talked about

notching ears and slitting noses I judged that that was your own your embellishment, because white men don't take that sort of revenge. But an Injun! That's a different matter, altogether" (*Mississippi Writings* 181).

If "an Injun is a different matter altogether", it is because the town accepts that there are different races, and that the white is the superior one. After all, "white men don't take that sort of revenge". Such racist assumptions somehow mirror the other racist crime, the one that cannot even be mentioned, for all the stability of the community rests on it. I am referring, of course, to slavery, which has all but disappeared from the book.

Injun Joe is first characterized by the boys as a murderer, even before the killing of Dr. Robinson happens: "That's so -- that murderin' half-breed! I'd druther they was devils a dern sight. What kin they be up to?" (*Mississippi Writings* 67). He is a man not easily intimidated: at the trial, he is "stolid as ever" (144), and Tom is scared when he looks at "Injun Joe's iron face" (146) or when "a contemptuous smile flitted across Injun Joe's face" (146). Injun Joe is, in fact, a very aggressive, fearless and outspoken individual, obsessed with revenge: "'You don't know me. Least you don't know all about that thing. 'Tain't robbery altogether – it's REVENGE!' - and a wicked light flamed in his eyes" (162). His only weakness, as happens with most of other marginals characters in Twain's fiction, is the use of alcohol, but even that is not enough for the boys to overcome his fear of him:

> "But say, Tom, now's a mighty good time to get that box, if Injun Joe's drunk."
>
> "It is, that! You try it!"
>
> Huck shuddered.
>
> "Well, no -- I reckon not."
>
> "And I reckon not, Huck. Only one bottle alongside of Injun Joe ain't enough." (*Mississippi Writings* 169-70)

Injun Joe dislikes his status as "half-breed", yet he, in a way, is respected by the community - the narrator emphasizes his "formidable character" (59) and the capacity he has to impinge fear on the other citizens. They, on the other hand, seem to need him as an enemy, as an opposition to all the values that the community sustains. It is interesting to note that the community mourns his death at the cave -- including, perhaps, the narrator, who at the moment describes him as "poor unfortunate" (198) and "hapless half-breed" (199). We also learn at the end that there were several petitions for Injun Joe's pardon:

> This funeral stopped the further growth of one thing - the petition to the Governor for Injun Joe's pardon. The petition had been largely signed; many tearful and eloquent meetings had been held, and a committee of sappy women been appointed to go in deep mourning and wail around the governor and implore him to be a merciful ass and trample his duty under foot. (*Mississippi Writings* 199)

According to Forrest Robinson, "the plangent appeal of the village women is an oblique admission that the half-breed was the victim of white society before he was its villain. Ironically enough, Mark Twain seems to have shared this strange mingling of fascination and self-inspired pity" (52). After all, the earlier moving description of Joe's death "contrasts dramatically with the diatribe against 'sappy women' that immediately follows" (53).

If Muff Potter is too far from a culturally accepted behavior to be regarded as anything more than an outsider, and Injun Joe is too dangerous to be kept alive, there is one character who, specially because of his young age, is still capable of being "reformed": it is Tom's friend, Huckleberry Finn. He is first described as "the juvenile pariah of the village, Huckleberry Finn, son of the town drunkard. Huckleberry was cordially hated and

dreaded by all the mothers of the town, because he was idle, and lawless, and vulgar and bad - and because all the children admired him so, and delighted in his forbidden society, and wished they dared to be like him" (*Mississippi Writings* 45). His position seems to be, in a way, privileged: he "came and went, at his own free will . . . . did not have to go to school or to church, or call any being master or obey anybody. . . . in a word, everything that goes to make life precious, that boy had. So thought every harassed, hampered, respectable boy in St. Petersburg" (*Mississippi Writings* 45). Yet this greater freedom, which gives him a higher status in relation to the other boys, is obtained at the cost of being rejected by the adults. Afraid of his influence on other boys, they forbid their children to socialize with Huck: Tom is punished for the mere fact of having talked to him. Although such prohibition only increases the desire of other boys (specially the mischievous Tom) to talk to him, the truth is that this desire will certainly diminish as he grows up and becomes an adult marginal figure, perhaps like his father or Muff Potter, and as the other boys grow up and become members of the community.

Yet, the fact that the mothers "cordially hated" the boy shows that he was not directly rejected or resented. The humorous remark says that he was "hated", but not that much, for he was rather harmless and, more than that, served as a limit to measure until what point the sons of such mothers should go -- Huck was the "bad boy" with whom the "good boys" should be compared. And that is why Tom, who sees himself as a "bad boy", but is actually closer to being a "good boy", desires to be as free as Huck.

Huck's outcast condition is best described by his clothes:

> Huckleberry was always dressed in the cast-off clothes of full-grown men, and they were in perennial bloom and fluttering with rags. His hat was a vast ruin with a wide crescent lopped out of its brim; his coat, when he

> wore one, hung nearly to his heels and had the rearward buttons far down the back; but one suspender supported his trousers; the seat of the trousers bagged low and contained nothing, the fringed legs dragged in the dirt when not rolled up. (*Mississippi Writings* 45)

Another important characteristic of the boy, which also marks his marginal condition, is the language he uses. Huck is, after all, illiterate, not being able yet to read or write, and his speech, as reproduced by the narrator, is consistently less "correct" than Tom's. This difficulty with language is even confused, in some instances, with a less capable mind: "This question was not entirely answered in Huck's slow mind" (206); "Huck was silent for some time, engaged in a mental struggle" (213) -- unfair characterizations of Huck that, as Leslie Fiedler observes, are not to be repeated in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.*

Because he is a marginal, Huck Finn has certain privileges over the other boys, or at least this is how the other boys, specially Tom Sawyer, understand it. As the narrator says, Huck is in a "gaudy outcast condition" (*Mississippi Writings* 45). He is also described as a "romantic outcast" (45) with a "superabundance of that time which is not money" (150). In other words, he has a kind of personal freedom not accessible to the other boys. However, not everything is fine in his life. The marginal position has its downsides too, and the rejection that Huck feels can be seen in the scene when the three boys (Tom, Huck and Joe Harper) appear alive in their own funeral and are received by the community:

> Aunt Polly, Mary, and the Harpers threw themselves upon their restored ones, smothered them with kisses and poured out thanksgivings, while poor Huck stood abashed and uncomfortable, not knowing exactly what to do or where to hide from so many unwelcoming eyes.
> He wavered, and started to slink away, but Tom seized him and said:

> "Aunt Polly, it ain't fair. Somebody's got to be glad to see Huck."
> "And so they shall. I'm glad to see him, poor motherless thing!" And the loving attentions Aunt Polly lavished upon him were the one thing capable of making him more uncomfortable than he was before. (115)

The problem of Huck is that he is not totally comfortable in the solitude of marginality, but a "regular" life doesn't make him feel comfortable either. His position as social outcast also makes him mingle with lower people -- slaves, for instance. In fact, one of the few remarks about black people is made by Huck himself, and it is a favorable one:

> "I tote for Uncle Jake whenever he wants me to, and anytime I ask him he gives me a little something to eat if he can spare it. That's a mighty good nigger, Tom. He likes me, becuz I don't ever act as if I was above him. Sometimes I've set right down and eat *with* him. But you needn't tell that. A body's got to do things when he's awful hungry that he wouldn't want to do as a steady thing." (*Mississippi Writings* 90)

While his "sound heart" makes him accept Uncle Jake as an equal, his conscience says that there is something wrong with that. For, as if ashamed of the confession he has made, or afraid that Tom might tell on him, Huck adds: "But you mustn't tell that." He is obviously afraid of the repercussion the fact could have. Moreover, his final, racist remark seems more a belated excuse than a sincere feeling. He is, from the start, divided between what he feels and what he thinks he must feel. Yet, his basic innocence is untouched, as he manages to survive at the margins of a community that partly tolerates him.

Huck Finn starts to be better seen by the community when he sees that Injun Joe and his friend are near the Widow Douglas' house, plotting revenge. He runs to a neighbor to get help, and is received at first with a certain hesitation:

> "Let me in - quick! I'll tell everything."
> "Huckleberry Finn - quick, let me in!"

> "Huckleberry Finn, indeed! It ain't a name to open many doors, I judge! But let him in, lads, and let's see what's the trouble." (177)

However, since the boy poses no serious threats, and since he has been so helpful in preventing Injun Joe from committing yet another crime, soon enough he begins to be considered apt to be a part of the community. He is considered to have "good spots": "You can depend on it. That's the Lord's mark. He don't leave it off. He never does. Puts it on every creature that comes from His hands" (*Mississippi Writings* 184).

Huck Finn, however, as we will see more clearly in the examination of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, has an ambiguous feeling towards society. Several of his new habits are uncomfortable to him, and the process of adaptation is very hard at the beginning: "the widow made a pretty fair show of astonishment, and heaped so many compliments and so much gratitude upon Huck that he almost forgot the nearly intolerable discomfort of his new clothes in the intolerable discomfort of being set up as a target for everybody's gaze and everybody's laudations" (208). The key word in Huck's feeling is "discomfort". When he momentarily escapes from the widow, he feels "comfortable" again:

> Early the third morning Tom Sawyer wisely went poking among some old empty hogsheads down behind the abandoned slaughter-house, and in one of them he found the refugee. Huck had slept there; he had just breakfasted upon some stolen odds and ends of food, and was lying off, now, in comfort, with his pipe. He was unkempt, uncombed, and clad in the same old ruin of rags that had made him picturesque in the days when he was free and happy. (*Mississippi Writings* 211)

Yet, Huck's contradictory feelings toward this new status in the community are not taken much into account, and "The widow said she meant to give Huck a home under her roof and have him educated" (208). This process of education, of course, will not be

as easy as it may seem, but the intention of the community, symbolized by the widow, is very clear: to turn Huck into a good, obedient, educated boy, conscious of the rules of society and of his duties in it.

Thus we have three types of marginal characters, each one deserving a different fate: one that first loses and then resumes his marginal position; one that poses a danger to the whole community and is eliminated; and another one that, after an approximation attempt, and being still young, is given the chance to enter "regular" society.

2.2 Setting up the borders: the education of Tom Sawyer

It is interesting to notice that hardly any black is mentioned in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. That is not casual. To depict the past in a nostalgic way as a time of a "happy childhood", the narration could not afford to make too clear the fact that the community in which such "happy childhood" takes place was sustained by the oppression of a whole race. But the fact that slavery is not mentioned betrays the reality that slavery was supposed to be something right and unquestionable: a part of life, just like anything else. Yet, to assume that all characters in the town are "evil" or "unconsciously guilt-ridden" because they support slavery would be wrong. They are, usually, unconscious of the implications of slavery, and, as Twain explains in his autobiography, talking about his childhood's Hannibal: slavery "stupefied everybody's humanity as regarded the slave, but stopped there" (*Autobiography* 33). He also remembers that

> In my schoolboy days I had no aversion to slavery. I was not aware that there was anything wrong about it. No one arraigned it in my hearing; the local papers said nothing against it; the local pulpit taught us that God approved it, that it was a holy thing and that the doubter need only look in the Bible if he wished to settle his mind – and then the texts were read

> aloud to us to make the matter sure; if the slaves themselves had an aversion to slavery they were wise and said nothing. (*Autobiography* 7)

Thus Aunt Polly, main representative of the "status quo", can be seen as a "good" character, just as Tom is, and therefore all the evils are concentrated on the figure of Injun Joe. However, by the existence of slavery, reflected in its denial, we can see signs depicting that there is something wrong at the core of that community. Furthermore, the division between blacks and whites in the next books of Twain will show hidden aspects of Southern towns similar to St. Petersburg.

Tom Sawyer has grown up in that community and therefore, even if unconsciously, he has already internalized the main rules. He, like Twain in his childhood, is unable to see anything wrong with slavery, and we do not need to turn to *Huckleberry Finn* and the dehumanizing "evasion" of Jim in order to find that out. In a footnote in *Tom Sawyer*, Mark Twain writes that "If Mr. Harbison had owned a slave named Bull, Tom would have spoken of him as "Harbison's Bull", but a son or a dog of that name was "Bull Harbison" (*Mississippi Writings* 72). In denying the slave the right to have the name of the family, which even a dog could have, Tom assesses that the black boy is actually less than a human being; that he is, in fact, mere property, as the "Harbison's" unquestioningly asserts. Tom is, in fact, insensible to slavery, as all the other members of the community, except, perhaps, Huck, whose comment on Uncle Jake's generosity shows, at least, that he is aware that slaves are capable of human emotions.

In what regards other aspects of "civilized behavior", Tom is not as obedient as some authority figures would expect. He lies, he makes fun of others, he cheats, he disobeys. He, in other words, manipulates the other members of the community in order to

have things his way. Yet, if we pay attention, there is an evolution in his behavior -- from an inconsequent child to a more "respectable" boy. The story of Tom Sawyer, more than a "children's story", is a story of the process of growing up. It is not by chance that at the end of it Mark Twain says that "it being the story of a boy, it must stop here; the story could not go much further without becoming the story of a man" (*Mississippi Writings* 215). Indeed, in *Tom Sawyer* we have the initiation of a juvenile hero into the "mysteries" of St. Petersburg society, for every adventure ends in an expression of adult approval.

Throughout the story, we read about the very strict norms that rule behavior in the small southern town. In order to become one of its citizens, Tom must obey such rules, internalize them, and finally pass a test. The episode at the cave is the final test, after which he will be accepted into society. As Forrest Robinson affirms, the cave

> is the place where Tom and Becky go to pieces, where the identities as children begin to dissolve, and where, in various ways, they "die". Later on, it is the place where they begin to reintegrate themselves as individuals, where they take the first steps in the transformation of their social roles, and from which they are reborn to their new personal and social identities. In short, the cave is at once a grave and a womb. (87)

Tom Sawyer, of course, never really challenges the "status quo". Indeed, he is more often considered a hero, and admired for his actions, than chided for supposed misbehavings. In fact, his misbehaving is also part of the game, and we should note that although he may cheat sometimes, as when he obtains the tickets to win a Bible, he never questions the necessity or the importance of the process in itself. The fact that he accedes to tell the truth about the murder is proof of his maturation and greater concern with responsibility. At the end of the book, the fact that he finds the treasure can be symbolically interpreted as the reward that he receives for having "eliminated" Injun Joe,

since he got out from the cave and Joe did not. As James M. Cox notes, "the discovery of the treasure, significantly hidden under Injun Joe's cross, enables Tom to enter heroically the ranks of the respectable" (Cox 144). There is no doubt, as Tom's survival is celebrated, that he will become a leading member of the community when he grows up: "Judge Tatcher hoped to see Tom a great lawyer or a great soldier some day" (*Mississippi Writings* 211).

But the most telling proof that Tom has "grown up" is that he is the one who tells Huck to adapt to society, even if he does not like its discomforts: "Tom routed him out, told him the trouble he had been causing, and urged him to go home." (*Mississippi Writings* 211). Huck complains that "everything's so awful reglar a body can't stand it" (212), to which Tom replies that "Well, everybody does that way, Huck" (212). He says to his friend that he won't be able to play robbers with him, for "we can't let you into the gang if you ain't respectable, you know" (213). Confronted with this mild form of blackmail, Huck, then, resigns and goes back to live with the widow. Tom Sawyer, who, by the way, was never a real outcast, is now a "respectable" boy. He seems to say that now it is Huck's turn to become "respectable" too.

Just as the marginal characters in the story have each a different fate, also Tom's relation to each of them is different. With Huck he has a relation of friendship and mutual admiration. Huck admires Tom's imagination and skills -- "Huckleberry was filled with admiration of Tom's facility in writing, and the sublimity of his language" (*Mississippi Writings* 72) -- and Tom envies Huck's freedom from social pressure: "Tom was like the rest of the respectable boys, in that he envied Huckleberry his gaudy outcast condition, and was under strict orders not to play with him" (*Mississippi Writings* 45). That does not

keep him from playing, of course. Tom never rejects Huck because of his lack of education or lower social status -- in fact, he envies him for not having to go to school or obey anybody -- but it is true also that he always assumes a leading position, always commanding the action. Huck, more passive and conscious of a certain inferiority, accepts Tom's leadership, as he will also in the final part of *Huckleberry Finn*. The friendship between the two boys is certainly sincere; they admire and trust each other; yet there is one important moment in which Tom betrays Huck, and perhaps we should analyze it with some attention. Just after they make the oath of not telling the truth about the murder they have seen, Huck asks Tom:

> "Does this keep us from ever telling -- always?"
> "Of course it does. It don't make any difference what happens, we got to keep mum. We'd drop down dead, don't you know that?"
> "Yes, I reckon that's so." (*Mississippi Writings* 72)

Of course, that is not "so". At the trial, Tom tells the truth, choosing social responsibility instead of a mere concern with his own safety, and obeys the pressure of his conscience (which is, perhaps, a form of unconscious social pressure) -- but breaks the oath with his friend. As a result, both boys are put in a dangerous position, because Injun Joe might seek revenge, and Huck loses his confidence, not only in Tom, but in the whole world: "Since Tom's harassed conscience had managed to drive him to the lawyer's house by night and wring a dread tale from lips that had been sealed with the dismalest and most formidable of oaths, Huck's confidence in the human race was well nigh obliterated" (*Mississippi Writings* 148). However, Twain does not explore further Huck's feelings, and the chapter ends there, with both boys subsumed in fear and apprehension; in the next

chapter, they seem already to be feeling much better, and simply decide to hunt for some hidden treasure.

Tom's relation with Muff Potter, as we have seen, is permeated by feelings of guilt. During several chapters he is divided between the fear he has of Injun Joe and the remorse he feels for knowing that there is an innocent in jail, and he is the only one that can save him. Since Muff Potter, despite his flaws, is a kind man, Tom's guilty feeling becomes each time harder to sustain. Yet, he will reveal the truth only at the trial. Thomas Blues, in *Mark Twain and the Community*, sees in that yet another manifestation of Tom's hunger for transforming everything into a spectacle: "Tom's conscience increasingly nags him as the trial date draws closer, but he manages to live with his guilt until he can reveal the truth to a packed courtroom" (Blues 8). At the trial, in fact, what appears more strikingly is not Tom's revelation in itself but the enchantment of the audience with it:

> Tom began -- hesitatingly at first, but as he warmed to his subject his words flowed more and more easily; in a little while every sound ceased but his own voice; every eye fixed itself upon him; with parted lips and bated breath the audience hung upon his words, rapt in the ghastly fascinations of the tale. (*Mississippi Writings* 147)

Of course, it is also Twain's own taste for spectacles that makes him prefer to write a dramatic courtroom scene instead of a boring early confession to the authorities. But what is interesting is that, however the reasons, the community never questions Tom's delay, and he even becomes "a glittering hero once more - the pet of the old, the envy of the young" (*Mississippi Writings* 148). The community understands very well Tom's fear of Injun Joe. But the transformation of Tom into a "hero" has less to do with Muff Potter's acquittal, since he was never socially admired, than with the courtroom spectacle

in itself, provided by Tom, and with the identification of the real murderer and real enemy of the town, Injun Joe.

The relation of Injun Joe and Tom is based mostly in fear. Tom doesn't tell the truth about the murder because he is afraid that Injun Joe might kill him; after the trial (and Injun Joe's disappearance) he fears that he will be back for revenge. Yet, while Tom fears Injun Joe, there is an element of admiration also. After all, his imagination plays with "robbers" and "Indians" -- all that Injun Joe actually is, and all that he, a respectable boy, cannot really be. It is significant that in the end Tom even experiences an identification with the criminal: "Tom was touched, for he knew by his own experience how this wretch had suffered" (*Mississippi Writings* 198). Of course, "nevertheless he felt an abounding sense of relief and security now, which revealed to him in a degree which he had not fully appreciated before, how vast a weight of dread had been lying upon him since the day he lifted the voice against that bloody-minded outcast" (*Mississippi Writings* 198).

Nevertheless, Tom's attitude regarding the marginals is ultimately one of denial and rejection. Since he assimilates the ideals of the community, he must not mingle much with them. His assertion to Huck that "being rich ain't going to keep me back from turning robber" (*Mississippi Writings* 213) suggests that he knows very well the difference between child-play and real life. In fact, it is interesting that, although his imagination runs to an ideal of marginality (pirates and robbers), it takes a literary and romantic form which does not correspond at all to reality. Tom would rather imagine a marginal life than live it; Huck lives it, and therefore is unable to quite believe in Tom's fantasy world. The fact that Tom decides to accept Huck at his games of "playing marginal" only if his friend gives up living as a real marginal shows that access to marginality, for him, is only possible in his

romantic imagination, for he is as part of the community, as much a "good boy", as Sid. As Leslie Fiedler puts it, commenting the end of the book, when Huck is, at the same time, accepted by the widow and by Tom in his gang: "both the integration into the family and the playing of terror in the place of living it stand for a surrender of independence, since Tom, who thinks he wants to be like Huck, secretly wants Huck to be like him" (*Love and Death in the American Novel* 283).

2.3 The narrative

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer is narrated by an omniscient narrator, seemingly distant both in space and time, for he is not involved in the action. We have, as Louis D. Rubin says, the world of children "seen from the perspective of an adult" (236). The narrator is outside the frame of reference of the story, and tells it, not as if it he was telling his own memories, but as if he was telling some kind of myth. His view is nostalgic, and that is why the book is described by himself as a "hymn to boyhood". The most representative moment of such narrative option is when the narrator describes in a humorous way the group of boys in the island, away from the town, playing to be Indians. For instance, when the boys start practicing smoking, the narrator tells us that "They were prouder and happier in their new acquirement than they would have been in scalping and skinning of the Six Nations" (*Mississippi Writings* 112). Sometimes the narrator even addresses the reader, as if blinking an eye. As he notes in the preface, "part of my plan has been to try to pleasantly remind adults of what they once were themselves, and of how they felt and thought and talked, and what queer enterprises they sometimes engaged in" (*Mississippi Writings* 4).

There are, of course, darker scenes and moments, but the narrator's voice always assures us that nothing really serious will happen. As Forrest Robinson says,

> Mark Twain settled into the safe, rather nervously studied, and thoroughly untoward persona of an urbane, slightly condescending outsider. Had it been narrated from the point of view of an illiterate, humorless, in almost all ways innocent outsider, the world of *Tom Sawyer* would have appeared to be what it in fact is: the world of *Huckleberry Finn*. (53)

There is however, something beyond the mere children's story. Dr. Robinson's unexplained involvement in grave-robbing insinuates that the "respectable" members of the community may not be as "respectable" as they first seem. Injun Joe's resentment towards the villagers, and their fear towards him, points to some unexplained racial hatred. Further, the almost total absence of references to slaves indicates that there would be something wrong in mentioning them more often, and therefore that slavery was incompatible with the portrayal of a happy town. Huck's uneasiness in being adopted tells us that perhaps civilization may not be as good as it seems at a first sight.

James M. Cox once mentioned that Twain had a "twofold" view of his native Hannibal, that his good memories were mixed with some unexplained sense of guilt that perhaps even he could not properly control or understand (145). Such twofold view is maintained and emphasized in his next books, as we can see in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, shown by the division between Huck's communal life with Jim on the raft, and the towns along the margin of the river, where there is no place for a slave and a boy to live together. In The *Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson*, as we have seen, the division between blacks and whites in the community becomes the main issue of the story. In *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* the division is at an embrionary state, perhaps, but it is there.

Despite all this, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* is a book in which nostalgic revision triumphs over bad memories, in which comedy triumphs over tragedy, in which the community is still a place for happiness and peace. All this is clearly shown in the "happy end": the villain Injun Joe dies, Tom saves Becky and finds himself rich. Huck is given a chance to adapt to society, and nothing in the end of the book indicates that he will eventually reject the offer - "I'll stick to the widder till I rot" (*Mississippi Writings* 214), he says to Tom. The law is still a reference for justice and for the division of human beings into categories, establishing who is guilty and who is innocent, what is right and what is wrong. The values of the community are not questioned but in a few sarcastic comments directed to some special habits. Yet, perhaps we should ask ourselves what is the reason for this position of the author: why the "marginals", who will have such an important position in *Huckleberry Finn*, appear only - well, "marginally" - in this previous book, and why the community is hardly criticized, and Tom's attitudes are not questioned.

One of the reasons is the evident identification of Mark Twain with the main character, Tom Sawyer. Tom is basically the young Twain in Hannibal; in reviewing his childhood from the point of view of adulthood, he obviously privileges the good memories over the bad ones. Tom is a positive character, the "good bad boy" that, opposing the shallow morality of Sunday school books, makes imagination win over the rigidity of adults. The story may be told in the third person, but it is certainly seen from Tom's perspective. As Leslie Fiedler observes, in *Love and Death in the American Novel*:

> By and large, it is possible to say that *Tom Sawyer* is a fable of lost boyhood written by Tom, while *Huckleberry Finn* is that same fable transcribed by Huck. Somewhat misleadingly, Tom's version does not appear in first person, though Twain considered telling it that way, and the "Boy's Manuscript", which is its germ, is actually written so. But its third-

> person narrative is finally even more right; for Tom is himself always an actor in a fiction of his own making, and, of course, he and Mark Twain are alternative sketches of the same character. Just as Tom speaks in a literary style compiled out of his favorite reading, so his book is a compound of genteel and gothic clichés, tempered with the condescension and humor which Twain considered proper in a book written for children. (284)

Indeed, such lines as "Life to him seemed hollow, and existence but a burden" (*Mississippi Writings* 16), describing Tom's feeling in the white-washing episode, are as exaggerated and "literary" as anything that Tom Sawyer himself would write. Even if written by an adult narrator, the perspective of the book is Tom's. This is also present in the description of the marginal characters, seen either as romantic or dangerous. After all, what makes a "marginal" a "marginal"? The word itself is never used by Twain in the book. The closest we have is "outcast" -- Huck, for instance, is described as a "romantic outcast" (*Mississippi Writings* 48), while Injun Joe is a "bloody-minded outcast" (*Mississippi Writings* 198), the two poles of marginality. Each character, indeed, has a particular trait that is emphasized, which is exactly what makes him a marginal, the characteristic that distances him from the community. In Muff Potter, it is the improper habits -- drunkenness and the filthiness. In Injun Joe, what is emphasized is his malignancy, his inclination to crime and anti-social attitudes, but also his courage, manliness and "formidable character" (79). In Huck Finn, it is his relative freedom from strict rules, joined with his mistrust or misunderstanding of the norms of civilized behavior. All this is, in a way, how Tom sees the marginals; but how they really are, when portrayed and self-portrayed by a real marginal, will be found only in *Huckleberry Finn*.

The other reason for the prevalence of the center over marginality in this book, akin to Twain's identification with Tom, is that he still believed that society could work

properly, that its inner conflicts could somehow be solved. The whole story in *Tom Sawyer* happens within the boundaries of a closed community, and all the dangers come from outsider characters, specially Injun Joe. As the happy ending shows, with Injun Joe's death, Tom's finding of the treasure and Huck's adoption by the widow, marginality is finally seen as negative, while acceptance (and, therefore, the community) is good. This, of course, was a belief that Twain had which, over the years, would be torn apart, and the community, as it appears, for example, in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, is no longer a safe haven. Therefore, in order to have a more clear picture of the theme of our study, we must now analyze Mark Twain's following books.

CHAPTER III

ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN

3.1 The marginal as protagonist

One of the major differences between *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn* is that the later book is narrated by the main character himself, and he is a highly original character: a semi-literate outcast fourteen-year old boy. The fact that it is Huck himself who tells his story accounts for great part of the interest still raised by the novel: the stylistic innovations created by Twain in the invention of "Huck's writing" are remarkable, as is the unique point-of-view provided by the perspective of the marginal.

Huck's narration, however, has not always been admired. In fact, when the novel was first published it was very criticized, and the book was even banned -- a polemic decision that gave birth to a discussion that continued for years. As mentioned in an unsigned article in *Life Magazine*, in 1885, reproduced in the Internet: "It is a pleasure to note that the Concord Library Committee agree with Life's estimate of Mark Twain's 'blood-curdling humor,' and have banished *Huckleberry Finn* to limbo. If they will again take our advice, let them banish the School of Philosophy. Concord will then rank with other well-regulated Massachusetts towns" (1).

What the critics disliked in the book was the "coarse" language as well as the lack of morals of the main character. Another contemporary review by *The San Francisco Evening Bulletin* says: "The author starts out by telling his juvenile readers that there are

some lies in his book -- that most people lie, and that it is not very bad after all. Of course the warning is timely that persons attempting to seek a moral in the story should be banished" (1). And the same *Life Magazine*, in a previous article, had laughed at the notion that the book could be suitable for children:

> An elevating and laughable description of how Huck killed a pig, smeared its blood on an axe and mixed in a little of his own hair, and then ran off, setting up a job on the old man and the community, and leading them to believe him murdered. This little joke can be repeated by any smart boy for the amusement of his fond parents" (2).

In *Recovering American Literature*, Peter Shaw explains that the genteel sensibility dominating nineteenth-century American literary taste "called for socially acceptable attitudes expressed with strict propriety of language. Huck's asocial attitudes and colloquial language, both of which manifestly violated genteel standards, led straight to the Concord Public Library's banning of the book in which it had appeared" (101).

Nowadays, of course, Huck's language is far from being considered offensive and his anti-social attitudes are not shocking at all. Still, in the context of the book, Huck's behavior causes him a lot of trouble, and his contradictory attitudes toward "civilization" still puzzle several readers. After all, Huck is a "marginal", that is, he lives at the margins of civilization, but not completely outside of it. He rejects a few aspects of civilization, but he also accepts others. The story of *Huckleberry Finn* is, in a way, the story of the dichotomy between these two forces: acceptance and rejection of society's values.

Twain described once a key scene of his book as the struggle between "a sound heart and a deformed conscience" (Smith 83), a good definition for the theme of the whole book as well. But, first of all, we have to consider that Huck is not wholly conscious of

the consequences of his behavior. What moves his rejection of the social rules, at least in a first moment, is not a profound ethical or social motive, since he is only fourteen and uneducated, but simply a rejection of the limits it imposes on his personal freedom. What most bothers him are the uncomfortable clothes, the annoying habits (good manners at the table, praying) and the prohibitions (not being able to sleep outside, for instance). If it is true that Huck's friendship with Jim, helping him to escape, is a more subversive act, it is also true that he never recognizes this act as an independent and noble decision, but rather as a manifestation of an "evil" inner self -- he never, in fact, becomes aware of the "deformity" of his conscience.

More than that, Huck starts the book playing with Tom Sawyer, and although he is a little tired of Tom's fantasies, which have "all the marks of a Sunday school" (*Mississippi Writings* 638), he is slowly getting used to civilization: "At first I hated the school, but by-and-by I got so I could stand it. . . . So the longer I went to school the easier it got to be. I was sort of getting used to the widows' ways, too, and they warn't so raspy on me. . . . I liked the old ways best, but I was getting so I liked the new ones, too, a little bit" (*Mississippi Writings* 639).

It is somewhat ironical, if not ominous (for it would imply that Huck might repeat his predecessor's fate), that it is his father the one who finally pushes him toward uncivilized life in the isolation of the woods. His father, jealous of the boy's ability to read and write, decides that Huck should not go to school anymore:

> And looky here -- you drop that school, you hear? I'll learn people to bring up a boy to put on airs over his own father and let on to be better'n what *he* is. You lemme catch you fooling around that school again, you hear? Your mother couldn't read, and she couldn't write, nuther, before she died.

> None of the family couldn't before *they* died. I can't; and here you're a-swelling yourself up like this. I ain't the man to stand it -- you hear? (644)

And so Pap takes Huck away from "sivilization", locking him up in a cabin in the woods. Huck's escape with Jim through the river, after pretending to have been killed, is less an escape of civilized life than an escape from Pap Finn's tyrannical violence and drunken fits. Once Huck is already alone in the woods, of course, he doesn't want to go back to the widow; but he also resents being alone. So he can only find a "soul mate", so to speak, in another runaway figure who, far from being a ruthless scoundrel like Pap Finn, has a "sound heart" like himself: the slave Jim.

There are few "father figures" in Twain's childhood novels. With the exception of Pap Finn, one of the most negative characters in all of Twain's fiction, in both *Tom Sawyer* and *Huck Finn* the familiar authorities are rigid but ultimately sweet women – the only exception being the patriarchal family of the Grangerfords in the duel episode, a universe of masculine violence that resembles that of *Pudd'nhead Wilson.* Aunt Polly, Aunt Sally, Miss Watson or the widow Douglas want to educate Huck and Tom by persuasion and insistence, not by sheer force. But if these women are presented as somewhat naïve by Twain, not so is the society to which they belong, and the codes that they obey. It is the widow who owns Jim, after all, and it is for fear of being sold down the river by her that Jim runs away.

The marginal characters, on the other hand, are all male. There is here, perhaps, an opposition between the "quest for adventure" associated with males and the "family values" associated with women (It would be hard, indeed, to imagine a "marginal" woman as a character in the nineteenth century, and specially in Twain's fiction, where

marginality, to some extent, means independence, a concept hardly associated with women at that time. We could point out Roxana's case, in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*; but it is an exception, for her marginal status is caused not by her behavior, but by the fact that she is legally black). But the significant point is that, being Pap Finn a negative force, and the other "father figure", Judge Tatcher (who takes care of Huck's money) conveniently distant, Huck can be on his own while away from the civilizing force of the women who insist on adopting him -- he is free while away from the family and the community, the "world of the mothers" (*Love and Death in the American Novel* 286). And Jim, because of his lessened position as a slave, relates to Huck as a "son", or at least a "brother": it is he who has to be protected from slave-hunters. In fact, while they are on the run, both the outcast boy and the slave are equal. Their friendship is, as Twain himself once declared, a "community of misfortune": they are together because of terrible circumstances, but, in the end, remain isolated by their different identities. When they get to the shore, they will have to be separated, so that their equality lasts only as long as the trip down the river lasts, and the problem remains waiting for a solution. Perhaps these several unsolved oppositions that construct the book (safety/adventure, conscience/heart, white/black, shore/river, civilization/marginality) are what ultimately gives major force to the story.

Yet, before we examine the problematic division inherent to Huck's and Jim's relationship, we should examine the other outcast characters present in the story. After all, they are the ones who, because of their detachment from the center, help to define it.

Pap Finn, for instance, is defined by Fiedler as a "corrupt victim" (*Love and Death in the American Novel* 286) of the system. Drunk, uneducated, ignorant and violent, he seems to be beyond remission. When a new judge, who doesn't know him, tries to reform

him, he seemingly behaves, becoming sober for a couple of hours. At night, however, Pap Finn gets drunk -- and violent -- again. The new judge "reckoned a body could reform the ole man with a shot-gun, maybe, but he didn't know not other way" (*Mississippi Writings* 646). Pap Finn is a proof that the system has several shortcomings. Nobody in the community likes Finn's father, and he doesn't seem to like them much either. He only comes back to town and takes Huck away because he wants the boy's money. According to Jim's hair-ball prediction, "Dey's two angels hoverin' roun' 'bout him. One uv 'em is white en shiny, en t'other one is black. De white one gits him to go right a little while, den de black one sail in en bust it all up. A body can't tell yit which one gwyne to fetch him at de las'" (*Mississippi Writings* 641-42).

However, Huck's own reaction to his father seems to be more of pity than simply fear: "I used to be scared of him all the time, he tanned me so much. I reckoned I was scared now, too; but in a minute I see I was mistaken -- that is, after the first jolt, as you may say, when my breath sort of hitched, he being so unexpected; but right away after I see I warn't scared of him worth bothering about" (*Mississippi Writings* 643). The first description of Pap offered by Huck shows, in fact, a destroyed old man:

> He was most fifty, and he looked it. His hair was long and tangled and greasy, and hung down, and you could see his eyes shining through like he was behind vines. It was all black, no gray; so was his long, mixed-up whiskers. There warn't no color in his face, where his face showed; it was white; not like another man's white, but a white to make a body sick, a white to make a body's flesh crawl -- a tree-toad white, a fish-belly white. As for his clothes -- just rags, that was all. He had one ankle resting on t'other knee; the boot on that foot was busted, and two of his toes stuck through, and he worked them now and then. (*Mississippi Writings* 643)

What is ironical in this description is the emphasis on Pap Finn's whiteness: it is an extreme, scary whiteness. This is Twain's first satirical observation about the problem of racial differences: the savage Pap is shown metaphorically as the greatest representative of white society. The joke is clearer when Pap later displays comments of extreme racism, contrasting whiteness (of skin and of the shirt) with blackness (the "real" condition of the mulatto, as it also happens in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*):

> There was a free nigger there from Ohio -- a mulatter, most as white as a white man. He had the whitest shirt on you ever see, too, and the shiniest hat; and there ain't a man in that town that's got as fine clothes as what he had; and he had a gold watch and chain, and a silver-headed cane -- the awfulest old gray-headed nabob in the State. And what do you think? They said he was a p'fessor in a college, and could talk all kinds of languages, and knowed everything. And that ain't the wust. They said he could VOTE when he was at home. Well, that let me out. Thinks I, what is the country a-coming to? . . . . I says to the people, why ain't this nigger put up at auction and sold? . . . . Here's a govment that calls itself a govment, and lets on to be a govment, and thinks it is a govment, and yet's got to set stock-still for six whole months before it can take a hold of a prowling, thieving, infernal, white-shirted free nigger" (*Mississippi Writings* 652)

But Pap's racism is, in the end, just one more feature of his angered temperament; Huck doesn't condemn it or approve it, and his cohabitation with Pap is not so bad in a first moment. Indeed, at first, Huck accepts his new life in the cabin at the woods with resignation, sometimes even with joy, because he doesn't need to go to school anymore; it is only "when pap got too handy with his hick'ry, and I couldn't stand it" (*Mississippi Writings* 648) that the boy decides to escape. And later, although Huck has reasons enough to reject his father's opinions, sometimes he quotes him to justify his own actions: "Pap always said, take a chicken when you get a chance, because if you don't want him yourself you can easy find somebody that does, and a good deed ain't ever forgot. I never

see pap when he didn't want the chicken himself, but that is what he used to say, anyway" (*Mississippi Writings* 689). Sometimes he even compares Pap's words with those of the widow, without deciding definitely for any of them: "Pap always said it warn't no harm to borrow things if you was meaning to pay them back some time; but the widow said it warn't anything but a soft name for stealing, and no decent body would do it" (689).

Pap Finn's social rejection comes from his coarseness and vulgarity, associated with violence and drunkenness: he is, after all, a more radical version of Muff Potter. In fact, Leslie Fiedler tells us that "Pap Finn had, indeed, been cast for the role of Muff Potter in an early version of *Tom Sawyer*, but he was too real a terror for that theatrically gothic tale" (*Love and Death in the American Novel* 281). Yet, although everybody in the community considers Pap Finn "a hard lot", Pap Finn considers himself a victim of society, and he is at least partly right in that feeling. After all, there are some manifestations of violence that are permitted by the community (for instance, duels in defense of "honor" or the feud between the Grangerfords and the Shepherdsons). Therefore, we have to admit that his rejection comes not only from his drunken violence and vulgarity, but from his lower social position, reflected by his clothes and uneducated speech. During the short period in which he tries to reform, "pap said he'd been a man that had always been misunderstood before, and the judge said he believed it. The old man said that what a man wanted that was down was sympathy, and the judge said it was so; so they cried again" (*Mississippi Writings* 646). But both the sympathy of the judge and the repentance of Pap Finn are lies, whether intentional or not. The rules of the community are too severe to permit a realistic integration to centrality of such an outlaw as Pap Finn, and he, by turn, only proves to be totally beyond reform: the vice is stronger than him. After refusing or

failing to take the opportunity that the centrality, in the figure of the new judge, offers him to rehabilitate, Pap Finn becomes the symbol of everything that the community rejects, fears and hates. In this sense he is like Injun Joe in *Tom Sawyer*. In fact, comparing *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*, Leslie Fiedler observes that

> In both books, there is a terrorized flight from a threatening Satanic figure, who also stands outside of the community from which the boy-protagonist tries to escape in earnest or in play; and in each case, the outlaw figure represents a grotesque travesty of the boy himself, his innocence distorted into an image of guilt. Tom plays the robber, the pirate, which Injun Joe is in fact; Huck yearns in Widow Douglas' house for the life of ignorance and sloth, which his Pap actually lives. (*Love and Death*... 281)

Yet, perhaps because Huck's sound heart overlooks his father's "bad angel", or perhaps exactly because he is also an outcast and sees in the old man a reflection of his own possible future, the boy does not completely reject his father as the rest of society does – we have seen, for instance, that Huck constantly quotes him. Moreover, if he feels relief when he finds out that his father is dead, we can suspect that he feels pity too. Just as Tom still maintains a minimal identification with the half-breed in the pity he feels when Joe is found dead in the cave (but, of course, such identification can only appear after Joe's death), Huck might not get totally rid of Pap Finn after the old man's death. As Leslie Fiedler puts it, referring to Huck's silence when Jim tells him that the corpse he had found was his father's: "had Huck been permitted to speak, one suspects that he might have paraphrased his own comment on the doomed crooks aboard the Walter Scott: 'I felt a little heavy-hearted about Pap, but not much, for I reckoned that if he could stand it I could' " (*Love and Death in the American Novel* 286).

The tar-and-feathering of the duke and the king is also taken with great pity, inspiring even one of Huck's most moving and known comments: "Human beings *can* be awful cruel to one another" (*Mississippi Writings* 851). Perhaps what is happening is, again, a process of self-identification: "one cannot help feeling that it is his own fate which Huck foresees in their plight, and it is himself he weeps for" (*Love and Death...* 286). Indeed, Huck and the two frauds share some characteristics, notably their marginality, the fact that they are always escaping from someone, and the way in which they disguise themselves or play roles to trick other people. But there's a difference: while Huck's tricks (the simulation of his death, for instance) and disguises (as a girl, as "George Jackson", etc.) are only used in extreme cases, to assure his survival, the two rascals live eternally playing roles that victimize other people. They profit from other people's credulity by amusing and exploring an eager audience. In this sense, they resemble more Tom Sawyer and his eternal craving for spectacle than the pragmatic Huck Finn:

> When the duke insists that it is 'blame foolishness' to risk the harsh consequences of being exposed as fraudulent claimants to the estate of Peter Wilks, the king replies: "Hain't we got all the fools in town in our side? and ain't that a big enough majority in any town?". The argument is perfectly plausible, of course; the townspeople in *Huckleberry Finn* are as perpetually ready to be deceived as the residents of St. Petersburg in Tom Sawyer. Armed with this knowledge, these comical, utterly unprincipled charlatans enjoy virtual immunity from detection and great material benefit in the confidence games they play on unsuspecting bumpkins along the Mississippi. It has been noted more than once that Tom Sawyer's possession and exploitation of the same knowledge is a key ingredient in his kinship with this pair of humbugs. (Robinson 111)

As in *Tom Sawyer*, spectacle is also very important in Huck's world. However, in *Tom Sawyer* Tom was always at the center of the stage, and all actions of the young hero tended towards becoming a "spectacle": the tribunal scene, the return at the funeral, the

appearance out of the cave, the revelation of the found treasure, all was done in order to maximize its public attention and obtain hails from the community. In *Huckleberry Finn*, however, the main character is mostly a watcher, a "voyeur." Instead of creating spectacles, as Tom does, Huck usually prefers to watch them and to describe them. That more passive characteristic is essential because it is this what makes us readers -- who cannot interfere in the story, but who are, just like him, "taken along" in it -- identify with him. Moreover, it allows Twain a more ironical description of the community, because he can criticize more openly by means of an "innocent" look. However, someone has to create the action. The spectacle, therefore, has to be provided not by the protagonist but by the world he sees; and since that world is extremely violent, the spectacle also assumes a grotesque form. Its actors are criminals or violent people like Cel. Sherburn; gun-fighting aristocrats, as seen in the feud between the Grangerfords and the Shepherdsons; and, mainly, a pair of rascals known as the "duke" and the "king", who poke fun at a community that is, at the same time, audience and willing butt of the jokes.

The duke and the king, are, of course, professionals of the spectacle. They have to create different tricks in order to survive, to entertain an eager audience-victim. This doubleness of the audience is clearly seen in the episode of the "Royal Nonesuch". After the audience discovers that they have been fooled, and are ready to lynch the two men, but one person (turns out to be a judge, that is, a person whose opinion matters in the community) rises up and says: "We're sold -- mighty badly sold. But we don't want to be the laughing-stock of this whole town, I reckon, and never hear the last of this thing as long as we live. No. What we want, is to go out of here quiet, and talk this show up, and sell the rest of the town! Then we'll all be in the same boat. Ain't that sensible?"

(*Mississippi Writings* 774). So the duke and the king have a full house for two more nights. Indeed, they had planned that things would happen just that way. The two frauds are always one step ahead of their audience: having predicted their behavior in the first night, they also know that in the third night the mob will try to lynch them, and so they run away first.

However, the duke and the king pay a price for their superior knowledge: they have to remain in eternal escape, being perpetually marginalized. They know too much about the hypocrisy of the villagers to be accepted as members of any community; and the villagers, on the other hand, can only remain their audience as long as the two impostors remain outlaws liable to lynching. Besides, they cannot live for too long in one place, for their games have a limited time duration: they have to be perpetually in motion. In fact, the first time that Huck finds them, they are escaping after being hunt for having performed a few tricks:

> Just as I was passing a place where a kind of a cowpath crossed the crick, here comes a couple of men tearing up the path as tight as they could foot it. I thought I was a goner, for whenever anybody was after anybody I judged it was *me* – or maybe Jim. I was about to dig out from there in a hurry, but they was pretty close to me then, and sung out and begged me to save their lives -- said they hadn't been doing nothing, and was being chased for it -- said there was men and dogs a-coming. (743)

Huck's description of both the duke and king is direct and objective, as was Pap Finn's, emphasizing the clothes used. It shows a couple of torn men rather than anything romantic or resembling a real duke or king:

> One of these fellows was about seventy or upwards, and had a bald head and very gray whiskers. He had an old battered-up slouch hat on, and a greasy blue woollen shirt, and ragged old blue jeans britches stuffed into his boot-tops, and home-knit galluses -- no, he only had one. He had an old

> long-tailed blue jeans coat with slick brass buttons flung over his arm, and both of them had big, fat, ratty-looking carpet-bags. The other fellow was about thirty, and dressed about as ornery. (*Mississippi Writings* 743)

In fact, Huck soon finds out by their behavior that they are not dukes or kings or anything similar. Nevertheless, he lets them continue their play-acting, for it costs him nothing to pretend that they are royalty. Once again, he quotes his father as an authority: "If I never learnt nothing else out of pap, I learnt that the best way to get along with his kind of people is to let them have their own way" (*Mississippi Writings* 747). Of course, Huck's mention of his father is ironical for the reader, because "this kind of people" could certainly include the old man. But Huck's father, despite being also an outlaw, differs from the frauds in the fact that he does not play with the hypocrisy of the community or tries to fool anyone: he usually acts in a more crude manner; for instance, when he wants Huck's money, he threatens the Judge by asking for it. While the duke and the king play a partly "useful" role, providing the spectacle that the community needs, Pap Finn can only serve as a "ghost", a reference of the way one should not behave, a negative image of all the values desired or seen as desirable by the community.

The duke and the king may have nothing to do with royalty; but, as Huck's and Jim's earlier discussion about kings with Jim shows, in practical terms there is not much difference between them and the actual royalty: "all kings is mostly rapscallions, as fur as I can make out" (*Mississippi Writings* 775). This is not limited to old kings in Europe. In fact, in the same South, in the pole opposite to Huck in the social spectrum, the aristocracy proves that it is as prone to violence as any European duke or king, real or not. When Huck first describes Cel. Grangerford, he says that "He was a gentleman all over;

and so was his family. He was well born, as the saying is, and that's worth as much in a man as it is in a horse, so the Widow Douglas said, and nobody ever denied that she was of the first aristocracy in our town; and pap he always said it, too, though he warn't no more quality than a mudcat himself" (*Mississippi Writings* 728). The quoting of his father, again, has an ironical sounding, for it suggests that any pretense to aristocracy is simply that: pretense.

The mention of "gentleman" in an ironical way had already been made in Twain's writing. In Chapter XL of *Life in the Mississippi*, after criticizing Walter Scott's and his chivalry books' negative influence in the South, he quotes a prospect from a college that says: "The president is southern by birth, by rearing, by education, and by sentiment; the teachers are all southern in sentiment, and with the exception of those born in Europe were born and raised in the South. Believing the southern to be the highest type of civilization this continent has seen..." (*Mississippi Writings* 469). At this point, however, Twain calls a footnote that describes "Illustrations of it thoughtlessly omitted by the advertiser" (the "it" referring ironically to the "highest type of civilization"). For what follows is the quoting, from newspaper articles, of several murders in duels or fights similar to the feud described in *Huckleberry Finn*, and for which they may have been the model. For instance:

> Professor Sharpe, of the Somerville, Tenn., Female College, 'a quiet and gentlemanly man', was told that his brother-in-law, a Captain Burton, had threatened to kill him. Burton, it seems, had already killed one man and driven his knife into another. The Professor armed himself with a double-barreled shot gun, started out in search of his brother-in-law, found him playing billiards in a saloon, and blew his brains out. The "Memphis Avalanche" reports that the Professor's course met with pretty general approval in the community; knowing that the law was powerless, in the

> actual condition of public sentiment, to protect him, he protected himself. (*Mississippi Writings* 470-71)

Having read that, the description of Cel .Grangerford in *Huckleberry Finn*, also a "quiet and gentlemanly man," sounds almost terrifying. Of course, he appears to be kind, and is much better dressed than any other character previously described by Huck:

> Col. Grangerford was very tall and very slim, and had a darkish-paly complexion, not a sign of red in it anywheres; he was clean shaved every morning all over his thin face, and he had the thinnest kind of lips, and the thinnest kind of nostrils, and a high nose, and heavy eyebrows, and the blackest kind of eyes, sunk so deep back that they seemed like they was looking out of caverns at you, as you may say. His forehead was high, and his hair was black and straight and hung to his shoulders. His hands was long and thin, and every day of his life he put on a clean shirt and a full suit from head to foot made out of linen so white it hurt your eyes to look at it; and on Sundays he wore a blue tail-coat with brass buttons on it. He carried a mahogany cane with a silver head to it. There warn't no frivolishness about him, not a bit, and he warn't ever loud. He was as kind as he could be -- you could feel that, you know, and so you had confidence. Sometimes he smiled, and it was good to see; but when he straightened himself up like a liberty-pole, and the lightning begun to flicker out from under his eyebrows, you wanted to climb a tree first, and find out what the matter was afterwards. He didn't ever have to tell anybody to mind their manners -- everybody was always good-mannered where he was. (*Mississippi Writings* 728)

The description reveals a man that has power and knows how to command others. But such power of authority, unfortunately, is not enough to stop the final bloodshed in the feud of the Grangerfords against the Shepherdsons – in fact, it is used to stimulate it; for, although the actual motive for the fight lies in oblivion, it certainly has something to do with "honor", being an affront to his gentlemanly condition. The only one that can see past this delusion of honor and nobility is, in fact, Huck. During the killing in which whole families die, he, an eternal "voyeur", hides up in a tree. Unable to do anything, he watches,

scared and powerless: "It made me so sick I most fell out of the tree. I ain't a-going to tell *all* that happened -- it would make me sick again if I was to do that. I wished I hadn't ever come ashore that night to see such things. I ain't ever going to get shut of them -- lots of times I dream about them" (*Mississippi Writings* 737).

Definitely, the world of *Huckleberry Finn* is not like that of *Tom Sawyer*, where the story happens within the borders of a closed community, centrality is safe and warm, and excessive adventure -- as Tom's unwatched wandering into the cave -- is dangerous. In *Huckleberry Finn*, as the episode of the feud well demonstrates, centrality is not so safe. It seems even that at the core of it there is only chaos -- both the pretensions to Southern aristocracy or to traditional royalty seem only to hide scams, feuds, fights, killings, and other things that make Huck feel "sick". Moreover, it is exactly Huck's distance from the center that allows him to describe it better, for he does not belong to it and is not obliged to accept blindly its values. In fact, Huck's connection with other marginal characters allows for a process of comparison and contrast, engaging the reader into different positions, displacements and approximations.

3.2 Transgression of borders: the "river" and the "shore"

The main theme of *Huckleberry Finn* is the friendship of Huck, a white boy, and Jim, a black slave. In this sense it represents a transgression of borders, a disobedience to the rules. And this is also related to the structure of the novel, with the friendship symbolized in the division of river and shore. At least that is how some authors, along them Tim Machan, see it. In the essay "The Symbolic Narrative of *Huckleberry Finn*", Tim Machan sees three different parts in the novel. The first one, before the appearance of

the duke and the king, shows a clear dichotomy between the river and the shore. The river is the place of peace, in which Huck and Jim are "free". The shore is the place of convention and of the lethal "sivilization". This opposition appears on the level of language too. If on the "river" there is more lyricism, on the "shore" we have more of a farce, with episodes of low comedy mixing with a satiric description of the town's people. Here, also, Huck's options are two: the "shore" is bad, the "river" is good. Moral choices, in this first part, are very clear (Machan 277-234). The second movement, referred by Machan, is when the duke and the king come aboard, thus ending the river-shore dichotomy. For, now, the boat is no longer the "community of misfortune", as Twain once described it, but characters of the shore have entered into it. Not only that; now the shore is also a more confusing place, where ignorant and violent people are mixed up with people like Mary Wilkins, "the girl with the most sand" (*Mississippi Writings* 341). Huck's options seem now more confusing and confused. Moral choices are ambiguous. The third movement, of course, is the "evasion", in which Huck becomes a secondary character, obeying orders from Tom. Here, his moral growth seems to have turned to nothing, for he does not seem to care about the treatment dispensed to Jim. In becoming Tom Sawyer, Huck's nobility – and, by extension, all nobility – is rendered as absurd; freedom is nonexistent; moral choices are not even possible.

All these three movements are directly related to the development of Huck's and Jim's relationship, a transgression of borders that starts innocently but acquires each time more profound implications. Huck and Jim, after all, cannot be friends in normal conditions because the boy is white and the man a black slave. But Huck has a sensibility that makes him see traits of humanity even in those who were not considered humans. In

fact, the first time that Huck mentions Jim is when Tom decides to play a trick on the slave. Huck would rather not do it; he alleges that "he might wake and make a disturbance, and they'd find out I warn't in" (*Mississippi Writings* 630). Yet Tom, unable to see anything wrong in doing tricks to a slave, insists, and "nothing would do Tom but he must crawl to where Jim was, on his hands and knees, and play something on him" (*Mississippi Writings* 630). So Tom takes Jim's hat off and hangs it upon a limb. The slave wakes up and thinks that he has been tricked by witches.

To play a trick on somebody one must assume a relation of superiority, not of equality. This is, in fact, how the relation of Huck and Jim starts. The first trick that he plays on the slave, for instance, putting the snake-skin near him while he sleeps -- a trick that Tom, by the way, would be very glad to perform -- proves to be almost fatal to the slave when the snake's mate comes and bites him. Yet, since the blame lies with the snake-skin negative powers, the fact is still not enough to make Huck learn the lesson; it takes still another trick: pretending that their separation in the fog had not happened, Huck tells a long story to Jim. The slave's response when he finds out that his friend was trying to fool him is moving:

> "En when I wake up en fine you back agin, all safe en soun', de tears come, en I could a got down on my knees en kiss yo' foot, I's so thankful. En all you wuz thinkin' 'bout wuz how you could make a fool uv ole Jim wid a lie. Dat truck dah is *trash*; en trash is what people is dat puts dirt on de head er dey fren's en makes 'em ashamed." (*Mississippi Writings* 709)

Indeed, so moving is his speech that Huck has to apologize to him, marking a new stage in his personal growth: "It was fifteen minutes before I could work myself up to go and humble myself to a nigger; but I done it, and I warn't ever sorry for it afterwards, neither.

I didn't do him no more mean tricks, and I wouldn't done that one if I'd a knowed it would make him feel that way" (*Mississippi Writings* 709). This episode marks an acknowledgment, by Huck, that Jim also has feelings; but it does not still represent a fight with his conscience (he was not sorry afterwards). The first time that Huck actually breaks the rules of the slave-holding society – in fact, the first time that Huck realizes that, by traveling with a runaway slave he is breaking serious rules of a slave-holding society – happens when the slave hunters come and Huck saves Jim from them. In this occasion his thoughts are more conflicting: "I got aboard the raft, feeling bad and low, because I knowed very well I had done wrong" (*Mississippi Writings* 714).

Huck's point of view pervades all the narrative, and all the characters portrayed in the book are, in one way or another, filtered through Huck's eyes. He always, for instance, describes Jim as "a mighty good nigger" -- "mighty good", sure, but a "nigger" nonetheless. And although Huck's character development allows him to decide that his friendship with Jim is more important than the rules he is breaking, this is based more on an intuitive feeling than on a rational recognition of his humanity. After all, even the final decision to "go to hell" is a recognition that he is doing something wrong, shameful, which should be punished. Yes, it represents a break with the centrality and an option for marginality: it is, after all, a grave disobedience to the rules of Miss Watson, the widow Douglas and all the community to which they belong. However, it does not implicate in a rejection of their morality: Huck is not saying that "society is wrong, my feelings are right", but simply acknowledging that such morality is something that he cannot afford, something which is beyond his powers to attain. Huck comes to believe, indeed, that he is wicked: "I would take up wickedness again, which was in my line" (*Mississippi Writings*

835), but he does not deny that the widow and Miss Watson's teaching represent "goodness" (a "goodness" which includes, of course, returning a runaway slave to its legitimate owner).

Twain has said that Huck's decision represented the fight between a sound heart and a deformed conscience, and that in this instance the heart wins. Yet, the victory over the racist conscience is not complete. As Huck holds the letter written to Miss Watson telling about Jim's location, the images that come to his mind at the moment are those of the good moments he spent with the runaway slave:

> But somehow I couldn't seem to strike no places to harden me against him, but only the other kind. I'd see him standing my watch on top of his'n, 'stead of calling me, so I could go on sleeping; and see him how glad he was when I come back out of the fog; and when I come to him again in the swamp, up there where the feud was; and such-like times; and would always call me honey, and pet me and do everything he could think of for me, and how good he always was; and at last I struck the time I saved him by telling the men we had small-pox aboard, and he was so grateful, and said I was the best friend old Jim ever had in the world, and the *only* one he's got now; and then I happened to look around and see that paper. (834)

Such images, contrasted with the final image of the written paper in his hand, persuade him to decide for the rescue of Jim in spite of the punishments provided by the morality of the community, in which, however, he still innerly believes. The decision is, in fact, a choice between sincere feelings of friendship and false feelings of righteousness. And if he chooses the friendship it is because Jim's generous personality has caused such a big impression on him that he cannot simply accept what his "deformed" conscience dictates. As Davis Sloane says, "Twain's optimism manifests itself in Huck Finn's action. In a private act of conscience, a person's kindness responds to kindness and guarantees ultimate human rights" (122). Huck's decision is, certainly, more emotional than rational,

based on the remembrance of good moments down the river instead of considerations about the evilness of slavery. The emotional root of his decision does not take the merit of it, but perhaps it helps to explain why, in the final part of the book, Huck will again assume a passive role and let Tom control the action.

Huck's decision to save Jim presents two problems for Twain. The first one is that this action will transform Huck Finn into an outlaw beyond remission. After all, while the rebellious thoughts are only in the boy's head, he is not breaking any law. But to rob a slave is a crime that the community cannot forgive. The second problem is related to the plot: to make Huck rob a slave is problematic for the resolution of the story. After all, if he succeeds in the rescue, he will have nowhere to go, since a new journey down the river would only lead him again to an endless escape; if he fails, tragedy will be unavoidable. The solution found by Twain was to put Tom Sawyer back in the story and turn the rescue into a false option, thus transforming what would be a dramatic or even tragic episode into a farcical plot that will lead to a reenactment of the initial order.

Certainly this final part is the most troublesome in the book. Several critics deplore the dehumanization of Jim, the reduction of Huck to a mere supporting actor, and the lengthy extension of the farcical episodes. But the last part of the book can also be seen as a mockery of romantic literature and all it represents, which means, the ideals of "honor" and "nobility" of the southern aristocracy. In *Life in the Mississippi*, Twain argues that the books of chivalry have caused terrible evils to the South, and it is not a coincidence that the plots to save the prisoner are based at least partly in Walter Scott's books. It is also true that the final part can well be read as an indictment of the absurdity of slavery, portrayed in an absurd way. Yet, as Leslie Fiedler says,

> The burlesque tone of the finale manages to suggest such ideas, but at the same time keeps them in the realm of slapstick, where they do not appear either problematical or horrifying. The essential point of the ending is to reassert the duplicity of the book, to play out its moral issues as jokes; for if we were once to stop laughing, we would be betrayed out of the Neverland of childhood back into an actual world of maturity. The book must end just short of Huck's growing up, thus leaving us with the conviction that his gesture of total rejection and the brief, harried honeymoon that preceded it, are as endless as childhood's summers, really eternal. (*Love and Death in the American Novel* 288)

If Huck's silence while his friend all but tortures Jim is at least a little puzzling, it is true that he still believes that they are actually rescuing a slave. It is only when Huck finds out that Tom knew all along that Jim was already free, that he understands the real situation: "I couldn't ever understand before, until that minute and that talk, how he *could* help a body set a nigger free with his bringing-up" (*Mississippi Writings* 909). But he remains silent as to the reasons of his friend's action, and it is Aunt Sally who asks the question that he could have asked: "Then what on earth did *you* want to set him free for, seeing he was already free?" (908). Tom's answer, although interrupted by the arrival of Aunt Polly, is unequivocal: "Well, that *is* a question, I must say; and just like women! Why, I wanted the *adventure* of it; and I'd a waded neck-deep in blood to -- goodness alive, AUNT POLLY!" (908). The travesty of an anti-social act into a harmless game is typical of Tom; as usual, he "plays being a marginal" while remaining safely at the center. But the irony is that Huck's participation in the rescue, and even in the earlier quest for freedom in the river, is turned into an almost meaningless act, which is only important for his personal growth, but not for its practical consequences, since Jim was already free. A similar deception happens when Huck finds out that his father is dead. Tom Quirk, in "The Realism of *Huckleberry Finn*", states that

> the two principal plot devices, it turns out, are false leads, Hitchcockean Maguffins: Huck is fleeing from Pap, but Pap, we learn at last, was the dead man in the floating house thirty-four chapters and several hundred miles ago. Jim is escaping from the dreadful edict of Miss Watson to sell him down the river but, again, we eventually discover that he had been freed in her will two months earlier. (149)

But no matter how they are received by the reader, both the death of the father and the legal freedom of the slave solve a problem for Twain, who can finish his plot with a happy ending, and for the community, making possible the reintegration of Huck into it. Since Huck's attempt to free a slave was harmless, it did not turn him into a criminal; and his father's death eliminates at least one obstacle in the process of education of the boy. Yet, there is still one element of resistance, which is Huck's inner desire for freedom, which the adventure with Jim has only made bigger. The rescue of the slave might have been false, but Huck's decision to do it was not, and we can guess further conflicts with the community later on. And so the ending of the book must be yet another turn to the beginning, another attempt to an impossible yet always attempted escape: "I reckon I got to light out for the Territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and sivilize me and I can't stand it. I been there before" (*Mississippi Writings* 912).

3.3 The narrative: language and point of view of the marginal

Certainly the first thing that strikes the reader of *Huckleberry Finn* is its language. As Richard Chase points out, "The book makes a music of words which is beautifully sustained and modulated to the very end. The language is original and it has proved to be one of the most important discoveries - for it was discovered and adapted rather than

Indeed, even before the first chapter, Twain tells the reader in a partly humorous but partly serious explanatory note:

> In this book a number of dialects are used, to wit: the Missouri Negro dialect; the extremest form of the backwoods Southwestern dialect; the ordinary 'Pike County' dialect; and four modified varieties of this last. The shadings have not been done in a haphazard fashion, or by guesswork; but painstakingly, and with the trustworthy guidance and support of personal familiarity with these several forms of speech. (*Mississippi Writings* 610)

But what is most fascinating in the book is not only the language in itself, but how it is used by the young narrator, Huck Finn. We cannot, in fact, separate Huck from his language. The way he talks creates his identity, specially in what concerns his marginal status, which is defined by the words he uses. Huck starts the book by identifying himself and assuming control of the narration: "You don't know about me without you have read a book by the name of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*; but that ain't no matter. That book was made by Mr. Mark Twain, and he told the truth, mainly. There was things which he stretched, but mainly he told the truth" (*Mississippi Writings* 625). This mention of the earlier book is done by Twain not only to associate his new enterprise with the previous successful story (the original subtitle of the book was "*Tom Sawyer's Comrade*"); but also to emphasize most clearly is the great difference that exists between the two books in terms of language use.

Huck's language, as an uneducated marginal, is based in his "unliterary" narration, full of misspellings and grammatical errors. While the effect was obtained by a careful juxtaposition of colloquial features and more correct sentences, it was so well-done that for the reader it appears that Huck writes in the same way in which he talks. His language is one and only one through the whole book, never losing its rhythm and easy flow.

However, we should note that he is very much aware of the different modes of speech. This is most clearly seen in the scene in which he burlesques the speech of the king when he first sees Peter Wilks's coffin:

> Well, by and by the king he gets up and comes forward a little, and works himself up and slobbers out a speech, all full of tears and flapdoodle about its being a sore trial for him and his poor brother to lose the diseased, and to miss seeing diseased alive after the long journey of four thousand mile, but it's a trial that's sweetened and sanctified to us by this dear sympathy and these holy tears, and so he thanks them out of his heart and out of his brother's heart, because out of their mouths they can't, words being too weak and cold, and all that kind of rot and slush, till it was just sickening; and then he blubbers out a pious goody-goody Amen, and turns himself loose and goes to crying fit to bust. (*Mississippi Writings* 786)

The sentence "it's a trial that's sweetened and sanctified to us by this dear sympathy and these holy tears" is a direct transcription of the king's speech, while the beginning and the end of the paragraph are clearly Huck's voice. Huck, in fact, not only knows enough as to reproduce exactly the king's language, but also knows that his manipulation of language is done with the purpose of fooling others. Huck starts qualifying the speech as "all full of tears and flapdoodle" and ends saying that the king continued with "all that kind of rot and slush, till it was just sickening". This completely ridicules the king's speech and his use of sentences such as "because out of their mouths they can't, words being too weak and cold", etc. The language of the king, which would be a more "civilized", correct language, reproducing what is actually said at funerals, is not only parodied but demystified by Huck, who is more sincere with his incorrect speech. It is as if the same "correct" or "civilized" language was a cover for lies, hiding other meanings than the literal one, while Huck's incorrect spelling shows a sincere display of

feelings. As Janet McKay says, in "'Tears and Flapdoodle': Point of View and Style in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*",

> Through the consistent use of certain linguistic features Twain characterizes Huck and makes the reader believe in the reality of Huck's vision. Huck's style both because of its apparent simplicity and because of the way in which it contrasts with the hypocrisy of acceptable language use comes to represent honesty in a dishonest world. Ultimately, the reader distinguishes truth from falsity by the linguistic contrasts of the text. (208)

Indeed, the central speech (grammatically correct, "elevated") is usually shown as false by Twain, using Huck's narration in an ironical way. For instance, the hilarious description made by Huck of Emmeline Grangerford's paintings, showing, for instance,

> a young lady with her hair all combed up straight to the top of her head, and knotted there in front of a comb like a chair-back, and she was crying into a handkerchief and had a dead bird laying on its back in her other hand with its heels up, and underneath the picture it said "I Shall Never Hear Thy Sweet Chirrup More Alas." (*Mississippi Writings* 724)

Such image leads to Huck's ironical statement (ironical for us readers, for it is said as seriously as anything that Huck says): "I reckoned that with her disposition she was having a better time in the graveyard" (*Mississippi Writings* 725).

Emmeline Grangerford's poems, accurately reproduced by Huck, are also a parody of romantic and gothic pieces:

> "Despised love struck not with woe / That head of curly knots, / Nor stomach troubles laid him low, / Young Stephen Dowling Bots.
> O no. Then list with tearful eye, / Whilst I his fate do tell. / His soul did from this cold world fly / By falling down a well." (726)

The sole reproduction of the poem is enough to make us laugh, and Huck's later comments only emphasize the contrast between his practical realism and Emmeline's

ornated language: "She warn't particular; she could write about anything you choose to give her to write about just so it was sadful" (*Mississippi Writings* 726). In fact, it is usually acknowledged that the major aesthetic achievement of *Huckleberry Finn* as a literary piece is its realism. Twain hated the works of James Fenimore Cooper and Walter Scott exactly because of their "falseness". In his famous essay "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses", Twain says that Cooper's work "has no invention, it has no order, system, sequence, or result; it has no lifelikeness, no thrill, no stir, no seeming of reality; its characters are confusedly drawn and by their acts and words they prove that they are not the sort of people the author claims that they are" (qtd. in Chase 147). Of Walter Scott he says worse things, getting to the point of considering his books as one of the causes of the Civil War (*Mississippi Writings* 501) -- and, of course, it is no coincidence that the sinking boat in *Huckleberry Finn* is called "Walter Scott". Such books are the basis for Tom's imagination, as well as for the codes of honor of the southern aristocracy, another delirious fantasy.

Huck's realism, then, is simply his inability to see the fantasies that others see all the time. He is unable to see, as Tom does, Arabs and elephants, or to contrive strange plots taken from books to free a free slave. He also cannot afford the language of the aristocracy: when he tries to write a poem for the deceased Emmeline, he finds out that he is not able to do so: "I tried to sweat out a verse or two myself, but I couldn't make it go, somehow" (*Mississippi Writings* 727). The realism of the book, then, with its narration devoid both of linguistic ornaments and false intentions, is directly associated with the special point of view of a character that is marginal. Language, point of view and social

position are all connected, to the point that it becomes impossible to separate one from the other.

It is Huck's marginal, peripheral view that best serves to satirize the social conventions of the center. While Huck himself doesn't make fun of anyone, he has an acute eye to see the real truth behind the people's acting. Huck observes everything, and although sometimes he is unable to grasp the mechanisms of hypocrisy that lie in great part of the behavior observed, it is exactly this ignorance, joined with our further understanding of what he is seeing, that make the narration so funny. For instance, conventional religious morality is ridiculed several times; perhaps most poignantly in the church service just before the bloody feud between the Grangerfords and the Shepherdsons:

> Next Sunday we all went to church, about three mile, everybody a-horseback. The men took their guns along, so did Buck, and kept them between their knees or stood them handy against the wall. The Shepherdsons done the same. It was pretty ornery preaching -- all about brotherly love, and such-like tiresomeness; but everybody said it was a good sermon, and they all talked it over going home, and had such a powerful lot to say about faith and good works and free grace and preforeordestination, and I don't know what all, that it did seem to me to be one of the roughest Sundays I had run across yet. (732)

To Huck, the service was a bore; to him the words said there had no meaning. But, ironically, expressions as "brotherly love" and "free grace" seem to make sense to the Grangerfords and the Shepherdsons; nevertheless, they take their guns with them. Here again, as in the king's speech, the language of "civilization" is revealed as empty words, without sincere feelings. To them, "brotherly love" means nothing but rhetoric; to Huck, who doesn't use such pompous words, it means his friendship with Jim.

CHAPTER IV

THE TRAGEDY OF PUDD'NHEAD WILSON

4.1 The community and the marginal characters

In *Tom Sawyer*, the clash between marginality and centrality was not the main issue of the story, but it could be observed in some secondary elements of the plot. In *Huckleberry Finn*, the view of centrality by a marginal character was certainly a major point of interest, but the conflicts happened mainly inside Huck's head (the "heart" versus "conscience" issue). It was in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* that the conflict between centrality and marginality, and the questions of social identity raised by it, were more fully explored by Twain. This happens because the plot developed around the movement, from the margin of society to its center, which is performed by David Wilson, as well as a his relation with the slave Roxana and her son Tom Driscoll - all of them involved in some attempt of social transgression.

Moreover, the whole idea of the plot is concerned with questions of marginality and social identification. When Roxy changes in the cradle a "legally" white baby for a "legally" black one, she is not simply saving her son from the terrible fate from being sold down the river, but questioning the "law" that determines who should be black and who should be white, and the process in which identity itself is defined. If, as I have said in the introduction, the "marginal" defines the "center", then *Pudd'nhead Wilson* is a book that focused on what happens when marginals and respected characters change their places,

revealing the superficiality of the distinction. The story shows an artificial division of human beings, best represented (but not limited to it) by the division of races. In fact, the initial description of the town already foreshadows the tale about division that will unfold:

> The scene of this chronicle is the town of Dawson's Landing, on the Missouri side of the Mississippi, half a day's journey, per steamboat, below St. Louis. In 1830 it was a snug collection of modest one- and two- story frame dwellings, whose whitewashed exteriors were almost concealed from sight by climbing tangles of rose vines, honeysuckles, and morning glories. Each of these pretty homes had a garden in front fenced with white palings and opulently stocked with hollyhocks, marigolds, touch-me-nots, prince's-feathers, and other old-fashioned flowers; while on the windowsills of the houses stood wooden boxes containing moss rose plants and terra-cotta pots in which grew a breed of geranium whose spread of intensely red blossoms accented the prevailing pink tint of the rose-clad house-front like an explosion of flame. When there was room on the ledge outside of the pots and boxes for a cat, the cat was there-- in sunny weather--stretched at full length, asleep and blissful, with her furry belly to the sun and a paw curved over her nose. Then that house was complete, and its contentment and peace were made manifest to the world by this symbol, whose testimony is infallible. (*Mississippi Writings* 917)

A few lines below, the description of this quiet southern town ends abruptly with an ominous paragraph stating that "Dawson's Landing was a slaveholding town" (*Mississippi Writings* 918). It is as if the peace and natural beauty was only a cover for the horrors of slavery and racial injustice, for this sole sentence undermines or even eliminates all that the image of peace and tranquillity that has come before.

After this description of the town we have an ironical presentation of the leading citizens of Dawson's Landing: all "gentlemen" proud of their ancestry. Of course, it is another cover, this time for arrogance and violence, as the characterization of Pembroke Howard well shows:

> He was a fine, majestic creature, a gentleman according to the nicest requirements of the Virginia rule, a devoted Presbyterian, an authority on

> the "code", and a man always courteously ready to stand up before you in the field if any act or word of his had seemed doubtful or suspicious to you, and explain it with any weapon you might prefer from bradawls to artillery. (*Mississippi Writings* 919)

It is almost unnecessary to clarify the ironical use of the verb "to explain" related to the use of weapons. Another ironical portrait is that of Percy Driscoll, who "was a fairly humane man toward slaves and other animals" (*Mississippi Writings* 926).

The first chapter ends with the famous episode of the "half-dog" which introduces us to David "Pudd'nhead" Wilson, in a clear parable about division and the issues that will be developed later throughout the book. It is from this episode on that the plot develops: the whole story, after all, can be read as Wilson's attempt to clear his name and leave behind his nickname. In order to do that, he must be accepted by the establishment, which presupposes that he understands the rules of the game. After all, his initial rejection by the people comes from the fact that he seems to be unable to understand basic principles of division. Wilson starts by saying aloud when he hears a dog barking:

> "I wish I owned half of that dog."
> "Why?" somebody asked.
> "Because I would kill my half."
> The group searched his face with curiosity, with anxiety even, but found no light there, no expression that they could read. They fell away from him as from something uncanny, and went into privacy to discuss him. One said:
> "'Pears to be a fool."
> "'Pears?" said another. "_Is,_ I reckon you better say."
> "Said he wished he owned _half_ of the dog, the idiot," said a third. "What did he reckon would become of the other half if he killed his half? Do you reckon he thought it would live?"
> "Why, he must have thought it, unless he IS the downrightest fool in the world; because if he hadn't thought it, he would have wanted to own the whole dog, knowing that if he killed his half and the other half died, he would be responsible for that half just the same as if he had killed that half instead of his own. Don't it look that way to you, gents?"

> "Yes, it does. If he owned one half of the general dog, it would be so; if he owned one end of the dog and another person owned the other end, it would be so, just the same; particularly in the first case, because if you kill one half of a general dog, there ain't any man that can tell whose half it was; but if he owned one end of the dog, maybe he could kill his end of it and—"
>
> "No, he couldn't either; he couldn't and not be responsible if the other end died, which it would. In my opinion that man ain't in his right mind."
>
> "In my opinion he hain't _got_ any mind."
>
> No. 3 said: "Well, he's a lummox, anyway."
>
> That's what he is;" said No. 4. "He's a labrick--just a Simon-pure labrick, if there was one."
>
> "Yes, sir, he's a dam fool. That's the way I put him up," said No. 5. "Anybody can think different that wants to, but those are my sentiments."
>
> "I'm with you, gentlemen," said No. 6. "Perfect jackass--yes, and it ain't going too far to say he is a pudd'nhead. If he ain't a pudd'nhead, I ain't no judge, that's all."
>
> Mr. Wilson stood elected. The incident was told all over the town, and gravely discussed by everybody. Within a week he had lost his first name; Pudd'nhead took its place. In time he came to be liked, and well liked too; but by that time the nickname had got well stuck on, and it stayed. That first day's verdict made him a fool, and he was not able to get it set aside, or even modified. The nickname soon ceased to carry any harsh or unfriendly feeling with it, but it held its place, and was to continue to hold its place for twenty long years." (*Mississippi Writings* 920-921)

There are several important things to notice in this episode. The first one is that the discussion about the half-dog, and how just one half couldn't live while the other dies, is very similar to the discussion about the Siamese brothers in *The Comedy of Those Extraordinary Twins*, the story that gave origin to *Pudd'nhead Wilson*. Although in this latter book the twins have been physically separated, they are dependent of each other, always appearing together; besides, although they no longer share the same body, the idea of opposed characters (as if they were two halves of the same person) is also maintained. The idea of "half", by the way, is repeated in several other parts of the story: Roxy asks for half of Tom's pension. In the engine company and the hook-and-ladder company, "half

of each was composed of rummies and the other half of anti-rummies, after the moral and political share-and-share-alike fashion of the frontier town of the period" (984). When the knife of the twins is stolen, "half the people believe they never had any such knife, the other half believe they had it and have got it still" (1012). This recurrent image of a half that cannot survive without the other also suggests the division of blacks and whites in the community, and their relations of dependence: the white society may despise the slave, but its whole foundation is based on racial slavery, and cannot survive without it.

Another significant aspect in this episode is the uniformity of opinion of the town members. Mark Coburn says that "Twain took pains to present the crowd as a collective personage. All the voices sound alike and reflect the same point of view. Wilson's judges are "the group" or "everybody"; when the narrator particularizes the speaker, he gives them numbers rather than names" (211). In fact, such presentation of the community as a group of beings without individual thoughts will appear in the whole book as a recurrent idea, and it implies that individual, independent thoughts, are not highly valued in the community.

It is also important to notice that the nickname of "Pudd'nhead" stood for twenty years, singling out Wilson as a marginal figure. After all, this is a culture that gives an enormous importance to names. From Cecil Burleigh Essex to Roxy (who believes to be a descendant of John Smith and Pocahontas), everybody praises high ancestral names. They are one of the main signs of status, and it is significative that Wilson is ostracized by being given a derisive name. To get his name back, which means, to be accepted in the high ranks of the community, it is important that he understands the rules. And he will do that

by putting the black and the white in their proper places -- by discovering that there are rules of division that should not be contradicted.

Wilson has been compared to a grown-up Tom Sawyer, and in fact, he is almost the perfect opposite of Huckleberry Finn: instead of trying to evade society, as Huck, he wants to be accepted, to get in. He, moreover, dislikes his position as an outcast, and tries not to appear as too different from the other members of the community. For instance, he says about his interest in palmistry that "I haven't examined half a dozen hands in the last half dozen years; you see, the people got to joking about it, and I stopped to let the talk die down" (*Mississippi Writings* 977). And, in what relates to his finger-printing hobby, "he had found that his fads added to his reputation as a pudd'nhead; therefore, he was growing chary of being too communicative about them" (*Mississippi Writings* 922). More importantly, he never questions the rules of the establishment. To him, for instance, as for any other "Southern gentleman", the duels are a form of maintaining the honor. He also views Roxy with a superior eye, since she is a slave; and, apparently, he also tries to disguise his New York origin, for he does not seem to use clothes of Eastern origin, for, if not, he could be ostracized, as Tom once was, after coming back from Yale:

> Tom's Eastern polish was not popular among the young people. They could have endured it, perhaps, if Tom had stopped there; but he wore gloves, and that they couldn't stand, and wouldn't; so he was mainly without society. He brought home with him a suit of clothes of such exquisite style and cut in fashion -- Eastern fashion, city fashion -- that it filled everybody with anguish and was regarded as a peculiarly wanton affront. (*Mississippi Writings* 940)

Wilson tries, in fact, to match with the environment. As Mark Coburn puts it, "Concerning belief in the rightness of slavery, the supremacy of white men, and the glory

of the code duello -- perhaps the community's three most important tenets of faith -- Wilson would appear to be a model citizen of Dawson's Landing" (212). Perhaps the best scene in which this support of the establishment can be seen is in the discussion after the fight of Tom and the twins is resolved in court instead of in a duel. Pudd'nhead, surprisingly for a Northerner, insists that the duel is a more honorable solution, even if that would ruin his career as lawyer.

> "Tom, I am ashamed of you! I don't see how you could treat your good old uncle so. I am a better friend of his than you are; for if I had known the circumstances I would have kept that case out of court until I got word to him and let him have the gentleman's chance."
>
> "You would?" exclaimed Tom, with lively surprise. "And it your first case! And you know perfectly well there never would have _been_ any case if he had got that chance, don't you? And you'd have finished your days a pauper nobody, instead of being an actually launched and recognized lawyer today. And you would really have done that, would you?"
>
> "Certainly."
>
> Tom looked at him a moment or two, then shook his head sorrowfully and said:
>
> "I believe you--upon my word I do. I don't know why I do, but I do. Pudd'nhead Wilson, I think you're the biggest fool I ever saw."
>
> "Thank you."
>
> "Don't mention it."
>
> "Well, he has been requiring you to fight the Italian, and you have refused. You degenerate remnant of an honorable line! I'm thoroughly ashamed of you, Tom!" (*Mississippi Writings* 991-992)

We have seen before how derisively Twain regarded the duels and violent disputes about "honor", and so we cannot have illusions that Pudd'nhead's ideas are considered as right by Twain. In fact, it is very clear that Wilson, but for his origin and use of "irony" -- which he is very careful to keep away in a hidden Calendar -- would be a perfect member of the Southern aristocracy. His temporary status of marginal, then, is not caused by rebellious thoughts (for, although some of his observations in the Calendar could be

considered "dangerous", he never shows them to others; besides, they wouldn't understand them, for "irony was not for them"), but simply because he has been misunderstood by the community. All his actions and comments in the book, including the solution to the case of the exchanged babies, are attempts to prove that he, too, can be a part of the community.

The world of Dawson's Landing is another revision of the same Hannibal that gave origin to Tom Sawyer's St. Petersburg -- the name, in fact, was taken from J. D. Dawson, master of one of the schools that Clemens attended (Cardwell 1082). Yet, contrary to St. Petersburg, where the mothers are the main figures of authority, and children the protagonists that antagonize them, in Dawson's Landing there are no children, and the main figures of society are all male, ancestors of the First Fathers of Virginia and "gentlemen". Their authority and rights are never questioned by anyone. In fact, all main characters aspire to such "nobility", including Pudd'nhead Wilson, the foreigner, and Roxy, who is proud to be a descendant of the "Smith-Pocahontases" and whose plot to disguise his son as a white free man is a way to make him enter into white society -- and, by extension, to make her enter, indirectly, that society. It is up to Pudd'nhead Wilson to discover the plot and be named as David Wilson again.

The other two important characters in the book, Tom and Roxana, start the story as slaves – and, therefore, they have no status whatsoever in Dawson's Landing. They are mere property, liable to be sold down the river at their minor fault. Yet, the irony is that their appearance is totally different from their social status: they look white and, if it was not for their clothes, they could be mistaken for white people.

Roxana - or Roxy - is, in some ways, a contradictory character. One of the few important female characters in Twain's books about the South, she is remarkable for several reasons. First of all, for her aspect: "Her complexion was very fair, with the rosy glow of vigorous health in her cheeks, her face was full of character and expression. . . . Her face was shapely, intelligent, and comely--even beautiful" (*Mississippi Writings* 924). Indeed, not only does she look white, but she is obviously sexually attractive. But, ironically, it is precisely her fictitious status as "black" that makes her sexually available for the white gentlemen. In *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*, where the social universe, according to Fiedler, was a "world of mothers", the white Southern women appeared as chaste and assexuated. Yet, Dawson's Landing is a place where the authority figures are virile Southern men. As Leslie Fiedler puts it:

> Though the man of Dawson's Landing, being Virginians, are potent still, their white women, who languish and retreat and die, are latter-day American, almost asexually genteel, so that only the Negress can match the vigor of the fathers with a corresponding fertility and power. Roxy is just such a negress, and her union with Cecil Burleigh Essex represents not only a sociological but a symbolic truth. If the fathers of the South are Virginia gentlemen, the mothers are Negro girls, casually or callously taken in the parody of love, which is all that is possible when one partner to a sexual union is not given the status of a person." (*Love and Death...* 406).

Roxy's white complexion is at the same time the indication of her white ancestry, in a process similar to that which gave origin to her son, and the absurdity of her legal status as slave. Because of miscegenation, racial purity becomes an illusion. "Twain makes clear that there is in the South no absolute distinction of black and white, merely an imaginary line - crossed and recrossed by the white man's lust" (*Love and Death...* 405).

However, the most important feature of Roxy is not her appearance but her strong and independent character. Right at first she is described as having "an easy, independent carriage -- when she was among her own caste -- and a high and "sassy" way, withal; but of course she was meek and humble enough where white people were" (*Mississippi Writings* 924). The narrator is careful to remind us that her independence has social limits: she must always be meek and obey her white masters. Yet, Roxy's relation with white society is controversial. On one side, she is very proud of her ancient white heritage: "My great-great-great-great-great-gran'father and yo'great-great-great-great-gran'father was ole Cap'n John Smith, de highest blood dat Ole Virginny ever turned out" (*Mississippi Writings* 1000). On the other hand, she seems resented because of the humiliations imposed on her by her masters: in fact, in the few occasions that Tom is good to her, "she was happy; happy and proud, for this was her son, her nigger son, lording it among the whites and securely avenging their crimes against her race" (939-940). Other instances of that behavior that denotes a certain resentment of blacks against their masters appears at the beginning, when she almost robs a few dollars from her white master, but decides not to because she has just come from church: "She made this sacrifice as a matter of religious etiquette; as a thing necessary just now, but by no means to be wrested into a precedent; no, a week or two would limber up her piety, then she would be rational again" (927). The narrator defends her behavior: "Was she bad? Was she worse than the general run of her race? No. They had an unfair show in the battle of life, and they held it no sin to take military advantage of the enemy--in a small way; in a small way, but not in a large one" (927). Thus, they would take provisions, or small articles of clothing or other properties of light value without considering it a real sin. In fact, the slave could be "perfectly sure that

in taking this trifle from the man who daily robbed him of an inestimable treasure--his liberty--he was not committing any sin that God would remember against him in the Last Great Day" (927).

It is for the same reason that Roxy accepts and even helps Tom to rob the village to get her a monthly payment to support her. Yet, Roxy's relation with her son is even more ambiguous than her relation with white society in general. It consists of a love-hate relationship that is never quite solved. At first, considering himself a white free man, Tom has power over her and treats her with contempt. The situation is inverted when Roxy tells him that she is her actual mother: now it is she who commands him, for she can reveal his true identity any time. It is in the relation with her son that the strength of her character is best seen: after all, she ultimately controls him and makes him do as she wishes. Both the authority and the sweetness of Roxy come in full view. On one side, she resents Tom for his continuous mistreatment of her, yet she also loves him to the point of allowing to be sold again to slavery, after having been freed, in order to help him pay his gambling debts. Also, her contradictory feelings about their mixed racial origin are revealed in his talks with him: while she is proud of his white heritage and tells him that "Dey ain't another nigger in dis town dat's as high-bawn as you is" (*Mississippi Writings* 967), she is also ready to tell him, when he fails, that "It's the nigger in you, dat's what it is" (1000).

Roxy, nevertheless, is also a brave and compassionate woman, solidary to the sufferings of fellow slaves. For instance, when she runs away from the cotton plantation down the river, she saves a little girl:

> "Dey was a little sickly nigger wench 'bout ten year ole dat 'uz good to me, en hadn't no mammy, po' thing, en I loved her en she loved me; en she come out whah I uz' workin' en she had a roasted tater, en tried to slip it to

> me--robbin' herself, you see, 'ca'se she knowed de overseer didn't give me enough to eat--en he ketched her at it, en giver her a lick acrost de back wid his stick, which 'uz as thick as a broom handle, en she drop' screamin' on de groun', en squirmin' en wallerin' aroun' in de dust like a spider dat's got crippled. I couldn't stan' it. All de hellfire dat 'uz ever in my heart flame' up, en I snatch de stick outen his han' en laid him flat. He laid dah moanin' en cussin', en all out of his head, you know, en de niggers 'uz plumb sk'yred to death. Dey gathered roun' him to he'p him, en I jumped on his hoss en took out for de river as tight as I could go." (1011)

Roxana is, finally, a very clever woman, in fact smarter than most of the other characters in the story. She solves most problems that Tom is unable to solve, and she also guesses Wilson's actions. She knows, for instance -- perhaps intuitively, but she does know -- that her only real enemy, the only man that could eventually identify the usurpation of white privileges, is Pudd'nhead Wilson himself: "Dey ain't but one man dat I's afeard of, en dat's dat Pudd'nhead Wilson. Dey calls him a pudd'nhead, en says he's a fool. My lan, dat man ain't no mo' fool den I is! He's de smartes' man in dis town, lessn' it's Jedge Driscoll or maybe Pem Howard" (*Mississippi Writings* 933). In fact, not even Wilson realizes that she suspects that he might have collected valuable information about the exchange with his fingerprints, or that she might be hiding something from him. He simply believes, assuming a racist point of view, that "the drop of black blood in her is superstitious" (*Mississippi Writings* 940).

Tom Driscoll, who in fact is the "real" Chambers, is by far the more controversial character in the story. He is described as fearful, indolent, mean and selfish. He gambles, steals, betrays his mother, and finally kills his uncle. He lies, including to his own mother; he shows no compassion for other people. He is "weak and careless" (970) and has a

"capricious temper" (939). Part of that problem has to do with his raising as a white man, specially in what concerns Roxy:

> Tom had long ago taught Roxy "her place." It had been many a day now since she had ventured a caress or a fondling epithet in his quarter. Such things, from a "nigger," were repulsive to him, and she had been warned to keep her distance and remember who she was. She saw her darling gradually cease from being her son, she saw *that* detail perish utterly; all that was left was master--master, pure and simple, and it was not a gentle mastership, either. (*Mississippi Writings* 939)

Yet, the deterministic moral of the tale ("training is everything") in his education as a white man is not enough to make us understand why his character is so flawed. For instance, his recurrent mistreatment of his mother cannot be explained solely by his raising as a white man, since he later finds out that he is as "black" as her. Besides, in spite of the fact of having been educated as a white man (he talks and dresses like a white man), he does not obey some fundamental tenets of the Southern society in which he was raised, as dueling for "honor". Therefore, some authors have suggested that Tom's behavior is hereditary: that his actions could be at least partly credited to his "drop of black blood". In fact, Roxy herself believes so: "Thirty-one parts o' you is white, end on'y one part nigger, and that po' little one part is yo'*soul*" (*Mississippi Writings* 1000). However, Roxy's own behavior is the proof that it is not Tom's "black blood" which is responsible for his cowardice; at least Roxy is not fearful or a coward at all (and she has more parts of "black blood" than him).

Therefore, the reason for Tom's character lies, certainly, in his problematic raising, first by Roxy, a "doting-fool of a mother" (935) that treated Tom as "her darling, her master and her deity, all in one" (936). When Tom was a baby, he "would claw anybody

who came within reach of his nails, and pound anybody he could reach with his rattle. He would scream for water until he got it, and then throw cup and all on the floor and scream for more" (934). But, being considered white, and therefore superior to Roxy, "He was indulged in all his caprices, howsoever troublesome and exasperating they might be" (941). Later, the problem was made worse by childless foster parents: "Mrs. York Driscoll enjoyed two years of bliss with that prize, Tom -- bliss that was troubled a little at times, it is true, but bliss nevertheless; then she died, and her husband and his childless sister, Mrs. Pratt, continued this bliss-business at the old stand. Tom was petted and indulged and spoiled to his entire content--or nearly that" (941).

Since the growth and social education of Tom, as well as that of all the three main characters, is intimately related to the plot, and specially to the main issue of it -- namely, the exchange of the babies and its tragic consequences -- I will analyze the plot in the following section.

4.2 Transgression of borders: the exchange

The story's main conflict is set in motion by Roxana, who changes the two babies that she takes care of, one being "white" and the other "black". Yet, even before the actual exchange takes place, we can foreshadow what is going to happen:

> On the first of February, 1830, two boy babes were born in his house; one to him, one to one of his slave girls, Roxana by name. Roxana was twenty years old. She was up and around the same day, with her hands full, for she was tending both babes.
>
> Mrs. Percy Driscoll died within the week. Roxy remained in charge of the children. She had her own way, for Mr. Driscoll soon absorbed himself in his speculations and left her to her own devices." (918)

It is, of course, when "left to her own devices" that she will perform the exchange. Later, in the second chapter, we will find out that the two children are almost identical, being differentiated only by their clothes: Roxy's son

> had blue eyes and flaxen curls like his white comrade, but even the father of the white child was able to tell the children apart--little as he had commerce with them--by their clothes; for the white babe wore ruffled soft muslin and a coral necklace, while the other wore merely a coarse tow-linen shirt which barely reached to its knees, and no jewelry." (925)

The clothes are an important sign of status in Dawson's Landing, together with names. They serve to mark the identities of the babies, for, although the skin of both is fair, the white one wears fancier clothing than the black one. Since their difference is not visible, their identification as "black" or "white" is, in fact, simply cultural; but so strong that even Roxy knows it. When Wilson comes and talks to Roxy, he says:

> "They're handsome little chaps. One's just as handsome as the other, too."
>
> A delighted smile exposed the girl's white teeth, and she said:
>
> "Bless yo' soul, Misto Wilson, it's pow'ful nice o' you to say dat, 'ca'se one of 'em ain't on'y a nigger. Mighty prime little nigger, _I_ al'ays says, but dat's 'ca'se it's mine, o' course." (*Mississippi Writings* 925)

The fact that her son is "only a nigger" is as clear in her head as it is in the head of any other citizen of Dawson's Landing. Yet, it is Wilson who asks the fatal question about their resemblance, and perhaps giving Roxy the first idea about the exchange:

> "How do you tell them apart, when they haven't any clothes on?"
>
> Roxy laughed a laugh proportioned to her size, and said:
>
> "Oh, _I_ kin tell 'em 'part, Misto Wilson, but I bet Marse Percy couldn't, not to save his life."
>
> Wilson chatted along for awhile, and presently got Roxy's fingerprints for his collection--right hand and left--on a couple of his glass

> strips; then labeled and dated them, and took the "records" of both children, and labeled and dated them also." (*Mississippi Writings* 925)

After this scene, everything in the story is ready to start: the babies are almost identical and not even their father can differentiate them; one is black, the other white; and Wilson already has the fingerprints that will eventually reveal the usurpation. All that is still missing is the actual exchange, but in the end of that same chapter, when Roxy's owner threatens to sell some slaves down the river, she will have a motive to change the babies.

It is significant that Wilson asks how Roxy can differentiate between the boys when they have no clothes on (that is, revealing that the clothes are not a perfect form of measurement) almost at the same time that he takes their fingerprints: another form of telling the children apart that, despite being more "scientific", does not really establish who is "white" and who is "black". In fact, had Wilson taken the prints a month later, the exchange would already have been made, and he would not be able to say, by the prints alone, who was black and who was white. Susan Gillman refers to the use of clothing and finger-prints as methods of identification:

> Because the two incidents occur side by side, the reader is led to anticipate that if one system of personal identification in the novel - names, titles, clothing - is patently unreliable, the other - fingerprinting - may prove to have more accurate differentiating power. But we also begin to wonder whether the issue is less one of accurately reflecting individual differences and more one of actually creating those differences. (77)

Indeed, one of the babies is black simply because of a "fiction of law and custom" (*Mississippi Writings* 925) that determined his race, not regarding his physical appearance. This, of course, existed to conceal the fact of miscegenation: "By classifying the mulatto

as a Negro [the white slaveowner] was in fact denying that intermixture had occurred at all." (Winthrop qtd. in Gillman 83). Therefore, miscegenation is a social transgression performed by white men, that needs however to be denied by the Southern establishment: slave women, after all, were not exactly considered "human", and having sexual relations with them was usually considered immoral. But the only possible denial of miscegenation is considering that the white part doesn't count, that somehow it has not taken part in the process. As Mary Boykin Chestnut, an actual Southern lady, noted in her diary, in an 1861 entry: "Any lady is ready to tell you who is the father of all the mulatto children in everybody's household but her own. Those, she seems to think, drop from the clouds." (qtd. in Gillman 85). As a result, despite the fact that Roxy is only one-sixteenth black and her son is one thirty-seconds black, "all that counts racially in Dawson's Landing are two categories: black and white" (Gillman 81).

The change of babies happens for the same reason that Jim runs away in *Huckleberry Finn*: for fear of being sold down the river. Historically, it was in the cotton plantations of New Orleans that the situation was worse for blacks; where there were "the field-labor and beatings that cotton-belt slaves suffered and which made Missouri slaves dread being sold down the river" (Cummings 447). When Percy Driscoll forgives the slaves that robbed some money and does not sell them down the river, he believes, of course, that he has been extremely generous: "He knew, himself, that he had done a noble and gracious thing, and was privately well pleased with his magnanimity; and that night he set the incident down in his diary, so that his son might read it in after years, and be thereby moved to deeds of gentleness and humanity himself" (*Mississippi Writings* 928).

Roxy, however, finds herself so terrified that she decides to change the clothes of the babies, and in doing that she realizes that she has changed their identities as well:

> "You's young Marse *Tom* fum dis out, en I got to practice and git used to 'memberin' to call you dat, honey, or I's gwine to make a mistake sometime en git us bofe into trouble. Dah--now you lay still en don't fret no mo', Marse Tom. Oh, thank de lord in heaven, you's saved, you's saved! Dey ain't no man kin ever sell mammy's po' little honey down de river now!" (*Mississippi Writings* 931)

With the exchange, Roxy is not simply protecting her son; she is changing his identity and social status. And, in doing that, she is simply reversing the miscegenation process that made the son of a white man with a slave become a black slave too -- or so she believes. She believes, according to Thomas Blues, that she is "restoring her son to the white community of which she thinks she is a member" (Blues 66). However, she forgets that the important feature of racial identification in her is the "blackness", not the white ancestry. When Roxy proudly says that she is descendant of the Smith-Pocahontases, we know that such "noble blood" is useless, for all that counts is her drop of "black blood". To her slave-born son things are - apparently - different. All he needs to become white are nice clothes and a white-man's name, for, as we have seen more than once, clothes and names are the main sources of identification in Dawson's Landing. The reason why Roxy cannot do the same (if we leave out the obvious reason that everybody would recognize her as a slave) is that there is a third important factor of racial identification that we have not discussed yet: language.

"For Roxy's manner of speech, a stranger would have expected her to be black, but she was not" (*Mississippi Writings* 924), the narrator tells us. Language is a basic element to identify black people; and, of course, it also has cultural roots. When "Tom"

grows up, after being educated, he talks as a white man, to the point of being irritated by her mother's way of speaking, for his contempt for slaves is the same found in "real" white men. And this, of course, is what Roxy has not perceived when she made the change: "Her decision originates in her identification with 'white folks' and is carried through in the illusory belief that the cradle-switch does not imply a severance of the mother-son relationship" (Blues 66). However, "For her deception to succeed she must treat her son with all the indulgence due a white master. But the necessity of deceiving the world very soon causes Roxy to be her own victim" (Blues 66-67). Indeed, Roxy is the first one to treat Tom as a white Master, obeying his very wish.

Paradoxically, it is because of this same indulgence that Tom ultimately fails to follow the rules of white aristocracy. This is specially seen when he refuses to duel with the twins, as it would be the honorable conduct expected, and everybody, including Wilson and Roxy, think him a coward. Confronted with the failure of her son to obey the principles of white society, Roxy tells him that it is because of his "black blood". But Tom's "black blood" is not responsible for his behavior any more than his usurped clothes or name. Rather, his own spoiled childhood, in which he received everything he wanted, is a more logical explanation. After all, it was not simply the case of a black woman taking care of someone else's son: it was a black mother taking care of her own "white son", and we could expect her care to be properly exaggerated: he was master and son, all in one. The fact that there is something wrong in the character of Tom (meaning that, even for "white" parameters, he is extremely selfish, bossy and mean) can be seen from the time is a baby. But the narrator is careful to mention that "Tom was a bad baby, from the very beginning of his usurpation" (*Mississippi Writings* 934), thus making clear that the origin

of all the trouble lies in the usurpation, and in the change of the mother-son relationship that it implies -- nurture, not nature. In other words, Tom's vices are not "natural" of his race: he has not been born with them, but has acquired them during his raising.

The "blackness" of Tom, or, rather, his later acknowledgment that he is in fact the son of a black mother, and so legally a black man, does not change his fundamental character, which, the narrator admits, "could not be changed" (*Mississippi Writings* 970), perhaps because at this age it is already too late. Even after discovering that he is of black origin, he still displays racist remarks, referring for instance to Roxy's finger-prints as "nigger's paw-marks" (*Mississippi Writings* 1042). Yet, his relationship with Roxy changes significatively -- and for the worse. After all, he does not identify more with her after discovering that he too, is black. In fact, after knowing that she is his real mother, he does not seem to love her more, but less; and despite the fact that he obeys her (because she's smarter and stronger), he also tries to betray her when he gets a chance. Of course, the cause for this could be a certain resentment that he feels for his own origin: after all, Roxy, by having caused the exchange of babies, is the one who put him into that delicate position. At least this is how he feels about his white heritage: "if his father was only alive and in reach of assassination his mother would soon find out that he had a very clear notion of his indebtedness to that man, and was willing to pay it up in full" (*Mississippi Writings* 1000). A similar resentment can be seen in his relation with Roxy: "No more can he abide being the son of a Negress, and ends by selling his mother down the river" (*Love and Death in the American Novel* 405).

His relationship with his uncle -- which could be seen as representative of his relation with white society in general – also gets worse after that moment: "And all the

time, hatred of his ostensible "uncle" was steadily growing in his heart; for he said to himself, "He is white; and I am his chattel, his property, his goods, and he can sell me, just as he could his dog" (*Mississippi Writings* 969-970). Here Tom is, in fact, assuming his identity as a black usurper; and, therefore, the fear of being exposed, the same fear that Roxy felt at the beginning of the story, will become a constant characteristic of him.

Of course, all of Tom's attitudes tend toward that same exposure which he dreads. His descent from gambling to debts, robbery, and, finally, murder, are the different stages of a fate that has already been written at the moment that the exchange was made. That is, in fact, what made Twain call his book a "tragedy" despite its characteristics of farce: for, as in the Greek tragedies, we have a character trying to escape from his own destiny, without succeeding. Indeed, Roxy's plans fail, and, as Leslie Fiedler comments, "by virtue of her very act of evasion she sets in motion the events that bring both of them to the end she has dreaded" ("As Free as Any Cretur..." 134). In trying to care exceedingly for Tom's destiny as "white man", she ends with a son that will cause so much trouble that will end by having his real identity revealed.

The story of Tom, therefore, is not a biological tragedy caused by racial inheritance, but rather a cultural tragedy, for the whole problem lies in the fact that, in Dawson's Landing, there is an artificially constructed division between blacks and whites. The exchange, therefore, is the incident of transgression that, by unfolding in unexpected ways, reveals the terrible problems of such an unjust social order -- and, instead of covering the fact that Tom is a slave, ends by serving as an exposure of the contradictions of the slavery system.

In fact, the main function of Wilson in the narrative is to reveal the change and thus complete the tragedy. Twain noted in his final remarks to *Those Extraordinary Twins*, the story that gave origin to *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, that Tom and Roxy's career "began to take a tragic aspect, and some one had to be brought in to help work the machinery; so Pudd'nhead Wilson was introduced and taken on trial." (*The Comedy of Those Extraordinary Twins* 2) This is what turned the tale into what Fiedler calls a "detective story." ("As Free as Any Cretur..." 139). But the problem is that, contrary to what happens in most detective stories, we already know who the murderer is, as well as an usurper of white identity. Thus, "the real suspense in the novel has been waiting not for the identity of the murderer (whom we've known all along), but for the moment when Wilson would discover that he has the means to prove it" (Gillman 90). However, the finger-prints prove to be as illusory as clothes or names in establishing a secure form of identity, for they say nothing about "blackness" or "whiteness" in themselves. They only justify the established order without questioning its validity.

When, at the trial, Wilson sensationally reveals the truth about Tom, he says: "The murderer of your friend and mine -- York Driscoll of the generous hand and the kindly spirit -- sits in among you. Valet de Chambre, negro and slave, -- falsely called Thomas à Becket Driscoll, -- make upon the window the finger-prints that will hang you!" (1053). It is significant that there is more emphasis placed on the fact that he was "negro and slave" than in the fact that he was a murderer; and, indeed, his real crime, in what concerns the rigid racial laws of Dawson's Landing, is the usurpation of white identity: the attempt to blur the lines that separate blacks and whites. The proof is that Tom is not hanged, as he

would be if he was white, but sold down the river as a slave, thus putting things back in their places.

Yet, for all it counts, the only important result of the trial is the acceptance of Wilson by the community that rejected him at first. It is as if all was done only for "Pudd'nhead" to regain his real name and obtain the social status that he always wanted, instead of remaining a marginal. And, of course, his ascension to the "center" of Dawson's Landing has to happen simultaneously with the decay of those who tried to get out from their excluded position and cross the social and racial lines -- namely, Tom and Roxy. Yet, both the identification of Tom as slave and the ascension of Wilson are shown to be the result of the same meaningless social and cultural conventions. The revelation of Tom as an usurper, in itself, sheds no light to clarify the mysteries of identification that haunted the novel; the finger-prints are no more "scientific" to prove identity than are clothes, names or language:

> Neither the triumphant tone nor the burst of applause from the audience nor the aura of logical deduction and absolute clarity disguises the fact that Wilson's conclusion, though strictly "the truth," is also illogical and arbitrary, almost more confusing than clarifying. Fingerprints appear theoretically to be the one measure of unique, non-contingent, individual identity, but are in practice relational indices that must be read in and against the context of other sets of prints. (Gillman 90-91)

The fact that one set of finger-prints must always be compared to another reminds us of the fact that "blacks", also, must be compared to "whites" (or "marginals" to the "center"), in order to define who is who -- just as the "I" must be compared to the "Other" in the process of creation of identity. Therefore, the finger-prints prove to be a deceptive method of identification, for they do not establish, once and for all, that Tom is really

"black", but only that he is the baby that had been labeled as "black" by a law previous to his birth, but which has nothing to do with empirical differences between whiteness and blackness, since there are no differences in the marks to indicate the race of the babies. It is interesting to note that the same failure in the attempt to use finger prints as a form of racial identification was felt by Francis Galton, whose book *Finger Prints* (1892) influenced Twain in the writing of *Pudd'nhead Wilson*. Galton says that "I thought that any hereditary peculiarities would almost of necessity vary in different races, and that so fundamental and enduring a feature as the finger markings must in some way be correlated with temperament" (qtd. in Railton 2), but concludes, somewhat frustrated, that "I was misled at first by some accidental observations, and as it seemed reasonable to expect to find racial differences in finger marks, the inquiries were continued in varied ways until hard fact had made hope no longer justifiable" (qtd. in Railton 2).

The major effect of the revelation, then, is the fulfillment of the most terrible fears of Tom's mother: that he would be sold down the river. Tom's tragic destiny also affects Roxy, for it has destroyed her illusion of being able to transcend the racial and social barriers and enter, by means of her son, white society:

> Roxy must cling to her illusion in order to preserve her identity. The irony is that the illusion to which she clings is of a relationship based on mutual love and devotion. But opposed to her is the white community and its spokesman, David Wilson - a community whose very existence depends on preservation of illusion, but of another sort. Their illusion of white purity precludes humane values. Roxy needs the community in order to survive, but it is a community which, seen through, makes life not worth living. (Blues 72)

Yet, despite the revelations and the definitive fate of the major characters (Tom's and Roxy's fall, Wilson's ascent), one problem remains unsolved: the destiny of the "real Tom", the white man who was created as a slave and "could neither read nor write, and his speech was the basest of the negro quarter" (*Mississippi Writings* 1055); who "could not endure the terrors of the white man's parlor" (1056), yet "he could nevermore enter into the solacing refuge of the 'nigger gallery'" (1056) - therefore becoming "essentially identity-less, his "true-self" permanently usurped, an exile in no-man's land between the races" (Gillman 75). Having been educated as a slave, he has no conditions of joining white society, but cannot socialize with slaves because he is legally white. So puzzling is his situation that the narrator tells us that "we cannot follow his curious fate further -- that would be a long story" (*Mississippi Writings* 1056). Indeed, while the revelation of the real identity of the "false Tom" seems to have reestablished racial identity on scientific grounds, the permanence of the real heir -- a white man who behaves as a slave -- is the gap in the story that reminds us, once again, of the "fictions of law and custom" (*Mississippi Writings* 925) that created racial slavery in the first place.

4.3 The narrative

First of all, we should note that *Pudd'nhead Wilson* has some flaws in its structure, caused by its confused creation. The original story was edited and transformed into two other stories, *The Comedy of Those Extraordinary Twins* and *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson*; however, the initial story, "The most extraordinary book in American literature unfortunately has not survived as a whole" ("As Free As Any Cretur..." 130). As Twain himself explained in the preface to *Those Extraordinary Twins*, "I pulled one of the stories

out by the roots, and left the other one -- a kind of literary Cesarean operation." (*The Comedy of Those Extraordinary Twins* 2). This caused some important scenes to be left out, as the later publication of early manuscripts of the novel have shown. I will, however, not analyze such passages, studying the book only as it was originally published, assuming that the published version was probably the closest to what Twain believed his book should be.

In *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, contrary to what happens in *Huckleberry Finn*, we have an external narrator that does not take part in the story. In this sense it is similar to *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, with the difference that here the tone is not of nostalgic or condescending humor, but of a cynical and detached, sometimes sarcastic, point of view. We can see this ironical detachment sometimes in the narrator's direct comments, often in the satirical description of the citizens of Dawson's Landing, and even in the apparent disregard for some characters. For instance, at the beginning of the book the character called Cecil Burleigh Essex appears to have no importance at all, because "with him we have no concern" (*Mississippi Writings* 919). Chapters later, we find out that he was actually the father of Roxy's son, therefore playing a crucial role in the development of the story. Similarly, the evasive comment that "we cannot follow his curious fate further" (*Mississippi Writings* 1056), referring to the real heir, makes us wonder whether there has been a definitive solution for the racial conflict.

It should come as no surprise that such type of bitter satire in the narrative was not well-received by some readers, specially of Southern origin. In a letter published in the "Southern Magazine" in 1894, and reproduced in the Internet, one reader, Martha McCulloch Williams, complains of the "malicious and misleading" (1) story. She asks

"why it is that the Southern man who has an honest and decent pride in the fact that he comes from good stock fares so ill at the hands of certain literary gentlemen" (1), and says that "I quite fail to comprehend why it pleases him to vilify us as he is doing in this book" (1). She also fails to understand the joke about the "half-dog":

> Throughout the Southwest, for at least seventy-five years, 'I'd like to own that dog - and kill my half' has been a cant saying so commonly current that it is laughed at only as a compliment to the user of it. The men who should now perpetrate it as original would perhaps be called something worse than a 'pudd'nhead', but very certainly nobody - not the most ignorant - would find in it a suggestion of uncanniness." (2)

Perhaps the narrator's comment that "irony was not for those people" could serve also to explain its rejection or miscomprehension by some Southerners, mainly ex-slave owners as Martha McCullochs Williams.

Still, the most interesting aspect of the narration lies somewhere else. In a book about doubleness and ambiguity, in which blacks look white and so, to disguise that fact, they have to pretend to be what they actually look like, in which a character who is not really "Tom" is still called Tom even after the revelation of his real identity, in which twins with contradicting characteristics confuse the reader, and in which even Wilson has an apparent double identity ("David", the accepted, and "Pudd'nhead", the marginal), it was almost unavoidable that the narration should be, in a way, "double" too. At the beginning of each chapter, we have a few observations labeled as "Pudd'nhead Wilson's Calendar", which, if do not comment directly on the action, at least provide significant insights into what is happening. The sentences in "Pudd'nhead Wilson's Calendar" suggest, first, a doubleness in Wilson's character -- for his inner critical thoughts are never revealed in the action of the novel -- and, second, a doubleness in the novel's construction, impelling the

reader in a search for connections or contradictions between what is said in the Calendar and what happens in each chapter.

Wilson's reasons to keep his Calendar are mysterious. While he soon finds out that they "added to his reputation as a 'pudd'nhead'" (*Mississippi Writings* 922), thus deciding not to show them to anyone, he continues to write them. The reason for this is perhaps, as James Cox suggests, the action of unconscious guilty feelings: "The redeeming pathos pervading his cynical wit [in his Calendar] is a mode of expressing his own awareness of his refusal to face the guilt surrounding the crime he has laid bare." (qtd. in Coburn 216). Or, if not, that they demonstrate a failure in Twain's construction of the character. As Richard Chase sees it, "We are not told of out of what complex of experience and feeling issued his aphorisms in the Calendar, and except for the ones that are mere easy cynicism we do not believe them to have come from him" (Chase 156). In fact, the Calendar could as well, and perhaps more rightly, be called "Mark Twain's Calendar", or "The Narrator's Calendar", for they seem much more to represent the thoughts of the external narrator than those of Pudd'nhead. In fact, a sentence like "an enemy can partly ruin a man, but it takes a good-natured injudicious friend to complete the thing and make it perfect" (*Mississippi Writings* 943), told by the narrator, could very well become an observation issued in the Calendar. "Irony was not for those people" (*Mississippi Writings* 943), says the narrator about Dawson's Landing citizens; apparently, it is not for Wilson either.

Yet, whether the diegesis allows us to believe that the aphorisms were created by Wilson or not, the fact is that they help to create a more ambiguous (an even more ambiguous) tone to the novel, specially in the final chapters. Just before the trial, for instance, the Calendar says that "Even the clearest and most perfect circumstantial

evidence is likely to be at fault, after all, and therefore aught to be received with great caution" (1037). This should warn us against thinking that the results of the finger-prints are really "perfect" and definitive. In the Conclusion, two other thoughts issued in the Calendar also serve to disquiet us. One of them has been quoted by several authors: "October 12, The Discovery. It was wonderful to find America, but it would have been more wonderful to miss it" (*Mississippi Writings* 1055). Leslie Fiedler sees in it "a disconcerting ending for a detective story, which should have faith in all disclosures" ("As Free As Any Cretur..." 139). For Susan Gillman, it is a confirmation that "when the novel ends, its various scientific and legal bodies of knowledge -- definitive means of identification and differentiation -- result in no certainty at all" (93), and Mark Coburn believes it is "both a comment on human blindness and an anguished rejection of a dream that had failed" (219). Whatever its interpretation, the sentence reflects a growing uncertainty about the revelations presented, mixed with the deception with a dream of racial integration that has not worked as it should, even for an enlightened mind as Wilson's, who uses an empirical scientific discourse to discover the horrors of slavery.

The second Calendar entry in the final chapter of the novel was not received with similar critical attention, but it also focuses on the same issues, and also causes the reader to feel a sensation of doubt: "It is often the case that the man who can't tell a lie thinks that he is the best judge of one" (*Mississippi Writings* 1055). Wilson, being or not a liar himself, is unable to rightly judge the "lie" of Tom's usurpation. His revelation of the "truth" is, in fact, simply covering the huge lie of racial differentiation based on arbitrary criteria and the injustice of slavery. His ascension from marginal to respected citizen, finally, is not caused by a heroic act or a more accurate understanding of society, but

exactly by a "dumbing down", a loss of individuality and independent thought. When he loses his nickname, 'Pudd'nhead', that we can be more sure that he is one; and we can guess that, since he is now simply the respectable 'David Wilson', he will have no more reasons to maintain the Calendar (which was, together with the name 'Pudd'nhead', his only trait that revealed an independent thought). As David Wilson has no longer reasons to resent the people of Dawson's Landing, his Calendar will probably disappear, as did, not coincidentally, Roxy's "voice of laughter", "her martial bearing", and the "spirit in her eye" (*Mississippi Writings* 1055).

While the narrator's pity for Roxy is sincere, he does not seem to criticize Wilson, who ends as the official hero of the story. The narrator assures that "he was a man made for good" (*Mississippi Writings* 1055), and Leslie Fiedler notes that

> If there is an undertone of irony in this, it is impossible to prove and, indeed, there is scarcely any room for it to exist in the minimal distance Twain has left between author and character. Like Pudd'nhead, Mark Twain, too, wants to have it both ways at once too: to insult the society he lives in in the guise of tossing off "playful trifles," and to be hailed as a hero for discovering what no one really wants to know!" (*Love and Death in the American Novel* 467-468)

Wilson is the first prototype of a character that would later be displayed in other works such as "The Mysterious Stranger" or "The Man that Corrupted Hadleyburg": the foreigner with superior knowledge who comes and mocks the ingenuity and falseness of the inhabitants of a small town. The difference, however, is that Wilson not only has not the courage to express his actual views openly, but also, at the end of the story, he remains in the city and is hailed as its hero. He is not, in fact, as independent from the Southern small-town morality as he (or Twain) believes. His notes in the Calendar, in the end, only

prove how far from his real thinking he has drifted. "Marginal" as he was considered at the beginning of the story, he believes to be a hero for discovering that a "black" man and a "white" one have changed places, without defining what it means to be "white" or "black" – without noticing, in fact, that the real crime behind it all was racial slavery and similar processes of social exclusion based on race or social position. However, Wilson's criticism goes on only insofar as it does not creates him any trouble:

> It is of the essence of Pudd'nhead Wilson that he is scorned by the citizenry as a crank, a complainer, and an ironist, that he stubbornly takes up a position of aloofness and nonconformity, but that ultimately he shows that he is in no way radically alienated from the conventional ways, and in fact dreams of being one of the boys. Pudd'nhead Wilson is finally able to vindicate his Tom Sawyer-like fantasies and crotchets by putting them to direct, socially approved use. (Chase 152)

If the end represents the final success for Wilson, then we can say about Pudd'nhead that "like his creator he wants to succeed in the world he despises" ("As Free As Any Cretur..."138).

Despite its narrative flaws and problems in the construction of some characters, the major achievement of *Pudd'nhead Wilson* is that it dramatizes racial and social problems in a way that had seldom if ever been done before: "Mark Twain's astonishing clairvoyance and honesty have given *Pudd'nhead Wilson* a strong moral action, an action one can describe as a radical dilemma turned into a stirring dialogue of traditions, attitudes and social forces" (Chase 155). It is, in fact, precisely the conflict between a society based on exclusion and its outcast characters which gives the novel its force, revealing the hidden social processes involved in the construction of individual and communal identity.

CONCLUSION

The three novels by Mark Twain that were studied in this dissertation -- namely, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson* -- certainly present many similarities. That is not surprising, since they share time and location (the South before the Civil War). However, what is more interesting is that there are also many differences in the description of society in the three books, and we can even see an evolution, from one book to the other, in the way that such society, its members and social institutions are represented.

This study has been mainly concerned with the processes of exclusion and marginalization in the "Old South" as presented by Twain, as well as the transgression of borders that these three stories showed. Therefore, I have concentrated the analysis of the books in three main areas:

(1) the marginal or outcast characters and their relation to the community, or how the marginal helps to define the center;

(2) the transgression of social or racial borders, present in the plot, that one or more of these characters has performed or attempted to perform;

(3) the narrative options and how they emphasize or diminish the issue of transgression developed in the plot. In the following paragraphs I will analyze each one of these three areas separately.

Marginal and outcast characters are present in all three stories. However, the analysis of *Tom Sawyer* presented more difficulty, since the marginal characters have a secondary importance to the plot, and the social transgressions performed by the main

character, who is not in a marginal position, are actually "false transgressions", for they do not represent a break with the "status quo". That is why I have chosen to study also the main character, Tom Sawyer, and his relation with the marginal characters, who are basically three: Muff Potter, Huck Finn and Injun Joe. Muff Potter, the village drunkard, is certainly an outcast rejected by the community of St. Petersburg. However, he is not an altogether unsympathetic character. In fact, after being falsely accused of a murder, he is celebrated by the community when his innocence is proved. Moreover, he is very kind -- helping, for instance, the children to mend their kites – and harmless. After being freed from the accusation of murder, he will probably resume his marginal status. Huck Finn, Tom's best friend, is presented in this book as a "romantic outcast", whose marginal status gives him a freedom that the other boys do not have. However, this higher freedom has its price, which is a greater insecurity. His fear of Injun Joe after the trial is justified, for he is not protected by any social institution. At the end of the book, he is given the chance to enter society by means of an adoption. And, finally, Injun Joe is the most dangerous of the three, in fact the only marginal character that poses a real threat to the community, and, therefore, has to be eliminated. It is important to note, also, that his rejection by the community is based, at least partly, in racial reasons: he is a "half-breed", part Indian, and therefore seen with prejudice by the white people. The book, however, is mainly concerned with the wanderings of the main character, Tom Sawyer, who is really not a social outcast, but a boy that will certainly grow up to be one of the leading members of the community. It is interesting, in fact, to note that Tom's final attitude toward the three marginal characters reflect the general position of the community: tolerance of Muff Potter

after he has been acquitted; fear of Injun Joe while he is alive and relief when he dies; and the insistence to Huck Finn that he be adopted and educated.

In *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, however, we see that Huck Finn does not accept his adoption so easily. He tries to escape from it, in fact, for he does not feel comfortable with many of its rules that limit so much his freedom. Moreover, Huck is shown as a character that is constantly fighting against the diatribes of his "conscience", that is, the thoughts that have been inculcated in him by society. His nature, however, is revealed as basically kind and generous, and that is reflected in his actions: his attempt to help the robbers in the *Walter Scott*, his friendship with Jim, his feelings of pity for the duke and the king, his "sickness" with violence and falsity, whether socially approved or not. In this book, marginalization and exclusion are a fundamental issue. After all, not only is the marginal boy the protagonist of the story, but the narrator as well. This permits us to observe society from the unique perspective of the marginal, and this is perhaps the main reason why the society seen appears as more crude or violent, when it is basically the same one of *Tom Sawyer*, and even many of the characters are the same. Marginality is not seen here as totally negative, at least in the case of Huck Finn, for it is a source of freedom, if only momentary: an escape from the limitations and injustices of society. However, there are other marginal figures present in the book, but they do not appear in such a favorable light. Pap Finn, Huck's father, is a drunk and violent man, hated and feared by the community of St. Petersburg. The duke and the king, two impostors that live profiting by fooling other people, are also shown to be negative influences. However, we should note that the "central" or dominant characters are not much better: the aristocracy, for instance, is prone to irrational moments of violence, as demonstrated in the feud. In fact, the only

two characters that are totally positive and appear as "victims" of the rest of the world are Huck and the runaway slave Jim: basically good characters lost in an unfair world, an unjust social order.

In *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, the story is concerned with three main characters: David Wilson, Tom Driscoll and Roxy ("no surname, slaves hadn't the privilege"). Wilson assumes, at first, a marginal position because of an unhappy remark. This remark, however, innocent as it could appear at first, defines a character with an independent and critical thought. Wilson, however, shows that he is very concerned with social approval; in truth, all that he wants in the end is to be accepted, even if in order to do that he has to forget his criticism of the system. And indeed, by the end of the story he is directing his witticisms to the socially approved revelation of a "Negro and slave" usurping the place of a "white and free man". This usurper is Tom Driscoll, a young man that, because of his problematic and indulgent raising, becomes extremely selfish and mean. Moreover, he shows resentment and hatred of his real origin, and has a troubled relationship with his mother, Roxana. Roxana is certainly the most interesting character in the novel; a slave woman, she is nonetheless strong and independent. Being, as her son, a product of miscegenation, and in appearance white, she has mixed feelings about her double origin. On one side, she is proud of her white ancestors and believes in the "nobility" of their "blood". On the other, she is aware of the unjust sufferings of her black fellows, and in a way the exchange of babies she performs is an attempt of "avenging their crimes against her race" (*Mississippi Writings* 965).

Now, if it is true that all three stories present instances of social transgression, it is also true that such transgressions vary widely in their significance and scope. In *Tom*

Sawyer, as we have said, the transgressions are "false". The main character, Tom Sawyer, is a mischievous boy that lies and cheats occasionally. Nonetheless, his actions are shown to be inoffensive to the constituted social order: mere pranks, which he is free to perform only while he is a child. Perhaps the main proof of that "innocence" is that he never questions the issue of slavery, foundation of that society and a natural fact to him as to most other characters in that book. Later, as evidenced by the approval of adults, Tom will grow up to be a leading member of the community to which he belongs. The plot, in fact, can be seen as a series of adventures that initiate in a mild form of transgression but culminate with the "education" of Tom. Perhaps this is best seen in the last adventure of the story, in which Tom's prohibited wandering in the cave is punished with an almost-death. There, however, he learns some of his social roles (protection of women, for instance) and emerges as a more socially responsible individual, even stimulating Huck to accept his "adoption". The hidden treasure found by Tom can be seen as a form of social prize given to the boy because of the "elimination" of Injun Joe in the cave.

In *Huckleberry Finn* the social transgression is more radical. First, his rejection of "civilization", and, later, his subversive friendship with a slave, certainly represent a break with the Southern small-town morality. However, there are a few things that we should note: first, his transgression is not based on a rational consideration, but on an emotional one. His decision to free Jim is based on the feelings that he has for him. However, he never ceases to consider that he is doing something morally reprehensible -- that he is, in fact, being "evil". He never acknowledges the "deformity" of his conscience, and, despite his feelings that Jim's friendship is more important than what he has been taught, he is unable to decide that slavery is wrong on moral grounds. Moreover, the social

transgression performed by Huck loses some of its meaning at the end of the book, when Tom Sawyer comes back and transforms it into a mere fantasy: the "evasion" of a free nigger. Then, Huck's "stealing" of a slave is not as subversive as it seemed, for the slave was already free. This, however, was the solution found by Mark Twain to give the story a "happy ending" and permit Huck to return to his initial status: neither assuming totally his marginality, neither totally accepting the society that wants to "civilize" him.

It is in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* that we have the first instance in which, to use Leslie Fiedler words, "Twain permits himself no sentimental relenting, but accepts for once the logic of his own premises" ("As Free As Any Cretur..." 131). There is no "happy ending" to smooth the awful truth. Moreover, the plot presents the more radical transgression of borders so far: it is not only a transgression of social position, but of racial status. The exchange of a white and a black baby in the cradle is so dangerous because it challenges one of the most important foundations of the Southern society: the myth of racial purity. And what the book shows clearly is that race and social position are mostly based on "fictions of law and custom" created by the powerful elements of the community. Even the finger-prints so celebrated by Wilson prove to be incomplete forms of identification, that do not prove the racial origin or social status of anyone. In fact, what *Pudd'nhead Wilson* shows, specially in the scene of the final trial, is a society worried in artificially creating differences. And in fact, Roxy and Tom, although looking as white as Percy Driscoll, are excluded from white society because they are products of miscegenation, and represent a proof that all ideas about "honorable blood" are illusions. If it was proved that there was no difference whatsoever between Roxy and Judge Driscoll, for instance, but those

resultant from cultural education, the whole foundation of society -- a society supported by slavery and based on the belief of differences between the races -- would fall apart.

Therefore, *Pudd'nhead Wilson* is, of the three, the book in which this "construction" of differences is more clear. The "marginals", in fact, define the "center": it is in the exclusion of people with "drops of black blood" that the belief in the superiority of ancient heritage and "white blood" is confirmed. In the same way, the prejudice against Wilson is not based exclusively on his Northern origin, but on his tendency toward dangerous critical thoughts that contradict the rigid norms of racial division in Dawson's Landing. He has, therefore, to prove that he can obey the norms and turn to socially approved forms of conduct before he can be accepted in the highest ranks of the community. The fact that he is not accepted at the beginning of the story because of his remark about the "half dog" (which revealed, not coincidentally, an unproper understanding of basic rules of division), and the fact that he is accepted and even hailed when he discovers a transgression of racial borders, say much about the community that first rejected and then admitted him.

I have also studied some narrative options chosen by Twain, as well as some issues of language and structure of the novels, to see how the issues of marginalization and transgression of borders are emphasized (or not). In *Tom Sawyer*, the external narrator assumes a condescending and nostalgic tone. It is humorous, but not sarcastic or corrosive. In fact, although he criticizes the community a few times, it is more a criticism of the world of adults as opposed to the world of children. The reason for this lack of a higher critical concern lies on two basic aspects: (1) Twain's close identification with the main character of the story, and (2) the nostalgic tone of a book that was meant for

children, and did not permit the mention of more serious issues, as slavery and racial oppression. Now, in *Huckleberry Finn* the question is tackled by means of the use of a marginal character in the position of narrator. Huck Finn, in his simplicity, is able to see beyond the falsity of the other characters. This permits Twain a maximization of his criticism of society, in an indirect manner, by means of dramatic irony. Thus, Huck's "innocent look" serves as a weapon for the author, who can make fun of the viciousness of the community without running risks himself. Finally, in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, there is again an external narrator, but the tone is much more critical than in *Tom Sawyer*, and the author permits himself several satirical and critical comments. Besides, the "doubleness" that is the main issue of the plot appears in the construction of the novel as well, with the appearance of critical comments at the beginning of each chapter labeled "Pudd'nhead Wilson's Calendar". Such comments, sometimes supporting and sometimes contradicting what is said in the story, are another element that Twain uses to criticize the rules and characters of the community he describes.

I also think that there is an evolution from one novel to the next in the presentation of the problems related to the issue of this thesis: the processes of marginalization and social transgression. From *Tom Sawyer* to *Huckleberry Finn* to *Pudd'nhead Wilson* we note the following progressive changes:

(1) The portrait of society is more negative and critical. Its social institutions and beliefs are shown to be worse and worse. If in *Tom Sawyer* characters that represent persons in high position (Judge Tatcher, for instance) are presented in a favorable light, in *Huckleberry Finn* the Southern aristocracy is seen as prone to violence and irrational

beliefs. In *Pudd'nhead Wilson* the criticism of high-born persons is more direct, with ironical comments of the narrator.

(2) There is a growing concern with issues related to social and racial marginalization. In *Tom Sawyer*, slavery is hardly mentioned. In *Huckleberry Finn*, it is a fundamental part of the story, but is questioned only at the individual level (what Huck questions is Jim's slavery, not slavery in general). In *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, the racial and social transgression is the basis of the story, and the problem of race and slavery is presented in more general terms. Here there is an attempt to define or understand the question of racial differences that transcends the fate of the main characters. In fact, it is the first time that Twain addresses the delicate question of miscegenation, and its problematic consequences for social identification that it creates.

(3) The transgression performed gets more radical. In *Tom Sawyer* we have a "false" transgression. In *Huckleberry Finn*, there is a major form of social transgression that, however, is not carried to its ultimate point (which would be stealing a slave that was not actually free). In *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, the transgression, both social and racial, is more profound (and, therefore, is received with serious punishment).

(4) The ending becomes more tragic. In *Tom Sawyer*, the happy ending is convincing, for the plot has not presented a really serious transgression, and never leaves the comfort of centrality. In *Huckleberry Finn*, there is also a happy ending, but it sounds artificial, because it represents a return to the initial situation, which was shown as fragile, and therefore collapsed. There is nothing in the final situation that prevents it from collapsing again. In *Pudd'nhead Wilson* the tragedy, as seen by Roxana, is complete: her son is sold down the river, exactly as she feared in the beginning, and exactly because of

the exchange of babies that she performed for fear that such tragedy could happen. However, the ending is also ambiguous, for *Pudd'nhead Wilson* is a "success story" too. Its title character, after all, is hailed as a hero after discovering the exchange. And although his discovery only proves the stupidity of slavery and the vagueness of the definition of "black" and "white", and of who should be excluded in that society (definitions which are based on cultural and not scientific grounds), David Wilson is not openly criticized or satirized by the narrator at the end of the novel. In fact, it appears that Twain, like Wilson, still wanted to have things both ways: to criticize society with ironical comments and, at the same time, not to be rejected by it.

Finally, we should note that a comparative analysis of the three books has shown that, beyond their possible narrative flaws or "happy endings", the society of the small towns in the slaveholding South was presented by Twain as based on an unjust social order, where racial and social differences are artificially created to protect the privileges of certain elements. When a marginal or excluded character tries to get out of the limits that have been imposed on him, he causes a break in the social constituted order, and reveals the injustice of the whole process of marginalization and exclusion. In *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, the crime perpetrated by Injun Joe, a "half-breed", and his consequent persecution by the community, while forgetting the involvement of Dr. Robinson in the same crime, reveals the hypocrisy of the villagers. In *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Huck's subversive friendship with Jim reveals the injustice of slavery. In *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson*, the attempt to change a "white" and a "black" baby reveals the absurdity of trying to define different races to justify slavery.

In any case, the marginal characters always help to define the center, and this can be seen in all three stories, which have many similarities in this aspect. In *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, the exclusion of such characters of Injun Joe and Muff Potter shows a community intolerant of racial impurity and disobedience of its shallow small-town morality. In *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Huck's marginal perspective enables him to see the violence inherent in southern towns in a way that could not be seen in *Tom Sawyer*, where the perspective of the center dominated the story. It is also Huck's marginal status that allows him to be the only friend of Jim, a runaway slave. Such friendship shows a society in which slaves are not considered human, and cannot be, for then the horror of slavery would be patent. In *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson*, the exchange of babies performed by Roxana shows very clearly the absurdity of the creation of racial differences based on heritage (fictions of law and custom) to justify slavery. Moreover, the initial marginal status of Wilson and his subsequent acceptance when he discovers the "usurpation" of white identity demonstrates that those who do not understand the rules of social division are to be punished, while those who defend such rules are to be praised. It is important to note, indeed, that the social universe is basically the same in the three stories; what changes is only the degree in which we, readers, are able to see its mechanisms. And it is not a coincidence that our awareness of such social mechanisms grows in the same reason of the prominence of marginal characters in the plot: the more importance given in the story to the marginal characters and their transgression of borders, the clearer is our view of the unjust social order.

I have used, in the title of this dissertation, the river -- an ever-present element in Twain's life and fiction -- to symbolize the limits that define a society, just as the margins

define a river. I do believe that Mark Twain's fiction is realistic in the portrayal of the complex social forces of society, and his analysis of the exclusion and marginalization in small southern towns in the Old South is accurate. As Huck Finn would say, those books "was made by Mr. Mark Twain, and he told the truth, mainly. There was things which he stretched, but mainly he told the truth" (*Mississippi Writings* 625).

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