



FACULTADE DE FILOLOXÍA



Grao en Lingua e Literatura Inglesas

Traballo de Fin de Grao

**Racialized Spaces: A Spatial Analysis of Mark Twain's**  
*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

Autor: Manuel Anxo Cabañas López

Titora: Noemí Pereira Ares

CURSO 2024–2025



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**Título:** Racialized Spaces: A Spatial Analysis of Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn***Resumo** [na lingua en que se vai redacta-lo TFG; entre 1000 e 2000 caracteres]:

Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, a canonical work of American literature, is characterized by its emphasis on space and its connection to racial issues. Following from this and considering the so-called "spatial turn" in cultural and literary studies witnessed in recent decades, the present dissertation aims to analyze the representation of space in the *Huckleberry Finn* as a means through which the author depicted the racial tensions and segregation governing the American context in which the novel is set. Drawing on spatial literary studies as well as critical race theory, the study contends that narratological elements – and particularly here, space – encode socially embedded meanings and reflect underlying racial tensions. To this end, the dissertation begins by problematising narrative space as a key narratological category, unpacking its social significance within the American context of the nineteenth century. This is followed by a critical interrogation of the concept of "race" through the lenses of scholarly work linked to colonial discourse and Critical Race Theory. The socially construed nature of both "space" and "race" justifies a joint study thereof, as illustrated by the theoretical framework provided by Racial Space Theory. Finally, the main section of the dissertation will be devoted to exploring how race and space intersect in Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, and how the novel's spatial configurations become symbolically charged, serving as signifiers and conduits for racial meaning.

Santiago de Compostela, 10 de abril de 2025.

SRA. PRESIDENTA DA COMISIÓN DO TRABALLO DE FIN DE GRAO

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**Declaración de orixinalidade do traballo**

Eu, Manuel Anxo Cabañas López, estudante do Grao en Lingua e Literatura Inglesas na Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, con DNI 49674002M, declaro que os contidos do presente traballo son orixinais, non plaxiados e que as ideas aquí expostas fan mención á súa orixe e autoría.

En Santiago de Compostela, a 30 de xuño de 2025

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'MANUEL ANXO CABANAS LOPEZ', written in a cursive style.

Manuel Anxo Cabañas López

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Literature is where I go to explore the highest and lowest places in human society and in the human spirit, where I hope to find not absolute truth but the truth of the tale, of the imagination of the heart.

Salman Rushdie (2020)

## INTRODUCTION

Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, first published in 1884, is widely regarded as one of the foundational works of American literature and one of the most influential texts in the shaping of modern narrative. Its apparent simplicity as an adventure story conceals a complex structure, marked by multiple levels of interpretation, a rich intertextual dimension, and a sharp social critique. The novel has sparked numerous controversies over time, partly due to its use of colloquial and dialectal language as well as its racial representations, making it a complex and, at times, problematic text from both ethical and pedagogical perspectives.

This study proposes an analysis of the novel through a specific hermeneutic lens: that of space as a symbolic structure and a vector of meaning. As this study contends, far from serving merely as a backdrop, space in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* acquires a fundamental semiotic function, through which the ideological and symbolic reading of the text is articulated. The central opposition between the Mississippi River and the mainland, along with the depiction of specific places—houses, Jackson's Island, the raft—allows for a reading of the text in terms of spatial binaries charged with meaning. These spaces not only shape the physical universe of the narrative but also determine the reading mode and define the values opposed within the work: freedom versus oppression, mobility versus rigidity, authenticity versus imposture. To this end, the dissertation offers a close reading of the text which is informed by different theoretical frameworks: narratological studies on space, race theory and postcolonial theory.

In the first chapter, 'The Spatial Turn in Literary Studies', the focus is placed on space and its narratological centrality, a question that has garnered increasing attention since the final decades of the twentieth century. Once the most neglected aspect of narratology, the spatial turn has brought space to the forefront of philosophical concerns, as well as those of art and narratology. Building on the pioneering studies of Mikhail Bakhtin (1937–1938) and Joseph Frank (1945), the chapter delves into the contributions of Michel Foucault's lectures (1967, 1976), which offer a social and political perspective on space, in contrast to earlier psychological and individual approaches. All of this has led to space-centred approaches to literary studies, such as those proposed by Franco Moretti (2005) or Robert Tally (2012, 2017). In short, this theoretical deepening allows space to be established as a social construct that operates through semiotic processes such

as cartography or literature itself. As a starting point for the analysis in this work, the proposal by Vincent Jouve (1997) is used, according to which the way space is described in a literary text internally programs the reading regime. Thus, a dense space, described in detail and linked to ideological categories —as is the case in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*— guides a hermeneutic reading oriented toward symbolism and richness of meaning.

The second chapter, ‘Race and Space in the American South’, reviews the social construction of the category of race, which was placed at the service of the colonial enterprise, drawing on the key work by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (1998). The chapter examines the emergence and evolution of the term *race* in English culture and explores the theories of Cuvier (1805) and Francis Galton (1886), as well as the critical voices and reformulations that challenged racial theory, such as those proposed by Du Bois (1897). Although necessarily brief, attention is also given to the history of slavery in America, as an essential framework within which *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* must be situated, and the way in which spaces were racially coded in nineteenth-century America. Intertextual connections are drawn with other works that, in one way or another, have also problematized the history of slavery and the representation of racial issues, showing how literature not only reflects but also actively participates in the historical dynamics that have shaped the operative hierarchies in our societies.

Drawing on these theoretical approaches, we delve into the analysis of the novel in the third chapter, ‘Race and Spatiality in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*’, paying special attention to topographical descriptions, to the way spaces are depicted, and to how they interact with the representation of racial issues. This analysis of this novel is carried out through a close reading of the text, centering the study on the description of spaces and their interrelation with issues of race and slavery. The novel’s construction around the structural pattern of the journey is examined in intertextual relation to other works and genres, highlighting the explicit intertextuality that is, in fact, constitutive of the novel itself.

Thus, the chapter includes three sub-sections. The first, ‘The Mississippi River as a Liminal Space’, analyzes this central space on both a structural and symbolic level. Key to the narrative plot, this fluid journey powerfully introduces the topos of *vita flumen*, presenting the river as a space of social suspension, of freedom and transformation, a space of reconciliation where it becomes possible to build a human relationship as individuals, beyond hierarchies. The next sub-section, ‘Mainland’, explores its opposite:

the solid ground where social prejudices and hierarchies persist with rigid stability. In a third sub-section, ‘Other Spaces’, the analysis turns to how other locations —such as Jackson’s Island or the numerous houses that appear throughout the plot— also concentrate rich descriptive resources and acquire deep symbolic meanings that underscore and reinforce the essential antithesis.

Finally, we bring the entire analysis to a confluence that allows us to draw illuminating conclusions about *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and about the ways in which human beings inhabit spaces, recreate them, and imbue them with meaning through culture, constructing within and through them the ways we relate to one another. So, this work argues that in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, spatial representation is not only central to the novel’s structure and symbolism, but also deeply entangled with the racial dynamics it portrays, so that space becomes a narrative device through which race is both constructed and contested.

## CHAPTER 1. The ‘Spatial Turn’ in Literary Studies

Space is one of the fundamental pillars of narratology. A non-spatialized narrative is not possible, as the very concept of an event implies a place where it occurs. However, the extent to which space is emphasized in a narrative can vary significantly. On one end of the spectrum, space may be schematic, stereotypical, and reduced to a mere background framework. On the other end, spatial dimensions may take on a central role, with narration becoming deeply intertwined with spatial description. In such cases, space is not only essential to the depicted world, but often it also carries a symbolic significance crucial to the interpretation of the text’s ultimate meaning.

Despite this, attention to space has remained secondary until very recently (Manfred 2021: 67). In contrast to the emphasis placed on modalization—both voice and vision—as well as on time and even the study of characters, space has traditionally been relegated to a subordinate position. This marginalization can be partially attributed to the fact that, in Western thought and on a philosophical level, space has tended to occupy a secondary and subsidiary role vis-à-vis time. Although both space and time were considered *a priori* forms of sensibility in Kantian philosophy, time garnered more intense and profound scholarly attention. Similarly, in literary theory, narration was privileged over description, which was often burdened with negative connotations. Gérard Genette (1969: 260), for instance, famously described description as *ancilla narrationis*—a mere servant to narration—an expression that encapsulates the subjugation of description to narration and, by extension, of space to time.

However, the final decades of the twentieth century were characterized by what came to be known as the ‘spatial turn’ which reversed the traditional hierarchy between space and time, placing space at the core of philosophical inquiry and, concomitantly, at the center of literary theory. As early as the 1930s, Mikhail Bakhtin (1937–1938) introduced into literature the fusion of time and space that had already taken place in physics. Some critics have regarded his essay *Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel* as ‘the greatest study ever written on space and narrative’ (Moretti 2005). Indeed, Bakhtin’s concept of the *chronotope* remains central in contemporary discussions of space in literature, particularly in recent works influenced by the so-called ‘spatial turn’ in literary studies.

A few years after Bakhtin's formulation of the concept of the *chronotope*, Joseph Frank (1945) analyzed modernist literature through his *theory of spatial forms*, arguing that authors such as James Joyce, Marcel Proust, and T. S. Eliot disrupted the conventional association between narrative and time, counterbalancing it with an *effect of spatialization*. However, it was in the second half of the twentieth century that a true proliferation of theories placed space at the very core of narratology and philosophy.

In this regard, Michel Foucault's lectures *Des espaces autres* (1967) and *Questions à Michel Foucault sur la Géographie* (1976) were particularly influential. While earlier approaches to space—such as Gaston Bachelard's *La poétique de l'espace* (1957)—had emphasized psychological and universalist perspectives, Foucault adopted a social and political framework. He established the historicity of spatial conceptions and their deep entanglement with structures of power, marking a significant shift in the study of space in the humanities.

This new space-centered paradigm has also taken hold in the field of literary studies, culminating in approaches such as those proposed by Franco Moretti (2005). Moretti went so far as to suggest abstract spatial models—such as maps and graphs—as analytical tools for literature. According to his argument, these models can sometimes reveal the interplay of forces and transformations at work in literature more powerfully than direct textual analysis.

Ultimately, as Paul Smethurst (2000: 15) asserts, the postmodern *chronotope* is characterized by a shift from the temporal to the spatial. This spatial turn has left its mark on postmodern literature, but it has also prompted a retrospective critical examination of how space has been represented in literary works from earlier periods, uncovering meanings encoded within spatial structures. As a result, the notion of literature as *ortgebunden*—bound to place—has gained prominence, as Franco Moretti (1997: 5) has defined it.

In this regard, Vincent Jouve's idea is particularly insightful: the way a narrative describes and encodes space fundamentally shapes the reading process itself (Jouve 1997). According to Jouve, a stereotyped, barely described space programs a fast-paced reading oriented toward narrative progression. Conversely, a dense space, elaborated through descriptive and constructive mechanisms, encourages a hermeneutic reading, one that is slower, interpretative, and attuned to symbolic and meaningful complexity. In this way, ideological values are often conveyed in narrative precisely through the coding of space. This is particularly evident when such values are linked to power hierarchies. In

the case of racial issues, for instance, spatial representation serves as a multilayered and meaning-rich mode of encoding, one that is open to symbolism and connotation.

Under this new space-centered paradigm, the study of narrative space has gained significant prominence within postcolonial theory. Edward Said's seminal work *Orientalism* (1975) had already highlighted how Western literary depictions of the East imbued this 'distant Orient' with connotations of mystery and beauty, fostering a desire for appropriation and domination. Similarly, Mary-Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1991) reinforced the notion that travel literature functioned as a promoter of the colonial enterprise.

Within this context, the study of spatial representation has expanded beyond literary texts to encompass cartography itself. As John Thieme (1998) points out, cartographic production has historically reflected Eurocentrism. This recognition has led postcolonial and space-centered approaches to advocate for alternative mapping systems, such as the well-known Arno Peters' projection and Arthur's projection. These projections challenge the conventions of the Mercator map, a projection created in the sixteenth century by the Dutch merchant Gerardus Mercator with the explicit aim of facilitating maritime navigation at the height of early colonial expansion. Despite its functional origin, the Mercator projection has profoundly shaped our perception of the world. In this conventional representation, the North is positioned at the top and the South at the bottom, reinforcing a hierarchical spatial order that places Europe at the center. Additionally, the distortion inherent in projecting a three-dimensional sphere onto a two-dimensional surface results in a disproportionate enlargement of certain landmasses — Europe in particular— relative to others, such as Africa and Asia. This spatial distortion has had lasting ideological and geopolitical implications, reinforcing power asymmetries through visual representation.

Moving from the general to the particular, within narrative analysis in English, the terms *setting*, *space*, and *place* converge. The term *setting* most specifically refers to the spatiotemporal framework of a literary work. In contrast, the concepts of *space* and *place* allow for a broader perspective that extends beyond the strictly textual dimension. They thus allow us to pay attention to the social dynamics that emerge from and are shaped by space itself:

Space, then, has been seen in distinction to place as a realm without meaning -as a 'fact of life' which, like time, produces the basic coordinates for human

life. When humans invest meaning in a portion of space and then become attached to it in some way (naming is one such way) it becomes a place. Although this basic dualism of space and place runs through much human geography since the 1970s it is confused somewhat by the idea of social space -or socially produced space- which, in many ways, plays the same role as place (Cresswell 2004: 10).

Undoubtedly, the *spatial turn* has fostered greater interdisciplinarity, aligning with the sociological approaches to literary studies that replaced the formalist paradigms of the early twentieth century. Within this interdisciplinary framework, the study of space in literature has intersected with fields such as geography and cartography (Prieto 2019). Following Robert Tally in his *Handbook of Space and Literature* (2017), we can categorize this renewed focus on space in literature under the broad designation of *spatial literary theory* (Tally 2017: 3). Under this overarching umbrella, various subdisciplines have emerged, including *literary cartography*, *literary geography*, and *geocriticism*.

In summary, the space-centric paradigm has established the idea that space is a social construct, produced through language itself (the primary modeling system) — including deixis, adverbs, toponymy, and modes of designation— but also, in a fundamental way, through cultural production. In the defense of space as a cultural construction, Lefebvre (1974) and Soja (1989) played a prominent role by postulating the interconnection between space and culture, which had a decisive influence on Literary Theory. Lefebvre (1974) argued that each mode of production determines the spatial configurations that emerge from it. Consequently, a major transformation in the system of production, such as the abandonment of slavery-based economies, must necessarily be reflected in a reconfigured conception of space. Artistic creation, in this sense, becomes a privileged site for studying and analyzing these shifts in conceptualization. Soja, from a postmodern perspective, converges with Lefebvre's Marxist approach in advocating for the heterogeneity of spatial forms against the homogenization imposed by capitalist modes of production. Both scholars share an interest in examining spatial representation as a means of generating resistance processes.

In this cultural construction of space, cultural activities such as map-making and pictorial art play a central role, but so does —perhaps in a privileged way— literature. In this regard, Chris Fitter (1995) highlights that literary texts exhibit a higher density of evaluative and interpretative meaning due to their greater capacity for establishing analogies and metaphors. From this, it follows that literature also carries a greater ideological weight (Fitter 1995: 22):

Similitude, of course, is far more central to literary landscape than is scrupulous visual impression. If it takes a Turner and a canvas to capture the aerial swirl and mystery of Victorian fog and mist, Dickens can summon at a stroke its phantasmagoric ambiguity by suggesting an emerging Megalosaurus waddling up Holborn Hill. Literary landscape overtly beds the optical in the ideological; working by metaphor or wit, fancy or piety, it is permanently closer than art to ideation, to the world of relations, to explicit networks of thought.

In this sense, we could say that the spatial representation in the literary text gives rise to what we could call, following Manfred (2021: 68), ‘semanticization’ or ‘semantic charging of space’. Tally (2012) actually refers to the writer as a ‘map-maker’. In fact, one of the most universal narrative motifs is that of the journey, often shaped by tropes such as that of the *homo viator*. Since the *Aeneid* and the Homeric epics, the journey has become a powerful metaphor for human life, as well as the spatial counterpart of various processes of quest and transformation. In actantial studies, such as Propp’s *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928) or Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), the journey and the return serve as the spatial framework for the hero’s journey, his departure from the initial realm to face the dangers of the ‘other realm’, ultimately returning with something valuable not only for himself but for his community as well.

We can thus conclude, following Salman Rushdie (1991), that ‘all description is a political act’, a notion we aim to test through the analysis of the depiction and representation of space in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in relation to the ideological dimensions associated with race and social hierarchy. The ‘spatial reading’ that we intend to undertake aligns with the purpose described by Prieto (2019: 7) in the following terms:

Spatial reading is a kind of reading against the grain, which takes what is usually relegated to the background and moves it to the foreground, asking what can be learned by paying serious attention to the ways actions and objects and social structures are arrayed in space, rather than taking space for granted as a kind of byproduct of or medium for the foregrounded elements. By focusing on what is usually considered secondary and often goes unnoticed, even in some cases by the authors themselves, this kind of analysis can help the critic gain access to a kind of spatial unconscious at work in every narrative, with potentially far-reaching implications.

Building on the idea of space as a socially constructed entity that encodes social hierarchies, the following section examines how the spatial dynamics of southern America reflected racial hierarchization. This analysis provides a necessary foundation for understanding the role of space in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* within the broader context of racial dialectics and the profound transformations in social relations and the economic model.

## CHAPTER 2. Race and Space in the American South

Just as space is a culturally constructed category, so too is race. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (1998) regard it as a central cultural construct within colonial discourse, a conceptual tool serving the aims of the colonial enterprise. The notion of *race* functioned to uphold distinctions between colonizer and colonized, thereby justifying and sustaining practices of exploitation:

Race is particularly pertinent to the rise of colonialism, because the division of human society in this way is inextricable from the need of colonialist powers to establish a dominance over subject peoples and hence justify the imperial enterprise (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1998: 218).

In this way, although the concept of race was not created by imperialism, it soon became one of its main ideological pillars, enabling the combination of ideas of domination and civilization. In their historical overview of the concept, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin trace how, during the Middle Ages and the Crusades, differences between races were already being acknowledged, though without the prejudices that would later become attached to such distinctions with the rise of European imperialism. The first recorded use of the term *race* in English dates back to 1501, in a poem by William Dunbar, where it held a much looser meaning, referring to a type or category of people or things. It was not until the late eighteenth century —significantly, at the height of imperial expansion— that the term acquired the meaning it has retained to this day: ‘a distinct category of human beings with physical characteristics transmitted by descent’ (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1998: 219).

Throughout the 19th century, the rise of the biological sciences gave increasing solidity and a more concrete formulation to racial theory. Cuvier (1805) proposed a classification of humanity into three broad categories —white, yellow, and black— which would later become more commonly known as Caucasoid, Mongoloid, and Negroid. Despite their lack of scientific foundation, these categories continue to persist in social perceptions and in many forms of cultural expression. It was precisely upon this supposed biological difference that the justification for distinctions between human cultures would be constructed. The emergence of evolutionary theory later in the century (Darwin 1859) did not challenge racial theory; if anything, it provided a mechanism for change within it, and even laid the groundwork for eugenics. This period also saw the rise of studies

explicitly aimed at documenting alleged racial differences, such as those by Francis Galton (1886), who carried out measurements on some 9,000 individuals.

Although racial theory remained influential in both thought and social imagination throughout the twentieth century, it was also increasingly challenged by critical voices. A key milestone in this regard was the Universal Races Congress, held in London in 1911, which marked an important moment for the school of thought known as ‘monogenism’, the belief that there is ‘only one species of man living on earth today’ (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1998: 222).

The problem, however, is that the scientific questioning of racial distinctions has had little impact on social perceptions and it is precisely these perceptions that ultimately shape social and cultural practices. This was highlighted from a postcolonial perspective by Fanon (1961), who argued that the concept of race was not only employed by colonial powers but also had a profound influence on the self-perception and psychological experience of racialised individuals. For this reason, no matter how questionable the notion of race may be from an objective or scientific standpoint, its effectiveness and persistence in shaping social practices —particularly throughout processes of colonisation and hierarchisation such as slavery— cannot be denied: ‘However fictional race may be shown to be as an objective category, its power as a discursive formation remains unabated’ (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1998: 224). Years later, Helms (1990) would state that Black identity is strongly shaped by the history of racism and discrimination.

This conception already has a notable precedent in the 19th century, specifically in Du Bois’s theorization in *The Conservation of Races* (1897). As the title itself suggests, Du Bois advocates for the preservation of races, though from a perspective that firmly rejects the scientific racism prevalent in the late 1800s. He argues that each race possesses a unique contribution rooted in its historical experience. In this way, his thought offers an alternative to *monogenism*, proposing a path toward equality that does not require the denial of racial difference, but rather affirms it —cultural and historical difference— separated from structures of subordination and exploitation.

Of the eight races he distinguishes —alongside various racial subgroups— Du Bois focuses on the ‘Negro race’, with which he identifies, asserting that it has not yet been able to fully contribute its historical legacy: ‘Manifestly some of the great races of today —particularly the Negro race— have not as yet given to civilization the full spiritual message which they are capable of giving’ (Du Bois 1897: 9). He therefore urges the

embracing of Black identity in order to achieve a ‘high destiny (...) as American Negroes’ (Du Bois 1897: 15).

*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) emerged during a period when race theory was at its peak, in the late nineteenth century —precisely as Francis Galton was conducting his influential studies, and before the rise of an intellectual movement that would challenge racial categorizations—, eventually finding expression in the 1911 Universal Races Congress. The 1880s, moreover, marked a pivotal moment in the global trajectory of abolitionism. While President Abraham Lincoln had already issued the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, slavery persisted in other parts of the Americas. It was during this same decade that slavery was abolished in Cuba (1880) and in Brazil (1888).

Beyond the issue of race, it is impossible to analyze *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* without at least briefly addressing the history of slavery in America, which plays a central role in the plot and in the relationships between characters. Approximately 25% of the 12 million people forcibly displaced from Africa to be enslaved in the Americas ended up in the United States, giving rise to a complex reality of exploitation and social hierarchy: ‘Over the course of the transatlantic slave trade, approximately one in four enslaved Africans —around 3.3 million individuals— were transported by the British, the majority of whom were sent to the Caribbean and the southern United States’ (Gomes 2019: 272). As Burrell-Craft (2020: 9) puts it: ‘Slavery was complicated...so are its ramifications’.

Gomes (2019) estimates that 12.5 million Africans, victims of the transatlantic slave trade, were taken to the Americas aboard approximately 36,000 ships between 1500 and 1867, nearly two million of whom died during the voyage. As he notes, ‘em média, catorze cadáveres foram atirados ao mar todos os dias’ (Gomes 2019: 47). Of this global figure, 85% of all slave ship journeys took place after 1700. Upon arrival in the Americas, these individuals faced exploitation and subjugation at the hands of enslavers. In addition to the structural violence inherent in daily labor routines, there were also instances of punitive violence resulting in death or mutilation.

Critical thought on race has developed analytical tools and frameworks, among which *Critical Race Theory* stands out. As Taylor describes it, it focuses on the ‘unequal and unjust distribution of power and resources along political, economic, racial, and gendered lines’ (Taylor 2009: 1). In Neely and Samura’s (2011) key formulation of the theory, it focuses on analyzing how racial and spatial processes are interconnected and

mutually constitutive. Racial dynamics shape the configuration and meaning of spaces, and, in turn, these spaces condition and reinforce racial relations. The cotton, tobacco, and sugar plantations —structured around a system of slavery-based exploitation— may be regarded as true chronotopes of historical significance in the Americas. Furthermore, in recent decades, an awareness of the history of slavery and discrimination has taken shape through the affirmation of Black experience and counternarratives. As part of the call for the importance of self-representation, attention has been given to narratives that offer an alternative to the single story told by white and colonial voices.

A notable and recent example is the novel *Água de barrela*, which centers on the history of six generations of a Black family, beginning with the first generation taken from Africa and transported on a slave ship. The narrative spans from 1849 to 2015 — over a century and a half— encompassing key historical processes such as the transatlantic slave trade, slavery, abolition, and the persistence of racial discrimination under new forms of exploitation. The author, Eliana Cruz, reconstructs her family history —her double genealogy— which links her to the Portuguese Tosta family, from which she also descends due to the sexual exploitation of enslaved black women. Despite being a descendant of both social and ethnic groups, she chooses to identify with her enslaved heritage and tells the story from the perspective of her Black lineage.

The novel, published in 2016, was awarded the Oliveira Silveira Prize, promoted by the Palmares Cultural Foundation. It depicts experiences of humiliation, repression, and violence: the near-institutionalized sexual abuse of enslaved women; instances of extreme punitive violence (such as when the enslaver Joanna Tosta cuts out an enslaved woman's tongue or has another, pregnant with her firstborn son, beaten so brutally that she loses the child). Through the use of autofiction, the author constructs a narrative that becomes what Fredric Jameson termed a 'national allegory', in which 'the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society' (Jameson 1986: 69). Eliana Cruz's adoption of an Afro-identified perspective allows her to portray, from a viewpoint markedly different from the dominant one, the history of discrimination and humiliation rooted in the structural racism born during the period of slavery, racism that still persists in contemporary American society.

In the United States, there are also novels that, in a similar vein, undertake the rewriting of a family saga whose origins lie in the abduction of an ancestor from Africa. These narratives trace the enduring legacy of slavery and systemic racism as it unfolds

through successive generations. One of the most widely known and culturally impactful examples is *Roots* by Alex Haley (1976), a work that achieved major public recognition and was later adapted for television. The 1970s and 1980s proved to be particularly fertile decades for this kind of literature, arguably as a consequence of the growing influence of postcolonial theory, which began to take shape in the 1960s and encouraged new readings of history, identity, and representation (Said 1978, Spivak 1988, Bhabha 1994).

Other landmark texts include *Kindred* by Octavia E. Butler (1979) and *Beloved* by Toni Morrison (1987), both of which have become central to African American literary studies. Butler's novel is especially noteworthy for anticipating a discourse of intersectionality, a term later formalized by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), as it places an African American woman at the center of the narrative. In doing so, it overlays two intersecting axes of subalternity —race and gender— thus offering a powerful critique of the structures that produce and perpetuate multiple forms of oppression.

A historical trajectory can thus be traced in which literature has both reflected and played a role in relation to the legacy of slavery and colonialism, contributing, on one hand, to the colonial enterprise, and on the other, to challenging racial hierarchies, reconstructing the experiences of enslaved people, and representing those who, even after the abolition of slavery, continued to suffer discrimination under new economic and exploitative systems. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is part of this network of texts that intersect with the history of slavery in America, the construction of racial social differentiation, and its critique. The complexity of the concepts, relationships, and meanings involved imbues space with significance, allowing it to encode within the text questions that are difficult to express more directly. It is precisely from this dynamic that *Racial Space Theory* emerges, rooted in the idea that the spatial expression of racial issues 'teaches us things about race we cannot know by other means' (Knowles 2003: 78).

In a sense similar to that expressed by Knowles, Lipsitz (2011) argues that racism is not established or enacted solely through discourse and legal frameworks, but also — and indeed fundamentally— through the organization of space, expanding on the idea already introduced by Delaney (1998) in *The Spatial Production of Race*. In line with the intersection between this issue and gender, Katherine McKittrick (2006), for her part, explores the exclusion of the Black female body from spaces of power, as well as the creation of spaces of resistance by Black women.

And yet, despite the significance of the intersection between racial and spatial issues—and the fact that both have garnered considerable scholarly interest in recent decades—their interconnection has rarely been explored. As Burrell-Craft recently pointed out (2020: 20): ‘There was no intersectionality in terms of viewing racial identity development with race/space or even place’. She thus questions whether theoretical explorations of these concepts are truly *going deep enough*. In this work, we seek precisely the convergence of these two dimensions in the analysis of a crucial work, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, beginning from Knowles’s assertion that ‘the social constructions of space illuminates the social constructions of race and vice versa’ (Knowles 2003: 78), and testing this claim through a critical, contextualized reading of the novel, one illuminated, retrospectively, by the conceptual and theoretical developments of Postcolonial Studies, Racial Theory, and Racial Space Theory.

### CHAPTER 3. Race and Spatiality in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* has been the subject of multiple interpretations since its publication; interpretations that, as analyzed by Gilbert (2000) and evidenced by the plurality of voices compiled in the collective volume *The Critical Response to Mark Twain's The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, edited by Laurie Champion (1991), have ranged from its dismissal as a juvenile or trivial work to its defense as a central canonical text by figures such as T. S. Eliot, Ernest Hemingway, and Lionel Trilling. These readings also span from viewing the novel as a key work in the anti-racist tradition to its radical rejection—especially from a postcolonial perspective—on account of its portrayal of African American characters. This multiplicity of readings points to the hermeneutic complexity of a polyphonic text, one that resists reduction or confinement to a single, coherent worldview. In such texts, it may be by turning to the less direct and more symbolic sites of meaning-making that one can find a way to reread, interpret, and uncover deeper layers of significance. Among these sites or textual dimensions, space emerges as a narratological cornerstone and a particularly fertile ground for symbolism and semantic density.

On the cover of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Mark Twain included two specific pieces of information, precisely the spatiotemporal coordinates of the narrative:

Scene: The Mississippi Valley

Time: Forty to Fifty Years Ago (Twain 1884: 1).

The spatial precision is clear and highlights the structural and symbolic centrality that the Mississippi River will assume throughout the novel. In fact, the author's very pseudonym already points to the significance that this body of water held for him—even on a personal and biographical level—since 'Mark Twain' was a phrase used by riverboatmen to indicate that the water was deep enough for safe navigation. In this regard, it is noteworthy that a profound transformation occurred in the years between the time depicted in the story and the time of its writing, one that affected the river's role as a transportation route. As Raquel Marques (2009: 102) notes, in the years following the Civil War, river transport declined significantly due to the rapid expansion of the railroad network. Meanwhile, the temporal reference implies, from the very moment of writing, a return to a time prior to the abolition of slavery. In fact, there is a kind of symmetry between the

number of years separating the end of slavery in the United States and the writing of the novel—roughly twenty—and the number of years the narrative looks back into the past: around twenty before the key date of 1863. At the time, the temporal proximity to the abolition of slavery was considered an obstacle to addressing the issue directly, which makes Mark Twain one of the few writers of his time to do so: ‘Unlike many of his literary contemporaries, Mark Twain repeatedly explored the race question after the Civil War. According to William Dean Howells, his longtime friend Samuel Clemens rejected popular opinion that the wounds of the Civil War were too fresh and emotions too high to “philosophize the events of the great struggle” in the pages of fiction’ (Sloan 2010: 159). In this way, the two coordinates with which the novel opens point directly to the two dimensions brought into focus here: space and the question of race, through their connection with the abolitionist process.

Right after the cover, a notice appears ‘by order of the author’ that seems intended to discourage any attempt at interpretation, delivered in the humorous tone that characteristically defines the figure of Tom Sawyer throughout the novel. Commenting on these ‘impossible commands’ at the beginning of the text, Susan Dewin (1993) linked them to the profound irony that underlies the narrative:

Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot (Twain 1884: 2).

The notice is, in effect, part of a set of rhetorical strategies that play with blurring the boundaries between fiction and the empirical world, projecting a playful attitude, and shaping—through paratextual elements—the fictionality pact that governs the reader’s engagement with the text. In this sense, several elements in the first chapter present Huck as an unreliable narrator. He introduces himself through an intertextual reference to *Tom Sawyer* and to Mark Twain himself, in an initial gesture that evokes *Don Quixote*: ‘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 ’ (Twain 1884: 3). Lying and invention, in fact, become recurring strategies to which Huck resorts throughout the narrative, sidestepping conventional standards of moral behavior while nonetheless eliciting sympathy from the reader through a kind of natural morality that stands above the concrete norms of his society.

The spatial dimension of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* encodes, from the outset, its connection with literary genres and intertexts. Ting-Ting (2015) analyzed how the novel brings together topographical, mental, and social spaces. The narrative motif of escape establishes an evident intertextual link with *Don Quixote* from the very beginning, reinforced by Tom Sawyer's repeated metafictional remark: 'I've seen it in books; and so of course that's what we've got to do' (Twain 1884: 11). The allusion to the Spanish novel is made explicit in Chapter III, leaving no doubt as to Mark Twain's deliberate invocation of this intertextual reference. Of course, the model for adventure in this context is not the world of knight-errantry, but rather that of highway robbers—as suggested by Tom Sawyer at first—and, more broadly, the adventure novel, which was flourishing in the nineteenth century and clearly serves as a foundational reference for Twain's work.

The motif of the journey—structurally central in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and present in the literary tradition since Homer's *Odyssey*—takes on the role here of a spatial and episodic foundation characteristic of the picaresque genre. In fact, the connection between *Lazarillo de Tormes* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* has been explicitly analyzed (Hughes, 1979). As with the foundational work of the picaresque, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* may also be linked to the *Bildungsroman*, or novel of formation. Intertextuality is a fundamental and consistent hallmark of the novel, encompassing Shakespeare (with clear references and playful nods to *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet*), Daniel Defoe (with passages that strongly evoke *Robinson Crusoe*), and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, especially in terms of the novel's capacity for social critique directed at the society of Twain's time. Many of the novel's narrative motifs align with the genre of the *Bildungsroman*: a child protagonist who, over the course of the narrative, undergoes a process of maturation and develops an identity that entails personal decisions and an axiological stance that may diverge from—or directly oppose—the dominant ideology of his social group. This entire intertextual backdrop is powerfully and clearly manifested in the novel's spatial dimension, in its structuring around the idea of a journey, in the episodic incursions on land that create a constant back-and-forth *between the Mississippi River and the mainland*, evoking the island episodes of Odysseus's travels, Don Quixote's wanderings through La Mancha, the journey of *Lazarillo* with his successive masters, or the coexistence of Robinson and Friday on their island.

That the spatial dimension of the novel should be so intensely tied to its generic affiliation and intertextual connections seems to support the centrality of space and the

hypothesis that, in this particular narratological aspect, one might find its most powerful interpretative key. In this regard, the novel exemplifies what Vincent Jouve has observed: that the way spatial description is handled within a text internally determines the mode of reading it elicits. The depiction of space in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* relies on detailed, profuse, and richly textured description, which encourages a hermeneutic, reflective, and symbolic reading, one that exists in tension with the forward motion and drive typical of the adventure novel. A clear example can be found in the lengthy inventories of items described when Huck and Jim discover the house where Jim sees the body of Huck's father. Yet, despite such moments, the descriptive pauses in the novel generally do not match the number, length, or density found in other works from the second half of the nineteenth century, which often favored elaborate and extensive description. Frequently, the descriptive technique employed here is what is known as Homeric description—so named after the passage in Book XVIII of the *Iliad* that describes Achilles' shield—a mode that fuses description with narration, so that representational elements are introduced simultaneously with the unfolding of the plot. Thus, while the raft drifts down the Mississippi River, the descriptive features of the surrounding environment accumulate in a diffuse manner, intimately bound to the narrative action itself, and in doing so, they enhance the symbolic density and interpretative richness of the novel.

Numerous scholars have noted the novel's strong tendency toward spatial binarism, toward presenting spaces in antithetical opposition and constructing around them a symbolic spatial duality (Frye 1957; Harris 1983; Moretti 1997). Northrop Frye (1957: 141–147) identifies the existence of an 'apocalyptic symbolism', which is positive and desirable, and a 'demonic symbolism', which is feared and rejected. In *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, this binarism becomes apparent as early as the first chapter, through the euphemistic and Manichean designation of 'the good place' and 'the bad place'. Opposed to Widow Douglas's Christian worldview, filled with rules and restrictions, Huck expresses his desire to escape the space in which he feels confined: 'All I wanted was to go somewheres' (Twain 1884: 4). Yet this conventional binarism—found in many religions and mythologies, as emphasized by Northrop Frye and Mircea Eliade—is projected onto the novel in such a way that it generates a distinct symbolic opposition: that between the Mississippi River and the mainland, which come to represent the two major spaces sustaining the novel's symbolic antithesis.

This oppositional binary, clearly grounded in spatial logic, becomes central in the early chapters: there is a contrast between Widow Douglas's house and the woods, where Huck sometimes escapes to sleep before the cold sets in, a clear expression of his resistance to the spaces of civilization embodied in the widow's home and in the school. But as the narrative progresses beyond these more conventional and religiously inflected oppositions in the opening pages, it develops a more meaningful binary opposition, not religious but social: that which opposes the Mississippi River to the mainland; a liminal, fluid space where social structures are suspended, versus a solid world where categories and hierarchies are clearly defined. Our analysis will therefore focus on this fundamental binary opposition, before considering the role of other spaces within the novel.

### 3.1. The Mississippi River as a Liminal Space

The first time the river is mentioned in the novel, it is focalized from a high point where Huck ascends and gains a panoramic view. This initial depiction, despite its brevity, already reflects the shifts in landscape perception that took place during the nineteenth century: the emergence of the panoramic perspective and the aesthetic category of the sublime, as theorized by Edmund Burke (1757), which celebrates the grand and awe-inspiring in nature over the merely beautiful. Indeed, this first vision of the river—vast, at night—is presented through the lens of the sublime:

Well, when Tom and me got to the edge of the hill-top, we looked away down into de village and could see three or four lights twinkling, where there was sick folks, may be; and the stars over us was sparkling ever so fine; and down by the village was the river, a whole mile broad, and awful still and grand (Twain 1884: 9).

A deeply positive vision of the river is foreshadowed, one that will become the dominant descriptive tone throughout the novel. The connotations of freedom and safety associated with the river quickly become evident, as illustrated at the end of Chapter XVIII: 'I never felt easy till the raft was two mile below there and out in the middle of the Mississippi. Then we hung up our signal lantern, and judged that we was free and safe once more' (Twain 1884: 130). Immediately afterward, in Chapter XIX, a more extended, leisurely description emerges—clearly positive in tone—initially echoing the same sense of grandeur and magnitude characteristic of the sublime, but soon shifting toward a perception of beauty that connects with the literary tradition of the *locus amoenus*:

It was a monstrous big river down there - sometimes a mile and a half wide; we run nights, and laid up and hid day-times; soon as night was most gone, we stopped navigating and tied up -nearly always in the dead water under a tow-head; (...) Not a sound, anywheres -perfectly still- just like the whole world was asleep, only sometimes the bull-frogs a-cluttering, maybe. The first thing to see, looking away over the water, was a kind of dull line -that was the woods on t'other side- you couldn't make nothing else out; then a pale place in the sky; then more paleness, spreading around; then the river softened up, away off, and warn't black any more, but gray; (...) and you see the mist curl up off of the water, and the east reddens up, and the river (...); then the nice breeze springs up, and comes fanning you from over there, so cool and fresh, and sweet to smell, on account of the woods and the flowers (...); and next you've got the full day, and everything smiling in the sun, and the song-birds just going it! (Twain 1884: 131-132).

A deeply sensory and immersive description unfolds from the feeling of calm and safety that the river inspires, although this paradise is never presented through radical idealization, and a latent threat is always present, whether in the form of a snake or in the inevitable corruption that taints paradise: 'but sometimes not that way, because they've left dead fish laying around, gars, and such, and they do get pretty rank' (Twain 1884: 132).

The nighttime travel and daytime concealment introduce another duality —this time temporal— that intersects with the spatial one: at night, the river allows for movement and progress toward freedom; by day, the mainland becomes dangerous for Jim, who must remain hidden. Thus, the symbolic value of the night and the river's fluidity reinforces the idea of transformation: the passage from slavery to freedom.

The flight along the river becomes, for both characters, a flight toward freedom. This is established early on through narrative focalization: Huck feels constrained and struggles to endure the strict rules of Widow Douglas's household, even though he respects and values her good intentions. As soon as he is able, he seeks ways to escape, even just to sleep outside the house. When his father eventually confines him in the cabin in the woods, Huck becomes, quite literally, a prisoner, placing him in a situation that parallels Jim's lack of freedom. His staged suicide becomes a metaphor for social death and allows for a kind of rebirth through water. It is at this point that he encounters another fugitive —one fleeing slavery and the threat of being sold— and the river becomes, for both of them, a liquid space of movement and freedom. This is true even despite the paradox that, instead of traveling northward toward freedom, they head south, following

a plan to reach the confluence with the Ohio River, where they hope to board a steamboat and ascend into the free territories of the North.

The Mississippi emerges as a space outside the social order, one in which Huck and Jim can relate to one another as individuals, at least partially removed from social hierarchies and the logic of pro-slavery thought. In the words of Zwerneman (2021), the river becomes a space of reconciliation. In a sense, the liquid, unstable, and fugitive nature of the river itself becomes a metaphor for the dissolution of rigid social categories. This fluidity allows for the development of a bond between Huck and Jim based on their personal and human connection, rather than on the social categories governing the mainland. It is significant that, throughout the novel, Huck repeatedly refers to the raft on which they travel as a true home, as has been pointed out by Maafa (2023: 55): ‘the raft on which Huck and Jim were sailing meant a safe and comfortable home for both’.

The river thus emerges as a benevolent element. Early on, during the June flood, it brings Huck, adrift, a beautiful canoe that he estimates to be worth at least ten dollars. Although his initial impulse is to turn it over to his father, the first idea of his escape plan soon takes precedence. From an actantial perspective, applying the categories established by Greimas (1966), one could argue that the river functions as a silent and benevolent helper. After staging the scene to make it appear that he has been murdered—so that no one will pursue him—Huck lets himself drift. He has diverted the trail toward a lake that does not connect to the river, generating a symbolic antithesis between the image of stagnant water and the free-flowing movement of the Mississippi. No scene up to this point has conveyed such tranquility as this moment when Huck allows himself to be carried away by the current. This serenity is reflected in the beauty of the description, which stands in sharp contrast to the images of violence in the forest cabin: the deep, cloudless sky, Huck lying on his back with his face turned from the moon, listening to distant sounds that reach him clearly, though far away.

In this sense, the river represents a promise of freedom for Jim, a path opening before him with the hope of liberation. But it is also a space of freedom for Huck, one that takes him away not only from the abuse and confinement imposed by his father, but also from the rigid social norms and expectations of the well-meaning Widow Douglas, and, more broadly, from the dominant systems of thought and social imaginaries embedded in that society. Of course, Huck carries with him the prejudices, judgments, and worldview he has inherited through his upbringing, and this surfaces on numerous occasions, especially in those passages that are most problematic from a postcolonial and

critical perspective. One such example, among many that could be cited, appears at the end of Chapter XIV: ‘I see it warn’t no use wasting words — you can’t learn a nigger to argue. So I quit’ (Twain 1884: 90). Yet the point is that Huck’s relationship with Jim is not ideological but human; it is not revolutionary but rooted in a natural feeling. And it is on the river —that space often marked by Edenic connotations and at other times by subversion and adventure— where the possibility emerges to destabilize and reconstruct the bond between two human beings. It is no coincidence, then, that the most clearly identifiable descriptive sequences —those in which representation is not channeled through Homeric description but instead forms extended descriptive pauses— are most often devoted to space, and in particular to the river: its sensations, its hidden corners and misty expanses, its currents and branching paths.

In literature the river has given rise to its own topos —*vita flumen*— in which the course of water is presented as a variant of the path, evoking through its flow the passage of human life, the passage of time, and its inexorable movement toward an end (Curtius 1948). However, the Mississippi, as it is depicted and described in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, escapes this notion of linearity. Its vastness allows it to contain islands and sandbars that create internal currents and zones within the river itself, as well as fog that, in many passages, blurs its boundaries. This fluidity is further reinforced by the numerous excursions Huck makes from the river into the mainland.

As part of the episodic structure inherited from the adventure novel tradition, Huck makes several incursions into the mainland, only to return each time to the raft and to his reunion with Jim. On each occasion, the idea of a ‘return home’ becomes evident, as does Jim’s joy at Huck’s return, especially when, for one reason or another, he fears Huck may have died.

This depiction of the Mississippi as a deeply positive space —a home where freedom is possible— establishes a profound oppositional relationship with the cabin in the woods, where Huck’s father confines him, putting his life in danger and ultimately forcing him to escape. That place, though a literal house, cannot be considered a home; the true home, paradoxically, is the unstable raft drifting down the Mississippi, where Huck lives alongside Jim.

As part of its metafictional dimension, the novel itself assigns symbolic meaning to the river when, at the end of Chapter XI, Jim reflects on the chaotic events of the previous hours as though they were a dream. He interprets the spatial features of the river

—its sandbars and contours— in symbolic terms, virtually constructing an allegory based on the river’s geographical formation:

Then he said he must start in and ‘terpret’ it, because it was sent for a warning. He said the first tow-head stood for a man that would try to do us some good, but the current was another man that would get us away from him. The whoops was warnings that would come to us every now and then, and if we didn’t try hard to make out to understand them they’d just take us into bad luck, ‘stead of keeping us out of it. The lot of tow-heads was troubles we was going to get into with quarrelsome people and all kinds of men folks, but if we minded our business and didn’t talk back and aggravate them, we would pull through and get out of the fog and into the big clear river, which was the free States, and wouldn’t have no more trouble (Twain 1884: 96).

With the exception of *Lazarillo de Tormes* and the picaresque tradition, the emergence of the child as a central figure in literature takes place primarily in the nineteenth century (Cabo 2001). This shift is undoubtedly one of the consequences of the change in worldview brought about by Romanticism, which elevated various marginal spaces and figures: the child, the savage, the beggar, the drunkard, the pirate. It is no coincidence that *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* brings together several of these forms of alterity or subaltern identity: the slave and the child, whose marginal status is further intensified by their specific conditions (Jim as a runaway slave, and Huck as an orphaned boy with an abusive, alcoholic father).

In this sense, the novel powerfully illustrates what subaltern studies have termed *intersectionality*, as multiple forms of marginalization converge in its characters. In fact, some of the classic studies of the novel already address several of these forms of subalternity simultaneously, as in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: Race, Class and Society* by Michael Egan (1977). On their journey, Huck and Jim also encounter other types of outsiders, such as the con men, and other forms of social irreverence or reversal, embodied in the playful and adventurous spirit of Tom Sawyer.

Play and the child protagonist in the novel serve as means to both present and destabilize dominant belief systems. The game enacted by Tom’s gang allows, under the guise of play, for the exaggerated, hyperbolic, and highly visible display of cultural values. One striking example is the gang’s code regarding the differential treatment of women in the context of ‘highway robbery’. Huck’s perspective on Widow Douglas’s religious beliefs likewise offers an ‘outside’ view, one that is unbound by the codes of sacrilege or faith. In this sense, Huck parallels the character of Sancho Panza, embodying the outlook of a lower, more marginal social class in contrast to the noble background of

his master. Similarly, Huck occupies a more marginal social position than Tom, who becomes a kind of Quixotic figure, thus extending the intertextual link with Cervantes' novel.

This link continues throughout *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, with references to enchantment and the symbolic transmutations invented by Tom, whereby pigs become ingots and turnips become jewels. Huck, in contrast, embodies a more naïve stance, 'ignorant', in Tom's words: 'if I warn't so ignorant, but had read a book called *Don Quixote*, I would know without asking' (Twain 1884: 16). Tom's games are not only inspired by adventure novels but also by *Don Quixote* itself, allowing him to incorporate enchantment as just another element of play. Huck, on the other hand, seeks to test Tom's fantasies against realism, walking into the woods with a lamp and a ring to rub, in order to see whether a genie will truly appear. In this intertextual reworking of *Don Quixote*, set in a radically different social context from seventeenth-century Spain, the novel subtly shifts the narrative focus: Tom no longer occupies center stage. Instead, the spotlight falls on Huck, as though *Don Quixote* had become *Sancho Panza's* book.

Undoubtedly, this centrality of everything that stands in opposition to the cultural center—to the hegemonic space—constitutes a necessary point of departure for the creation of a work like *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Huck is marginal in multiple and diverse ways: as a child, he lacks power; he is an orphan of questionable reputation, without means, and on the run. That his is the perspective and focalization of the novel is surely the only way to produce a work that, while remaining polyphonic and ambiguous, gives voice to—and supports—a profoundly decentralized, marginal view of nineteenth-century American society. It is likely the only viewpoint capable of registering the deep and radical transformations taking place at the material level of society, transformations not matched—at the same pace—by changes in dominant mentalities.

Jinxu (2018) attributes five distinct roles to the Mississippi River in the narrative. First, the river is introduced as the source of Mark Twain's literary inspiration, as he was born in a town near the Mississippi and worked on its waters as a young man piloting steamboats. Second, it is portrayed as a mysterious and dominant force that shapes the fate of the characters, reflecting Twain's own perception of the river during his childhood. Third, the river symbolizes freedom, embodying Twain's desire to escape the injustices of society and his vision of the river as a pathway to liberation. Fourth, it functions as an axis between the North and the South throughout the novel, as the characters alternate between navigating its waters and venturing into the mainland. Finally, the river serves

as the structural backbone of the narrative, propelling the plot forward, just as the water itself is in constant motion.

Huck undergoes significant personal growth as he travels along the waters of the Mississippi, thus bringing to life the literary topos of *vita flumen*. When Huck and Jim are on the mainland, they must hide and adopt false identities; yet on the river, they are able to be themselves and experience a certain degree of freedom. The river also functions as a kind of *paradise* for Huck's rebirth. Both characters entrust their fates to the river, which, in a way, takes care of them. For Huck in particular, the river raises him, enabling a symbolic rebirth. Over the course of the journey, Huck matures and gains a deeper understanding of the world, far more than he did when attending school or reading the Bible in the 'civilized' world. In this sense, the river acts as a maternal figure or tutor, guiding his development.

Finally, the river is also associated with ecological thought. Even at the time the novel was written, a sense of dissatisfaction with the artificiality of human civilization was beginning to emerge, and Twain perhaps expresses a longing to return to a more natural way of life, one in which human essence is more closely connected to nature. The beauty of the river is described repeatedly throughout the novel, and Huck and Jim clearly find greater joy and peace there than in any other setting. However, the river is not untouched by human interference: steamboats regularly traverse its waters, disrupting its serenity and contributing to its pollution. This reading resonates even more strongly today, as humanity continues to expand its reach and, in many cases, irreversibly damage natural environments.

Within the interpretative framework outlined by Jinxiu (2018), it is worth noting how, on numerous occasions, the Mississippi River—with its vastness and grandeur—seems to be assimilated to the sea, thus aligning itself with the powerful maritime motif found in many nineteenth-century adventure novels. As the French theorist Alain Roger (1997) has pointed out, one of the major shifts in the perception of natural spaces during the nineteenth century was a reconceptualization of territories that had traditionally been viewed as *locus horribilis* or *locus terribilis* due to their hostility to human life. In contrast to earlier *eremophobia*, *orophobia*, and *thalassophobia*—which framed the desert, the high mountains, and the sea as threatening and uninhabitable spaces—Romanticism brought about a revaluation of these environments under the aesthetic category of the sublime. This shift is evident in Henry Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* with regard to the desert, in Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* with regard to the

sea, and in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, which reimagines the Alps and the Arctic. This broader cultural transformation is also reflected in the powerful valorization of the river in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* —a river as imposing as the great adventure spaces mentioned above— and corresponds to a similar inversion of values that the novel enacts in relation to racial issues.

### 3.2. Mainland

In contrast to the fluid nature of the river, the stability of the mainland is anchored in established values, upheld by legality and religion. During the early chapters, which take place on the mainland, there are several attempts at escape. Huck runs away from the house and, after returning, he makes several nocturnal outings. The exterior of the house —particularly the woods and the barrel— represent spaces of freedom for Huck, allowing him to escape the process of domestication that, for him, is embodied in education and civilization.

What ultimately triggers Huck's escape is the fear he feels upon seeing footprints in the snow that he recognizes as his father's, identifiable by the cross carved into the left heel, a mark meant to ward off the devil. Jim's first appearance in the novel takes place within the framework of play, during a nighttime escape from Widow Douglas's house. Against Huck's judgment, Tom makes Jim part of his game, displaying his usual playful and irresponsible attitude. Later, Huck intentionally seeks Jim out, worried about the possibility of his father's return, hoping that Jim will use the gift of premonition attributed to him to determine whether or not Pap will stay.

A scene of prophecy follows, one that introduces further intertextual connections, particularly with the theatrical genre of tragedy. Jim is ambiguous and resorts to codified color symbolism: he tells Huck that two angels are hovering over his father, one white and one black —one pulling him toward the good path, the other toward the bad— and that it is not yet decided which path he will follow. Jim continues, with deliberate ambiguity and binarism, to describe a life filled with both joy and suffering —like anyone's— and warns Huck to stay away from water and that he is destined to die by hanging. Although Huck does not criticize Jim, it is understood that he, too, is superstitious, something already made clear in an earlier scene in which he spills salt and

becomes upset when it is taken away before he can throw some over his shoulder to ward off bad luck.

That same night, Huck's father bursts into the house. The description of his father emphasizes the whiteness of his skin, but with clearly negative connotations, comparing him to a toad and presenting a kind of repulsive pallor. This antithetical and deliberately ambiguous play on the colors white and black —and their association with two key figures in Huck's life, Jim and his father— does not seem accidental. This binary structure has been noted: 'The application of binary oppositions of white versus black and dominance versus subordination as a way of controlling racialized groups made so far, are established in the novel through the power of language, and are 'said to 'guarantee' truth by excluding and devaluing the 'inferior' part of the binary' (Abbasi & Rizzi, 2012: 10).

Given the numerous explicit references to Shakespeare in the novel —particularly to *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet*— it is not unreasonable to draw a connection between the inversion of white and black in the characterization of Jim and Huck's father and the opening scenes of *Othello*. Specifically, Desdemona's famous assertion, in which she inverts the traditional chromatic associations of axiological value during her initial speech before the city of Venice in defense of her love for Othello, offers a compelling parallel.

Among the spaces described and represented on the mainland, houses —in their various forms— occupy a particularly significant place: Widow Douglas's home, the cabin in the woods where Huck's father confines him, the house of Judith Loftus, which Huck reaches disguised as a girl to gather information about the search for Jim, and the home of the Grangerfords. In Widow Douglas's house, the sense of enclosure and confinement is especially acute, even though Huck expresses sympathy and respect for her, a sentiment he will reaffirm on multiple occasions throughout the narrative. The cabin becomes a true prison, where Huck is held in a condition comparable to slavery and where his life is even in danger. During his confinement, having lost the habits of school and the routines of Widow Watson's household, Huck longs to escape both spaces. In their opposition, each in its own way represents a form of unfreedom that Huck rejects, and in contrast to both the house and the cabin, the river and the raft emerge as his true home.

Gaston Bachelard has already analyzed the importance of houses in the formation of the psyche, particularly the significance of the first house we inhabit. And although some of the houses in the novel are initially described in markedly positive terms through Huck's perspective as focalizer, all of them eventually become hostile for one reason or

another, harboring some form of violence. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that houses — along with the river— are the spaces that receive the most intense descriptive treatment, often accumulating an astonishing level of detail. This is the case with the house where Jim finds the body of Huck’s father, but even more so with the home of the Grangerfords.

The enumerative profusion in these passages is clearly, and deliberately, excessive:

It was a mighty nice family, and a mighty nice house, too. I hadn’t seen no house out in the country before that was so nice and had so much style. It didn’t have an iron latch on the front door, nor a wooden one with a buckskin string, but a brass knob to turn, the same as houses in a town. There warn’t no bed in the parlor, not a sign of a bed; but heaps of parlors in towns had beds in them. There was a big fireplace that was bricked on the bottom, and the bricks was kept clean and red by pouring water on them and scrubbing them with another brick; sometimes they washed them over with red water-paint that they call Spanish-brown, same as they do in town. They had big brass dog-irons that could hold up a saw log. There was a clock on the middle of the mantel-piece, with a picture of a town painted on the bottom half of the glass front, and a round place in the middle of it for the sun, and you could see the pendulum swing behind it. It was beautiful to hear that clock tick; and sometimes when one of these peddlers has been along and scoured her up and got her in good shape, she would start in and strike a hundred and fifty, before she got tuckered out. They wouldn’t took any money for her.

Well, there was a bit outlandish parrot on each side of the clock, made out of something like chalk, and painted up gaudy. By one of the parrots was a cat made of crockery, and a crockery dog by the other; and when you pressed down on them they squeaked, but didn’t open their mouths nor look different nor interested. They squeaked through underneath. There was a couple of big wild-turkey-wing fans spread out behind those things. On a table in the middle of the room was a kind of a lovely crockery basket that had apples and oranges and peaches and grapes piled up in it which was much redder and yellower and prettier than real ones is, but they warn’t real because you could see where pieces had got chipped off and showed the white calk or whatever it was, underneath (Twain 1884: 112-113).

The description continues in the same exhaustive, enumerative tone, but the depiction of the clock already hints at deeper meaning: the abundance of decorative yet lifeless animals —expressionless, inert, devoid of vitality— and the colorful, attractive fruits — more vivid than real ones, yet clearly artificial— stand in stark contrast to the world of the river and the raft: poorer, less polished, but authentic. Particularly striking is the attention paid to the paintings, a clear example of *ekphrasis*, or the literary description of a work of art. The paintings, made by a now-deceased daughter of the family, are profoundly melancholic and, one could argue, expressive of the family’s own decline. There are unfinished paintings showing a woman about to leap, depicted with multiple arms because the painter died before deciding which ones to keep; an image that, to Huck,

evokes a spider. The girl's morbid disposition, revealed not only in her paintings but also in her habit of composing poems for the dead, seems to contain an intertextual reference to the Gothic genre, which emerged in the nineteenth century and found one of its most prominent precursors in Edgar Allan Poe.

Underlying the description of the Grangerford home—as with most of what is represented on the mainland—is an idea of falsehood and simulation, one that affects not only identities (often performed or assumed) but also objects, spaces, and the houses themselves. The annihilation of the Grangerford family in their absurd, Shakespearean-style feud with the Shepherdsons seems to point to the necessity of radical change, a replacement of this stagnant, fossilized world with one that is more fluid, dynamic, and authentic. Huck and Buck Grangerford develop something very close to a friendship, and Buck's tragic death—caused by the feud between the Grangerfords and the Shepherdsons—is experienced by Huck with deep sorrow and a sense of absurdity. As is often the case throughout the novel, Huck is also accompanied by a lingering feeling of guilt, stemming from his indirect involvement in the events. It is therefore on the raft, in several moments of return, that Huck experiences a true sense of home. Just after retrieving two dead bodies from the water, one of them that of his friend Buck, he reunites with Jim and expresses, in a collective voice that implies shared agreement between the two: 'We said there warn't no home like a raft, after all' (Twain 1884: 130).

The mainland represents the greatest danger for Jim, which is why he generally remains on the river, not daring to venture onto land. It is Huck who, in keeping with the episodic structure of the narrative, enters the mainland on several occasions for different purposes. Significantly, under such circumstances, he must resort to disguise. Having already faked his death in order to flee without being pursued, he later disguises himself as a girl during a reconnaissance mission, and during his stay at the Grangerfords' house, he invents a new identity under the name George Jackson. Beyond the possible intertextual reference to Elizabethan theater—where gender-based disguises and mistaken identities were frequent—there is no doubt that the motif of disguise is closely linked to the novel's broader exploration of identity. Jim, too, adopts a disguise in order to travel during the day, following the suggestion of the Duke and the King, who themselves are masters of impersonation and identity fraud. Thus, the mainland becomes symbolically associated with false identity, a motif of significant symbolic weight throughout the novel. In fact, Huck invents new identities so quickly that on more than

one occasion he forgets the false name he has just created and must resort to various tricks to sustain the deception.

It is on the mainland where society becomes most visible —and most sharply satirized— through techniques reminiscent of those used by Jonathan Swift in *Gulliver's Travels*. The absurd violence Huck encounters during his episode with the Grangerfords is a clear example of this type of social critique in the novel. However, a recurring element that acquires notable significance is the presence of female characters who show greater humanity and, on several occasions, express a willingness to help Huck. Not only does Widow Douglas earn Huck's respect despite the distance he feels from her, but also Judith Loftus —whom he deceives by pretending to be a girl— offers him advice and even the promise of future assistance should he need it: 'Now trot along to your uncle, Sarah Mary Williams George Elexander Peters, and if you get into trouble you send word to Mrs. Judith Loftus, which is me, and I'll do what I can to get you out of it' (Twain 1884: 70).

Likewise, when Huck arrives at the Grangerford home, it is an elderly woman — 'the sweetest old gray-headed lady ' (Twain 1884: 109), Rachel— who notices that he is wet and hungry:

Why bless you, Saul, the poor thing's as wet as he can be; and don't you reckon it may be he's hungry?  
True for you, Rachel - I forgot (Twain 1884: 110).

This marks yet another notable parallel with *Lazarillo de Tormes*, in which the deep anticlericalism and cruelty of ecclesiastical figures sharply contrast with the compassion and assistance offered by women on various occasions in response to Lázaro's suffering. In fact, the complex web of intertextual connections that links *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* with other authors and works from world literature ultimately converges on a critical dimension aimed at the structures of society, particularly those tied to social hierarchies and the subjugation of subaltern classes. In an ironic, polyphonic, and nuanced way, Mark Twain's novel enacts a deep subversion of hierarchies, which in the context of nineteenth-century American society were most visibly manifested in the institution of slavery. Moreover, the depiction of female characters adds yet another layer of subalternity and intersectionality, as if the multiple forms of marginalization represented in the novel enabled a kind of kinship or solidarity from the margins.

### 3.3. Other Spaces

In general terms, and given the strength of the novel's antithetical binarism, most of the that acquire distinctiveness and relevance in the narrative can be associated with—or assigned to— either the river or the mainland. The houses, for example—spaces of great significance that elicit a striking deployment of descriptive techniques— are intimately connected with the mainland, to the point that they may be seen as its most representative space, expressing it almost entirely through a metonymic process.

Likewise, Jackson's Island also acquires strong symbolic significance in the novel. In this case, as an island located within the Mississippi River itself, its symbolic force reinforces that of the river. Huck's arrival at Jackson's Island gives rise to one of the purest descriptive passages in the entire work, one that can be clearly aligned with the literary topos of the *locus amoenus*. If the biblical reference had already been introduced earlier through the simile comparing Huck's father to Adam, Jackson's Island is presented here as a true paradise.

Given the strength of intertextuality throughout the novel and the explicit references to *Don Quixote*, the implications of insular space cannot be overlooked. In the sixteenth century, Thomas More created *Utopia*, the foundational work of the utopian genre, which made the island that gives the book its name the space outside the world where a perfect society could be imagined. This line was continued in the following century by Francis Bacon in *New Atlantis*. It is this idealizing impulse that guides Huck at this point in the novel. The island, by its very geographical nature, suggests the individual's isolation from society. Huck's awakening on the island is imbued with Edenic connotations: the sun filtering through the leaves, the breeze gently moving the treetops, and two squirrels inhabiting this secluded place, unaware of the nearby town visible five kilometers away. The precariousness of this provisional paradise—the looming danger of expulsion—is present from the start, symbolized by the barge Huck encounters and the proximity of the town, clearly visible from the island itself.

The island is part of the river; in a way, it is its hidden heart. Christopher Jean Filetti (2020) has analyzed Jackson's Island as a 'brave space'. During their time on the island, Huck and Jim undergo a transformation in their ways of thinking and relating to one another, one that proves crucial for the rest of the narrative and for their development as characters. As a virgin, uninhabited space, far removed from civilization, the island provides an ideal setting in which they can get to know each other without the interference

of social prejudice. It thus becomes what we might call a *brave space*, where all voices are acknowledged and where conflict is embraced and addressed openly. Within this setting, Huck and Jim begin to form an honest friendship and gradually come to respect each other's perspectives, a remarkable development given the values with which Huck was raised. Brave spaces are, by nature, temporary, and indeed, Huck and Jim eventually leave the island. However, by the time they do, their bond has been deeply strengthened, and both characters have acquired a much broader understanding of the world through the shared exchange of stories and experiences. As the journey continues and they face more dangerous and socially charged environments, the connection forged on Jackson's Island remains a foundational element of their evolving relationship.

The pursuit drives them out of this paradise, conveying the idea that freedom may always be transitory or only truly attainable in transit: in the fluid, ever-changing flow of the river, with its currents, sandbars, and meanders, constantly in motion.

## CONCLUSIONS

*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, an almost illiterate child, does not consciously, theoretically, or systematically oppose the moral code he has been taught. He even feels remorse and guilt for breaking the laws and norms instilled in him. Yet his behavior aligns with a defense of human equality and dignity, and with the values of friendship and emotional connection. This is where the subversive power of the character—and of the novel—lies. It is also from this narrative strategy that some of the controversy surrounding the novel may stem, since certain excerpts or isolated quotations contain statements with clearly racist overtones. It is therefore essential to distinguish between such statements—arising from the fact that Huck is a historically situated character, raised in a racist environment and moral system—and the deeper meaning of a novel that ultimately subverts those values not through reasoned argument or ideology, but through feeling and human connection. In the tension within Huck between thought and action, we perceive the internal fracture of an individual in conflict with his society. And it is Huck's actions—rather than his thoughts—that grant him dignity and establish the ultimate meaning of the novel.

This meaning is most powerfully conveyed through the semiotic weight carried by the novel's spatial structures. The mainland gives expression to a system of rigid social hierarchies, exclusion, and slavery; the river, by contrast, represents the promise of movement, of change, and of the possibility of reaching a new ideological horizon and new forms of human relationship. The binary opposition introduced as early as the first chapter—between the 'good place' and the 'bad place'—is subverted. The hierarchy of spatial imagination, so thoroughly studied by Northrop Frye, between a desired apocalyptic space and a demonic one, is inverted, symbolized in the novel by the fact that Huck and Jim travel south even though their intended destination is the North.

Good and evil, black and white—initially presented in an apparently simple and Manichaean fashion at the start of the novel—become increasingly complex and subverted as the narrative unfolds, with narrative space playing a central role in this process. In contrast to the social rigidity of the mainland, the Mississippi River, with its power and dynamism, its constant and benevolent flow for the characters, becomes a major symbolic chronotope: the fragile raft that floats along its waters rises, in its very precariousness, as the true home for Jim and Huck, a place where freedom and happiness can coexist, where identity is released from falseness and disguise, where one can lie on

one's back and gaze at the stars, and find a sense of human authenticity and connection unbound by social definitions.

For all these reasons, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*—once seen merely as a young readers' adventure tale—reveals itself to be a work of deep hermeneutic complexity and truly subversive meaning. In the century that witnessed the height of abolitionist movements, the rise of feminism, and the emergence of the child as a legitimate literary protagonist, an uneducated, orphaned boy and an escaped slave established—on a raft—a new form of human dignity. This is the greatness they projected, with all the power of literary symbolism, onto the Mississippi River, where the shadow of that raft and those two beings who began to heal a fractured humanity will always remain.

*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is an extraordinarily rich and complex work in which space plays a fundamental symbolic, narrative, and ideological role. The Mississippi River—central to both the emotional and episodic structure of the novel—functions as a space of freedom, a symbolic refuge, and the setting for a friendship that destabilizes the hegemonic social structures of nineteenth-century America. In contrast to the solidity of the mainland—which represents the weight of norms, slavery, social hypocrisy, and imposed identity—the river, and especially the raft, emerge as a possible home: a fluid, open space where a human relationship based on equality, honesty, and shared experience becomes possible.

This spatial binarism is supported by a network of intertextual spaces and motifs that reinforce its symbolic depth. Jackson's Island, for instance, evokes utopian and Edenic traditions and can be interpreted as a *brave space* in which the characters are able to be themselves, free from masks and external pressures. Conversely, domestic spaces—the homes of Widow Douglas, the Grangerfords, or Judith Loftus—become metonymic representations of the society Twain critiques, often using techniques reminiscent of Gothic fiction or Swiftian satire.

At the same time, the novel offers a profound subversion of social hierarchies through its choice of focalizer. Huck's marginalized position—as a child, an orphan, a runaway—enables a decentralized point of view capable of questioning dominant values. His relationship with Jim, marked by the intersectionality of their respective subalternities, gives rise to a bond grounded in shared humanity, opposed to the logic of racial and class domination.

In this way, Twain constructs a polyphonic, intertextual, and socially critical novel that uses the symbolism of space and the journey to interrogate the foundations of the society it portrays. The tension between freedom and constraint, authenticity and simulation, identity and disguise runs throughout the novel and renders it a profoundly modern work, whose interpretative richness remains vibrant and relevant today.

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*Total number of characters (including spaces): 98,429*