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Don Quixote on the Mississippi: Twain's Modernities

I will approach Twain's work, and primarily *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, from the dual 'European' perspective of an inter-text present throughout *Huck Finn*, and also in *Tom Sawyer*, that is to say Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, and from that of a more general theory allowing me to re-situate Twain with regard to American Studies, but also with regard to the study of literary history more in general. The particular theory I am here thinking of is that developed by Pascale Casanova in her 1999 *La République mondiale des lettres*, since translated into English as *The World Republic of Letters*.

Is there anything novel to say about Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), a book that, as Jonathan Arac put it in his 1997 *Huckleberry Finn as Idol and Target: The Functions of Criticism in Our Time*, is the most "hypercanonized" of "American" texts? Arac dates *Huckleberry Finn*'s elevation to its present exalted status from the period 1948 to 1964. He cites the decisive role of a number of influential critics, including Lionel Trilling, with his 1948 introduction to the first college text edition of Twain's book, subsequently reprinted in *The Liberal Imagination* (1950), Walter Blair, with his *Mark Twain and Huckleberry Finn* (1960), Henry Nash Smith, with *Mark Twain: The Development of a Writer* (1962), and Leo Marx, who in *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (1964) hailed *Huckleberry Finn* as the first novel in which "the [pastoral] mode is wholly assimilated to the native idiom" (319). To this list we might add Richard Chase, with *The American Novel and Its Tradition* (1957) and Leslie Fiedler, with *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960). All of these critics and literary historians in one way or another pick up on Hemingway's famous dictum from *Green Hills of Africa* (1935) that "all modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*." But they all also chime

in with the then reigning orthodoxies of the study of American literature as the embodiment of the spirit of the nation, as practiced by the Myth and Symbol School, and of New Criticism, reinforced by Leavisite yearnings for an American 'Great Tradition.' Small wonder then that Arac, to immediately sketch the contours of the debate he will be conducting in his book, starts off by quoting Norman Podhoretz, who in a 1959 article claimed that "sooner or later, it seems, all discussions of 'Huckleberry Finn' turn into discussions of America – and with good reason . . . Mark Twain was the quintessential American writer" (Arac 3). Now Arac himself has a great deal of problems with this designation of Twain, and particularly *Huckleberry Finn*, as quintessentially 'American,' because he thinks that the book in question is only representative, in all senses of the word, of part of the American population, and notoriously mis-represents another part, primarily the African American one. Be that as it may, I do not intend to go into that discussion here. What I do want to note is that Arac, while contesting the particular role ascribed to *Huckleberry Finn* within traditional or 'orthodox' American Studies, at the same time limits the discussion to the American context. Now it seems to me that such an approach unduly limits the scope of Twain's novel. Specifically, I think it prevents us from seeing how *Huckleberry Finn* may function not only within the paradigm of a national literature, in this case American, or to be more precise the literature of the United States, but also within Casanova's "world republic of letters." To do so would be to situate Twain's text within a continuum of texts circulating in Western literature, and therefore also in relation to European texts, not only American ones, and with respect to events and developments outside the United States. Obviously, this is quite a program, and I can only hope to scratch the surface. Therefore, I will take a shortcut by looking at *Huckleberry Finn* in relation to one 'intertext' manifestly present in the book, and that is Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, or with its original title, *El ingenioso hidalgo don Quijote de La Mancha*, published in two parts in 1605 and 1615 respectively.

Of course, it is somewhat of a commonplace in Twain criticism to acknowledge the American author's indebtedness to his famous Spanish predecessor, specifically with regard to *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876), *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889). Already in 1922 Olin Harris Moore published an article on "Mark Twain and Don Quixote" in *PMLA*, and in a number of ways this has remained the staple reference

for later critics and literary historians on the subject. Blair, for instance, commenting on the episode with the “A-rabs” who will eventually turn out to be Sunday school children at the beginning of *Huckleberry Finn*, cites Moore as having established that this episode is based on chapters 18 and 19 of *Don Quixote* part II. He credits Moore as having noted that “the humor of the romance lies in the contrast between the matter of fact philosophy of Sancho Panza and the romantic spirit of Don Quixote” (Blair 119), and then having extrapolated this to the relationship obtaining between Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn. Moore also already noted how Tom Sawyer shares with Don Quixote a preference for books, and for acting out his reading in the ‘real life’ of the fiction he himself is part of. Nash Smith, when touching upon the much-discussed ending of *Huckleberry Finn*, claims that for Tom Sawyer Jim here is “the hero of a historical romance,” and that Mark Twain, in portraying Tom this way, is “consciously imitating *Don Quixote*” (Smith 134).

Montserrat Ginés is the most recent commentator to take up, and at the same time summarize, the relationship between Mark Twain’s *oeuvre* and Cervantes’ masterpiece in her *The Southern Inheritors of Don Quixote* (2000). Instead of immediately focusing upon specific works, Ginés establishes a more general relationship between *Don Quixote* and Southern writing: “certain Southern writers,” she posits, “have been particularly sensitive to the fundamental themes of Cervantes’ novel: the insoluble discord between the real and the ideal and the attempt, at once grotesque and dignified, to affirm one’s individuality in complete disregard of common sense and against all the demands of historical reality” (Ginés 3). With Twain, Ginés comments, this translates into bringing “Don Quixote and Sancho Panza to life again in the shape of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn, the most memorable partnership in American literature . . . they not only reproduce the characters from Cervantes’ novel but also establish a genuine dialogue between the ideal – as romance and thirst for heroism – and the ineluctable force of the real transposed into the common sense of the ordinary folk of the American frontier among whom the author moved in his youth” (Ginés 7-8). In line with most readings of the Quixotic import into Twain’s fiction, Ginés concentrates on Tom Sawyer as the counterpart to Don Quixote in both *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Linking each of these heroes to his specific cultural environment, Ginés contends that their different fates reflect the different fortunes of these environments.

Whereas old and tired Don Quixote is destined to fail, reflecting Spain's slow decline as already initiated at the time of Cervantes' writing, youthful Tom Sawyer's success is emblematic of nineteenth-century American prosperity and optimism. As she puts it: "Tom's prospects are those dreamed of but forever denied to Alonso Quijano . . . Tom Sawyer and Don Quixote both seek adventure as a way of escaping their inauspicious lives, they both go in quest of glory and aspire to the heights of romance, and they both wish to alter their given realities, but only Tom succeeds in realizing his dreams, when in the course of his adventures, fiction actually overlaps with life" (Ginés 28). Most readers of Mark Twain would agree that this statement obviously applies to *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* where Tom and Huck, under Tom's guidance playing at pirates and robbers and all that actually uncover a murder, and actually end up with a pirate's treasure.

Ginés also links Tom Sawyer's fortunes to those of young Samuel Langhorne Clemens himself as portrayed in *Life on the Mississippi*. When it comes to assessing Tom Sawyer's role in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, though, I think there would be less of a consensus as to the validity of the statement just made. But then, in that novel Tom Sawyer so to speak acts by proxy, that is to say in the guise of Huck Finn ventriloquizing Tom Sawyer's ideas to Jim, and always still in the mold of *Don Quixote*. In the words of Ginés: "taken as a whole, Huck and Jim's adventures and misadventures along the Mississippi are carried out very much in the manner of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza's, with Huck playing Tom's usual role (Don Quixote) and Jim playing Huck's (Sancho)" (31). In fact, Ginés labels the entire undertaking of Jim's flight with the aid of Huck "quixotic." The fundamental 'quixoticism' of Huck himself, however, for Ginés lies in Huck's "moral stance," and when "he refuses to hand Jim over to his persecutors, when he turns a deaf ear, not only to the heavily prejudiced society he lives in, but also to his own biased conscience, he performs a most genuine quixotic act" (Ginés 31-2). With one stroke, we have here arrived at one of the two elements that also in Arac's analysis have ensured the 'hypercanonization' of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in American literature: the famous "alright, then, I'll go to hell" from chapter 31, when Huck finds that, notwithstanding everything his civilization and his religion have imbued him with, he cannot turn in Jim to his 'rightful' owner. The other element Arac singles out is Twain's use of "American vernacular," particularly as used in the

opening pages of chapter 19 of *Huckleberry Finn*. I will come back to this in a while.

The point of my discussion so far, then, is that ever since Olin Moore in 1922 comparisons of *Don Quixote*, *Tom Sawyer*, and *Huckleberry Finn* have by and large focused on parallels of character, and on the obvious resemblances between a limited number of episodes. The main reason, I believe, is because, as I intimated before, Twain's work has hitherto been read exclusively within an 'American' context. In fact, many works, biographical as well as critical, dealing with Twain, do not even mention Cervantes or the *Quixote*. To just stay with the biographies, that is the case, for instance, with such recent works as Andrew Hoffman's *Inventing Mark Twain* (1997) and Fred Kaplan's *The Singular Mark Twain* (2003). Yet even the few attempts to situate especially *Huckleberry Finn* in a larger context, and to do so at least partially by way of *Don Quixote*, have tended to remain on the same level of generalities. I am thinking here in particular of an article by Lauriat Lane Jr., published in the October 1955 issue of *College English*, and thus squarely within what Arac sees as the formative period of *Huckleberry Finn*'s rise to 'hypercanonization,' an issue moreover largely devoted to discussing the pre-eminence of Twain's novel, and thus greatly contributing to said hypercanonization. Lane Jr.'s article is entitled "Why *Huckleberry Finn* is a Great World Novel," a kind of novel "whose importance in its own literature is so great, and whose impact on its readers is so profound and far-reaching, that it has achieved world-wide distinction." But that is not all, the world novel "achieves its position not only through its importance but also because of its essential nature," and it is from this perspective that Lane Jr. chooses to discuss *Huckleberry Finn*, that is to say from the perspective of "the special qualities *Huckleberry Finn* has in common with certain other world novels" (Lane Jr. 1).

The first world novel, for Lane Jr. is *Don Quixote*. "The most important thing which *Don Quixote* has bequeathed to the novels after it (apart of course from the all-important fact of there being such a thing as a novel at all)," Lane Jr. says, "is the theme which is central to *Don Quixote* and to almost every great novel since then, the theme of appearance versus reality . . . this theme is also central to *Huckleberry Finn*" (Lane Jr. 1-2). Other themes that make *Huckleberry Finn* qualify as a world novel are the "passage from youth to maturity," effectively making it into a novel of education, and therefore in a lineage likewise comprising *Candide*, *Tom Jones*, and *Portrait of the*

Artist as a Young Man. Furthermore, always according to Lane Jr., *Huckleberry Finn* shares with “most of the world’s great novels [the theme] of man’s obsession with great wealth,” as well as that it conveys a “total vision of the nation or people from which it takes its origin” (Lane Jr. 2). Further contributing to *Huckleberry Finn*’s world novel status is that it fulfils some of the functions of epic poetry, features an epic hero, highlights epic values, and partakes of the epic style. Finally, *Huckleberry Finn* also has the quality of allegory, putting it in a direct line of descent from Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*. The particular form this allegory takes, according to Lane Jr., is that of a journey towards knowledge. The specific ‘progress’ Huck Finn makes, then is that at the end of his eponymous novel “he is about to undertake another journey, this time to the west, in search of further experience and further knowledge” (Lane Jr. 5). Especially with his appeal to the epic qualities of *Huckleberry Finn* and to how it conveys a “total vision of the nation or people from which it takes its origin,” and its insistence on the hero’s impending “journey to the west,” Lane Jr. to me seems to be defining *Huckleberry Finn*’s ‘world novel’ qualities in terms of what others have termed its ‘quintessential’ Americanness.

Now it is my contention that the actual relationship between *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, and even more so *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and the *Quixote* is far more fundamental and specific than has hitherto been acknowledged, and that this has important consequences for a full appreciation of Twain’s work. Obviously, space does not allow me to go into too much detail, so what I will do is take my cue from a recent book on the *Quixote*, by David Quint, and entitled *Cervantes’ Novel of Modern Times: A New Reading of Don Quijote* (2003), and use that as filter through which to read *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*. Quint essentially reads Part II of the *Quixote* in function of Part I, interpreting the sequel as a re-write of its predecessor, and a conscious reflection upon it. My suggestion, not original of course, is that this is also what happens with *Huckleberry Finn* and *Tom Sawyer*. In this I am supported not only by the remarkable coincidence that both Parts I and II of the *Quixote* were published ten years apart, as is roughly also the case with *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*, but, more importantly, by the parallel developments these two sequences show, and where I would like to contend that Twain is deliberately following the mold cast by Cervantes. For brevity’s sake, I will stay with three key elements Quint sees as structuring the rela-

tionship between Parts I and II of the *Quixote*, and which I see Twain as taking up in his two linked novels: parody, love, and money.

First as to the use of parody with both Cervantes and Twain, relative, respectively, to medieval and modern chivalry. Quint argues that whereas the parodic dimension of the *Quixote* in Part I is a source of humor and suspense, in Part II it is a source of suffering. He instances this with reference to Sancho Panza in Part I undergoing physical punishment as a result of his master's foolishness, but argues that such punishment never results from any meanness of spirit on the part of the perpetrators, but is simply a reflection of good cheer and of the spirit of buffoonery informing the entire Part I of the *Quixote*. In Part II, however, Sancho Panza is continuously under threat of having to inflict three thousand lashes upon himself in order to comply with the remedy the Duke and Duchess with whom Don Quixote and Sancho Panza are staying for a great part of the novel have determined to be necessary to dis-enchant Don Quixote's beloved Dulcinea and turn her from an ugly and smelly farm girl into a lovely princess again. The Duke and Duchess are able to play this trick upon Don Quixote and Sancho Panza because they have read Part I of the *Quixote*, and hence they know both the gullibility of the Don and Sancho's fear of pain. In other words, they are using their knowledge to impose real suffering, and they are doing so from a real meanness of spirit too. Tom Sawyer, in his eponymous novel, constantly plays tricks on people, but this never leads to real suffering – and even when it does, as one could legitimately argue with respect to the anguish his 'playing dead' causes to his relatives, this is done unwittingly and unintentionally. In *Huckleberry Finn*, on the contrary, Tom's insistence on freeing Jim 'the proper way' at the end of the book puts Jim in danger of being sold 'downriver' again while Tom all the while is fully cognizant that Jim actually already is a free man in the eyes of the law, thus causing unnecessary suffering in the interest of a boy's prank.

In Part I of the *Quixote*, Quint argues, love as portrayed in Don Quixote's infatuation with Dulcinea runs along Petrarchan lines of courtly love, and is hence pure and unselfish. In fact, as Don Quixote never actually gets to see Dulcinea, it is a purely 'ideal' love, untainted by any ulterior motives. In Part II, in contrast, the figure of the beautiful Princess Micomicona, who eventually turns out to be the rich farmer's daughter Dorothea, introduces the 'realities' of love. Dorothea has been seduced by a nobleman, who, not without some hesitations and trepidations, will also eventually marry her. With Dorothea,

then, the physically 'sordid' aspects of love, as well as the social implications of class relations, upward mobility, and fortune hunting make their appearance. Nor does this leave Don Quixote himself untouched, as Dorothea in her guise of the Princess Micomicona also appears a possible and desirable mate for our knight, who thus might gain a kingdom through marriage. In *Tom Sawyer* Tom is romantically and chivalrously in love with Becky Thatcher. In *Huckleberry Finn* love takes the guise of Aunt Polly restoring 'reality' on the Phelps farm at the end of the book.

Don Quixote manages without money in part I of his adventures, as is only fit for a true erring knight in the traditions of old. In Part II, though, and partly as a result of reflecting on his own adventures as related in Part I, which in the meantime Don Quixote has read himself, the knight and his valet, when they set out upon new adventures, carry a bag of coins along, and it is Sancho Panza's duty to properly pay whatever is due along the way. In fact, in Part II money emerges as a means with which to compensate for the knight's foolishness as when in a fit of rage at what he sees as a gross insult to knight errantry he destroys the marionettes of the puppeteer Maese Pedro, and Sancho has to pay the damage. Money even partially comes to substitute for the immaterial bonds of loyalty obtaining between the knight and his squire when Don Quixote, exasperated by Sancho's slowness in administering the lashes the Duke and Duchess prescribed and hence desperate as to the dis-enchantment of Dulcinea, ends up paying Sancho for his ordeal.

In *Tom Sawyer*, money moves from being the 'ideal' object of Tom's boyish fantasies to being the real treasure the boys recover at the end of the book. Throughout *Huckleberry Finn* Huck's part of that same treasure is a constant source of worry to him, as it leads to the return of his no-good father, driven by greed, into Huck's life, but also as it robs Huck of the freedom he used to enjoy before wealth came his way.

For Quint, the changes from Part I to Part II of the *Quixote* reflect the social and other changes affecting the Spain of Cervantes, and primarily the transition from military to court nobility, and from a feudal order based on honor and prowess to a proto-capitalist or mercantilist order founded on money and favor at court. As Quint himself puts it, "*Don Quijote* throughout tells and retells a master narrative of early-modern Europe: the movement from feudalism to the new order of capitalism that will become the realistic domain of the mod-

ern novel, the genre this book does so much to invent" (Quint x). I would argue that the change from *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* to *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* reflects a comparable transition in nineteenth-century America. Specifically, I would see in this change a reflection of the transition from a belief in an America of youthful innocence restored after the Civil War, with the issue of slavery supposedly solved, Reconstruction under way, and the achievement of the ideals encoded in the American Constitution apparently within actual reach, to the realization of the closing of these opportunities with the end of Reconstruction, the institution of Jim Crow laws, and the United States rapidly turning into a fully capitalist society. Moreover, I would maintain that Twain in all this closely parallels Cervantes.

What does all this finally lead to? In the first instance, I think it proves that Twain was not the 'untutored genius' he has often been held to be. In fact, he was a very 'literary' writer, who at least in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and even more so in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* deliberately and skillfully used a variety of inter-texts, prime among these Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, to compose his own fictions. Moreover, he did not use these inter-texts in the sense of preying upon them or cannibalizing them simply for the sake of easy reference and a higher recognition factor with his audience. No, part of the meaning of his fictions, and particularly of *Huckleberry Finn*, arises out of the interrelationship with these inter-texts. In the case of *Huckleberry Finn* this interrelationship is moreover 'over-determined' because of a further interrelationship with *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, parallel to the interrelationship obtaining between parts II and I of the *Quixote*.

Second, it goes to suggest that Mark Twain, like all 'great' writers, was acutely aware of his own position within his own 'national' literature, but also of the position of that literature within the context of world literature, and hence his own place within Casanova's world republic of letters. Specifically, I would propose that Twain used the apparent 'naiveté' of his narrative stance as a deliberate strategy for novelty, thus opening up a 'novel' space for himself within American literature, but also for American literature within world literature. Indeed, whereas before the publication of *Huckleberry Finn* Twain was well known on the national scene, and thanks to *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* also enjoyed some international reputation, the truth is also that until then he had been working mostly in well-worn genres, be they that of frontier humor, public lectures, or boys' adventure

stories. It is only with *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* that he changes the course of American literature, and gives that literature a fully distinctive voice on the world scene. I deliberately use the term 'voice' here, because to a large extent, of course, it is indeed a matter of language, as has been stressed over and over again in Twain criticism, and as Casanova herself also maintains. Again, though, the strategy here deployed by Twain, while novel in its specific context, was not wholly original in the sense of being without precedent. In fact, Twain's move closely parallels the strategy first followed by the French writers of the *Pléiade*, when in the sixteenth century they emancipated French literature from the domination of Latin by opting for the vernacular, thereby practically 'inventing' what we now know as 'French' literature, but at the same time also setting in motion the complex struggle for literary recognition and hegemony that has characterized modernity, or at least its Euro-American variant, ever since. In fact, such emancipation, as Benedict Anderson has argued in *Imagined Communities* (1983), is itself a feature of and a contributing factor to what we now call modernity. The language, and the cultural system of authority closely linked to it, and from which Twain emancipated his heroes, his literary form, himself, and American literature, was, of course, not Latin but rather the standard English then in use.

All of this certainly warrants Hemingway's crediting Twain with having 'initiated' American literature with *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. However, and this is a point I want to stress, this was not an invention 'ex nihilo,' as it is so often made out to be in traditional 'Am. Lit.' In fact, I would see this very claim as itself a strategy used, perhaps by now unconsciously or at least unwittingly, by the upholders of American 'exceptionalism' also in matters literary. In other words, it is yet another manifestation of the ingrained American desire to always 'start afresh' or 'make it new'; part of the same ideology that also enshrines the self-made man, particularly the self-made businessman, as the embodiment of the 'American dream.' In reality, what I see Twain doing is carefully clearing a space for himself, and for American literature, on the (by the end of the nineteenth century) already rather crowded scene of world literature, by using old strategies in a novel way, while at the same time firmly anchoring himself in that world literature by drawing upon the authority of what was arguably the most authoritative predecessor in his chosen genre, i.e. Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. In other words, what I am trying to say is that for his own foundational text of his own American literature,

which for him also constituted the only possibility for gaining access to world literature as a major writer in his own right, and not as a minor author in a major language not his own, Twain unhesitatingly drew upon, in the sense of actually building upon, the authority of the foundational text in the genre of the modern novel, and thereby also one of the foundational texts of modernity, or at least – as the term these days needs qualification – of Euro-American modernity. And just as *Don Quixote* needed to destroy what went before in order to allow modernity to come into being, and did so by parodying to death the literary form ‘organically,’ that is to say socially and ideologically linked to the old feudal order, so too Twain, using a comparable strategy, had to do away with the literary forms linked to the pseudo-feudal order of the Old South. Hence the famous passage from the end of chapter 46 of *Life on the Mississippi* where he compares the effects wrought upon the nineteenth-century South by *Don Quixote* and *Ivanhoe*, respectively, concluding that “the first swept the world’s admiration for the medieval chivalry-silliness out of existence; and the other restored it . . . as far as our South is concerned, the good work done by Cervantes is pretty nearly a dead letter, so effectually has Scott’s pernicious work undermined it” (Twain 502). To revive that dead letter, and to ‘sink’ Sir Walter Scott is precisely what Twain aims to do with *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

Both Cervantes and Twain, while savagely criticizing what went before, and fully recognizing its inability to provide valid models for the changed times, at the same time could not also but lament the passing of the old forms, the old ways. Still, I would argue, they did not suffer from what Svetlana Boym, in a recent book with the same title, has diagnosed as ‘the future of nostalgia.’ Rather, while fully acknowledging the inevitable, and in some undeniable ways also beneficial, coming of the new, Cervantes and Twain also already understood, and dreaded, what its corollaries would be, and particularly the inexorable turn toward everything economic, commercial, and ‘bourgeois’ their respective societies were taking. That is also why I prefer to read both the *Quixote* and the combined *Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn* as not having an unambiguously positive ending, with the Don’s retreat from his ‘madness’ and his “good Christian death,” and Huck’s “lightin’ out for the Territory.” As we know, by 1615, the year of publication of the second part of *Don Quixote*, Spain’s retreat into the most orthodox Catholicism possible had firmly set the country on the course of decline it would continue on over

the next centuries. Likewise, in 1884, at the time of publication of *Huckleberry Finn*, the territory as such no longer existed, and what in a fiction set in about 1835 had still seemed a life-enhancing way out of “sivilization,” at the end of the nineteenth century had proven to be a dead end. Both *Don Quixote* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, then, while apparently ending on a (moderate) triumph for their heroes, in fact only engage in a holding operation, a “willing suspension of disbelief,” or “a momentary stay against confusion,” in the inevitable defeat of these very same heroes. This, of course, is also what renders Don Quixote and Huck Finn, regardless of the humor of the fictions in which they figure, into tragic heroes, and therefore also into icons of the contradictions, or even the regrets, of modernity, or perhaps even more appropriately, of the various and successive guises modernity takes, each of which in its very own triumph at the same time mourns the ‘antiquity’ it had to slay in order to give life to itself.

Briefly put, then, and this is my conclusion, rather than as a unique and exceptional American phenomenon I prefer to see *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* as taking its place in a long line of literary works that mark the turning points of Euro-American modernity.

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