"The Dreadful Pluribus-Unum Mumps": America's Political Diseases in Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*"

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Adventures of Huckleberry Finn *met au jour les failles d'une nation désunie, scindée de ses origines fondatrices, en proie également à des tensions restées latentes dans l'héritage républicain. Dans le détournement de notions politiques, dans l'irrespect du narrateur pour la grammaire et le dictionnaire, dans la profusion narrative des dialectes, se lit une dissidence simultanément linguistique et politique. Il s'agira donc ici de dégager le discours politique sous-jacent au récit et d'en montrer la force subversive.*

The "imagined political community" in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885) takes the shape of a diseased political body, estranged from its founding origins and affected by disorders that had remained latent in the national heritage.[1] The writing of the novel, from 1876 to 1884, took place during a period of major tensions highlighting the discordance between the ideals of the nation's origins and the present. As Fishkin has shown, the anniversary of the Declaration of Independence in July 1876 gave rise to a rhetoric of freedom that dominated the national discourse all along the summer.[2] Freedom would however soon be denied following the elections of 1876, in a political context that became favorable to racial discrimination. With the Hayes-Tilden Compromise in 1877 and the subsequent withdrawal

of all federal troops from the South, the African-Americans, whose freedom and civil rights were now flagrantly violated, soon became effectively re-enslaved.[3] While the relevance of the antebellum and post-Reconstruction contexts to the interpretation of the novel is already well established, the linguistic presence of a political imagination rooted in the founding period of Independence has so far remained unexplored. The present article will consequently focus on the historicity of language to show how seemingly innocuous linguistic elements convey a subversive political discourse confronting the ideals and values of the nation's political origins to the multi-layered historical context of the novel.

This linguistic and political subversion proceeds first of all from the appropriation of the words *nation*, *land* and *laws* used as interjections and swear-words or in emphatic turns of phrase. The resulting political isotopy gives sense to the hijacking of the Latin motto meant to express national unity, *e pluribus unum*, to refer to a cluster of diseases (the "dreadful pluribus-unum mumps") and more insidiously to a diseased political body. More broadly, the irreverent treatment of grammar and spelling as well as the coexistence of a plurality of dialects in the text entail a fundamentally subversive dimension, in that they contradict the linguistic principles on which the republican edifice was originally supposed to rely.

The Appropriation of a Political Idiom

In spite of the coexistence of seven dialects asserted in the explanatory note to the reader, the characters share a common predilection for hyperbolic turns based on these terms—*nation* in particular. Huck, Jim, Ben Rogers, strangers met on the way, the Dolphin, the Duke, Joanna Wilks, women gathered at the Phelpses' farm after Jim's evasion—all shamelessly swear by the nation. A euphemism for *damnation*, *nation* is used as an adverb to intensify the meaning of an adjective ("I'm nation sorry for you" [140]; "it was a most nation tough job" [266]), while the adverbial locution *in the nation* recurs with emphatic value in interrogative turns like "how/why/what in the nation […]?"[4] As for *land* and *laws*, they are used as homophones for *Lord* in swearing such as "land alive!" (284, for "Lord alive"), "good land!" (290, for "good Lord"), "laws!" (128, 198, for "Lord"), "laws knows" (286, for "Lord knows") and "lawsamercy" (285, for "Lord have mercy").

The adverbial and emphatic use of *nation* is assuredly not specific to Twain. It appears as early as the 1770s in English and American literature as well as in popular songs. It is used for instance in "Yankee Doodle," wherewith English soldiers initially defied American revolutionaries, until the latter appropriated the song, integrating it into national folklore: "It made a noise like father's gun, / Only a nation louder" (*American Broadside Verse*

141). *Laws*, as a substitute for *Lord*, is already present in Shakespeare, while the same use of *land* is most frequent in the Pike County dialect during the nineteenth century.[5] Nevertheless, the recurrence and conjunction of these three terms in this particular narrative context may hint at a dissident political discourse relating to the country's national identity.

The misuse of language—its being improper but also disrespectful of the usual relationship between signifiers and their signified—belongs to a carnivalesque strategy scornful of grammar and spelling rules, devaluing the nature and meaning of words. The carnivalesque indeed, as defined by Bakhtin, implies a movement of "degradation," "the lowering of all that is high, ideal, abstract" (Bakhtin 19-20). Adverbs and interjections have a weak semantic content and are not essential, syntactically speaking, to the structure of a predicative clause, contrary to nouns, which may be the object of predication. Assigning to *nation*, *land* and *laws* the function of adverbs or interjections consequently amounts to degrading and debunking them, taking them down from their syntactic and semantic pedestal and from their prominent position in the political discourse.

Rather than being actually sacralized by such constant invocation and by the substitution for *Lord* in the case of *land* and *laws*, the political terminology is only uplifted the better to be profaned. Swearing as it is used here is close to its original, primitive form which, as Ashley Montagu points out, was regarded as subversive of social and religious institutions, as when the names of the gods were usurped in vain (Montagu 1). The euphemistic use of *nation*, *land* and *law* as substitutes for *damnation* and *Lord* does not make the swearing act harmless, the usurpation of the name of otherwise respected entities or institutions (whether religious or political) being intrinsically subversive. Euphemism here rather transfers the blasphemous dimension of the swearing act from the religious to the political field.

The repetition of *nation, land* and *laws* with emphatic or exclamatory value results in an obsessive, incantation-like quality which may hint at some deep concern with the significance and value of these terms, if not at a sense of frustration that may be inherent to swearing (Montagu 56, 65). The idea of nation had indeed been highly problematic beginning with the period surrounding Independence. Disagreement about the use of the terms *nation* and *national* was central to the debates over the drafting of the Constitution in 1787 due to widespread prejudice against centralization among the delegates. As a rhetorical concession to state pride (Beeman 171), the word *national* initially chosen by Madison was dropped out from the Constitution and replaced with *federal*, while *nation* appears only twice, in the phrases "foreign nations" and "law of nations," which do not actually designate the new country as a nation.

Besides, the idea of *nation* lacked a secure philosophical basis. The nascent nation had indeed attempted to found its identity on two pillars, one

legal (*law*) and the other territorial (*land*), without yet succeeding in solving the contradictions that these two conceptions entailed. The Constitution—"the supreme law of the land" (Article 6)—represents the founding act of American institutions. The new nation, in its attempt at legitimating its independence, could claim no identity anterior to its institutions and to the political ideology they implicitly carried (Marienstras 1976, 14). Defining it by its sole political and institutional reality, hence by the State, was however inconceivable. To the Founding Fathers, and to most theoreticians of the period excepting Joel Barlow, the nation had to rely on an organic foundation, whether human or territorial (Marienstras 1976, 209; 1988, 386).

Such organic definitions presented crucial tensions which the revolutionary period left unsolved. Indeed, the Constitution as well as the texts voted by Congress fully omitted the questions of the civic status of the slaves and of the racial identity of the population, thus maintaining the fiction of an ethnically homogeneous nation. In the absence of any explicit doctrine, the institution of slavery itself was implicitly recognized and tolerated, indirectly protected by the article on fugitives and by the amendment on private property (Marienstras 1976, 271). The omissions in the Constitution actually reinforced the racial, political and cultural exclusion of the Black population.

The *land*, in the sense of *country* or *territory*, offered an equally unsteady political foundation primarily because the nation was devoid of the deep territorial roots conveyed by a long history, and also because land ownership was an equivocal issue. In the pre-revolutionary decade already, the colonists' relationship to the American territory played a central role in the defense of their liberties against the British. Jefferson, in *A Summary View of the Rights of British America* (1774), and even more so John Adams, in the letters he signed with the pseudonym "Novanglus," legitimated American political liberties through the right to emigrate to a new territory which, having never belonged to Great Britain, could not be ruled by the latter's political institutions. This contradicted the hitherto prevailing theory, still accepted by John Adams himself in his *Dissertations on the Canon and Feudal Laws* of 1765, according to which American rights should be rooted in the uninterrupted English tradition (Marienstras 1988, 195; 204). It was now in a territory and a history they claimed as their own that the American revolutionaries endeavored to root the young nation's identity, its rights and the legitimacy of its independence. The principle of land ownership could however only be artificially maintained through the rejection of the Indians, labeled as uncivilized. In eighteenth-century America, except for rare theoreticians like Jefferson and Franklin, legitimating the nation justified the appropriation of the continent (Marienstras 1976, 176-183) and implied a necessarily restrictive definition of citizenship. The problematic figure of the Indian, whose original presence on the continent potentially undermined

the territorial basis of national identity, was cast into the role of the other, excluded from humanity and hence also from the nation, like the slave.

A linguistic dissident, Huck tellingly places on the margin of "sivilization" the "s" of savagery against which the white man strives to define himself. The symbolic attraction of the savage state is made tangible in the presence of the Indian on the margins of Huck's discourse, "Honest injun!" recurring as his favorite swearing phrase. It culminates at the end of the novel, when Huck reiterates his decision to secede from "sivilization": "But I reckon I got to light out for the Territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and sivilize me and I can't stand it. I been there before" (296). His desertion reveals the fragility and porosity of the frontier between civilization and savagery in a symbolical sphere that takes root in the colonial period. Always liable to be transgressed, this frontier delineates an identity defined by nothing more than a sense of difference, the native being what the white man is not—a pagan, devoid of culture. Deserters threaten this emerging identity for, by fleeing away and joining the "savages," they demonstrate that civilization is fragile, that savagery resides in all men, and that the line between the colonists and the natives can easily be overstepped (Marienstras 1988, 43). It is thus in the margins that the coherence of national myths comes apart—the margins of "sivilization," of the misspelled word itself, and of discourse, loaded as it is with swearing. They are the symbolic locus of linguistic and political dissidence.

The political heritage of the revolutionary period thus remains alive in the novel, giving shape to its linguistic imagination. The tensions inherited from that period actually became increasingly acute in the second half of the nineteenth century. With the Civil War tearing apart the American territory and people and threatening federal institutions, the place of the law and the territory in the definition of the nation became all the more problematic. Besides, in the post-Reconstruction period the legal outcomes of the war in terms of racial relations were flagrantly negated by the "Jim Crow" laws—the segregationist laws that the narrator of *Pudd'nhead Wilson* designates as mere "fictions": "Her child was thirty-one percent white, and he, too, was a slave, and by a fiction of law and custom, a negro" (13). The obsessive invocation of the nation, the land and the law may therefore express a political discourse questioning their actual meaning and value in the twinned contexts of antebellum and post-Reconstruction America.

The Diseased Political Body

Given the isotopy of the nation towards which historical and civic themes converge in the novel, the original meaning of *nation*, *land* and *law* remains latent in these terms so that different levels of signification may be superimposed in the text. Indeed, if the emphatic use of such words tends to

reduce them to signifiers rendered unable to express their proper signified along a syntactic logic, the semantic and thematic network surrounding the idea of nation allows their original meaning to subsist underneath. It is this double orientation of language that enables the text to convey a discourse on the nation even as its syntax itself makes it impossible. This appears for instance in a dialogue of chapter 28 in which Huck, talking to the young Joanna Wilks, attempts to justify her sister Mary Jane's absence from home, claiming she had to go and sit up with a certain Mr. Lothrop. Having first afflicted him with mumps, he soon makes his diagnosis more serious in an attempt at being more credible, thus perplexing his interlocutor:

> *I couldn't think of anything reasonable, right off that way, so I says:*
> *"Mumps."*
> *"Mumps your granny!—they don't set up with people that's got the mumps."*
> *"They don't, don't they? You bet they do with these mumps. These mumps is different. It's a new kind, Miss Mary Jane said."*
> *"How's it a new kind?"*
> *"Because it's mixed up with other things."*
> *"What other things?"*
> *"Well, measles, and whooping cough, and erysiplas, and consumption, and yallerjanders, and brain fever, and I don't know what all."*
> *"My land! And they call it the mumps?"*
> *"That's what Miss Mary Jane said."*
> *"Well, what in the nation do they call it the mumps for?"*
> *"Why, because it is the mumps. That's what it starts with."*
>
> (*Huckleberry Finn* 203-204)

On the syntactic, horizontal axis of language, "My land!" and "in the nation" are mere interjections, devoid as such of the semantic content that the dictionary lends to the words *land* and *nation*. Yet, a syllepsis soon allows the resurgence of their latent signified, when Huck calls the disease "the dreadful pluribus-unum mumps" (204)—an indecorous appropriation of the venerable motto that Adams, Franklin and Jefferson had selected for the first Great Seal of the United States in 1776.

The incongruous, comical conflation of a protean, fictive yet "dreadful" disease, with the Latin motto expressing national unity has been prepared by the isotopy of the nation latent in Joanna's interjections ("My land!" and "in the nation") as well as in the idea of something new and composite ("It's a new kind," "it's mixed up with other things"). Newness and diversity indeed characterize the country, which is a nation of a new kind since the creation of its State precedes the definition of a coherent national identity, and a "mixed up" nation since it is culturally and ethnically composite. The linguistic manipulation that makes the national terminology seemingly innocuous thus appears as the prelude to another grammar in which meaning proceeds from the underlying coherence of isotopy.

The improbable encounter of the national motto with the infectious disease also results from phonetic assimilation. *Pluribus-unum* and *mumps* echo each other through a quasi-anagram [*p-s-num* / *mumps*] in which the Latin phrase loses the few central letters that distinguish it from the mumps, undergoing thereby minor inflexions—the remains of some originally crucial difference between the body politic and the diseased body. The middle-space of the coined compound, which phonetically disappears behind the doubled [m], is the place where the two incongruously interact. It is a site of poetic irony, poetic in so far as the coinage partly originates from phonetic affinities.

Last but not least, the seemingly marginal loss of the initial "*e*" obliterates the "act of communal incorporation" (Ferguson 21), the movement from many to one expressed in the Latin phrase. It dooms the motto to nonsense and transforms the unifying structure of the nation into a chaotic mixture, similar to the sequence of unrelated diseases that Huck enumerates. Under a pretense of plain and innocuous humor, the "dreadful pluribus-unum mumps" may thus be emblematic of a loss of cohesion of the American nation.

Huck's coinage revives the implicit lexicalized metaphor of the body politic, bringing its problematic connotations into play. The trope, which has a complex history in Western thought reaching back to Plato, the Stoics and the Church Fathers (Howe 105), became increasingly associated with the monarchical regime and consequently sounds deeply equivocal in the American context. It was used by the Mayflower colonists on the document they signed in 1620[6] and still occurred during the colonial period, but the heritage of political metaphors from England became more and more problematic. In the American revolutionary period, its use was significantly much more frequent among the loyalists than among the patriots, its organic connotations being hardly compatible with the stakes of political protest and separation (Howe 106). In post-Independence America, references to the body politic became scarcer, restricted for instance to the specific designation of the Confederacy at the time of the Civil War. The image indeed still aroused some mistrust as its monarchical implications seemed to run counter to the contractual ideology on which the republican edifice relied (Howe 107-108).[7] Furthermore, the metaphor of political disease itself involved anti-republican implications and was mainly used against England at the time of Independence—the young nation perceived itself as a new Eden, free from the sins and corruption of the lands from which its citizens had fled, associating republican values and political order with good health and natural order (Myrsiades 13).

The "dreadful pluribus-unum mumps" may consequently be understood as an alteration of republicanism, a loss of values and identity, a crisis of the principles of incorporation and unity hinting at the disunion of the states, if not at the threatening disintegration of the nation in the Civil War

context. Considering the burning racial issue that weighs on the narrative, it may also be related to the failure of the principle of equality in the twinned contexts of slavery and segregation. If, as W.C. Harris writes, the works of nineteenth-century writers like Poe, Whitman, Melville and James formally solve "the profound disjunction between the theorization of social order (the Declaration's equality principle) and its actualization" (Harris 20), Huck's coinage here rather emphasizes the full extent of the disjunction. Furthermore, if such writers examine "e pluribus unum" as a compositional problem involving "the unification of disparates, the reconciliation of the one and the many, [and] the preservation of variety within unity" (Harris 5), Twain's achievement here lies rather in the creativity with which he distorts the national motto and linguistically brings it into crisis.

Huck's Linguistic Dissidence

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn more broadly questions the political conception of language that prevailed in the founding period surrounding the Declaration of Independence. Though history would soon challenge these assumptions, the central imperatives of revolutionary republicanism—the struggle against English authority, the establishment of a republican form of government and the careful delineation of individual liberties—strengthened the call for a political language "standing above the confusions of the historical moment," a language that was "clear in its meaning, stable in its forms, and capable of containing political behavior" (Howe 13, 37).[8] As political relationships were being redefined and the future remained uncertain, language was considered to be the foundation of democracy, the instrument of political action, the "currency" which would make the expression of the permanent and universal principles of democracy possible (Howe 8).

Beyond the definition of political notions and laws—the specific sites of the construction of the nation—it is common language itself which was conceived as the bedrock of democracy. Adams, Paine, Jefferson, Franklin, Witherspoon and Webster all explored the connection between language and politics. They insisted on the necessity to clarify the rules of written and spoken English, improve patterns of usage, and render the language increasingly certain, thus establishing it as a fully reliable system of communication (Howe 37). At the time of Independence, the articulation of language and politics was so tight that Thomas Paine could treat language as a metaphor for political experience, claiming that "[t]he American constitutions are to liberty, what a grammar is to language: they define its parts of speech, and practically construct them into syntax" (quoted by Howe, 55-56). Theoreticians would then endeavor to propagate the "grammar" of democracy by means of grammar and spelling properly speaking.

"The Dreadful Pluribus-Unum Mumps"

The belief in the political import of language led to wide-ranging linguistic reform projects aiming at the normalization of the American language, the establishment of approved standards of grammar, vocabulary, orthography, and pronunciation. Inspired by English rhetoricians and grammarians, these projects expressed the eighteenth century's preoccupation with system and rationality (Howe 14). They implied the unification of language, advocated by Noah Webster in particular—"Let us then seize the present moment, and establish a *national language*, as well as a national government" (quoted by Howe, 199)—as well as its rationalization: "fixing the language in grammar, syntax and meaning and rendering it capable of defining universal truth" (Howe 7). Conversely, dialects and slang were perceived as a threat to the republican experience as much as to intelligence: "the use of slang [...] is at once a sign and cause of mental atrophy," Oliver Wendell Holmes claimed (quoted by Cmiel, 55).

As a result of the educational movement launched by the reformers, the number of grammar books and dictionaries circulating in the country had tellingly soared by the beginning of the nineteenth century, with deeply ambivalent consequences. If, indeed, the educational establishment struggled to maintain a refined language codified in grammars and dictionaries, the countervailing force of mass education, combined with rough speech, allowed a democratic force to emerge and challenge "the authority of the refined" (Cmiel 56).

The reception of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* confirms that "its coarseness and bad taste" (*The Boston Advertiser*, March 12, 1885) challenges "the authority of the refined"—so much so that the book was famously expelled from the Concord library shortly after its publication. As a member of the Concord committee reported for the Saint-Louis *Globe-Democrat* (March 17, 1885), "all through its pages there is a systematic use of bad grammar and an employment of rough, coarse, inelegant expressions. . . . The whole book is of a class that is more profitable for the slums than it is for respectable people, and it is trash of the veriest sort" (quoted by Powers, 490). More than just linguistic refinement, Twain's coarseness challenges the cultural and political authority that stands behind the normalization of language. It rejects a politics of language that might petrify grammar, vocabulary and spelling along established standards.

The irreverent treatment that Huck inflicts on the dictionary, in an episode of chapter 26 in which he is asked to take an oath, illustrates his rejection of the linguistic principles defended by Webster:

> *[Joanna Wilks] "Honest injun, now, hain't you been telling me a lot of lies?"*
> *[Huck] "Honest injun," says I.*
> *"None of it at all?"*
> *"None of it at all. Not a lie in it," says I.*
> *"Lay your hand on this book and say it."*
> *I see it warn't nothing but a dictionary, so I laid my hand on it and said it.*
>
> (*Huckleberry Finn* 187)

The use of a dictionary as a Bible, meant to lend the former the symbolical value of the latter and thus warrant the veracity of Huck's declarations, allows him on the contrary to give a stronger basis to his lies. With much irony, it is the linguistic authority embodied by the dictionary that is here desecrated, and with it the political ideal of a normalized language.

Furthermore, the claim to a dialectal and composite language made at the beginning of the novel sets the multiplicity and relativity of idioms against the principle of a universal language:

> *Explanatory*
> *In this book a number of dialects are used, to wit: the Missouri negro dialect; the extremest form of the backwoods South-Western dialect; the ordinary "Pike-County" dialect; and four modified varieties of this last. The shadings have not been done in a hap-hazard fashion, or by guess-work; but pains-takingly, and with the trustworthy guidance and support of personal familiarity with these several forms of speech.*
> *I make this explanation for the reason that without it many readers would suppose that all these characters were trying to talk alike and not succeeding.*
>
> The Author.

If the "explanatory" was once read by some critics as an authorial hoax, it has long been established that various dialects were actually used coherently in the novel (Carkeet 315-332).[9] It is nevertheless clear that the author's claim of authenticity has a rhetorical function and that its real purpose is not to alleviate the potential confusion of the reader. Smith, who rightly points out that the truthfulness of the representation of dialect in American literature is a less important question than why and how the appearance of authenticity matters (Smith 2001, 164), reads the explanatory as a way of calling attention to the author's social and cultural difference from his first-person narrator, and of establishing the former's cultural knowledge and authority (2005, 431-432).

Yet, what is also at stake in the rhetoric of the explanatory is the establishment of a linguistic democracy that ushers rough language into the literary sphere. The text anticipates—but also overtakes—Howells's call for a democratic aesthetics in *Criticism and Fiction* (1891), which claims that the political state was built on "the affirmation of the essential equality of men in their rights and duties" and that "these conditions invite the artist to the study and appreciation of the common [...]. The arts must become democratic, and then we shall have the expression of America in art" (Howells 43). To fulfill this democratic mission, the artist should favor realistic themes and language and consequently the use of dialects: "let fiction cease to lie about life; let it portray men and women as they are [...]; let it speak the dialect, the language that most Americans know" (328). The artistic democracy Howells calls for fully depends on linguistic realism.

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn actually fulfills Howells's demand while reaching far beyond it. Twain indeed, in Messent's terms, "out-realists Howells" in his use of a first-person vernacular voice (Messent 191), devoid of any narrative frame. Furthermore, as Fishkin has shown in *Was Huck Black?,* the narrator's voice in fact integrates Blacks' forms of speech: "The voice we have come to accept as the vernacular voice in American literature […] is in large measure a voice that is 'black'" (Fishkin 4). The "imaginative blending of black voices with white ones […] effectively deconstructs 'race' as a meaningful category" and dismantles the cultural and legal fiction of racial purity (Fishkin 144, 142). The hybrid nature of the narrative voice shows that the linguistic democracy that unfolds in the novel is not a matter of Howellsian realism, of mere fidelity to the diversity of the people's language—and Twain quite significantly never labeled his writing "realistic" in spite of his tight connection with Howells (Bell 45).[10]

Linguistic democracy here rather consists in the literary legitimacy and authority of rough or non-standard languages and even more so in political participation, in the sense that these forms of speech surreptitiously voice a dissident political discourse that questions national myths and official discourses. It is indeed in the disparity of idioms, the authority granted to the vernacular, as well as the linguistic transgressions of its narrator, that the text gains the capacity to construct a subversive political discourse. Against the project of linguistic unification, the "explanatory" consequently reads like a defense of dialects, insofar as it offers a pacified, victorious, maybe idyllic vision of linguistic plurality contrasting with the Babel-like confusion that could have followed from the characters' not "talking alike."

The coalescence of a plurality of dialects in the "explanatory" hints at the politics of language that governs the entire text. The novel indeed appears to carry in its very texture the rejection of a language that would contain republicanism by transcending historical as well as geographical variations. The literary democracy that it defines fully depends on the historicity of a language which, rather than being the immutable pillar of the American republican experience, has the ability to question its historical developments.

It thus appears that the incorrectness of Huck's language subverts the original principles of the nation on several levels: it hijacks the key notions of the political discourse on American identity, it contradicts the rationalist conception of language that was central to the republican experience as it was originally conceived, and it metaphorically questions a political grammar, a system of values presented as the syntax of democracy. In its lack of respect for a prescriptive syntax, in both linguistic and political terms, Huck's language may be considered as fundamentally a-grammatical.

Rancière's notion of a "politics of literature" that would express itself in a particular relationship between words and things is fully operative in this

context.[11] The principle of a "democracy of writing" (Rancière 13) consists in the disruption of a given order of relationship between bodies and words, between ways of speaking, ways of doing and ways of being. In the case of Twain, this disruption proceeds from a double movement by which dialectal and colloquial speech incorporate a political idiom while trivial and colloquial registers are enlisted as political idioms in their own right. At the root of this renegotiation of the relationship between words and things are two principles: all topics are equal, and all words and sentences are available to construct the fabric of life. For, as Rancière further explains, "This is where the historic novelty of the term 'literature' lies: not in a particular language but in a new way of linking the sayable and the visible, words and things" (9). The dissidence of Huck's language may be understood as the disruption of a pre-established order between political meaning and language. It is the dissidence of an intrinsically democratic language, in which dialects contest the authority of high style and all words and styles stand equal to construct a political discourse.

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NOTES

1. "In an anthropological spirit, we propose the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community. . . " (Anderson 6).

2. Shelley Fisher Fishkin points out that "Twain himself was formally invited to attend the Centennial celebrations and to contribute an essay to a 'Centennial Collection'" (Fishkin 71).

3. For Fishkin, the historical context may partly account for Twain's giving up the writing of this flight to freedom in 1876 and his ending it with a farcical episode of re-enslavement in 1884 (73-74).

4. See for instance: *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, 21, 83, 84 ("who in the dingnation"), 94, 204, 247, 283.

5. See OED for these uses of *nation*, *land* and *laws* (*The Oxford English Dictionary,* ed. J.A. Simpson and E.S.C. Weiner. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989).

6. "We [...] having undertaken for the Glory of God and advancement of the Christian Faith and Honour of our King and Country, a Voyage to plant the first Colony in the Northern Part of Virginia, do by these presents solemnly and mutually, in the presence of God and one of another, covenant and combine ourselves together into a Civil Body Politike, for our better ordering and preservation. . . " (quoted by Hale 11).

7. Howe writes that the metaphor of the body "continued to echo with the corporate values of monarchical culture, threatened to delegitimize the act of sundering the body imperial, and was in logical conflict with notions of a Lockean, contractually based polity" (108-109).

8. The Anti-Federalists' conviction that the rationality of the republican experience required the normalization of language prevailed only until the triumph of Federalism in 1787-1788, when it was supplanted by the idea that an expanding democracy, being perpetually unfinished and open to redefinition, needed a flexible language open to redefinition and historical change (Howe 224).

9. See Carkeet (315) for details about the misreading of the explanatory.

10. Bell notes that "the absence of this term from Twain's critical vocabulary, even at a time when his closest literary friend was making it the rallying cry of the American literary vanguard, ultimately has the force of a deliberate avoidance" (45).

11. The democracy of writing is "a matter of a new distribution of the perceptible, of a new relationship between the act of speech, the world that it configures and the capacities of those who people that world" (Rancière 13).