



**From the first Puritans in America
to the last decades of the nineteenth century:
children and nature
in *The Scarlet Letter* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn***

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1. Vision of nature in *The Scarlet Letter* (1850)

The Scarlet Letter is certainly the most celebrated novel by the American writer Nathaniel Hawthorne. His literary production was focused on moral problems and human values from a transcendental literary perspective. This work was published in 1850 which accounts for its being taken as the novel that opened the second half of the profoundly prolific nineteenth century. This work represents one of the most influential sources from which both scholars and authors after Hawthorne have drawn from thanks to the thorough analysis the author makes of the morality of the era in which the novel takes place. *The Scarlet Letter* is not only a breath of fresh air for the mid-century American literature, but a serious and somber reminder of the dark past of its culture. The novel tells a "tale of human frailty and sorrow" (Hawthorne 60) about its protagonist –Hester Prynne– after becoming pregnant and refusing to reveal the identity of the father. The events take place in the Puritan society of Boston in the seventeenth century, which the author subtly used to attack the procedures of justice at the time, whose morality and effectiveness were, as shown by the work, more than questionable. This first section analyzes the role of nature in the novel *The Scarlet Letter* with a special focus on its twofold use as a dangerous element and a salvation.

1.1. Before Hawthorne: Puritanism and nature

The Scarlet Letter represents an emerging nation, fresh from the “old” England and which is still testing its social and justice rules. The Puritan believes of the first settlers in New England were strict and deeply-rooted, therefore it seems logical that the view these people had about the natural element *par excellence* in this novel –the forest– is nothing short of sinful and that they connect it to the forbidden and the hidden.

Many are the writings of earlier settlers who tell about the dangers of nature and its ability to play tricks to the pure and wise Puritan mind of the Pilgrim Fathers, but it was during the American Romanticism that new ways to approach this reality appeared. The subject of the famous "frontier"¹ and the so-called "leatherstocking novels" had already been presented relating to the last vestiges of virgin nature in those territories (even though when Twain wrote *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* there were still unexplored territories). The explorers who traveled to the "New World" in search of wealth (e.g. John Smith) or pursuing free preaching for their religious doctrines found in the newly discovered lands occupied only by what they called "savages". Despite their desire to reaffirm the status of the first European explorers and early settlers in America, it is certain that the new lands were already inhabited: many indigenous tribes lived there before the arrival of the Europeans.

Many scholars speak of the slaughter to which these Indian tribes were subject,² however different the stories that have come to Europe may be. Through some of the biographies of John Winthrop (Robert C. Winthrop, 1869), Anne Bradstreet (Kellogg, 2010; including a close reading of some of her poetic production) and Jonathan Edwards (Murray, 1987) we are informed, arguably biased, about the main quality of the inhabitants of these lands: their savagery. That "uncivilized nature" of indigenous people is clearly reflected in the literature of the settlers: using nature as a metaphor of the “unexplored” land which has to be feared but also "conquered". In this sense, a basic element of nature –the forest– appeared in the stories of the Europeans as the home of witches, social outcasts and all kinds of evil spirits that might endanger the recently settled pilgrims.



Further attention should be paid to the ambivalence of nature presented for the settlers. The vast majority of those who came belonged to the Puritan religious branch, as they had been forced to leave their home countries searching for a safer place to develop their religious activity. Thus, the New World brought Puritanism as its religious doctrine and lifestyle, a doctrine characterized by self-improvement and the pursuit of the individual religious truth without any mediators. Nevertheless, it did maintain a clear distinction between the Puritan individual and the "other". The topic of the other has been explored in literature; in this case, the "other" was for the Puritans anyone who was not a Puritan too. As such, the native inhabitants of the land were regarded as barbarians, cannibals, and even demons.

Setting this stark difference, those who refused to follow the ordinances of the Doctrine, were expelled from the community in which they lived and were forced into exile in the forest. For this reason nature (and forests more specifically) was regarded as sinful as the laws of demons prevailed and darkness and evil reigned.³ Another essential element of the nature of Puritans was their sense of sin towards anything that could be seen as tempting. This will be a constant reference in Hawthorne's work *The Scarlet Letter*, where the protagonist (Hester) stood out from other women for her beauty, which was compared by the Puritans with a great temptation, a temptation that had to be eradicated.

Conversely, the double Puritan view of nature also responded to the idea of the "Eden" or the "Promised Land".⁴ This would be the land that gave them food and water, which filled them with riches and where any good Puritan would easily survive thanks to their constant efforts to improve their position in society and deserve Heaven.

1.2. A Romantic perspective of nature: The symbolism of the forest in Hawthorne's work

This section discusses the vision that the Romantics had of nature. This term refers to the cultural movement that came to America during the first half of the nineteenth

century and in which Hawthorne is one of its greatest late representatives. We can divide the American Romanticism in two phases: 1770s-1830, the first phase and the second phase: 1830s-1860s. Hawthorne thus fits well into the second phase of American romanticism (or "American Renaissance", more focused of the second half of the XIX century). The characteristics of this movement are given with regard to the cultural movement that occurred just before this one: the Enlightenment. Romanticism –like the Transcendentalism– highlights the importance of nature in human life placing humans in a shared sphere together with nature where the latter provides support and protection to the former.

The arrival of Romanticism and the rise of "Transcendentalism" became a rich source of inspiration to address the issue of nature in literature. The “father” of transcendentalism –Ralph Waldo Emerson– wrote a literary essay stressing his love for nature.⁵ In his essay "Nature," (published in 1836) Emerson discusses the importance of nature for humans, giving a relevance to this aspect of humans’ life thus becoming the main focus of study for many Transcendentalist authors (especially the work of Henry David Thoreau as Emerson’s disciple) and authors of the American Romanticism (as Poe and Hawthorne own and others).

The great influence that Romanticism had on Hawthorne served for his portrayal of the natural imagery in the novel this article studies. In this work, the forest maintains a double Puritan vision according to the time in which the story is set (XVII century). This forest appears repeatedly, however there is an element that is constant: it preserves its association with the "preternatural", with darkness and sin. The first reference we have to the forest in the novel appears when the author talks about the unfair treatment the Quakers and all citizens who did not follow this doctrine received from the Puritans:

It may be, that an Antinomian, a Quaker, or other heterodox religionist, was to be scourged out of the town; or an idle and vagrant Indian, whom the white man’s fire-water had made riotous about the streets, was to be driven with stripes into the shadow of the forest. It might be, too, that a witch, like old Mistress Hibbins, the bitter-tempered widow of the magistrate, was to die upon the gallows (Hawthorne 61).



This gives a clear idea of the dark nature that the Puritan community had about the forest. For them, the forest was not only a kind of instrument of punishment but an evil in itself from which they had to separate. It is normal in the novel to describe this natural area as a "dark [and] inscrutable forest" (97), which appear in turn as a veiled criticism of the Puritan hypocrisy of a society. As a counterpoint to this perspective, Hawthorne does see the healing quality of nature as a medicine of the soul providing peace and tranquility to its visitors, as in the case of the "long walks [...] in the forest [...] with the plash and murmur of the waves, and the solemn wind-anthem among the tree-tops" (Hawthorne 149) that Chillingworth and the Reverend Dimmesdale enjoyed. There is even a chapter dedicated to this natural space: Chapter XVI: "A Forest Walk". It presents the "Black Man" referred to by young Pearl (Hester Prynne's daughter) as a symbol of the devil according to the words of a woman who, they say, made a deal with the devil. In this scene, Pearl asks his mother to tell her about the Black Man and "how he haunts this forest, and carries a book with him –a big, heavy book with iron clasps; and how this ugly Black Man offers his book and an iron pen to everybody that meets him here among the trees" (226). In this fragment we can notice again the Puritan forest-evil association. However, the fact of putting those words in the mouth of such an innocent being like a child stresses the already ambiguous nature of the character of Pearl as an "elf-child" (Chapter VIII: "The elf-child and the Minister") for its union with nature.

The forest will also be the space for hiding and "secur[ing] themselves from the observation of any casual passenger" (227). This place is equally important because forbidden unions and meetings will take place in it where characters can speak freely of the passions that afflict them. When Hester and Pearl went the forest to meet Dimmesdale secretly, "they sat down on a luxuriant heap of moss; which, at some epoch of the preceding century, had been a gigantic pine" (227). This allusion to the tree trunk symbolizes, beyond the simple metaphor of the passing of time, the expected decline of the Puritan colonies and of their rigid morality. Soon after this, Hawthorne makes

another declaration of feelings when Hester utters these words: "Wilt thou go and play, child?" [...] 'But do not stray far into the wood. And take heed that thou come at my first call'" (229). Once it is known the symbolism of the forest in this book, it is easy to imagine that the intention of Pearl's mother by telling her daughter to go to the forest and come back when her mother called her is that the mother feared that Pearl would go through the same she had gone through: that her passions would lead her to social exclusion.

Similarly, the forest shadows were the only witnesses to the conversation between the two lovers (Hester and the Reverend), which strengthens the intimate bond between the protagonist (and her daughter) with nature. Unlike Hester's community, for her the forest is a place to recover her individuality, so suppressed by the strict Puritan standards. The symbolic relationship (more explicit in Pearl's case) between Hester and nature is so great that this space comes to perfectly symbolize the emotions of the heroine. Thus, when Hester opened her heart to speak with tenderness and sincerity to the Reverend in the forest the scenery of the place matched the mood of the characters and the situation, being this:

[O]bscure around them and creaked with a blast that was passing through it [...] while one solemn old tree groaned dolefully to another, as if telling the sad story of the pair that sat beneath, or constrained to forebode evil to come" (240).

Likewise, this forest symbolizes the sinful and dishonorable conversation (from the Puritan view of their society) that the lovers maintained. Therefore, at that time, the forest was "intricate and shadowy" (245) as "they were now holding a colloquy that was to decide their fate" (245). But a few lines later comes an undeniable comparison between the soul of the protagonist and the place where she was: "[h]er intellect and heart had their home, as it were, in desert places, where she roamed as freely as the wild Indian in his woods" (245). Even when the Reverend Dimmesdale walks out of the woods toward the community he sees "the path among the woods [...] wilder, more uncouth with its rude natural obstacles, and less trodden by the foot of man, than he

remembered it on his outward journey” (264). Here again it shows the clear connection between the spirit (soul) of the characters and their bond with nature, as the Reverend left the forest knowing that what he had promised he would do (fleeing with Hester and her daughter) is something that he couldn’t fulfill without first giving something in return, as it was.

The words of the young Pearl towards the end of the novel echo the idea that the encounter in the forest (i.e. hidden world) does not reflected what happens in society (i.e. real and pure life). Pearl claimed that:

[I]n the deep forest, where only the old trees can hear, and the strip of sky see it, [Reverend Dimmesdale] talks with thee, sitting on a heap of moss! And he kisses my forehead, too, so that the little brook would hardly wash it off! But here, in the sunny day and among all the people, he knows us not, nor must we know him!” (280).

This is the last reference that the characters will make to the forest in the novel and is very straightforward and clear in its idea that in the seventeenth-century Puritan society, nature had no place in the life of an honest person.

1.3. Pearl as symbol of nature: Innocence and evil

Of all the characters from Hawthorne’s novel, it is possibly Pearl, Hester and Dimmesdale’s daughter, which has the most symbolic load. While children in literature have a close connection to the insight and sincerity that the adult characters often lack, in this novel this polarity is made very clear. In *The Scarlet Letter*, children play a key role, providing alternative visions of the adult characters and helping to uncover the plot of the story. Young Pearl is represented as the sign of a sign: the letter "A" Hester carries in her chest. The role of young Pearl is not only to give an innocent vision of things and characters that surround her but to be the incarnation of pure nature, as conceived by the Romantics. On several occasions throughout the novel Pearl is related or compared to elements of nature or nature itself. Thus:

Mr. Wilson first compares Pearl to a bird, something from nature, which the Puritans distrust, then implies that something is wrong with Hester for tastelessly dressing Pearl in such beautiful, striking



clothing. In this instance, Mr. Wilson's comments are hypocritical because Governor Bellingham, the leader of the Puritans, decorates his mansion lavishly and enjoys many worldly pleasures ("The Foolish Puritans of The Scarlet Letter" np).

In the novel, the freedom and innocence enjoyed by the girl is compared with a little bird, both are fragile but not subjected to the restrictions imposed by the Puritan society: "[Pearl is like] a wild tropical bird, of rich plumage, ready to take flight into the upper air" (135). What is also striking in this description are the terms in which it alludes to the child: a girl who dresses in vivid and rich colors (like the letter her mother wanted her to imitate). At the beginning of Chapter XIV, "Hester and the physician," Pearl is also defined as "a bird" (205) when her mother tells her to go to the water to play while she talks to Roger Chillingworth.

As the child grows up, her closeness to nature is accentuated, thus separating children from the community. Hawthorne devotes Chapter V: "Pearl" to make a portrayal of the young girl. In the first line it says that this is a "little creature whose innocent life had sprung, by the inscrutable decree of Providence, a lovely and immortal flower, out of the rank luxuriance of a guilty passion" (108). Again, a comparison between the kid and an element of nature: a flower. This metaphor will recur to refer to both mother and daughter, as both are very beautiful and have an indomitable personality. Although Pearl is referred to as a girl full of innocence and natural beauty, she has also qualities her mother fears believing they are more typical of the evil beings than of a little girl. The people of the village claimed that "poor little Pearl was a demon offspring" (120).

Taking up the ideas of the Puritan doctrine, it is worth stopping in the clear and well delineated comparison established between the child and the beauty of nature, which the Puritans both hated and feared at a time. Likewise, Pearl is alluded as the letter "A" mentioned above. Nina Baym states:

In another sense, however, the child is beauty and freedom and imagination and all the other natural qualities that the Puritan system denies. Beautiful, intelligent, perfectly shaped, vigorous, graceful, passionate, imaginative, impulsive, capricious, creative, visionary:

these are only a sampling of the adjectives with which she is described. And these are all traits in Hester as well as in Pearl (2).

The close relationship between mother and daughter is made even clearer not only for the family ties but because the girl has all the qualities the mother presents. It's like the hate, beauty and all other emotions of the mother had gone down to the girl through some kind of "preternatural" force, using Hawthorne's term. This symbolism of the novel and in specific the character of Pearl are specially relevant because: "[t]he first generation of great American novelists consists of authors who have written from an exalted, emotive and symbolic trend following the biblical and Puritan tradition of the early settlers" ("Novela de tendencia simbolista: Nathaniel Hawthorne y Herman Melville" np; my translation) among which we can count Hawthorne himself.

One of the key moments in the novel that show Pearl's innocence and well-defined relationship with nature occurs in Chapter XVI, where the girl addresses her mother to inquire her about why the light runs away from her:

‘Mother,’ said little Pearl, ‘the sunshine does not love you. It runs away and hides itself, because it is afraid of something on your bosom. Now see! there it is, playing, a good way off. Stand you here and let me run and catch it. I am but a child. It will not flee from me; for I wear nothing on my bosom yet!’

‘Nor ever will, mu child, I hope,’ said Hester.

‘And why not, mother?’ asked Pearl, stopping short, just at the beginning of her race. ‘Will not it come of its own accord, when I am a woman grown?’

‘Run away, child,’ answered her mother, ‘and catch the sunshine! It will soon be gone’ (224-225).

This dialogue represents a clear instance of the full awareness of the mother about her own sins and of how she wants to prevent her daughter from making the same mistakes. Similarly, she makes an innocent remark about the sun (life-symbol) and states that it does not flee from her because she has not "sinned" and so she is "purer" than Hester, more in touch with nature. The girl believes that all women wear a scarlet letter on their chest, which is not so; however, the things she does not yet understand seem not to worry her.

On the subject of evil, it has been repeatedly linked with this idea, but Hawthorne seems reluctant to condemn the young Pearl or her mother. The people of the Puritan community and their children too did not want to treat Hester's daughter, as she was also considered sinful and dangerous, like her mother. Even though there is a clear character that we can refer to as "bad" –Roger Chillingworth, for his cruelty and merciless treatment with the Reverend– the "evil" of Pearl is constantly connected to nature, not the cruel hypocrisy of her society so she can be reaccepted in it because she is the incarnation of the new nation, the future. According to Rafael Monroy Casas:

[H]er evil is different from that found in other characters described by the author, it is related with wild elements such as forests, Indians, the sea, the mariners, with whom she shares not only her color but above all, her openness and lack of hypocrisy (311; my translation).

By the end of the novel, the value of Pearl as a symbol disappears and gives way to a character beyond symbolism more than the identity of the new nation, independent nation. Someone who wants to create her own paradigms and borders is born. Thus:

Pearl proves to be an ideal amalgam of the old and the new worlds, or between nature and civilization, something that remains a mystery and underlying both. She is a figure, in short, that separates both from the complexities of the past and from the mysteries of the future, an innocent life (Monroy Casas 312; my translation).

But the value of the little Pearl transcends the literary and becomes the emblem of the struggle between the past (the New England of the seventeenth century) and the modern (nineteenth century America). In the words of the scholar Monroy Casas:

Perhaps we see all this as a child's smugness, but it certainly serves to see the role as a messenger of truth Hawthorne assigns to them, even though we may not obtain a clear idea about the identity of this "truth." Perhaps it is a desperate attempt by the author to find the simple and good in the past (311; my translation).

Therefore, Pearl personifies both the value of nature in its most romantic sense and the evils that the Puritans fear from it. Little Pearl also symbolizes the emerging nation that would later be the United States from its young and naive beginnings to a

maturity that will come with the years and the experiences. Pearl's character is therefore a constant source of meanings in which there is always room for more interpretations.

2. A vision of nature in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884)

One of the most famous novels in the history of American literature is Mark Twain's book *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, published in 1884. This is a story of struggle and overcoming in which two apparently opposite worlds are opposed: nature and "civilization", represented through the adventures of young Huckleberry Finn. In this book the author unleashes the purest realism in an effort to recreate as closely as possible the American Society of the mid-nineteenth century. The quality that has made of this novel a reference in literature not only for the young but for all ages is precisely the fact that it deals with universal themes such as companionship, selfishness, human cruelty or the struggle for human freedom and search for self identity. The technique of placing in the mouth of a child the evils and vices of a society constitutes a well-studied and refined technique Hawthorne used in the previous novel, as we have already seen. *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is considered, one of the key novels to understand the nineteenth-century American Realism, while narrating in a fresh and carefree way the life and adventures of a society that is just learning to walk taking the first steps in its way separated from the European control.

2.1. Realism in Twain's work

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is one of the novels that best fit the reality of the time where Twain lived as well as the years before the Civil War, in which the Confederate States of America –or Southern States– were forced to abolish slavery after losing the war. This work constitutes a subtle but scathing critique of slavery. However, the novel was not very acclaimed upon publication for its subject, which many critics and writers interpreted in different ways. They considered this a work that promoted slavery through the mockery of African-Americans based on Twain's recurring use of the word "nigger".



Despite this, the work has entered into the annals of literary history as "the great national novel" (Fernández de Cano np; my translation).

The fact that it's regarded as one of the literary pillars on which national literary identity is based on stands for the fact that it is one of the first novels in which the real main character in the story is an essentially unique natural element of America: the Mississippi River. Thanks to the masterful use that the author makes throughout the work of the structural unit of the novel adding characters, recovering lost characters in the middle of the story or giving full prominence to the river, the writer and humorist Mark Twain is today one of the world's most successful writers in both his time and ours.

But perhaps the greatest achievement in terms of the realistic character of the novel is reached because many of the life experiences of its author are reflected (though in a veiled way) in this great work. In this sense:

Mark Twain recovered much of his childhood and youth memories related to the town of Hannibal and his river cruises to submerge his work into a dazzling realistic aesthetic (the "Twainian realism") that allowed him to portray perfectly the spirit and traditions of his time (Fernández de Cano np; my translation).

This serves as an example of why Twain is still regarded as one of the most important authors of didactic novels because in it the characters learn life lessons and moral values and this further use of the novel is what has made it reach the success it has obtained. But *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is not only a novel for young children, as I have already noted; it is a novel for an audience from all ages, since the conflicts of the characters are extrapolated to any person's at any age.

The most critical point that has arisen regarding this novel is Twain's use of language; as mentioned above, many considered it pejorative the way in which several characters, including Huck himself, refer to blacks. However, that did not stop it from becoming a constant reference of the adventure fiction literary genre to which it belongs, through a keen sense of humor and some descriptions of all true to life: "[Twain took] as a starting point the realistic models (and, among them, their most credible instrument:

the American *slang* or colloquial language) to provide a brilliant dissection of society, habits and moral values of his time” (Fernández de Cano np; my translation; italics in the original).

What's more, the novel does not only not promote slavery, but the main character (Huck) goes through a process of transformation from being a boy with prejudice about the black people to feeling deep affection for a black slave (Jim), who would later on become his friend even to the point of not betraying him when he had the opportunity to. As Lauriat Lane, Jr. claims:

Another specially American theme is that of the Negro, and Huck is faced with this problem throughout the story. Starting with the typically American prejudices and easy generalizations about Jim, he is gradually shocked into an increasingly complex awareness of Jim as a human being. And although Huck's relations with Jim do not so much embody a national attitude as suggest how the nation may purge itself of one, the theme of the Negro is still one which achieves epic stature in *Huckleberry Finn* (Lane np).

This novel puts forward several issues being the theme of the Civil War clearly one of the most relevant ones –either explicitly or more covert–. Twain used the literary language to denounce the injustices and false moral values around him, but he did it with satire and humor. This was the value that realism acquired in the hands of this writer, as:

In [Twain's hands] realism is not just a literary technique, but a means to tell the truth accurately and to make a critique of the society in which he lived, especially through satire, denouncing social inequality, slavery and an excess of interest in success and money (“Mark Twain: el realismo en la novela norteamericana” np; my translation).

This work has hence turned into one of the greatest cases of anti-slavery literature in the history of American culture, with its humorous and sarcastic tone that grabs the attention of all readers of all ages and cultures.

2.2. Symbolism of the Mississippi River in the novel



As mentioned before, the Mississippi River is the main protagonist of this novel (except for Huck) and it is not only for its value as a purely American element but because here again we have a novel with a high symbolic significance. *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is a work of multiple protagonists given the amount of characters that come and go from the novel without any other excuse than the progress of Huck and Jim to new horizons where they can be completely free. The incessant flow of characters may, in some ways, resemble the steady and calm flowing river, symbolizing this one's progress toward a new life, a better future. Another fact that will be crucial to understand the work is that this river stays in the "frontier". This idea of the frontier and the idea of "civilizing" will be developed later in this paper. Thus, the border issue will underlie the whole story from the beginning of the work, imbuing it with one of its inherent characteristics, language, which appears likened to the epic style by the critics: "much of the exaggerated language of the frontier world, one not far removed in kind from that of the primitive migrations, is also a natural part of the epic style"(Lane np).

2.2.1. The river as a metaphor of life

The variety of images along the river banks and its water or the sound of water rushing downstream are common themes in American literature. However, the fact that a river is the main protagonist of a novel is an innovation that is attributed to the genius of Mark Twain. The symbolism of this current of wild water is very rich and has led to a whole culture of the Mississippi River as a result of this and other writings that tell of the splendor and vitality of the river. Huck and Jim float on one of those steamboats on board of which Twain himself had lived many experiences in his job as a river pilot. Under the pretext of this trip, the river appears as a character itself: "in its waters and shores, both characters will live a kind of reconciliation between human beings and nature" (Fernández de Cano np; my translation). Getting back to the topic of nature, it is precisely this which reconciles life in society with life in the countryside. In fact the poetic and literary burden of the river in this work is so relevant that we can say the river

is the cause and healer of everything that happens in the lives of the two navigators. In fact, the two sailors' trip is more of a symbolic journey because:

Huckleberry Finn is the story of a journey, a real journey. If we are to find any meaning in Huck's journey beyond the literal level, we must seek it first in the medium through which Huck journeys, in the great river down which he drifts during much of the story (Lane np).

The river acts like a living being, it gets angry and so it gets wilder, it is calm and the water passes with softness and calm facilitating Huck and Jim's journey and even appears in the moments when they most need it, for instance when Huck flees from his father and Jim runs away from the family for which he worked and states: "a raff is what I's arter, it doan' *make* no track" (56). The power that the river has is actually so strong that "[i]n *The adventures of Huckleberry Finn* the 'Mighty' Mississippi river gives the story its form and controls the voyage of Huck and Jim" (Douglass np).

The Mississippi provides not only shelter and food but it "provides Huck and Jim with Life sustaining elements; Being the Most Important That It provides comfortable transportation towards freedom" (Douglass no page). Moreover, Huck is fully aware of his status as "rebel" because he does not abide by the rules established for young boys and (half) orphans. He even says: "I guessed I wouldn't stay in one place, but just tramp right across the country, mostly nighttimes, and hunt and fish to keep alive, and so get so far away that the old man nor the widow could not find me any more" (33). Here it is clearer the indispensable help of the river to the life of this young boy, as it provides food and a place where he knows he will always be welcome.

When Huck pretends to be dead after escaping from his father, he finds in the river and the forest the coziest home he has ever met. And no wonder the attachment felt by the young Huckleberry Finn to natural life with a somewhat transcendentalist mentality noting as well several materialistic touches. These will protect and respect him as much as he to them even claiming that he is the ruler of this natural space as if it were his own home:

I went exploring around down through the island. I was boss of it; it all belonged to me, so to say, and I wanted to know all about it; but

mainly I wanted to put in the time. I found plenty strawberries, ripe and prime; and green summer grapes, and green razberries; and the green blackberries was just beginning to show. They would all come handy by and by, I judged (50).

This great respect for life in nature and everything that lives in it is due explained for the close relationship between the soul of nature and the love and respect that Twain professed for it. For this reason, "Huck has a tremendous amount of respect for the river and it is obvious in the beautiful descriptions he makes throughout the journey; his most touching language is reserved for these descriptions" (Douglass np). As when it comes to reaching the forest to perform one of the tricks of the Duke and the King:

The woods was full of teams and wagons, hitched everywhere, feeding out of the wagon troughs and stomping to keep off the flies. There was sheds made out of poles and roofed over with branches, where they had lemonade and gingerbread to sell, and piles of watermelons and green corn and such-like truck (166).

The fact that "Huck [is] a boy only half socialized" (Aguirre Romero np; my translation) has a clear parallelism with the river: both appear untamed and yet, calm. This ambivalence is what attracts Huck to life in the purest nature and makes him feel safe and protected in it. The concern about the education of the young boy is also an important issue in the novel. All the people he has lived with have tried to "civilize" him. But Huck's ethos, full and natural as it is refuses the social demand, not attending school and in turn, life becomes the best school. Therefore, the river and nature in general are by far a much richer and practical source of knowledge than any social imposed institution. Thanks to the moral lessons Huck learns, we can consider that:

Huckleberry Finn also gains its place as a world novel by its treatment of one of the most important events of life, the passage from youth into maturity. The novel is a novel of education. Its school is the school of life rather than of books, but Huck's education is all the more complete for that reason (Lane np).

For this reason, Twain's work has been considered a reference and has marked a literary milestone in the cultural history of the United States: "*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and Twain's other works found admirers as eminent as Robert Louis Stevenson, Thomas Hardy, Andrew Lang, and George Bernard Shaw "(Gribben 31).

2.2.2. The river as a counterpoint to human corruption

We have already mentioned the symbolism of the Mississippi River; this section will deepen in the aspects that have made this river a reference for the theme of nature vs. civilization. The Mississippi is depicted in the novel as a character endowed with all the features that constitute it. Thus, for Huck "civilized" equals caged; he belongs to the realm of nature and he only obeys natural laws, thus:

[T]he constant and totemic presence of the Mississippi River rises at all times against the dangers brought by the excessive desire for civilization. For Huck, a free man in whose love for nature shows his rejection for the unjust and tormented society around him, "education" is synonymous with "domestication" and fleeing from it equals freeing oneself from the traumas, complexes and conflicts that afflict all its neighbors (Fernández de Cano np; my translation).

The role of the river in this novel is crucial for the development of the characters as symbols of youth and freedom, and also to reflect the ambivalence of life, which is at once dangerous and risky but yet pleasant and homey. The river "can be seen as a symbol, however, it is not depicted as either totally good or totally evil; it is merely looked upon as divine" (Douglass np). Twain wisely uses this advantage of not judging the river to make use of the two faces of the people and the qualities of nature (benevolent and cruel). In fact, we can repeatedly see his treatment of the river, because it is "sometimes [...] a good and forgiving God and sometimes it takes the form as a malicious God" (Douglass np). But still remains the Biblical allegorical reference to the river as a god that controls the lives of people and their destinations.

Huck's moral and human qualities are made evident at various times, which helps us perceive clearly the contrast between the virtues of nature and the wickedness, vices and perversions of a self-proclaimed perfect society. It is in the moments when the

young Huck is in contact with people in society, that he changes and becomes a liar or a selfish person because "Huck has lived separate from most of the social laws. His natural goodness, or if you prefer it, his innocence has been perverted when he gets in touch with society" (Aguirre Romero np; my translation). Only when Huck is free from society can he develop his subjectivity and can he be his own master. This is the case of the Widow Douglas, who, like almost everyone else, tries to civilize him when she takes care of him officially. So the author narrates at the beginning of the book:

The Widow Douglas she took me for her son, and allowed she would sivilize me; but it was rough living in the house all the time considering how dismal regular the widow was in all her ways; and so when I couldn't stand it no longer I lit out. I got into my old rags and my sugar-hogshead again, and was free and satisfied (2).

This is precisely one of the main themes of the novel, "the spirit of freedom or individualism and Independence against the hypocrisy of a society that consideres itslef civilized" ("Mark Twain: el realismo en la novela norteamericana" np). The hypocrisy of society is not a new theme, because as already explained in the analysis of the novel *The Scarlet Letter*, the Puritan society has been characterized from the beginning by the double standards in judging people and nature. However, the bad qualities that Huck shows following his contact with society, will soon give way to purely altruistic morals regarding his trip companion, the slave Jim. At the beginning of the novel there are times when he has doubts whether to deliver him to Justice or not. Huck's words give an account of the moral dilemma that involves the release or betrayal of his friend Jim:

And then think of *me*! It would get all around that Huck Finn helped a nigger to get his freedom; and if I was ever to see anybody from that town again I'd be ready to get down and lick his boots for shame. That's just the way: a person does a low-down thing, and then he don't want to take no consequences of it. Thinks as long as he can hide, it ain't no disgrace. That was my fix exactly. The more I studies about this the more my conscience went to grinding me, and the more wicked and low-down and ornery I got to feeling (271).

But fortunately, those doubts are dispelled and Huck is true to his nature in his decision not to betray his new friend, which can be taken as a triumph of human kindness from the corruption of society. As Gribben says:

Mark Twain did seem to be inculcating lessons about human nature and social behavior; we readers come away from that book feeling that we have learned a good deal more than Huck has concerning our fellow human beings, their gullibility, their greed, and their strivings for fellowship and self-respect. The prominence of this novel has colored our responses to Twain's appraisal of himself" (40).

The didactic nature of this work is accentuated by two aspects analyzed in this section, which highlight the difference between man, forests, and rivers. In Lane's words: "[a]t the heart of *Huckleberry Finn* lies a story about real human figures with genuine moral and ethical problems and decisions, figures placed in a society which we recognize as having everywhere in it the flavor of authenticity--the whole combination treated, for the most part, as directly and realistically as possible" (Lane np). Continuing with the topic of morality, it is worth noting that "Huck's truth and the truth of the world are diametrically opposed. Throughout the novel his truth is always cutting through the surfaces of the world's appearance and learning the contrary reality beneath" (Lane np).

The basis of the culture of Mark Twain is also important when it comes to seeing the fundamental aspects of the novel and how they relate to nature. Twain "was a materialist with a slight romantic touch although he had a Renaissance basis, he was inspired by classics such as Don Quixote, by Cervantes, and Pezzirra, by Potlomeo" (Ambrocio Barrueto and De la Cruz Mendoza 28). In fact, many qualities of these genres and authors are represented in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* but also the materialistic character of the author explains some of the scenes in the novel, for example, why:

The book opens with an account of the six thousand dollars Huck got from the robbers' hoard and ends on the same note. Throughout the intervening pages gold is shown to be not only the mainspring of most human action, but usually the only remedy mankind can offer to atone for the many hurts they are forever inflicting on one another" (Lane np).



Money as a metaphor for the greed of people is a recurring resource that contrasts with the simplicity of nature (the river and forest) and Huck's goodness. Society is perfectly portrayed in this novel, as Twain takes us through all social classes and goes through all kinds of situations that Huck encounters. This review of the "social strata" is developed with a quiet rhythm and a natural touch which runs parallel to the ever-present Mississippi River. Consequently, the course of the novel:

[R]anges down the length of the great river and cuts through the center of a whole nation. As it does so, it gains further scope by embracing all levels of society, from the lowest to the highest. And it has the added scope of its own varying qualities, ranging from high comedy to low farce, from the poetic tranquility of life on the raft to the mob violence and human depravity always waiting on the shore (Lane np).

In this way, the boat in which Huck travels would represent the spirit, while the river would be a turning back to reality (Lane np). The spirit Lane refers to can be both the adventurous and altruistic spirit of Huck himself and the spirit of nature. Thus, when Huck gets on the boat he becomes immersed in a more symbolic than real world where things just get carried away by the river's course. But when the boat reaches the shore its occupants are forced to return to the reality of life in society or to face the dangers lurking in the woods. Similarly, "the nakedness of Huck and Jim when they are alone on the raft becomes a symbol of how they have shucked off the excrescences of the real world, their clothes, and have come as close as possible to the world of the spirit" (Lane np). This representation of Huck's spirit becomes more evident if we consider the fact that Huck feigned death and its passage to the "world of spirits". This polarity between the real world and the shadows appears when we "read between the lines" in the novel:

[Huck dies] symbolically almost at the opening of the novel, Huck journeys through the world of the spirit, ever working out a pattern of increasing involvement with the world of reality and with his own self, both cast aside at the beginning of the journey. Only when he is finally forced to assume this real self in the eyes of the world, through the sudden arrival of Aunt Polly, is he allowed to learn the all-important truth Jim has kept from him throughout the novel [that his father won't come back again]" (Lane np).

2.3. Huckleberry Finn and nature: Towards the construction of a national identity

This section analyzes the relevance of Twain's novel taking into account all the elements that comprise it –characters and natural elements– without losing sight of the historical dimension of the novel. In this book we can see the implicit progression of a traditional America with its almost strictly Puritan habits towards a more open society. For this reason "in fact, they are but the reflection of the different ages, mentalities and social classes of a young America that hasn't found yet its own means of expression" (Fernández de Cano np; my translation). The economic affairs are also given importance in this story, as already explained, though, being that obsession a reflection of the economic situation of the America of the mid-nineteenth century. Along with this, the continuous and progressive expansion of the American frontier towards the West is, in a way, symbolized in Twain's novel. Thus, "[t]he young American nation carries out during the XIX century its expansion towards the West, it consolidates itself as a State and highlights its economic development" ("Literatura norteamericana en el XIX" np; my translation).

But we must also take into account the social situation that reflects the background of the novel: the terrible existing segregation between black slaves and white inhabitants. Young Huck is an orphan who runs away from home and is adopted by a widow and her sister. Many critics have seen in "the picaresque adventures of its young characters [...] the social and racial problems of the American society" ("Literatura norteamericana en el XIX" np; my translation). Huck is a homeless child and feels only at home when in nature, separated from civilization and Jim is the stereotype of the black slave seeking freedom beyond slavery in the house in which he served. Huck's words about Jim's immense desire to get his freedom reflect the oppression of slaves and the tireless fight for their rights: "[h]e said he'd be mighty sure to see it, because he'd be a free man the minute he seen it, but if he missed it he'd be in a slave country again and no more show for freedom" (111).

On the other hand, the parallels between the character of Huck and the idea of the incipient and growing nation go hand in hand in this work. Furthermore, you can observe in Huck's character that of an (anti) national hero who could well be the precursor of the heroes of contemporary American fiction. Along with this, the great knowledge he had about the nature of his country and the close relationship that tied him to his country both physically and psychologically, turn this orphan into something more than just a fictional character. As Lane says:

The epic hero is usually an embodiment of some virtue or virtues valued highly by the society from which he has sprung. Huck has many such virtues. He holds a vast store of practical knowledge which makes itself felt everywhere in the story. He knows the river and how to deal with it; and he knows mankind and how to deal with it. And he has the supreme American virtue of never being at a loss for words (np).

When Mark Twain writes *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* nearly two decades have passed since the Civil War ended, which gave the author a certain perspective on the events of his country he could use effectively in his novel. Thus, Twain presents the slave in a situation of total desperation, which depicts the untenable situation just before the war, in between slaveholding states and the anti-slavery ones. Jim's desire to achieve freedom is so great that he even risks his life on several occasions staying next to Huck in all his travels. The historical perspective is present in the novel more than once, for example, when referring to the War of Independence and General George Washington: "I took up a book and begun something about General Washington and the wars" (25).

Twain's experiences resulting from the War were also a rich source of inspiration and motivation for writing this novel. Therefore, "Mark Twain embodies what is memorable and noteworthy about the post-Civil War decades of literary realism and [...] national experience" (Gribben 47). As for Twain as a "humorist he knew how to cross the boundaries and thanks to his intuition, he mastered comedian all genres, including 'National Humor' which was being born in America at the time, he was one of the pioneers in this movement" (Ambrocio Barrueto and De la Cruz Mendoza 28; my



translation). This is another of the many qualities that made Mark Twain an icon of national and world literature.

3. Nature as a way to individual freedom in *The Scarlet Letter* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

The two works analyzed in this study have shed light on the vision of nature during two different periods of the same country. Although both novels develop their plots during previous historical moments to that in which they were written, they teach us how the American society arose and evolved since the arrival of the Pilgrim Fathers until the last decades of the nineteenth century. In Hawthorne's novel, the protagonist rejects the social norms that oblige her to disclose the name of Pearl's father and as a result, she must be punished for adultery. Hester accepts the punishment of social isolation because she believes she has done wrong, it is her self-blame for having "sinned" and her words are proof of it: "a proof that all was not corrupt in this poor victim of her own frailty, and man's hard law, that Hester Prynne yet struggled to believe that no fellow-mortal was guilty like herself" (107). This is why she seeks the re-acceptance in the community group through her work as an artist escaping to nature in search for some solace. She devotes all her time and energy to try to amend her fault, for which she only blamed herself in the sphere of the social, for when she is in nature, all that guilt disappears and she is at peace with herself. This is so because she knows that in the forest the law of nature governs and she does not have to answer to anyone since there are no hierarchies to dictate who should respond for their acts, which calls to mind young Huck's rebellious attitude.

Similarly, in Twain's novel the discomfort that society causes to Huckleberry can only be cured when he is in direct contact with nature. It is (as in the case of Hester) about the search of their own subjectivity –their inner selves–, of the value of people as unique beings and not as mere gear in a group. It is in nature, where Hester, Pearl and Huck will again be human beings and where their vital essence will be more alive in comparison with the social masses that form the communities from which each one

exiles voluntarily. In the *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, "Huck has already assimilated the false social values when he determines to condemn himself to protect Jim. The fact that he felt guilty proves this" (Aguirre Romero np; my translation). This is another similarity with the novel by Hawthorne, since both protagonists –Hester and Huck– feel guilty for doing or having done something sinful (in the case of Hester's adultery and the Huck is not bringing to justice the escaped slave Jim). In addition, it should be noted that they feel guilty because it's what the Puritan society has told them is condemnable. This shows that society has had a decisive influence on the two characters, but despite being social outcasts, they have managed to maintain their identity and to be faithful to their ideas until the end.

4. Conclusion

In this paper I have analyzed the novels *The Scarlet Letter* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* based on the relationship between humans and nature and the role of children in both works and how they represent a reflection (or a part) of nature. The close connection that both Hawthorne and Twain show between human morality and the laws of nature is present in these two masterpieces of American literature of the second half of the nineteenth century. Key issues such as guilt, freedom or subjectivity stay at the heart of these two novels.

The moral load of the first novel is evident from the first page. In fact, it is in the preface where Hawthorne recounts the causes that encouraged him to write this work and the moral obligations he felt towards his society. *The Scarlet Letter* thus becomes a work with a strong didactic side where the fantasy elements are intertwined with the real qualities of nature. Hawthorne gives life to all elements of the natural environment; consequently, trees, streams and even celestial bodies come alive from the hand of the author.

Mark Twain embodies perfectly in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* the double standards of the people while he puts at odds this social criticism with the purity of natural elements. In this novel Twain uses the same literary technique Hawthorne had



used more than three decades earlier: the (metaphorical) personification of natural elements. Twain will focus on the element of the Mississippi River, which becomes the main character in a novel with a multiple protagonist. Along the river, Huck makes a spiritual and physical journey into a person with more life experience and whose respect and appreciation for nature are finally reinforced.

In sum, the relationship between the two novels is established in this paper based on the nature theme as a link between the two. This union does not refer only to the most purely literary aspects (i.e. characters, themes, etc.) but also to the historical context: different periods in the development of one and the same nation towards the construction of an identity of their own.

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Notes

¹For a better knowledge of the “Literature of the American Frontier” see the works of James Fenimore Cooper or T.B. Thorpe.

²These attacks to the native American tribes known as “Indian massacres” have been widely documented in several sources. I recommend the book: *Massacres of the Mountains. Volume 2 of 2: A History of the Indian Wars of the Far West*.

³But despite this harsh repression and attacks against non-Puritans, some writings suggest a certain affection or at least understanding towards the indigenous population. This can be seen in the work of Mary Rowlandson (c. 1637-1711) in her "Captivity Narrative".

⁴See "A description of New England" by the English settler John Smith (c. 1579-1631) who describes the new land in terms of a lost Eden, among many other references of this land to the celestial Promised Land.

⁵To know more about the Transcendentalism, see: *The Norton Anthology of American Literature. Volume A, American Literature to 1820 and Volume B, American Literature 1829-1865*.

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