

“The Huck Finn novel”: Faulkner’s Revision of Twain

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Abstract

The Reivers: A Reminiscence (1962) was conceived 20 years before its publication as “a sort of Huck Finn” novel: following the outline of Twain’s novel but revising and reversing Twain’s vision of the American experience. While Twain depicts the American experience as a fluid experience located forever in the here and now (the timeless present of the primeval river and forest), in the practical and the concrete and in the native (the pristine experience of America, precious if seemingly primitive) that Huck and Jim would happily live in on the raft until they are periodically encroached upon and imperiled by defunct and deadly experiences from the land, grotesquely playacting Europe and its past; Faulkner places America in the stable codes of the past and Europe, more of a concept than a reality. Faulkner opposes Twain’s extreme depictions and expressions of the reality of their world consistently and methodically. The deliberate formlessness of Twain’s narrative (Twain would prosecute, banish and shoot anyone who would look for form or purpose in his narrative!), which projects a formless experience, is replaced by a carefully controlled narrative in which forms become extremely meaningful. In Faulkner’s narrative experience is mellowed and partially presented to produce the comedy in the novel but more importantly to make possible an extreme affirmation of social experience. The reminiscence, which is the essence of the narrative (the novel is subtitled *A Reminiscence*), identifies social experience as a crystallization of a definite legacy: British, conservative and highbrow and presented as older and superior to America. This extreme affirmation of the social experience takes the obvious and extreme form of dictating and prescribing the right and appropriate course of action in any situation, hence the description of *The Reivers* as a “latter-day courtesy or conduct book”. In the form and content of Faulkner’s novel the revision of (and opposition to) Twain is glaringly obvious. While the hero of Faulkner’s novel comes back home to become a gentleman, Huck is in continuous flight from the restrictiveness of the social and the images of the old world which he encounters at every juncture of his experience.

The Reivers is distinguished from Faulkner’s other novels by its prescription of a remedy for the chaos in the American experience of his time and of the modern world in general (this chaos Twain would identify in his time as alien to America and therefore the only remedy needed is to deny and exclude that which is alien). Although Faulkner’s characters in the fiction after 1950 (after the Nobel Prize address), sometimes moralize and are sententious, they affirm certain values or “verities” as viable but they do not directly prescribe. I do not mean that Faulkner speaks directly and suggests explicitly what he thinks will deliver man from his predicament. I mean that the characters’ behaviors constitute a prescription. Faulkner, in effect is defining his role as an artist. He is not content to delineate experience and reveal its depths as he had done in the works of

the prolific period (1929-1936), but he is impelled to subordinate it to certain concepts and values and to present it in such a way as to reflect thought and feeling that that exist prior to it (the opposite of what Twain does in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*).

Key words

revision, American experience, The Old World, play, past and present.

William Faulkner's last novel *The Reivers: A Reminiscence* (1962), generally regarded as a minor work that continues in a mellowed and comic manner the affirmative theme of the works after the Nobel Prize [1], may be seen as expressing not only a serious theme but , more importantly as revealing a final stance to Faulkner's immediate experience, if how it was conceived and what it finally achieved are carefully considered [2]. The novel was conceived 20 years before its publication as "a sort of Huck Finn novel," following the outline of Twain's novel but calculatedly achieving a revision and a reversal of Twain's vision of the American experience [3]. Faulkner spoke about a novel he was planning to write and whose idea was similar to that of *The Reivers* in a letter dated May 3, 1940, to Robert Haas of Random House:

It is a sort of Huck Finn novel-a normal boy of twelve or thirteen, a big warmhearted, courageous, honest, utterly unreliable white man with the mentality of a child, an old negro family servant, opinionated, querulous, selfish, fairly unscrupulous, and in his second childhood, and a prostitute not young any more with a great deal of character and generosity and common sense, and a stolen race horse which none of them intended to steal. The story is how they travel for a thousand miles from hand to mouth trying to get away from the police long enough to return the horse. The white man knows the police have been put on his tail by his harridan of a wife whom he has fled from. Actually, the police are trying to get the boy to his parents to get the reward. The story lasts a matter of weeks. During that time the boy grows up, becomes a man, and a good man, mostly because of the influence of the whore. He goes through in miniature all the experiences of youth which moulds a man's character. They happen to be the very experiences which in his middle class parents' eyes stand for debauchery and degeneracy and actual criminality; through them he learned courage and honor and generosity and pride and pity. He has been absent only weeks, but as soon as his mother sees him again, she knows what has happened to him. She weeps, says, " He is not my baby any more"(Blotner, *Letters*, p. 123-124).

In its essentials the novel conforms largely to the above outline of the "Huck Finn novel". The characters described in the outline, the normal boy of twelve or thirteen, the unreliable white man, the opinionated unscrupulous servant and the generous prostitute, correspond roughly to Lucius Priest, Boon Hogganbeck,

Ned McCaslin and Corrie. Both outline and story have a stolen horse “which none of [the characters] intended to steal.” More important is the fact that the novel expresses roughly the same theme as the outline on a large scale. Both the boy of the outline and Lucius Priest go through experiences “of debauchery and degeneracy and actual criminality” that bring to an end their innocence and initiate them into the adult world of choice and responsibility. But there are also obvious differences between the novel and the outline. Lucius is eleven not twelve or thirteen, Boon is not in flight from a wife (like Jiggs, in *Pylon*), and the story lasts a few days in the novel not “a matter of weeks”. Another detail in the outline that did not go into the novel is how he characters “travel for a thousand miles from hand to mouth trying to get away from the police long enough to return the horse.” This detail went into the short novel, *Notes on a Horse Thief*, which was published in a limited edition in 1951 and later revised and made part of *A Fable* (1954).

The outline of the “Huck Finn novel” shows similarities only in surface features of character and action with Twain’s novel (the boy and the elderly Negro and a brief venture into a world removed from the usual sphere of their experience) but would thwart expectations of finding a similar pattern of experience or the kind of character that Twain has made memorable. Essentially the outline of Faulkner’s novel expresses a movement away from stability and a stable society and a moving along with *motion* (a word used repeatedly by Faulkner throughout his last novel and a state dramatized by Twain throughout his novel) but eventually a return to stability and an affirmation of that which is stable and stays the same, while *The Adventure of Huckleberry Finn* is virtually unceasing motion that has no end and that constitutes a rejection of stability. In historical and social terms, Faulkner affirms what Twain rejects: the validity of a historical experience that defines America and that produces a viable wholesome social experience; the very experience Twain rejects and damns as destroying all that is American. Both writers, as we shall see, locate that experience outside America, in Europe; but while Faulkner upholds it as the experience that gives America life and meaning, Twain depicts it as a defunct and life-killing experience whose lethal effects are to be seen at every juncture in American life.

Both writers make clear their purposes before they begin their stories. Faulkner’s dedication of *The Reivers* to his grandchildren and the children of his step children (“To Victoria, Mark, Paul, William, Burks”, [4]) and the opening of his novel with “Grandfather said:” (*Novels*, p. 725) is assuming a deliberate stance of maintaining the past as the edifying experience that extends into the present, bequeaths values on it, and gives it shape and character. The stance of Lucius McCaslin and Faulkner is a stance of the past imperatively controlling the present [5]. In contrast the seemingly flippant notices that preface *The*

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, (but which really, I will try to show, encapsulate the meaning of the book) reject intention, form and purpose in the narrative that follows and in the experience it projects. Virtually those notices propose a present uninformed by anything before it and not informing anything after it:

NOTICE: Persons attempting to find a motive in the narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot.

BY ORDER OF THE AUTHOR PER G.G., CHIEF OF ORDINANCE. [6]

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 of this last. The shadings have not been done in a haphazard fashion or guess-work; but painstakingly 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 (*Huck Finn*, p. 5)

The two narratives elaborate on what preface them, that is what is suggested or insinuated comes out in grand scale narratives but the original ideas are maintained, concretized in telling details. Significantly, the narrators stand apart from the experiences they recount and view and comment on them critically so that the sense of what the two writers are conveying is never missed. If Lucius is clearly viewing his teenage misadventure at an age of expected sobriety and wisdom and therefore can assess it critically, Huck; notwithstanding his young age, inexperience, his occasional neutral reporting of crucial occurrences (as in his reporting of Tom Sawyer's antics at the end of the book) and his succumbing to others' directions (as with the King and Dauphin); succeeds in disentangling himself from many contingencies he comes across and earning a sufficient distance from what befalls him and a space of his own where he can have a

stance and a perspective which enable him to view critically what he has got entangled in. Generally what the two narratives bring out is that while both Lucius and Huck throw themselves into motion and that motion becomes the essence of their experiences (the moving in a space transported by a vehicle be it a raft or an automobile but which is at the same time a metaphor for moving away from and unsettling the accepted stable forms in society), they view and deal with motion in opposite ways. Lucius seeks to arrest and control motion and align himself with a world that controls motion and subjects it to its rules and values. Huck, on the other hand, is in quest of motion and fluidity that are not arrested and contained in any forms (and only arrested and controlled temporarily for purposes of survival and essential needs.)

Lucius is an old man who presents himself as a boy who edifies others, leads them to reform, fights for virtue and morality and changes the lives and the world of the grown ups. In the account that he gives, the boy is minimally present; the tone and the commentary are those of the old man. Huck on the other hand is a boy and continues to be a boy although he witnesses and goes through some of the harshest experiences that would transform any Lucius into a man in the short span of time he spends away from home. The difference between the two characters is that Lucius has a reference for his experience outside and before him, in the form of the values and accepted modes of conduct of his family and community (whose roots are elsewhere), while Huck is his own and only reference and is constantly resisting the demands on him to conform to any forms outside his own experience (only occasionally and temporarily would he conform because it is expedient or for the sake of survival). Lucius recaptures the past but in the act of recall the past is obviously reshaped in order to properly contain the present; Huck transcribes the present, not that he is keeping a journal and recording every moment as it is passing, but by describing his own and Jim's efforts to live completely in the here and now on the raft and how that is made difficult by their need to move away from dangers and reach a safe haven. The progress of the two boys through experience yields two diametrically opposed versions of America. While Twain depicts the true American experience as a fluid experience located forever in the here and now (the timeless present of the primeval river and forest), in the practical and the concrete and in the native (the pristine experience of America: its superstitions, legends and folklores: precious if seemingly primitive) that Huck and Jim would live on the raft until they are periodically encroached upon and imperilled by defunct and deadly experiences from the land grotesquely playacting Europe and its past; Faulkner places true America in a past dominated and shaped by Europe, more of a concept than a reality.

It would not be an oversimplification or claiming too much to assert that Twain's is the more original and more complex vision and perhaps it is the originality of his vision that makes Huck seem occasionally unbelievably above his age. From the beginning Huck creates a distance between him and the boy's world of *The Adventure of Tom Sawyer* by the critical summary and assessment of that book and its world. More importantly, Huck brings in from the beginning a key motif in his narrative and that is: the book. Throughout his account the book features as the tool or the device to control experience and gain knowledge: "You don't know about me unless you have read a book by the name of 'The Adventure of Tom Sawyer,' but that it ain't no matter" (*Huck Finn*, p. 13). The "you" here is the reader who is used to get his knowledge from books rather than directly from experience. In the book motion is arrested so that experience is preserved in order to be contemplated and comprehended. It is for this person who is used to get his knowledge from books that Huck is compelled to write a book to present and vindicate what he stands for and finally demonstrate its validity against what this reader has been given as the truth in books imported from outside America and that have curiously come to shape its present and future. The sense of a compulsion is clear at the beginning of the narrative: "but that ain't no matter," and at its end when Huck announces the completion of the book he has been writing: "...and so there ain't nothing more to write about, and I am rotten glad of it, because if I knowed what a trouble it was to make a book I wouldn't a tackled it and ain't going to no more" (*Huck Finn*, p. 295-296).

Like Hawthorne (in "The Custom House"), Melville (Chapter 32 of *Moby Dick* "Cetology"), Emerson (*The American Scholar*) and Thoreau (Chapter 3 of *Walden* "Reading"), who recognize the mediation of experience by the book and accept, maintain or reject that mediation, Twain in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* recognizes and admits mediation but makes a qualified concession. Huck writes a book because he suffers in a world controlled by the book and he makes the painstaking effort in order to be free of that world and move to a world where there are no books, "the Territory" he lights out for "ahead of the rest" (*Huck Finn*, p. 296). *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is a book that discredits books and negates the idea of the book

The pattern of Huck's experience is clear from the beginning. Huck attempts to live in his way and in a manner unrelated to the community where he lives and is always opposed by the community which attempts to coerce him back within its bounds and norms or it at least makes him settle temporarily and tactically in what others have set for him.

The success of his venture in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* leads to a recognition by the community, a recognition which amounts to an incarceration within its ideological bounds exemplified by the Widow Douglas's efforts to

“civilize” him. Unable to stand this “rough living” he moves back into the street idyll of American naturalness “I got into my old rags, and my sugarhead again, and was free and satisfied” (*Huck Finn*, p. 13) The inadequacy of this state becomes clear (it is stagnant) when he is easily persuaded by Tom Sawyer to move back with the Widow for a promise of an expansive world of play which will liberate him from all restrictions. The return to the Widow’s world provides an opportunity not just to see the deadness of the life of the dominant middle class in America but to discover that America is a travesty and a dim reflection of Europe, the idea that seizes the whole book and prompts its main action. In the widow “learning” Huck about Moses and the Bulrushers (and very likely comparing herself and what she does with Huck to the Pharaoh’s daughter and her discovery and adoption of the baby Moses (*Exodus* 2.1—10) and in her and her sister’s instruction of Huck in religion and manners and in Tom Sawyer’s playing games in imitation of adventures recounted in European books, the sense of travesty and burlesque is often oppressive.

Huck moves between worlds that he comes to realize, experientially, are unreal, lifeless or even deadly. The movement from the widow’s world to Tom Sawyer’s and then to his father’s constitutes an initial discovery and in miniature of what he will encounter in a large scale when he flees into a wider world. But before he moves out of those constricting beginnings, Huck reveals his own perspective on experience. He lives in and upholds the present completely and in such a way that the past (legacy, tradition) has no place in or relevance to his life:

After supper she got her book and learned me about Moses and the Bulrushers; and I was in sweat to find out about him; but by and by she let out that Moses had been dead a considerable long time; so I didn’t care no more about him; because I don’t take no stock in dead people. (*Huck Finn*, p. 14)

Instead Huck follows the precepts of his own native (of that time and place) experience which are largely folk beliefs and superstition, and primitive and illiterate though they may seem, they have the value of being rooted in the actual experience of that place and time :

...and I heard an owl way off who-whooping about something that was dead, and a whippoorwill and a dog crying about somebody that was going to die.....Pretty soon a spider went crawling up my shoulder and I flipped it off and it lit in the candle; and before I could budge it shrivelled up. I didn’t need anybody to tell me that that was an awful bad sign and would fetch me some bad luck, so I was scared and most shook the clothes off me (*Huck Finn*, p. 15).

This is of course the way Jim views the world and reads experience and moreover he can sometimes demonstrate the validity of this perspective. Connected to this stance of Huck is his adherence and affirmation of the concrete

and the practical in experience. Because of this Huck often seems to be too literal and without imagination in his regard of many things he comes across. When Miss Watson tells him he can get what he wants by praying he tries it to get a hook for his fish line,; and when Tom Sawyer tells him he can call up a genie to build a palace for him by rubbing an old tin lamp or a ring Huck actually tries that too. In all cases Huck goes to the woods, performs his experiments, does his thinking about others' assumptions and reaches conclusions that refute what he is told. Huck's search for the practical aspects of experience and his insistence on concrete evidence to bring out the validity of what he is told, which makes him seem foolish (..she said I was a fool) and stupid (you don't seem to know anything somehow—a perfect sap-head) reveal an immediate and direct relationship to experience which the Widow, Miss Watson and Tom Sawyer do not have. The way Huck responds to the world and the perspective that come out of this response have their basis on what I would call the native experience: the actual and concrete, the here and now of America—represented by Huck and even better by Jim; an experience Tom and the women and the host of characters Huck encounters throughout the book have alienated themselves from. Tom and the women, and as we shall see all the rest of the characters, relate to the world through the book. What the books tell them they do ("I have seen it in books; and so that is what we've got to do." "Don't I tell you it is in the books ..."Why can't a body take a club.....Because it ain't in the books so—that's why" (*Huck Finn*, p. 21-22). The world Huck moves in is mid-nineteenth century pre-civil war America whose mind and heart, in Twain's view, were dominated and controlled by the European book: the Bible and the literary work, and more by the literature than the religion of Europe. The outcome of this dominance and control is the emptiness and pervasive boredom in the Widow's house that makes Huck wish he were dead and the grotesque comedy of Tom Sawyer's quixotic mimicries that demand of him to efface and robotize himself. References to death and the hereafter in Tom's play and the Widow's and her sister's grim instruction show the life killing essence of this world hidden beneath its innocuous features. When Huck is about to succumb to this state he is thrown back to a condition of life that predates this society and that is obviously deadly and self-destructive exemplified by his father ("A body would a thought he was Adam..." *Huck Finn*, p. 39). The appearance of Huck's father seems to bring out a logic of experience which makes clear that Huck who now comes out as the representative of the native experience cannot settle down in and identify himself with any one of the established social or cultural experiences : his father jeering at him expresses this idea comically ("Starchy clothes—very. You think you're a big bug, *don't* you?" (*Huck Finn*, p. 31). As would be expected Huck's father destroys his books and forbids him to go to school and thus bars him

completely from the worlds of the Widow and Tom Sawyer. But again when Huck attempts to settle in his father's world, his father's destructiveness comes out in an accentuated manner that forces him to flee this world too. The Widow's, Tom Sawyer's and Huck's father's experiences delineate between them the actual America of the time, a world that has become lifeless because on the one hand it is stifled by impulses foreign to it and on the other because it has stifled its own living impulses and sources of energy. The chain of events in the first seven chapters make clear that in order for Huck to truly live and be completely himself he must die to this world. His "death" in the shape of a flight from this world is therefore inevitable. The flight is the flight of the native American from an America that has gone against itself and therefore that flight must include a black man. Moving out of the Widow's, Tom Sawyer's and his father's worlds, Huck joins Jim who combines in a positive way the roles of the characters Huck flies from; he is at once a twin figure and a father figure. Jim brings out more clearly the sinister aspects of the world they are fleeing from. He is fleeing from a bondage worse than Huck's. Not only is he dehumanized by slavery but he is also starkly treated as a commodity when his owner, Miss Watson, plans to sell him down the river and separate him from his family. Again, more than Huck, he presents and lives the native experience completely and in its purity. He responds directly and immediately to life (he always expresses his mind and is passionate and compassionate), believes in his native resources (superstition and native lore, and simple reasoning where inference is made directly from appearance as in his discussion of the story of King Solomon and the two women and the baby and his comic reasoning about why a Frenchman does not speak like a man) and unhesitatingly uses them. His color indicates that he carries the burden of experience (black is the condensation of colors and in Jim all natural human impulses are present unrefined) and as a slave he bears the burden of history. Jim represents the native experience in its pristineness: present, earthly and not socially and religiously transcended. As a father figure he is adequate, complex and challenging: the adequacy is in guiding and instructing Huck not only on native lore but more importantly on the appreciation of the basic humanity and the otherness of another regardless of what he socially and historically is: "It was fifteen minutes before I could work myself up to go and humble myself to a nigger—but I done it, and I warn't sorry for it afterwards, neither" (Huck Finn, p. 95); the complexity and challenge is in his historical and social identity (his Negritude and slavery) exposing and challenging Huck's conscience (the one aspect of the society Huck is fleeing that he is still carrying with him) and leading to Huck's crisis of conscience that finally liberates him of that he is fleeing from.

Huck and Jim must be in continuous flight. That Jim is freed at the end of the book and that he can go back to his family is no guarantee of total freedom. The flight and a few periods of peaceful living on the raft are all the freedom and true living they have. The raft is a refuge and a haven. On it Huck and Jim live the simplest physical, perceptual, emotional, and intellectual experiences; there is a sense that where they are, there is no need to stretch the features of man beyond the here and now, to be other than what they are and to respond to anything other than that which is immediate and practical: "...there weren't no home like a raft after all. Other places do seem so cramped up and smothery, but a raft don't" (Huck Finn, p. 134). "Huck and Jim on the raft", as Lionel Trilling remarks, "do indeed make a community of saints...because they do not have an ounce of pride between them" (Inge, 1984, p. 87) However their stance on the raft is untenable because the world outside the raft has a different version of reality that apparently emphasizes transcending the physical and the present in pursuit of a life beyond and above them but it pursues in reality worldly forms that distort and disfigure man's humanity, images of which fills the book. That world constantly remind them that their state cannot be maintained and they have to have a connection with it. Huck and Jim (mostly Huck) are made to go to the shore or right in the middle of towns where Huck discovers that this world is essentially Tom Sawyer's world of play assuming elaborate and sinister proportions when the boy's play is taken up by adults and made into a way of life. Huck shows the people he encounters as perpetually playacting; either role playing, mimicking, pretending or even, as in the case of the king and the duke, playing on a stage. Bruce Michelson suggests that we look at *Huckleberry Finn* as a novel...about people who play games, who make games out of everything, including matters of moral consequence—and who run into trouble because they do so. Nearly everyone in Huck's and Jim's world (including Huck some of the time) takes play beyond the boundaries of childhood, safety and common sense; the world of the novel is always at play in the wrong place and the wrong time (Inge, 1984, p. 211-212).

Play is at the heart of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* as it is at the heart of Augustus Baldwin Longstreet's *Georgia Scenes*. But while the play in Longstreet's book is simple play in which the players play the standard games of their society according to the rules and conventions of that society and in order to express and uphold its values and exemplary character, in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* play is a complicated activity that may destroy both individual and society. However, it is not just people playing games and making games of everything and taking "play beyond the boundaries of childhood, safety and commons sense," as Michelson suggests. The play in *The Adventures of Huckleberry* is almost always a re-enactment of scenes, dramas and whole chronicles recounted

in European books: Walter Scott's and Alexander Dumas's romances, Shakespeare's plays, and almost every literary work that America read at that time. This sense of play cannot be missed. It is glaringly clear in the major episodes of the book: the band of robbers who are about to kill their accomplice are aboard a wrecked steamboat called *The Walter Scott*, the Grangerford and Shepherdson's feud almost follows the outline of *Romeo and Juliet* and the Wilks episode brings to mind various European romances. Not that the actions in those episodes are not real but that their reference is outside and away from their world. As Huck and Jim watch the king and the duke play their antics, Huck speaks comically of the European book that may be the source of the con men's play. As he tells Jim of Henry VIII, he confuses *The Doomsday Book* with *The Arabian Nights* and brings together persons, incidents and centuries that have no connection with Henry VIII. But the connections that Huck makes in ignorance are telling especially when he says:

And he made every one of them tell him a tale every night; and he kept that up till he had hogged a thousand and one tales that way, and then he put them all in a book, and called it *Doomsday Book*-which was a good name and stated the case (*Huck Finn*, p. 168).

In the major episodes the lethal aspects and consequences of play are glaringly present. This constitutes a drastic change from the therapeutic and cathartic effects of play in the America of the early nineteenth century as described by Longstreet in *Georgia Scenes* (1835). Ahmed Nimeiri remarks:

Longstreet suggests in (*Georgia Scenes*) that play is an effective way to end the Southern gentleman's alienation and bring him close to the positive aspects of Southern life located in what remained of the rural society of the Old South (Nimeiri, 2001, p. 48).

Some of the most alienated Southern gentlemen and ordinary men in nineteenth century American literature are those that play and at play all time in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. I would suggest that the drastic change in the depiction of the effects of play that we find in Twain may be attributed to his sense that play became a response to foreign experiences mediated and distorted by the book. It is very likely because play has become this kind of response in America that even when it is not mediated by the book, even when it is engaged in by people who have no use for the book in their life, it continues to be an absurd activity with destructive effects on the individual and society. This idea is brought out clearly in the Bricksville episode, the episode which comes before the climactic Wilkes episode. The episode sums up the effects of play and brings together all its strands: the king and the duke playact, in a grotesquely comic manner, scenes from Shakespeare's plays; a circus brings a form of play where human skill is stretched to the limit and ends with a scene of bitter

comedy; and the townspeople entertain themselves in weird ways that end with Colonel Sherburn killing the town drunk Boggs. Bricksville is the only place where folk play is depicted as not affected by or responding to an experience outside its sphere, where it is not mediated by the book, but strangely enough it is the opposite in form and effect to the kind of play Longstreet presents in *Georgia Scenes*. Play in this place is mockery, voyeurism, sadism and cruelty to others especially children and animals. The “tragedy” of the “Royal Nonesuch” performed in a comic but terribly dehumanizing manner by the king in a show in which the townspeople are enraged not morally but because they feel “sold” for not getting enough show for what they have paid for, comes as an apt conclusion to this part and shows unequivocally that play is damned in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. And therefore in the climactic Wilks episode that follows Huck has seen enough of the negative aspects of play and moves from an observer of play or an actor that uses play to survive to one that uses it to help others. This change in Huck must be appreciated in order to understand properly the controversial conclusion of the book, the fate of Huck and what the book ultimately expresses.

If Huck is to finish the book he is writing, which is mainly about games and the play Europe brought into the American scene, he must bring in Tom Sawyer to play those games on a grand scale. From the start Huck has been using tricks, deceptions, and disguises and assuming characters to get out of tight situations. The world he moves in will be readily amenable to Tom Sawyer and Huck therefore often plays the Tom Sawyer kind of play, and in the resolution of the story he is made to assume and accepts Tom Sawyer’s identity. In that role he easily becomes Tom Sawyer’s submissive and helpless accomplice and allows him to direct the action and to play his games on a situation that requires the greatest seriousness and compassion. That is, the role that Huck assumes removes from this scene the compassionate Huck who has taken risks to help the Wilks’s orphan girls and who has felt pity even for the king and duke when they are tarred and feathered. In the end when it is revealed that Jim had been set free by Miss Watson before her death and that Tom has known this all along and that his play has been for the sake of play, the sense of the absurdity of Tom’s play and of this part of the book is pervasive and intense. The ending of the book exposes extreme absurdity of the European book (and the thought and culture that it stands for) when it is used to deal with a real American predicament – Jim’s slavery-and and the absurdity intensifies with every ploy Tom suggests to use to free Jim and insists on in order to follow the books. It becomes clear that Huck joins Tom’s play and colludes in bringing this ending in order to expose the absurdity of play mediated by the European literary book, and European solutions for American dilemmas and predicaments, and generally the absurdity

and deadliness of arresting experience in a book, a medium, a form or a system. Once the play in this part is done and its point is made Huck will be free, at least emotionally and intellectually, from the fetters of the world he has been fleeing from and can “light out for the Territory ahead of the rest”.

If the last part book does not make sense to many critics and readers-if it seems disappointingly anti-climactic, childish bathetic-it is because what Huck / Twain is doing here (exposing the absurdity of the action of Europe, its play, its book, on America) is missed.

Curiously the book achieves by its baffling ending what it has set out to achieve: to be disappointing to the readers of well-plotted (European) novels and to those who subscribe to Forester’s notion of plot. Leo Marx states that “the flimsy devices of plot, the discordant farcical tone, and the disintegration of the major characters all betray the failure of the ending” (Inge, 1984, p. 119). It may seem critically preposterous to claim that the failure of the ending is an intentional act and part of the purpose of the book. But Twain warns from the beginning that “Persons attempting to find a motive in the narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot”, a warning that apparently no critic and reader took seriously. But if the warning were taken seriously the book would make sense and we would see that Huck has written a book that put him on the threshold of an experience without plot or structure where he may have freedom and a real life.

It is precisely the experience without structure and that has no reference or authority outside itself that Faulkner criticizes and discredits in *The Reivers: A Reminiscence*. His revision of Twain is mainly in his effort to refute the main idea of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. But Faulkner also provides details of action and aspects of lived experience and history to support claims of a contrary stance to Twain’s in his famous novel.

Faulkner did not know that *The Reivers* was going to be his last novel. Yet the novel has about it a valedictory aura and a sense of being a coda to a life-work. The situation of the grandfather reminiscing to his grandchildren and in the course of this imparting to them the values he and his ancestors have lived by is a situation which signals the passing of the old and the emergence of the new which is shaped and conditioned by it in order to take its place. It is as if Faulkner were handing a legacy to the grandchildren to whom the book is dedicated and thus discharging a duty before he leaves. The book enhances this quality. It begins by recapitulating Faulkner’s past work and ends with a conscious moral. The sense of a conclusion and coda to Faulkner’s work is inescapable. The situation of the grandfather reminiscing to his grandchildren also directly or indirectly responds to the dismissal of the purport of this kind of

situation in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (as when the Widow reads to Huck from the Bible and instructs him in religion to which he responds by “so I didn’t care no more about him[Moses]; because I don’t take no stock in dead people) and generally to the discrediting and rejection of the book mediating experience.

The situation of the grandfather recreating the past for his grandchildren is a metaphor that expresses a central preoccupation of Faulkner’s work: that of the connection, the tension, and the reconciliation of the past and the present. The idea becomes clear in the encounter between Boss Priest and Lucius at the end of the book. In the first two chapters of the novel, the reality of the past is emphasized. Faulkner gives every person and everything a significant history and uses an involute prose where interlinked phrases and clauses emphasize the continuity of everything in time. Lucius, Boon and Ned move on a landscape peopled with the ghosts of the past. Almost the whole past of Yoknapatawpha comes alive during the trip. But the present is even more real and it takes the form of free unhampered and often foolish and senseless motion. The novel opens with this sense of the present. Boon dashes into Maurys Priest’s office and attempts to take his gun. Failing in this he takes John Powell’s gun, rushes to the square and shoots five times at Ludus and misses him. Apparently this scene is unrelated to the novel but it is deliberately placed at its beginning to give a sense of the present as senseless motion that leads to disastrous results. The rest of the novel expands this idea and illustrates it on a large scale. The pleasure trip to Memphis in Boss Priest’s car and he horse race express the idea of unhampered motion (in spite of the obstacles that meet both the car and the horse, such as the horse’s unwillingness to run) which is pleasurable but ultimately absurd and senseless because of its lack of purpose or connection with a meaningful scheme. The same idea is expressed by the brothel and the easy pleasure it offers. The absurdity of these activities are brought out occasionally by such things as the mud farmer who charges three times as much as he used to charge for pulling the car out of the mud, Ned making Lightning run by giving it sardines and Otis’s stealing of Minnie’s gold tooth. There is a sense of the present threatening to become too fluid, chaotic and unmanageable, if not checked and controlled. The novel expresses the necessity of control and discipline if life is to become liveable and suggests specific kinds of control in the form of marriage and respectability. Lucius’s pricking conscience and the code of the gentleman that he finally opts to live by after his encounter with his grandfather are expressions of the ethics of responsibility, respectability and middle class values that Faulkner prescribes in the novel for a life threatened by chaos. Corrie’s reformation and Boon’s marriage to her express the same idea. *The Reivers* is distinguished from Faulkner’s other novels by its prescription for a remedy to the chaos of

experience. Although Faulkner's characters in the fiction after 1950, sometimes moralize and are sententious, they affirm certain values or "verities" as viable but they do not directly prescribe. I do not mean that Faulkner in *The Reivers* speaks directly and suggests explicitly what he thinks will deliver Southerners and Americans from the predicaments he has been depicting them as going through. I mean he shows that the characters' behaviour constitutes a prescription. Boss Priest, of course, speaks out what a gentleman should be and do. But Lucius also prescribes marriage to Corrie and Boon by his idealization of Corrie and his pressure on both of them to conform to his code of conduct.

It may be strange to speak of Lucius as prescribing to and directing others when he is being initiated into experience. Lucius's initiation, however, is a special kind of initiation, different from that of Bayard Sartoris, in *The Unvanquished*, Ike McCaslin, in *Go Down, Moses*, and Chick Mallison in *Intruder in the Dust*. While these characters are innocent when they come to experience and gradually discover the realities of the world they come in contact with and are shaken out of innocence into maturity, Lucius comes to experience with innocence but also with values and codes. When Otis tells him about the peephole he does not understand (Otis says to him, "You don't know much, do you?") but when Otis explains what it is and what he has done he attacks him fiercely:

I was hitting, clawing, kicking not at one wizened ten-year-old boy, but at Otis and the procuress both ...[and] not just those two but all who had participated in her debasement... (*Novels*, p. 852).

Boon's misunderstanding of what Lucius has done and his mistaking it for the typical conduct of a boy his age in a place like that ("Lucius got to know the name of where he's at to brag about where he's been" (*Novels*, p. 852) only emphasizes the difference between Lucius and the innocent characters, both the Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn kind of character. And Corrie's reformation, familiar and pedestrian though it may seem, makes the same point more strongly. Lucius is not changed by experience but he, we are to believe, changes it. Lucius is innocent only in the sense that he does not have enough information about the world he comes into, but he recognizes the nature of that and is able to live with it. Occasionally he is shaken by the new experience and feels that it is too much for him. But this is because the experience comes abruptly and he is unprepared for it. Later he explains to his grandchildren: "Because you should be prepared for experience, knowledge, knowing; not bludgeoned unaware in the dark as by a highwayman or footpad" (*Novels*, p. 850). Throughout his progress in the new experience he regards it as amoral, devoid of that which is right and good and designating it as non-virtue. His initiation finally leads only to a confirmation of the values he has temporarily suspended. He "falls"--he tells his grandfather that

he has lied and before this he speaks of being involved in deceptions and tricks--only to gain awareness of the validity and viability of what he has been taught to live and revere. At the end of his experience, when he comes back home, he realizes that he has changed but Jefferson "has not changed" (*Novels*, p. 967). This realization comes to have a different meaning after his encounter with his grandfather: what have not changed (and do not change) are the values and codes of his grandfather and society.

Codes and manners in this novel replace the "eternal verities" of the novels of the period after the Nobel Prize. But this should be understood properly. It is not an attenuation in moral or literary substance but it is a deliberate stance. *The Reivers*, in a sense, expresses Faulkner's relationship to his audience at the end of his career. The image of the grandfather telling stories to his grandchildren and in the course of this instructing them into the proper values and conduct, sums up Faulkner's sense of this relationship. If the grandfatherly stance is an awkward stance, it is also appropriate in relating to an audience ready to listen and to be influenced. Faulkner, in effect, is redefining his role as an artist. He is not content to delineate experience and reveal its depths, as he has done in the works of the prolific period (1929-1936), but he is impelled to subordinate experience to certain concepts and values and present it in such a way as to reflect thought and feeling that exist prior to it. [7]

The Reivers has a simple narrative structure, perhaps the simplest and most conventional narrative structure in all Faulkner's novels. Reminiscing about events that occurred fifty-sixty years before and telling the story to his grandchildren, Lucius Priest presents his tale carefully. He has complete control over his material, and its effects are calculated in advance. The story does not grow naturally and develop its own logic but it is ordered by Lucius who imposes on it the simple logic he deems suitable for his special audience. Between the initial folly of Boon Hogganbeck and his rise to responsibility, at the conclusion of the book, there is no logical progression. Yet this ordering of the material of the novel may be seen as the simplest and strictest kind of plot--the extremest form of the literary device Twain warns against and the kind of experience that Huck would regard as the most oppressive and most life killing. While Huck is compelled to flee, Lucius chooses to go out of his normal sphere. Therefore Lucius has a control over his experience that Huck never has and instead is continuously encroached upon by that experience. In artistic terms, Faulkner controls the material of work and directs it along definite ideological lines, whereas Twain explores and discovers.

One aspect of authorial control is the deliberate mellowing of experience. Boon's shooting at Ludus is a comic act; the brothel becomes almost the boarding house Boon euphemistically calls it, where people start to behave decently and

correctly; and the villainy of Butch Lovemaiden and Otis is diluted by their comic behaviour or their presence in comic contexts. The mellowing of experience and the partial presentation of it make prescription possible.

What Faulkner prescribes needs to be examined carefully. So much has been written about the code of the gentleman as essential to the meaning of the book, and the novel has been described as a latter-day courtesy or conduct book [8]. But even if these characterizations are acceptable, they are still vague. Faulkner is specific about the legacy the grandfather is handing to his grandchildren and which constitutes the essence of his prescription. Lucius Priest refers to it parenthetically (this is only to indicate that it should be well known) when he explains that the source of his regret that Otis, whom he is fighting, is not his size, is his “ancient playing-fields-of Eton avatar” (*Novels*, 852). Lucius, in effect, is defining his legacy as being British, conservative, and highbrow-as something older and superior to the America he and his grandfather before him have lived in. This definition is also implicit in the code of the gentleman, originally Elizabethan, to which Lucius and his ancestors subscribe. Faulkner expresses a similar idea about his sense of the legacy he is handing to his grandchildren in the title of the novel. Deliberately choosing a word for the title which is obsolete [9], he emphasizes its association with the Old World rather than America by preferring the Old Scottish spelling of the word (reiver) to the American (reaver).

In *The Reivers: A Reminiscence*, therefore, Faulkner attempts to correct the American experience (with its chaos of lies, thefts, brothels, gambling, extortions) by imposing on it the pattern of an older and, supposedly, superior experience it presumably derived and deviated from. This means that Faulkner, in *The Reivers*, locates reality-that which is meaningful and significant-in the past and outside America. It becomes clear that *The Reivers: A Reminiscence* affirms a version of reality, a view of the true American experience and a general concept of experience quite antithetical to that affirmed in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. We speak of Faulkner revising Twain because he uses the tools that Twain has used: a boy narrator, a similar story line, and some similar characters, to negate the vision that Twain expresses in his novel.

In what it expresses and in its revision of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *The Reivers: A Reminiscence* provides an important clue to the understanding of Faulkner’s vision. Faulkner emerges clearly as a modernist who retreats from the horrors and nightmares of the modern world into a neat world of well-trying, albeit simple, patterns and structures of living.

Notes

[1] Most of the early reviewers of the book regarded it as a minor work. Granville Hicks, for example, remarked in his review of the book in *The Saturday Review* of June 2, 1962, that *The Reivers* “isn’t a major Faulkner novel, nor I should say, was meant to be one.” The same idea was expressed by some of the major early critics of Faulkner, such as Irving Howe, Frederick J. Hoffman and Michael Millgate. Later critics mostly noted the simplicity of the novel, that it struck a different note, that it moved away from the themes of the disintegration of Southern life and the fragmentation of the human psyche of the works of the prolific period (1929-1936) and that it expressed the positive sense of affirmation and faith in his last works in a comic manner. Ann Goodwyn Jones, for example, notes that the novel the received little critical attention and not much readers’ interest and surmises it may be because of “the novel’s apparent simplicity.’ And that “Its narrative moves in straight chronological line. Its tone is forgiving, humorous, kind, even satirical. Its characters live in a world in which people from all classes, sexes, genders, and races know and accept one another” (Moreland, p. 55).

[2] Views of the novel as similar in one way or another to *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* abound. From the first reviews (e.g George Plimpton in the first major review of the book in the *New York Herald Tribune*, May 27, 1962, describes the novel as “a boy’s adventure story” like *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *Treasure Island* and *The Rover Boys*.) to recent discussions of the novel, the relation between the two books is at least similarity in story. William Rosky points out similarities between *The Reivers* and *Huckleberry Finn*: the boy narrator, fear of capture, the desire to be free of time and society and others; and that these parallels indicate an influence, a spiritual affinity, a common tradition that connect Faulkner and Twain; and ultimately that Twain is Faulkner’s spiritual grandfather (Rosky, p. 373-387). The idea of opposition or even difference in any degree is not detected in any of the discussions of the two novels.

[3] There is a suggestion that Faulkner may have had the idea since the early 1930s. See Carothers, 97n.

[4] William Faulkner, *Novels 1977-1962, The Town, The Mansion, The Reivers*, edited by Joseph Blotner & Noel Polk, p. 724. All citations from *The Reivers* are from this edition. Page numbers will be placed hereinafter parenthetically on the text after *Novels*.

[5] Blotner rightly observes in his two-volume biography of Faulkner that the dedication “reinforces the grandfatherly tone of the book” (Blotner, *Biography*, 1811).

[6] Mark Twain, *The Adventure of Huckleberry Finn*. Edited by Thomas Cooley. A Norton Critical Edition. P. 4. All citations are from this edition. Page numbers will be placed hereinafter parenthetically on the text after *Huck Finn*.

[7] Irving Howe expresses a more critical opinion of this stance. He remarks, "During the last ten or fifteen years of his career, Faulkner came to be surrounded by an aura of solemn adulation that did neither his work nor himself much good. A false impression grew up that his books are neatly planned segments in a mosaic of symbolism and morality, rather than acts of creative passion and, sometimes, disorder. Faulkner himself, in some of his later novels, became quite ponderous, as if overwhelmed by the thought of his own wisdom (Howe, p. 295).

[8] A number of critics in the 1960s and 1970s expressed the idea: for example Cleanth Brooks. *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha County* (1966); Panthea Reid Broughton. *William Faulkner: The Actual and the Abstract* (1974); E. M. Bradford. "What Grandfather Said: The Social Testimony of William Faulkner's *The Reivers*." *The Occasional Review* (1973).

[9] Faulkner explained the meaning of the title in an interview with Simon Claxton, on March 23, 1962, as "an old Highland name for a robber". (Meriwether and Millgate, *Lion in the Garden*, p. 279).

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