



# **RILALE**

**REVUE  
INTERNATIONALE  
DE LINGUISTIQUE  
APPLIQUÉE, DE  
LITTERATURE ET  
D'ÉDUCATION**

**Volume 1, Numéro 1, décembre 2018**

**ISSN 1840 - 9318**

**[www.rilale-uac.org](http://www.rilale-uac.org)**



**FACULTE DES LETTRES,  
LANGUES, ARTS ET  
COMMUNICATION**



**UNIVERSITE  
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REVUE INTERNATIONALE DE LINGUISTIQUE APPLIQUEE, DE  
LITTÉRATURE et D'ÉDUCATION

(Revue en ligne, imprimée, abstractée, indexée, et à comité de lecture)

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# RILALE

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Créée en 2018, la *Revue Internationale de Linguistique Appliquée, de Littérature et d'Éducation (RILALE)* vient combler un vide. Elle se donne pour vocation de servir la communauté scientifique à travers sa plateforme privilégiée de publication, de discussion scientifique et de mise en valeur des résultats de recherche. Elle aborde les différentes questions de recherche dans une perspective large, ouverte à des approches diversifiées et à plusieurs disciplines de référence comme la linguistique appliquée, la sociolinguistique, les littératures et civilisations, les sciences de l'éducation, etc.

La RILALE entend opérer selon les normes internationales de présentation des périodiques scientifiques afin d'élever le niveau du débat scientifique. A cet effet, chaque livraison de publication offrira aux lecteurs et aux potentiels auteurs, outre les objectifs poursuivis et la ligne éditoriale, les moyens mis en œuvre pour l'atteinte de ses objectifs. Pour faciliter l'accès à ses contributeurs, la RILALE explicite les conditions de soumission des manuscrits qui s'articulent autour des modalités de traitement, des délais d'acceptation, des conditions de publication des manuscrits, etc.

Enfin, la rubrique des notes critiques fournit aux lecteurs des informations et des réflexions sur les principaux ouvrages récemment parus. Bref, la RILALE, votre nouveau-né, se propose de vous amener sur les océans des débats de haut niveau aux sons et rythmes endiablés de l'éditeur, mais agrémentés par vos diverses contributions. A présent, que la RILALE nous batte son tam-tam !!!

Professeur Léonard A. KOUSSOUHON

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## SUPERSTITION AS SEEN THROUGH MARK TWAIN'S *THE ADVENTURES OF TOM SAWYER* (1876)

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### Abstract

Mark Twain is the pen-name of Samuel Langhorne Clemens who was born in Florida, Missouri, in 1835, and grew up in nearby Hannibal, a small Mississippi River town. Hannibal would become the model for St. Petersburg, the fictionalized setting of his two most popular novels, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884). In St. Petersburg, life is ruled by some superstitious beliefs and traditions people respect. Twain's main characters (Tom, Huck) are taken to carry out activities likely to make them visit the churchyard at midnight, Jackson's Island, the haunted house in search of treasure, etc. These uncommon places in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* have offered the opportunities for Tom, Huck and other characters to explore the very world of superstition. The objective of this paper is to investigate how Twain has dealt with the concept of superstition in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* in order to understand how people lived in early nineteenth century in America. The results are amazing because St. Petersburg's people are very superstitious and all aspects of their life carry some features of superstition. Tom and Huck have taken the readers to the world of witches, ghosts, charms, and other beliefs people accept simply because they do not have any scientific clarification of them. Twain is criticizing these blind beliefs in the novel because he has made Tom and Huck discover the truth many times. In places where they are supposed to meet ghosts, they meet people they know and the miracles or misfortunes they are expecting never appear.

**Key words:** Superstition, belief, witches, ghosts, America.

### Résumé

Mark Twain est né en 1835 en tant que Samuel Langhorne Clemens en Floride (Missouri) et a grandi à Hannibal, une petite ville du Mississippi. Hannibal deviendra le modèle mais nommé St. Petersburg, le décor fictionnel de ses deux romans les plus populaires, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884). À St. Petersburg, la vie est régie par certaines croyances superstitieuses et certaines traditions respectées par les habitants. Les personnages principaux de Twain (Tom, Huck) sont amenés à faire des activités susceptibles de les conduire à visiter le cimetière à minuit, Jackson's Island, la maison hantée à la recherche de trésor, etc. Tous ces lieux insolites dans *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* ont offert des opportunités à Tom, Huck et d'autres personnages pour explorer le monde même de la superstition. Mon objectif dans cet article est d'examiner comment Twain a traité le concept de superstition dans *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* afin de comprendre comment les gens vivaient au début du XIXe siècle en Amérique. Les résultats sont étonnants parce que les habitants de St. Petersburg sont très superstitieux et tous les aspects de leur vie portent des traits de superstition. Tom et Huck ont amené les lecteurs dans le monde des sorcières, des fantômes, des charmes et d'autres croyances que les gens acceptent simplement parce qu'ils n'ont aucune explication scientifique les concernant. Twain critique ces croyances aveugles dans le roman parce qu'il a fait découvrir la vérité à plusieurs reprises à Tom et

Huck. Dans les endroits où ils sont censés rencontrer des fantômes, ils rencontrent des personnes qu'ils connaissent et les miracles ou malheurs auxquels ils s'attendent n'apparaissent jamais.

**Mots clés:** superstition, croyance, sorcières, fantômes, Amérique.

## Introduction

Set in a fictional town on the Missouri bank of the Mississippi River, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* is, in many ways, a tribute to Clemens' own childhood in Hannibal. Episodes, characters, and settings from his own childhood -the cave, Injun Joe, Aunt Polly, the Cadets of Temperance has become important parts of Tom's story. During the writing process, he has focused specifically on Tom's boyhood. Within the framework of the novel, however, he manages to be critical of the small-town society he has grown up in. The story takes place in the fictional town of St. Petersburg known for its superstitions. Superstition which is the belief of supernatural forces is the consequence of the incapacity of men to understand some natural phenomena. For the primitive man, the sun, the storm, the breeze and the calm represent miracles. The thunder, the sudden attack of mysterious illness, the earthquake, etc. are evil spirits and powers to be propitiated. Being contagious, superstition quickly spread everywhere. When someone fears and suspects a phenomenon, his neighbors fear and suspect it too. With the daily childish activities of Tom and Huckleberry Finn, many aspects of the superstitions regulating life in St. Petersburg are revealed.

This paper is an attempt to explore the superstitious aspects of the fiction of Twain in the early nineteenth century. As a matter of fact, Tom and Huck are mischievous but clever teenagers who are involved in activities likely to make them refer to superstitions like all people living in their community. They have undertaken to cure warts with a dead cat; they go to the churchyard at midnight to meet spirits; they hide in the Island or visit the haunted house in search of treasure. The howling of a dog for them is a bad omen. All these episodes have taken them to refer to superstitious beliefs in order to achieve their goals. Mark Twain's literary technique is but to question these beliefs that can be handicaps for the evolution of society.

### 1. Superstitions and their origins

According to *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, superstition is defined as the belief that particular events happen in a way that cannot be explained by reason or science. It is also the belief that particular events bring good or bad luck. Many of our superstitious beliefs and practices began long, long ago and it is interesting to trace back through the years to find the origin of some of the common ones. The origin of most of them is, undoubtedly, to be found in man's effort to explain the phenomena of nature and in an attempt to appease an angry deity and to invite a better fortune.

From these sources come many of the absurd notions still practiced among primitive people and which have been handed down in modified form to us.

Man has ever found it difficult to understand the mysteries surrounding him on all sides and groping in the dark. He has tried by prayer, incantation, peculiar practices to force nature to do his bidding.

In his book entitled *The Customs of Mankind*, Eichler explains the causes and origins of superstition. According to him:

The first note in all superstitions is, of course, ignorance – an ignorance to which fear is closely allied. The true origin of superstition is to be found in primitive man's effort to the phenomena about him; his wish to avoid evils he could not understand; his desire to propitiate fate and invite fortune; his attempt to pry into the future. Being contagious, superstition quickly spread everywhere. What one man feared and suspected, his neighbor was bound to fear and suspect. (Eichler, 1924, pp.23-24)

Superstition, therefore, arises primarily from ignorance. Early man believed that every phenomenon of nature was the work of a spirit or devil. His intelligence could not suggest any other explanation. To this belief was added fear. The thunder, the lightning, the earthquake and darkness, all filled him with fearful dread. To him they were the workings of spiteful powers to be propitiated.

Where ignorance and fear are surrounded by danger they will always grope for a way of escape. Thus superstition is born. A belief in the existence of spirits antagonistic to man gave rise to most of the old superstitions.

In Egypt, Greece and Rome, superstition gave birth to mythology with its pagan rites and ceremonies. During the Dark and middle Ages when most people were illiterate, superstition flourished.

For Eichler, there are some interesting bits of history about some of our popular superstitions. According to him:

Some of the early superstitions, originally concerned with the evil eye and with customs for banishing or destroying its influence, have survived and are still observed. The survivals have taken the form of bad luck omens such as the black cat, the spilling of salt, the number thirteen, and so forth. And, of course, there are methods for overcoming the bad luck promised by these omens, as casting a pinch of the salt over the shoulder, or whispering a benediction after the Sneeze. (Eichler, 1924, p.640)

The fear of the unknown and dread of the evil eye led early man to avoid whatever seemed, to his superstitious mind, an omen of bad luck. He saw signs of warning in the simplest of evil and hence something to be shunned. The examples of the black cat and the number thirteen can help to understand how people form and perpetuate superstitions and myths.

The black cat is the traditional companion of witches. Because of this old tradition, the black cat is associated with omens such as misfortune and ill luck. According to Eichler (1924, p.642), 'there is an ancient superstition that spirits are able to assume the form of black animals, particularly black cats.' The black cat is even said to be a

witch in disguise and killing it does not even mean killing the witch because the witch can take on the body of a cat nine times. Today, the black cat is not feared as it was in earlier times, but there are many superstitious people who still regard it as an unlucky omen. Some other people spread this belief over all cats having nine lives. It is a matter of belief and as such it is difficult to convince believers about the lack of veracity related to some phenomena.

The second example concerns the number thirteen which is believed to be an unlucky number. For this reason, some hotels do not have a room number thirteen. But how and where has this belief come from? In fact, nobody could answer. Eichler has provided an explanation in the following words:

In Scandinavian mythology there are twelve Aesir or Demigods, and the old legend is that Loki came among them, making the thirteenth. This Loki was cruel and evil, according to the story, and among the Demigods he became the "the chief author of human misfortunes." Because he was evil, and because he was the thirteenth, the number thirteen came to be looked upon as an omen of ill luck.

Another explanation as to the origin of this superstition is that the Valkyrs, or Virgins, who waited upon the heroes in Valhalla were thirteen in number. Many writers believe that from this source sprang the common superstition concerning the bad luck of the number thirteen, especially in connection with guests at a table. (Eichler, 1924, p.641)

So many explanations are provided to explain the origins of this belief but nobody can tell the truth about it. It is even said that there were thirteen people at the Last Supper and Judas was represented as the thirteenth guest. He betrayed Jesus-Christ and he was arrested and crucified. So many other examples can be given, but without any irrefutable evidence. In short, superstition, as a belief, is transmitted through generations and is used to fill the gaps of ignorance. Natural phenomena human-being cannot explain are subject to superstition and some means to get protected against are imagined by initiated people who claim to know about them. For a long time and even today, some superstitious beliefs exist about the thunder, the tide, the sea, the rainbow, death, the moon, the sun, etc. The point to discuss in this paper is not actually superstition and its origins, but rather the use of superstition by Mark Twain in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*.

Set in a fictional town on the Missouri bank of the Mississippi River, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* has been, in many ways, the story of Clemens' own childhood in Hannibal. The preface of the novel mentions clearly that

'Most of the adventures recorded in this book really occurred; one or two were experiences of my own, the rest those of boys who were schoolmates of mine. Huck Finn is drawn from life; Tom Sawyer also, but not from an individual – he is a combination of the characteristics of three boys whom I knew, and therefore belongs to the composite order of architecture'. (Twain, 1876, p.xv)

So Twain has fictionalized his own life experiences forty-one years after his birth in 1835. It is a way to revisit his childhood through the lenses of an adult mind and maturity views. In fact, Twain's original plan for the book was to cover the span of Tom's life well into adulthood, when he would return to visit St. Petersburg as a

grown man, the same way Twain himself had done during a lecture-tour. During the writing process, however, he decided that Tom shouldn't grow up in the book, and focused specifically on Tom's boyhood. Within the framework of the novel, however, he managed to create a story that, while upbeat, managed to be critical of the small-town society he grew up in.

## 2. Cases of Superstition in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876)

Many of the characters in Mark Twain's stories—Huck Finn, Tom Sawyer, Ben Rogers, Aunt Polly...live in worlds they do not understand and are powerless to control. These characters often used superstitions and other creative logic to try to explain the unexplainable occurrences in their lives. This is the best way for them to live in St. Petersburg where beliefs in outer forces influence and determine the life of its dwellers.

### 2.1. Warts cure

Warts viewed with modern eyes are so simple to understand and heal. As a matter of fact, a wart is a small growth with a rough texture that can appear anywhere on the body. It can look like a solid blister or a small cauliflower. Warts are caused by viruses in the human papillomavirus (HPV) family. Treatments include salicylic acid, duct tape, cryotherapy, surgery, laser treatment, electro cauter, photodynamic therapy, chemical treatments, topical creams, cantharidin, and antigen shots. That is what modern science suggests nowadays. But at the time of Twain's childhood when modern science was at its primitive level, Tom and Huck could view the matter with a different lens.

Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn, two adolescent main characters have definite ideas on the best way to cure warts in St. Petersburg. Tom has proposed spunk-water (rain water in a rotten tree stump) whereas Huck's favorite prescription requires a dead cat. For that purpose, Huckleberry Finn has got a dead cat from Ben Rogers in exchange for a hoop stick in order to perform the ritual likely to cure warts. Huck has convinced Tom about the use of his cat in the following words:

'What's that you got?'  
'Dead cat.' .....

'Say — what is dead cats good for, Huck?'  
'Good for? Cure warts with.'  
'No! Is that so? I know something that's better.'  
'I bet you don't. What is it?'  
'Why, spunk-water.'  
'Spunk-water! I wouldn't give a dern for spunkwater.' (Twain, 1876, pp.50-51)

For Huck, spunk water is not appropriate to cure warts. Before it has the healing force, it requires some typically superstitious ceremonies. Huck explains the process:

'Aha! Talk about trying to cure warts with spunkwater such a blame fool way as that! Why, that ain't agoing to do any good. You got to go all by yourself, to the middle of the

woods, where you know there's a spunkwater stump, and just as it's midnight you back up against the stump and jam your hand in and say:  
'Barley-corn, barley-corn, injun-meal shorts,  
Spunk-water, spunk-water, swaller these warts,'  
and then walk away quick, eleven steps, with your eyes shut, and then turn around three times and walk home without speaking to anybody. Because if you speak the charm's busted.' (Twain, 1876, pp.51-52)

The incantations and the attitudes required are from superstitious beliefs because they have no scientific explanation and they cannot be understood by common people. Even the people performing the rites do not know how they come to them. It is simply a matter of belief. Huck's warts remedy has something impossible to understand. The process goes like this:

But say – how do you cure 'em with dead cats?  
'Why, you take your cat and go and get in the graveyard 'long about midnight when somebody that was wicked has been buried; and when it's midnight a devil will come, or maybe two or three, but you can't see 'em, you can only hear something like the wind, or maybe hear 'em talk; and when they're taking that feller away, you heave your cat after 'em and say, 'Devil follow corpse, cat follow devil, warts follow cat, I'm done with ye!'  
(Twain, 1876, pp.52-53)

How is it possible to provide scientific explanation for the above process described by Huck?

Mark Twain himself is unable to explain the phenomena he has described in his novel or he wants to raise the matter related to the origins of some beliefs. When Tom has tried to know the origins of this cure, Huck replies he has received the explanation from the old Mother Hopkins who is said to be a witch. In fact, people fear witches because they believe they have supernatural powers and are able to know what common people ignore. To know more about witches, I refer to the definition provided by Maxwell-Stuart. In *Witch Beliefs and Witch Trials in the Middle Ages*, P.G. Maxwell-Stuart has tried to associate the term witch with some Italian terms: 'Stregones and stregule are Italian terms derived from the Latin strix meaning 'night owl', often taken to be a bird of ill-omen, and associated with feeding upon young or small creatures. Hence, when it became one of the terms for 'witch', it implied shape-changing and attacks upon babies or infants, especially at night. (Maxwell-Stuart, 2011, 32) According to Lara Apps and Andrew Gow, 'the word 'witch' almost invariably denotes a female person, a woman or a girl. For example, the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines 'witch' in female terms, as 'a sorceress, esp. a woman supposed to have dealings with the Devil or evil spirits' (Apps and Gow, 2003, 8). So many other definitions exist but for this study, I stick to the idea that witches are believed to have supernatural forces likely to allow them to carry out some strange and maleficent actions only initiated people can explain. People refer to witches or witchcraft simply to stop investigating about certain deeds and events. It is simply a belief because Tom and Huck believe they are in the presence of devils even when they see people coming to the churchyard at midnight. They are afraid. According to them, 'It's the devils sure enough. Three of 'em! Lordy, Tom, we're

goners! Can you pray?' But they have come closer Huck and Tom come to recognize that 'They're *humans!*' (Twain, 1876, 76) Tom and Huck have heard Muff Potter's voice. They know him quite well and come to be convinced that he is not a ghost. Superstitions resist up to the very day people happen to find some scientific explanations for them. However, a hundred years after the American Declaration of Independence in 1776, Mark Twain has written about the common beliefs of his childhood through Tom and Huck. Twain is criticizing these blind beliefs because, at the graveyard, Tom and Huck hide in a clump of elms waiting for devils to appear. After a while, three figures approach the grave. The boys believe with a horrified delight that these are the devils, but they turn out to be three adults from the town carrying out a midnight mission of their own. Tom and Huck are surprised to discover the young Dr. Robinson accompanied by two local outcasts, the drunken Muff Potter and Injun Joe. The worst comes when Dr. Robinson orders the other two men to dig up Hoss Williams's corpse, presumably for use in medical experiments. After the job, the two boys have witnessed the murder of Doctor Robinson after a fight with Injun Joe. The desecration of the fresh grave of Hoss Williams, the fight and the murder of Dr. Robinson at the very place where ghosts and other spirits, are said to dwell show the deceptive aspects of superstitions.

## 2.2. The howling of dog

Tom and Huck have run away from the graveyard after the murder of Dr. Robinson. But instead of going straight home, they run to a deserted tannery and hide. They decide that if they tell what they have seen and Injun Joe escapes hanging, he will probably kill them. Consequently, they decide to swear in blood never to tell anyone what they saw. After taking the oath, they hear the howls of a stray dog, which they interpret as a sign that whomever the animal is howling at will die. Tom and Huck assume the dog's howls are for them, but when they go outside, they see that the dog is facing Muff Potter. Their reaction can explain their superstitious view about the phenomenon:

They turned and saw the strange dog standing within a few feet of where Potter was lying, and *facing* Potter, with his nose pointing heavenward.

'Oh, geeminy, it's *him!*' exclaimed both boys, in a breath.

'Say, Tom – they say a stray dog come howling around Johnny Miller's house, 'bout midnight, as much as two weeks ago; and a whippoowill come in and lit on the banisters and sung, the very same evening; and there ain't anybody dead there yet.'

'Well, I know that. And suppose there ain't. Didn't Gracie Miller fall in the kitchen fire and burn herself terrible the very next Saturday?'

'Yes, but she ain't *dead*. And what's more, she's getting better, too.'

'All right, you wait and see. She's a goner, just as dead sure as Muff Potter's a goner. That's what the niggers say, and they know all about these kind of things, Huck.' (Twain, 1786, 87)

The howling of dogs is believed to be an announcement of a bad omen. According to Eichler, 'An ancient belief is that the howling of dogs portends death and calamities.

This appears to be a relic of the time when men made deities of animals. As a deity, the dog was supposed to be able to foresee death and give warning of it by howling or barking'. (Eichler, 1924, p.648)

Superstition is a shared belief and is transmitted from a generation to another. The interpretation of the howling of dogs as an ill omen has been heard from slaves from Africa. The universal dimension of the belief in superstition is underlined here. Through this belief, Tom and Huck are afraid first but feel out of danger when they notice the dog is facing Muff Potter.

### 2.3. The rattlesnake rattles

A rattlesnake is a poisonous American snake that shakes its tail to make a noise when it is angry. A rattle, according to Eichler, 'is older than you would suspect and is said to have been invented by Archytas. He made painted clay puppets, representing human beings or animals, and put small stones inside of them to cause a rattling noise'. (Eichler, 1924, p.606)

A rattler, at the origin, is not a magic power used for protection but certain superstitious beliefs of supernatural forces men can put in some things, people come to believe it protects. Tom is definitely conscious that his rattlesnake rattle protects him against cramps. As a matter of fact, Tom, Huck and Joe Harper trip to Jackson's Island where nobody in St. Petersburg can discover them. Feeling mistreated after ill-treating Aunt Polly's cat, Tom resolves to act on his earlier impulse to become a pirate. He meets Joe Harper, who is likewise disaffected because his mother has wrongly accused and punished him for stealing cream. They find Huck Finn, always up for a new adventure, and the three agree to slip away to Jackson's Island, an uninhabited, forested isle three miles downriver from St. Petersburg. That night, the three boys take a raft and pole their way to the island, calling out meaningless nautical commands to one another as they go. At about two in the morning they arrive on the island, build a fire, and eat some bacon that Joe has stolen for them. The three boys are playing when Tom notices he has lost his protective device. His reaction is automatic:

Then Joe and Huck had another swim, but Tom would not venture, because he found that in kicking off his trousers he had kicked his string of rattlesnake rattles off his ankle, and he wondered how he had escaped cramp so long without the protection of this mysterious charm. He did not venture again until he had found it, and by that time the other boys were tired and ready to rest. (Twain, 1876, p.126)

Superstitious beliefs take people to accept as true the power of charms prepared by some conjurors for protective purposes. Ignorance takes people to see the manifestation of supernatural forces everywhere. As a matter of fact, a cramp is a sudden, involuntary muscle contraction caused by muscle fatigue or a lack of electrolytes such as low sodium, low potassium or low magnesium. In early

nineteenth century people could not explain the mechanism of cramp and therefore attributed it to mystical forces.

#### 2.4. The haunted house and its treasure

From the twenty-fifth chapter, Mark Twain introduced again the phenomena of witch, haunting spirits and unlucky day to make the superstitious world more significant to explore. So, one day Tom has a desire to hunt for buried treasure. He encounters Huck Finn, and the two characters discuss possible places to find treasure, what form the loot might take, and how kings have hundreds of diamonds. They then set off for the nearest dead-limbed tree, since such trees are typical hiding places for treasure. That afternoon, the boys dig in a number of places around the tree but find nothing. At first, Tom blames a witch, and he then realizes that they are going about it all wrong: they need to find where the shadow of the tree limb falls at midnight. They return that night and dig for a time, again without result. Eventually frustration and fear of the darkened woods make them give up because they fear haunted houses because 'they're a dern sight worse'n dead people. Dead people might talk, maybe, but they don't come sliding around in a shroud, when you ain't noticing, and peep over your shoulder all of a sudden and grit their teeth, the way a ghost does. I couldn't stand such a thing as that, Tom – nobody could.' (Twain, 1786, p.192) Tom and Huck believe in ghosts and are sure they can appear any time in this haunted place. People have spread the belief and they can repeat it with determination and certitude. It even happens that people defend they have met dead people that have walked to avoid them. In fact, they have met the double of the dead one and with faith take it for truth.

Still in this haunted house, Tom and Huck confuse misfortune and superstition because their vain attempt to find out the hidden treasury is assimilated to the power of a witch. In the following dialogue, Tom and Huck explain the reasons of their bad luck:

Sometimes witches interfere. I reckon maybe that's what's the trouble now.'  
'Shucks! Witches ain't got no power in the day- time.'  
'Well, that's so. I didn't think of that. Oh, I know what the matter is! What a blamed lot of fools we are! You got to find out where the shadow of the limb falls at midnight, and that's where you dig!' (Twain, 1786, p.190)

In fact, when people are unable to explain a phenomenon, it is attributed to ghostlike powers influencing ongoing actions. People are not able to question their techniques or knowledge because of the period when the actions take place. Here the second solution regarding the shadow of the tree at midnight is more ambiguous because it may be a night without sunshine. Even though it is the case, the position of the moon is important to determine.

The other superstitious reason mentioned by Tom and Huck is about the day. It is Friday, the most unlucky day of the week. They decide to make their way to the haunted house on Saturday. The fear of Friday has no scientific roots and simply believed to be so. Eichler's point of view confirms my assertion:

The origin of the superstition concerning Friday is traced by most authorities to the crucifixion of Christ on that day. But there are some writers who advance the theory that Friday is regarded as an unlucky day because it was on Friday that Adam and Eve partook of the forbidden fruit. It is quite probable that this popular old legend gave rise to the superstitious notions concerning Friday. (Eichler, 1924, p.645)

It is but a matter of belief and environment simply because there exists no material evidence to show its veracity. He who does not believe in Christianity can laugh at such an explanation whereas Jesus Christ disciples may find an interest to accept it. Mark Twain refers to superstitious beliefs simply to trace to his own childhood and take the readers to appreciate this period of time when every aspect of life can be subject to its superstitions.

### **Conclusion**

Twain first explores superstition in the graveyard, where Tom and Huck go to try out a magical cure for warts. From this point forward, superstition becomes an important element in all of the boys' decision-making. The convenient thing about Tom and Huck's superstitious beliefs is that there are so many of them, and they are so freely interpretable; Tom and Huck can pick and choose whichever belief suits their needs at the time. The humorousness of the boys' obsession with witches, ghosts, and graveyards papers over, to some extent, the real horror of the things to which the boys are exposed: grave digging, murder, starvation, and attempted mutilation. The relative ease with which they assimilate these upsetting events into their childish world is perhaps one of the least realistic aspects of the novel. The boys negotiate all this horror because they exist in a world suspended somewhere between reality and make-believe. Their fear of death is real and pervasive, for example, but surely they do not really understand death and all of its ramifications. Twain uses this innocence of adolescence to spotlight the phenomenon of superstition in St. Petersburg and in the early nineteenth century. The very strategy used by Twain consists in revealing the falseness of what is believed. Wherever Tom and Huck are expected to meet ghosts, they happen to discover people they know. Nowhere in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* has a superstitious belief come true. Twain has written the novel in 1876 to demystify superstition. He has made use of teenagers who are still fragile in their beliefs to go where adults can never accept to go because of their strong beliefs in superstition. Huck, a pariah in St. Petersburg, is used to play this role because no parents can allow his child to experience superstitious events. The other boys (Tom and Ben Rogers sometimes) follow him for

the purpose. Superstition is less and less important because of the evolution of science.

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