



P E N G U I N



C L A S S I C S

**MARK TWAIN**

*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

## ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN

MARK TWAIN was born Samuel Langhorne Clemens on November 30, 1835, in Florida, Missouri, about forty miles southwest of Hannibal, the Mississippi River town he was to celebrate in his writing. In 1853 he left home, earning a living as an itinerant typesetter, and four years later became an apprentice pilot on the Mississippi, a career cut short by the outbreak of the Civil War. For five years, as a prospector and a journalist, Clemens lived in Nevada and California. In February 1863 he first signed the pseudonym “Mark Twain” to a newspaper article, and a trip to Europe and the Holy Land in 1867 became the basis of his first major book, *The Innocents Abroad* (1869). *Roughing It* (1872), his account of experiences in the West, was followed by a coauthored satirical novel, *The Gilded Age* (1873); *Sketches, New and Old* (1875); *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876); *A Tramp Abroad* (1880); *The Prince and the Pauper* (1881); *Life on the Mississippi* (1883); his masterpiece, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885); *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* (1889); and *Pudd’nhead Wilson* (1894). Compelled by debts, Clemens moved his family abroad during the 1890s and went on a round-the-world lecture tour in 1895–1896. His fortunes mended, he returned to America in 1900. He was as celebrated for his white suit and his mane of white hair as for his uncompromising stands against injustice and imperialism, as well as his invariably quoted comments on any subject under the sun. Samuel Clemens died on April 21, 1910.

AZAR NAFISI is the author of *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, a number one *New York Times* bestseller that chronicled her experiences teaching English and American classics to her students in Tehran; *Things I’ve Been Silent About*; and *The Republic of Imagination*, in which she considers her evolving relationship with and understanding of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. A passionate advocate of books and reading, she speaks to audiences around the world about the essential role of fiction in both totalitarian and democratic societies. She is a visiting professor and the executive director of Cultural Conversations at Johns Hopkins University’s School of Advanced International Studies and lives in Washington, D.C.

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*Twain A to Z* (revised as the two-volume *Critical Companion to Mark Twain*) and *The Quotable Mark Twain*. For Penguin Classics, he wrote the notes and introductions to *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, and edited Mark Twain's *Autobiographical Writings*.

MARK TWAIN

Adventures of  
Huckleberry Finn

*Foreword by*  
AZAR NAFISI

*Introduction and Notes by*  
R. KENT RASMUSSEN

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*The Mississippi of Huckleberry Finn*



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## Foreword

As a child I sympathized with Huck. I felt an inarticulate pain for this lonesome little boy who deliberately orphans himself, pretending to be dead to escape his father's cruelties and running away from the "smothery" home offered him by the Widow Douglas, that champion of "Sunday School" morality. Home to me, and to most of the children who have listened to or read Huck's story over the years, meant love, safety, a certain kind of comfort. Yet to Huck it meant stifling conformity and a deadening of the soul. Little did I know then that this guileless orphan would engender so many other restless and homeless characters who would come to roam the fertile landscape of American fiction.

While *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is a celebration of American individualism, it is also a condemnation of that other side of America: its stifling conformity. Perhaps no other children's adventure story invokes quite so many different forms of violence and brutality, imposed not by wild animals, monsters, or strange villains, but by ordinary men and women living in simple places we call home. This is the "civilized" world that Huck subversively rechristens as "sivilized," and nothing in this violent world of conventional cruelty is presented as more pernicious than slavery.

At the heart of this story is Huck's relationship with another orphan: Jim. What else should we call someone who, along with others of his race, has been stripped of his home and family and identified not as a father, a husband, an individual in his own right, but as the property of another man? His escape is a search not just for his family but for his confiscated

humanity. While the other characters are presented through Huck's eyes, Huck himself is redefined and transformed by his relationship with Jim.

Mark Twain once described *Huckleberry Finn* as “a book of mine where a sound heart and a deformed conscience come into collision and conscience suffers defeat.” Huck's relationship with Jim leads him to discover the true seat of morality: his heart, beating and aching in rhythm with the aches and beats of another heart.

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If there was any one figure in the history of American fiction who, through his writing, created a literary Declaration of Independence, it was Mark Twain. He was the first to deliberately cut himself off from the prevailing traditions of the mother tongue. With *Huckleberry Finn* he helped forge a new national myth, giving us a hero who looked and spoke like one of the tramp protagonists of the European novel but whose values and principles were more akin to those of the great epic heroes.

Huck is a mongrel, an outcast, uneducated and unmoored, and since his creation countless Americans have recast themselves in his image. Despite his modest background, he would have a far more enduring effect on the American psyche than other fictional protagonists before or after him. Huck is distinctly an American hero—or, more precisely, *the* American hero—but he can still claim kinship with some of the world's most lovable literary characters, heroes of picaresque novels such as Lazarillo de Tormes, Simplicius Simplicissimus, Jonathan Wild the Great, and Hajji Baba of Ispahan. His closest affinity, however, is with *Oliver Twist*.

Dickens uses two different forms of magic in *Oliver Twist*. The first is the hackneyed trick found in most sentimental fiction, whereby the kindhearted and downtrodden hero is returned to the fold and ultimately rewarded with a life of luxury and comfort. The other, the real magic that is the trademark of any great writer, is to reveal a new truth in such a way that the reader will never again look at the world in quite the same way. Dickens does this with the help of satire and caricature, and Twain with dark humor and irony. Both *Oliver Twist* and *Huckleberry Finn* “own” a particular place that will become a universal space: for Dickens, the London of the industrial revolution, and for Twain, the mighty Mississippi River and the vast

expanse of America's uncharted wilderness. Twain shares Dickens's fierce, at times desperate, abhorrence of the social injustice of his times.

Where Twain departs from Dickens, and from other great European writers of orphan tales, is in denying his hero a permanent home. There will be no return to the fold for this prodigal son—both the reward and the punishment for straying are a permanent state of homelessness.

“Huckleberry Finn took the first journey back,” wrote F. Scott Fitzgerald. “He was the first to look back at the republic from the perspective of the west. His eyes were the first eyes that ever looked at us objectively that were not eyes from overseas. There were mountains at the frontier but he wanted more than mountains to look at with his restive eyes—he wanted to find out about men and how they lived together. And because he turned back we have him forever.”

From the moment of his birth, Huck invited controversy. Efforts to redefine, rehabilitate, and reject Huck Finn—to make him respectable—reveal more about us readers than about the book. As Toni Morrison so brilliantly explains, “For a hundred years the argument that this novel *is* has been identified, reidentified, examined, waged and advanced. What it cannot be is dismissed. It is classic literature, which is to say it heaves, manifests and lasts.” Like all other classics of world literature, *Huckleberry Finn* is not only a celebration of reality, but a subversion and a provocation. Those who hate it are disturbed by its heresies and those who love it are not immune either, or insensitive to the timeless image in the mirror that the book relentlessly if compassionately reflects.

Hemingway and all those other American writers who found their ancestors in *Huckleberry Finn* were not exaggerating. One by one its characters would populate the landscape of American fiction, redefining home and homelessness. In future decades Jim would light out for his own territory and start telling his own story. He would reclaim his identity, faith, and confidence as well as his rage and pain. Even the small towns Huck and Jim passed by on their raft would acquire new identities, and the theme of the solitary individual, his sound heart resisting a monitoring conscience, would be articulated in different times and different manners.

One character remains: the reader. When Mark Twain wrote *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, there were still physical territories to light out to, but in twenty-first-century America, such uncharted terrain is part of fiction as

well as fantasy. The only way to light out, to see the “sivilized” world through fresh eyes, is through our imaginations, our hearts, and our minds, and that is the real question for us: will we risk striking out for new territories and welcome the dangers of thoughts unknown?

AZAR NAFISI

## Introduction

If one measure of greatness in a literary work is its ability to remain alive, ever growing and evolving in readers' eyes and withstanding both withering criticism and overly lavish praise, then Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is surely a great book. No other nineteenth-century American novel has experienced the vicissitudes in reputation it has seen through its long lifetime. Continuously in print since it was first published in England in late 1884 and in America in early 1885, it has been called almost everything, from the "veriest trash" to the "great American novel." It has been dismissed as a boy's adventure story and has been castigated as a book unfit for children. It has been labeled a racist work and thrown out of classrooms and school libraries and has been called one of the most powerful antiracist novels ever written. Scores of books and thousands of essays, articles, and editorials have been written about it. Even in the twenty-first century, 130 years after it came into being, it continues to provoke strong debate and find its way into headlines as new discoveries, new interpretations and theories, and fresh charges continually arise.

On its surface, the novel could scarcely be simpler. Set in the pre-Civil War era of slavery and narrated by Huck Finn, the "juvenile pariah" of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876), *Huckleberry Finn* is the story of a young boy who joins a runaway slave named Jim in their shared quest for freedom. Huck wants to escape from the restrictions of respectable society imposed on him by his well-meaning adoptive mother, the Widow Douglas, and also from the physical abuse of his natural father, "pap," who snatches him from the widow's home. Jim is fleeing from the imminent danger of

being sold down the Mississippi River, which would mean permanent separation from his wife and children, and hopes to reach a free state and earn enough money to buy his family out of slavery. The fugitives grow closer together as they raft down the river toward Cairo, Illinois, where they hope to sell the raft and buy steamboat passage up the Ohio River into freedom. After a mishap carries Huck and Jim past Cairo, they penetrate ever deeper into slave territory. What has begun as a boy's adventure story then morphs into a more adult story as Huck increasingly senses the implications of what he is doing: helping a black slave to escape from his legal owner. He struggles with his conscience as he tries to make sense of moral issues concerning freedom, slavery, and human dignity. He and Jim encounter a diverse range of characters, the raft reaches the end of its long journey, and then another transformation occurs. Huck's friend Tom Sawyer reappears, and the book ends in much the same spirit of a boy's adventure as it begins.

Huck Finn, the narrator and protagonist of *Huckleberry Finn*, made his first appearance in the sixth chapter of *Tom Sawyer*. There he is introduced as the “juvenile pariah” of Tom's village, St. Petersburg. As the “son of the town drunkard,”

Huckleberry was cordially hated and dreaded by all the mothers of the town, because he was idle, and lawless, and vulgar and bad—and because all their children admired him so, and delighted in his forbidden society, and wished they dared to be like him. Tom was like the rest of the respectable boys, in that he envied Huckleberry his gaudy outcast condition, and was under strict orders not to play with him. So he played with him every time he got a chance.

Despite his quasi-outcast social condition, Huck develops into Tom's closest friend and ally through the course of *Tom Sawyer*. Toward the conclusion of that novel, he performs an act of heroism rivaling Tom's most courageous deeds. He thereby wins the respect of the villagers and appears to be on the threshold of respectability when the wealthy Widow Douglas takes him into her comfortable home. He is not, however, satisfied with his new condition, and that dissatisfaction carries over into *Huckleberry Finn*.

In July 1875, immediately after finishing *Tom Sawyer*, Mark Twain wrote to his close friend and literary confidant William Dean Howells to report on

that novel's completion and plans for its publication. He also dropped his first hint about writing the sequel that would become *Huckleberry Finn*: "By & by I shall take a boy of twelve & run him on through life (in the first person) but not Tom Sawyer—he would not be a good character for it." What Mark Twain was moving toward—and what he eventually produced—was a sober, deadpan narrative free of the kinds of imaginative flights of fancy an attention-hungry character like Tom Sawyer would want to create and also free of value judgments and omniscient commentaries, like those of the anonymous adult narrator of *Tom Sawyer*. That novel is primarily a boy's book narrated by an adult; *Huckleberry Finn* would become a primarily adult book narrated by a boy.

Huck Finn's most outstanding quality is his "good heart," as Mark Twain put it, and his empathy for other human beings, even criminals. His moral struggle is between his conscience, which constantly tells him helping a slave escape is wrong and never lets up on him, and his heart, which tells him that helping his friend Jim is his greater duty. Incapable of articulating the nature of this struggle, he can only conclude that he is an irredeemable "hard lot" who might even become a murderer someday, and he eventually concludes he is going to hell.

Huck's comments about other people reveal that he is intelligent and observant but not imaginative. He generally describes what he observes without passing judgment or drawing moralistic conclusions. Although he himself is normally humorless, he is also often funny because he fails to see the humor in what he describes and occasionally grossly misunderstands what he sees. A striking example is chapter 22's circus episode, in which a skilled acrobat pretending to be drunk comes out of the audience and forces his way onto a dangerously cavorting horse. Huck describes the audience going wild with laughter when it appears the ostensible drunk is headed for disaster, but he himself finds nothing funny in the scene because he fears for the man's safety. After the man sheds his surplus clothes and reveals himself as a gorgeously outfitted and skilled circus performer, Huck transfers his concern to the ringmaster, whom he believes to have been humiliated by the rider's trick, not realizing the entire performance has simply been an act. Much of the novel's frequent humor is made all the funnier by similar misunderstandings, which would be impossible if Tom Sawyer were in Huck's role. Unlike Huck, Tom would work out what is



really going on, analyze what he sees, and provide an informative but almost certainly less interesting and moving narrative. A major part of *Huckleberry Finn*'s greatness therefore lies in Mark Twain's choice of Huck as its narrator.

The sudden appearance of Huck's father at the end of chapter 4 introduces an ominous tone to what to that point has been a comparatively light story. Once described by the English poet W. H. Auden as "a greater and more horrible monster than almost any I can think of in fiction," pap is even more menacing than the murderous Injun Joe of *Tom Sawyer*. The fact that he is Huck's father makes him especially frightening because he directs much of his anger and threats of violence at his own son. The issue of slavery is generally seen as central to *Huckleberry Finn*, but pap's role in the book makes child abuse an issue—an important aspect of the novel that has received surprisingly little attention, despite the fact that Huck's fear of his father is what moves him to run away. Healthy and sound families are the exception rather than the rule in Mark Twain's writings, but in his fiction, pap is rivaled as a cruel and dangerous parent only by the father of Tom Canty, the pauper boy in *The Prince and the Pauper* (1881). As the son of the "town drunkard," it is not surprising Huck himself is described as "idle, and lawless, and vulgar and bad" in *Tom Sawyer*. His ability to rise above his disreputable origins is an impressive tribute to his inherently strong character.

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During *Huckleberry Finn*'s early years, the book was strongly criticized for its language. Before it appeared, American fiction was typically written in formal and, consequently, not-quite-natural language. Good writing was equated with genteel English, which meant precisely correct grammar and syntax and socially acceptable word choices. *Huckleberry Finn* broke from that stuffy tradition by telling its story through the voice of an observant but uneducated boy living on what was then America's western frontier. The book was the first significant American novel narrated entirely in an authentic and often coarse vernacular—a fact evident in the novel's very first sentence: "You don't know about me, without you have read a book by the name of 'The Adventures of Tom Sawyer,' but that ain't no matter." Genteel readers who managed to get past the archaic use of "without" as a

conjunction and the widely condemned contraction “ain’t” quickly encountered many more violations of proper English.

Coarse language was not the only thing in *Huckleberry Finn* to which genteel readers objected. To many, Huck’s behavior was too often improper and something to which children should not be exposed. Despite Huck’s empathy for others and his striking acts of loyalty, courage, generosity, and self-sacrifice, what mattered most to critics were his disobedience, smoking, cussing, lying, and occasional stealing. Worst of all, perhaps, was his flouting both the law and God by proclaiming, “All right, then, I’ll go to hell,” instead of betraying the runaway slave Jim. Huck was, in short, a bad boy, and it would not do for children to read about a boy who despite doing so many things wrong—including using bad grammar—nevertheless comes out all right in the end.

Moves to ban *Huckleberry Finn* were not long in coming. In March 1885, only one month after the book’s American publication, the public library committee of Concord, Massachusetts, had it removed from circulation. The banning movement was led by Concord resident Louisa May Alcott. The author of *Little Women* (1868) and other books deemed more proper for impressionable children, Alcott considered *Huckleberry Finn* morally repugnant. One library committee member complained about the book’s “systematic use of bad grammar and employment of rough, coarse, inelegant expressions.” Another called the book “the veriest trash.” An unsigned editorial in the Springfield, Massachusetts, *Republican* heartily endorsed the banning:

The Concord public library committee deserve well of the public by their action in banishing Mark Twain’s new book, “Huckleberry Finn,” on the ground that it is trashy and vicious. It is time that this influential pseudonym should cease to carry into homes and libraries unworthy productions. . . . The trouble with Mr. Clemens is that he has no reliable sense of propriety.

The Concord library was not the only one to ban *Huckleberry Finn*—especially in New England, where the Puritan tradition still lingered. In April, shortly after the Concord incident, Mark Twain received a letter from W. E. Parkhurst, the editor of the Clinton, Massachusetts, *Courant*, reporting that the public library directors in his town had also banned

*Huckleberry Finn*. Whatever else the consequences of banning *Huckleberry Finn* might have been, they apparently did not include damaging the book's sales. Parkhurst wanted to assure Mark Twain "that the anxiety to see and read 'Huckleberry' is on the increase here; the adults are daily inquiring where 'Finn' can be had, and even the children are crying for 'Huckleberries' . . ."

Complaints about *Huckleberry Finn*'s allegedly bad influence on children continued into the early twentieth century. In August 1902, for example, it was reported that the juvenile section of the public library in Omaha, Nebraska, had removed *Huckleberry Finn* from its shelves after complaints about the book had been "in the pulpit and press." Already aware that even bad publicity could help sell his books, Mark Twain sent a letter to the Omaha *World-Telegram* that appeared in its August 23 issue:

I am tearfully afraid this noise is doing much harm. It has started a number of hitherto spotless people to reading Huck Finn, out of a natural human curiosity to learn what this is all about—people who had not heard of him before; people whose morals will go to wreck and ruin now. The publishers are glad, but it makes me want to borrow a handkerchief and cry. I should be sorry to think it was the publishers themselves that got up this entire little flutter to enable them to unload a book that was taking too much room in their cellars, but you never can tell what a publisher will do. I have been one myself.

Mark Twain

The newspaper later printed an editorial ridiculing the censorship of *Huckleberry Finn*. "What are we coming to anyway," it asked, "when namby-pamby public library boards exclude from the juvenile shelves that great boy's book, 'Huckleberry Finn,' while they inconsistently dish up the worst kind of fiction for adults. . . ." Meanwhile, these newspaper items moved a twelve-year-old Greeley, Nebraska, girl named Gertrude Swain to write directly to Mark Twain in October about the Omaha library's banning of *Huckleberry Finn*:

Dear Mr. Twain:

I've been going to write to you for a long time. Ever since I saw that piece in the paper about Huck Finn being a bad book.

I am a little girl twelve years old. I have read Huck Finn about fifty times. Papa calls it my bible, I think it is the best book ever written and I don't think it would hurt any little boy or girl to read it. I think it would do lots of them a lot of good. I don't think that preacher knew what he was talking about.

I think the folks know it all by heart I have told them so much about it, especially all of Jim's sign's. Poor Huck, he did get into more trouble, and get out of it so slick. . . .

Mark Twain quickly replied:

My dear Child:

I would rather have your judgment of the moral quality of the Huck Finn book, after your fifty readings of it, than that of fifty clergymen after reading it once apiece. I should have confidence in your moral visions, but not so much in theirs, because it is limited in the matter of distance, & is pretty often out of focus. [But these are secrets, & mustn't go any further; I only know them because I used to study for the ministry myself.]

Truly yours  
Mark Twain

Mark Twain never actually studied for the ministry, but his allusion to the superiority of Gertrude's "moral visions" over those of adults might apply equally to the vision he invests in Huck Finn in his novel.

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Despite complaints about *Huckleberry Finn*'s language, the novel was generally well received on its first publication but was far from being recognized as a significant contribution to literature. Mark Twain's well-earned reputation as a humorist got in the way of his being taken seriously. After his later novel *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889) was attacked by British critics for its portrayal of medieval England, Mark Twain asked his Scottish friend Andrew Lang, a respected critic, to come to his defense. In an essay titled "On the Art of Mark Twain," Lang said of Mark Twain, "If you praise him among persons of Culture, they cannot believe that you are serious. They call him a Barbarian. They won't hear of him, they hurry from the subject." Lang then went on to praise *Huckleberry Finn*, which he called "more valuable, perhaps, to the historian than 'Uncle Tom's Cabin,' for it is written without partisanship, and without a

‘purpose’”—a point to keep in mind while reading the book and assessing what it says about slavery and race. Lang added that the book’s

drawing of character seems to be admirable, unsurpassed in its kind. By putting the tale in the mouth of the chief actor, Huck, Mark Twain was enabled to give it a seriousness not common in his work, and to abstain from comment. Nothing can be more true and more humorous than the narrative of this outcast boy, with a heart naturally good, with a conscience torn between the teachings of his world about slavery and the promptings of his nature.

After pointing out specific virtues of the novel, Lang concluded that

the book remains a nearly flawless gem of romance and humour. The world appreciates it, no doubt, but “cultured critics” are probably unaware of its singular value. . . . And the great American novel has escaped the eyes of those who watch to see this new planet swim into their ken.

Despite continuing criticisms and charges brought against *Huckleberry Finn*, the book’s stature as a literary work steadily grew over the years. In 1909, the year before Mark Twain died, Baltimore journalist and critic H. L. Mencken declared *Huckleberry Finn* by itself worth “the complete works of Poe, Hawthorne, Cooper, Holmes, Howells and James, with the entire literary output to date of Indiana, Pennsylvania and the States south of the Potomac thrown in as makeweight.” An aggressive advocate of purely American letters and one of the book’s most outspoken champions, Mencken called Mark Twain the “true father of our national literature, the first genuinely American artist of the blood royal . . . a literary artist of the very highest skill and sophistication.”

Mencken’s view of Mark Twain’s artistry was not shared by all critics. Shortly after Mark Twain died in early 1910, Henry Thurston Peck, editor of the New York literary magazine *Bookman*, praised Mark Twain’s purely humorous writings but predicted that *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn* had so little literary merit that both would be forgotten within two decades. A little more than two decades later, however, the future Nobel Prize-winning author Ernest Hemingway echoed Mencken’s earlier assessment of *Huckleberry Finn* in a curiously unlikely setting: a campfire conversation in East Africa about American literature. In *Green Hills of Africa* (1935),

Hemingway described himself naming Henry James, Stephen Crane, and Mark Twain as examples of “good” American writers. When his campfire companion replied, in apparent surprise, “Mark Twain is a humorist,” Hemingway countered, “All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*. . . . It’s the best book we’ve had. All American writing comes from that. There was nothing before. There has been nothing as good since.”

Another Nobel Prize–winning writer who greatly admired *Huckleberry Finn* was T. S. Eliot. Although he had been born and raised on the banks of the Mississippi River, in St. Louis, Missouri, downriver from Mark Twain’s hometown of Hannibal, Eliot never read the book until he was nearly sixty years old. In his introduction to a 1950 edition of the novel, he suggested his parents may have kept *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn* away from him out of fear he might adopt their characters’ bad habits, such as smoking. Ironically, his parents’ opinion that *Huckleberry Finn* was an unsuitable book for boys left him, through most of his life, “under the impression that it was a book suitable only for boys.” When he finally read *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn* during the late 1940s, he greatly enjoyed both books and judged the latter a “masterpiece.” Eliot believed the essence of the novel’s greatest strength lay in its use of the impassive, humorless, and nonjudgmental Huck as its narrator. That judgment might serve as a rebuttal to an attack made on the book by another distinguished writer nearly a half century later.

Although the general trend in literary criticism has supported a steady rise in *Huckleberry Finn*’s stature, strong dissenting voices have also been heard. One of the most forceful has been that of the popular and respected novelist Jane Smiley. When Smiley was in her late forties, a broken leg confined her to bed, allowing her to read *Huckleberry Finn* for the first time since junior high school. She afterward reported being “stunned” by the experience. In “Say It Ain’t So, Huck: Second Thoughts on Mark Twain’s ‘Masterpiece,’” published in *Harper’s Magazine* in January 1996, she explained why. What amazed her was not the artistry of Mark Twain’s book but “the notion this is the novel all American literature grows out of, that this is a great novel, that this is even a serious novel.” Smiley argued that Mark Twain’s greatest failing in the novel was not taking Jim’s quest for freedom, the book’s central moral issue, seriously enough. She makes a

cogent point in noting that Jim is repeatedly shoved aside as Huck involves himself in other issues away from the raft. Smiley attributes Mark Twain's failing to his inability to face the true nature of slavery, which she calls the "very heart of nineteenth-century American experience and literature." To bolster her argument, she contrasts *Huckleberry Finn* with Harriet Beecher Stowe's antislavery novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), which she considers truly great because of its uncompromising denunciation of slavery and passionate championing of the right of African Americans to be free.

As Stowe's novel was the bestselling American book of the nineteenth century (aside from the Bible) and played a role in provoking the Civil War by stirring up Northern feelings against the slaveholding South, its historical significance is undeniable. But is it fair or even relevant to compare *Huckleberry Finn* to a deliberately polemical book such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which was written at a time when slavery was not only still legal but was also the most controversial and divisive issue in the United States? *Huckleberry Finn* appeared two decades after the Civil War had ended and the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution had abolished slavery. As Andrew Lang pointed out in comparing *Huckleberry Finn* favorably to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1891, Mark Twain's book was "written without partisanship, and without a 'purpose.'" It was, in short, an adventure story that drew in readers with its humor and along the way presented them with compelling moral issues. Points Smiley makes raise valid questions about what kind of book *Huckleberry Finn* is. It should be remembered, however, that the "Notice" inserted at the beginning of his book explicitly denies the book has any kind of purpose:

Persons attempting to find a motive in this 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 Ordnance.

With its inscrutable allusion to a "Chief of Ordnance," Mark Twain's "Notice" is obviously meant to be playful. At the same time, however, it serves to remind readers that what follows is not intended to espouse any cause. In this, the novel differs sharply from the explicit moralizing of

*Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which contains value judgments such as this passage opening chapter 29:

We hear often of the distress of the negro servants, on the loss of a kind master; and with good reason, for no creature on God's earth is left more utterly unprotected and desolate than the slave in these circumstances.

Chapter 27 of *Huckleberry Finn* addresses virtually the same subject when members of a slave family belonging to the recently deceased Peter Wilks are sold to traders intending to carry them off in different directions and thereby split up the family. Huck describes the distress of the slaves and Wilks's nieces and adds no judgments on the injustice of the slaves' treatment:

I thought them poor girls and them niggers would break their hearts for grief; they cried around each other, and took on so it most made me down sick to see it. The girls said they hadn't ever dreamed of seeing the family separated or sold away from the town. I can't ever get it out of my memory, the sight of them poor miserable girls and niggers hanging around each other's necks and crying.

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A nineteenth-century Buffalo, New York, lawyer named James Fraser Gluck has been called both a hero and a culprit by scholars of Mark Twain. In 1885 he helped save the manuscript of *Huckleberry Finn* from possible destruction—the fate of many manuscripts—by persuading Mark Twain to donate it to the public library in Buffalo. A few years later, unfortunately, Gluck was also responsible for losing the first half of the manuscript. Manuscripts showing authors' changes can provide important clues to their thinking and original intentions, so that loss represented a substantial blow to modern scholarship. Nonetheless, scholars continued to research the novel without access to the complete manuscript.

In 1966, Victor A. Doyno of the State University of New York at Buffalo began a quarter century of meticulous study of the surviving portion of *Huckleberry Finn*'s manuscript and other materials with the goal of reconstructing exactly how Mark Twain created his greatest novel. For the centenary anniversary of the book's first American edition in 1985, the



editors of the Mark Twain Project at the University of California in Berkeley meanwhile worked on a corrected edition that would make the book's text conform as closely as possible to what Mark Twain intended. They drew on all available materials, including the surviving portion of the book and original proof sheets of the entire work. Mark Twain was never happy with what publishers did with his books, and even though *Huckleberry Finn* was published by his own firm, Charles L. Webster & Co.—headed by his nephew by marriage, Charles L. Webster—he was not pleased with the way the book's text was handled.

The Mark Twain Project's reedited novel was published to great acclaim in 1985. Five years later, when Professor Doyno was on the verge of publishing *Writing "Huck Finn": Mark Twain's Creative Process*, news stories broke that the long-missing portion of the original *Huckleberry Finn* manuscript had been found in October 1990. After having a chance to examine the rediscovered manuscript, Doyno made some minor changes in his book before its publication. Then, only six years after having published the scrupulously prepared centennial edition of the novel, the editors at the Mark Twain Project realized that the manuscript's reappearance would require them to reedit the book again. As daunting as that prospect was, it offered the opportunity to get even closer to what Mark Twain had intended and to learn things about his writing process that had previously not even been suspected.

One of the first and most striking discoveries made in the recovered manuscript was that Mark Twain had made many more alterations in the first part of the novel than he had in the second part. This was doubtless because he was struggling to find the right tone early on and needed to make fewer changes after settling on that tone as the novel progressed. The second striking discovery was that Mark Twain's original conception of the novel was darker than its final form. Many of his revised word choices and deletions lessened that darkness. A subtle example is his replacement of four instances of "rawhide" whippings with the slightly less brutal "cowhide" whippings—an alteration, incidentally, that was not made in the "Raft Episode," which is discussed below.

One of the most powerful passages Mark Twain removed from his manuscript was originally set in chapter 20's Pokeville camp meeting. The passage has Huck deride the mercenary motives used by religious con men

and describe a scene in which a preacher delivers a sermon that fires up the crowd to whoop and shout and wildly hug one another. Huck goes on to say, “One fat nigger woman about forty, was the worst. The white mourners couldn’t fend her off, no way—fast as one would get loose, she’d tackle the next one, and smother *him*.”

In 1995, the *New Yorker* magazine published excerpts of some lengthy passages deleted from the first edition of *Huckleberry Finn*. The following year, Random House published a new “unexpurgated version of *Huckleberry Finn*” that restored those passages—which it clearly marked—to their original positions in the novel and added more than fifty pages of texts and facsimile illustrations from the rediscovered manuscript, along with substantive commentaries by Victor Doyno. The appearance of this material launched a new debate about the novel over the question of whether material Mark Twain himself had removed from the book should be restored to the novel. Robert Hirst, the general editor of the Mark Twain Project, challenged the implication that the restored material had been removed from the original edition against Mark Twain’s wishes. He pointed out that “Mark Twain deleted this new material for sound reasons, and to put it into a new authorized version now is to mix up two levels of textual reality.” Doyno himself acknowledged that the camp meeting passage restored in the Random House edition “was way over the top for its time and Twain knew that.”

The question of the propriety of restoring deleted material to *Huckleberry Finn* actually has a much deeper history. It had long been known that most of chapter 3, “Frescoes of the Past,” of *Life on the Mississippi* (1883) was taken from Mark Twain’s draft of chapter 16 of *Huckleberry Finn* to illustrate life on the river’s giant flatboats. When he was preparing *Huckleberry Finn* for publication the following year, his publisher, Charles L. Webster, persuaded him to leave what later came to be known as the “Raft Chapter” (or “Episode”) out of the novel to keep the novel’s length down. Mark Twain agreed because the passage had already been published and because it did not seem essential to the novel’s narrative. That latter judgment was not quite correct, however, because something that Huck learns about differences between the waters of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers in the passage is crucial to a decision Huck later makes. The question of whether the “Raft Chapter” should be restored to its original place in the

novel is still not fully resolved. University of California Press editions prepared by the Mark Twain Project have restored the passage. Some editions, including the present Penguin edition, include the passage as an appendix. Still others omit it entirely.

Concluding that material Mark Twain removed should not be restored to the novel is not the same as saying it should be ignored. The rediscovery of the missing manuscript reveals an important aspect of how Mark Twain's conception of his novel evolved as he wrote it. That, in turn, makes possible fresh interpretations of aspects of the book, such as how he wanted to treat racial and religious issues. For example, the deleted camp meeting passage demonstrates that while he may have wanted to challenge white Christian hypocrisy, he felt there were limits to how far he should go. The Springfield *Republican* editorial endorsing a library's banning of *Huckleberry Finn* in 1885 had been well off the mark in charging Mark Twain had "no reliable sense of propriety."

One obvious conclusion emerging from this debate is that the more evidence we have about authors' writing processes, the better chance we have of understanding what they are trying to do. In 2003 the University of California Press published the Mark Twain Project's revised edition of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, edited by Victor Fischer, Lin Salamo, and others. It accounts for every omitted or altered word and includes all the deleted passages (except the "Raft Chapter") in appendices. At the same time, however, it strives to present the text of the novel as close to what Mark Twain intended as is reasonably possible.

In July 1992, *Huckleberry Finn* again made front-page news when the *New York Times* published an article about a forthcoming Oxford University Press book—*Was Huck Black?: Mark Twain and African-American Voices*. Talk of the book's startling thesis reverberated across the United States. Its author, Professor Shelley Fisher Fishkin, then of the University of Texas in Austin, argued that the way Huck talks owes much of its language and rhetorical techniques to African American influences. Through meticulous analysis of speech patterns in the novel and linguistic studies of African American speech, Fishkin attempted to show specifically what those influences are—such as Huck's use of certain words, a variety of characteristically African American syntactical forms, and irony and sarcasm to outwit others in a technique known as "signifying." She also

presented evidence about African Americans who were important influences in Mark Twain's life and drew particular attention to a loquacious young African American whom Mark Twain met and dubbed "Sociable Jimmy" in an article he published in the *New York Times* in 1874. Indeed, she seemed to suggest Huck was modeled on that boy. Not all scholars accepted Fishkin's thesis because flaws in her methodology weakened her arguments. Nevertheless, *Was Huck Black?* profoundly influenced both Mark Twain scholarship and public perceptions of *Huckleberry Finn*.

For decades, most criticisms leveled against *Huckleberry Finn* concerned the negative influence the book might have on young readers, and the coarseness of its language was typically singled out for complaint. By the late twentieth century, however, complaints had shifted to an entirely different issue: the book's purportedly negative treatment of African American characters, especially Jim. In 1957 the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People called for banning the book from schools because of its "racial slurs." New York City's board of education responded by removing it from its list of books approved for elementary and junior high schools. Since that time, calls for keeping the book out of schools have intensified. In 2006, for example, Sharon E. Rush, a Florida law professor, published *Huck Finn's "Hidden" Lessons: Teaching and Learning Across the Color Line*, arguing not to ban the book from schools but merely not to make it government-mandated reading in public schools. By that time, *Huckleberry Finn* consistently ranked among the most frequently banned books in the United States. Many people have charged that the book is "racist" and that Mark Twain himself was racist because of his book's negative portrayals of black characters. However, the bulk of modern attacks on the novel have focused on a single offensive word: "nigger," which appears more than 210 times in the book.

In 2011, NewSouth Books, a Montgomery, Alabama, publishing firm, addressed the problem in a controversial way, removing the word "nigger" from one line of its *Huckleberry Finn* editions. This is not a new idea, of course. Expurgated, abridged, and "rewritten" editions of *Huckleberry Finn* have been published for many years, and most of them have dropped the offending word, but usually without notifying their readers. What NewSouth did is a little different. With the editorial assistance of the

respected Mark Twain scholar Alan Gribben of Auburn University at Montgomery, the firm published editions of *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn* in which every instance of “nigger” was replaced by “slave”—perhaps the closest equivalent of the rejected word in the contexts of those novels. (The press also changed “Injun” to “Indian” in both books.) When the NewSouth editions were released, *Huckleberry Finn* again made front-page news. This time attention focused on the “censorship” of a literary classic. Howls of protest were raised, but insufficient attention may have been paid to what the NewSouth edition actually represents. Its underlying rationale is that it is better for students to read the novel with the offending word removed than for them never to read it at all. As pressure to have the novel withdrawn from school classrooms was based mostly on that one offensive word, NewSouth wanted schools to have an alternative that would keep the book in classrooms while allowing individual students to choose which version they would read. Is it truly censorship when one word is substituted for another and the change is openly explained? Anyone reading the NewSouth edition after reading Gribben’s introduction discussing the alteration would have a difficult time reading the word “slave” without thinking of the word Mark Twain originally wrote.

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Despite the unrelenting attacks made on *Huckleberry Finn* over 130 years, the novel shows no signs of going away. The authenticity of its vernacular voices makes it a uniquely valuable document of the period and region in which it is set, and for that reason alone the book will continue to be read. Its language—both its dialogue and Huck’s narration—feels so natural and real, it is unlikely ever to go stale, as so much other literature of its era has already become. This may be slightly ironic, as what was once considered the book’s chief fault is now considered one of its primary virtues—the offensive “n-word” notwithstanding.

The novel’s enduring strength also lies within Huck himself. As an essentially parentless boy who overcomes severe social disadvantages, he is a character with a universal appeal. Even more appealing, however, is his steadfast loyalty to the slave Jim, whose dignity and value as a human being he increasingly learns to appreciate. Despite his low-caste origins, Huck has absorbed the racial attitudes of Southern white slave owners. He

instinctively believes white people are superior to black people and that slavery is both legally and morally justified. Throughout Huck's narrative, his conscience pecks at him, constantly making him feel ashamed and guilty for helping a slave escape from his rightful owner. Raised to believe few things are worse than a "low down abolitionist," Huck is utterly convinced he is doing a terrible thing. Nevertheless, despite having chances to correct his presumed mistake, he cannot bring himself to betray Jim. The strength of his character is demonstrated not by his doing the right thing because it is right, but by his doing the right thing all the time believing he is doing the *wrong* thing.

Weightier moral issues aside, *Huckleberry Finn* is populated with inviting characters, such as the deliciously unscrupulous "rascals" calling themselves the king of France and the Duke of Bridgewater who go from one shady moneymaking scheme to another. Of great interest for very different reasons are the Grangerfords—a wealthy family seemingly bent on self-destruction in a pointless feud with the neighboring Shepherdsons. Another compelling character is the formidable businessman Colonel Sherburn. He shoots an apparently harmless man in cold blood and then turns away an angry lynch mob through the sheer force of his personality, while delivering a stinging denunciation of the Southern character. *Huckleberry Finn* is rich in both comical and dramatic episodes that will always make it entertaining reading, regardless of how one feels about its treatment of moral issues. Huck and Jim's adventure on the derelict steamboat *Walter Scott*, for example, may be as thrilling an episode as one can find in nineteenth-century American fiction, and the king and duke's performance of the "Royal Nonesuch" as comical an episode as one can find. So comical, in fact, even Huck admits it is "awful funny."

While Mark Twain's colorful characters and memorable episodes contribute to the novel's endurance, *Huckleberry Finn* holds an even richer substance. It is a novel that continues to demand our engagement, ensuring that it will be read critically, dissected, analyzed, and fiercely debated. Such questions as whether *Huckleberry Finn* or *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is the greater antislavery novel may never be settled but will nevertheless continue to be argued. Debates about whether the book is racist or antiracist will take on changing forms as American society itself continues to evolve and each new generation responds to *Huckleberry Finn* differently. As each fresh

discovery is made, each new theory is developed, and each new battle over the novel is fought, *Huckleberry Finn* stays full of life. It is likely to remain so for a long time to come.

R. KENT RASMUSSEN