

» A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION »

SAMUEL LANGHORNE CLEMENS
ADVENTURES OF
HUCKLEBERRY FINN

AN ANNOTATED TEXT
BACKGROUNDS AND SOURCES
ESSAYS IN CRITICISM

Edited by

SCULLEY BRADLEY
UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

RICHMOND CROOM BEATTY
LATE OF VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY

E. HUDSON LONG
BAYLOR UNIVERSITY

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Introduction

Several generations of Americans have read this, Mark Twain's masterpiece, with undiminished affection, because for each generation increasingly it has recaptured a lost world of childhood and an earlier reality of their country which it is valuable to keep in memory. But in the largest sense, "only adults will read it," as its author less aptly remarked of *Tom Sawyer*. On the adult level this is a complex work of art, sometimes approaching profundity in its psychological perceptions, its moral judgments, and its social criticism. It is precisely located in place and time; yet by its power and its truth it has attained universal recognition as a classic.

In structure, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* resembles the earliest and simplest form of the novel. In the novella known to Chaucer, just as in the earliest British novels shaped by Defoe or Fielding, the form was episodic; so was the frontier narrative that first influenced Mark Twain. In its most popular examples this literature always dealt with the roguish adventures of characters ranging from fantastic pranksters to genuine badmen. This "picaresque" element was prominent in the burlesque romances, such as *Don Quixote* and *Gil Blas*, which inspired Mark Twain, in this book and elsewhere, in making his attack on the shams of romantic chivalry.

Huckleberry Finn was a literary creation from materials which were traditional in the sense that the humor, folkways, legends, and speech of a country are a common inheritance. Such characters as the duke, the king, Widow Douglas, and Colonels Grangerford and Sherburn, however much Twain individualized them, were recognizably derived from frontier legend and its literature. Mark Twain's accretions for this novel came first from his boyhood experience many years before, and second from a process not unusual in the literary shaping of traditional sources. He once said that he wrote on a plan of "spontaneous combustion," but in this case the spontaneity was only sporadically sustained. The book, like its legendary sources, had to grow up; the eight years' lapse between the beginning and the conclusion of this composition were necessary to let the book "make up its mind," as Twain said. He began in 1876 what he called then "another boy's book * * * more to be at work than for anything else," and he carried it through the first sixteen chapters, when the raft has missed the mouth of the Ohio and gone below freedom-land. In two spurts during 1879 and 1880 he

added five chapters, bringing the narrative through the Grangerford feud and the Sherburn-Boggs incident at Bricksville. He then abandoned it. Huck somewhere remarks, "Providence always did put the right words in my mouth, if I left it alone"; and two years later, this happened to the author as the result of a long summer visit among the old scenes on the Mississippi. In a burst of inspiration he finished the book in the next eighteen months.

His inspiration fulfilled again the exuberant demands of a literary genre long neglected. Twain's novel is, as Fielding called his early work, a "comic epic in prose": comic, because it employs great strokes of wit and humor—and the scourge of laughter—to attack the evils of mankind and the consequent sins of society; epic, because its moving force, the great River, is also a stream in time and in history, bearing its raft of argonauts to various shores where lie the relics, wrecks, and hopes of a civilization in transition. As his narrator, Twain chose Huck; this was a clear act of genius. Huck "had known and suffered all" that was on the River, and he could speak expertly, in the speech of the author's boyhood Hannibal. In the speech of Huck Finn Twain fashioned a new literary language in colloquial American, seen at its best in the descriptions of the River, where the cadences and vigor of the spoken language are expressed by a great artist with such authority that a whole generation of realistic authors, from Sherwood Anderson to Hemingway and Faulkner, were influenced. As Eliot remarked, "like Dryden and Swift," he brought the language "up to date."

The River is a fundamental element in the structure of this novel, but it is also the central symbol to which other symbolic elements are referred. "It's lovely to live on a raft," says Huck, and "sometimes we'd have that whole river to ourselves for the longest time." The literary discovery of the River, which we owe to Mark Twain, made it part of a continental myth somewhat similar to those of the Ganges, the Nile, and the Amazon, rivers which were also gods. In this story the River accorded with Huck's loneliness; and whether it ravaged the land or was at peace, it was a clean and trustworthy reality for Jim, a fugitive from slavery, and Huck, fleeing from all the brutality of "civilization" epitomized in his father. The Pokesvilles and Bricksvilles along the shore were not all bad, nor were the people, yet their pollution was always sufficiently evident to make the return to the raft a repeated experience of regeneration. Even though they were driven by the storm beyond the mouth of the Ohio, which was the gateway to legal freedom for the slave, the River and the raft still offered the best freedom of all. The intrusion of the king and the duke upon this sanctuary, although it brought such evil as only the community of man could foster, was not disastrous, so long as they all remained on the raft, where, as

Huck says, it is necessary "for everybody to * * * feel right and kind toward the others." This is the epitome of this novel's social criticism. Whatever evil appeared in society was the evil of men, and Twain here used Huck to carry on his relentless excoriation of "the damned human race," and to condemn stereotypes of right and wrong with which the rulers of society justified their own selfish interests. In this novel the representative stereotype was (slavery. Huck had to battle with his conscience continuously, because according to the morality of society and church, he should report as a runaway slave this Jim whom he had come to love as a brother. His final decision in Jim's favor was concluded with his famous reflection, "All right, then, I'll go to hell!" Yet when Aunt Sally asked whether the steamboat explosion hurt anyone, he automatically responded, "No'm. Killed a nigger."

The English edition of *Huckleberry Finn* appeared on December 4, 1884, some time before the first American copies, dated 1885, were officially received for copyright. The present text follows a photographic reproduction of the first American edition, first issue, 1885, with the annotated correction of typographical errors.

In deciding to include with the text a collection of criticism, the editors had in mind their own experience with groups of students primarily interested in studying the book itself as a work of literature. We rejected principles of selection and organization which might have been given preference had it been our object to represent the history of the scholarship or the varieties of critical method that have been motivated by the problems of *Huckleberry Finn*. Within the limits of the space available the editors have preferred to assemble critical writings, excellent in themselves, which have suffused with insight the intrinsic characteristics of this work of art, its evocation of values inherent in the culture of a people, its power to extend itself into the continuous experience of successive generations of readers.

Yet in selecting such works and arranging them in the order of their appearance, certain patterns were automatically revealed. Beginning in the year of the novel's publication, four of the first five critics, two British and two American, show concern for the supposed crudity of the psychological and social experience of the American West which the book somehow transcended. About 1950 such authors as Lionel Trilling and T. S. Eliot memorably praised the novel's symbolic power and spiritual insight; Leo Marx represented a group who in opposition noted the novel's flaws of structure, sensibility, or sociological rectitude—five articles, pro and con, represent this critical debate. The Contents page shows four of those who participated in another debate, about five years later, which arose when Lauriat Lane wrote that *Huckleberry Finn* was a

great world novel and William Van O'Connor replied that it was not even the great American novel. The concluding essays represent the increasing sophistication and complexity of recent criticism, and a tendency to project the experience of Huck and Jim into universal aspects of the human experience.

The first group of selections following the text of the novel represents some Backgrounds and Sources; brief notes included there may explain the connection of these primitive materials with the personal and American experience which formed the matrix of this novel. The foreground of this fiction was the Mid-American continental culture during the early life of Mark Twain; nevertheless, even a few illustrations may show the gulf between the epic artist and his sources. The bibliography at the end of the volume, listing writings concerning Mark Twain and *Huck Finn*, is intended as a judicious selection.

S. B., R. C. B., E. H. L.

A Note on the Texts and Documentation

Since the editors share the concern for the teaching of scholarly fidelity in the documentation of research work, we list here the editorial principles we have followed in reproducing the source materials and critical essays included in this Critical Edition. The text for each selection is printed from a photographic facsimile of the original publication, and, in each case, the footnote numbers are those of the original. The first footnote for each title is a bibliographical record of the item, giving its source and the original page numbers. Occasional additional footnotes supplied by the editors are indicated by a dagger (†) and the bracketed word "[Editors]." Titles of selections not original with their authors have been enclosed in brackets.

The majority of the articles have been printed in their entirety. Where matter irrelevant to this book has been excluded, the deletion is indicated by three asterisks; where a deletion is extensive, we have usually noted the general subject of the deleted material.

The editors have not, in this Critical Edition, followed the practice of indicating the pagination of each original document within the texts as here printed. In our opinion, the principle to be taught is the scrupulous documentation of the present source of reference, whether it be the first or later edition or a transcript. The citation of the original source, if possible, should also be included for the benefit of others who may be able to consult it. In the use of this Critical Edition for documented themes, the researcher could be advised, in his first reference to any article in the collection, to give the location, the date, and the pagination of the original as shown in our first footnote, followed by the number of the page in the Critical Edition on which the quoted or designated matter appears. A second reference to the same article could be abbreviated to the author's name, with or without a short title, followed by the page number in the Critical Edition.

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Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

(TOM SAWYER'S COMRADE)

SCENE: THE MISSISSIPPI

TIME: FORTY TO FIFTY YEARS AGO

NOTICE

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.

EXPLANATORY

In this book a number of dialects are used, to wit: the Missouri negro dialect; the extremest form of the backwoods South-Western dialect; the ordinary "Pike-County" dialect; and four modified varieties of this last. The shadings have not been done in a hap-hazard fashion, or by guess-work; but pains-takingly, and with the trustworthy guidance and support of personal familiarity with these several forms of speech.

I make this explanation for the reason that without it many readers would suppose that all these characters were trying to talk alike and not succeeding.

THE AUTHOR

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