

Mark Twain and his masterpiece  
The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

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Samuel Clemens was an American writer and humorist whose best work is shown by broad social satire, realism of place and language, and memorable characters.

Clemens was born November 30, 1835, in Florida, Missouri. His family moved to Hannibal, Mississippi when he was four. There he received a public school education.

Samuel Clemens was a difficult child, given to mischief and misadventure. He barely escaped drowning on nine separate occasions. His father's death was a calamity in which

Samuel was not prepared for. Albert Bigelow Paine, Clemens' official biographer, offers the following glimpse of the young Clemens

"The boy Sam was fairly broken down. Remorse, which always dealt with him unsparingly, laid a heavy hand on him now. Wildness, disobedience, indifference to his father's wishes, all were remembered; a hundred things, in themselves trifling, became ghastly and heart-wringing in the knowledge that could never be undone. Seeing his grief, his mother took him by the hand and led him into where his father lay."

"It's all right, Sammy," she said. "What's done is done, and it does not matter to him anymore; but here by the side of him now I want you to promise to me--"

He turned, his eyes streaming with tears, and flung himself into her arms.

"I will promise anything," he sobbed, "if you won't make me go to school! Anything!"

His mother held him for a moment, thinking, then she said:

"No, Sammy; you need not go to school anymore. Only promise to be a better boy. Promise not to break my heart."

After his father's death, Clemens got a hold of two Hannibal printers, and in 1851

began setting type and contributing articles to his brother's newspaper, The Hannibal

Journal. After leaving his first job he took his printers and became a journeyman printer

in Keokuk, Iowa, New York City, Philadelphia, and other cities, and then a steamboat

pilot until the break out of the American Civil War which brought end to

traveling on the river. After a failed attempt at silver mining in 1862 he became a reporter on the Territorial Enterprise in Virginia City, Nevada, and later in 1863 began signing his articles with the pseudonym "Mark Twain," a Mississippi River phrase meaning two fathoms deep. After the move to San Francisco in 1864, Twain met the writers Artmeus Ward and Bret Harte, who encouraged him on his work. In 1865 Twain rewrote a tale he heard in the California gold fields and within months the author and the story, "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County," had become a national sensation. In later years Twain visited Europe and the Holy Lands which he wrote about in the book, "The Innocents Abroad," which was published in 1869. This book discussed those aspects of the Old World culture which impress American tourists. 1870 is the year in which he married his loving wife Olivia Langdon. After a short time in Buffalo the newlywed couple moved to Hartford, Connecticut. In the years between 1870 and 1880 much of Twain's best work was written. The book *Roughing It* recalls his early experiences as a miner and a journalist; *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, a book celebrating boyhood in a town on the Mississippi River, was published in 1867; *A Tramp Abroad*, published in 1880, describes a walking trip through the Black Forest of Germany and the Swiss Alps. Along with four other books, Twain wrote his adventurous masterpiece, the sequel to *Tom Sawyer*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, which was published in 1884. This was the first of his books to deal with childhood and the Mississippi River Valley in which himself had grown-up. It took Twain seven years to write the book and it initially met mixed receptions, rejected in some places as "rough, coarse and inelegant. . . more suited to the slums than to intelligent, respectable people." But in his lifetime, *Huckleberry Finn* became the most remunerative of all his works, and has since been called an American classic. "This book was praised by T.S. Eliot, celebrated by Ernest Hemingway, and recommended by thousands of high-school reading teachers." Twain's best novel now holds the burden of much criticism that the work itself threatens to become lost amid the almost endless volume devoted to its explication. There is no question that *Huckleberry Finn* has become "one of the central documents of American culture." "A book that can delight both fourteen-year-olds and

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graduate professors of literature is rare indeed, and we should give it careful attention."

We should not take an exaggerated reverence to this book. Twain himself, who devoted so much of his time and energy into his book, would find it ironic if we did so.

The setting of this novel is in the Mississippi River Valley, "forty to fifty years

ago" according to the original tittle page of 1885. This story was told by Huck. "Huck has

been living with the widow Douglas and her sister, Miss Watson, an experience that has

left him feeling "all cramped up." Accustomed to being "free and easy," he cannot abide

life within this well-regulated household, where he is expected to sit up straight, do his

homework, and pray to a God he cannot see." Huck is always looking for adventure. "All

I wanted was to go somewheres [SIC]," he tells us, "all I wanted was a change. I warn't

[SIC] particular."

Huck believes that his abusive father is dead so it is a surprise to him that his father

is waiting for him when he came back to the house. His father wants money which had

come to Huck at the end of Tom Sawyer. He claims his son and brings him to a remote

cabin in the woods. He suffers from delirium tremens and in one of there many physical

fight, Hucks father comes at him with a knife. Realizing that he cannot live with his father

anymore he fakes his death and takes a canoe to Jackson Island." There he meets a

runaway slave named Jim and they begin a series of adventures on the Mississippi River.

The whole story is based around the part where

Jim is captured and then Huck meets Tom Sawyer. They free Jim and then there is no real

ending to the story. It ends with a quote that Huck is saying, "To light out for the

Territory. . . because Aunt Sally is going to adopt me and sivilize me and I can't stand it. I

been there before."

Many readers are disappointed that the novel ended this way. They wanted Jim and

Huck to become some kind of heroes and they live happily ever after but, it didn't, and

that is why it has raised such bad criticism. Bernard DeVoto complained that "in the whole

reach of the English novel there is no more abrupt or chilling descent." More recent

critics have dismissed the conclusion as a "travesty" and "a failure of nerve." As Walter

Blair has explained,

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"The chief crimes are against characterization: Jim,

whom the reader and Huck have come to love and admire, becomes  
a victim of meaningless torture, a cartoon. Huck, who has  
fought against codes of civilization, follows one of the  
silliest of them."

On the other hand many well known critics, most notably T.S. Eliot,  
have tried to defend the conclusion saying that it has "a certain aptness" that lets  
Twain restate his primary goal in another key and beat his way back from incipient tragedy  
to the comic resolution called for in the original conception of the story. But this  
approach emphasizes the structure of the novel, and structure is a big part, but it is also a  
mechanical part of the story.

"Robert Miller believes that the conclusion can be defended in the  
very area where it seems the most vulnerable, characterization. If the final chapters of  
the novel seem to divest both Huck and Jim of their dignity, it is because Twain never  
intended them to be perceived as "a community of saints." The widespread dissatisfaction with  
the novel's resolution may well spring from the fact that modern readers may take  
Huck and Jim too seriously. If we take a look at them throughout the novel we see that  
they are "attractive but imperfect." Some people don't recognize the limitations of these  
characters so they might seem them as super heroes. But they aren't, they are just regular  
people.

Huck is a skeptic, as shown by his disregard for Miss Watson's  
vision of Providence and his unwillingness to accept Tom Sawyer's lies for  
instance, Tom over exaggerates a normal Sunday picnic into being a crowd of Spaniards,  
Arabs, and elephants. Huck believes in things he can see and touch which makes him  
shrewder than most of the adults in the novel. He is also very superstitious as in the  
part of the novel when he gets upset after he accidentally kills a spider. He thinks that  
it will bring him bad luck. Or when he sees nothing funny in Jim's beliefs of witches. Huck is  
also very honest but, he does lie a lot. These lies can't really be called lies though  
because of there transparency. For example when he dresses up like a girl to try and get  
some local news.

When he is confronted by Buck he can't even remember his assumed name.  
Jim is a very loving caring person, an example of this would be when  
Jim thought

that Huck had drowned and became very mournful. Then Huck found his way back to the raft and found Jim asleep, so the next morning Huck said that he had never left the raft.

After Jim found out about this little practical joke he said,

for  
wuz  
raf'. En  
de tears  
I's so  
make a  
trash is what  
'em

"When I got all wore out wid work, en wid de callin' you, en went to sleep, my heart wuz mos' broke bekase you los', en I didn' k'yer no mo' what become er me en de when I wake up en fine you back agin', all safe en soun', come en I could a got down on my knees en kiss' yo' foot thankful. En all you wuz thinkin 'bout wuz how you could fool uv ole Jim wis a lie. Dat truck dah is trash; en people is dat put dirt on de head er dey fren's en makes ashamed."[SIC]

At this point Huck realizes that Jim is a person with feelings also and he can be hurt just like anybody else. After this moment Huck never tells a lie or plays a practical joke on Jim throughout the rest of the story.

pessimism  
and his two  
failed and he lost  
problems and the  
writings  
is corrupt.

Twain's work during the 1890s and the 1900s is marked by growing from the result of his business reverses and later the deaths of his wife daughters. Twain also invested in a automatic printing machine but, this money. He then had to file for bankruptcy. Do to the fact of the money death of his family Twain moved to Europe. There he kept writing but, his weren't funny. He talked about the way the world stinks and how everybody

some of the best  
Recollections of  
make a comeback  
21, 1910.

No novels Twain wrote in this period even came close to Huck Finn but, works are Pudd'nhead Wilson. Another of his writings is the Personal Joan Arc, a sentimental biography. Through these novels he was able to and able to live wealthy again until his death in New York City on April

dominated by  
civil war. His  
important  
writers, Twain is renowned as a humorist, but his literary reputation

Twain raised his voice in protest at a time when American life was the materialism and corruption of the so called Gilded-Age following the writings were inspired by the unconventional west. One of America's most

also rests on his

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realistic use of dialects and the vernacular, especially of the Mississippi River Valley,

realistic characters and scenes makes his stories that much better.

Through Twain's novel he was able to express what he felt. The reason that he

wrote some of the novels so well is because that he lived his writing.

Twain lived in the

deep south so therefore he used settings that contained the deep south.

Many of the things

in which Huck did in the story relates to what Twain did or wanted to do as a young child.

Twain must have like his childhood somewhat for him to reflect back on it through his

stories and to also use humor in it. He thought his life as a child was funny.

I believed that Twain was a very good writer. All of his adventurous books are

loved by millions of young children and adults. Twain was a great writer

when he was

living and even a better one when he died. I wonder if there is anything

really deep about

the books Twain wrote or if they were just written for the pure reason for entertainment? I

believe that this book represents an on going struggle that will never be resolved.

According to Roger Salomon,

"Both Huck and Jim are related to the demigods of the

river, to the barbarous primitivism of the Negro, and

beyond that

to the archetypal primitives of the Golden Age,

instinctively good,

uncorrupted by reason, living close to nature and more

influenced

by its portents than by the conventions of civilization."

I believe that Salomon is looking for something that is just not there. I don't think that

Twain is trying to make some real deep point about Huck and Jim. Salomon perceives

these people as cave men. He is trying to tell us that this story is about the beginning of

life. He is looking too hard. Mark Twain has been a famous writer for a long time and he

will always be looked back on as one of the best American writers not just of his time but,

through out history. If you read one of his books I wouldn't recommend reading it for

some deep meaning because I do not believe that you will find one. Just read for the fun of

it.

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