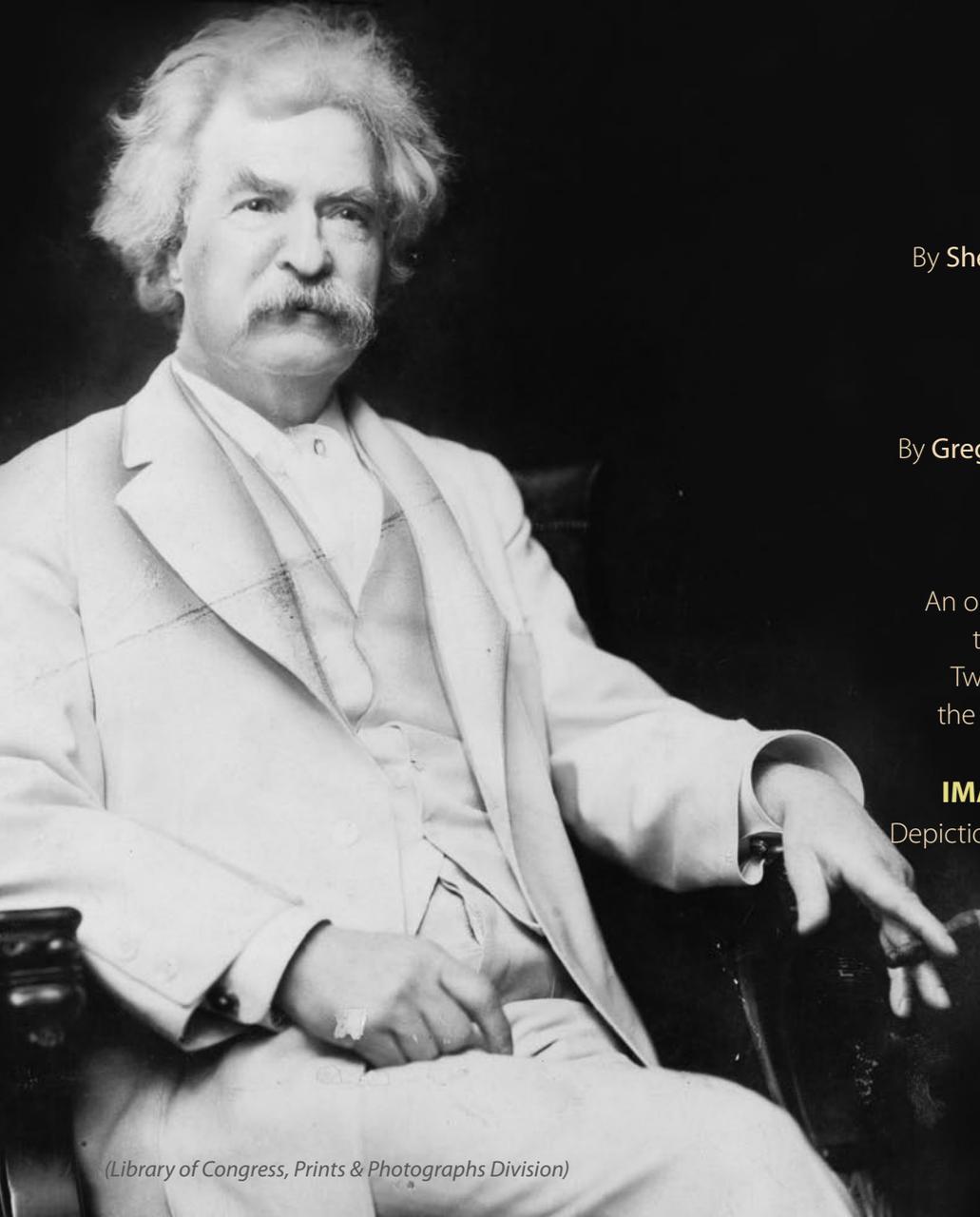


MARK TWAIN



The First Truly American Writer

MARK TWAIN: The First Truly American Writer



CONTENTS

MARK TWAIN: NOVELIST, HUMORIST AND CITIZEN OF THE WORLD 1

By Shelley Fisher Fishkin, professor of English and director of American studies at Stanford University

MARK TWAIN ABROAD: TRAVEL AND GROWTH 5

By Gregg Camfield, editor, *The Oxford Companion to Mark Twain*

TWAIN'S JOURNEYS MAPPED: IMAGES FROM TWAIN'S JOURNEYS 9

An original map created by the noted artist John Burgoyne traces Mark Twain's travels through five continents. Twain crossed the Atlantic Ocean 29 times, and toured the world "talking and reading from his own rich humor"

IMAGES: MARK TWAIN'S FICTIONAL WORLD 16

Depictions of scenes from Twain publications and related images

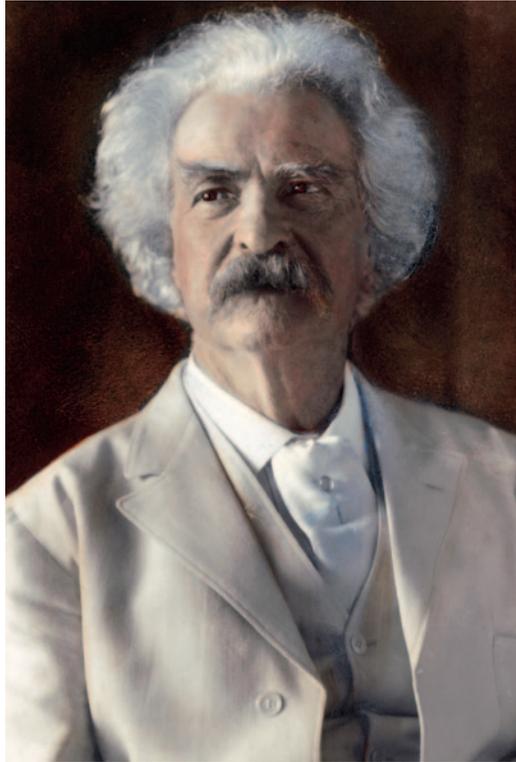
MARK TWAIN'S ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN 27

By Ron Powers, author, *Mark Twain: A Life*

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn excerpt 31

Mark Twain: Novelist, Humorist and Citizen of the World

Commemorating the 100th anniversary of Mark Twain's death



Photographic portrait of Mark Twain, 1906
(*The Granger Collection, New York*)

William Faulkner called Mark Twain “the first truly American writer”; Eugene O’Neill dubbed him “the true father of American literature.” Charles Darwin kept *Innocents Abroad* on his bedside table, within easy reach when he wanted to clear his mind and relax at bedtime. The Gilded Age gave an entire era its name. Joseph Conrad often thought of *Life on the Mississippi* when he commanded a steamer on the Congo. Friedrich Nietzsche admired Tom Sawyer. Lu Xun was so entranced by *Eve’s Diary* that he had it translated into Chinese. Ernest Hemingway claimed “All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*,” while his fellow Nobel laureate Kenzaburō Ōe cited *Huck* as the book that spoke so powerfully to his condition in war-torn Japan that it inspired him to write his first novel. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt took the phrase “New Deal” from *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*, a book which led science fiction giant Isaac Asimov to credit Twain (along with Jules Verne) with having invented time travel. When José Martí read *Yankee*, he was so moved by Twain’s depiction of “the vileness of those who would climb atop their fellow man, feed upon his misery, and drink from his misfortune” that he wanted to “set off for Hartford [Connecticut] to shake his hand.”

Twain has been called the American Cervantes,

By Shelley Fisher Fishkin



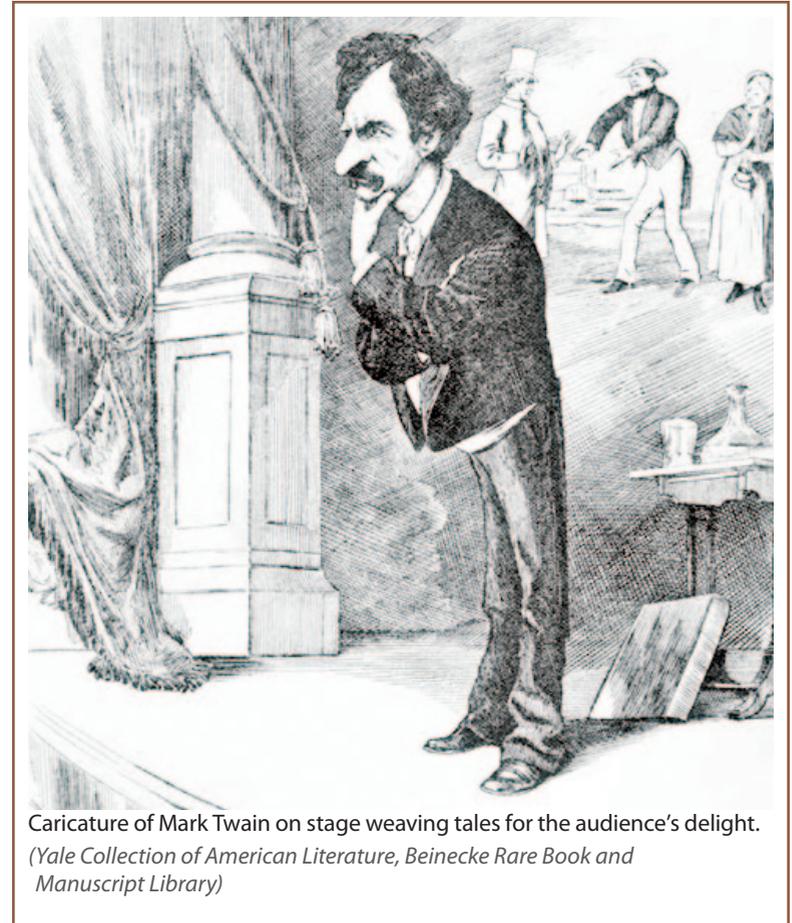
Shelley Fisher Fishkin, Professor of English and Director of American Studies at Stanford University, is the author or editor of many books about Mark Twain, including *Was Huck Black? Mark Twain and African-American Voices*, *Lighting Out for the Territory*, the 29-volume *The Oxford Mark Twain*, and, most recently, *Mark Twain’s Book of Animals* and *The Mark Twain Anthology: Great Writers on His Life and Works*. (Courtesy of Shelley Fisher Fishkin)

our Homer, our Tolstoy, our Shakespeare, our Rabelais. From the breezy slang and deadpan humor that peppered his earliest comic sketches to the unmistakably American characters who populated his fiction, Twain's writings introduced readers around the world to American personalities speaking in distinctively American cadences. *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* was America's literary Declaration of Independence, a book no Englishman could have written — a book that expanded the democratic possibilities of what a modern novel could do and what it could be.

Twain helped define the rhythms of our prose and the contours of our moral map. He saw our best and our worst, our extravagant promise and our stunning failures, our comic foibles and our tragic flaws. He understood better than we did ourselves American dreams and aspirations, our potential for greatness and our potential for disaster. His fictions brilliantly illuminated the world in which he lived and the world we inherited, changing it — and us — in the process. He knew that our feet often danced to tunes that had somehow remained beyond our hearing; with perfect pitch he played them back to us.

His unerring sense of the right word and not its second cousin taught people to pay attention when he spoke, in person or in print. ("The difference between the almost right word and the right word is really a large matter — it's the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning.")

Twain's quirky, ambitious, strikingly original fiction and nonfiction engaged some of the perennially thorny, messy challenges we are still grappling with today — such as the challenge of making sense of a nation founded on freedom by men who held slaves; or the puzzle of our continuing faith in



Caricature of Mark Twain on stage weaving tales for the audience's delight.
(Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library)

technology in the face of our awareness of its destructive powers; or the problem of imperialism and the difficulties involved in getting rid of it. Indeed, it would be difficult to find an issue on the horizon today that Twain did not touch on somewhere in his work. Heredity versus environment? Animal rights? The boundaries of

gender? The place of black voices in the cultural heritage of the United States? Twain was there. Satirist Dick Gregory once said that Twain “was so far ahead of his time that he shouldn’t even be talked about on the same day as other people.”

At the beginning of his career, Twain was lauded as a talented humorist. But the comic surface turned out to mask unexpected depths. (“Yes, you are right,” Twain wrote a friend in 1902, “I am a moralist in disguise.”) Time and time again, Twain defied readers’ expectations, forging unforgettable narratives from materials that had previously not been the stuff of literature. As William Dean Howells once put it, “He saunters out into the trim world of letters, and lounges across its neatly kept paths, and walks about on the grass at will, in spite of all the signs that have been put up from the beginning of literature, warning people of dangers and penalties for the slightest trespass.”

Humane, sardonic, compassionate, impatient, hilarious, appalling, keenly observant and complex, Twain inspired great writers in the 20th century to become the writers they became — not just in the U.S., but around the world. Writers marveled at the art Twain wrought from the speech of ordinary people — speech whose previous appearance in literature had most often been treated with ridicule. Jorge Luis Borges observed that in *Huckleberry Finn* “for the first time an American writer used the language of America without affectation.” Twain taught American authors from Arthur Miller to David Bradley, Ralph Ellison, Ursula Le Guin, Toni Morrison, and countless others important lessons about the craft of fiction. Some key figures in the visual arts, as well, found reading Mark Twain transformative. Cartoonist Chuck Jones, for example, who played a key role in developing such icons

of American popular culture as Road Runner, Wile E. Coyote, and Bugs Bunny, tracks these characters back to his early reading of Mark Twain’s *Roughing It*.

Born in 1835 in the village of Florida, Missouri, Sam Clemens (who would take the name “Mark Twain” in 1863) spent his boyhood in the town of Hannibal, Missouri. In 1847, when his father died, 11-year-old Sam ended his formal schooling and became a printer’s apprentice in a local newspaper office, later working as a journeyman printer in St. Louis, New York, Philadelphia, Washington and elsewhere. He spent two years learning the river and becoming a riverboat pilot, but his career on the river was ended by the Civil War. After spending two weeks in a ragtag unit of the Missouri State Guard that was sympathetic to the Confederacy, he set out for the Nevada Territory with his brother and tried to strike it rich mining silver. Although he failed as a prospector, he succeeded as a journalist. He got his first taste of national fame when his “Jumping Frog” story [“The Jumping Frog of Calaveras County”] appeared in 1865. He courted Olivia Langdon of Elmira, New York, and published *Innocents Abroad* in 1869, to great popular acclaim. He married, started a family, and began writing the books for which he is best known today while living in the family mansion he built in Hartford, Connecticut. Financial problems forced him to close the house and relocate the family to Europe in the early 1890s. Later in that decade he would pull himself out of bankruptcy by embarking on a lecture tour that took him to Africa and Asia. As the 19th century ended and the 20th century began, he condemned his country — and several European powers — for the imperialist adventures they had pursued around the world, and he became vice president of the

Anti-Imperialist League. The accolades and honors bestowed on him in his later years — honorary degrees, birthday celebrations — failed to fill the hole in his heart created by the death of his wife and two of his daughters. He died in 1910.

In 1899, the *London Times* dubbed Twain “Ambassador at Large of the U.S.A.” He had seen more of the world than any major American writer had before him, and his books would be translated into over 70 languages. Cartoonists made him as recognizable an icon worldwide as “Uncle Sam.” Twain was one of the country’s first genuinely cosmopolitan citizens, someone who felt as at home in the world as in his native land.

“What is the most rigorous law of our being?” Twain asked in a paper he delivered the year *Huckleberry Finn* was published. His answer? “Growth. No smallest atom of our moral, mental or physical structure can stand still a year. ... In other words, we change — and must change, constantly, and keep on changing as long as we live.” This child of slaveholders who grew up to write a book that many view as the most profoundly anti-racist novel by an American clearly spoke from his own experience. Troubled by his own failure to question the unjust status quo during his Hannibal childhood, Twain became a compelling critic of people’s ready acceptance of what he called “the lie of silent assertion” — the “silent assertion that nothing is going on which fair and intelligent men are aware of and are engaged by their duty to try to stop.” Experience also taught him not to underestimate the transformative power of humor. The greatest satirist America has produced wrote that the human “race, in its poverty, has unquestionably one really effective weapon — laughter. Power, Money, Persuasion, Supplication, Persecution — these can lift at a colossal humbug — push it a little

— crowd it a little — weaken it a little, century by century: but only Laughter can blow it to rags and atoms at a blast. Against the assault of Laughter nothing can stand.”

MORE MARK TWAIN WRITINGS ONLINE

The full text of many of Mark Twain’s books are available for free online. (Links current as of May 2010)

***Roughing It* (1872)**

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/3177/3177-h/p1.htm#popup>

***The Innocents Abroad* (1869)**

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/3176/3176-h/p1.htm#popup>

***A Tramp Abroad* (1880)**

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/119/119-h/p1.htm#popup>

***Following the Equator* (1897)**

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2895/2895-h/p1.htm#popup>

***Life on the Mississippi* (1883)**

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/245/245-h/p1.htm#popup>

***Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876)**

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/7193/7193-h/7193-h.htm#popup>

***De Lotgevallen van Tom Sawyer* (Dutch)**

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/18381/18381-h/18381-h.htm#popup>

***Die Abenteuer Tom Sawyers* (German)**

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/30165/30165-h/30165-h.htm#popup>

***Les Aventures de Tom Sawyer* (French)**

<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5706208j#popup>

Mark Twain Abroad: Travel and Growth



Mark Twain and his family aboard the SS *Warrimoo* sailing to Australia in 1895
(Special Collections, University of Virginia)

Shortly before his 41st birthday, Mark Twain wrote to a Missouri correspondent,

As you describe me I can picture myself as I was, 22 years ago. ... You think I have grown some; upon my word there was room for it. You have described a callow fool, a self-sufficient ass, a mere human tumble-bug. ... Ignorance, intolerance, egotism, self-assertion, opaque perception, dense and pitiful chuckle-headedness. ... That is what I was at 19–20.

(1 November 1876)

It might seem surprising that a person could see himself as so transformed in two decades, but to Twain this would not have seemed surprising at all. As he emphatically proclaimed in 1887, “What is the most rigorous law of our being? *Growth*. No smallest atom of our moral, mental or physical structure can stand still a year.” Appropriately, Twain uses the metaphor of movement, of travel, to describe growth, because he was an inveterate traveler whose wanderings contributed to his profound growth as a person and as a writer. While his friends, family, and reading had an equally profound impact, no better index of his growth is to be found than in his five major travel narratives.

He had much to write about. Few people in the 19th century could match Mark Twain mile for mile. To detail

By Gregg Camfield



Gregg Camfield, editor,
The Oxford Companion to Mark Twain
(Courtesy of Eileen Kogl Camfield)

all of his voyages would take volumes. In the United States, he traveled from coast to coast, and from the Mississippi delta to the northern border. He worked as a printer, riverboat pilot, reporter, lecturer, and literary man, and he lived in just about every kind of population center, from farms, small towns, and mining camps to great cities. Mark Twain traveled extensively outside the United States, living at times in or near London, Paris, Berlin, Vienna, and Florence. He visited, among other places, lands that today comprise Australia, the Azores, Bermuda, Canada, Ceylon, Egypt, Fiji, Gibraltar, Greece, India, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritius, Morocco, New Zealand, Pakistan, Turkey, Ukraine, South Africa, and Syria. While he didn't always find travel comfortable or pleasant, he found it compelling. As he wrote in an 1867 letter, "All I do know or feel, is, that I am wild with impatience to move — move — *Move!*"

To track those movements is to chart the artistic and ethical growth of a writer who was as prolific as he was mobile. Indeed, after he became a newspaper correspondent in the 1860s, Twain's travels led him to collect material for his writing. In doing so, he experienced travel differently with each voyage. This is not to say that his earlier travels did not change him. When describing his training to be a steamboat pilot, he writes,

In that brief, sharp schooling, I got personally and familiarly acquainted with about all the different types of human nature that are to be found in fiction, biography, or history. ... When I find a well-drawn character in fiction or biography, I generally take a warm personal interest in him, for the reason that I have known him before — met him on the river.
(Mississippi, Chapter 18)

But meeting is not the same as knowing. As a reporter,



Mark Twain (left) in academic robes. Twain received an honorary doctorate from Oxford University along with Rudyard Kipling. Kipling stands to Twain's right.

(Courtesy of Kevin Mac Donnell, Austin, Texas)

Mark Twain learned to pry into matters, to look below surfaces, to question justifications and rationalizations for human behavior. He was supposed to judge, and judging helped him see more deeply, to understand new places and events from different perspectives. This process began in San Francisco, where he came to see the corruption of the local police and their abuse of disenfranchised Chinese immigrants as a human rights problem. Outraged at finding bigotry in the police, Twain then found it in himself. From

finding it to fighting it was a necessary step, one that put him on a path toward cosmopolitanism.

Not that it was an easy or an unbroken path. Twain's first major travel narrative, *Innocents Abroad*, (1869) is known as much for its boorish irreverence toward Europe, North Africa, and Asia Minor as for its energetic humor. He expressed just about equal parts defensiveness and fascination. The more alien a place was to his prior experiences, the more likely he was to enjoy what he saw. Twain's descriptions of Tangiers, for example, express wide-eyed delight. On the other hand, his knowledge of Christian schisms and his Protestant background fueled a constant scorn of anything having to do with Roman Catholicism. The line from Chapter 25, "Why Don't You Rob Your Church?" could serve as a subtitle for much of the book.

Brash bluster and irreverence are normal reactions of the ignorant; in this sense, Twain's mockery both of European customs and of Americans who "went native" in Europe are typical outbursts of the beginning traveler. Indeed, travelers for generations have enjoyed his laughter at "those necessary nuisances," tour guides. But Twain was acutely aware of his own ignorance, and his humor opened the door to self-exploration. The book's very title acknowledges how much he had to learn and how simultaneously painful and funny that learning could be.

Twain built *Innocents* from a collection of newspaper articles that reflected his immediate impressions. *Roughing It* (1872) began as a book, affording Twain the opportunity to craft his narrative persona as an older person reflecting on youthful folly. He thus could show how travels in the American West matured the narrator from a credulous, narrow-minded neophyte into a wiser, more

flexible, and much more observant man of the world. Much of the book's rich humor juxtaposes his prejudiced expectations of the American West with the far richer reality. Readers thus learn to see East Coast or European airs and assumptions about other cultures as limited and stultifying. The book teaches the importance of viewing the world from more than one perspective.

In *A Tramp Abroad* (1880), Twain returns to the Old World. This book is cast not so much as a description of his travels, but rather as a warning. By imitating European aristocrats, Twain suggests, Americans endanger their democracy. Again, Twain created a narrator whose expectations and rigidities force him into humorous situations, but, unlike in *Roughing It*, this narrator never learns. He justifies his genteel wanderings as an educational grand tour to teach him the fine arts, but the title tells the truth — that a lazy rich man turning himself into an ersatz aristocrat is really a tramp. This is a subtler and more important criticism: Mark Twain is not the ugly American blasting anything he doesn't understand; instead, his narrator shows the dangers of pretension. He creates his Mark Twain persona as a cautionary example to show that democracy requires egalitarianism and compassion. Along the way is much wonderful humor about intercultural contact, including, at the most basic, learning a foreign language. As Twain puts it in an appendix on his efforts to learn German, "I heard a Californian student in Heidelberg say, in one of his calmest moods, that he would rather decline two drinks than one German adjective."

Life on the Mississippi (1883) combines pieces written in two distinct periods. Twain first published Chapters 4–17, describing his apprenticeship as a riverboat pilot, in 1875. The bulk of the book describes an 1881 tour of America's heartland. Perhaps no single

work so clearly indicates Twain's growth. Here he candidly admits that as a child and young man he was a conforming member of the slave-holding South. He speaks from experience as he humorously condemns the phony feudalism of "the lost cause" (slavery). Twain has two political purposes: first, that time and opportunity can enable great change, and second, that one cannot change without learning how to observe and judge, to peer beneath placid surfaces to find complexity. No doubt Twain understood, too, that one might liken this kind of social observation to piloting a steamboat on a wild river. Twain saw up close in 1881 that the Civil War had solved little; racial prejudice and de facto segregation allowed the Southern fantasy aristocracy to live on, stunting America's moral and material progress. It was not safe to say such things in the South. Twain softened the point with humor, but he made the point nonetheless.

Twain's agenda to liberate people from prejudice persisted in his last major travel narrative, *Following the Equator* (1897), which reports his experiences in a world-girdling 1895–96 lecture tour. While *Mississippi* addressed specifically American chauvinism, *Equator* addresses the prejudices that lay behind European imperialism. Often attacked by Europeans for his irreverence toward Christianity, Twain pointed out the hypocrisy of his detractors, writing, "True irreverence is irreverence for another man's god." While this book extends Twain's plea for a more generous and cosmopolitan appreciation of cultural differences, it transcends advocacy, seeking to explain human cultural variation. Twain expresses both puzzlement and joy in the wide range of cultural practices that human beings can invent and then call "natural."

While these books reflect Twain's personal and intellectual development, they also display a remarkable consistency. He

always sought to understand the world by juxtaposing what he learned from books and peers with his careful observations and emotional experience. And he always observed the world through a wide range of filters, from compassion to ridicule, from angry scorn to humorous joy. While this combination often manifested itself in irreverence, it also turned him into one of the most tolerant and open-minded of travelers. Not surprisingly, then, Twain's travel books were among the best sellers of his time and still wear well in ours.

READ AND LISTEN: TRAVEL WRITINGS

(Links current as of May 2010)

***Innocents Abroad* (1869)**

Audio (http://stream.state.gov/streamvol/libmedia/amgov/890/audio/Innocents_Abroad_excerpt.mp3)

Transcript (<http://www.america.gov/st/peopleplace-english/2010/April/20100506122015naneerg0.8795282.html#popup>)

***Life on the Mississippi* (1883)**

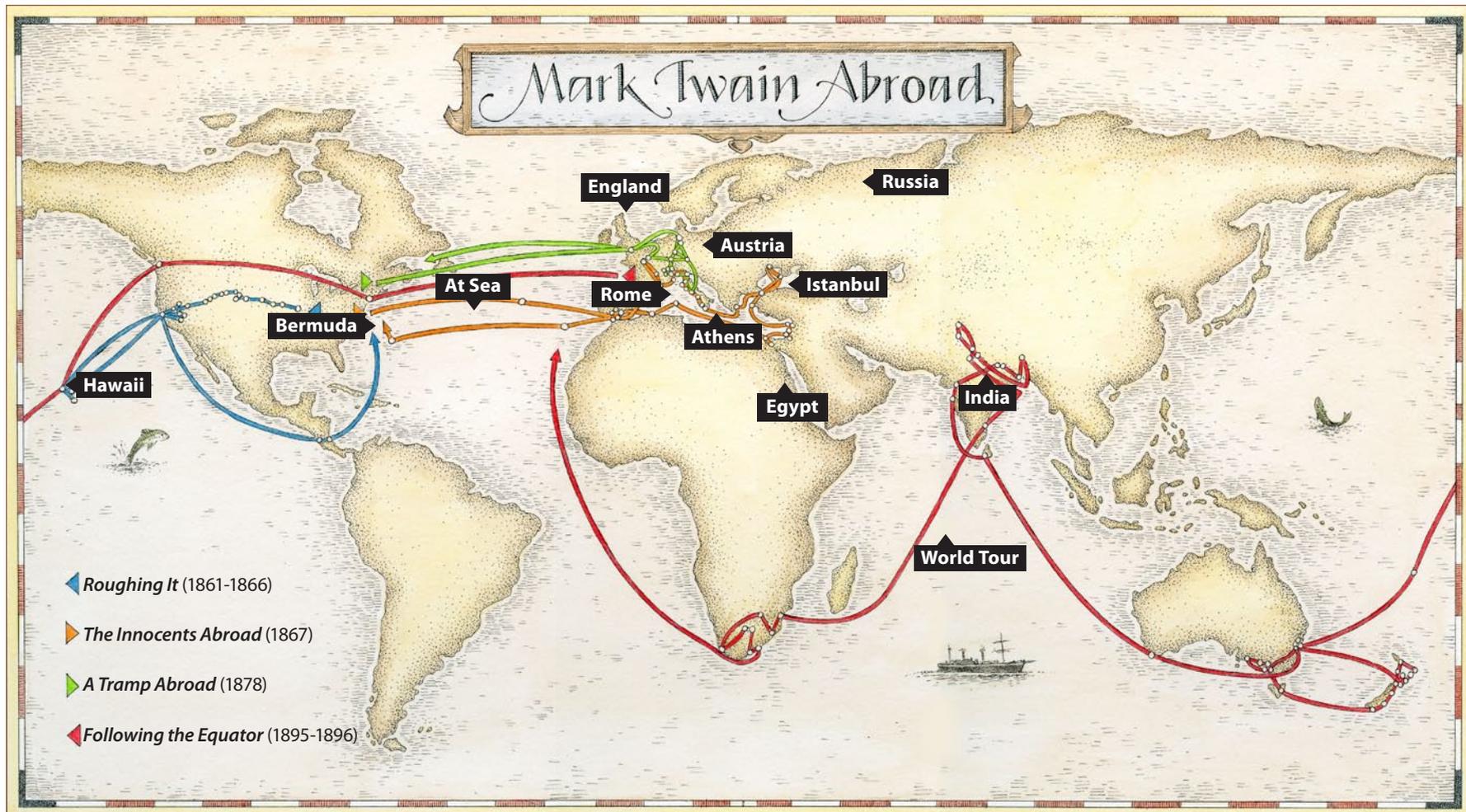
Audio (http://stream.state.gov/streamvol/libmedia/amgov/890/audio/Life_on_Mississippi_exceprt.mp3)

Transcript (<http://www.america.gov/st/peopleplace-english/2010/April/20100506123819naneerg0.1925166.html#popup>)

***Following the Equator* (1897)**

Audio (http://stream.state.gov/streamvol/libmedia/amgov/890/audio/Following_Equator_excerpt.mp3)

Transcript (<http://www.america.gov/st/peopleplace-english/2010/April/20100506125009naneerg0.1505793.html#popup>)



(John Burgayne for America.gov)

Mark Twain visited five continents, crossed the Atlantic Ocean 29 times, and toured the world "talking and reading from his own rich humor."

At Sea



Drawing of boat in rough seas
(Special Collections, University of Virginia Library)

Travel in the 1800s was a hazardous proposition.
The pleasure cruiser *Quaker City* encountered bad weather.

Athens

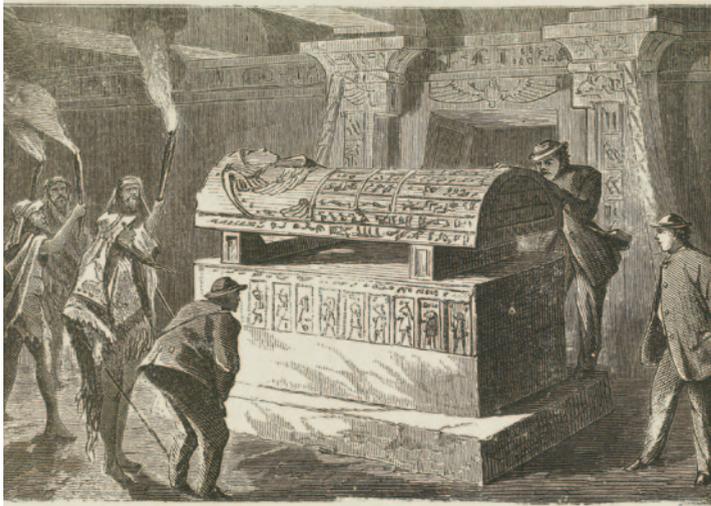


The Acropolis of Athens
(© Roger Wood/CORBIS)

Mark Twain visited the Acropolis in Athens.

"What a world of ruined sculpture was about us! Set up in rows — stacked up in piles — scattered broadcast over the wide area of the Acropolis — were hundreds of crippled statues of all sizes and of the most exquisite workmanship; and vast fragments of marble that once belonged to the entablatures, covered with bas-reliefs representing battles and sieges, ships of war with three and four tiers of oars, pageants and processions — every thing one could think of. History says that the temples of the Acropolis were filled with the noblest works of Praxiteles and Phidias, and of many a great master in sculpture besides—and surely these elegant fragments attest it." — Mark Twain

Egypt



Drawing of Egyptian tomb
(Special Collections, University of Virginia Library)

The Quaker City tour of Europe and the Holy Land, described in *The Innocents Abroad*, took Mark Twain to Egypt to see the pyramids and other antiquities.

“The Sphinx is grand in its loneliness; it is imposing in its magnitude; it is impressive in the mystery that hangs over its story. And there is that in the overshadowing majesty of this eternal figure of stone, with its accusing memory of the deeds of all ages, which reveals to one something of what he shall feel when he shall stand at last in the awful presence of God.” — Mark Twain

England



Drawing of Mark Twain meeting England's King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra
(© 2010 Culver Pictures Inc.)

Mark Twain travelled to England to receive an honorary doctorate from Oxford University. At a garden party in Windsor in 1907, Twain meets King Edward VII.

“Although I wouldn't cross an ocean again for the price of the ship that carried me, I am glad to do it for an Oxford degree.”
— Mark Twain

Hawaii



Mark Twain seated with others in Hawaii
(Lori Cagwin Leavy/Dorothy DeMare)

As a reporter for the *Sacramento Daily Union* in 1866, Twain travelled to the Sandwich Islands, now Hawaii. For the next 40 years, Twain lectured around the world and his favorite topic was the Sandwich Islands.

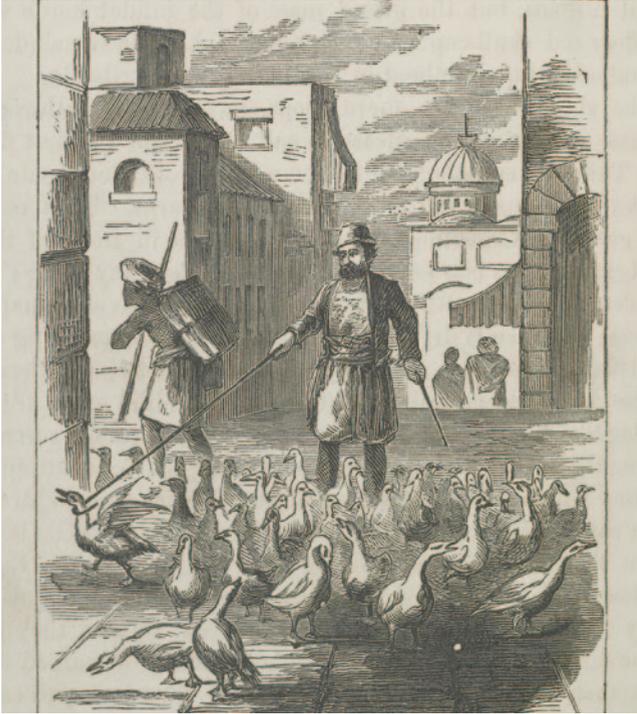
India



Tiger-hunting party traveling by elephant in India
(Popperfoto/Getty Images)

Mark Twain wrote of India, "So far as I am able to judge, nothing has been left undone, either by man or nature, to make India the most extraordinary country that the sun visits on his rounds. Nothing seems to have been forgotten, nothing overlooked."

Istanbul



Drawing of man herding geese
(Special Collections, University of Virginia Library)

In *The Innocents Abroad*, Mark Twain describes the streets and markets of Istanbul.

“You cannot conceive of anything so beautiful as Constantinople, viewed from the Golden Horn or the Bosphorus. I think it must be the handsomest city in the world.” — Mark Twain

Rome

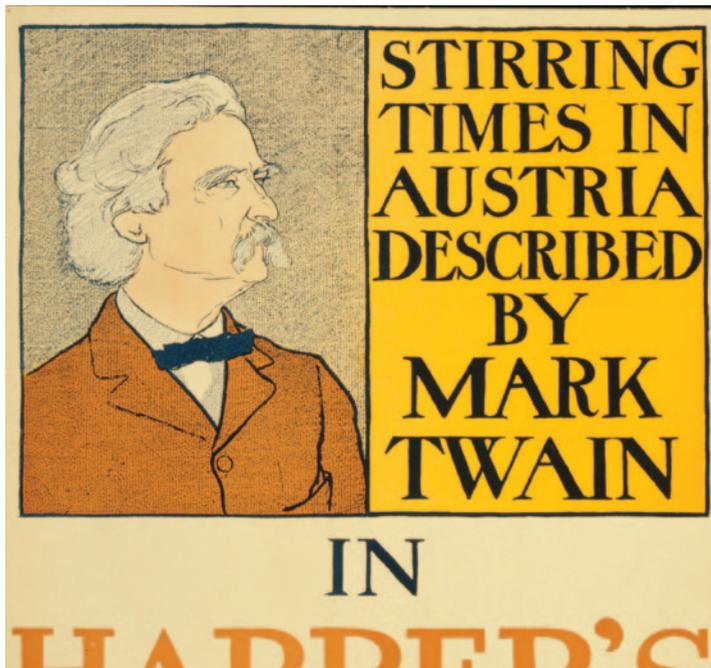


Drawing of men looking at preserved bodies of popes in St. Peter's Basilica
(The Mark Twain House & Museum, Hartford)

In *The Innocents Abroad*, Mark Twain describes his visit to St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. The preserved bodies of former popes are in display cases.

“Day after day and night after night we have wandered among the crumbling wonders of Rome; day after day and night after night we have fed upon the dust and decay of five-and-twenty centuries — have brooded over them by day and dreamt of them by night till sometimes we seemed moldering away ourselves, and growing defaced and cornerless, and liable at any moment to fall a prey to some antiquary and be patched in the legs, and “restored” with an unseemly nose, and labeled wrong and dated wrong, and set up in the Vatican for poets to drivel about and vandals to scribble their names on forever and forevermore.” — Mark Twain

Austria



Magazine cover with drawing of Mark Twain
 (Prints and Photographs, New York Public Library Digital Gallery)

"The empire is made up of health resorts; it distributes health to the whole world. Its waters are all medicinal. They are bottled and sent throughout the earth; the natives themselves drink beer. This is self-sacrifice, apparently." — Mark Twain

Bermuda



Mark Twain sitting on porch surrounded by others
 (The Mark Twain House & Museum, Hartford)

Vacationing in Bermuda with future U.S. President Woodrow Wilson (at right rear) and other friends, 1908.

Russia

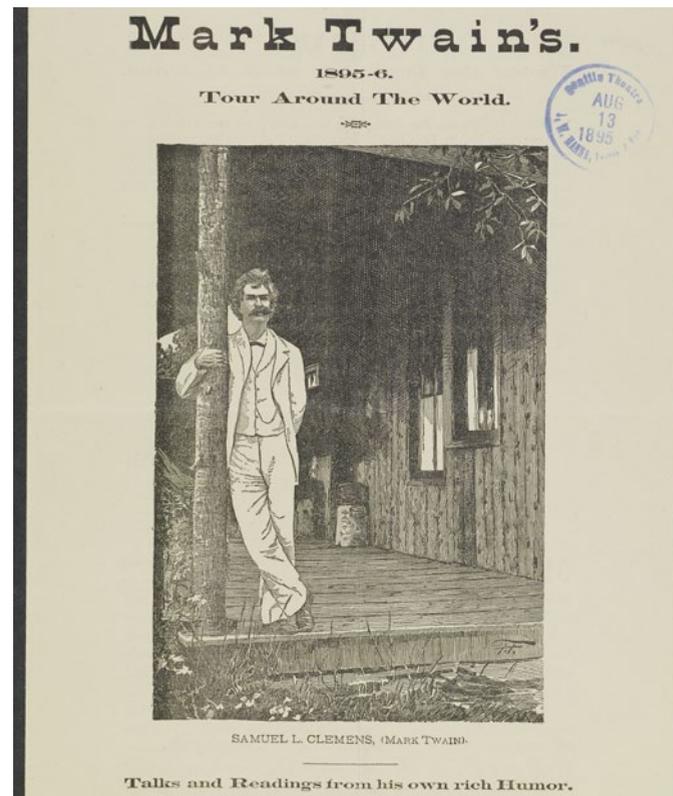


Mark Twain in Russian
(The Mark Twain House & Museum, Hartford)

Mark Twain met Czar Alexander II in Yalta during the *Quaker City* excursion to Europe and the Holy Land in 1867. Twain was selected by his fellow travelers to help write a speech addressing Alexander II. Twain wrote about the Czar's emancipation of the Russian serfs.

"One of the brightest pages that has graced the world's history, since written history had its birth, was recorded by your Majesty's hand when it loosed the bonds of twenty millions of men, and Americans can but esteem it a privilege to do honour to a ruler who has wrought so great a deed." — Mark Twain

Brochure announcing Mark Twain's Tour Around the World



Cover of brochure including Twain's description of his 1895-96 journeys
(Special Collections, University of Virginia Library)

In 1895–1896, Mark Twain travelled around the world. His popular and humorous lectures earned him the money to repay creditors.

Mark Twain's Fictional World

Mark Twain's quirky, ambitious, strikingly original fiction and nonfiction engaged some of the perennially thorny, challenges we still grapple with today. Enjoy these introductions to his publications and the photos and illustrations from his work and life.



"Mark Twain," America's best humorist

(Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division)



Mark Twain was a 32-year-old newspaperman when he wrote *The Innocents Abroad* (1869), a collection of reports to newspapers on a trip he took to Europe and the Holy Land with a group of American tourists. It was Twain's first major book and also his best-selling book during his lifetime. Much of his trademark humor focuses here on his stance as a

disillusioned innocent, a no-nonsense traveler who discovers that the inflated accounts of famous sights in previous travel books are often far from reality. As William Dean Howells wrote in a review, Twain's gift is that he writes "always good-humored humor," which is "even in its impudence charming."

Cartoon of Twain walking past ship passengers reading his works
(Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library)



TOM MEDITATES.

Illustration from Tom Sawyer showing Tom dreaming (from *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain)

(Special Collections, University of Virginia Library)

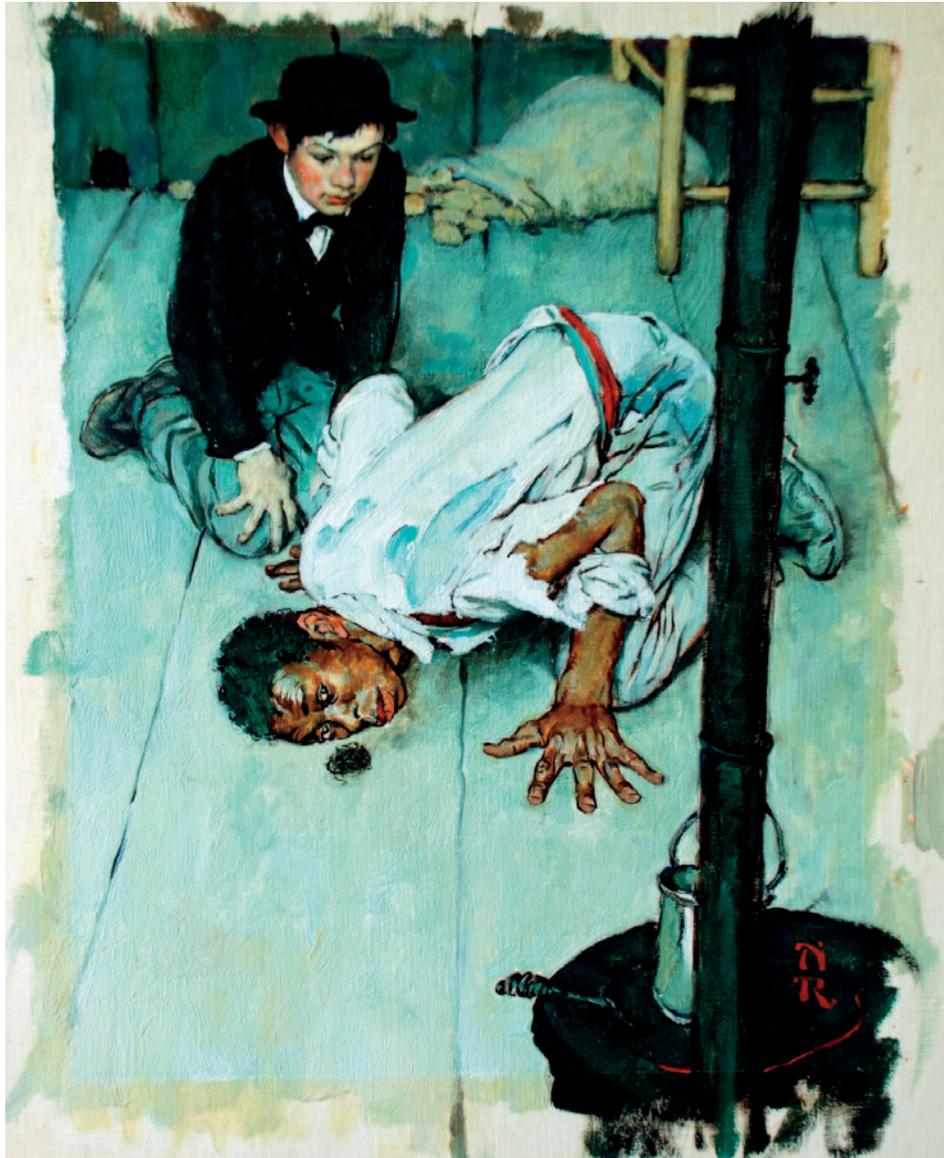
The Adventures of Tom Sawyer (1876) had disappointing sales when it appeared, but has become one of Twain's most popular works. Twain started out to write a parody of earlier American children's novels that had popularized model good boys. The prank-playing Tom is a good-bad boy, the kind of 13-year-old who dreams of escaping school and playing pirates or Robin Hood. Tom is "mischievous but not vicious," one reviewer said. But the source of the book's enduring attraction is that it is an enchanting idyll of American small town life, a "hymn to boyhood," as Twain later recognized.



Painting of men playing music and dancing on flat boat of the type often found on the Mississippi River before the American Civil War

(Topham/The Image Works)

Life on the Mississippi (1883) is two books in one. The first half is Mark Twain's nostalgia-laced account of his apprenticeship as the 21-year-old pilot of a steamboat on the Mississippi River. Riverboat pilots had to know every bend in the river, and they were exalted figures. "A pilot, in those days," he writes, "was the only unfettered and entirely independent human being that lived in the earth." The second half covers the trip that an older, unillusioned Twain took by steamboat down the same river 21 years later, after the Civil War and the spread of railroads had undermined steamboats economically.



On its face *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1876) is one of the great boys' adventure stories. Two runaways — Huck, an outcast escaping a brutal father, and Jim, a slave in the pre-Civil War South seeking freedom in the North — float down the vast Mississippi River on a raft and encounter a gallery of scoundrels, con men, and backwoods yokels. On a deeper level, the novel builds to one of the great moral choices in all of literature — the moment when Huck, remembering his friendship with Jim, goes against everything his upbringing has taught him is right and decides to help Jim to freedom. When Huck says, "All right, then, I'll go to hell," it's a triumph of existential emotion over the false abstractions of society and its moral codes. Twain wrote of this novel in his notebook: "A book of mine where a sound heart and a deformed conscience come into collision and conscience suffers defeat." (See *Huckleberry Finn* excerpt, page 31.)

Norman Rockwell illustration of Huck and Jim examining hairball on ground

(Mark Twain Home Foundation, Hannibal, MO/© MBI, Inc. Reproduced with permission from Easton Press)



Illustration from
*Connecticut Yankee in King
Arthur's Court* of a mounted
knight attacking a man
in a tree

(Library of Congress Prints
and Photographs Division,
Cabinet of American
Illustration)

Many of Twain's obsessions come together in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889), a time-travel fantasy novel. A deeply practical American of the 19th century — the factory superintendent Hank Morgan — finds himself in King Arthur's Camelot in the sixth century. In a series of contests, he outwits Merlin, the royal wizard; becomes the king's chief

minister; and tries to turn Camelot into a modern democracy. Along the way Twain satirizes chivalry and pokes much fun at European aristocracy and religious superstition. By the apocalyptic ending, however, the novel's mood has darkened, and it prefigures the bleak, bitter humor that will come to the fore in many of Twain's last works.



Following the Equator (1897) is Twain's account of a round-the-world lecture tour he took of British Empire countries — Pacific islands, Australia, India and South Africa — in 1895 at age 60. The famous author had gone bankrupt the year before after investing in a typesetting machine, and the lecture tour and ensuing book's success enabled him to pay off his debts. The book, Twain confided to a friend, was one "whose outside aspect is to be cheerful, but whose secret substance is all made of bitterness and rebellion." Twain's usual self-deprecating humor stands alongside heartfelt editorials against the cruelty of imperialism.

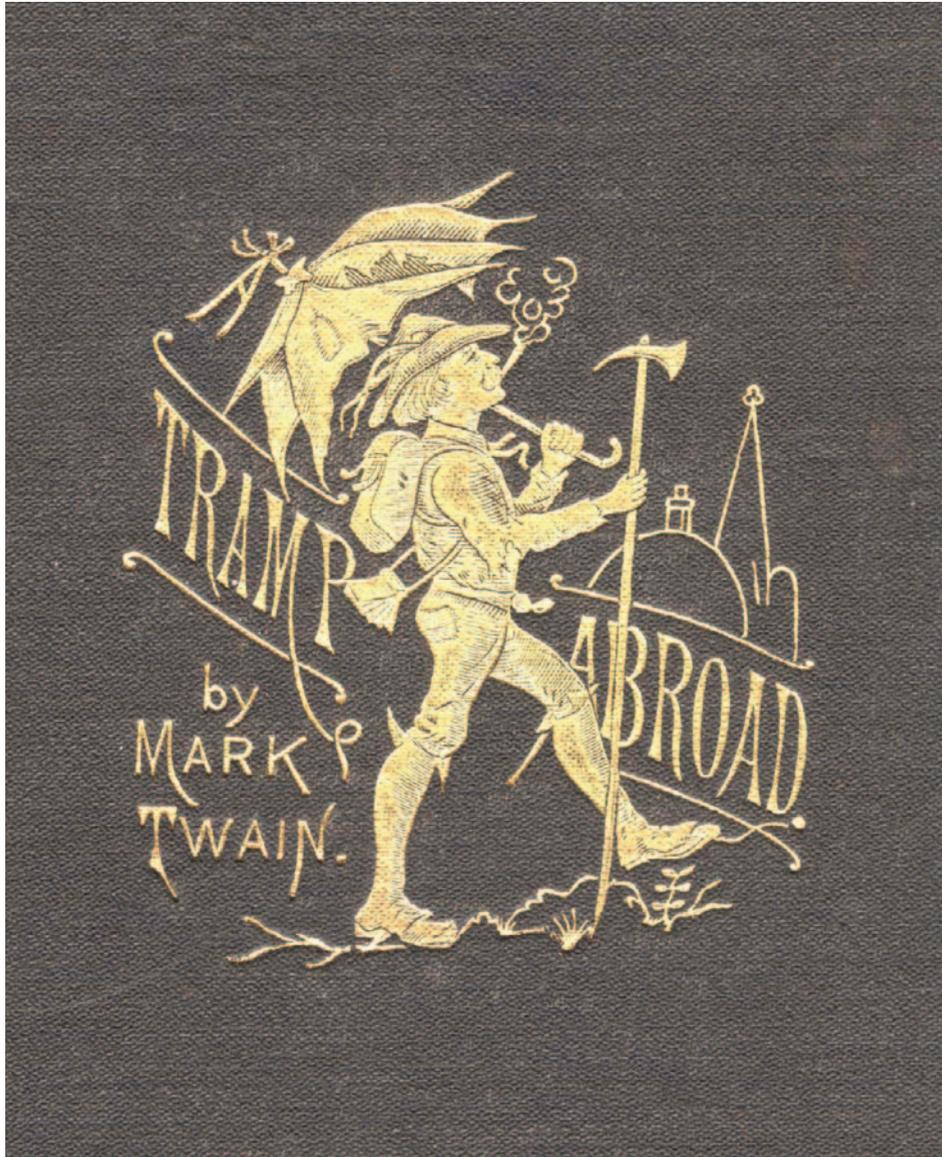
Mark Twain relaxing aboard the *SS Warrimo* in 1895. This photograph was included in the first edition of *Following the Equator* with the inscription "Be good & you will be lonely."

(Courtesy of Photograph Archive, New York Public Library Digital Gallery)



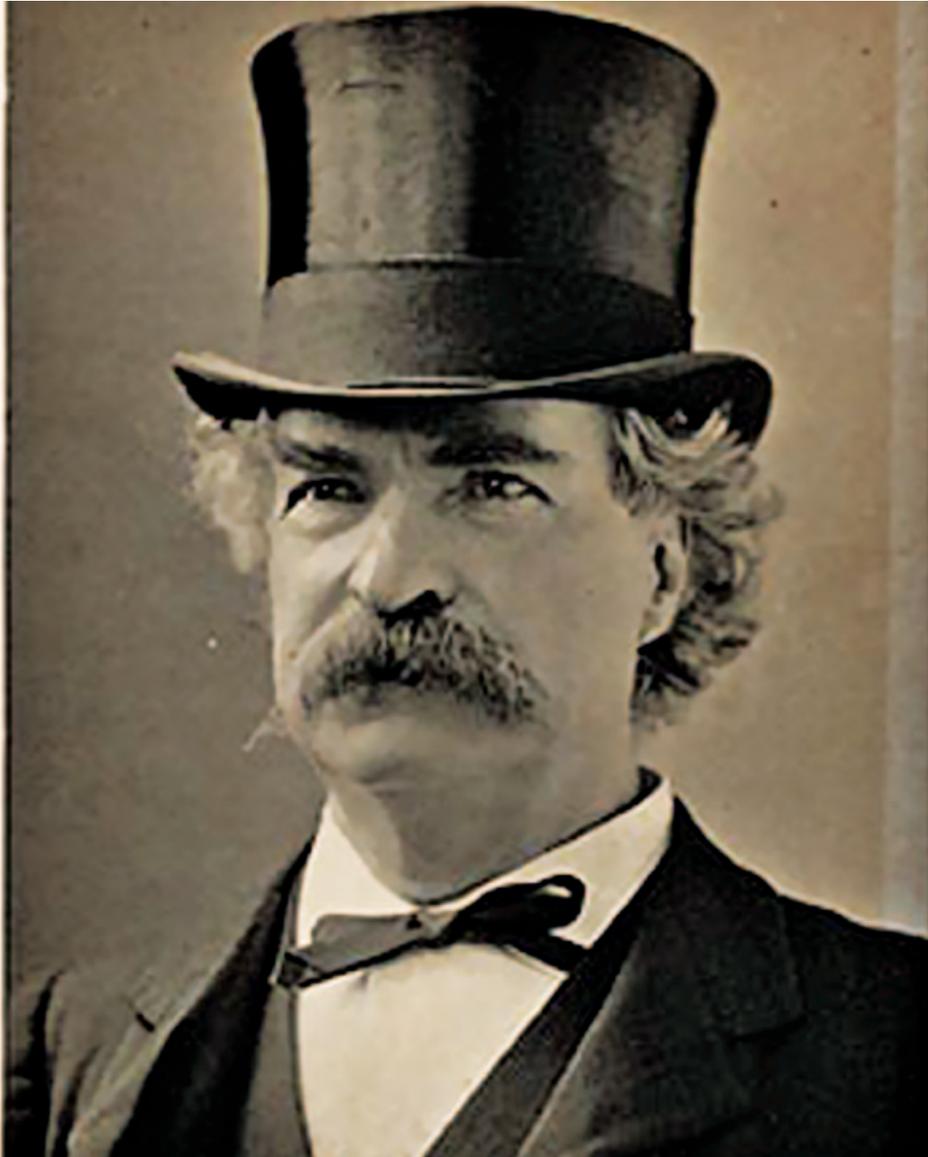
In *Eve's Diary* (1906), Twain once again assumes the voice of a naïve narrator for comic effect. This is one of several Eve and Adam stories — retellings of the biblical Genesis narrative — Twain wrote near the end of his life. He began *Eve's Diary* soon after the death of his wife, Livy, and it can be read as a tribute to her and the long, loving marriage they enjoyed. In Twain's version, Eve is devoted to Adam, though her efforts to understand his male nature are the source of much gentle humor. The story ends by jumping ahead to 40 years after the Fall, with a disconsolate Adam alone at Eve's grave thinking: "Wheresoever she was, THERE was Eden."

Mrs. Clemens urges Mark to put coat
(Courtesy of Kevin Mac Donnell, Austin, Texas)



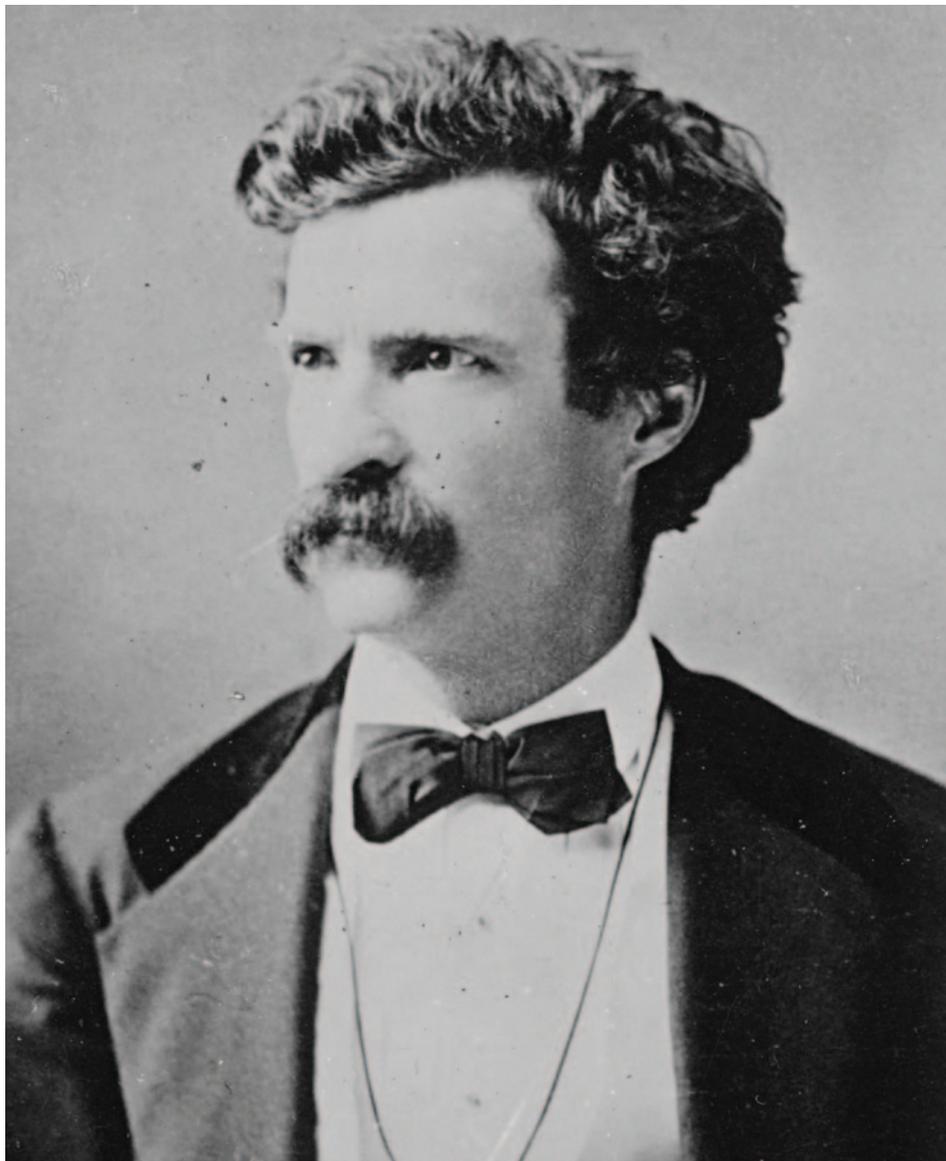
Twain wrote *A Tramp Abroad* (1880) as a sequel to his best-selling *The Innocents Abroad*. The punning title refers to an intended walking tour of Europe that Twain took with a friend, even though, ironically, they traveled mostly by train, steamboat and carriage. Though he spent 14 months on the European continent collecting material, Twain had a difficult time writing this book. He confided to a friend midway through that he'd just realized he hated travel, hotels, European food, Old Masters and opera. While critics have considered this the weakest of his travel books, it was a popular success, selling nearly as well as *Innocents Abroad* and helping to establish Twain as an international celebrity.

Cover illustration showing jauntily Mark Twain with ax and umbrella
(The Mark Twain House & Museum, Hartford)



The Gilded Age (1873) gave its name to an era — the period after the American Civil War when, some assert, lobbyists, corrupt politicians and greedy land speculators dominated U.S. government and economic life. Set mostly in Washington, this was Twain's first novel and his only work in collaboration with another author, his friend Charles Dudley Warner. It arose from a dinner-party challenge by the authors' wives to write a better novel than the ones they were reading. Critics have seen this novel as a mish-mash — Twain's satirical bent and genre-pushing techniques clashing with the more conventional characters and plots of Warner.

Mark Twain in top hat
(Special Collections, University of Virginia Library)



Following the popular success of *The Innocents Abroad*, Twain revisited the formula — travel, humor and exotic information — in his second book, *Roughing It* (1872). It begins with a young Twain riding a stagecoach into the American West in 1861, and ends six years later after he's tried to get rich as a silver miner and then discovered his true vocation as an editor and reporter on a Nevada newspaper. This is a book of digressions, anecdotes and marvelous descriptions. "His style is singularly lucid, unambiguous and strong," a leading critic wrote. "Its simplicity is good art."

Portrait photo of Mark Twain as young man
(The Mark Twain House & Museum, Hartford)

Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*



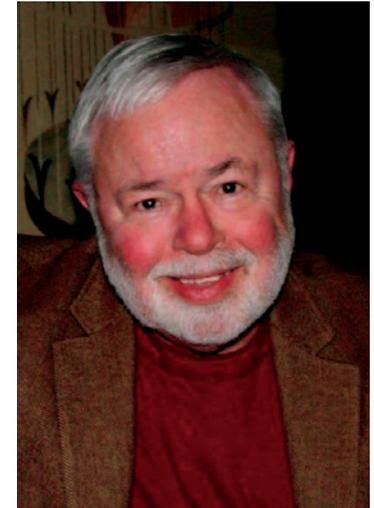
(Illustration © DevitoArt, www.jdevito.com)

One hundred thirty-five years after its first publication in the United States, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1883) continues to enlarge its international claim as a masterpiece. For uncounted millions of readers and scholars, it still stands as the greatest novel yet written by an American. Of the 30-plus books written by Mark Twain (who died a century ago this spring), *Huckleberry Finn* remains the work that elevates this one-time rustic humorist into the ranks of literary genius.

Proof of the book's enduring popularity is not hard to find: it sells an estimated 200,000 copies a year, dwarfing sales by all but a handful of contemporary novelists. It has been translated into more than 50 languages and published in more than 700 editions around the globe. Three hundred

thousand visitors a year — many from Europe, Russia,

By Ron Powers



Ron Powers is a winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Criticism and the author of *Mark Twain: A Life and Dangerous Water: A Biography of the Boy Who Became Mark Twain*.
(Courtesy of Ron Powers)

Asia and South America — descend upon Hannibal, Missouri (population 17,500), Mark Twain's boyhood hometown and the fictional launching-place for Huck and Jim's great Mississippi River odyssey.

And who could blame them, these ardent readers and pilgrims to the shrine? Who could fail to be captivated by this epic, lyric tale of two companions headed down a benevolent river on a raft, seeking freedom and fulfillment of their dreams? Who could not relish the illusion of being alongside them as they encounter fascinating characters and fend off the threats that constantly reach for them from the menacing shoreline?

Yet *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, like the Mississippi River itself, is far more complex than it may seem on its surface. While a child can be endlessly charmed by the sheer exuberance of Huck's escapades in the company of his friend, the runaway slave Jim, adult readers often dive into the novel's depths again and again, discovering ever-new layers of allusion, social commentary, and allegory.

Not all these readers have been gratified by what they have found. Although American eminences from H. L. Mencken to T. S. Eliot to Ernest Hemingway to Russell Banks have testified to the novel's transformative stature, others have seen in it a renunciation of values they hold sacred. Their questions can be sorted into two or three general lines of inquiry: what is the essence, the core quality, of *Huckleberry Finn's* greatness? Is it a great novel, or is it a bad, even a socially destructive, one?

And what, finally, did this "transformative" work transform?

Let us begin by examining the indictment which, for more than 40 years, dominated speculation as to Mark Twain's own



Huck Finn holding a gun and a hare. The 1902 edition of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* contained this illustration by Edward W. Kemble. (©Lebrecht / The Image Works)

intentions with the book: the canard that the author and his book were racist. This controversy exploded in 1957, when the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People condemned its 211 uses of the word, “nigger,” the infamous epithet for African slaves and their descendants. Over the ensuing four decades, *Huckleberry Finn* was banned from schools and libraries across America.

Defenders of the novel held fast. They retorted that, far from



Mark Twain, left, with John Lewis, a lifelong friend and inspiration for the character Jim in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*
(Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division)

amplifying personal bigotry, Mark Twain employed the word as dialogue representative of pre-Civil War southern Americans; and, further, that he employed it to satirize, not endorse, the racial prejudices of the time. A good example is this famous exchange, in Chapter 32, between Huck and Aunt Sally, as Huck describes a steamboat explosion:

“We blew out a cylinder-head.”

“Good gracious! anybody hurt?”

“No’m. Killed a nigger.”

“Well, it’s lucky; because sometimes people do get hurt.”

Admiring readers and critics are at a loss to understand how anyone could miss the scathing irony that glitters through these lines. The joke here is at the expense of Huck and Aunt Sally, who seem blind to the fact that “niggers” are in fact human beings. Furthermore, Huck, unlike the older woman, is already in the process of throwing off his blinders. Only one chapter earlier, in perhaps the book’s most immortal passage, Mark Twain shows Huck tearing up a letter to Jim’s owner back upriver, a letter that disclosed Jim’s whereabouts and would assure his recapture and punishment. Abetting a fugitive slave in antebellum America was widely considered a sin against God, but Huck destroys the letter with the defiant avowal: “All right, then, I’ll go to hell.” An even earlier passage, far less remarked on by either detractors or supporters of the novel, depicts Huck apologizing to Jim for tricking him into thinking Huck was a ghost. Robert Hirst, editor of the Mark Twain Project at Berkeley, California, maintains that this is the first — and still among the few — instances in American literature in which a white man apologizes to a black.

Nevertheless, the argument continued, though with

diminished force, through the 1990s. Die-hard dissenters still remain — proof in itself that *Huckleberry Finn* continues to play powerfully on the American conscience.

But let us adopt the most likely assumption: that Mark Twain was not a racist and neither was his book. (One of America's most eminent scholars, Shelley Fisher Fishkin, has long argued that the novel is self-evidently anti-racist.) The question remains: what did *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* transform?

It certainly did not transform race relations in the United States. In fact, for the first half-century after its publication, neither Huck's and Jim's friendship nor the effects of the hateful epithet itself received much attention from any quarter. What did draw attention, along with bitter controversy, was a dimension of the novel that would scarcely raise an eyebrow from a contemporary reader. That dimension involved the subjects' habits of slang and inelegant behavior. To put it another way, Huck and Jim and the characters they encountered talked and behaved like common, ordinary American people — not like European gentry. (Among the few exceptions were the fraudulent "Duke" and "King," who tried hard to imitate fancy Old World manners, and failed hilariously.)

American tastemakers and guardians of public piety — still defensive about their country's cultural "inferiority" almost a century after its political liberation from Europe — found this talk and behavior mortifying. Newspaper reviews, initially positive, took a sharp downward turn within weeks, with critics pronouncing the work "coarse," "a piece of careless hack-work," "the veriest trash." This barrage of public scolding might have seriously damaged the new book's prospects, but for a stroke of

good luck that Mark Twain himself recognized at once. On March 17, 1885, the directors of the Concord (Massachusetts) Public Library — "those idiots in Concord," as the author gleefully called them — inadvertently salvaged the book's appeal to the public. They accomplished this by banning it. This amounted to "a rattling tip-top puff," Mark Twain assured his publisher, "which will go into every newspaper in the country."

And so it happened. *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* survived the early tut-tutting and enjoyed sales of 43,500 copies by mid-March 1885, the best start of any new book by the author in a decade. The author did not live to see his work mushroom into the stature of an American classic, and from there into international recognition as one of the most beloved treasures of American literature.

And therein lies the answer to the riddle of *Huckleberry Finn's* timeless greatness. What did it transform? It transformed nothing less than the literary soul of America. Those same "common" readers who bought and read the novel in spite of — and in many cases, *because of* — the tastemakers' disapproval recognized something that eluded the anxious guardians of the new nation's piety. They recognized that here, for the first time, was a work that found nobility and poetic expression in characters just like them. Here, finally, was a work whose characters were not imprisoned by the past — by bankrupt standards of Old-World decorum and caste hierarchies — but rather, distinctly American characters, who looked to the future, who struck out for the future, who *improvised* their futures, at the very risk of their lives. And who spoke to one another about their adventures in the rough but authentic poetry of the American vernacular.

No American writer had ever achieved that kind of breakthrough before. Few American writers had dared try. Mark Twain had the audacity to try, and he had the genius to succeed. *Huckleberry Finn* is a novel intertwined with the enduring, regenerative American spirit. That is what makes it great.

READ THE NOVEL

The full text of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is available online for free. (*Links current as of May 2010*)

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

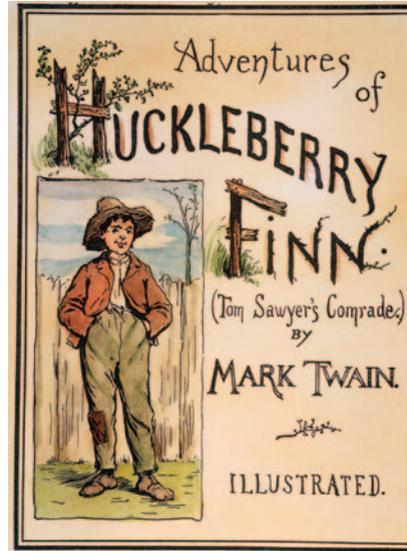
<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/76/76-h/p1.htm#popup>

Les aventures de Huck Finn : l'ami de Tom Sawyer (French)

<http://libsysdigi.library.illinois.edu/oca/Books2008-02/lesaventuresdeh00twai/#popup>

The Big Decision

(*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* excerpt)



Cover from the novel, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885)
(*The Granger Collection, New York*)

Mark Twain's novel Adventures of Huckleberry Finn builds to an epic moral decision for its protagonist, Huck Finn. Should he help his great friend, the slave Jim, escape to freedom, or do what the culture of the slave-holding South has always taught him — turn in the runaway slave?

So I was full of trouble, full as I could be; and didn't know what to do. At last I had an idea; and I says, I'll go and write the letter — and then see if I can pray.

Why, it was astonishing, the way I felt as light as a feather right straight off, and my troubles all gone. So I got a piece of paper and a pencil, all glad and excited, and set down and wrote:

Miss Watson, your runaway nigger Jim is down here two mile below Pikesville, and Mr. Phelps has got him and he will give him up for the reward if you send. Huck Finn.

I felt good and all washed clean of sin for the first time I had ever felt so in my life, and I knowed I could pray now. But I didn't

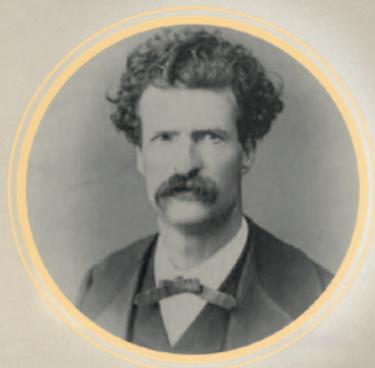
do it straight off, but laid the paper down and set there thinking — thinking how good it was all this happened so, and how near I come to being lost and going to hell. And went on thinking. And got to thinking over our trip down the river; and I see Jim before me all the time: in the day and in the night-time, sometimes moonlight, sometimes storms, and we a-floating along, talking and singing and laughing. But somehow I couldn't seem to strike no places to harden me against him, but only the other kind. I'd see him standing my watch on top of his'n, 'stead of calling me, so I could go on sleeping; and see him how glad he was when I come back out of the fog; and when I come to him again in the swamp, up there where the feud was; and suchlike times; and would always call me honey, and pet me, and do everything he could think of for me, and how good he always was; and at last I struck the time I saved him by telling the men we had smallpox aboard, and he was so grateful, and said I was the best friend old Jim ever had in the world, and the only one he's got now; and then I happened to look around and see that paper.

It was a close place. I took it up, and held it in my hand. I was a-trembling, because I'd got to decide, forever, betwixt two things, and I knowed it. I studied a minute, sort of holding my breath, and then says to myself:

“All right, then, I'll go to hell” — and tore it up.

Listen to the audio (*Links current as of May 2010*):

http://stream.state.gov/streamvol/libmedia/amgov/890/audio/huck_finn_exceprt.mp3



Mark Twain

“THE FIRST TRULY AMERICAN WRITER”

William Faulkner called Mark Twain “the first truly American writer;” Eugene O’Neill dubbed him “the true father of American literature.” Charles Darwin kept *Innocents Abroad* on his bedside table, within easy reach when he wanted to clear his mind and relax at bedtime. *The Gilded Age* gave an entire era its name. Joseph Conrad often thought of *Life on the Mississippi* when he commanded a steamer on the Congo. Friedrich Nietzsche admired *Tom Sawyer*. Lu Xun was so entranced by *Eve’s Diary* that he had it translated into Chinese. Ernest Hemingway claimed that “All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*,” while his fellow Nobel Laureate Kenzaburō Ōe cited *Huck* as the book that spoke so powerfully to his condition in war-torn Japan that it inspired him to write his first novel.

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt took the phrase “New Deal” from *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*, a book which led science fiction giant Isaac Asimov to credit Twain (along with Jules Verne) with having invented time travel. When José Martí read *Yankee*, he was so moved by Twain’s depiction of “the vileness of those who would climb atop their fellow man, feed upon his misery, and drink from his misfortune” that he wanted to “set off for Hartford [Connecticut] to shake his hand.”

Twain has been called the American Cervantes, our Homer, our Tolstoy, our Shakespeare, our Rabelais. From the breezy slang and deadpan humor that peppered his earliest comic sketches to the unmistakably American characters who populated his fiction, Twain’s writings introduced readers around the world to American personalities speaking in distinctively American cadences. *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* was America’s literary Declaration of Independence.

At the beginning of his career Twain was lauded as a talented humorist. But the comic surface turned out to mask unexpected depths. (“Yes, you are right,” Twain wrote a friend in 1902, “I am a moralist in disguise.”) Time and time again Twain defied readers’ expectations, forging unforgettable narratives from materials that had previously not been the stuff of literature. As William Dean Howells once put it, “He saunters out into the trim world of letters, and lounges across its neatly kept paths, and walks about on the grass at will, in spite of all the signs that have been put up from the beginning of literature, warning people of dangers and penalties for the slightest trespass.”

Humane, sardonic, compassionate, impatient, hilarious, appalling, keenly observant and complex, Twain inspired great writers in the 20th century to become the writers they became—not just in the U.S., but around the world. Writers gathered at the art Deco wrought from the speech of ordinary people.

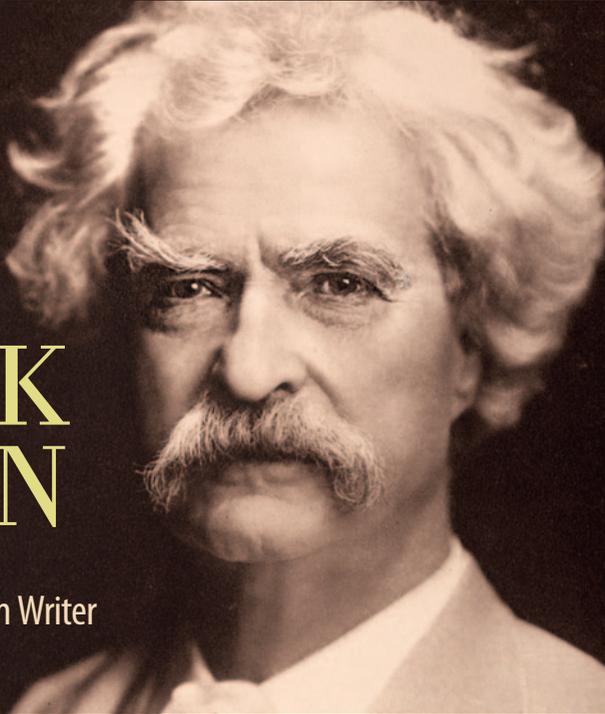
INTERACTIVE POSTER

(Links current as of May 2010)

Mark Twain: “The First Truly American Writer”

There are two versions of our Mark Twain poster. This one (3MB PDF http://www.america.gov/media/pdf/books/twain_poster_print.pdf#popup) can be downloaded and printed, or choose the interactive version (6MB PDF http://www.america.gov/media/pdf/books/twain_poster3.pdf#popup) to view on on your computer with embedded audio! Click each book cover to hear a professional reading. Each poster includes Professor Fishkin’s essay, plus excerpts from Twain’s selected works.

(Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division)

A black and white portrait of Mark Twain, showing his characteristic wild, white hair and a prominent mustache. He is looking slightly to the left of the camera with a serious expression. The background is dark, making his face and hair stand out.

MARK TWIN


The First Truly American Writer

(Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia. All rights reserved.)

Bureau of International Information Programs
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

<http://www.america.gov/publications/books.html>