



Project | Mark Twain

James, by Percival Everett

Notes from my reading March 2024

[LoA interview with Everett](#) (2024)

"There is no God, child. There's religion but there's no God of theirs. Their religion tells that we will get our reward in the end. However, it apparently doesn't say anything about their punishment. But when we're around them, we believe in God. Oh, Lawdy Lawd, we'd be believin'. Religion is just a controlling tool they employ and adhere to when convenient." (23)

"Naw, [Pappy] he got a special hate for you." I nodded. (63)

Religion keeps coming up, and James all but tells Huck — and anyone else who listens — that there ain't no God. | The ship gone, we continued to bale. We rocked less violently. "Did ya pray to da Lord?" I asked. "Never got a chance to," Huck said. "We made it anyway." "I reckon we did." (64) | One night, our fire burning, Huck asked, "Why don't you just make me take you across the river? In Illinois you be a free man." (65)

"I had never read a novel, though I understood the concept of fiction. It wasn't so unlike religion, or history, for that matter." (73) | "Ain't I doin' wrong, though?" Huck said. He was troubled. "How am I s'posed to know what good is?" / "Way I see it is dis. If'n ya gots to hab a rule to tells ya wha's good, if'n ya gots to had good 'sprained to ya, den ya cain't be good. If'n ya need sum kinda God to tells ya right from wrong, den you won't ever know." / "But the law says ..." / "Good ain't got nuttin' do do wif da law. Law says I'm a slave." (78)

| *My name is James.... I can tell you that I am a man who is cognizant of his world, a man who has a family, who loves a family, who has been torn from his family, a man who can read and write, a man who will not let his story be self-related, but self-written.* (93)

| I knew I owed it to [Young George] to write something important.... Stamped on it was the name FABER. Perhaps that would be my last name. James Faber. That didn't sound too bad. (102)

| It turned out that con men are the easiest to con. (111)

"But hey was Stalin' from dem folk. Tellin' lies lak dy was. He weren't never no pirate."

"Yes, but them people liked it, Jim. Did you see their faces? They had to know them was lies, but they wanted to believe. What do you make of that?"

"Folks be funny lak dat. Hey takes the lies dey want and throws away the truths dat scares 'em." (126)

The Virginia Minstrels remind me of John Candy and his polka band in "Home Alone." (157)

| "We never button the button on the vest," [Cassidy] said. "Why?"

"I don't know." He took the tie, put it around his own neck, put a knot in it and then slipped it over my head. (164)

| A man [referring to Emmet] who refused to own slaves but was not opposed to others owning slaves was still a slaver, to my thinking. (176) Cf. Wilkerson in Caste.

| "Suh, I'd tryin' to unnerstan'. You sayin' you is makin' a 'stinction 'tween chattel slavery 'n' bonded slavery?" I didn't think I'd meant to actually ask that question out loud, but I must have, because I said it in proper and

appropriate slave diction.

Emmett looked at me askance. "Would you mind repeating that?"

"I reckon I would," I said. (181)

Norman is one of the minstrels, a white-skinned Black man. He and James dominate in Part 2. Their plan is for Norman to sell, then steal back, James so they can build a cash fund for buying back their families. "For a moment I wondered whether Norman was in fact black and a slave. Perhaps he was an insane white man who fancied he was black. Unlikely, of course, stranger than most things I could imagine, but not impossible." (195)

In Part 3 (251) Huck and Jim are reunited.

The confrontation with Judge Thatcher is classic, kind of film narrative plot where the good guy is now in control of the bad guy. And Judge Thatcher isn't nearly the okay guy Twain portrays. On 291, Jim likens him to a slave now.

| "I'm no slave."

"Do you want to be rowing?" I asked. "No," I supplied his answer. "Are you getting paid for rowing? No. Are you rowing because you're afraid of me and what I might do to you? Yes, Judge Thatcher."

"I'm no slave."

"I pointed the barrel of the pistol at his face. "Row faster," I said. He did.

"Tom Hopkins had a pistol like that."

Tom Hopkins had raped Jim's friend before his eyes.

| "I'm going to see you dead, nigger."

"No doubt." (292)

When Jim finds the Graham place, where Sadie and Lizzie have been sold, he sets fire to the corn crop and frees all of the slaves. An old man comes out of the mansion with a shotgun and confronts / is confronted by Jim.

| "Niggers, where do ya'll think you're goin'?"

I stepped in front of him.

"Who the hell are you?" he asked. He pointed his gun at me.

I pointed my pistol at him. "I am the angel of death, come to offer sweet justice in the night," I said. "I am a sign. I am your future. I am James." (302)

| As happens with the frightened and unprepared, we scattered. Some of us would be caught. Some of us would be killed. Probably some of us would go crawling back.

Library of America [interview](#) with Percival Everett.

Change always occurs on the edges, then works its way to the center.

From Ken Burns film. Watched first of 2 episodes on 032422.

The difference between the right word and the almost right word is like the difference between lightning and the lightning bug.

Huckleberry Finn is our Homeric epic.

Feb 3, 1863 : first signature writing as "Mark Twain"

Notes from another notebook:

From Roy Blount, Jr., "America's Original Superstar," an essay in *Time* 2008.

Reprinted in The Mark Twain Anthology: Great Writers on His Life and Works

| Twain declined to let his admirers organize a relief fund [to solve his financial troubles]. He resolved to make enough money himself, writing and lecturing, to pay back every cent. "Honor is a harder master than the law," he said, sounding considerably more righteous than usual. But it was actually his wife, supported by Henry H. Rogers, an otherwise ruthless Standard Oil exec who had volunteered to manage Twain's money, who insisted he not take an easier way out. (471)

| The pivotal moment in Huckleberry Finn is when Huck decides not to do what his conscience tells him is right, to turn in "Miss Watson's Jim" as a runaway slave. Instead, he decides to abide by his personal affection for Jim, although the upshot will be, according to all he has been taught, eternal damnation for violating the norms of society and its view that a slave is the rightful property of its owner. (474)

In the 1901 essay, "The United States of Lyncherdom."

| This is not a single-minded polemic. It registers the horror of lynchings but also undertakes to empathize with people who attended them. Their motivation, Twain argued, is not inhuman viciousness but "man's commonest weakness, his aversion to being unpleasantly conspicuous, pointed at, shunned, as being on the unpopular side. Its other name is Moral Cowardice, and is the commanding feature of the make-up of 9,999 men in the 10,000 ..." (475)

From Toni Morrison's introduction to Huckleberry Finn, reprinted in The Mark Twain Anthology.

| Although Huck complains bitterly of rules and regulations, I see him to be running not from external control but from external chaos. Nothing in society makes sense; all is in peril. Upper-class, churchgoing, elegantly housed families annihilate themselves in a psychotic feud, and Huck has to drag two of their corpses from the water — one of whom is a just-made friend, the boy Buck; he sees the public slaughter of a drunk; he hears visors plans of murderers on a wrecked steamboat; he spends a large portion of the book in the company of "[Pap's] kind of people" — the fraudulent, thieving Duke and King who wield brutal power over him, just as his father did.... What does Huck need to live without terror, melancholy and suicidal thoughts? The answer, of course, is Jim. (412)

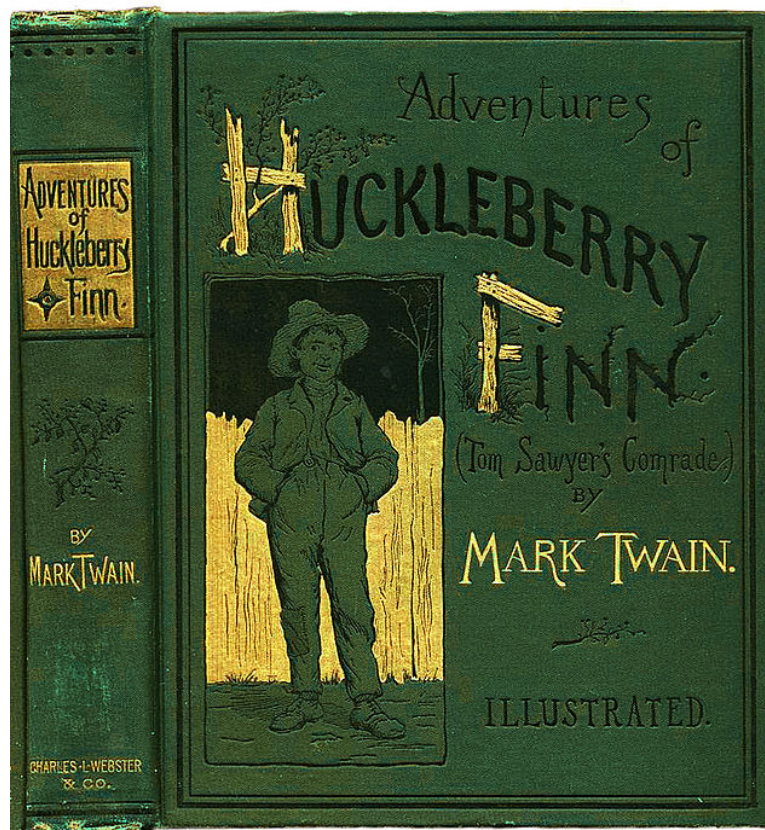
| Huck's desire for a father who is adviser and trustworthy companion is universal, but he also needs something more: a father whom, unlike his own, he can control. No white man can serve all three functions... Only a black male slave can deliver all Huck desires. (415)

When Jim leaves, a free man, "Huck runs. Not back to the town [with Tom Sawyer] — even it is safe now — but a further run, for the 'territory.' And if there are complications out there in the world, Huck, we are to assume, is certainly ready for them." (417) "Huck cannot have an enduring relationship with Jim; he refuses one with Tom." (418)

The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg (1899)
Read 041122

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1884)

032822 : Started LoA edition, "Mississippi Writings." Completed 040322.



[Adventures of Huckleberry Finn - Wikipedia](#)

Ian Frazier in TNY, concerning cabin fever: D. H. Lawrence once defined the American soul as “hard, isolate, stoic, and a killer.” I don’t know about “hard,” “stoic,” or “killer,” but the “isolate” part is right. The isolation that’s out there at large in the continent sets American stories in motion. Huck Finn, trapped in the cabin where Pap, his drunken father, has confined him, says, “And how slow and still the time did drag along.” He sits there, alone, sawing at a section of one of the cabin’s bottom logs. The book really begins when he saws it through and pulls the piece away and sets himself free. His enormous freedom afterward, when he’s on the raft, is more spacious for his having previously been locked in Pap’s dread cabin. It’s connected also to his travelling in the company of the unfree Jim, who eventually will be betrayed, captured, and locked up alone in a cabin himself, from which he is freed in the final and not-good part of the book.

| Then she told me all about the bad place, and I said I wished I was there. She got mad, then, but I didn’t mean no harm. All I wanted was to go somewheres; all I wanted was a change, I warn’t particular. She said it was wicked to say what I said; said she wouldn’t say it for the whole world; *she* was going to live so as to go to the good place. Well, I couldn’t see no advantage in going where she was going, so I made up my mind I wouldn’t try for it. But I never said so, because it would only make trouble, and wouldn’t do no good. (626)

Eventually, for Huck, the “good place” is on the raft. And when the river may be too dangerous — or too civilized — “light out for the territory.”

| I liked the old ways best, but I was getting so I liked the new ones, too, a little bit. (639)

| ... I reckoned I would walk off with the gun and some lines, and take to the woods when I run away. I guessed I wouldn’t stay in one place, but just tramp right across the country, mostly night times, and hunt and fish to keep alive, and so get so far away that the old man nor the widow couldn’t ever find me any more. I judged I would saw out and leave that night pap got drunk enough. and reckoned he would. (649)

We learn a lot about River life. For instance, when Huck is hiding out after faking his death, the cannon booms and quicksilver in bread loaves ... (660)
Also, all of Jim's superstitions (668).

| "You do a girl tolerable poor, but you might fool men, maybe. Bless you, child, when you set out to thread a needle, don't hold the thread still and fetch the needle up to it; hold the needle still and poke the thread at it — that's the way a woman most always does; but a man always does 'tother way. And when you throw at a rat or anything, hitch yourself up a tip-toe, and fetch your hand up over your head as awkward as you can, and miss your rat about six or seven foot.... (685)

| Morning, before daylight, I slipped into corn fields and borrowed a watermelon.... Pap always said it warn't no harm to borrow things, if you was meaning to pay them back, sometime; but the widow said it warn't anything but a soft name for stealing, and no decent body would do it. (689)

| Steamboat captains is always rich, and get sixty dollars a month, and *they* don't care a cent what a thing costs, you know, long as they want it. (690)

| Then Jim manned the oars, and we took out after our raft. Now was the first time that I begun to worry about the men — I reckon I hadn't had time to before. I begun to think how dreadful it was, even for murderers, to be in such a fix. I sways to myself, there ain't no telling but I might come to be a murderer myself, yet, and then how would I like it? (695)

"... he had an uncommon level head, for a nigger." (699)

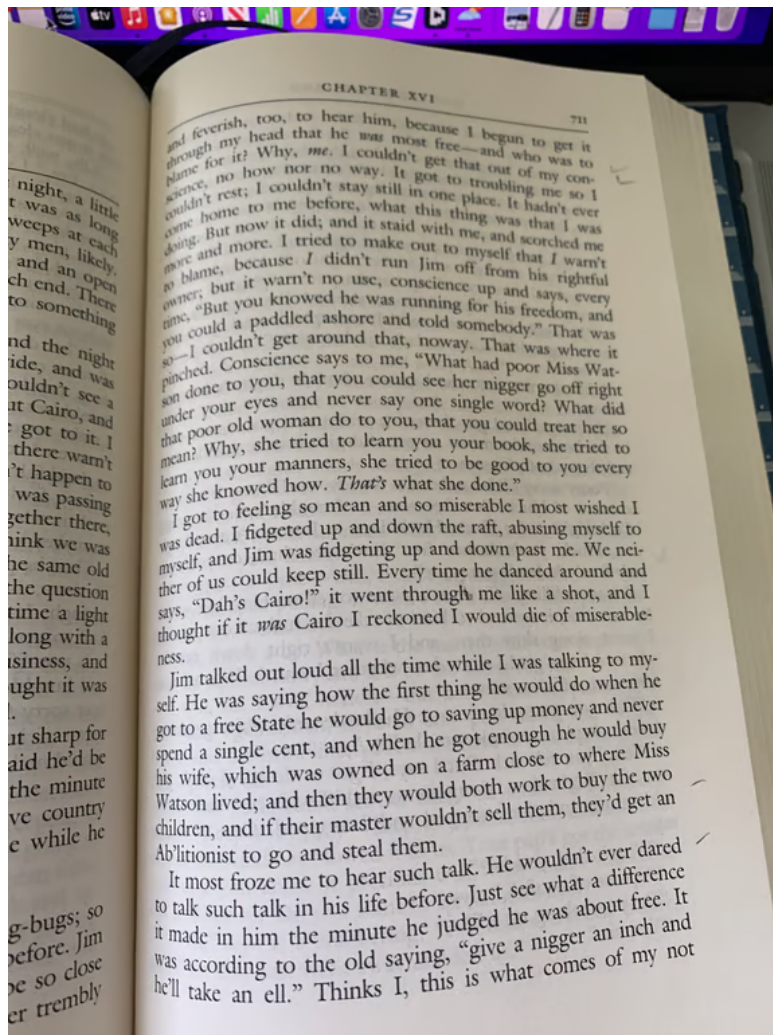
The jokes he plays on Jim are cruel, he sees, when Jim calls him out on it.

| "En all wuz thinkin 'bout wuz how you could make a fool uv ole Jim wid a lie ..."

Then he got up slow, and walked to the wigwam, and went in there, without saying anything but that. But that was enough. It made me feel so mean I could almost kissed *his* foot to get him to take it back.

It was fifteen minutes before I could work myself up to go and humble myself to a nigger — but I done it, and I warn't ever sorry for it afterwards, neither. I didn't do him no more mean tricks, and I shouldn't done that one if I'd a knowed it would make him feel that way. (709)

| Jim said it made him all over trembly and feverish to be so close to freedom. Well, I can tell you it made me all over trembly and feverish, too, to hear him, because I begun to get it through my head that he *was* most free — and who was to blame of rat? Why, *me*. I couldn't get that out of my conscience, no how nor no way.



"Just see what a difference it made in him the minute he judged he was about free."

| Pooty soon I'll be a-shout'n for joy, en I'll say, it's all on accounts o' Huck; I's a free man, en I couldnt ever ben free ef it hadn't ben for Huck; Huck done it. Jim won't ever forgit you, Huck; you's de bes' fren' Jim's ever had; en you's the *only* fren' old Jim's got now." (712)

Men come upon them looking for runaways. Huck concocts a story about his family on the raft, and the men infer there's smallpox aboard.

| They went off, and I got aboard the raft, feeling bad and low, because I knowed very well I had done wrong, and I see it warn't no use for me to try to learn to do right; a body that don't get started right when he's little, ain't got no show — when the pinch comes there ain't nothing to back him up and keep him to his work, and so he gets beat. Then I thought a minute, and says to myself, hold on — s'pose you'd a done right and give Jim up; would you felt better than what you do now? No, says I, I'd feel bad — I'd feel just the same way I do now. Well, then, says I, what's the use you learning to do right, when it's troublesome to do right and ain't no trouble to do wrong, and the wages is just the same? I was stuck. I couldn't answer that. So I reckoned I wouldn't bother no more about it, but after this always do whichever come handiest at the time.

Long description of Col Grangerford. Reads a bit like the dandy Clemens himself was / is in photos:

| His forehead was high and his hair was black and straight, and hung to his shoulders. His hands was long and think and every day of his life he put on a clean shirt and a full suit from head to foot made out of linen so white it hurt your eyes to look at it; and on Sundays he wore a blue tail-coat with brass buttons on it.... (728)

| I was powerful glad to get away from the feuds, and so was Jim to get away

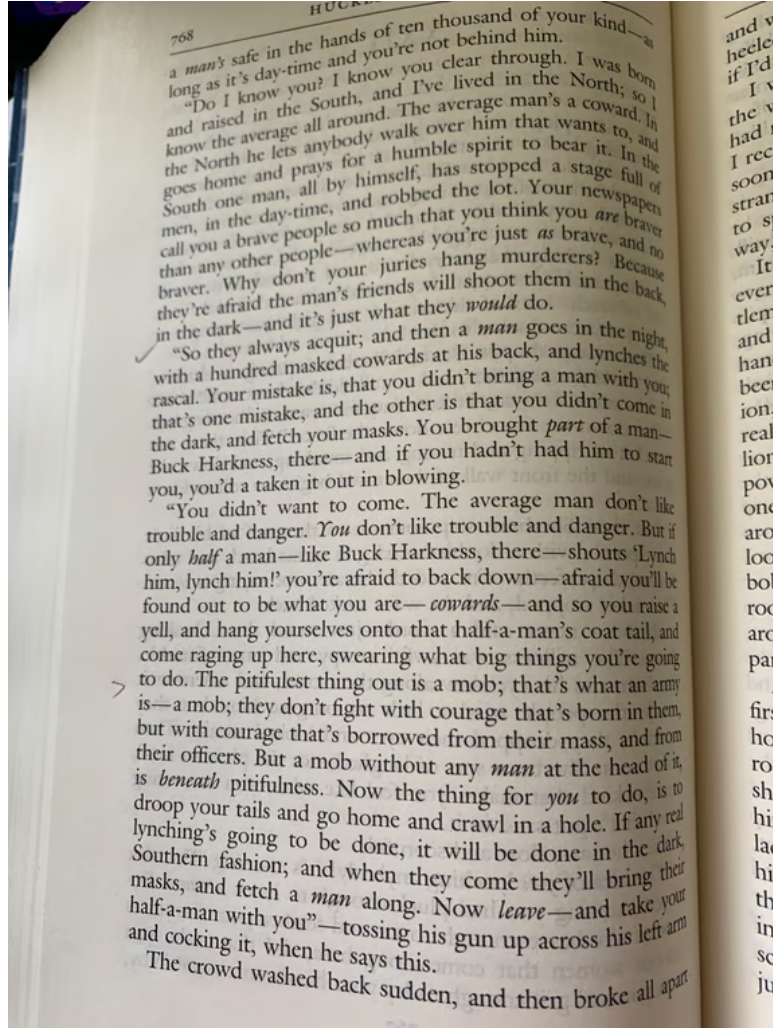
from the swamp. We said there warn't no home like a raft, after all. Other places do seem so cramped up and smothery, but a raft don't. You feel mighty free and easy and comfortable on a raft. (739)

Opening next chapter is a description of early morning: idyllic ...

| It's lovely to live on a raft. We had the sky, up there, all speckled with stars, and we used to lay on our backs and look up at them, and discuss about whether they was made, or only just happened — Jim he allowed they was made, but I allowed they happened; I judged it would have took too long to *make* so many. (742)

Following the feud, they're next involved with the Duke and the Dauphin.

This scene makes me think of the dysfunction today:



"The pitifullest thing out is a mob; that's what an army is — a mob; they don't fight with courage that's born in them, but with courage that's borrowed from their mass, and from their officers."

Huck wakes up and sees Jim with his head in his hands, moaning, crying, over his family:

| I do believe he cared just as much for his people as white folks do for their'n. (777)

| Well, the men gathered around, and sympathized with [the Duke and the Dauphin, masquerading as relatives to the deceased Wilks] ... and carried their carpet-bags up the hill for them, and let them lean on them and cry, and told the king all about the brother's last moments, and the king he told it all over again on his hands to the duke ... Well, if ever I struck anything like it, I'm a nigger. It was enough to make a body ashamed of the human race. (784)

Huck jumps behind a curtain to hide ... a la Hamlet. (797)

Huck befriends — and protects — Mary Jane ["there warn't no backdown to her, I judge"] ... "and she set there, very impatient and excited, and

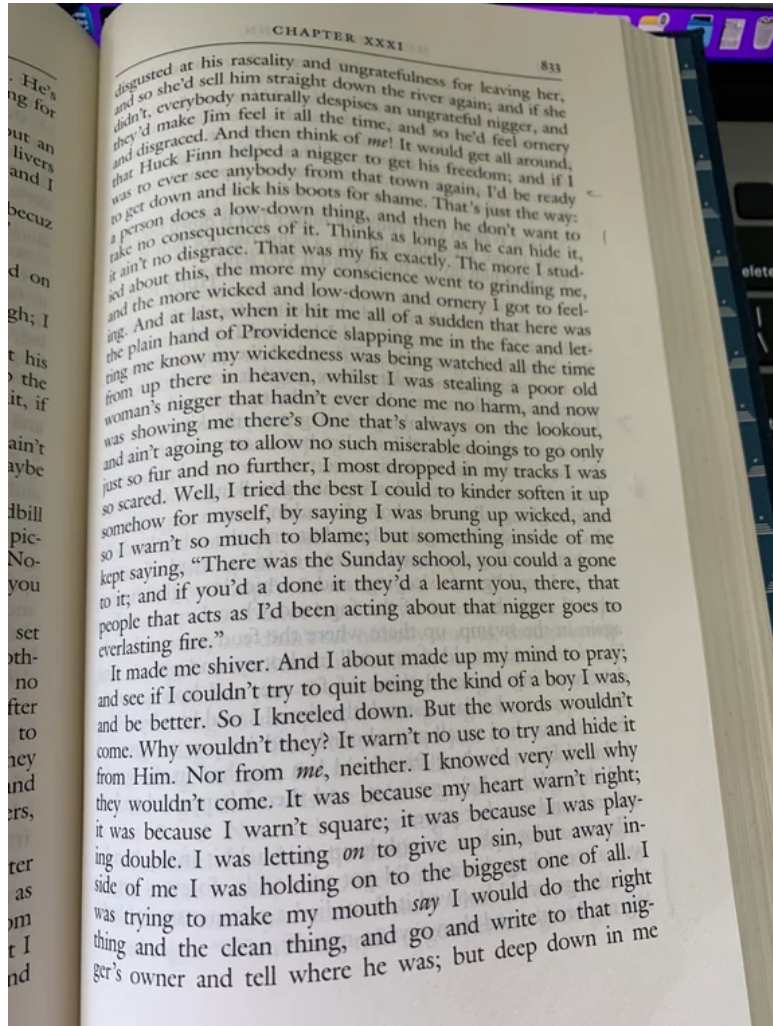
handsome, but looking kind of happy and eased-up, like a person that's had a tooth pulled out. So I went to studying it out. I says to myself, I reckon a body that ups and tells the truth when he is in a tight place, is taking considerable many risks, though I ain't had no experience, and can't say for certain; but it looks to so me anyway; and yet here's a case where I'm blest if it don't look to me like the truth is better, and actuly *safer* than a lie. (807)

The King and Duke are eventually tarred and feathered. The evil they represent ... But ultimately (851) Huck feels "sorry for them poor pitiful rascals, it seemed like I couldn't ever feel any hardness against them any more in the world. It was a dreadful thing to see. Human beings *can* be awful cruel to one another."

| After all this long journey, and after all we'd done for them scoundrels, here was it all come to nothing, everything all busted up and ruined, because they could have the heart to serve Jim such a trick as that, and make him a slave again his life, and amongst strangers, for forty dirty dollars. (832)

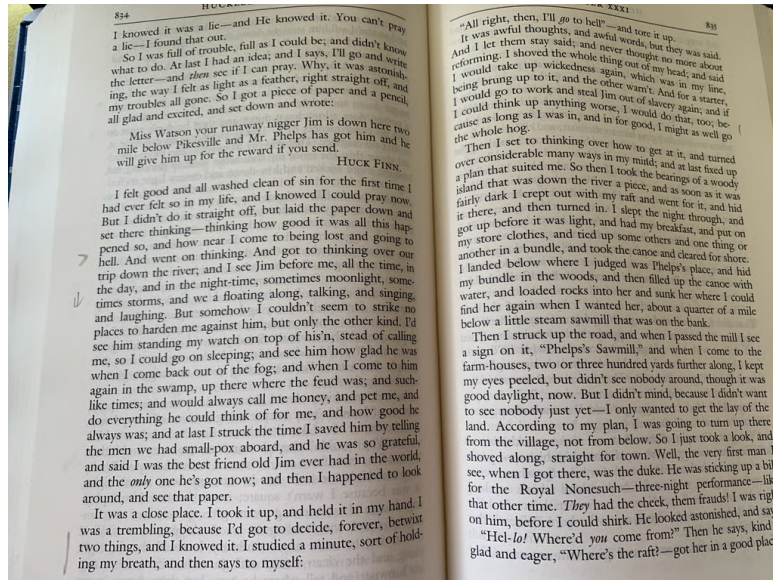
"That's just the way: a person does a low-down thing, and then he don't want to take no consequences of it. Thinks as long as he can hide it, it ain't no disgrace." (833) Cf. Pap's "borrowing" vs. stealing.

Huck knows" he's facing the consequences of "stealing" Jim, "a poor old woman's nigger" — from Providence "slapping me in the face."



Huck writes his letter, but then has second thoughts:

| I felt all 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....



| 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. (835)

Later, Huck is amazed at Tom Sawyer: "Only I couldn't believe it. Tom Sawyer a nigger stealer!" (846)

| What a head for just a boy to have! If I had Tom Sawyer's head, I wouldn't trade it off to to be a duke, nor mate of a steamboat, nor clown in a circus, nor nothing I can think of. (852)

[Note re Charity Dean, one of the heroes profiled in Michael Lewis's Premonition: She finished the first semester at the top of her class. Her new husband complained to the church elders that his wife was spending all her time working. "He told me I was being disobedient by working so hard," recalled Charity. "And they agreed with him. They told me I should be at the fiftieth percentile of my class. No better." After the next semester, when her grades remained high, the church elders sent her a letter instructing her to drop out of medical school and return to Junction City. She had to think about it, actually. She was still terrified of them. "I thought I was choosing between heaven and hell," she said.] p138, Kindle edition

Jim won't leave Tom after he's shot, even though it puts him at risk.

| I knowed he was white inside, and I reckoned he's say what he did say ... (895) And Jim is taken again, tied up, etc. But the doctor supports some leniency ...

| So that cooled them down a little, because the people that's always the most anxious for to hang a nigger that hain't done just right, is always the very ones that ain't the most anxious to pay for him when they've got their satisfaction out of him. (904)

| ... because if I'd knowed what a trouble it was to make a book I wouldn't a tackled it and ain't agoing to no more. But I reckon I got to light out for the Territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and civilize me and I can't stand it. I been there before. (912) *FINIS*

Life on the Mississippi (1883)

032422 : Started LoA edition, "Mississippi Writings." Completed 032822.

| A cut-off plays havoc with boundary lines and jurisdictions: for instance, a man is living in the State of Mississippi to-day, a cut off occurs to-night, and to-morrow the man finds himself and his land over on the other side of the river, within the boundaries and subject to the laws of the State of Louisiana! Such a thing, happening in the upper river in the old times, could have

transferred a slave from Missouri to Illinois and made a free man of him.
(228)

| After De Soto glimpsed the river, a fraction short of a quarter century elapsed, and then Shakespeare was born; lived a trifle more than half a century, then died; and when he had been in his grave considerably more than half a century, the *second* white man saw the Mississippi. In our day we don't allow a hundred and thirty years to elapse between glimpses of a marvel. If somebody should discover a crew in the county next to one that the North Pole is in, Europe and America would start fifteen costly expeditions thither: one to explore the creek, and the other fourteen to hunt for each other. (231)

Chapter III includes long passage from (?) Huck Finn ... storytelling on a freight raft, a keelboat.

Chapter IV ... "When I was a boy ..." Mr. Bixby is his tutor.

| "What is the shape of Walnut Bend?"

He might as well have asked me my grandmother's opinion of protoplasm.
(274)

Bluff reef vs. Wind reef.

| "But it is exactly like a bluff reef. How am I ever going to tell them apart?"

"I can't tell you. It is an instinct. By and by you will just naturally *know* one from the other, but you never will be able to explain why or how you know them apart."

It turned out to be true. The face of the water, in time became a wonderful book — a book that was a dead language to the uneducated passenger, but which told its mind to me without reserve, delivering its most cherished secrets as clearly as if it uttered them with a voice. And it was not a book to be read once and thrown aside, for it had a new story to tell every day. (283)

| No, the romance and the beauty were all gone from the river. All the value any feature of it had for me now was the amount of usefulness it could furnish toward compassing the safe piloting of a steamboat. Since those does, I have pitied doctors from my heart.... (285)

| Behind other islands we found wretched little farms, and wretched little log-cabins; there were crazy rail fences sticking a foot or two above the water, with one or two jeans-clad, chills-racked, yellow-faced male miseries roosting on the top-rail, elbows on knees, jaws in hands, grinding tobacco and discharging the retell at floating chips through crevices left by lost teeth; while the rest of the family and the few farm-animals were huddled together in an empty wood-flat riding at her moorings close at hand. In this flatboat the family would have to cook and eat and sleep for a lesser or greater number of days (or possibly weeks), until the river should fall two or three feet and let them get back to their log-cabin and their chills again — chills being a merciful provision of an all-wise Providence to enable them to take exercise without exertion.... (293)

| If you will take the longest street in New York, and travel up and down it, conning its features patiently until you know every house and window and door and lamp-post and big and little sign by heart, and know them so accurately that you can instantly name the one you are abreast of when you are set down at random in that street in the middle of an inky black night, you will then have a tolerable notion of the amount and the exactness of a pilot's knowledge who carries the Mississippi River in his head. (305)

| If I have seemed to love my subject, it is no surprising thing, for I loved the profession far better than any I have followed since, and I took a measureless pride in it. The reason is plain: a pilot, in those days, was the only unfettered and entirely independent human being that lived in the earth. Kings are but the hampered servants of parliament and people; parliaments sit in chains forged by their constituency; the editor of a newspaper cannot be independent, but must work with one hand tied behind him by party and patrons, and be content to utter only half or two

thirds of his mind; no clergyman is a free man and may speak the whole truth, regardless of his parish's opinions; writers of all kinds are manacled servants of the public.... (313)

His argument / fight with Pilot Brown:

| "I'll never turn a wheel on this boat again while that cub stays."

The captain said: —

"But he need n't come round when you are on watch, Mr. Brown."

"I won't even stay on the same boat with him. *One* of us has to go ashore."

"Very well," said the captain, "let it be yourself;" and resumed his talk with the passengers.

During the brief remainder of the trip, I knew how an emancipated slave feels; for I was an emancipated slave myself. (353)

As Ch 31 opens, we skip forward some 20+ years. From remembrance to revisiting the Mississippi. (360)

| Mississippi stem boating was born about 1812; at the end of thirty years, it had grown to mighty proportions; and in less than thirty more, it was dead! A strangely short life for so majestic a creature. (367)

| There is a tradition that Island 37 was one of the principal abiding places of the once celebrated "[Murel's Gang](#)." (404)

Dying man tells his tale of Napoleon, MO. Ch 31: A Thumb-Print (422 ff.)

| I found the half-forgotten Southern intonations and elisions as pleasing to my ear as they had formerly been. A Southerner talks music. At least it is music to me, but then I was born in the South. The educated Southerner has no use for an *r*, except at the beginning of a word. He says, "honah," and "dinnah," and "Gove'nuh," and "befo' the waw" ... (488) In the South, the war is what A.D. is elsewhere; they date from it ... (491) I was not sorry, for war talk by men who have been in a war is always interesting; whereas moon talk by a poet who has not been in the moon is likely to be dull. (493)

Sir Walter Scott takes his lumps throughout , but Ch 46 (500) singles him out.

| But when a Southerner of genius writes modern English, his book goes upon crutches no longer, but upon wings; and they carry it swiftly all about America and England, and through the great English reprint publishing houses of Germany — as witness the experience of Mr. Cable and Uncle Remus, two of the very few Southern authors who do not write in the southern style. Instead of three or four widely-known literary names, the South ought to have a dozen or two — and will have them when Sir Walter's time is out. (502)

| We had not time to go ashore in Muscatine, but had a daylight view of it from the boat. I lived there awhile ... But I remember it best for a lunatic who caught me out in the fields, one Sunday, and extracted a butcher-knife from his bot and proposed to carve me up with it, unless I acknowledged him to be the only son of the Devil. I tried to compromise on an acknowledgment that he was the only member of the family I had met; but that did not satisfy him; he wouldn't have any half-measures; I must say he was the sole and only son of the Devil — and he whetted his knife on his boot. It did not seem worth while to make trouble about a little thing like that; so I swung round to his view of the matter and saved my skin whole. (564)

The more I read of Life, the more I see it as what Twain's autobiography could have been.

Completed 032822.

A couple of weeks ago I was catching up on some saved reading from The New Yorker, specifically John McPhee's *Tabula Rasa* series, where perhaps our greatest living essayist says that a major project such as a memoir was thought to keep us alive until finished. But if that were the case, he said, Twain might still be alive, his autobiography was so large, so encompassing, so ... unfinished.

I was reminded that there's really so little of Twain I've read. Sure, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, several times; somewhere along the childhood way I read Tom Sawyer; The Celebrated Jumping Frog and other stories; Old Times and Life on the Mississippi, especially the first 10 or so pages ("When I was a boy ..."). But what did I know of Twain's work? If I admired him so much, both as author and as man of letters, why had I such a loose association with more of the body of his writing?

So I took up this project, to read as much of Twain as I could muster energy to do, starting with v1 of his Autobiography. But it's so big a book, too large for the beach. Therefore, I decided I could / should read more than one item at a time. I began with v1, yes, but first trip down to the beach I took Innocents Abroad, the first of the LofA volumes I have (included is Roughing It). Then I filled out my LofA series.

Today, as I write this, I'm approximately halfway through v1 of the Autobiography, about the same in Innocents, and I've cracked into the Anthology, treating it as a kind of spice tour to go along with the substantive reading from America's greatest author (?).

[Let me study on that last for a while.]

From "Democracy 101: Mark Twain's farewell address," by Lewis Lapham in The Atlantic, April 2011.

| Twain comes down on the side of the liberties of the people as opposed to the ambitions of the state, putting the force of his intellect against the "peacock shams" of the world's "colossal humbug," believing that it is the freedoms of thought that rescue a democracy from its stupidities and crimes, the courage of its dissenting citizens that protects it against the despotism of wealth and power backed up with platitudes and billy clubs subprime loans.... He is a disenchanted philanthropist who retains his affection for individuals, a fierce skeptic who thinks that the Constitution is the premise for a narrative rather than the design for a monument or the plan of an invasion.

Dick Gregory 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."

"All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called 'Huckleberry Finn,'" Ernest Hemingway said in 1935. "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."

"The older I grow the more I am convinced that Mark Twain was, by long odds, the largest figure that ever reared itself out of the flat, damp prairie of American literature." — H. L. Mencken (1919)

Mark Twain Tonight — [Bill Moyers 2004 interview with Hal Holbrook](#) (Vimeo)
Ken Burns, "Mark Twain" in two episodes, PBS.

George Will : "So, Trump must try to emulate the protagonist of "[A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court](#)." In Mark Twain's novel, a 19th-century American is transported back in time to Britain in the year 528. He gets in trouble, is condemned to death, but remembers that a solar eclipse occurred on the date of his scheduled execution. He saves himself by vowing to extinguish the sun but promising to let it shine again if his demands are met."

Mark Twain Anthology: Great Writers on His Life and Works

Edited by Shelley Fisher Fishkin. LofA series.

| As Thomas Edison remarked around 1908, "An American loves his family. If he has any love left over for some other person, he generally selects Mark Twain." (xxiii)

Howells: "Emerson, Longfellow, Lowell, Holmes — I knew them all and all the rest of our sages, poets, seers, critics, humorists; they were like one another and like other literary men; but Clemens was sole, incomparable, the Lincoln of our literature." (9)

The Autobiography (V1)

| As he put it in June 1906, he had finally seen that the "right way to do an Autobiography" was to "start it at no particular time of your life; wander at your Freedom will all over your life; talk only about the thing which interests you for the moment; drop it the moment its interest threatens to pale, and turn your talk upon the new and more interesting thing that has intruded into your mind meantime." (1)

| I had ben discovering fools all along when the General was talking, but this instance brought me to my senses. I put myself in this fellow's place and confessed that if I had been in that fellow's clothes it was hundred to one that I would have done the very thing that he had done, and I was thoroughly well aware that, at any rate, there was not a preacher no a widow in Christendom who would not have done it: for these people are always seeking investments that pay illegitimately large sums; and they never, or seldom, stop to inquire into the nature of the business. (84) [Made me think of Madoff ...]

"... a maxim of mine that whenever a man preferred being fed by any other man to starving in independence he ought to be shot." (87)

| In all the villages of prodigious London the villagers love music. The love it with a breadth and looseness of taste not known elsewhere but in heaven. If they were up there they would not shut their ears Sundays when the congregational singing was coming up from below. To them, anything that is a noise is music. And they enjoy it, not in an insipid way, but with a rapt and whole-hearted joy.... (115)

| The other maid, Withering Heights (which is not her name), is about forty and looks considerably younger. She is quick, smart, active, energetic, breezy, good-natured, has a high-keyed voice and a loud one, talks thirteen to the dozen, talks all the time, talks in her sleep, will talk when she is dead; is here, there, and everywhere all at the same time, and is consumingly interested in every devilish thing that is going on. Particularly if it is not her affair. And she is not merely passively interested, but takes a hand; and not only takes a hand but the principal one; in fact will play the whole game, fight the whole battle herself, if you don't find some way to turn her flank. But as she does it in the family's interest, not her own, I find myself diffident about finding fault.... (121)

| It is good to begin life poor; it is good to begin life rich — these are wholesome; but to begin it *prospectively* rich! The man who has not experienced it cannot imagine the curse of it. (209)

| When I was younger I could remember anything, whether it had happened or not; but my faculties are decaying, now, and soon I shall be so I cannot remember any but the latter. It is sad to go to pieces like this, but we all have to it. (210)

| Biographies are but the clothes and buttons of the man — the biography of the man himself cannot be written. (221)

| And that reminds me how unexciting the Morris incident will be two or three years from now — maybe six months from now — and yet what an irritating thing it is today, and has been for the past few days.... No, there will be just as much to write on Wednesday as Monday had furnished for Tuesday. And that is because life does not consist mainly — or even largely — of facts and happenings. It consists mainly of the storm of thoughts that is forever blowing through one's head. Could you set them down stenographically? No. Could you set down any considerable fraction of them stenographically? No. Fifteen stenographers hard at work couldn't keep up. Therefore a full autobiography has never been written, and it never will be. It would consist of three hundred and sixty-five double-size volumes per year ... (257)

Concerning man ... "He is the only creature that inflicts pain for sport, knowing it to *be* pain. But if the cat knows she is inflicting pain when she plays with the frightened mouse, then we must make an exception here; we must grant that in one detail man is the moral peer of the cat. *All* creatures kill — there seems to be no exception; but of the whole list, man is the only one that kills for fun; he is the only one that kills in malice, the only one that kills for revenge. Also — in all the list he is the only creature that has a nasty mind. (312)

The Innocents Abroad, Or The New Pilgrims' Progress (1867)

The trip was in 1867; the book was first published in 1869. [Wikipedia](#)
"This book is a record of a pleasure trip. If it were a record of a solemn scientific expedition, it would have about it that gravity, that profundity, and that impressive incomprehensibility which are so proper to works of that kind, and withal so attractive. (3)

Interesting to read this as I go through V1 of Autobiography. Also fascinating to come across his travels in Italy, especially in the lake area and Venice.

| There were no stirrups [he's riding a donkey], but really such supports were not needed — to use such a saddle was the next thing to riding a dinner table — there was ample support clear out to one's knee joints. (46)

| The Old Travelers ... we love the Old Travelers. We love to hear them prate, and drivel, and lie. We can tell them the moment we see them. They always throw out a few feelers; they never cast themselves adrift till they have sounded every individual and know that he has not traveled. Then they open their throttle-valves, and how they do brag, and sneer, and swell, and soar, and blaspheme the sacred name of Truth! (89)

Napoleon III and Abdul-Aziz compared and contrasted (101). The latter:
"Born to a throne; weak, stupid, ignorant, almost, as his meanest slave ..."

He butchers the story of Abelard and Heloise (114).

| I have not been to church so often in a long time as I have in the last few weeks. The people in these old lands seem to make churches their specialty. (130)

| I do envy these Europeans the comfort they take. When the work of the day is done, they forget it. Some of them go, with wife and children, to a beer hall, and sit quietly and genteelly drinking a mug or two of ale and listening to music; others walk the streets, others drive in the avenues ... they go to bed moderately early, and sleep well. (147)

The Old Masters ... they're everywhere.

Pretensions of language among Americans abroad, how they adopt the language, inflections ...

The Oracle, who knows everything; Scylla and Charybdis vs. Sodom and Gomorrah

Common Era
Vesuvius, Pompeii ...

| We never read of Pompeii but we think of that soldier; we can not write of Pompeii without the natural impulse to grant to him the mention he so well deserves. Let us remember that he was a soldier — not a policeman — and so, praise him. Being a soldier, he staid, — because the warrior instinct forbade him to fly. Had he been a policeman he would have staid, also — because he would have been asleep. (265)

“I thought I was lazy, but I am a steam-engine compared to a Constantinople dog.” (293)

| In the Russian town of Yalta I danced an astonishing sort of dance an hour long, and one I had not heard of before, with a very pretty girl, and we talked incessantly, and laughed exhaustingly, and neither one ever knew what the other was driving at. But it was splendid. There were twenty people in the set, and the dance was very lively and complicated. It was complicated enough without me — with me it was more so. I threw in a figure now and then that surprised those Russians. But I have never ceased to think of that girl. I have written to her, but I can not direct the epistle because her name is one of those nine-jointed Russian affairs, and there are not letters enough in our alphabet to hold out. I am not reckless enough to try to pronounce it when I am awake, but I make a stagger at it in my dreams, and get up with lockjaw in the morning. I am fading. I do not take my meals now, with any sort of regularity. Her dear name haunts me still in my dreams. It is awful on teeth. It never comes out of my mouth but it fetches an old snap along with it. And then the lockjaw closes down and nips off a couple of the last syllables — but they taste good. (326)

| Camels are not beautiful, and their long under lip gives them an exceedingly callus expression. They have immense, flat, forked cushions of feet, that make a track in the dust like a pie with a slice cut out of it. They are not particular about their diet. They would eat a tombstone if they could bite it. A thistle grows about here which has needles on it that would pierce through leather, I think; if one touches you, you can find relief in nothing but profanity. The camels eat these. They show by their actions that they enjoy them. I suppose it would be a real treat to a camel to have a keg of nails for supper. (347)

| She was the only Syrian female we have seen yet who was not so sinfully ugly that she couldn't smile after ten o'clock Saturday night without breaking the Sabbath. Here child was a hard specimen, though — there wasn't enough of it to make a pie, and the poor little thing looked so pleadingly up at all who came near it (as if it had an idea that now was its chance or never,) that we were filled with compassion which was genuine and not put on. (377)

Twain writes over and over about how the American travelers would steal almost anything:

| Our pilgrims broke off specimens. We visited, also, a new chapel ... (421)
And his acceptance of wild theories often has weak fact-basing ...

| This will strike any reflecting mind forcibly. That Adam was formed of dirt procured in this very spot is amply proven by the fact that in six thousand years no man has ever been able to prove that the dirt was *not* procured here whereof he was made.... There is no question that he is actually buried in the grave which is pointed out as his — there can be none — because it has never been proven that that grave is not the grave in which he is buried.
/ The tomb of Adam! How touching it was, here in a land of strangers, far away from home, and friends, and all who cared for me, thus to discover the grave of a blood relation. True, a distant one, but still a relation. (451)

| When I was a boy I somehow got the impression that the river Jordan was four thousand miles long and thirty-five miles wide. It is only ninety miles long, and so crooked that a man does not know which side of it he is on half the time. (476)

On "hospitable priests" at Mars Saba:

| Some of these men have been shut up here for 30 years. In all that dreary time they have not heard the laughter of a child or the blessed voice of a woman; they have seen no human tears, no human smiles; they have known no human joys, no wholesome human sorrows. In their hearts are not memories of the past, in their brains no dreams of the future. All that is lovable, beautiful, worthy, they have put far away from them; against all things that are pleasant to look upon, and all sounds that are music to the ear, they have barred their massive doors and reared their relentless walls of stone forever. They have banished the tender grace of life and left only the sapped and skinny mockery. Their lips are lips that never kiss and never sing; their hearts are hearts that never hate and never love; their breasts are breasts that never swell with the sentiment, "I have a country and a flag." They are dead men who walk. (478)

On the return trip, port of Gibraltar:

| It would be very tiresome staying here, and so four of us ran the quarantine blockade and spent seven delightful days in Seville, Cordova, Cadiz, and wandering through the pleasant rural scenery of Andalusia, the garden of Old Spain. The experiences of that cheery week were too varied and numerous for a short chapter and I have not room for a long one. Therefore I shall leave them all out. (509)

At a time of Trump's fake news and half-baked justifications and a pandemic not unlike the cholera epidemic, the misguided concept of American exceptionalism and travel no, much of this seemed timely, eerily prescient.

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