

"All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called Huckleberry Finn. If you read it you must stop where the Nigger Jim is stolen from the boys. That is the real end. The rest is just cheating. But 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."

- Ernest Hemingway, *Green Hills of Africa*, 1935

One of the great writers of American literature, Twain is admired for capturing typical American experiences in a language which is realistic and charming. [William Dean] Howells was one of Twain's early admirers, and he wrote the following on Twain's style: "So far as I know, Mr. Clemens is the first writer to use in extended writing the fashion we all use in thinking, and to set down the thing that comes into his mind without fear or favor of the thing that went before or the thing that may be about to follow." Most of the critical attention has been given to *Huck Finn*, Clemens' greatest achievement. This book concerns itself with a number of themes, among them the quest for freedom, the transition from adolescence into adulthood, alienation and initiation, criticism of pre-Civil War southern life. A remarkable achievement of the book is Clemens' use of American humor, folklore, slang, and dialects. There is critical debate, however, concerning the ending of the book - some call it weak and ineffective, others feel it is appropriate and effective.

- PAL: Perspectives in American Literature - A Research and Reference Guide
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[*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is a] book of mine where a sound heart and a deformed conscience come into collision and conscience suffers defeat.
- Notebook #35 (reprinted in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Univ. of California Press, 2003)