

HUCK AND JIM: SIMPLY UNFORGETTABLE



a different way of seeing

Sponsored by Hekma Press

Inspired by Bertha, heroine for those who dare to be free

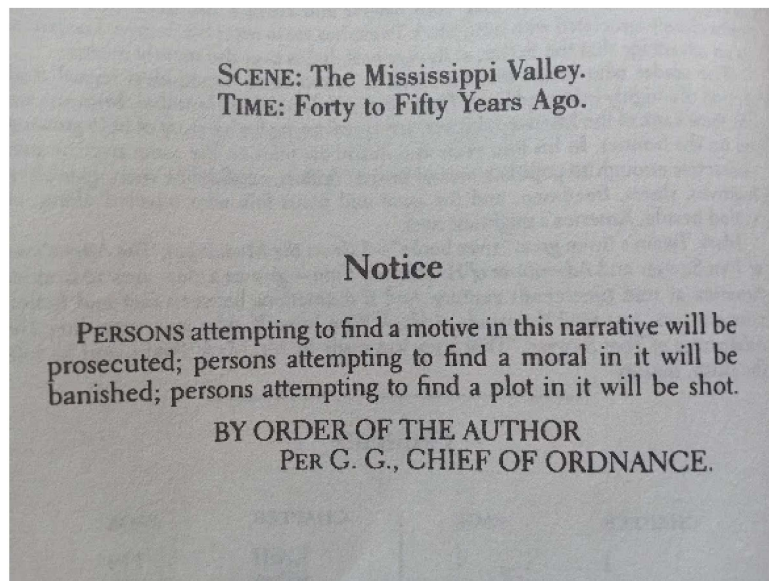
October 2026 - Volume 2, Issue #10

In this issue, read about Huckleberry Finn, one of literature's unforgettable characters and Mark Twain's equally unforgettable writing style. And in the non-fiction section, I might have discovered the medical label for my grandmother's condition of laughing at the most inappropriate times.

On my YT channel, [Bertha's Books ~it's all about the books~](#), I've uploaded episodes on Madame Bovary by Gustave Flaubert and Kidnapped by RL Stevenson.

Mark Twain

When I read the Notice at the start of Huck Finn's adventures I knew I was going to like the book. It resonated loudly and captures something I gravitate to as both a reader and writer. I've taken a pic of the Notice for you:



What does it say to me? I think, it's about the art of storytelling. Think about something you once heard, saw or experienced in some other way that brought on an intense feeling. Maybe joy or sadness, or maybe just a reminder of something you once had and lost. You're not sure why the experience evoked such strong emotions in you. It's difficult to explain, it's something you just feel. Maybe you try work it out and by doing so it helps you understand the feeling. Doing so also means the intensity of the feeling diffuses a little. Well, the same kinds of things happen in stories. You read something that you find very moving. Sometimes it's obvious why, but other times it's not and the writer doesn't go into a commentary of the events which might explain why you feel that way. Rather, the writer lets you just experience it. It's the absence of commentary, of being explicit, or of trying to explain that makes the experience impactful. The reason, as I learnt from my

time in theatre, is because the reader internalises the emotions rather than having them spelt out. And that's what, I think, Twain is getting at in his notice. He realized that if you come with a pre-determined message especially when it's of the moral kind the story can appear contrived, and he didn't want that.

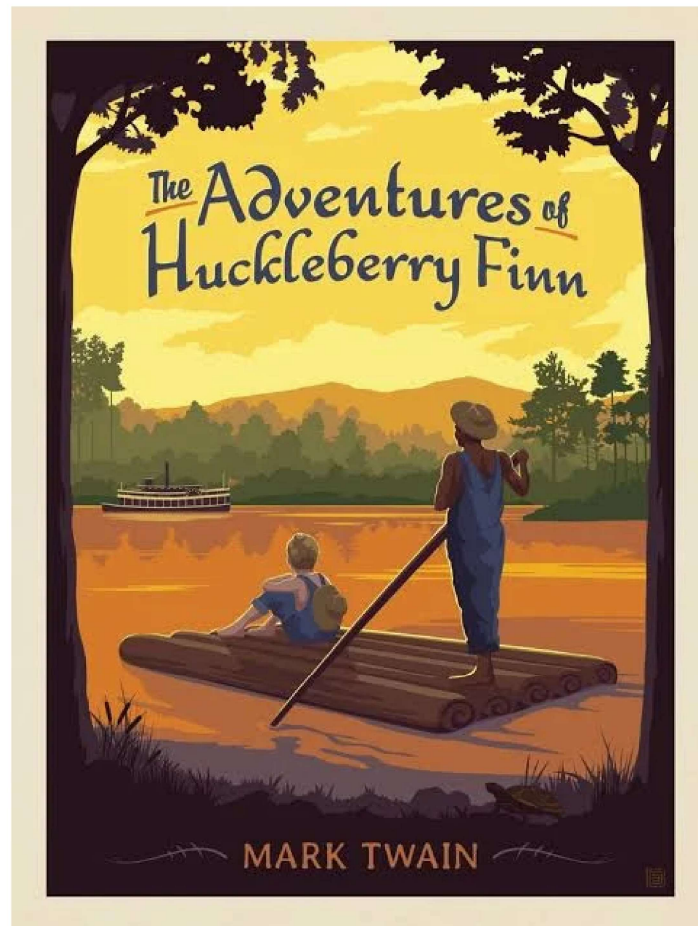
For most (if not all) writers, artists generally I guess, it's difficult to get this kind of storytelling right. It takes a lot of practice to let the story do the work. Very gifted writers achieve the mastery a lot sooner and there are many of those. Obviously Twain and his greatest fan Hemingway, but read any of the classics and you will probably see some of it there. I recognise it when I read it and on the (frustratingly too few) occasions when I get it right myself.

For literary critics and scholars reading this, indeed, Twain wasn't the only one to practise this style. In fact, most, maybe even all writers who include a literary element tend to do it at some point. And, of course, there's also not only one way of writing. There are other styles and it's not about right or wrong. Everyone has a unique voice; I guess it's what the academics call writing style. I enjoy several writing styles but one of my favourites is definitely the one Twain uses.

The adventures of Huckleberry Finn

My formative years were in the colonies, so at school we studied books by British, Irish, and anglophone African (Kenyan, South African, Nigerian) writers, occasionally an Australian and to a lesser extent Americans (meaning USA here). I do remember our English teacher suggesting Tom Sawyer, which sounds like a great read, but I always knew I would rather read about Huck. At first it was just because I liked his name and, later, knowing he was more on the periphery of society I intuitively found him appealing. Even though I wasn't a big reader as a kid or teenager, I had a sense that those outside the circle usually had much more interesting stories to tell.

I was glad I chose Huck's story, not that I have anything against Tom's, which sounds like an enthralling adventure. Huck's story, I had a feeling was going to be a lot more gripping for me. And gripping it was; it's nothing less than a struggle for survival.



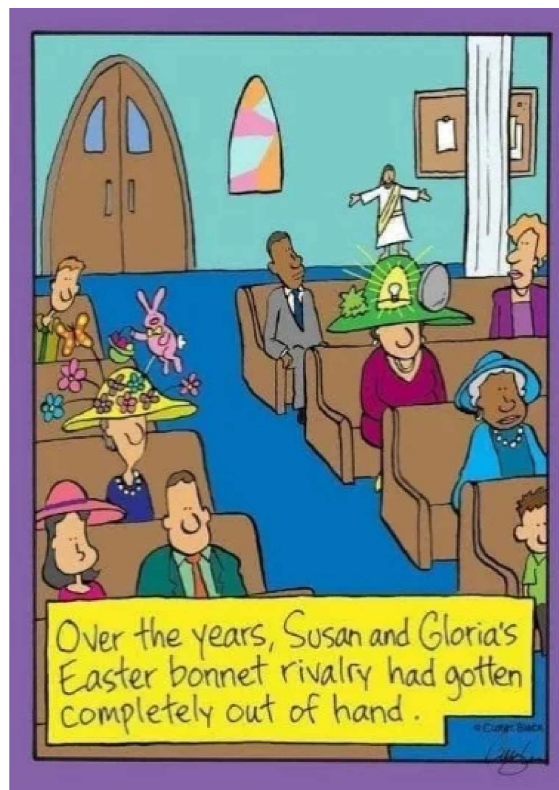
On my YT channel I'll be recounting the story—it will appear around the middle of this month, so I won't go into the plot here—but it's the kind of book you start talking about and find yourself still wanting to talk about months later. It's masterful. The plot for one, but as with all good literature it's mostly the characters. There are a whole bunch of interesting characters with the two main ones being Huck and Jim who team up in escaping their dreadful lives. Huck is an uneducated outsider who suffers at the hands of a violent father and Jim is yearning for freedom. Yep, it's got that extremely disturbing element of slavery and it's desperate. If you have a soul, that part of the story's

going to have an impact and be warned: the text is packed with racial slurs.

As I alluded to, one of the reasons I found the story so impactful is Twain's writing style. He doesn't make any social commentary. He doesn't moralise or have an explicit message for you. He doesn't need to. The story is so powerful and not going into the social context makes it all the more impactful.

Non-fiction Corner: paradoxical laughter and pseudobulbar affect

Most of us have probably experienced it: the giggles, knowing you shouldn't be laughing but you can't help yourself. It's sometimes called 'church giggles' and I remember getting them a lot: noticing a woman's ridiculous hat or having a man fall over in the pew while trying to shuffle his way past a particularly large worshiper.



I remember going to a funeral once. It was my uncle's and most of us were there only because we were meeting the lawyer afterwards to find out what he left us in his will. That was already amusing, but what really got me going was the exaggerated bunch of roses on the piano. It reminded me of a joke which I then, unwisely, shared with a fellow mourner: "What's better than having roses on your piano?" I asked. I can't give the answer here because this is a family newsletter, but the guy was understandably horrified. His indignation cracked me up and I had to go outside to recovery. I still chuckle when I think about it.

My grandmother didn't need much to get her going. It must have been quite serious because she consulted a doctor about it and apparently he labelled it 'paradoxical laughter of unknown significance'. It was quite disconcerting, however, because she used to laugh like a drain and even point inappropriately at, for example, a bald person or if she saw someone, especially someone large, falling. At times, we had to cross the road or duck into a shop if we saw someone coming along who was going to set her off. It could have been someone wearing an odd hat or limping or, even worse, someone with a disability. She was a nightmare at funerals.

She was, however, by all accounts very empathetic. In fact she dedicated her life to caring for orphans (she was herself an orphan). So when I came across another medical condition: Pseudobulbar Affect (PA), it made me think that maybe her condition was more serious than they realised. Apparently PA is an organic social brain disorder that causes sudden, uncontrollable outbursts of emotion that don't match the situation. There are different types like those who laugh at others less fortunate. Other can't help but cry when they see someone else laugh. It's all very odd but, coming back to my dear grandmother. Her guffawing was really quite extreme. Maybe she had a version of PA? It wouldn't come as a surprise. Just another bizarre condition that litters my peculiar heritage.

In October...

...I'm reading two novels, maybe I'll share one of those stories with you. I've also read about Van Gogh's strange relationship with yellow and I'll share that with you in the non-fiction corner.

Until then, warm greetings and be free to be.

Bertha and me.

Pierre



You received this email because you signed up on our website or made a purchase from us.

[Unsubscribe](#)

