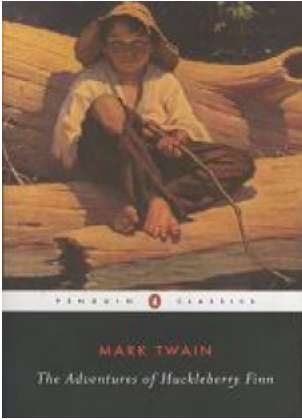


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In this centenary year of the first American edition of Huckleberry Finn, Neider, who has worked long and well in the thickets of Twain scholarship (this is the ninth Twain volume he has edited), offers a most fitting tribute, for which he will be thanked in some quarters, damned in others. Neider's contribution is twofold: he has restored to its rightful place the great rafting chapter, which the author had lifted from the manuscript-in-progress and dropped into Life on the Mississippi, and he has abridged some of the childish larkiness in the portions in which Huck's friend Tom Sawyer intrudes into this novel. For decades, critics have lamented the absence of the "missing" chapter and deplored the jarring presence of Tom in episodes that slow the narrative, but not until now has anyone had the temerity to set matters right. In paring back the "Tom" chapters (which he fully documents in his lengthy, spirited introduction, with literal line counts of the excised material), Neider has achieved a brisker read. Though there may be some brickbats thrown at him for this "sacrilege," few should object to the belated appearance of the transplanted rafting chapter in the novel in which it clearly belongs.