

# MARK TWAIN

## IN THE COMICS

### An Exhibition

M. Thomas Inge

Elmira 2009

The Sixth International Conference  
on the State of Mark Twain Studies

Elmira College Center for Mark Twain Studies

*On the Cover:*

The cover image originates with *Graphic Classics* eighth volume in the series published in 2004 designed and published by Tom Pomplun (2001). This volume, devoted to Mark Twain, included fourteen short works and essays by Twain as interpreted by twenty-five artists and writers. Our cover, a graphic rendering of “The Facts Concerning the Recent Carnival of Crime in Connecticut,” was illustrated by Antonella Caputo and Nicholas Miller and features a lively caricature of Twain himself as the lead character.

# Mark Twain in the Comics

M. Thomas Inge

From his early days as a raucous frontier humorist to his latter years as a white-suited and white-haired patriarch of American literary humor, Mark Twain was a delightful subject for the pens of America's caricaturists and comic artists. His distinct physiognomy, unruly hair, and penchant for striking poses endeared him to those influential cartoonists who portrayed him for the nation's periodicals, such as Thomas Nast, Joseph Keppler, John T. McCutcheon, and Richard F. Outcault (the father of the American comic strip). On the occasion of Twain's death in 1910, nearly every editorial cartoonist on a major newspaper commented on the loss through a cartoon memorializing the man or his work, an event usually reserved for the deaths of presidents or declarations of war.

Usually the art of the caricaturist and political cartoonist is an acerbic one and the subject is ridiculed or lampooned. This does not hold true in the case of Twain. While exaggeration and gentle parody of his features were practiced, the cartoonists and artists who undertook to depict him did so with loving humor and whimsical wit. This seems

to have been the case almost from the start of his career, but the comic beatification became more intense the longer he lived and the more beloved he became in the public eye. By the time of his death, he was a saint in a white linen suit.

Perhaps one of the reasons for this respectful treatment had to do with the fact that Twain considered himself a strong member of the fraternity of journalists, as did the cartoonists and illustrators, and they simply saw him as one of their own rather than a remote public figure and fit subject for ridicule. It is also true, however, that Twain seldom took stances or did things to incur public disfavor; thus the artists simply reflected widespread opinion that Twain was an American national treasure.

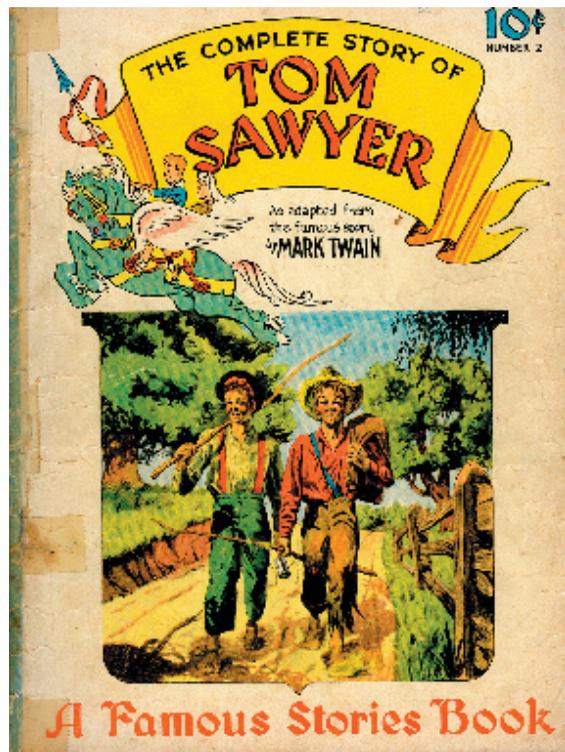
Twain's two most popular characters entered the pages of the newspapers in 1918 in the form of a comic strip entitled *Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn*. The syndicate, the McClure Company, began the strip with permission of the author's estate as each installment carried the copyright notice of the Mark Twain Company or the name of Twain's daughter,

Clara Clemens Gabrilowitsch. The artist and presumed author of the feature was Clare Victor Dwiggin (1874 - 1958), who used the pen name “Dwig” and specialized in portraying with nostalgic romanticism the lives of children in rural America in the decades before and after the turn of the century, especially in his popular daily panel series *School Days* (1917 - 1932). Dwiggin had a loose and sketchy style which invested realistic events with appealing wit and warm caricature, and it lent itself to the depiction of rambunctious children’s activities.

He was a suitable choice for *Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn* as an artist, but the story line lacked the satiric edge and critical bite of Twain’s fiction and drew little of its content from either Twain novel, except for some additional characters such as Becky Thatcher, Injun Joe, Aunt Polly, the Widow Douglas, and Miss Watson. Conflicts between Huck’s independent life style and Tom’s traditional mores occasionally were subject matter for the strip’s humor, as were Tom’s tricks on his peers to get away to fish and yet get his yard work done.

Dwiggin favored at the start single gag strips over extended narrative and employed the type of comedy which was the staple of all the other popular children’s strips of the time, such as *Skippy* by Percy Crosby, *Reg’lar Fellers* by Gene Byrnes, and *Out Our Way* by J.R. Williams. Despite several interruptions and changes in title, the strip had a faithful following and probably served to support Twain’s reputation as a chronicler of boyhood’s past. Dwiggin also used the

characters in a series of comic book adventure stories contributed first to *Doc Savage Comics* (1940 - 1943) and then after 1943 to *Supersnipe Comics* (1942 - 1949). The feature was concluded when Dwiggin decided to leave the comics for illustration and painting in 1946. A collection of *Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn* Sunday strips appeared in 1925 from Stoll & Edwards, and a set of the daily strips from 1940 was reprinted in 1990 by Malibu Graphics as *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

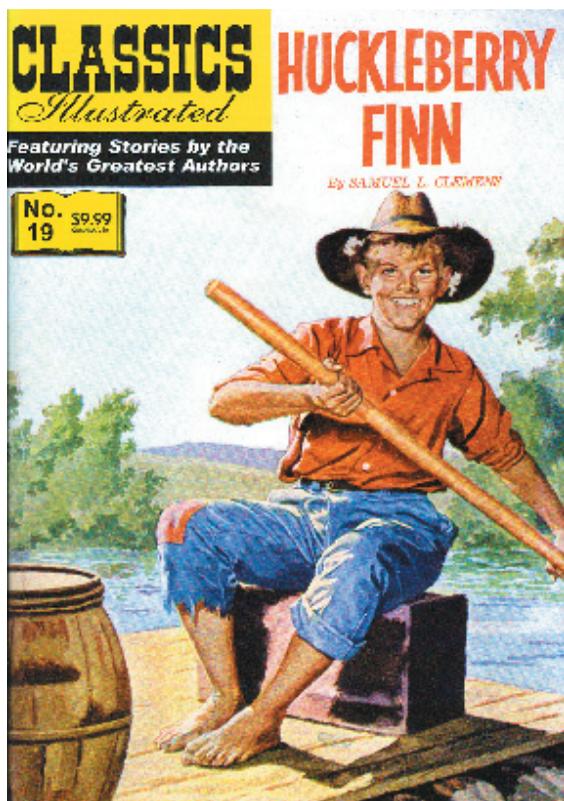


Oskar Lebeck’s *The Complete Story of Tom Sawyer*, (1942) the second number of the *Famous Stories Book* series, was issued by Dell Publishing Co. but immediately discontinued thereafter.

The first full adaptation of a work by Mark Twain to the comic book appeared in 1942, just nine years after the origin of the medium. This was Oskar Lebeck's *The Complete Story of Tom Sawyer*, the second number of the *Famous Stories Book* series issued by Dell Publishing Co. but immediately discontinued thereafter. It is a thorough but by no means "complete" retelling of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* which includes the major events of the plot, rearranges and abbreviates some of them, and strangely omits what has been the favorite scene of illustrators and most adapters ~ the famous fence-painting episode. The art is realistic and vivid, and the book largely captures the spirit of Twain's novel as a work for children about boyhood in a small frontier town. (Dell would also issue much later a second version titled *Adventures of Tom Sawyer* in October 1957, as issue number 10 in its *Dell Junior Treasury* series.)

When Albert Kanter began his major publishing project in 1941 to adapt classic works of world literature to the comic book, it was a sign of Twain's standing and reputation that early in the series of *Classics Comics*, issue number 19 (April 1944) was *Huckleberry Finn*, with a text adapted by Evelyn Goodman and art by Louis Zansky. Since the intent of the series was to remain as faithful to the original as possible, the adaptation exercised few of the artistic possibilities of the newly emerging comic book form, and Zansky's art was static and often even crude. The cover depicts Huck and Jim being shot at from the captain's deck of a wrecked steamboat, an action-filled scene which has no counterpart

in the novel or the following adaptation. As one would expect, the first-person narrative voice, the American vernacular, and the ingenious uses of irony and burlesque ~ all distinguishing features of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* ~ could not be retained. What was left were selected points of dramatic crisis and the swift pace of the narrative as Huck and Jim escape and keep on the move. While most of the basic plot was retained, most of the meaning, especially the social and political implications of the novel, was not.



*Classics Comics*, issue number 19 (April 1944) was *Huckleberry Finn*, with a text adapted by Evelyn Goodman and art by Louis Zansky.

The first version, nevertheless, was so successful among readers that it went through nine printings, but with the tenth printing a new cover and interior art were provided. This second adaptation drawn by Frank Giacoia moved closer to Twain's text in that it used the first-person point of view in narration, attempted an approximation of Huck's language, and included one of the novel's moral crises concerning Jim that reflect on Twain's concern with racism in society. The

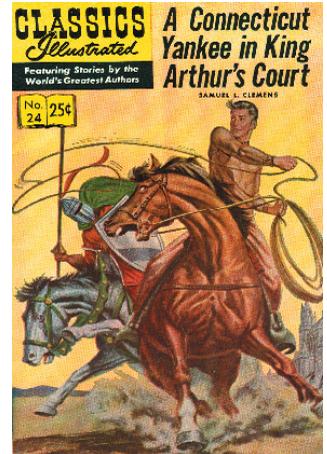


*Classic Comics*, issue number 24 (September 1945), *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, with drawings by Jack Hearne and a text by Ruth A. Roche and Tom Scott.

The second version went through an additional eleven printings, making it one of only nine titles in the entire *Classics* series to go beyond twenty printings.

A year after the initial publication of *Huckleberry Finn*, a second Twain title appeared as number 24 (September 1945), *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, with

drawings by Jack Hearne and a text by Ruth A. Roche and Tom Scott. The adaptation focuses on the chivalric conflicts portrayed in the novel which have led many to consider it a children's book of adventure, but in no way does it attempt to incorporate Twain's larger satiric intent ~ to ridicule monarchy, the Church, vested interest, and Victorian romanticism through a contrast of the sixth century with the nineteenth. Hearne's work is striking and especially strong in the use of dramatic facial expressions. After



*Classics Comics*, issue number 24 (September 1957), *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, second edition.

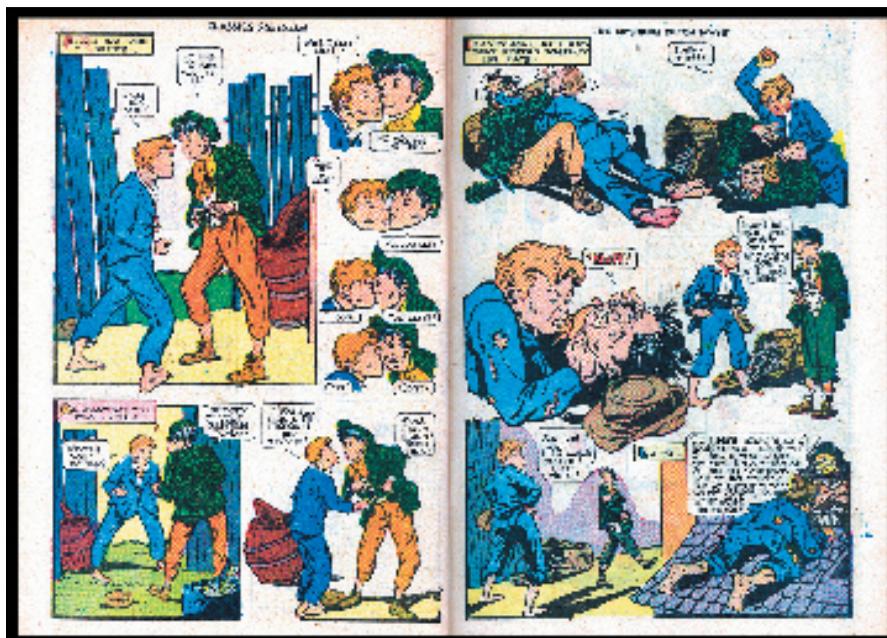
seven printings, new cover and interior art was provided for an additional eight printings by Jack Sparling, whose mannered and expansive style was less attractive than that of Hearne. Also, the ending of the novel was changed in that Hank Morgan was allowed to survive.

*Classics Comics* number 29 (July 1946) was *The Prince and the Pauper* illustrated by Arnold Hicks and written by Scott Feldman and Jack Bass. This popular tale of switched identities adapts easily to the comic book

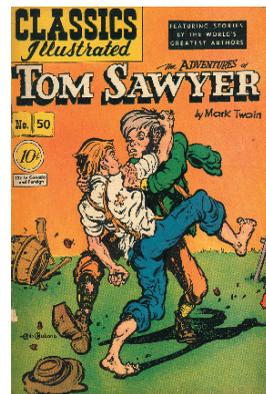
format and retains to some degree its social criticism of man's inhumanity to man, but Hicks's crude art work detracts from the appeal of the Classics version. A horrific cover with the hermit about to stab the prince was quickly changed after the first printing with new cover art by Henry C. Kiefer because of concern over public opinion, then under the sway of Fredric Wertham who crusaded against violence in comic books. The title would see fifteen printings and another new cover but without improved interior art.

An adaptation of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, surprisingly given its popularity, did not appear until August 1948, as number 50 in the series, retitled the year before as *Classics Illustrated*. The art work by Aldo

Rubano is quite innovative in comparison with the earlier titles. The text by Harry Miller retains the principal matters of plot, while Rubano allows his pictures to break free of the conventional panels ~ characters wander across the pages and a kind of simultaneous cinematic action is achieved which is possible only in comic book art. This title was one of the most distinctive in the *Classics* series. Nevertheless, after eight printings, new art work was prepared for another seven printings, but the uncredited artist for the new version was uninspired and no match for Rubano.



In the 1948 version of number 50, characters wander across the pages and a kind of simultaneous cinematic action is achieved which is possible only in comic book art.



*Classics Illustrated*, issue number 50, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, with its 1948 and 1961 covers.



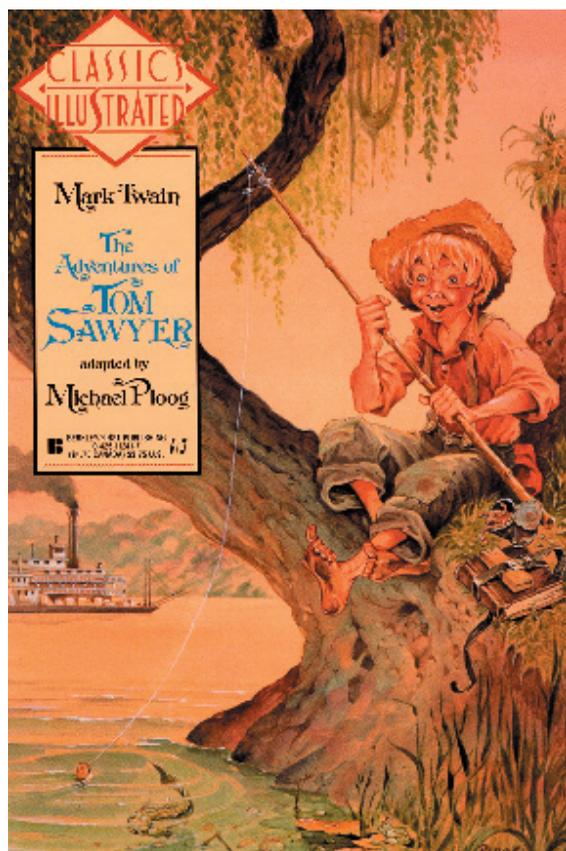
The final Twain adaptation in the *Classics* series was number 93 (March 1952), *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, with art by Henry C. Kiefer, one of the most frequently used artists by the publisher. The major plot elements were retained, including the treatment of the theme of the ambiguities of racial identity, a first in the comic books. Kiefer, however, had a penchant for staged tableaux and excessive detail which made his pages appear stiff and cluttered and which sometimes stalled the flow of the story. The title saw only four printings, the second of which was given a new cover by Gerald McCann. The only other Twain item to be used by the publisher appeared in *The World Around Us*, number 27 (November 1960), an illustrated text rendition of "The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County," with twelve drawings by Gray Morrow.

In 1990, the *Classics Illustrated* series was briefly revived by the Berkley/First Publishing Company, and number 9 was a new adaptation of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* by Michael Ploog. The popular artist's distinctive style, laced with whimsy and charming caricature, is highly suitable for Twain's text which Ploog also adapted. It is a faithful and appealing introduction to the novel.

The Pendulum Press began to issue in 1973 a set of new comic book adaptations called the *Now Age Illustrated* series, but these were printed in black and white and produced in a smaller paperback size. They were done specifically for classroom use, used type rather than hand lettering, maintained a vocabulary aimed at established grade levels, and included word lists and study questions

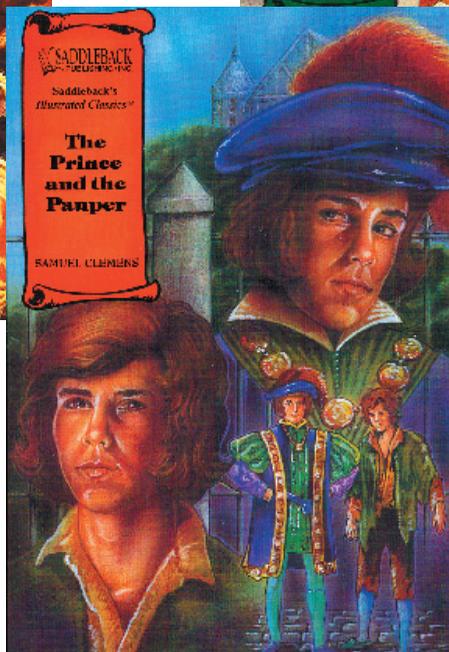
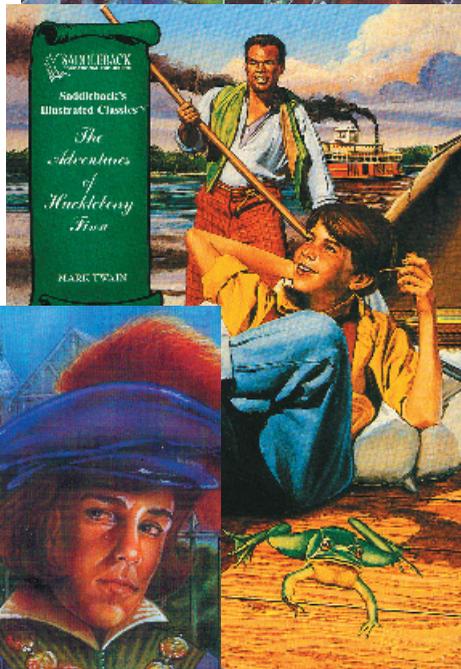
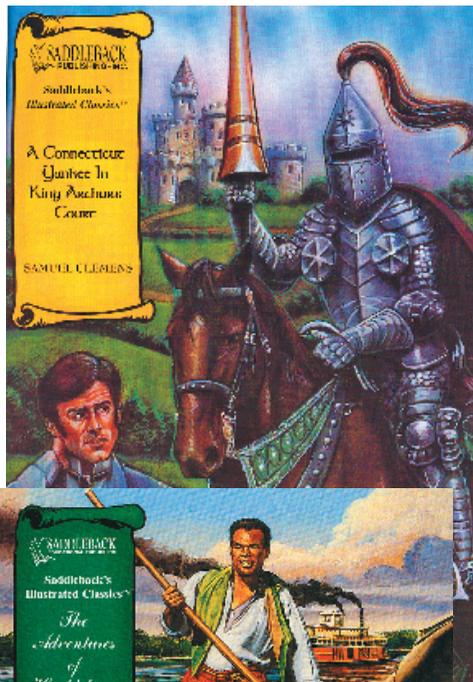
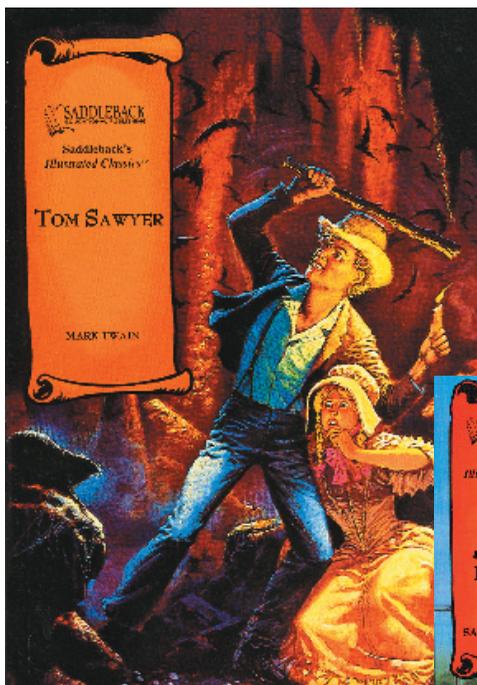
at the back. Four Twain titles appeared in the series: *Huckleberry Finn* (1973), text by Naunerle Farr and art by Francisco Redondo; *Tom Sawyer* (1973), text by Irwin Shapiro and art by E.R. Cruz; *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1977), text by John Norwood Fago and art by Francisco Redondo; and *The Prince and the Pauper* (1978), text by John Norwood Fago and art by E.R. Cruz.

In 2006, Saddleback Publish-



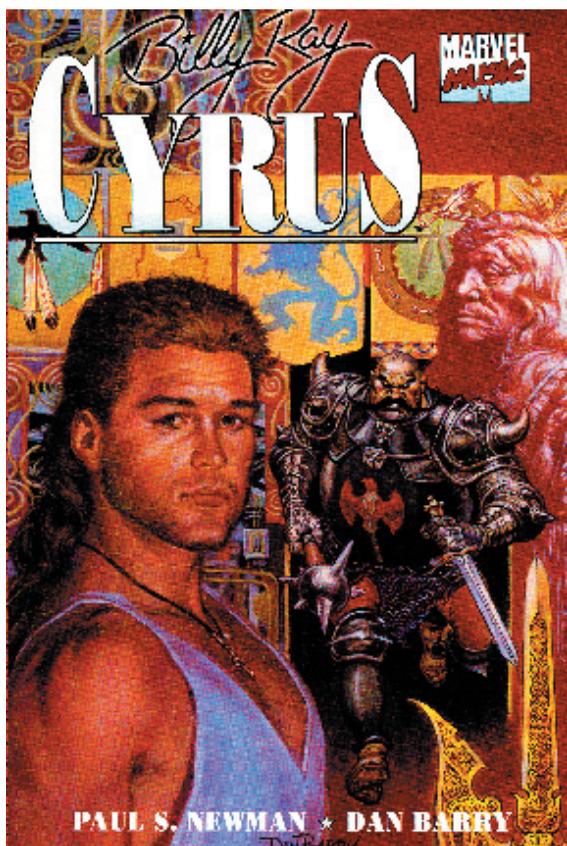
*Classics Illustrated* series was briefly revived in 1990 by the Berkley/First Publishing Company, and number 9 was a new adaptation of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* by Michael Ploog.

ing reprinted the Pendulum versions of *Tom Sawyer*, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *The Prince and the Pauper*, and *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* in color in its own *Illustrated Classics* series. Except for the necessary plot compression, all are faithful to the originals and are realistically illustrated with careful attention to historical detail for the time and place of each novel.

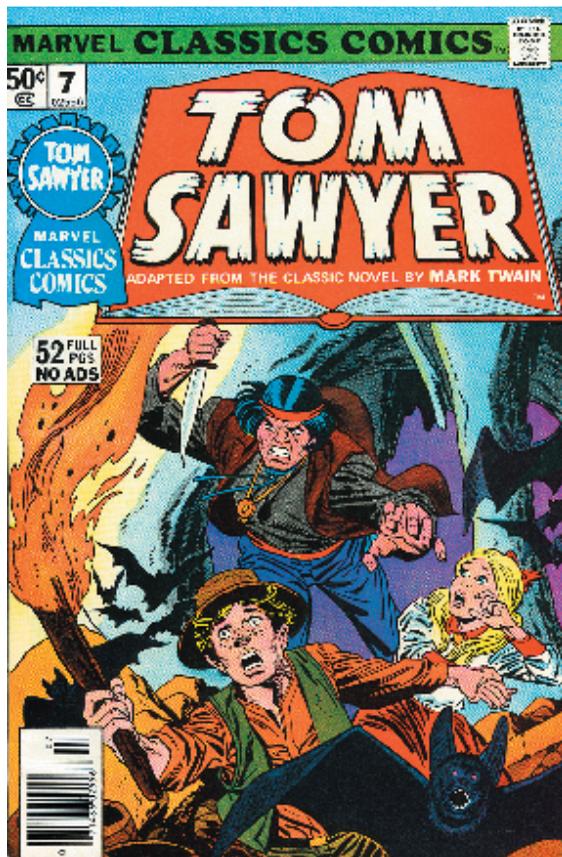


Saddleback Publishing reprints of the Pendulum versions (2006).

When Marvel Comics began publication of its own *Marvel Classics Comics* in 1976, the first twelve titles were abbreviated color reprints of Pendulum titles, including *Tom Sawyer* as number 7 (1976). Issue number 33 (1978) was an original adaptation of *The Prince and the Pauper* by writer Don McGregor and artists identified only as “The New Tribe.” The style of the art and the plot elements are heavily action-oriented in the Marvel Comics tradition.



Marvel Music’s most unusual use of the plot structure of *A Connecticut Yankee* in something other than a straight adaptation in its 1995 single issue of *Billy Ray Cyrus*.



*Tom Sawyer*, number 7 *Marvel Classics Comics* (1976), from the first twelve titles that were abbreviated color reprints of Pendulum titles.

Under its *Marvel Music* imprint, Marvel is also responsible for the most unusual use of the plot structure of *A Connecticut Yankee* in something other than a straight adaptation, in 1995 in its single issue of *Billy Ray Cyrus*. With a script and art by seasoned veterans Paul S. Newman and Dan Barry, in one story the country singer finds that his tour bus has been somehow returned to Arthurian England, and he reenacts selected adventures of Hank Morgan from the novel.

One other version of *The Prince and the Pauper* has been published by Walt Disney Publications, actually an adaptation of the 1990 animated film with text by Scott Saavedra and art by Sergio Asteriti. Featuring Mickey Mouse, Goofy, Pluto, and Donald Duck in the lead roles, neither film nor book bears much relationship to Twain's novel, except for the use of the switch between peasant and prince.

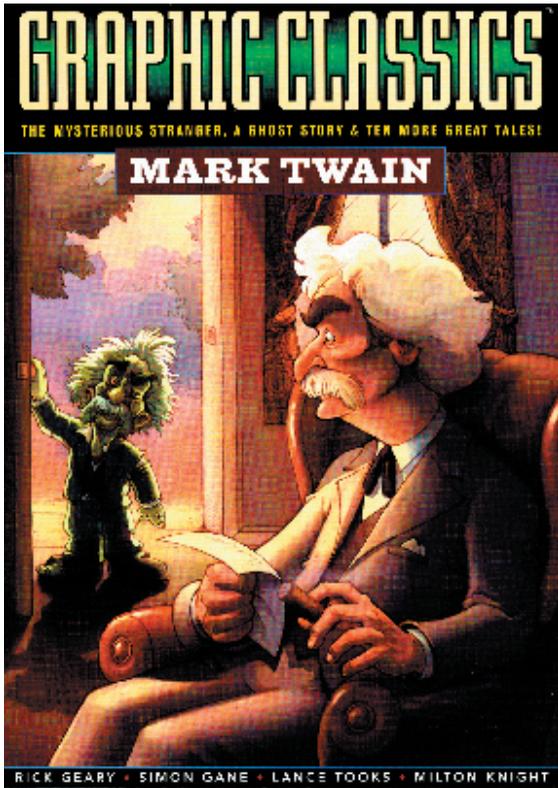
In a second effort to revive the original *Classics Illustrated* series, in 1997 Acclaim Books began to publish a series of digest-size reprints of the early adaptations decked out with plot analyses, study questions, and other instructional material for the classroom. In the case of the Twain titles, the additional material was written by Twain specialist Andrew Jay Hoffman. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* was No. 1 in the series, followed by *Huckleberry Finn* No. 7, *A Connecticut Yankee*

in *King Arthur's Court* No. 15, and *Pudd'nhead Wilson* No. 33, before the series abruptly ended again in early 1998. A third revival began in 2008 by Jack Lake Productions with full size reproductions of the original titles with introductory commentary but no study apparatus. While maintaining the original numbering, they are being published in no particular order, but the first set of titles included *Huckleberry Finn* No. 19 in its 1956 second edition.



*Classics Illustrated* revival efforts by Acclaim Books (1997).



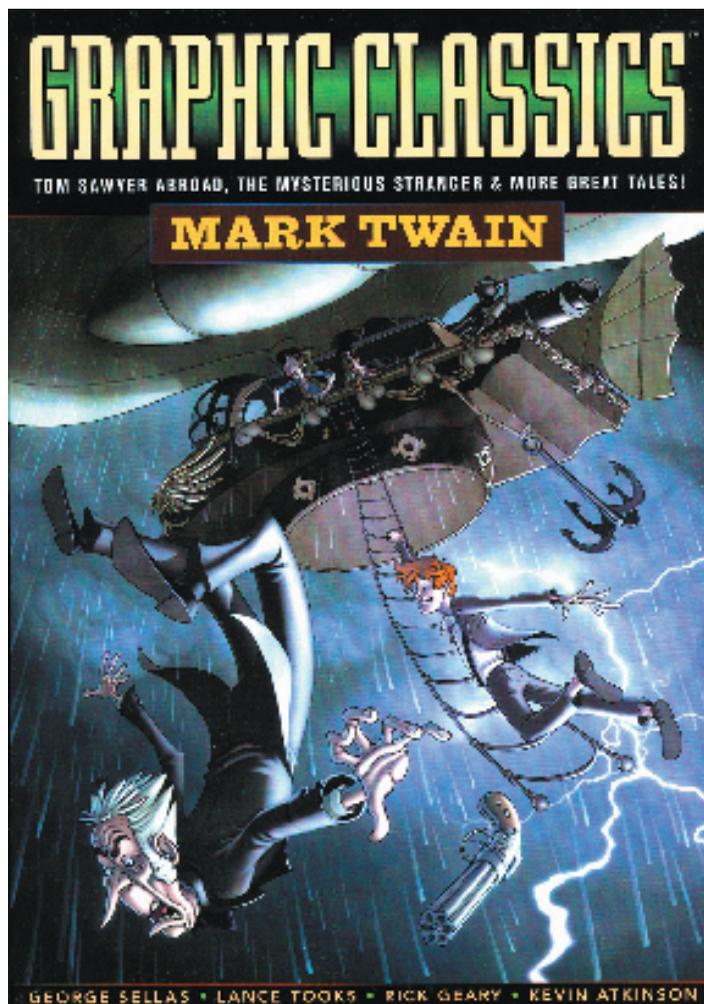


Called *Graphic Classics*, the eighth volume in the series was published in 2004 and was devoted to Mark Twain.

Graphic designer and publisher Tom Pomplun began in 2001 to issue a unique series of anthologies of short stories by major British and American authors, adapted or illustrated by the major comic artists and graphic novelists of the past few decades. Called *Graphic Classics*, the eighth volume in the series published in 2004 was devoted to Mark Twain and included fourteen short works and essays by Twain as interpreted by twenty-five artists and writers. Some of the selections are reprints of Twain's text with illustrations, such as "The Legend of Sagenfeld" with surrealistic art by Evert Geradts, or "A Dog's Tale" with text and pictures interwoven into striking single page designs by Lance Took. Seven selections from "Advice to Little Girls" are given full-page interpretations by as many artists with such figures as Shary Flenniken and Mary Fleener represented among leading feminist cartoonists.

Especially noteworthy are the lengthy adaptations of such works as "Is He Living or Is He Dead?" by Simon Gane or "A Ghost Story" by Antonin Emdin. In "The Facts Concerning the Recent Carnival of Crime in Connecticut," Antonella Caputo and Nicholas Miller feature a lively caricature of Twain himself as the lead character, and they work in references to other iconic comic figures like Charlie Chaplin and the Yellow Kid. The fullest adaptation is "The Mysterious Stranger" as written and drawn by graphic novelist Rick Geary, whose bold outlines and precisely rendered figures reflect the traditions of Victorian and early twentieth century popular print woodcuts. The style and story are suitably matched in a faithful and effective blend of art and narrative.

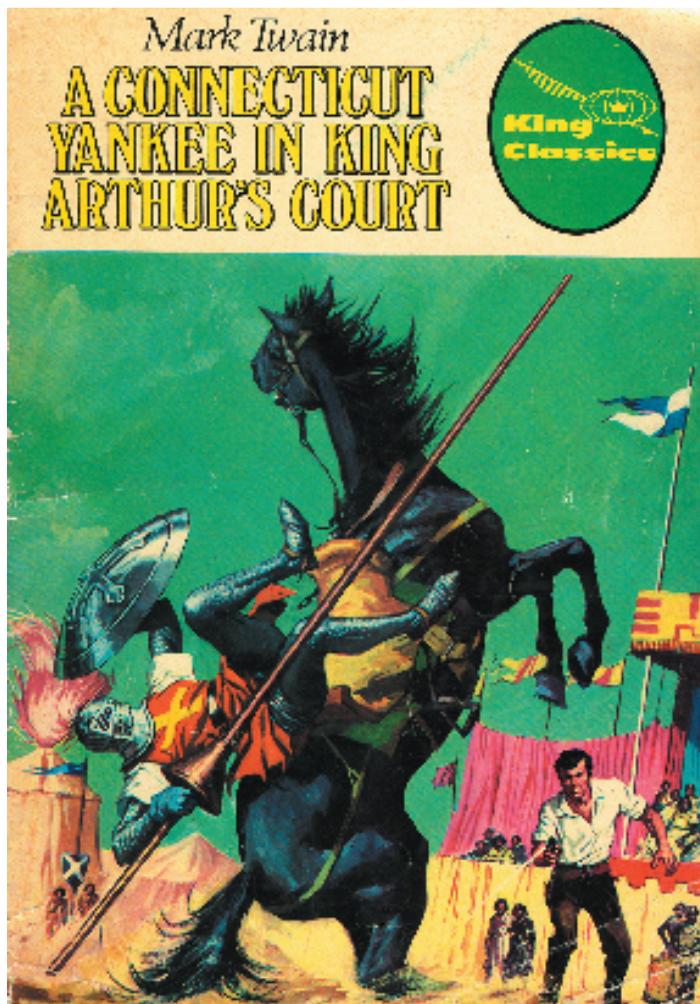
The popularity of *Graphic Classics: Mark Twain* led to the publication of a second edition in 2007. Seven pieces had to be dropped to make way for one lengthy new addition. Tom Pomplun provided the text and George Sellas the pictures for a lively rendition of a work by Twain never before adapted to the comics, “Tom Sawyer Abroad.” Written as a sequel to the first Tom Sawyer novel, the plot is full of fanciful adventures in foreign lands as Tom, Huck, and Jim try to manage a runaway balloon. It perfectly suits a visual medium. Either edition of this collection is a loving tribute to the major master of American humor who established all the ground rules for making people laugh.



*Graphic Classics*, second edition, 2007.

Educators and moral reformers have always been wary of comic books and have seen them, at best, as adulterated or debased versions of “real” books, and at worst as corrupting influences on young readers. When they entered the classroom surreptitiously, they were usually confiscated. Slowly, however, teachers began to understand that reading comic books was a gateway to further reading and that using the powerful appeal of comics to engage students’ interest was a way to advance comprehension in any field. Thus textbook publishers began to prepare adaptations of classic works specifically for the classroom.

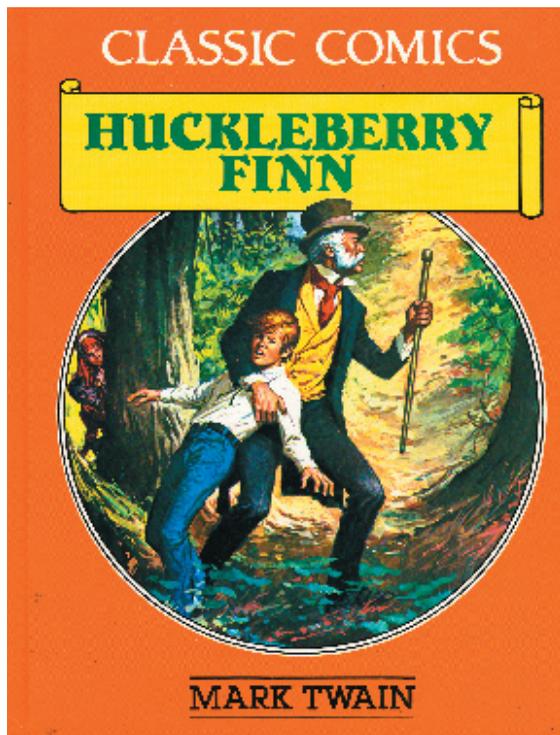
King Features Syndicate began such a project in 1977 with *King Classics*, a set of 24 comic books based on major works of literature, accompanied by motivational posters, teachers’ guides, lesson plans, and dramatizations on cassette tapes. The texts were credited to Marion Kimberly, a reading specialist and professor of education, but the name of the artist was not cited. Three titles by Twain appeared in the series: *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* was No. 1, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* was No. 10, and *The Prince and the Pauper* was No. 23.



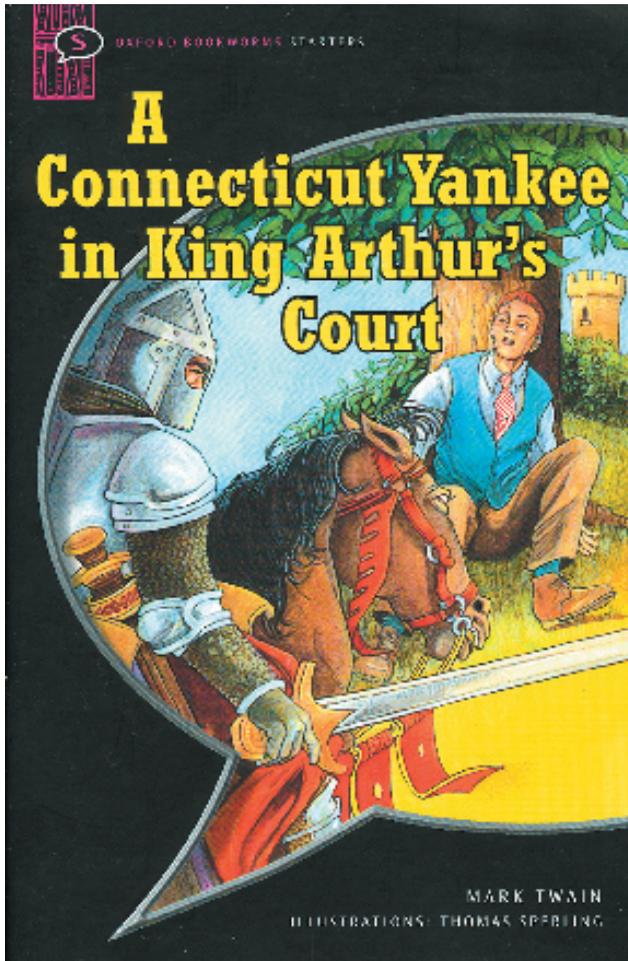
Number 1 of King Features Syndicate’s 1977 project, *King Classics - A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*.

The books alone were reprinted in 1979 for general distribution and sales as *King Classics*, and another selection of these, including *Huckleberry Finn*, were issued once more in hardcover under the Gallery Books imprint of W. H. Smith Publishers in 1990.

A major problem with all of the *King Classics* is that they appear to have been translated from another language, since the narration and dialogue often do not match the space and balloons, and the language in English is often simplistic and awkward. The books were copyrighted by publisher Editorial Bruguera and printed in Barcelona, suggesting a Spanish origin. The pages and panels are laid out mechanically, the art is workmanlike but unimaginative, and serious alterations in the plots occur. For example, in *Huckleberry Finn*, Jim is portrayed as simply another child in what appears to be an integrated community, and he runs away with Huck because he has heard that his former owners in New Orleans are trying to reacquire him as a slave. Both appear to be about ten years old. None of the father figure themes nor any of the complex racial tensions at the heart of the novel are possible here, and the moral imperatives are undermined. These are the sorts of things that can happen when well-meaning educators, who have no particular appreciation for the qualities of comic art and narrative, attempt to shape the adaptations in pedagogical directions.



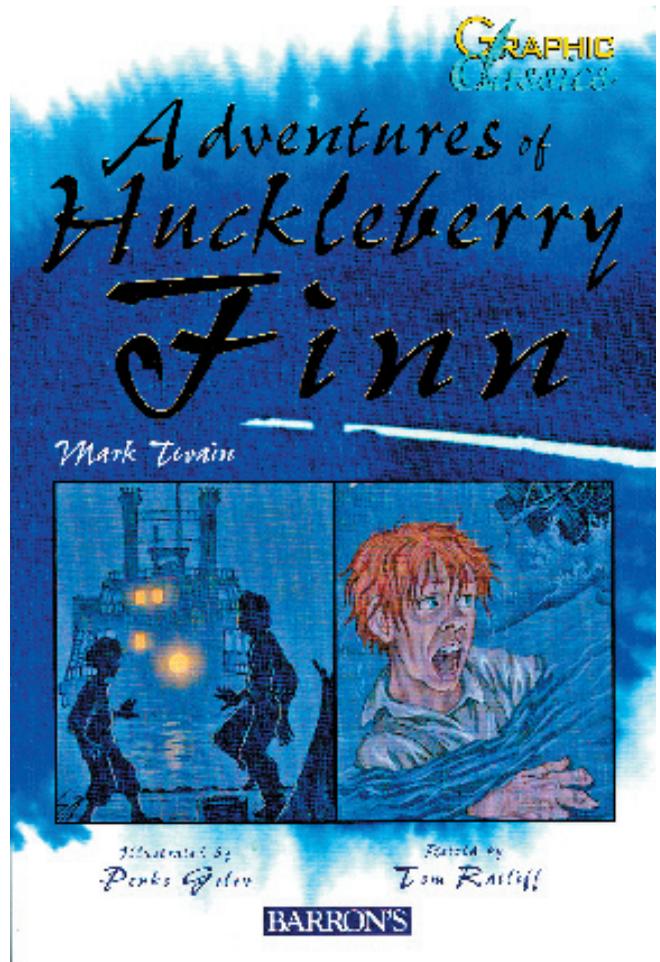
1990 hardcover edition of *Huckleberry Finn* under the Gallery Books imprint of W. H. Smith Publishers.



Similar efforts have subsequently been made with only slightly better results. The Oxford University Press Bookworms Starters series include a version of *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* adapted by Alan Hines and drawn by Thomas Sperling. While the pages are colorful and imaginatively designed, the text is intended for beginning readers of English, and only 24 pages are allotted to the narrative. Under such constraints, a good deal of the original plot had to be eliminated.

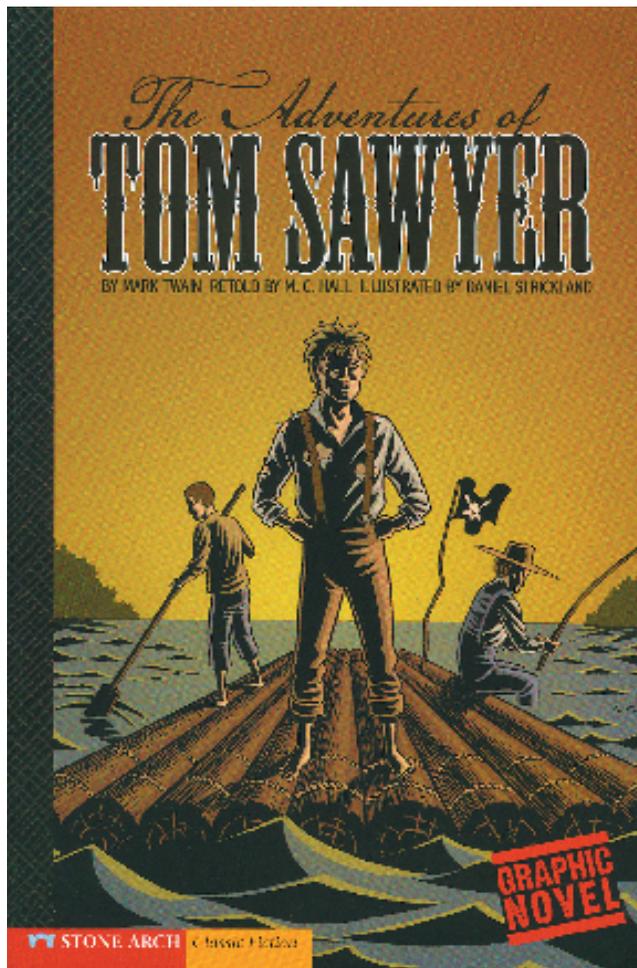
Oxford University Press Bookworms Starters series include a version of *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* adapted by Alan Hines and drawn by Thomas Sperling.

The Graphic Classics volumes from Barron's Educational Series includes among its initial offerings *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, one of the few adaptations to get the title right (there is no "The" in the title of the first edition). The artwork by Penko Gelev and Sotir Gelev is striking in its use of painterly caricature and comic mood, but the clearly phrased text by Tom Ratliff is mainly kept beneath the panels and segregated from the art. This lack of integration militates against reading pace and does not take advantage of the things children already know about how to read comics. The art is interesting to study, however, the central plot elements are maintained, and the supplementary study aids are well done.



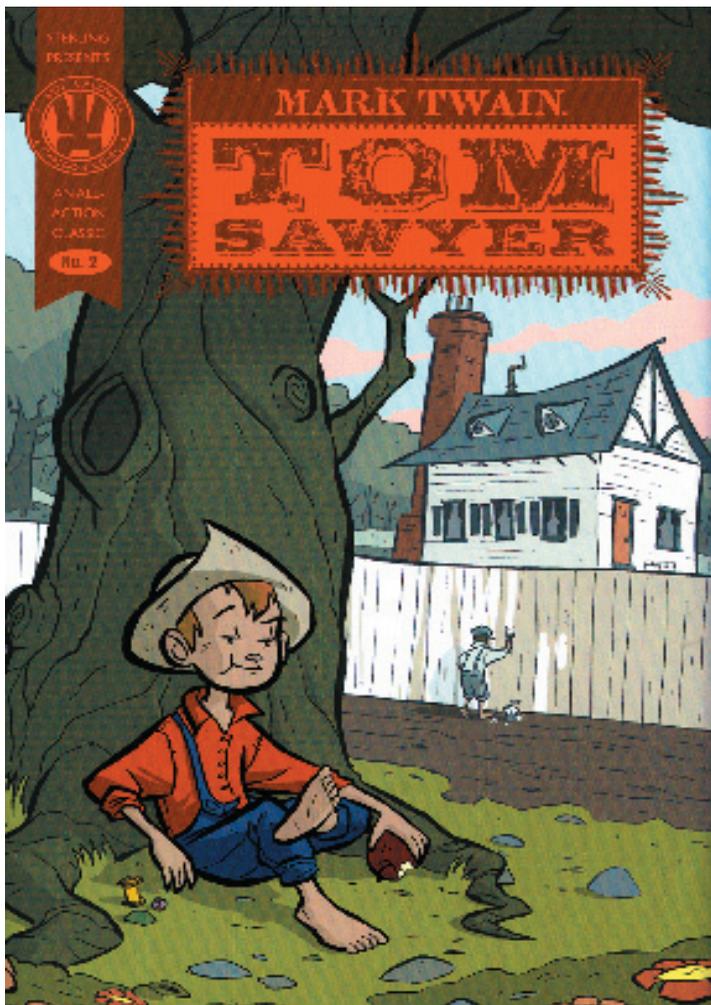
Barron's Educational Series includes among its initial offerings *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

If the Barron's volume surrenders the pictures to too much text, the version of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* in the Graphic Revolve series from Stone Arch Books limits the narrative to an almost fully visual retelling of the story. Meant for young readers, the text by M. C. Hall is kept to a simple level, but the drawings by Daniel Strickland make attractive uses of perspective, point-of-view, and close-ups, all film techniques, to engage the eye. The art is bold and fresh and borders on the naïve, but the artist betrays no familiarity with the nineteenth-century physical setting of the novel in frontier Missouri. But few of these artists have done that kind of research.



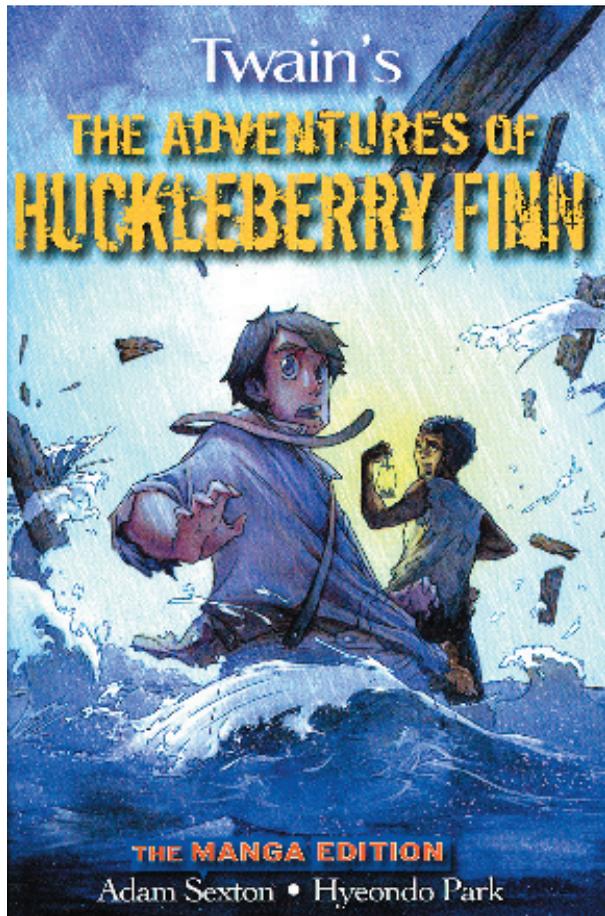
*The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* in the Graphic Revolve series from Stone Arch Books.

Teachers might be better served to use one of the recent efforts to adapt classic works to full-scale graphic novels. An effective one is the version of *Tom Sawyer* in the All-Action Classics series from Sterling Publishing as written by Tim Mucci and drawn by Rad Sechrist. In a full and casual retelling, Sechrist uses an old-fashioned style of comic caricature under the influence of film animation that keeps the story moving and full of lively action. Sechrist also knows little about Tom Sawyer's actual physical world, but the style is suitable to the spirit and humor of the original, and the characters are kept in the forefront.



*Tom Sawyer* in the All-Action Classics series from Sterling Publishing as written by Tim Mucci and drawn by Rad Sechrist.

In an interesting mixture of East and West, writer Adam Sexton and artist Hyeondo Park have produced a Manga Edition of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* for Wiley Publishing. Using the panel-breaking layouts, aggressive action, and large-eyed facial features of Japanese manga and anime, the major plot elements are maintained and nearly all of the dialogue is taken directly from the novel. This edition too illustrates what can be gained by allowing first-rate writers and artists to follow their own artistic inclinations and visions rather than some preconceived educational goal.



A Manga Edition of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* for Wiley Publishing.

Exactly what happens in the process of adaptation? I would like to answer that question by a study of the adaptation of one selected novel, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. Like so many of Mark Twain's novels (and I use that generic term with some degree of reservation and uncertainty, especially taking into account the way Henry James or William Dean Howells would have used it with reference to a carefully constructed and calculated artifice), *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* is largely an episodic narrative with one adventure following upon another with no necessary plan of plot development beyond the chronology of a busy season in Tom Sawyer's young life. Tom's love interest in Becky, their getting lost in the cave, and the need for the community to uncover and punish the murderer of Muff Potter compel our interest and carry the reader along. Less evident are Twain's concern with the myth of success in America, as parodied in the novel by Tom's subversive actions, and his satire of social and religious hypocrisy. These are evident to most readers only with a careful reading of the text.

All five of the first comic book adaptations published between 1942 and 1973 faithfully reflect the episodic nature of Tom's adventures and therefore largely capture the most evident and compelling elements of the original novel. Of the events in the thirty-five chapters in the novel, the comic book adaptations on the average incorporate twenty-two fully or partially, with the earliest Dell version containing nineteen and the Pendulum version containing twenty-six, which means that

over two-thirds of the original plot elements have been retained. They have occasionally been rearranged for the sake of abridgment or more effective pacing and sometimes given greater or lesser emphasis than Twain did, but the major events are nearly always found.

The episodes adapted include the white-washed fence episode (only the Dell comic book omits it), Tom's courtship of Becky (although only two include the incident in which Tom takes the blame and punishment for Becky having torn a page from the school master's anatomy book ~ a tribute to Tom's chivalry but a questionable moral action); the murder of Dr. Robinson and Tom's courageous act in testifying against Injun Joe; Tom, Huck, and Joe's runaway adventure as pirates when they are presumed to be dead only to reappear at their own funerals; Tom and Becky getting lost in the cave and finally rescuing themselves; and the return of Tom and Huck to the cave to retrieve Injun Joe's treasure. Only the last three versions include the attempt to civilize Huck by the Widow Douglas and his agreeing to continue it so that he can remain a member of Tom Sawyer's robber gang, an episode which brings their subversive tendencies into the decorum of middle-class respectability, a position from which Huck would have to free himself again in the sequel devoted to his adventures.

Any reader looking, therefore, for a substantial introduction to *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* can find it in all of these adaptations. What is missing are the style, the

local color, and the comic irony of Twain's language. Also the mentions of religion and the Sunday school scenes are either omitted or restricted to a single panel scene. The first are features of fiction which, of course, cannot be reproduced in comic book form, so one would not expect to find them there. The delights of these features will be discovered by the reader who continues to the text of the novel as the next logical step. The deletion of references to religion is a concession to public sensitivity, which Twain himself was known to make allowances for on some occasions. In fact, only with the passage of time would he dare to become more explicit in his attitudes and opinions on the failures of the Christian church; thus the hesitancy of the adaptors is understandable.

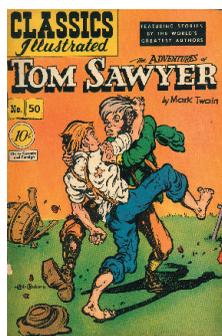
The carefree abandon of the world of children, their tendency to dress the ordinary with robes of action, adventure, and fantasy, the beginnings of romance, the frightening actions of an adult world in conflict, and the desire to challenge the legal and social limits of behavior ~ all of these are contained in the words and pictures of the comic book writers and artists. Reading the comic book *cannot* be the same experience as reading the novel, but it can be an altogether delightful experience on its own terms and one that clearly thousands of readers have sought out and found pleasurable. Otherwise publishers would not continue to produce such adaptations of Twain's works as they have for almost fifty years now.

The attraction of Twain for comic book adapters demonstrated the author's continu-

ing vitality among readers in the twentieth century, even though the artists and writers tended to overlook the deeper strains of cynicism in Twain's major works which scholars came to emphasize in the last half of the century. But how important is it that while many of the adaptations are faithful to the original works in plot and characterization, few of them attempted to address the larger social problems and moral questions he raises? As we have come to realize in discussing adaptations of fiction into film, it is unfair or inappropriate to judge the success of the new version purely in terms of its faithfulness to the original. Those things which make for a successful and satisfying film experience are not the same things which provide a rewarding reading experience, and each needs to be evaluated in terms of the separate aesthetic possibilities inherent in each medium.

I believe that the same principle should be applied to comic book adaptations. That is to say that the adaptation should be evaluated in terms of its success as a comic book and how creatively it uses and expands on the artistic and technical possibilities of the medium. Does it use the full range of verbal and visual techniques peculiar to the

comic book as a form of creative expression? On that basis, at least two of the adaptations discussed above should be declared praiseworthy ~ the 1948 Aldo Rubano version of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* for Classics Illustrated (left) and the



1990 version by Michael Ploog for the revived *Classics* series (right). Both exemplify a creative use of the medium and provide an engaging reading experience, while not detracting from or altering Twain's original intent. At a minimum, however, the comic book versions have served to keep Twain in the forefront of the minds and imaginations of young and old American readers, many of whom undoubtedly have also been led back to the original works. That alone is a valuable service.



There is one other thing to be said in defense of the comic book adaptations of Twain's works, which most scholars can see only as diluted and illegitimate degradations of the originals. Shortly after Twain's death, his biographers and critics went to work to rescue him for posterity as more than a "mere" humorist and make out a case for him as a "serious" writer for the ages ~ people like William Dean Howells, Albert Bigelow Paine, Bernard DeVoto, Dixon Wecter, and later Henry Nash Smith, Walter Blair, and Leo Marx, to mention only the more obvious names. Despite the occasional detractor like Van Wyck Brooks, they did their job so well that Twain has safely been ensconced in the pantheon of major American writers and selected works of his even canonized as among the great works of Western literature.

However noble their aims, one effect of this achievement was to rescue him as well

from the hands of the thousands of general readers who read him without sophisticated appreciation but for the pure love of his humor and entertainment value. This is an exaggeration, of course, because his books have continued to sell in general bookstores, but the populace saw Twain as the celebrator of the American experience and values, as a writer who preserved the childhood adventures of many who grew up in the rural reaches of the nation. They cared little for his somber broodings on man's fate and circumstance, his pessimistic satires of politics and society, or his acerbic statements on racism, religion, and the church ~ the signs of seriousness and metaphysical complexity sought out by the critics as signs of lasting value in important writers. By omitting these weighty concerns, and focusing on the Twain of boyhood adventure and fast-paced excitement, of skillful plot and narrative action, the comic book versions work to restore the Twain best loved by general readers.

If it was Twain's intent to reach the widest possible audience in his own lifetime, and the biographical facts support that idea, then the comic books have helped fulfill that goal in ours. I suspect Twain would have approved and maybe even have published a comic book or two of his own.

# Mark Twain in the Comic Books

## A Chronology

M. Thomas Inge

The following chronology is based on the best available bibliographic data, and when possible, an examination of each item by the compiler. While the information is not always complete, when known the writer of the text of the adaptation and the artist are identified. As always, John C. Haufe has been especially helpful on this and all classic comics projects, and Derek Parker Royal has been of particular assistance on this one. Thanks too to Marvin and Marsha Humphrey who help supply the primary material, and to Ray Bonis and Cindy Jackson in Special Collections at the Virginia Commonwealth University Libraries who archive it.

### 1942

*Famous Stories Book No. 2*. The Complete Story of Tom Sawyer by Mark Twain. New York: Dell, 1942. Writer and artist: Oskar Lebeck.

### 1944

*Classic Comics No. 19* (April 1944). *Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain. New York: Gilberton, 9 printings. Writer: Evelyn Goodman, artist: Louis Zansky. Second edition, March 1956, 12 printings. Artists: Mike Sekowsky and Frank Giacoia.

### 1945

*Classic Comics No. 24* (September 1945). *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* by Mark Twain. New York: Gilberton, 7 printings. Writer: Ruth A. Roche and Tom Scott, artist: Jack Hearne. Second edition, September 1957, 8 printings. Artist: Jack Sparling.

### 1946

*Classic Comics No. 29* (July 1946). *The Prince and the Pauper* by Mark Twain. New York: Gilberton, 1 printing. Writers: Scott Feldman and Jack Bass, artist: Arnold L. Hicks. Second edition, June 1949, 14 printings.

### 1948

*Classics Illustrated No. 50* (August 1948). *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain. New York: Gilberton, 8 printings. Writer: Harry Miller, artist Aldo Rubano. Second edition, October 1961, 7 printings. Artist: unidentified.

### 1952

*Classics Illustrated No. 93* (March 1952). *Pudd'nhead Wilson* by Mark Twain. New York: Gilberton, 4 printings. Artist: Henry C. Kiefer.

### 1953

*Tom Sawyer Comics*. Tallahassee, FL: Mendelson's, 1953. Promotional comic book, presumably from a department store, with Tom Sawyer appearing only on the cover. Inside are the contents of *Sparkler Comics* No. 111 (May-June 1953).

### 1957

*Dell Junior Treasury Series* No. 10 (October 1957). *Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. New York: Dell, 1957.

### 1960

*Four Color Dell Movie Classic* No. 1114 (July 1960). *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. New York: Dell, 1960. Adaptation of 1960 Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer film version.

*The World Around Us* No. 27 (November 1960). *High Adventure: The Illustrated Story of Men Against Mountains*. New York: Gilberton, 1 printing. Adapted text of "The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" with 12 illustrations by George Peltz.

### 1973

*Now Age Illustrated* No. 64-1025. *Huckleberry Finn* by Samuel L. Clemens. West Haven, CT: Pendulum Press, 1973. Writer: Naunerle Farr, artist: Francisco Redondo.

*Now Age Illustrated* No. 64-1050. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* by Samuel L. Clemens. West Haven, CT: Pendulum Press, 1973. Writer: Irwin Shapiro, artist: E. R. Cruz.

### 1976

*Marvel Classics* No. 7 (1976). *Tom Sawyer* by Samuel Clemens. New York: Marvel, 1976. Abbreviated reprint of *Now Age Illustrated* No. 64-1050, 1973.

### 1977

*Now Age Illustrated* No. 64-2634. *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* by Mark Twain. West Haven, CT: Pendulum Press, 1977. Writer: John Norwood Fago, artist: Francisco Redondo.

*King Classics* No. 1. *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* by Mark Twain. New York: King Features, 1977. Writer: Marion Kimberly. Second printing 1979.

*King Classics* No. 10. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain. New York: King Features, 1977. Writer: Marion Kimberly. Second printing 1979.

*King Classics* No. 23. *The Prince and the Pauper* by Mark Twain. New York: King Features, 1977. Writer: Marion Kimberly. Second printing 1979.

### 1978

*Now Age Illustrated* No. 64-3177. *The Prince and the Pauper* by Samuel Clemens. West Haven, CT: Pendulum Press, 1978. Writer: John Norwood Fago, artist: E. R. Cruz.

*Marvel Classics* No. 33 (1978). *The Prince and the Pauper* by Mark Twain. New York: Marvel, 1978. Writer: Dan McGregor, artists: The New Tribe.

## 1982

*Maravillas de la literatura* No. 3. *Huckleberry Finn*. Madrid: Ediciones Larousse, 1982. Writer: Antonio Perera, artist: Chiqui de la Fuente. Spanish.

## 1990

*Classics Illustrated* New Series No. 9 (May 1990). *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain. New York: Berkley and First Publishing, 1990. Writer and artist: Michael Ploog.

*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Clare Victor Dwiggins. Edited by Mickie Villa. Newberry Park, CA: Malibu Graphics, 1990. Reprints from 1940 the comic strip *Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn* authorized by the Mark Twain Estate and drawn from 1918 to the mid-1940s bt Clare Victor “Dwig” Dwiggins.

Disney’s *The Prince and the Pauper*. Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Publications, 1990. Writer: Scott Saavedra, artist: Sergio Asteriti. Based on the 1990 animated Disney film adaptation featuring Mickey Mouse, Goofy, Pluto, and Donald Duck in the lead roles.

## 1991

*Classic Comics: Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain. New York: Gallery Books/W. H. Smith Publishers, 1991. Writer: Marion Kimberly. Reprint of King Classics No. 10, 1977.

*Sandman* No. 31 (October 1991). “Three Septembers and a January.” New York: DC Comics, 1991. Writer: Neil Gaiman, art-

ist: Shawn McManus. Mark Twain appears briefly in a story set in San Francisco 1864 about Joshua Norton, who claimed to be Emperor of America.

## 1995

*Billy Ray Cyrus*. “No Way to Stowaway.” New York: Marvel Music, 1995. Writer: Paul S. Newman, artist: Dan Barry. Plot uses a premise based on *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* with the country singer in the Hank Morgan role.

## 1997

*Classics Illustrated: The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain. New York: Acclaim Books, February 1997. Reprint of the original *Classics Illustrated* No. 50 (1948) with notes and study guide by Andrew Jay Hoffman.

*Classics Illustrated: Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain. New York: Acclaim Books, March 1997. Reprint of the original *Classics Illustrated* No. 19 (March 1956 edition) with notes and study guide by Andrew Jay Hoffman.

*Classics Illustrated: The Prince and the Pauper* by Mark Twain. New York: Acclaim Books, April 1997. Reprint of the original *Classic Comics* No. 29 (1946) with notes and study guide by Andrew J. Hoffman.

*Classics Illustrated: A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* by Mark Twain. New York: Acclaim Books, May 1997. Reprint of the original *Classics Illustrated* No 24 (1957 edition) with notes and study guide by Andrew Jay Hoffman.

*Classics Illustrated: Pudd'nhead Wilson* by Mark Twain. New York: Acclaim Books, August 1997. Reprint of the original *Classics Illustrated* No. 93 (1952) with notes and study guide by Andrew Jay Hoffman.

### 2001

*A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* by Mark Twain. Oxford Bookworm Starters. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. Writer: Alan Hines, artist: Thomas Sperling.

### 2004

*Graphic Classics: Mark Twain*. Volume Eight. Mount Horeb, WI: Eureka Productions, 2004. Anthology of fifteen adapted and illustrated stories, essays, and excerpts by the indicated artists: "Seventieth Birthday" by Mark Dancey; "The Mysterious Stranger" by Rick Geary; "How the Author Was Sold in Newark" by Milton Knight; "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" by Kevin Atkinson; "The Legend of Sagenfeld" by Evert Geradts; "Ode to Steven Dowling Botts, Dec'd" by Jackie Smith; "P. T. Barnum and the Cardiff Giant" by Dan Burr; "A Ghost Story" by Anton Emdin; "A Dog's Tale" by Lance Took; "A Curious Pleasure Excursion" by William L. Brown; "A Reminiscence of the Back Settlements" by Lisa K. Weber; "Is He Living or Is He Dead?" by Simon Gane; "Advice to Little Girls" by Florence Cestac, Kirsten Ulve, Shary Flenniken, Toni Pawlowsky, Mary Fleener, Annie Owens, and Lesley Reppeteaux; "An Encounter with an Interviewer" by Skip Williamson; and "The Facts Concerning the Recent Car-

nival of Crime in Connecticut" by Antonella Caputo and Nicholas Miller.

### 2006

*The Five Fists of Science*. Berkeley, CA: Image Comics, 2006. Writer: Matt Fraction, artist: Steven Sanders. A fictional Mark Twain teams up with Nikolas Tesla to fight industrial evil.

*Saddleback's Illustrated Classics: A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* by Samuel Clemens. Irvine, CA: Saddleback Publishing, 2006. Reprint of *Now Age Illustrated* No. 64-2634, 1977.

*Saddleback's Illustrated Classics: The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain. Irvine, CA: Saddleback Publishing, 2006. Reprint of *Now Age Illustrated* No. 64-1025, 1973.

*Saddleback's Illustrated Classics: The Prince and the Pauper* by Samuel Clemens. Irvine, CA: Saddleback Publishing, 2006. Reprint of *Now Age Illustrated* No. 64-3177, 1978.

*Saddleback's Illustrated Classics: Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain. Irvine, CA: Saddleback Publishing, 2006. Reprint of *Now Age Illustrated* No. 64-1050, 1973.

### 2007

*Graphic Classics: Mark Twain*. Volume Eight, Second Edition. Mount Horeb, WI: Eureka Productions, 2007. Reprints seven adaptations from the first 2004 edition by Kevin Atkinson, Lance Took, Antonella Caputo and

Nicholas Miller, William L. Brown, Simon Gane, Rick Geary, and the “Advice to Little Girls” artists. Adds “Tom Sawyer Abroad” by Tom Pomplun and George Sellas.

*The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain. Graphic Revolve series. Mankato, MN: Stone Arch Books, 2007. Writer: M. C. Hall, artist: Daniel Strickland.

*Bank Street Graphic Novels: Historical Adventure*. “A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court.” Wilwaukee, WI: World Almanac Library, 2007. Writer: Henry Barker, artist: Dan Spiegle. Reprinted from *Boy’s Life* magazine, December 1999.

*The American Way*. La Jolla, CA: Wildstorm, 2007. Writer: John Ridley, artists: Georges Jeanty and Karl Story. A character called the Captain looks and acts like Mark Twain.

## 2008

*Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain. An All-Action Classic No. 2. New York: Sterling Publishing, 2008. Writer: Tim Mucci, artist: Rad Sechrist.

*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain. Graphic Classics series. Hauppauge, NY: Barron’s Educational Series, 2008. Writer: Tom Ratliff, artists: Penko Gelev and Sotir Gelev.

*Classics Illustrated* No 19 (2008). *Huckleberry Finn* by Samuel L. Clemens. Toronto, Ontario: Jack Lake Productions, 2008. Reprint

of original *Classics Illustrated* No. 19 (March 1956 edition) with introductory commentary by William B. Jones, Jr.

*Rogue Angel: Teller of Tall Tales*. San Diego, CA: IDW Publishing, 2008. Writer: Barbara Randall Kesel, artist: Renae De Liz. The search for an unpublished Mark Twain manuscript is central to the plot.

## 2009

*Twain’s The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. The Manga Edition. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Publishing, 2009. Writer: Adam Sexton, artist: Hyeondo Park.

*Tales Designed to Thrizzle*. Volume 1. Seattle, WA: Fantagraphics, 2009. Writer/artist: Michael Kupperman. Includes a story in which Twain and Einstein play crime-fighting policemen, originally published in issue No. 4 of the comic book series.

*Classics Illustrated Deluxe* No. 4. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain. New York: Papercutz, 2009. Writers: Jean David Morvan and Frederique Voulyze, artist: Severine Le Fevebvre.

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