

Global Huck: Mapping the Cultural Work of Translations of Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*— *Special Forum Introduction*

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Ever since his travels to the Sandwich Islands, Europe, Russia, and the Holy Land in the 1860s, Mark Twain found vital sources of inspiration and energy abroad. His writing, in turn, intrigued readers around the world, and international appraisals would shape the reception of this well-traveled author. The first book-length study ever written on Twain came out in Paris in 1884, penned by French critic Henry Gauthier-Villars.¹ Seventy years later, in 1954, another Frenchman, Roger Asselineau, would produce perhaps the fullest assessment, up to that time, of Twain's literary reputation.² During the writer's lifetime, interest in Twain was burgeoning all over Europe and beyond. Although France was certainly influential and set the tone for reception almost everywhere, French translations were not always first for any given title. As Anna B. Katona reminds us in her 1983 article on Twain's reception in Hungary, there was a "German Europe" where the author was immensely famous and appreciated (Archibald Henderson had first pointed this out in his assessment of Twain's world fame after the writer's demise in 1911).³ By "German Europe" these authors mean Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire; that is to say, a sizable portion of Europe. It is fair to say that the attraction between Mark Twain and "German Europe" was mutual and affectionate, whereas his relationship with France and French people was marred by prejudice and misunderstandings on both sides. Because Mark Twain was a

literary maverick even in his home country, French critics had a hard time construing his humor.

One particular episode involving translation shows how intricate the relationship between literary criticism and translation was at the time. The famous and widely circulated journal *Revue des Deux Mondes* offered both reviews and translations of foreign and American authors to give readers a taste of this literature. Extracts were simultaneously translated and commented upon in the same article (lengthy by today's standards). In 1872, Marie Thérèse Blanc, writing under the name of Th.[érèse] Bentzon, published "Les humoristes américains: Mark Twain" in which she dealt extensively with *The Innocents Abroad* (1869), made a few remarks on *Roughing It* (1872) and concluded with a translation of "The Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" (1865).⁴ Mark Twain came across the article in 1873 and felt slighted by it, as his correspondence indicates. It is highly likely that it was not the translation of "Jumping Frog" that offended Twain, but Bentzon's remarks that Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Madame de Graffigny had done a better job of naively describing Europe through the eyes, respectively, of a Persian, a Huron, and a Peruvian woman than Twain had done in *Innocents Abroad*. As a form of reprisal, he published in *Sketches, New and Old* (1875), "The Jumping Frog in English, Then in French, Then Clawed Back into a Civilized Language Once More by Patient, Unremunerated Toil."⁵ In his preface to the volume, Twain refers to this hilarious exercise in back translation as a piece which also could have been titled "Jumping Frog restored to the English tongue after martyrdom in the French."⁶

Translations of Twain's work, however, received relatively little attention until the 1982 publication of Robert Rodney's landmark study, *Mark Twain International*. A goldmine of bibliographical references and analyses of foreign editions of Mark Twain's work in English and in translation, Rodney's work is foundational.⁷

As of 1982, *Huckleberry Finn* alone had been translated into fifty-three languages, in forty-seven countries for a total of eight hundred and forty-one editions. What few gaps exist in Rodney can be filled thanks to UNESCO's Index Translationum, which also allows the roster to be brought up to date. As of 2019, Huck Finn can be heard conversing with Jim in sixty-five languages: Afrikaans, Albanian, Alemannic, Arabic, Armenian, Assamese, Basque, Bengali, Bulgarian, Burmese, Catalan, Chinese, Chuvash, Croatian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Esperanto, Estonian, Finnish, French, German, Georgian, Greek, Hebrew, Hindi, Hungarian, Icelandic, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Kazakh, Korean, Kirghiz, Latvian, Lithuanian, Macedonian, Malay, Malayalam, Marathi, Moldavian, Norwegian, Oriya, Persian, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Serbian, Sinhalese, Slovak, Slovenian, Spanish, Swedish, Tamil, Tatar, Telugu, Thai, Turkish, Turkmen, Ukrainian, Uzbek, Vietnamese, and Yiddish.

Work on the international dimension of Mark Twain accelerated in the 2010s with contributions by Tsuyoshi Ishihara (*Mark Twain in Japan*, 2011), Selina Lai-Henderson (*Mark Twain in China*, 2015), and Paula Harrington and Ronald Jenn (*Mark Twain and France: The Making of a New American Identity*, 2017). Also during this

decade, Shelley Fisher Fishkin advocated a more comprehensive and global approach with the *Mark Twain Anthology: Great Writers on his Life and Work* (2010), which included translations of criticism originally published in Chinese, Danish, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Russian, Spanish, and Yiddish; she also suggested how the rise of digital tools applied to Translation Studies could benefit transnational approaches to Twain in “Deep Maps” (2011).⁸ In 2017, sparked by an interest in assessing what progress has been made, the ROSETTA/Global Huck Project was created. The collaboration of Fishkin in English and American Studies at Stanford and Amel Fraisse in Information Sciences at the Université de Lille and Ronald Jenn in Translation Studies at the same institution received support from the France–Stanford Center for Interdisciplinary Studies and Stanford’s Center for Spatial and Textual Analysis (CESTA).⁹ The project’s goal was to develop new ways of consolidating our understanding of global translations of Twain’s greatest novel, and exploring potential directions for the future, building on the scholarship of the past.¹⁰ Continually being update, the France–Stanford ROSETTA/Global Huck Project has an associated website at <https://rosetta.huma-num.fr/worldmap/> that will give a sense of the work undertaken to date. This *JTAS* Special Forum on “Global Huck” is a continuation of this collaboration.

This *JTAS* Special Forum features researchers around the world with expertise in Mark Twain and his novel. It explores the social, cultural, and political agendas of translators and publishers, and looks at how the cultural demands of readers shaped the book’s translation. Some of the essays address the arc of translations over a broad swath of time: Margarita Marinova outlines the story of Russian translations, Ronald Jenn and Véronique Channaut deal with France, and Behnam M. Fomeshi with Iran. Others deal with how translators handled one specific dimension of the novel: Miguel Sanz Jiménez focuses on how Spanish translators dealt with the Explanatory while Winston Kelley addresses the challenges that the word “trash” posed for German translators. Two other contributors focus on the modes of presentation of translations: Vera Lúcia Ramos examines the contextualizing materials published with translations in Brazil, while Seema Sharma compares a Hindi graphic novel adaptation with another Hindi edition marketed to young readers. Finally, two translators, who are also scholars, contribute essays that provide insight into the challenges of translating the book in the twenty-first century: An-chi Wang describes what was involved in producing the most comprehensively annotated edition of the novel in Chinese, while Hamada Kassam explores the challenges of his efforts to produce a translation in vernacular Arabic. Both of these essays—autobiographical as well as critical—include some of the translators’ personal reflections on their experiences.

The contributors explore the ways in which the racial politics of a particular time and place have informed translators’ treatment of Black characters, and the ways translators handled the N-word. They discuss how various translations have tackled the issue of dialect and colloquial speech, how Twain’s humor has fared in translation, and the ways in which Twain’s satire and social critique were sustained or minimized

by translators. They look at how the audiences for which the translations were designed shaped the translators' choices, and explore the role of adaptations in other media, such as films and anime. They also pay attention to how translations of *Huck Finn* have shaped perceptions of the US around the world.

Through its examination of translations of *Huck Finn* across nine world regions, this Special Forum bridges disciplinary boundaries as well as national ones, melding the fields of Literary Studies, Translation Studies, and Transnational American Studies in fresh ways. It opens up a space in which we can rethink seminal works of American literature and American literary history in a radically different light as it situates US cultural, regional, linguistic, gender, and racial nuances in different spatial, temporal, and global geopolitical contexts.

Thanks to its exploration of how *Huck Finn* has been read in vastly different global sites and historic moments, this Special Forum provides new perspectives on the global circulation of knowledge and literary cultural production. Taken together, these essays gesture to a fascinating array of perspectives on racial and class divides that break through the monolingual and nation-bound silos that usually constrain literary studies. We hope that this Special Forum will facilitate global discussions of American literature; of satire and social criticism; of race, dialect, education, and historically marginalized voices. We hope it will be a critical tool to navigate the complexity of the role of American culture in the Global South (India, Brazil), in the Arab world, and in China, as well as in countries that have participated in the cultural conversation about Mark Twain for over a century—such as France, Germany, and Russia. And we hope it will help generate questions about challenges to authority that cross borders in sometimes surprising ways: It is well known, for example, that the vernacular voices in *Huck Finn* changed the course of American literature; however, as Fomeshi's essay illustrates, even in other languages, the colloquial voices in the novel have been regarded as subversive if they are faithfully recreated in the translations.

Behnam M. Fomeshi's "[Persian Huck: On the Reception of Huckleberry Finn in Iran](#)" claims that the first Persian translation of *Huck Finn* deviated from accepted norms of Persian translation in ways that paved the way for the translation of other American literary works in Iran, and, indeed, "had a major impact on the next generation of Iranian writers."¹¹ In 1949, Ebrahim Golestan, (1922–), an influential filmmaker and literary figure in Iran, who did the first translation of the novel, attempted the systematic use of colloquial Persian for the dialogues, "a very significant step in the history of Persian translation," which had not deployed colloquial language previously.¹² Fomeshi's essay also describes the way the US N-word controversy in *Huckleberry Finn* rippled through Iranian society. Suppressing the word is considered a more serious issue than using it, as it reminds reformist Iranians of the ongoing censorship by their government. Iranians debated whether or not the sanitization of the text was, in fact, another form of censorship no matter how "well intentioned."¹³ This study also reveals the significance of the 1970s Japanese animated TV series of *Huckleberry Finn*. Available on the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting in the 1980s

and 1990s, it gained millions of youthful Iranian viewers.¹⁴ Persian translations of *Huckleberry Finn* for children and young adult readers, which have recently proliferated, are largely produced by those who had viewed this series when they were younger. Just as numerous countries created their own versions of Shakespeare plays, *Huckleberry Finn* can no longer be viewed as a purely American product. It is modified and reproduced in dramatized form to be enjoyed by local audiences worldwide. Fomeshi's essay emphasizes that versions of *Huckleberry Finn* produced outside the US can be influential in their own right. In this globalized world, Huck does not need to stay in America. He can "light out" for any country where he finds a welcoming audience.

Ronald Jenn and Véronique Channaut in "[Translations of Adventures of Huckleberry Finn in France \(1886–2015\)](#)" discuss French translations from the 1886 book, *Les aventures de Huck Finn: L'ami de Tom Sawyer*, translated by William O'Gorman (aka William Little-Hughes) up through the deluxe 2015 Gallimard version edited by Philippe Jaworski. Throughout, valuable information is provided on the life and works of the different translators along with elements on the ideological and cultural context that help situate the translations and historicize the works under scrutiny, with the occasional examination of the physical qualities of some editions and their significance. Jenn and Channaut underline the fact that Twain's status as a critic of US imperialism rendered his works acceptable to pro-Soviet French intellectuals, a fact which fostered the first complete translation in 1948. The rival twenty-first-century translations testify to a latter-day acceptance of Twain by Europeans as a world author. The contributors also discuss the challenges posed by the linguistic diversity of the original and by the difficulty of translating the N-word.

As Richard Jacquemond, renowned expert on literature in the modern Arab world, has pointed out, two Arab countries have framed cultural and linguistic policies that stand out for their support of translation as part of their promotion of reading: Egypt and Syria.¹⁵ It is no wonder then that **Hamada Kassam**, whose own roots are in Syria, should unveil in "[Arabic Huck: Adventures of Huckleberry Finn in Vernacular Arabic](#)," his project for a new vernacular Arabic translation. His daring venture is the first in the Arabic-speaking world to address the issue of dialects in the novel. As Kassam explains, after retracing the first steps of *Huckleberry Finn* in Arabic, a translation that took up this linguistic challenge could be an important contribution to the modernization of the Arabic language. This idea resonates with Behnam M. Fomeshi's demonstration, in his contribution to this issue, that Persian translations of the American novel were major steps in the evolution of contemporary Iranian literature. Hamada Kassam's project—a work in progress—deserves support, and we hope, by featuring his contribution in this issue, that it gets the attention it merits.

In his examination of forty-one German translations of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* which appeared between 1890 and 2010, **Winston Kelley** discovered that all of them struggle with the task of providing an adequate rendition of a passage at the end of Chapter 15, in which Huck tries to deflect Jim's attention away from what

is clearly an uncomfortable topic by challenging him to interpret the “leaves and rubbish on the raft.” But Jim ignores Huck’s attempted distraction and, by way of a shrewd verbal maneuver, prompts the boy to realize that his previous behavior toward Jim marks him as “trash”—in Jim’s words, a person ““dat puts dirt on de head er dey fren’s en makes ’em ashamed.””

Based on the assumption that Jim’s response contains a veiled reference to the notion of “white trash,” this article documents the German terms that have been used to render the word “trash,” and explains to what degree they approximate the English expression with its highly specific cultural connotation. It concludes that the German language lacks a term that is capable of capturing the reference that Mark Twain might have implied and suggests that future translations should remedy this situation by addressing this dilemma by way of an explanatory annotation.

Margarita Marinova’s essay, “[Huck Finn’s Adventures in the Land of the Soviet People](#)” describes the immense popularity that Twain’s works generally and *Huck Finn* in particular enjoyed in both prerevolutionary Russia and the Soviet Union, and limns ways in which each era responded to specific elements of the novel. Russian readers, familiar with Twain through Russian translations from the French in the 1870s, viewed him as a national symbol of America, while Soviet critics preferred Twain’s disdain for organized religion and his antiracist views. In Russia, Twain was appreciated as a social satirist long before he was recognized as the author of books for children, and interest in his social critique soared after the Revolution. First serialized in Russia in 1885, *Huck Finn* was published as a stand-alone book in 1888; after the Revolution, a host of new translations appeared across the USSR, with Twain cast in the role as one of the greatest critics of America—as well as its most trustworthy chronicler.

Jim’s centrality for post-Revolution readers and critics—and the importance of the agency he shows in the book—is clear from the title of the first Soviet publication: *Приключения Гекльберри Финна и беглого негра Джима* (*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn and the runaway Negro Jim*). Increased attention to the racial politics of the book paralleled post-Stalinist interest in the generative role of Black US authors, and *Huck Finn* became widely viewed as the key to all of American literature. Soviet translators, however, feared and shunned the Explanatory and all chose to evade the problem of dialect and colloquial speech by replacing them with “blandscript,” or standard Russian.

Special attention is also paid to Nina Daruzes’s hugely popular 1950 translation, which sold more than 1.23 million copies during its first decade alone and which is routinely reprinted to this day. Though Daruzes’s translation does succeed in making the novel accessible and readable for Soviet readers by occasionally departing from “blandscript,” it still fails to evoke the novel’s complexity. The result of Daruzes’s artistic decision here—along with her occasional deletion of important lines of the text—is, as Marinova tells us, “a problematic simplification of the main characters’ complex identities, which is most damaging in the case of the African American hero.”¹⁶ Marinova states that “[w]hile Twain’s heteroglossic narrative does allow Jim’s

voice to be heard and appreciated alongside Huck's, in Russian, he is cast in a supporting role that hardly gives him the attention he deserves despite all Soviet proclamations" emphasizing his importance.¹⁷

Vera Lúcia Ramos's contribution "[Mark Twain: The Making of an Icon through Translations of Huckleberry Finn in Brazil](#)" discusses seven translations spread over close to a century with a focus on the ways in which the paratexts shape Mark Twain's positive image in Brazil. Brazilian Portuguese translations of the novel strike Ramos as more inventive than Portuguese translations coming out of Portugal, in addition to being more numerous. Although Ramos's principal focus is on recent translations, the role played by the very first version, which came out in 1934, is key as it sets the tone for the ensuing tradition and encapsulates the sense of kinship Brazilian translators felt with this iconic American writer. José Bento Monteiro Lobato (1882–1948), the foundational translator, turns out to have much in common with Mark Twain. A forward-looking Americanophile, Monteiro Lobato was a writer of fiction, children's books, and treatises and he was fascinated by Henry Ford and the market economy.¹⁸ An astute businessman in the publishing industry, he was instrumental, through publishing, writing, and translating ventures, in initiating a Brazilian tradition distinct from the overbearing Portuguese and French ones, which loomed large over Brazil. Lobato was eager for Brazil to embrace languages and cultures from other countries, and above all, its own. The parallels between Lobato and Twain are striking—writers of the hinterland portraying uncultured yet appealing characters, both were pioneers in forging the identity of their fledgling nations in literature.

The US–Brazil connection initiated by Lobato fostered a conversation between the Americas that took place largely beyond European interference. Another point of interest is the two nations' similar record of colonization, slavery, and emancipation. In this respect, Brazilian Portuguese is one of the relatively few languages that bear enough resemblance to American English to convey the verbal and cultural intricacies of slavery.

That Brazil has a special connection to Twain is highlighted by the comparatively limited response Twain has found in Portugal. In 2010, for the centennial of Mark Twain's death, the National Library of Portugal (Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal) issued a booklet recording the publications of Twain in Portuguese translation and a short text summarizing this history.¹⁹ It was not until 1944 that *Huckleberry Finn* was made available as part of an edition of his complete works in Portugal.²⁰ From then on, Twain and *Huckleberry Finn* were largely assigned to children's literature. There were far fewer new translations than in Brazil and only in the early twenty-first century did Portugal see a renewal of interest in the author.

A fruitful avenue of study for Lusophone scholars which remains unexplored is Francisco Tenreiro's 1973 translation published in Lisbon. Born in São Tomé, the capital city of the African nation São Tomé and Príncipe, Tenreiro was best known as the leading advocate for the concept of *négritude* in Portuguese poetry. Shelley Fisher Fishkin brought attention to this translation because of Tenreiro's creative decision to

use a Cabo Verde dialect for Black characters in the novel.²¹ This seems to be the only effort of this sort in the Lusophone world. Indeed, in the latest—and by all accounts the most complete—translation of the novel in Brazil by José Roberto O’Shea, the characters were made to fall into three distinct groups along social rather than racial or dialectal lines.²² Vera Lúcia Ramos’s contribution on Brazilian translations is a stark reminder of the fact that one cannot look at the history of Twain’s translations around the world from a purely linguistic point of view. Foregrounding cultural factors is essential.

In [“The Problem of the Explanatory: Linguistic Variation in Twenty First-Century Spanish Retranslations of *Huckleberry Finn*,”](#) **Miguel Sanz Jiménez** tackles versions of the novel’s Explanatory in twenty first-century Spain. As the Explanatory signals the use of dialects in the novel, its inclusion in or excision from a translation often signals the translator’s response to the issue of dialect. Given publishing conventions in Spain that discourage departures from standard spelling and diction, translators there have had little leeway and have only timidly pushed beyond those norms. Four of the six twenty first-century editions discussed here utilize Standard Spanish throughout, largely ignoring the linguistic variety of the original.

Of the half a dozen translations published in the late twentieth century, only that of Cristina Cerezales Laforet chose to “recreate Jim’s Black English as a variety of Southern Spanish, so that of the runaway Jim deviates from standard pronunciation,”²³ using “a few phonological traits that may remind Spanish readers of some regions of Andalucía, like Seville.”²⁴ Some twenty first-century translations omit the Explanatory but nonetheless sometimes preface the book with discussions of the linguistic richness and diversity of the original novel. Differentiation of Jim’s speech from Huck’s is mostly achieved by having Jim use more colloquial expressions that mark his alterity. Fernando Santos Fontenla, an experienced and respected translator, occasionally played with misspellings and malapropisms to convey the feeling of various dialects.

Sanz Jiménez’s essay also draws attention to issues beyond how Spanish translators dealt with the issue of dialect. He notes that the first translation of the book, which appeared in 1923, fared well during the Franco years (1939–1975), when Huck’s rebellious behavior avoided censorship despite the fact that it contrasted with the predominant Spanish ideology of obedience and respect for the authorities. Twain’s satirical treatment of religion, however, was intolerable to the regime. In one translation published in 1975, Sanz Jiménez tells us, “the censor demanded that the publisher omit Huck’s comment on not caring about Moses, since he had been dead for a long time; the censor also cut the protagonist’s remark that hogs prefer going to church more than people do.”²⁵

[Seema Sharma](#) points out a disconnect between academic awareness of Twain’s focus on social justice and what flows from some Hindi popular translators’ pens, especially for younger readers. Scenes crucial to the book’s challenge to the racist hierarchy dominating Huck’s world are botched or omitted. (Analogous

omissions were made in the first Japanese translation, as Ishihara notes in detail).²⁶ An example is the reunion between Huck and Jim after the fog lifts in Chapter 15, when Huck plays a trick on Jim, who reproaches Huck, suggesting that Huck's behavior is unworthy of a friend but typical of "trash." In one of the Hindi translations Sharma discusses, the whole exchange is rendered by this statement: "On seeing me Jim began to thank God and offer his prayers. Then we both cleaned the boat" (back translation Sharma's).²⁷

Although the dangers faced by people on the flight from slavery are sketched out in one of the two translations discussed, both versions ignore Jim's "longing for his family, his remorse at hitting his daughter, and other such incidents that humanize Jim," and both omit Huck's tearing up of the letter to Miss Watson meant to tell her of Jim's whereabouts.²⁸ These deletions demonstrate how "the translations miss the opportunity to close the gap between the academic readings of the text as a social commentary on race, and its popular status as children's idyll."²⁹ We also learn that Indian translators are faced with a rather unique challenge: the use of terms that denigrate a particular race is banned by law, making apt translations of the N-word illegal (a situation that has recently been the subject of several successful challenges when it comes to the use of such terms in song and film). Despite this obstacle, Sharma believes Hindi translators could more effectively "harness the potential of realizing the transnational relevance of Twain for younger readers in dismantling deep-seated prejudices."³⁰

Sharma notes that there is still room for a twenty-first-century translation of the novel that would engage its cultural as well as linguistic challenges. The Hindi language is rife with easily identifiable dialects that are still untapped. The ridiculous pretensions of the duke and dauphin could be conveyed by the bombastic language of "Brown Sahib[s]," stock figures of ridicule in nationalist literature.³¹ The expletive-filled language used by outlaws of the Hindi hinterland, "vulgar and threatening in its choice of words," would provide a perfect match for pap's outburst (which has been omitted in both the versions).³² Thus, Sharma hopes, young Hindi readers could have access to the book's full complexity—which could prompt them to reflect upon past and present America and India.

In her essay "[Translation Processes and Cultural Critique in My Annotated Chinese Translation of *Huckleberry Finn*](#)," **An-chi Wang** reflects on her career as a professor of American literature for more than thirty years in Taiwan. In particular, Wang's work sheds light on the most comprehensively annotated edition of *Huck Finn* in Chinese (2012)—a seven-year effort that has received critical acclaim in Taiwan and Chinese-speaking communities around the world. Her work also won recognition from such leading translation theorists and practitioners as Te-hsing Shan. Wang conveys rare insights on the challenging process of translating Twain's work, especially parts of Twain's text steeped in cultural nuances that are unfamiliar to readers in Taiwan. In addition to resolving the vast linguistic differences between the variety of dialects spoken in Twain's text and vernacular Chinese, Wang addresses the challenge of

translating Twain's humor and tall tales, criticism of religious hypocrisy in the slave-holding South, and the controversy surrounding the use of the N-word. Having taught *Huck Finn* in Taiwan for over four decades, Wang makes clear that some of the most valuable lessons that she conveys are ones drawn from her own students. Recalling a specific episode in the classroom examining the original English version of *Huck Finn* alongside her own translation drafts with her students, Wang articulates the value of understanding Twain's text in comparative and global perspective.

The essays collected in this Special Forum illustrate the potential inherent in an analysis of how foreign-language translations deal with the many challenges emerging from a close reading of Mark Twain's most famous novel. They sensitize the reader to the cultural specifics that give the novel its particular character and that are essential for an appropriate understanding of the original text. They also serve as a useful reminder that the way in which translated texts unfold their power outside of the context for which they were originally written depends not only on the linguistic skills of the translators but also on their talent for textual interpretation and their intimate familiarity with the historical and the cultural framework in which the original texts are situated. Several of the essays draw attention to the fact that certain details possess a cultural and historical specificity that make it nearly impossible to convey a text's meanings to an audience outside of the circle of readers to which it was originally addressed.

Being so intricately linked to American history and American culture, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, perhaps more than other works of literature, confronts readers from varying cultural contexts with the limits of what can be conveyed by a translator's expertise. As some of the essays show, non-English language versions of the novel have had a hard time trying to convey to their audiences phenomena and experiences that are remote from their own worlds. While many readers may grasp the general implications of life in a slave-holding society, the emotional and psychological impact caused by American slavery for both victims and perpetrators may be difficult to comprehend in different cultural environments. Similarly, the book's linguistic ingenuity and creativity, a feature inextricably interwoven with the novel's central concerns, defies attempts at direct transference and thus presents translators with an insurmountable challenge.

Taken together, the essays suggest that viewing life in antebellum America through the eyes of an uneducated child has had a powerful attraction for readers in other countries, and has helped feed the desire to convey Huck's story to the world. Ultimately, however, the record shows that despite the transnational exposure the book has had, each nation had to construct its own version of the boy who, (in Twain's words) equipped with an "ill-trained conscience" and "sound heart," must face a "moral emergency."³³

This Special Forum—a collaboration among scholars from four continents—underlines the value of transnational collaboration and the importance of bridging geographical, national, institutional, disciplinary, and language barriers that have

continued to govern our lives and world politics. In an age troubled by Covid-19, travel restrictions, persistent institutional racism, anti-Asian hate, and increasing nationalism around the globe, the need to look beyond the nation and connect global communities of letters through transnational engagements is more urgent than ever.

This Special Forum is not an end point but a beginning: It is an urgent call for American studies and literary studies scholars to situate the transnational at the center of these disciplines—as Fishkin asks in her 2004 ASA presidential address: “What would the field of American studies look like if the *transnational* rather than the national were at its center?”³⁴

Our willingness as scholars of Transnational American Studies and literary studies to consider voices, perspectives, and histories that have been marginalized in the frame of US imperial discourses brings us closer to transnational engagements and solidarity that defy definitions based on one’s skin color, class, native language, and nation-state—a message that resonates with Twain’s body of work and in Twain scholarship.

Although Twain and *Huck Finn* are the focus of this Special Forum, it is our hope that our model of intervention through approaching translation as theory and practice might provide a platform through which conversations among scholars in the fields of American studies and literary history about “canonical” American literature might be continually revisited, expanded, and reframed.

We still need studies on largely neglected translations in languages of the former Soviet Union: Armenian, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Tatar, Turkmen, and those of the Baltic countries (Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian), as well as the Yiddish version published in Kiev in 1929.³⁵ We need a scholar to analyze the Afrikaans version penned by famous antiapartheid writer André Brink in 1963.³⁶ We need a scholar to explore how the South Vietnamese translation published in Saigon in 1956 compares with the North Vietnamese one published Hanoi in 1960.³⁷ We need scholars to discuss translations in languages of the Indian subcontinent beyond Hindi—Assamese, Bengali, Gujarat, Telugu—especially in a postcolonial context that takes into account Indian language politics. We need further studies of what the translators’ and editors’ omissions reveal about social anxiety in a range of cultural and political contexts. We need research on the cultural work of editions in English-speaking countries outside the US. We need more work on the extent to which the book has intervened in cultural conversations about childhood, authority, slavery, morality, religion, and language politics around the world. We need comparative discussions of illustrations in various global editions. We need studies of the influence of translations of *Huck Finn* on writers in particular countries, and on uses of the novel and characters in global advertising and popular culture. Clearly our work has just begun. This Special Forum is a start.³⁸

Notes

- ¹ Gauthier-Villars's work was not translated into English until 2010, when Greg Robinson's translation of portions of it appeared in *The Mark Twain Anthology: Great Writers on his Life and Work*, ed. Shelley Fisher Fishkin. Henry Gauthier-Villars, "Mark Twain. 1884," trans. Greg Robinson, in *The Mark Twain Anthology: Great Writers on his Life and Work*, ed. Shelley Fisher Fishkin (New York, Library of America, 2010), 56–60.
- ² Asselineau builds on other work by scholars outside the US. For example, Friedrich Schönemann published a 119-page study of the author in German that addresses the critical response to Mark Twain's work (Ch. 1); Mark Twain as a humorist (Ch. 2); the "literariness" of Mark Twain's work (Ch. 3); his opposition to Romantic writing (Ch. 4); his concern with historical writing (Ch. 5); and his achievement as an essayist and as a writer of short narratives (Ch. 6). See Friedrich Schönemann, *Mark Twain als literarische Persönlichkeit* [Mark Twain as a literary figure] (Jena: Verlag der Frommannschen Buchhandlung, Walter Biedermann, 1925). Asselineau lists Schönemann's book on page 110; Roger Asselineau, *The Literary Reputation of Mark Twain from 1910 to 1950: A Critical Essay and Bibliography* (Paris: Librairie Marcel Didier, 1954).
- ³ Anna B. Katona, "Mark Twain's Reception in Hungary," *American Literary Realism, 1870–1910* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1983): 107–120; and Archibald Henderson, *Mark Twain* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1911).
- ⁴ Th.[érèse] Bentzon, "Les humoristes américains: Mark Twain," *Revue des deux mondes* 100, no. 2 (July-August 1872): 313–35.
- ⁵ Mark Twain, "The Jumping Frog in English, Then in French, Then Clawed Back into a Civilized Language Once More by Patient, Unremunerated Toil," in *Sketches, New and Old*, ed. Shelley Fisher Fishkin (1875; New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 28–45.
- ⁶ Twain, *Sketches*, 4.
- ⁷ Rodney draws on the bibliographic work that other scholars had done on individual countries before he put it all together. For example, Edgar Hemminghaus's *Mark Twain in Germany* (1939) has an eight-page appendix listing German translations of Mark Twain's works for the period of 1874–1937. See Edgar Hemminghaus, *Mark Twain in Germany* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939).
- ⁸ Writers have been reading and responding to Mark Twain in languages other than English for at least one hundred forty-nine years. The sixteen pieces in this anthology about Mark Twain by writers from Europe, Asia, and Latin America were (aside from a few excerpts) unavailable in English until the publication of this volume.

- ⁹ For more information on the dimension of the project supported by the France–Stanford Center and CESTA, see <https://francestanford.stanford.edu/projects/rosetta-resources-endangered-languages-through-translated-texts>, <https://cesta.stanford.edu/events/cesta-seminar-series-rosetta-0>, and https://francestanford.stanford.edu/sites/francestanford/files/media/file/V4_Rosetta_CESTA_Seminar.pdf See also Amel Fraisse et al., “A Sustainable and Open Access Knowledge Organization Model to Preserve Cultural Heritage and Language Diversity,” *Information* 10, no. 10 (2019): 303, <https://www.mdpi.com/2078-2489/10/10/303/htm#>
- ¹⁰ Scholars who have examined Mark Twain’s international appeal include, in addition to Asselineau and Rodney, Henderson (1911); Hemminghaus (1939); Howard Baetzhold (1970); Katona (1983); Raphael Berthele (2000); Carl Dolmetsch (1993); Fishkin (1997, 2010, 2011, 2015, 2019); Holger Kersten (1993, 1999, 2005); Judith Lavoie (2002); Tsuyoshi Ishihara (2005); Ronald Jenn (2006); Selina Lai-Henderson (2015); and Harrington and Jenn (2017).
- ¹¹ Behnam M. Fomeshi, “Persian Huck: On the Reception of Huckleberry Finn in Iran,” *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 12, no. 2 (2021): 28.
- ¹² Fomeshi, “Persian Huck,” 30.
- ¹³ Fomeshi, “Persian Huck,” 37.
- ¹⁴ For a thorough examination of this *Huck Finn* anime, see Tsuyoshi Ishihara, *Mark Twain in Japan: The Cultural Reception of an American Icon* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2005), 91–100.
- ¹⁵ Richard Jacquemond, “Translation Policies in the Arab World,” *The Translator (Manchester, England)* 15, no. 1 (2009): 15–35.
- ¹⁶ Margarita Marinova, “Huck Finn’s Adventures in the Land of the Soviet People,” *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 12, no. 2 (2021): 128.
- ¹⁷ Marinova, “Huck Finn’s Adventures,” 132.
- ¹⁸ John Milton, “The Resistant Political Translations of Monteiro Lobato,” *The Massachusetts Review* 47, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 489.
- ¹⁹ Isabel Oliveira Martins and Maria de Deus Alves Duarte, *Mark Twain em Portugal* (Lisbon: Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, 2010).
- ²⁰ The volume was published as part of *Obras Completas de Mark Twain-Romances e Contos*, Inquérito (Oliveira Martins and Duarte, *Mark Twain em Portugal*, 16). Previously the focus was mainly on his short fiction and his publications in periodicals.

- ²¹ See Shelley Fisher Fishkin, “Transnational Twain,” in *American Studies as Transnational Practice*, ed. Donald Pease and Yuan Shu (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2015), 120. In his “Nota do Tradutor,” Francisco Tenreiro equated Twain and Lincoln (see Oliveira Martins, *Mark Twain em Portugal*, 17).
- ²² O’Shea’s 2019 translation allows Brazil to join the ranks of countries with scholarly translations, complete with elaborate notes and the original Kemble illustrations. O’Shea’s translation has close to one hundred fifty notes, an introduction, and a note on the translation, all by the translator. With the Chinese version discussed in this Special Forum by An-chi Wang, and the Gallimard edition in France, one can perceive a pattern: Mark Twain and *Huckleberry Finn* are inching their way toward full literary recognition one country at a time.
- ²³ Sanz Jiménez uses the term “Black English” (also known as AAVE or African American Vernacular English) following, among others, linguist John Russell Rickford; see John Russell Rickford and Russell John Rickford, *Spoken Soul: The Story of Black English* (New York: Wiley, 2009).
- ²⁴ Miguel Sanz Jiménez, “The Problem of the Explanatory: Linguistic Variation in Twenty First–Century Spanish Retranslations of *Huckleberry Finn*,” *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 12, no. 2 (2021): 176.
- ²⁵ Sanz Jiménez, “The Problem of the Explanatory,” 176.
- ²⁶ Ishihara notes that Kuni Sasaki’s translation of *Huckleberry Finn* simply omits two of Jim’s most important scenes in the novel—the scene in which he rebukes Huck for fooling with him after their separation in the fog, and the scene in which Jim recalls with deep shame the time he beat his little daughter for disobeying before he realized she was deaf. He also mistranslates comments that show Jim “as a caring father who deeply loves his family,” even going so far as having Jim talk about buying “two children or so” after he is free. “Although Jim is planning to buy his own two children in order to emancipate them from slavery, Sasaki has him planning to buy two random children as if he, like the slaveowners saw them as commodities” (25). As Fishkin notes in “Deep Maps,” “Sasaki turns a parent distraught at being separated from his children into a would-be slave owner!” (11). Ishihara believes that “Sasaki’s distortions of Jim seem to reflect Japanese people’s deep-seated prejudices against blacks at the time” (26). Sasaki also “altered or deleted Twain’s most vivid depictions of racism”—including pap Finn’s infamous screed about the educated biracial professor from Ohio who could vote when he was at home (27).
- ²⁷ Seema Sharma, “*Huck’s Adventures in India—Cultural Conversation in Select Hindi Adaptations*,” *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 12, no. 2 (2021): 207. <https://doi.org/10.5070/T812255983>

- ²⁸ Sharma, “Huck’s Adventures in India,” 207.
- ²⁹ Sharma, “Huck’s Adventures in India,” 207.
- ³⁰ Sharma, “Huck’s Adventures in India,” 210.
- ³¹ Sharma, “Huck’s Adventures in India,” 209.
- ³² Sharma, “Huck’s Adventures in India,” 209.
- ³³ “Next, I should exploit the proposition that in a crucial moral emergency a sound heart is a safer guide than an ill-trained conscience.” Mark Twain’s Notebook 28a, TS p. 35, Mark Twain Papers, quoted in Walter Blair, *Mark Twain & Huck Finn* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), 143.
- ³⁴ Shelley Fisher Fishkin, “Crossroads of Cultures: The Transnational Turn in American Studies: Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, November 12, 2004,” *American Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (March 2005): 21.
- ³⁵ Itsik Kipnis, trans., *Hoklberi fin un zayne avantyures* (Huckleberry Finn and his adventures), by Mark Twain (Kiev: Kultur-lige, 1929).
- ³⁶ André Brink, trans., *Die Avonture Van Huckleberry Finn* (The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn), by Mark Twain (Cape Town: John Malherbe, 1963).
- ³⁷ See Mark Twain, *Đoi bạn phiêu lưu*, trans. Hoàng Lan (Saigon: Nhà xuất bản Sáng Tạo, 1956); and Mark Twain, *Chuyện phiêu lưu của Hắc Phin*, trans. Xuân Oanh (Hanoi: Văn hoá, 1960). It would also be interesting to compare these two translations to Mark Twain, *Những cuộc phiêu lưu của Huckleberry Finn*, trans. Xuân Thu (Los Alamitos, CA: no publisher listed, 1996. See also Hoang Thi Diem Hang, “An Assessment of the Vietnamese Translation of ‘The Adventures Of Huckleberry Finn—Chapter XX’ Using House’s Translation Quality Assessment Model,” *VNU Journal of Foreign Studies* 35, no. 1 (2019): 35–54. This article by Hoang Thi Diem Hang of VNU (Vietnam National University) University of Languages and International Studies in Hanoi provides an in-depth evaluation of a 2009 edition of Xuân Oanh’s translation.
- ³⁸ To help those who would like to delve more fully into the texts and issues discussed in this Special Forum, we have compiled a [composite bibliography](#) of secondary works cited in the articles, as well as lists of translations. We have also appended Selina Lai-Henderson’s [list of all known Chinese translations](#), a compilation that has not previously been published.

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