

Translations of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in France (1886–2015)

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France was remarkably quick in initially translating *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. The first version came out in 1886, right after Denmark and Sweden (1885), and ahead of Russia (1888), Germany (1890), and Poland (1898).¹ There was, after that, a protracted lull of more than six decades with no new French translations while Germany, Russia, and Spain were publishing new versions, sometimes by the dozen.

Long after this initial interest, two translation peaks occurred in 1948–1963 and 2008–2015, with up to three new major translations each time. The translations that are complete and meant for adults are the principal focus of this study. Even though the line between children's and adult literatures is often blurred, all the more so in the case of *Huckleberry Finn*, versions published as children's literature will not be taken into consideration here for practical reasons.² Those two translation peaks are marked by the coexistence of several translations, with varying degrees of importance—some being published only once, others relegated to children's literature, while others dominate the field. Within each period, the several coexisting versions should not be considered as standalone and isolated but as interacting with the others and vying for attention, making up dynamic clusters. Within each cluster, the several different versions, publishing houses, and translators, compete for attention and readership. It is to be remarked that the sheer textual quality of any given translation is not sufficient to secure its rank as the leading translation on the market. The social and symbolic status of the publishing house, the collection of which the book is a part, and the translator's ability to showcase their translations through a network of academic and media acquaintances, all factor in a translation's position.

This does not mean that the overall quality of the translation field is not improving, much to the contrary. French readers can currently choose from a range of

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significantly higher-quality versions than was previously the case. As of the writing of this article, France is experiencing a consolidating period as the latest translation peak brought no less than three new high-caliber versions over a relatively short span of seven years (2008–2015). As a result, the market is currently well-served by high-end translations crafted by translators of renown.

The State of the Art Prior to 2008

1. William O’Gorman’s Pioneering Version (1886)

Huckleberry Finn’s unassuming entry on the French scene is now well documented but the first translator, Irish-born William O’Gorman (1822–1887), also known by his nom de plume William-Little Hughes, has somewhat undeservedly become the whipping-boy of translation studies scholars. There is a robust tradition of assessing the extent to which William O’Gorman failed, in hindsight, to render the beauty and full richness of the original. Started in 1984, for the centennial of the novel, this tradition of harsh criticism leveled at the first translation has persisted relatively unabated so far. Ranking high on the list of the translator’s purported failures is his inability, if not unwillingness, to render Black voices and, as a matter of course, the humanity of the runaway enslaved character Jim.

In what could be termed unfair and rigged academic fights rife with foregone conclusions, the juggernaut of American literature, Mark Twain, has been pitted against the puny William-Little Hughes, whose career’s highlight actually happens to be his role as first translator of *Huckleberry Finn*. The Irishman pell-mell “anesthetized a subversive text,” “sanitized” it, “breached a reading contract,”³ generally betrayed or distorted the text, and committed an endless series of unredeemable crimes.⁴

As encapsulated in the title of another study, William-Little Hughes “transformed” Mark Twain’s great American novel.⁵ And there were blatant transformations indeed. In contrast to the broad readership the original was meant for, the French scope was narrowed and aimed at children only; pupils and students, to be more specific. Mark Twain’s rogue piece of writing had to be tamed and groomed to accommodate an acceptable form in France. The French Third Republic’s demand for mass schooling, as well as its reluctance towards public expression of religious belief, resulted in a bowdlerized version expurgated of a number of cumbersome elements such as violence, and it was tailored to fit the abilities of young readers.⁶

That O’Gorman has been treated unfairly by French critics appears with more clarity in view of what happened to the novel internationally. No study has singled out a nineteenth-century or even an early twentieth-century version as praiseworthy anywhere around the world. *Huckleberry Finn* was simply too outlandish and each country’s translation agenda too far removed from what translation studies scholars nowadays expect from a translated literary text for any first translation to be up to par

with the original, especially when current criteria are being used. Almost all first translations were abridged, expurgated versions of the original. They standardized rather than rendered dialects and Jim's speech in particular was oftentimes misunderstood and/or maimed, when not ridiculed. Such is the case in the early German and Swedish versions studied by Raphaele Berthele and B. J. Epstein.⁷

Rather than judging those initial translations in hindsight with standards largely inherited from the tradition of explaining literary texts, it has proven rewarding and challenging to investigate the purposes they served. Admittedly O'Gorman's translated prose is remote from Twain's sprightly and colorful narrative. And yet if one thinks of the form of the book as much as its textual content, then the first translation of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* resembles the novel in its original published format more than any of the later versions, barring maybe the recent high-quality Gallimard volume (2015),⁸ which, in spite of its diminutive pocket format, contains the original illustrations.

Remarkable craftsmanship went into the creation of *Les Aventures de Huck Finn, l'ami de Tom Sawyer* (1886), making it a beautiful book (see Figure 1). The embossed and colorful cover, adorned with a remarkably dynamic representation of the novel's main characters reminiscent of the nascent art of the comic strip, the gilt-edged pages, and the outstanding quality of the paper and binding, all make the first French translation stand out as a luxurious artifact whose textual content mattered less than its outward appearance:

On the symbolic level, these books stand for the ritual passage into the print culture of an ever-growing number of people whose incorporation was achieved thanks to schooling and literacy, with a view to developing their ability to read silently and individually. The symbolic nature of these books seems to be inscribed within their very materiality, their sheer size and quality making them pleasurable to the hands and to the eyes. They can be seen as tridimensional, intersemiotic objects designed to arouse an appetite for reading and writing.⁹

Because its content was so novel and so far removed from traditional expectations in France, *Huckleberry Finn* was neglected during the pioneering period while its companion piece, *Tom Sawyer*, reaped all the glory, was translated multiple times, and enjoyed the triumph of canonization. *Tom Sawyer*, thanks to its plot, was better equipped to survive a translation process catering mainly to schoolgoers. While new translation after new translation of *Tom Sawyer* was being penned, *Huckleberry Finn* was trekking along a solitary path that only started broadening in 1948 to ultimately turn into the avenue it is today.

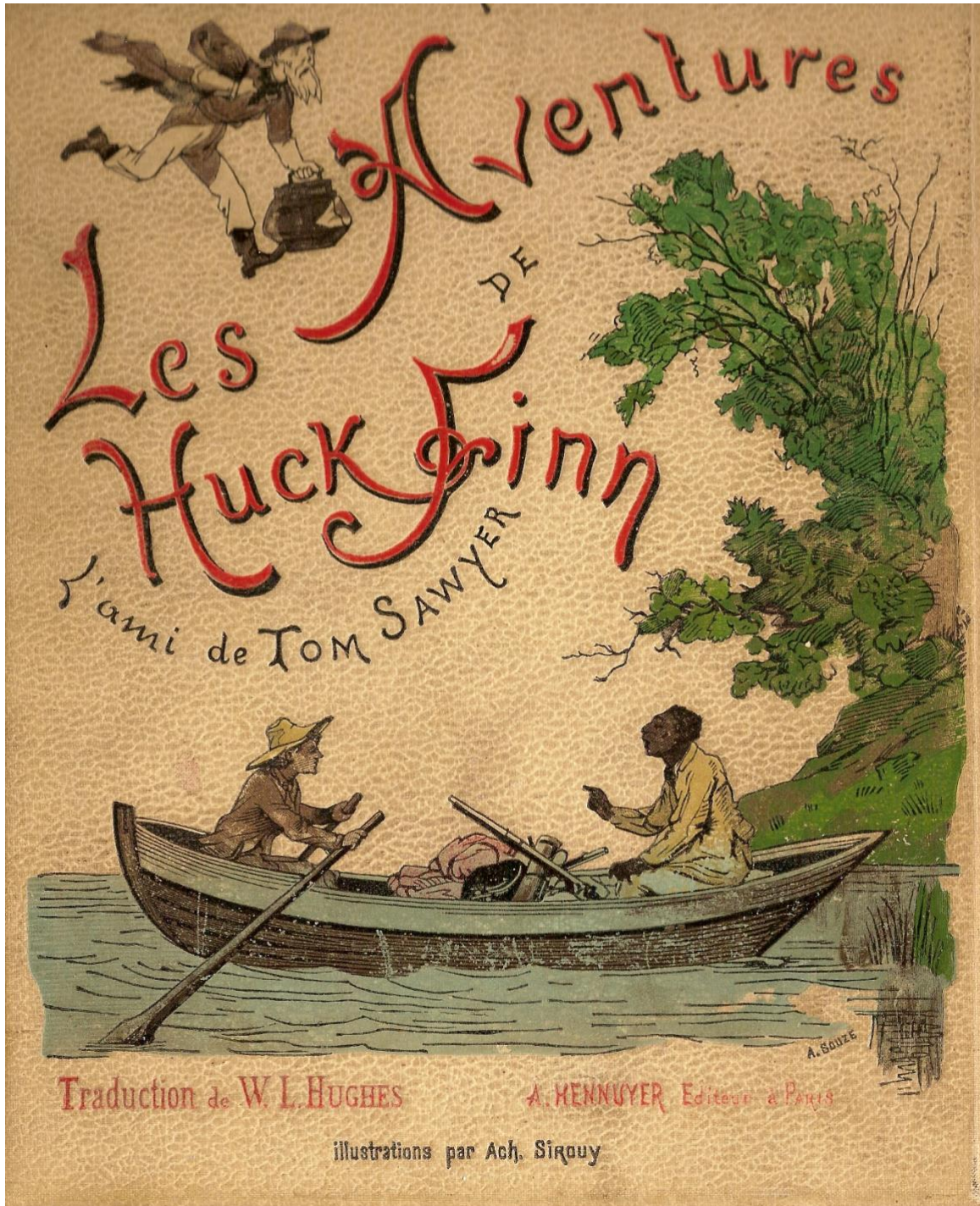


Fig. 1: Cover of the 1886 edition of William-Little Hughes's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, published by Hennuyer.

2. The Expansion Period: Of the Cold War, Teenagers, and the Leisure Society (1948–2008)

A combination of factors allowed *Huckleberry Finn* to come to the fore in the second half of the twentieth century. The ascent of the image and role of the teenager and its offshoot demographic, the “young adult,” combined with the rise of a leisure society, helped lead to a reevaluation of the importance of activities conducted outside the classroom, making *Huckleberry Finn* more acceptable and desirable as reading matter for all ages. There was also a growing awareness of marginalized youth as well as of ethnic minorities and an evolution in the perception of the treatment they should receive. Finally, whereas *Tom Sawyer* initially tended to be more celebrated and recognized, French readers and scholars gradually came to appreciate *Huckleberry Finn* more, reflecting the place the novel has within the American literary canon as a more mature and meaningful piece of writing.

World War II and the ensuing period of the Cold War was also a game changer in the French reception and perception of *Huckleberry Finn*. Unable or unwilling to directly fight one another, except by proxy, both superpowers, the US and the USSR, used soft power to strengthen their position or weaken that of their opponent. Because of a string of so-called antiimperialist writings penned mostly during the final decade of his life, Mark Twain, although an American writer, had the fulsome approval of Marxist critics under the leadership of the Soviet Union. Hence Twain’s immense popularity in the USSR and all communist countries, including China. Of course, as has been pointed out, it would be unfair to attribute Twain’s popularity in those countries to this single cause, “for *Huckleberry Finn* has that combination of universal emotions of exotic circumstances which seems to be the formula by which literature becomes world literature.”¹⁰ Yet, because Twain was perceived as a friendly figure in the fight against imperialism and the bourgeois mindset, French communist publishing house Hier et aujourd’hui took it on itself to provide the first complete translation of *Huckleberry Finn*, which was preceded by a lengthy and politically engaged preface by Marxist historian Jean Kanapa in 1948 (see Figure 2).¹¹

The translation itself was penned by Suzanne Nétillard. Born in Brittany in 1910, she took the *agrégation* national competitive exam to become an English teacher. Unlike present-day translators, she was not a specialist in Mark Twain, but her skills earned her the Maurice-Edgar Coindreau translation prize in 1983.¹²

The major flaw in Nétillard’s version is the use of *passé simple*, a French past tense that makes Huck’s narration sound a little too erudite for an unschooled boy. Yet, scholars who studied her translation have found redeeming features in her awareness of sociolects and her handling of the relationship between Huck and Jim, making her translation as close to the original in esthetic as well as political terms as translators of her period could get.¹³ O’Gorman’s version of 1886 being so far from the original, Nétillard’s was arguably the first real translation and by all standards the best of the twentieth century.¹⁴

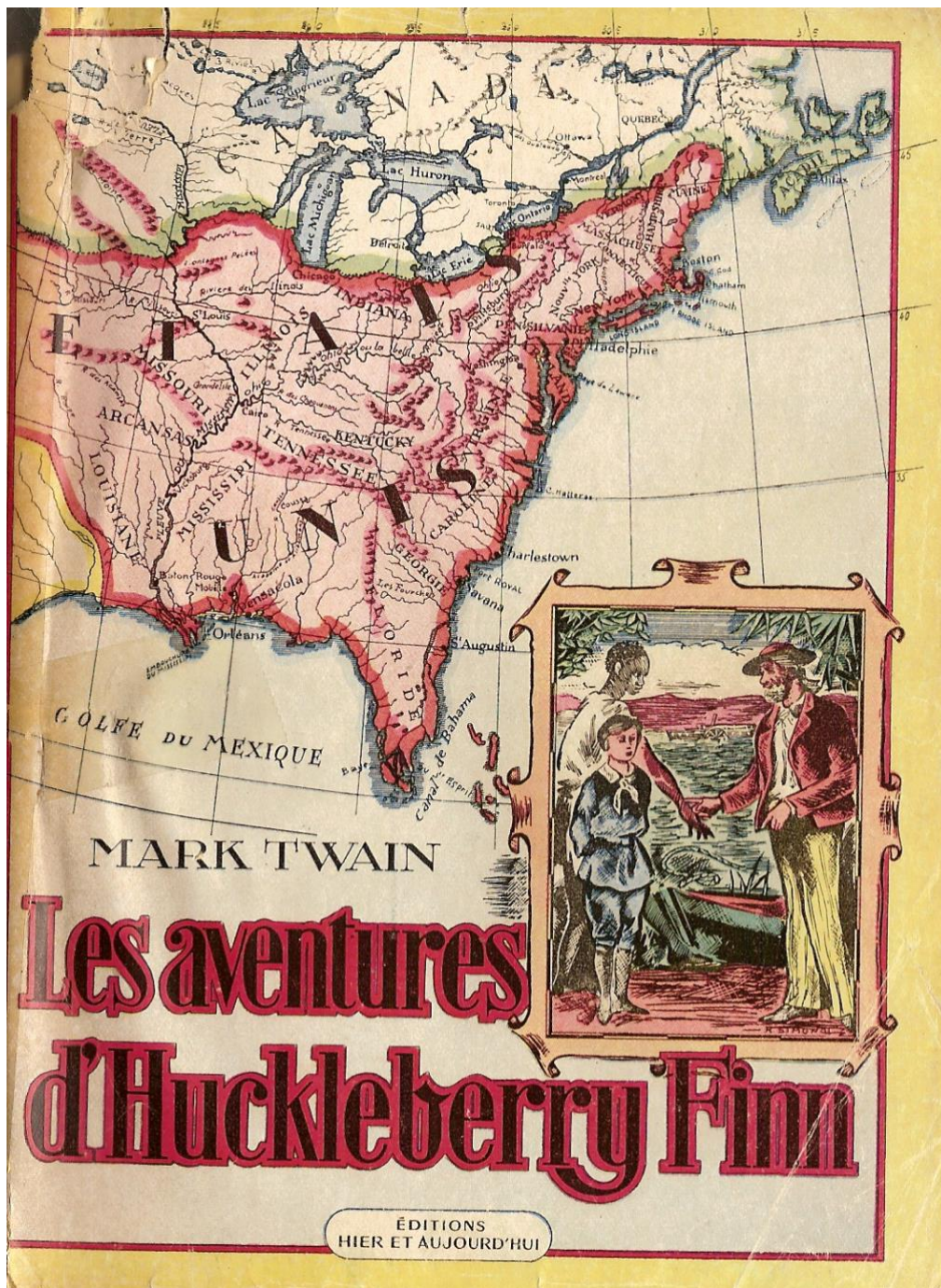


Fig. 2: Cover of the 1948 edition of Suzanne Nétillard's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, published by Éditions Hier et aujourd'hui.

Notwithstanding its qualities and in spite of a number of republications, Nétillard's version was eclipsed by André Bay's (1960). André Bay (1916–2013), born André Pierre Robert Dupont, literary editor of the publishing house Stock, was also a writer, translator, and painter.¹⁵ His production as a writer far outweighs his translation

activities and he was first and foremost a man of letters with numerous connections and acquaintances in the Parisian artistic and literary circles. His own writings include poetry for children and nursery rhyme collections. Bay's innovation is that he discarded the somewhat bombastic *passé simple* and used more accessible past tenses, infusing his translation with fluidity. On other counts, his translation has been noted to be more standardized in terms of dialects and less sensitive to the relationship between Jim and Huck than Nétillard's. For example, the runaway enslaved Jim addresses the runaway boy using the formal "vous" form while Huck sticks to the more familiar "tu" form. This imbalance seriously disrupts the egalitarian relationship the two characters come to develop.

Although Nétillard's version was by all standards closer to Twain's original project, after Bay's came out in 1960, Nétillard's was gradually published in collections meant for younger readers while Bay's occupied the more central and prestigious position of being the reference for adults. Those two major translations ended up sharing the market, each one in its specific section until the latest translation peak occurred. In a slightly ironic twist, Nétillard's version, published with a view to fighting bourgeois ethics in the name of Marxist ideology, was partly defeated by André Bay's somewhat more bourgeois version.¹⁶

The *status quo* between the Nétillard and Bay versions, each being cast for a different readership, lasted for a remarkably long time. Only in the late 1990s and early 2000s did translators and publishers start to think twice about these translations and wonder whether it might be time for a renewal. With the centennial of Mark Twain's death looming large on the horizon, the daunting task of retranslating his masterpiece was starting to be perceived as an urgent and timely matter.

The Consolidating Period—An Esthetic and Scholarly Turn

The latest translation peak added three versions to the field in 2008, 2009, and 2015. This spate of new translations coincided with the centennial of Mark Twain's death. Comparatively, the centennial of the novel in 1984 elicited no new major version and sparked little academic interest—a trickle at best, that would eventually expand over the years. This time around, publishing houses were eager to come up with new versions ahead of, or in the wake of, the much-anticipated *Autobiography* publication.¹⁷ The landmark also offered a unique occasion for dedicated translators to deliver on a project they had nurtured for years.

Contrary to what happened in the preceding periods, all three translators, besides being skilled and outstanding, had some previous experience in translating Mark Twain (Bernard Hoepffner and Freddy Michalski) or other nineteenth-century American authors (Philippe Jaworski). The latest batch of French versions consequently is of a higher quality and provides increased visibility and further canonization of the iconic American writer in France. This later period is also one of reunion between *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*. Hoepffner simultaneously and single-handedly

offered new translations of both novels; no French translator had done so since O’Gorman. The Gallimard edition similarly brought together the two texts, though by different translators.¹⁸

The Players Behind the 2008 and 2009 Versions

The translators and publishing houses of the 2008 and 2009 versions share a striking number of similarities. Both translators were dedicated professionals with strong personalities. Their respective ties to their small but dynamic publishing houses were strong, if not intimate. They unwittingly became rivals, however, when each publishing house and translator realized they had simultaneously, and unbeknownst to each other, launched their projects. The regrettable outcome of this literary struggle between translators sharing comparable profiles was the complete neglect of the 2009 translation in terms of media and scholarly attention.

Bernard Hoepffner and Tristram (2008)

Bernard Hoepffner (1946–2017) first lived in Germany, where his father originated from, and then France, before moving to the UK. He became a restorer of works of art, and even cultivated bananas on the Canary Islands for a while before moving back to France in 1980. Self-taught and a relative latecomer to translation, he started his career as translator and writer in 1988. He would eventually publish two hundred translations of all kinds: novels, collections of short stories, essays, and poetry, by authors such as Oscar Wilde, George Orwell, Lewis Carroll, Jonathan Swift, and James Joyce.¹⁹

Hoepffner’s experience as a restorer of works of art deeply shaped his vision of translation. In an interview given when his *Huckleberry Finn* came out, he declared: “Je ne crois pas à l’idée selon laquelle le traducteur devrait être transparent. J’ai été artisan pendant longtemps, je restaurais des objets d’Extrême-Orient, et il m’arrive de dire que je suis un ‘manuel de la traduction.’ Je pense que la traduction n’est pas un travail intellectuel, mais artisanal” (I do not believe in the notion that a translator should be transparent. I was, for a long time a craftsman, restoring East Asian artifacts and sometimes I say that I am a “translation manual.” I consider translation not as an intellectual calling but as arts and craft).²⁰ Hoepffner is punning on the word “manuel,” which can be both an instruction guide and an adjective (as in “manual labor”), thereby stating that he is more of an artisan and craftsman than an intellectual (a pun that comes across fairly well in English). Self-taught, he did not go through academic and formal training, but was as equally skilled with objects and artifacts as with words. Though he had no college education, Hoepffner had an intellectual streak and he quickly made a reputation for himself both in literary circles and the academic world by giving talks at conferences and publishing scholarly articles. He often got media attention and coverage in leading newspapers such as *Le Monde* when his books came out.

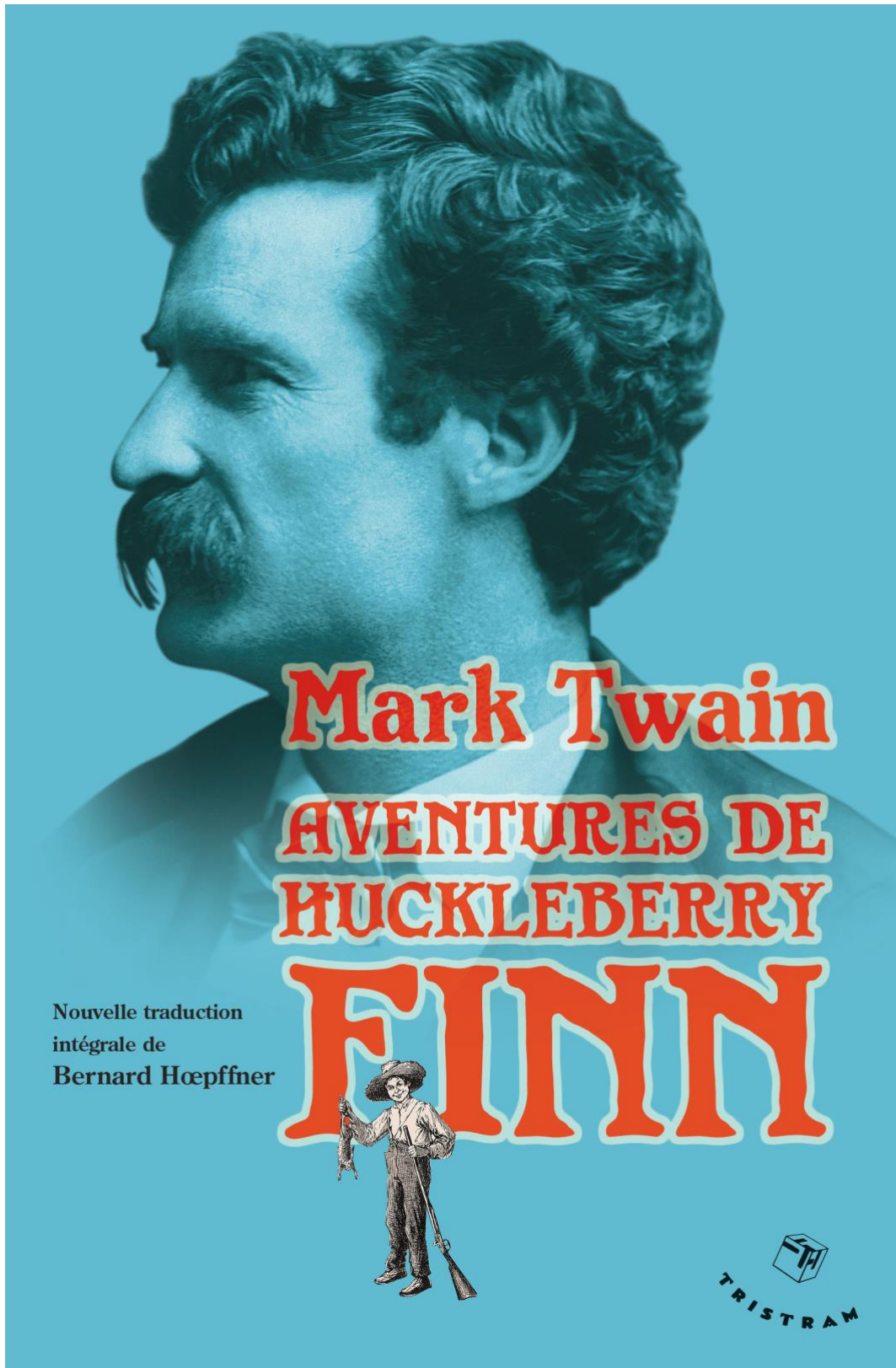


Fig. 3: Cover of the 2008 edition of Bernard Hoepffner's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, published by Tristram Editions. © Éditions Tristram, used by permission.

Finding the first existing translations of *Huckleberry Finn* lacking, Sylvie Martigny and Jean-Hubert Gailliot, who founded the Tristram publishing house in 1989 in the provincial town of Auch in the southwestern part of France, asked Bernard Hoepffner to revitalize this classic (see Figure 3). The venture yoked together *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*, and the two novels came out as separate volumes but on the same day. Before tackling *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*, Hoepffner had worked as freelance translator on those parts of the *Autobiography* that were already available to the public. After the final and official version came out in 2010, he eventually completed and published his translation in 2012.²¹

Through his work ethic, his vision of the translator as a craftsman bent on quality over quantity, his close relationship with his publishers, Hoepffner's profile eerily resembles that of the other translator, Freddy Michalski.

Freddy Michalski and L'OEil d'or (2009)

Freddy Michalski (1946–2020) was born in Northern France to a family of Polish immigrants working the coal mines. He was bound to be aware of language differences as French, formally taught at school, came as a third language long after Polish, spoken at home, and a widely spoken local patois typical of northern France. English, also taught at school, came as a fourth language, so to speak. He graduated from the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Cachan with a degree in English and passed the *agrégation* national competitive exam. Always attracted to the very sound and rhythm of English and a longtime reader of hardboiled detective novels, he started translating James Ellroy in 1987 and would continue to do so for fifteen years along with James Lee Burke and Edward Bunker. As a translator, he has been acknowledged as a stylist.

Established in 1999 in Paris, L'OEil d'or publishing house is headed by Jean-Luc André d'Asciano, holder of a PhD in literature and psychoanalysis. As a doctoral student, d'Asciano struck up a friendship with Freddy Michalski, who encouraged him to publish new translations of Mark Twain. Their collaboration started with Michalski's translations of Mark Twain's *Adam's Diary*, *Eve's Diary* (2004), soon followed by *Letters from the Earth* (2005), *The American Claimant* (2007), and *The Mysterious Stranger* (2008).

Both Hoepffner and Michalski were provincial, raised in multilingual contexts, creative and experienced, and well-equipped to tackle Twain's prose and his shades of dialects. When Hoepffner's version came out in September of 2008, on the same day as *Tom Sawyer*, he immediately received media attention and praise for his work. He had "brought Mark Twain back to life" and created much-needed quality translations.²² The hype around his translations triggered academic interest and his *Huckleberry Finn* was subsequently studied in a number of scholarly articles and master's dissertations. Coming a little too late, Michalski's version (see Figure 4) was no competition for Hoepffner's and was simply ignored, if not totally eclipsed, and has not been republished.²³

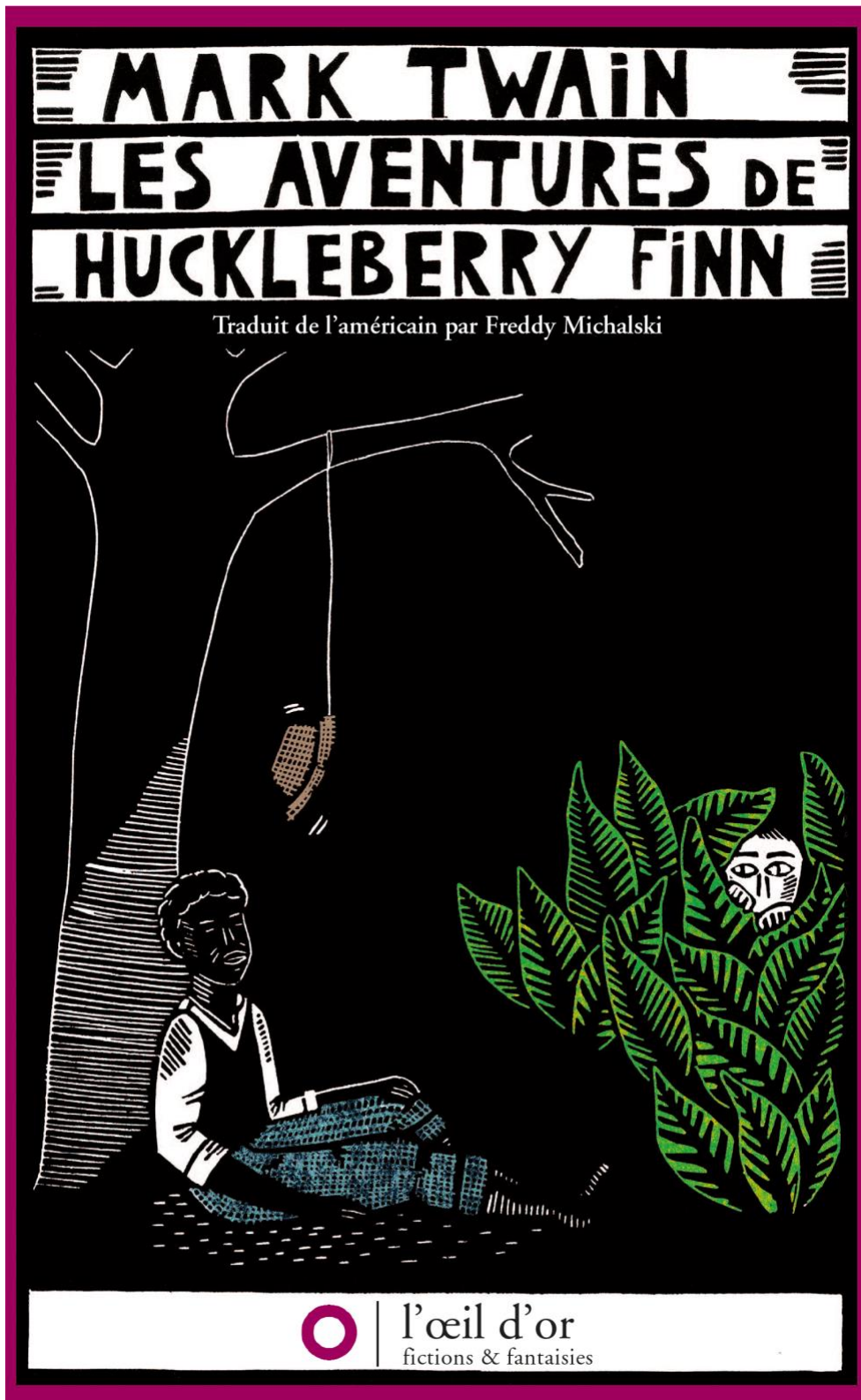


Fig. 4: Cover of the 2009 edition of Freddy Michalski's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* published by Éditions L'OEil d'or. Linocut by Sarah d'Haeyer. © Éditions L'OEil d'or 2009. Used by permission.

Philippe Jaworski and Gallimard (2015)

The 2015 translation is different from the previous ones. It was penned with a more highbrow and scholarly readership in mind. Philippe Jaworski, professor emeritus at the University of Paris-Diderot, is a nineteenth-century American literature scholar with a focus on Herman Melville, and a recent translator of Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Jack London. He also is an editor for Gallimard's "La Bibliothèque de la Pléiade" collection.

Gallimard, the flagship of French publishing, needs no introduction, but its Pléiade collection, wherein the *Mark Twain* volume appeared, deserves some context. Named after a group of famous and influential sixteenth-century French poets, the collection was created in 1931 to publish reference editions of the works of classic authors in a pocket format with a host of notes and comments. Those handsome, leather-bound books with gold lettering on the cover, printed on Bible paper (allowing for a great number of pages) gracefully adorn bookshelves. La Pléiade is an acknowledged reference for the accurate and complete critical paratext (prefaces or introductions, footnotes, and commentary) penned mostly by academics, often working in teams, that accompanies the works of both French and foreign authors. The wealth of information provided makes it a reference for researchers and students. When it comes to foreign authors, La Pléiade tends to not republish existing translations but presents its own.

Just like the volume entitled *Mississippi Writings* (1876–1894), published by the Library of America (1982),²⁴ the Pléiade volume features *Tom Sawyer*, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *Life on the Mississippi*, and *Pudd'nhead Wilson*. The collection's French title, *Mark Twain: Oeuvres* (*Mark Twain: Works*) is somewhat misleading considering that the author's works would actually fill at least a dozen volumes in that collection. The book comes with close to two hundred fifty pages of notes and more than six hundred fifty original illustrations. In this critical edition, Philippe Jaworski plays the dual role of translator and critic in charge of the notes and the paratext. Jaworski's first round of notes for *Huckleberry Finn* deal with questions such as the fluctuations of the novel's title (*The Adventures* vs *Adventures*), who the initials G. G. in the Notice might refer to, and David Carkeet's comments on the "Explanatory." In his notes to the first chapter, Jaworski explains the references to *Tom Sawyer* (although that novel is in the same volume), gives some context on the N-word, and explains biblical references as well as the many references to superstitious beliefs.

In stark contrast, Tristram and L'OEil d'or relied solely on the author's and the translators' skills, creativity, and style of writing, with minimal paratextual elements. Though definitely more erudite and somewhat above the fray for obvious reasons of prestige, format, and readership, the Pléiade edition's achievement in terms of translation can nevertheless be compared to the 2008 and 2009 versions.

A Brief Stylistic Comparison

Though all three versions have very strong points and participate in the overall improvement of the French *Huckleberry Finn*, there is a huge difference between those penned by professional translators Hoepffner and Michalski on the one hand, and Jaworski's on the other. Hoepffner and Michalski came to *Huckleberry Finn* with experience built up from professional practice and they provide vivid and lively insight into Twain's style. Because their texts could not rely on notes and comments the way Jaworski's did, they tend to be more creative within the text.

Used to dealing with orality, Michalski and Hoepffner resorted to a great number of markers and dared to make changes in the spelling and thus the phonology of certain terms to render the intonations of young voices. Michalski proved even more daring than Hoepffner in that department, so much so that, specialized as he was in hardboiled detective novels, his characters at times sound like they belong in a detective novel with strongly connoted slang words and phrases.²⁵ Overall, Michalski's use of truncated negations and colloquial terms serves his translation well.

Jaworski, also an experienced translator and well-versed in nineteenth-century American literature, can be deemed less daring and slightly more conservative than the other translators. Acting as critic as much as translator for the scholarly Pléiade collection, he could expand in the notes and comments he provided on the text. This is a major difference compared to professional translators aiming at a wide readership and trained to rely on nothing but their translation. To them, a translation should be self-explanatory and readers not allowed to digress. In an interview, Michalski declared that footnotes interfere both with the original text and the reading process.²⁶

Compared to the method of the other translations, Jaworski's scholarly approach had an impact on syntax, which tends to be more conventional; orality, which is toned down; and register, which is more formal. Jaworski will often render colloquial terms by formal ones.²⁷ He also makes a more frequent use of the formal "vous" form of address between characters. As Shelley Fisher Fishkin pointed out in the context of Jim's speech, "[s]cholars working in French and German are increasingly looking at the ways in which the asymmetrical or symmetrical forms of address that Jim and Huck use for each other in translations of the book have changed over time, reflecting, in part, changes in racial attitudes in the French-speaking, Spanish-speaking, and German-speaking countries in which translations have been published."²⁸ Both Hoepffner and Michalski use the informal "tu" form when Jim addresses Huck and vice versa, reinforcing their egalitarian relationship and Jim's role as a father figure to the boy. Jaworski's choice of the formal "vous" pronoun when Jim addresses Huck creates an asymmetrical relationship, as was already the case in Bay's version. In this respect, Jaworski's approach to this specific part of the text is a major setback, relegating Jim to a subordinate position. It is reminiscent of earlier translations as it blurs, or even erases, the ambivalence of Jim's character, who evolves from a fully grown adult (in

the first half of the novel) to an apparently racial stereotype (when Tom Sawyer pretends to save him).²⁹

Concerning Jim's speech in the novel, it is now widely accepted that it has the features of what is technically called African American Vernacular English. David Carkeet has noted that Twain resorted to features such as respelling, the widespread loss of "r," and much more eye dialect in Jim's speech than in Huck's.³⁰ Because the loss of "r" also happens to be commonly used in French to characterize Black speech,³¹ Hoepffner and Michalski make repetitive use of it. Jaworski shunned this strategy and resorted to the device much less systematically than Hoepffner and Michalski did, probably on the grounds that it would sound too stereotypical. Michalski and Hoepffner also reinforced the effect of illiteracy through grammatical, syntactic, and phonological markers, such as partial deletion in negative structures; dislocation; and elision so that their texts do elicit a sense of difference when Jim speaks even as the reading process remains smooth and accessible. This is particularly true of Michalski. Jaworski's version, which has fewer omissions of "r," also has a more standard syntax, barring the readers from perceiving the specificities of Jim's voice.

Only Hoepffner and Michalski clearly mark the difference between Black and white speech and make it possible for Jim to be recognized at once by the way he talks. In their translations, Jim's speech is characterized by a widespread loss of "r" and elisions, along with other markers such as crasis (also called syneresis, the contraction of two adjacent vowels into one), and epenthesis (the addition of one or more sounds to a word). On the syntactic level we find truncated negations (French negation usually requires two elements "ne" and "pas"), along with a misuse of auxiliaries—"avoir" and "être" being the two French verbs instrumental in constructing past tenses—faulty subject-verb agreement that sounds grammatically incorrect but also has overtones of dialect (for example "je vas" for "I'm going" instead of "je vais"). To illustrate this point, here are three examples (translations back into English are provided in note 35):

Passage 1

Say, who **is** you? Whar **is** you? Dog my cats **ef** I didn' hear **sumf'n**. (Twain and Elliot, *Huck Finn*, 6)

(Michalski) Z'êtes qui, vous **aut'**? Que le **c'ic** me **c'oque** si j'ai pas entendu **queq'chose**. (17)³²

(Hoepffner) Eh—c'est qui, vous ? Où vous êtes ? Qu'on me change en chat si j'ai pas entendu **kekchose**. (14)

(Jaworski) Ho ! Qui c'est ? Où **c'est qu'**vous êtes ? Ma main au feu que j'ai entendu **quéqu'chose**. (882)

Passage 2

Mars Tom, I's willin' to tackle mos' anything 'at **ain't on**reasonable [...] (Twain and Elliot, *Huck Finn*, 235)

(Michalski) **M'sieur** Tom, **ch'suis d'acco'd pou'** essayer **p'esque** tout [**ce**] qui [**n'**]est pas **dé'aisonnable** [...] (339)³³

(Hoepffner) **Missié** Tom, **chuis d'acco' pou'** me lancer dans tout ce qui est pas **tréfonnable** [...] (394)³⁴

(Jaworski) **J'suis** prêt à faire tout ce qu[**i**] [**n**]est pas trop loufoque, maître Tom [...] (1209)

Passage 3

En when I wake up **en fine** you back **agin**, all safe **en** soun', **de** tears come [...] **En** all you **wuz** thinkin' 'bout **wuz** how you could make a fool **uv ole** Jim **wid** a lie. **Dat** truck **dah** is trash. (Twain and Elliot, *Huck Finn*, 235)

(Michalski) Et quand je m'**ai** 'éveillé pou' te 'etrouver là, sain et sauf, bien vivant, mes la'mes **ont** monté à **mes** yeux [...] Et toi, tout ce que t'avais en tête, c'est comment pouvoi' **tou'nebouler** ce pauv' Jim avec des histoires. Tes machins, là, c'est des mentiries. (122)

(Hoepffner) Et quand je me réveille et que t'es revenu, en un seul morceau, les larmes viennent [...] Et tout ce que tu te disais, c'était à comment tu allais couvri' le vieux Jim de ridicule avec un mensonge. Ces débris, c'est des ordu'. (131)

(Jaworski) Et quand **j'me** suis réveillé et que **j'vous** ai retrouvé sain et sauf j'en ai eu des larmes [...] Et tout ce que vous pensiez à faire, vous, c'est **d'vous** moquer du pauv' Jim en lui racontant un mensonge. Toutes ces choses que vous voyez là c'est des ordures.³⁵ (984)

In the last extract, Michalski is also using a low register with “tournebouler” and “mentiries,” itself a misspelling of “menterie,” a synonym for “mensonge,” “a lie.” These colloquial words also have a dialectal and archaic ring to them.

Through these three examples one can tell that, on average, when it comes to Jim's speech, the markers of linguistic difference occur twice as often in Michalski's version as in Hoepffner's and Jaworski's; Michalski's version having an overall higher density of oral markers. Besides, Jaworski makes little distinction between the speech of illiterate Black and white characters. In Jaworski's version, the markers of Black

speech do not underline the phonological specificity inherent to Black pronunciation.³⁶ This is consistent with his overall approach because his version tends to neutralize or erase a number of specific markers present in the source text, hence the lack of singularity in the rendition of each sociolect.³⁷

Conclusion

Huckleberry Finn's progress in France could be defined as a series of rapid elevation gains followed by long plateaus. The initial and rather quick translation of 1886 was followed by a long stretch of relative inactivity. The sudden peak of 1948–1963 was followed by an adjustment period, in which the two main versions vied for leadership, a struggle that eventually resulted in decades of relative stability with one translation catering to adults and the other to youngsters. The latest batch of new versions, published in quick succession in 2008–2015, rejuvenated and greatly reshaped the field, providing higher-quality versions more in tune with the increasingly canonized status of the novel at home. The story of *Huckleberry Finn*'s progress in France has its fair share of underdogs, struggle, and dramatic tension with valuable translations such as Nétillard's and Michalski's being sidelined or ousted on terms that are not exclusively literary.

And yet the result is also one of overall improvement in the reception and understanding of *Huckleberry Finn* and Mark Twain in France. The latest translation peak is a watershed in the relationship between *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*. So far, *Tom Sawyer*'s comrade had to make do with his friend's greater fame, unabated for over a century.

French readers now have a range of options to choose from. They can browse Jaworski's less polyphonic yet more erudite and highbrow version. They can relish Hoepffner's more syntactically literal but lexically creative prose (especially when it comes to malapropisms). They can also have a greater taste of orality in Michalski's version through his more daring moves, although that translator can be more liberal with the original's syntactic structure.

Notes

¹ Mark Twain, *Les aventures de Huck Finn, l'ami de Tom Sawyer*, trans. William-Little Hughes (Paris: Henuyer, 1886).

² Two exceptions will be made: in the case of the very first translation mentioned above, the only one available for a long time, and Nétillard's 1948 version (*Les aventures de Huckleberry Finn*, translated by Suzanne Nétillard, Paris: Éditions Hier et Aujourd'hui, 1948), initially meant for adults and only later published for children.

³ These are the words and phrases used in the titles of the first wave of criticism on French translations of *Huckleberry Finn*. Lucile Garbagnati, "Une traduction

anesthésiante pour un texte subversif: Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), traduit par W.-L. Hughes, 1886,” in *Actes du Congrès de Poitiers, SAES* (Paris: Didier-Érudition 1984), 215–22; Judith Lavoie, “Traduire pour aseptiser, Huck Finn revu et corrigé par W.-L. Hugues,” *Babel* 48, no. 3 (2002): 193–216; and Claire Maniez, “Ruptures de contrat: les traductions françaises de *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*,” in *L’Incipit*, ed. Liliane Louvel (Poitiers: Publications de la Licorne, 1997), 91–103.

- ⁴ Not all remarks regarding O’Gorman were unfair though. As Claire Maniez astutely pointed out, regardless of outside constraints on the translation project, O’Gorman was not the best person to translate dialects and a teenager’s language. Born and raised in Ireland, he moved to France around 1857 when he was 35 and missed out on the experience that would have allowed him to acquire these kind of linguistic abilities (Claire Maniez, “Les traductions françaises de *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*: production et réception,” *Annales du monde anglophone* 7 (1998): 75 n12). O’Gorman also worked for the Ministry of the Interior while translating Dickens, Poe, and Twain. He was a collector of Shakespeare books from around the world.
- ⁵ Judith Lavoie, “Mark Twain vs. William-Little Hughes: The Transformation of a Great American Novel,” in *Translation: Reflections, Refractions, Transformations*, ed. P. C. Kar and Paul St-Pierre (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2007), 95–106.
- ⁶ Most noticeable is the removal of all references to the Bible and, to take just one example, the reference to Moses and the Bulrushers in Chapter One. The gruesome feud episode is also excised because of its sheer violence.
- ⁷ See Raphaele Berthele, “Translating African-American Vernacular English into German: The Problem of ‘Jim’ in Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn*,” *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 4, no. 4 (2000): 588–614; and B. J. Epstein, “Are There Blacks In Europe?: How African-American Characters Are (Or Are Not) Translated,” in *True North: Literary Translation in the Nordic Countries*, ed. B. J. Epstein (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 84–97.
- ⁸ Mark Twain, *Aventures de Huckleberry Finn*, trans. Philippe Jaworski, in *Mark Twain: Œuvres* (Paris: Gallimard, 2015).
- ⁹ Ronald Jenn, “From American Frontier to European Borders: Publishing French Translations of Mark Twain’s Novels *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn* (1884–1963),” *Book History* 9 (2006): 241–42.
- ¹⁰ Arthur Egon Kunst, “Twenty-four Versions of *Huckleberry Finn*: Studies in Translation” (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1961), 212.
- ¹¹ Mark Twain, *Les aventures de Huckleberry Finn*, trans. Suzanne Nétillard (Paris: Éditions Hier et Aujourd’hui, 1948). It is worth mentioning that the first new translation of

Huckleberry Finn in the twentieth century was an adaptation for children: *Les Aventures de Huckleberry Finn*, translated by Richard Walter; Mark Twain, *Les Aventures de Huckleberry Finn*, trans. Richard Walter, illus. Irma Anita Bébié (Geneva: Meyer & Cie, 1945).

- ¹² After *Huckleberry Finn* (1948), she went on to translate high-profile novels of British literature (Claire Maniez, “Les traductions françaises de *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*: production et réception,” *Annales du monde anglophone* 7 [1998]: 80 n30).
- ¹³ Judith Lavoie, *Mark Twain et la parole noire* (Montréal: Presses de l’Université de Montréal, 2002), 189; and Jean-Marc Gouanvic, “L’adaptation et la traduction: analyse sociologique comparée des *Aventures de Huckleberry Finn* de Mark Twain (1948–1960),” *Palimpsestes* 16 (2004): 162.
- ¹⁴ It is to be borne in mind that the *agrégation* national competitive exam that Suzanne Nétillard was successful in taking fostered, as an institution, a rather conservative view of language and style. This makes Nétillard’s efforts all the more remarkable. It is to be noted that *Huckleberry Finn* was on the syllabus of the *agrégation* in 1972 and again in 1997. Whether the latter inscription might have sowed seeds in the various translators’ minds is a matter of conjecture but all three were, at one point or another, involved in academic circles so that it is not at all unlikely that the need for a new translation became blatant when the novel was put in the spotlight of this national exam. *Agrégation* is known for giving exposure to the authors involved. This exposure outlives the short time span of the exam itself as the courses designed specifically for that occasion tend to be subsequently taught at the undergraduate level.
- ¹⁵ Besides *Huckleberry Finn*, he translated a number of other world literature classics.
- ¹⁶ The two versions left but little room for Lucienne Molitor’s translation published in 1963. The last major translation of that period, but also a latecomer, it was never republished. Mark Twain, *Les Aventures de Huckleberry Finn*, trans. Lucienne Molitor, in *Les aventures de Tom Sawyer et Huckleberry Finn* (Verviers: Gérard et Cie, 1963).
- ¹⁷ Mark Twain, *Autobiography of Mark Twain*, Vol. 1, ed. Harriet Elinor Smith (Berkeley: University of California Press, Mark Twain Project, 2010).
- ¹⁸ In the Gallimard *Mark Twain* volume, Thomas Constantinesco, a nineteenth-century American literature scholar, was in charge of *Tom Sawyer*; he is a currently a tenured professor of American literature at the English Department of Sorbonne, Paris. Mark Twain, *Tom Sawyer*, trans. Thomas Constantinesco, in *Mark Twain: Oeuvres* (Paris: Gallimard, 2015), 63–279.
- ¹⁹ Virginie Morard Charvet, “*The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* au pays de la retraduction—Enjeux et évolution” (Master’s thesis, University of Geneva, 2011), 17.

- ²⁰ Sabine Audrierie, “Mark Twain tel qu’on ne l’avait jamais lu,” *La Croix*, October 1, 2008, <http://www.la-croix.com/Culture-Loisirs/Culture/Livres/Mark-Twain-tel-qu-on-ne-l-avait-jamais-lu-NG-2008-10-01-678338>. Translation ours.
- ²¹ Hoepffner went on to translate a collection of Twain essays and articles entitled *La Prodigieuse procession et autres charges* (2011) and *The Mysterious Stranger* as *N° 44, Le mystérieux étranger* (2014); Mark Twain, *La Prodigieuse procession et autres charges*, trans. Bernard Hoepffner (Marseille: Agone, 2011) and Mark Twain, *N° 44, Le mystérieux étranger*, trans. Bernard Hoepffner (Tristram: Auch, 2011).
- ²² Grégoire Leménager, “C’est Mark Twain qu’il ressuscite,” interview with Bernard Hoepffner, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, Sept. 18, 2008, <https://bibliobs.nouvelobs.com/romans/20080918.BIB2032/c-est-mark-twain-qu-il-ressuscite.html>.
- ²³ There is a bitter claim on the part of Michalski’s publisher that Michalski started translating first. Indeed, *L’Œil d’or*’s plan to publish several retranslations of Twain’s works, including *Huckleberry Finn*, started as early as 2002. In a series of interviews filmed by Henri Colomer, Hoepffner explained that from the moment he became a translator, he always had the desire to retranslate *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*. Only in 2005–2006 did he seriously contemplate doing it. He approached publishing house Actes Sud, who turned down his offer. Then at a literary event in La Baule, he met Sylvie Martigny and Jean-Hubert Gailliot during the summer of 2006. They welcomed the idea, which allowed Hoepffner to start sometime later.
- ²⁴ Mark Twain, *Mississippi Writings (1876–1894)* (New York: Library of America, 1982).
- ²⁵ Véronique Channaut, “The Voice of the Other in Retranslation: Case Study—Michalski’s and Jaworski’s Retranslations of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*” (Master’s thesis, Université Toulouse Jean Jaurès, 2019), 110.
- ²⁶ Channaut, “The Voice of the Other in Retranslation,” 16.
- ²⁷ Among many other examples, the very formal “chère” for “grub” (Channaut 2019, 22).
- ²⁸ Shelley Fisher Fishkin, “Transnational Mark Twain.” In *American Studies as Transnational Practice: Turning toward the Transpacific*, ed. Yuan Shu and Donald E. Pease (Hanover, IL: Dartmouth College Press, 2015), 120.
- ²⁹ Channaut, “The Voice of the Other in Retranslation,” 81. At the end of the day, Jim’s character becomes a vivid illustration of the “Sambo” myth while his relationship with Huck and Tom appears as one of utter dependence and childlike attachment (Channaut, “The Voice of the Other in Retranslation,” 81).
- ³⁰ David Carkeet, “The Dialects in *Huckleberry Finn*,” *American Literature* 51, no. 3 (1979): 317.

- ³¹ Channaut, “The Voice of the Other in Retranslation,” 67.
- ³² More standard French would have: “Vous êtes qui vous autres ? Que le cric me croque si je [n’] ai pas entendu quelque chose.”
- ³³ More standard French would have: “Monsieur Tom, je suis d’accord pour essayer presque tout ce qui [n’]est pas déraisonnable.”
- ³⁴ More standard French would have: “Monsieur Tom, je suis d’accord pour me lancer dans presque tout ce qui [n’]est pas déraisonnable.” “trésionnable,” a portmanteau word blending “très” (very) and “raisonnable” (reasonable), seems to be an odd choice, all the more difficult to construe as Hoepffner is actually having Jim say the contrary of the original. Yet it is a reminder that Hoepffner used lexical creation a lot in his version. Here is a short list of malapropisms used by Twain and kept by Hoepffner while the other translators tended to normalize them: “funeral orgies / *orgies funèbres*; preforeordination / *préordination*; majestifying / *majestiser*; pranced them out of town / *les a cabriolés hors du village*; yellocution / *locuté*; missionarying / *missionnarisation*; mesmerizing / *mesmérisation*; juley / *jouaillerie*; miserableness / *désespération*; the doxolojer / *la doxologique* (adjective used as a noun); glidingest / *cataminieux*; skreeky and colicky / *grinchineux et coliqueux*; will suspicion / *vont suspicionner*.”
- ³⁵ Translations back into English:

Passage 1

(Michalski) Who are you all? Let the Bigfoot bite if I didn’t hear something.

(Hoepffner) Hey—who are you? Where are you? I’ll be turned into a cat if I didn’t hear something.

(Jaworski) Hoy! Who’s there? Where is it that you are? I’m dead sure I heard something.

Passage 2

(Michalski) Mister Tom, I’m totally ready to go along with almost anything that’s not unreasonable.

(Hoepffner) Mister Tom, I’m totally ready for whatever is untreasonable [sic].

(Jaworski) I’m ready to do anything that’s not too zany Master Tom.

Passage 3

(Michalski) And when I woke up to find you here, safe and sound, alive and kicking, my tears they came up to my eyes [...] And you, all you had in mind was how you could

spin poor old Jim around with you yarns. All of this right here is nothing but a bunch o' lies.

(Hoepffner) And when I wake up and you're back, in one piece, tears come [...] And all you told yourself was as to how you were going to ridicule poor old Jim with a lie. This refuse is trash.

(Jaworski) And when I woke up and I found you safe and sound, it jerked tears from me [...] And all you had in mind, you Sir, was to make fun of poor old Jim by telling a lie. All that you see right here is trash.

³⁶ Channaut, "The Voice of the Other in Retranslation," 75.

³⁷ Channaut, "The Voice of the Other in Retranslation," 110.

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