



The Boy in His Winter

A novel by Norman Lock

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“Make[s] Huck and Jim so real you expect to get messages from them on your iPhone.”

—**Scott Simon, NPR *Weekend Edition***

“Brilliant . . . this novel shimmers with glorious language, fluid rhythms, and complex insights. . . . *The Boy in His Winter* is a glorious meditation on justice, truth, loyalty, story, and the alchemical effects of love, a reminder of our capacity to be changed by the continuously evolving world ‘when it strikes fire against the mind’s flint,’ and by profoundly moving novels like this.” —**Jane Ciabattari, NPR**

“Boldly reimagines Huck Finn. . . . Striking and original. . . . The premise may be an outlandish brain-twister that takes risks with a sacred American myth, but the vessel stays afloat by virtue of [Lock’s] wily ingenuity.” —**Atlanta Journal-Constitution**

INTRODUCTION

Launched into existence by Mark Twain, Huck Finn and Jim have now been transported by Norman Lock through three vital, violent, and transformative centuries of American history. As time unfurls on the river’s banks, they witness decisive battles of the Civil War, the betrayal of Reconstruction’s promises to the freed slaves, the crushing of Native American nations, and the electrification of a continent. Huck, who finally comes of age when he’s washed up on shore during Hurricane Katrina, narrates the story as an older and wiser man in 2077, revealing our nation’s past, present, and future as Mark Twain could never have dreamed it.

The Boy in His Winter is a tour-de-force work of imagination, beauty, and courage that re-envision a great American literary classic for our time.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

1. Consider how this story’s two protagonists, Huck Finn and Jim, metamorphose from Mark Twain’s original characters in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. What might the author be suggesting about the stability of human personality—or, indeed, of the world itself?
2. One can think of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* as a myth of American naiveté—an idyll of our nation’s childhood, ironically exposed. How is mythmaking related to actual transformation? Discuss the significance of Huck’s seeing himself depicted—as he appears in Twain’s novel—on a billboard advertising a lounge chair.
3. In *King Lear*, the brothers Edgar and Edmund are swayed, each in his own way, by the play’s tragic currents. They reappear, significantly altered, in *The Boy in His Winter* as comic—even farcical—characters. How is their transformation from *King Lear* to *The Boy in His Winter* consistent with the novel’s overall handling of the theme of metamorphosis? In what way does Huck, in his winter, resemble Lear in his?
4. In the novel’s most startling metamorphosis, Jim becomes James and, finally, Jameson. Discuss these changes and what the author might have meant us to understand by them. Huck also tries to become someone else, adopting the identity of a dead man, whose grave he happens upon accidentally. Does he succeed or fail? What do such personal transformations suggest about the nature of human identity within the sweep of time?
5. How does the chapter devoted to the death of Tom Sawyer function in terms of the novel’s overall meaning? What about the death of Jim?



6. Jim touches a dead cow floating in the river beside the raft in hopes of bringing it to life. Can you recall any other attempts at resurrection? Were they successful? How are they significant to the novel and its message?
7. While the novel's themes are serious, *The Boy in His Winter* is, in some ways, a comic novel. Did you find it so? Can you recall any humorous incidents or passages that lightened the reading experience?
8. The penultimate sentence of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is "I reckon I got to light out for the Territory. . . ." In what way is the plot or action of *The Boy in His Winter* a response to Huck's declaration? What might Twain have thought of Lock's twenty-first-century idea of the Territory?
9. As this novel progresses, Huck must surrender his dream of adventure in Mexico to the actuality of living in Los Angeles's Little Mexico, just as Jim's dream of finding freedom yields to the brutal reality of Jim Crow. Navigation by starlight is superseded by GPS, just as the experience of listening to music in performance shrinks to the dimensions of an iPod. Travel becomes virtual tourism. Great fish such as marlin become smaller fish, doomed to extinction. Finally, at the end of this novel, nineteenth-century Hannibal's mudflats and wharves have become the Hannibal Riverside Amusement Park, and all that is left of the riverboats of Mark Twain's youth is a tin-pot amusement ride. In the book's final irony, Huck becomes Twain himself and spends his last years pretending to be his creator. What does this convey about progress? Is the author's view of the world similar or dissimilar to Twain's? Do you agree or disagree with that view?
10. *The Boy in His Winter* is the first in Lock's The American Novels series. Through writing these books, Lock has said, "I hope to understand, a little, the present American era by what came before and shaped its thought, beliefs, prejudices, virtues, vices, and emotional undertow." In your opinion, does this novel shed greater light on the past or the present? Is there any hope to be found in Lock's vision of the future?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Norman Lock is the author of, most recently, the short story collection *Love Among the Particles* and six books in The American Novels series, a major literary project that exquisitely subverts traditional boundaries between history and imagination, and fiction and nonfiction, to illuminate humanity's glorious and monstrous legacy. Although each novel stands alone, Lock weaves subtle connections between each book, paying homage to major American literary figures and genres: first with Mark Twain and the coming-of-age story in *The Boy in His Winter*; then with Walt Whitman and the Western in *American Meteor*; Edgar Allan Poe and the gothic psychological thriller in *The Port-Wine Stain*; Henry David Thoreau and other transcendentalists in a marriage of slave narrative and pastoral drama in *A Fugitive in Walden Woods*; Emily Dickinson in a lyrical lament of love and innocence lost in *The Wreckage of Eden*; and Herman Melville in a dark tale of ambition and the secrets of the heart in *Feast Day of the Cannibals*. Lock lives in Aberdeen, New Jersey, where he is at work on the next books in The American Novels series. Visit his website at www.normanlock.com.

GO BEHIND THE SCENES

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