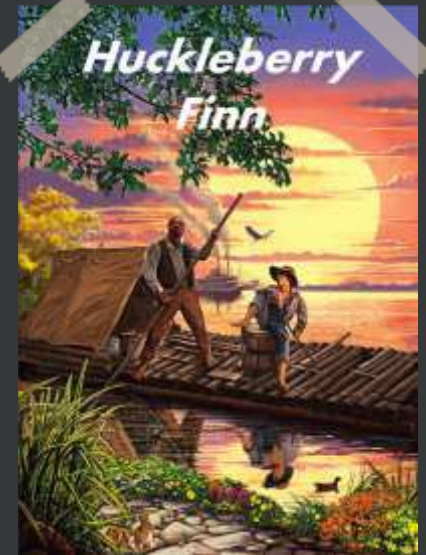




Great Novels

By DK Books



**The World's Most Remarkable Fiction
Explored and Explained**

Anna Karenina

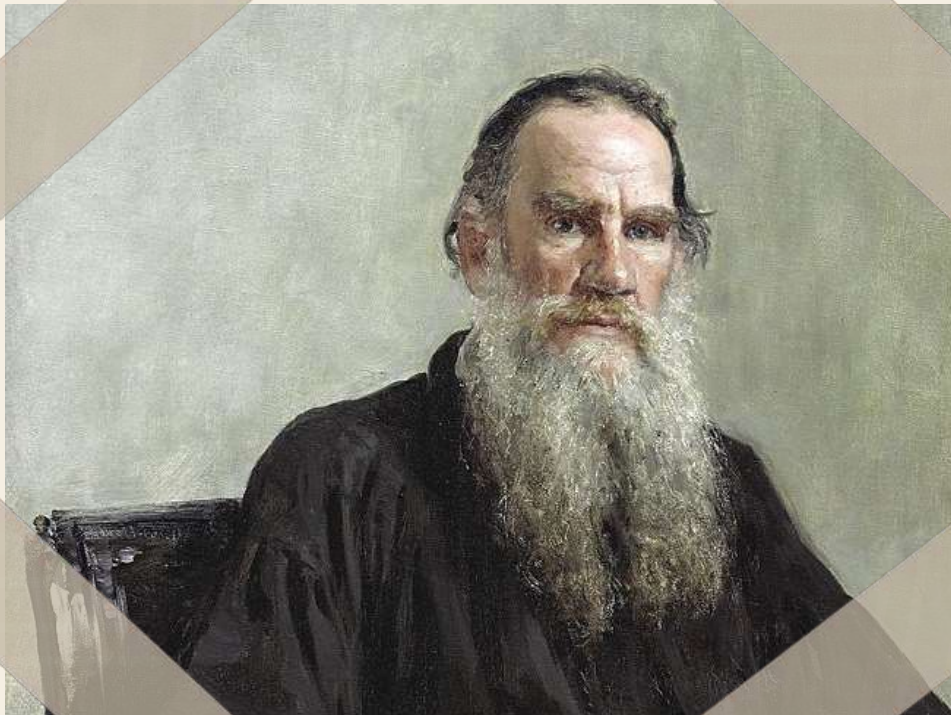
1878 – Russia





Leo Tolstoy

(1828 - 1910)



When the Nobel Prize-winning American novelist William Faulkner was once asked what he considered to be the greatest novel ever written, he unhesitatingly replied, “Anna Karenina”.

He has never been alone in that judgement – even though its author, Leo Tolstoy, once repudiated his masterpiece, along with its predecessor, War and Peace. However, in the early 1970s, before he renounced his earlier habits and achievements to embrace radical religious abstinence instead, Tolstoy with a novel about a “social woman”, whose infidelity and resulting fall from grace would be viewed sympathetically and not judgementally.



Around the same time, he heard that a despairing woman, jilted by her lover, had thrown herself beneath a moving train at the station near Tolstoy's country estate, Yasnaya Polyana, 322km (200 miles) south of Moscow. The fusion of these two themes would eventually grow into Anna Kerenina.

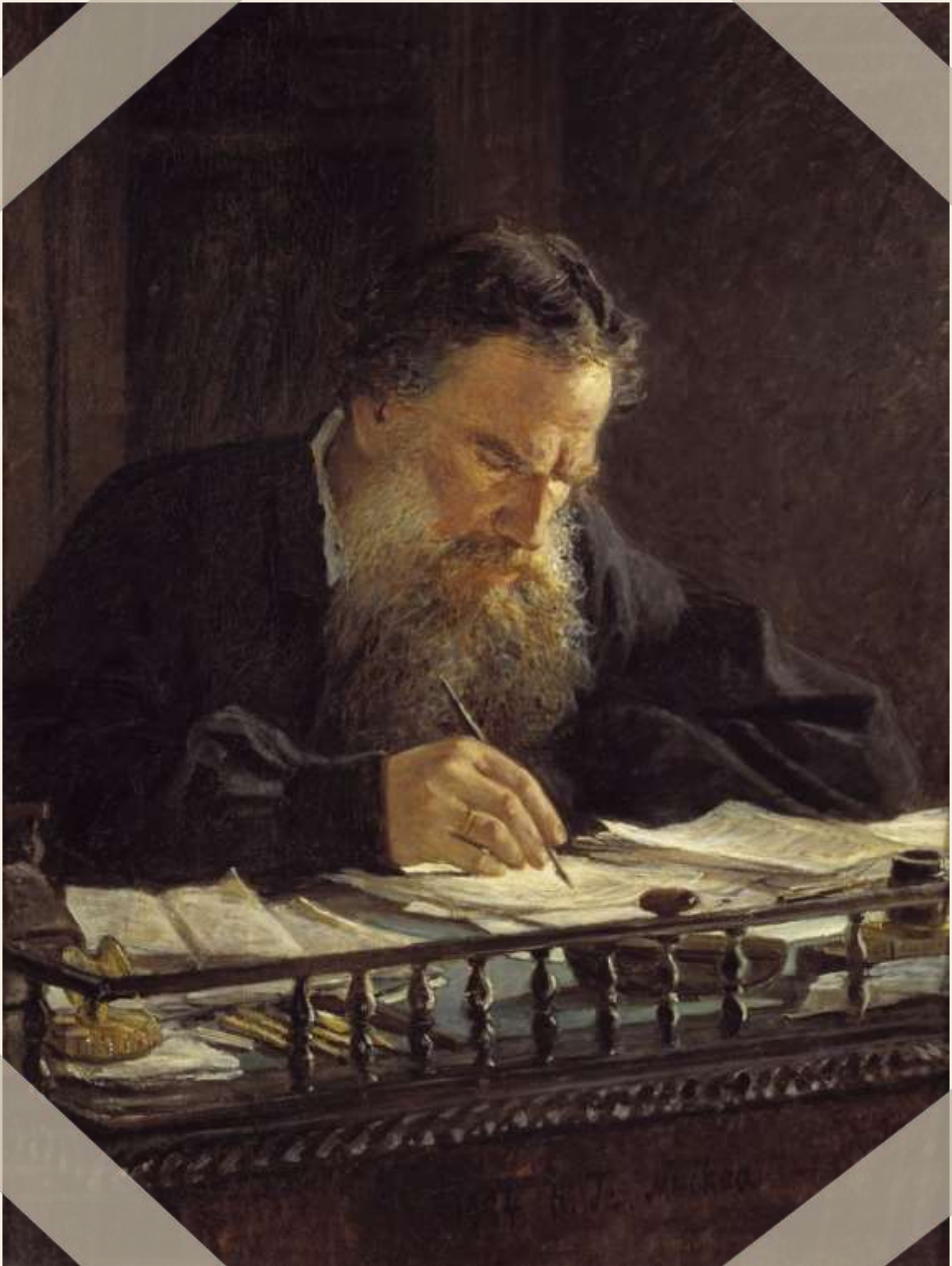
The new novel was not set in the past, as War and Peace had been, but in the contemporary world of the Russian aristocracy in the years 1873-78 – a world that Tolstoy knew well. The nobility was larger in Russia than in most other European countries, and since every child was larger in Russia than in most other European countries, and since every child of a count or prince inherited a title, the nobility was overflowing with princes and princesses, counts and countesses.



It was a world of palaces and balls, of boxes at the opera and horse races – and of country estates near Moscow and St Petersburg, where people went for the summer. This is the backdrop against which the intertwining stories of Anna Karenina's eight books and multiple chapters take place.

The narrative is delivered with Tolstoy's Olympian-like omniscience, which also allows the novelist to probe deep into the human heart. The overall theme is similarly grand in scale – nothing less than the quest for a happy marriage and for what constitutes a meaningful life.





Portrait of Leo Tolstoy at Work



**Portrait of Anna Karenina By
Steve Chappell**

Kitty and Levin



Anna and Vronsky are not the only couple that Tolstoy creates so memorably in this novel. They are always being compared to Kitty and Levin, shown here in the early pages, skating together in Moscow. Tolstoy loved to skate, finding it the perfect metaphor for a graceful relationship between a man and a woman; not without its risks, but at its best, approaching balletic perfection.

“Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.”



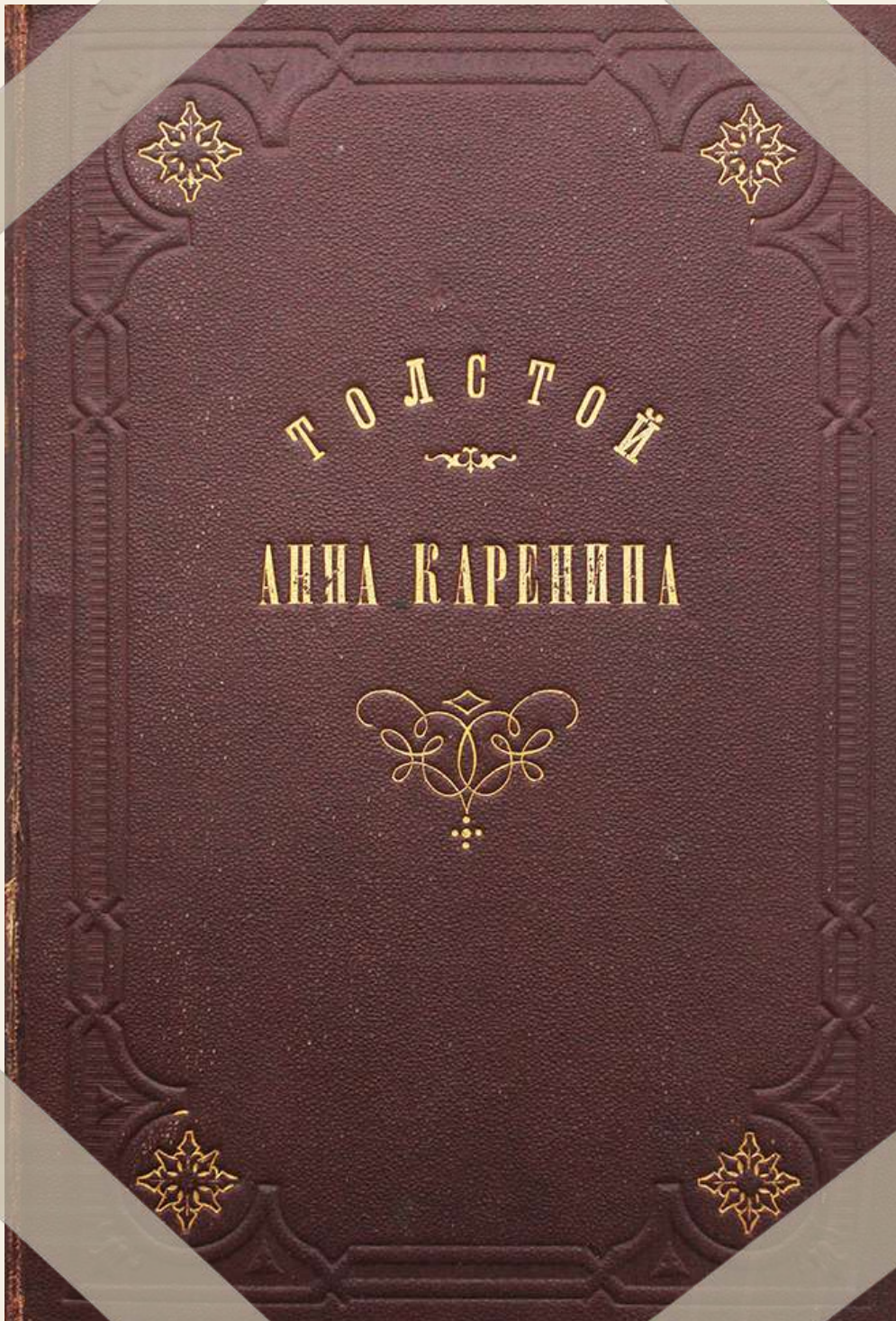
Kitty and Levin

First Edition



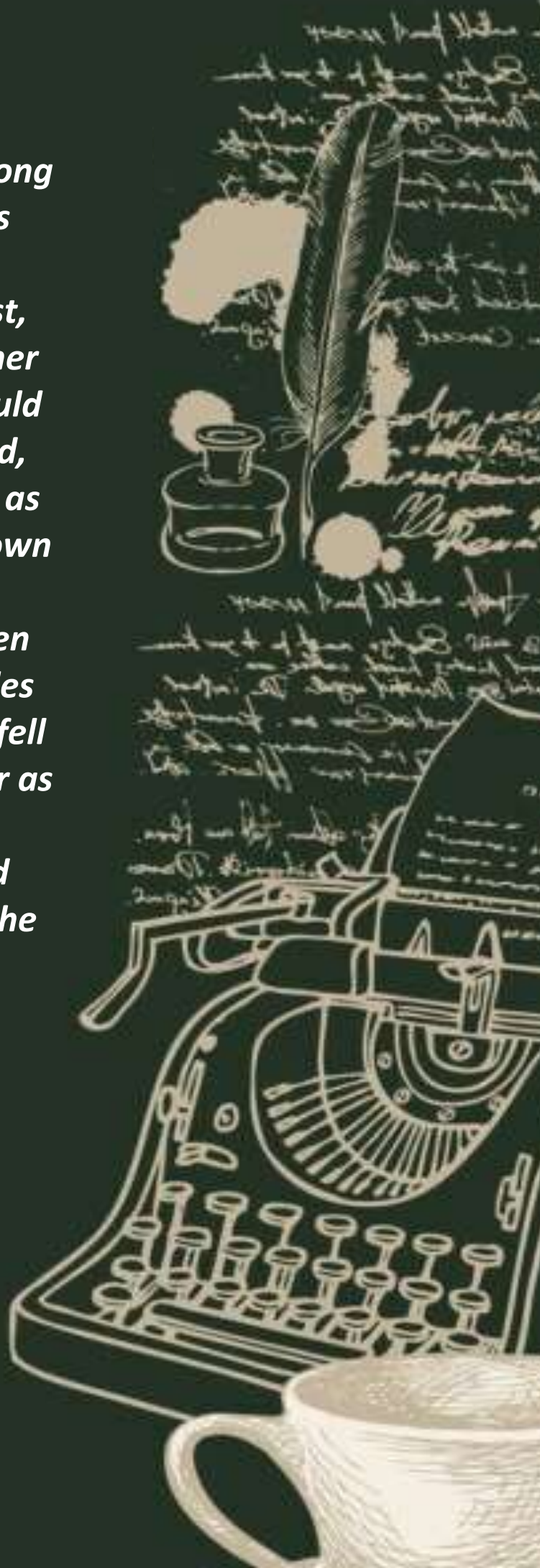
Like most Russian novel at this time, Anna Karenina first appeared in instalments. It was written between 1875 and 1877, and was first published in book form in early 1878.

It was so enthusiastically received that one St Petersburg bookshop sold 500 copies of it in a single day.

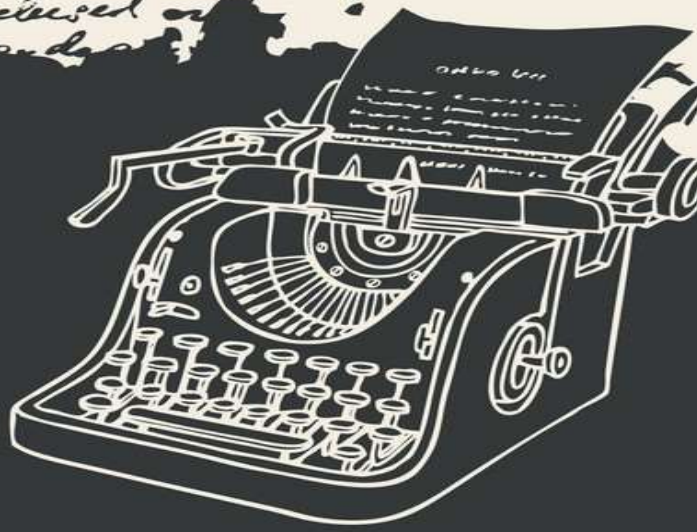


Anna Karenina First Edition

“Two maids who were walking along the platform turned their heads round to look at her ... The stationmaster, as he walked past, asked her if she was continuing her journey. The boy selling kvass could not take his eyes of her. ‘Oh, God, where should I go?’ she thought, as she walked further and further down the platform. At the end she stopped. Some ladies and children meeting a gentleman in spectacles and laughing and talking loudly, fell silent and turned their eyes on her as she came level with them. She quickened her pace and walked away from them to the edge of the platform. A goods train was approaching ... ”



Reform in Russia



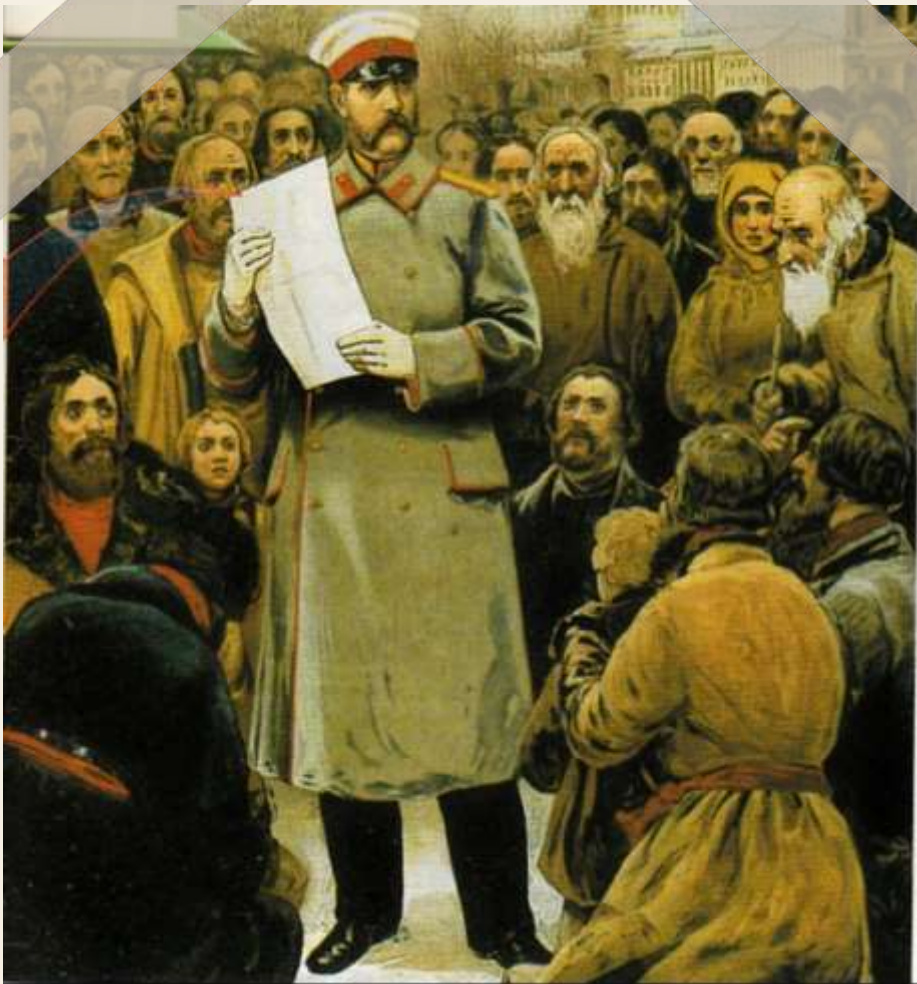
The Oblonskys were not the only family thrown into confusion in Russia during the 1860s and '70s. alexander II became Tsar in 1856, and instituted a series of long-overdue political reforms.

He famously freed the serfs, but also eased the once-stifling censorship, which led to the founding of new journals, museums and cultural institutions. The 1860s became a golden age for Russian literature.

It was the decade when Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* (1862), Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (1866) and Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (1865-69) were all published. Alexander II also promoted industrialization and an extensive national railway system soon crossed the entire land.

Inevitably, tensions arose between supporters of the old ways and the new. Radicals opposed reactionaries, free-thinkers spurned the church and the “woman question” challenged the old patriarchal system. All this ferment is mirrored in Anna Karenina.





Tsar Alexander II is shown here, reading the Emancipation of the Serfs Act in 1861. This freed a third of the Russian population

Two Story Lines



Two story lines intertwine through the book and meet in a third one. The first is the story of the beautiful, charming and warm-hearted Anna Arkadyevna Karenina, married too young to the much older Count Alexei Alexandrovich Kaernin. Now in her late twenties, she has a son and she is trapped in a loveless union. Hungry for love and admiration, she is excited by the attentions of an infatuated young cavalry officer, Count Alexei Kirillovich Vronsky.

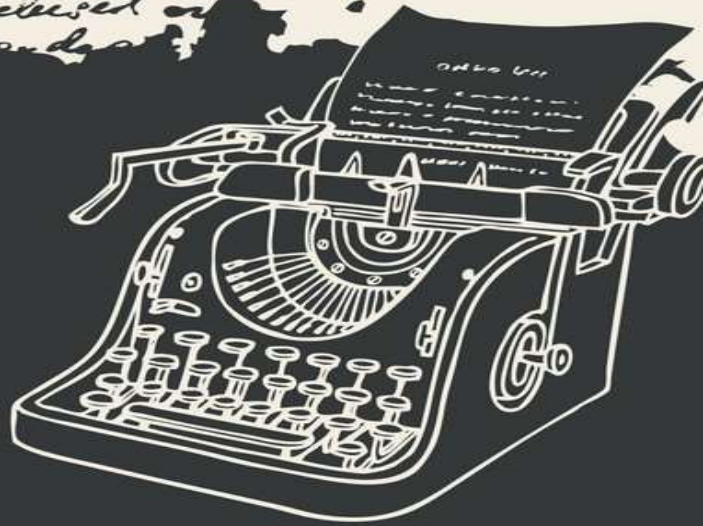
Though she initially resists him, Anna eventually enters into a passionate affair. However, the impossible relationship will lead to tragedy for her.

The second story line followed the courtship and marriage of Konstantin “Kotsya” Dmitrich Levin and Princess Katerina “Kitty” Alexandrovna Scherbaysky. Their union, set mostly in a lyrically described Russian countryside, is not perfect, but is perhaps as warm and abiding as fallible human beings can hope for.

These two story lines connect through the tale of the flawed marriage between Anna’s brother, Prince Stephan and “Stiva” Arkadyevich Oblonksy – an affectionate but unfaithful husband – and Kitty’s sister, Princess Darya “Dolly” Alexandrovna Oblonsky.



The Quest for a Meaningful Life



And the quest for what constitutes a meaningful life? It, too, is largely played out in the countryside, where the philosophical Levin struggles with bouts of existential despair – a battle that mirrored Tolstoy’s own doubts when writing the novel. This quest concludes on a resigned but affirmative note – one that ends the book.

The focus on contrasting marriages, the Karenin’s failed one and the Levins’ happy one, lay behind one of Tolstoy’s early titles for the novel, *Two Marriages*, but he realised that Anna’s was the heart of story. Indeed, the reader remembers Anna as Vronsky recalls his first sight of her: beautiful, alluring and loving. It is a memory that lingers long after her suffering has ended.

In Context – Russian Orthodox Church



Moscow's St Basil's Cathedral typifies the splendour of the Russian Orthodox Church, which in the 1870s still wielded jurisdiction over any case of divorce in the land. Divorce was not illegal, but it was difficult to obtain without stigma. This is why Anna's husband will not grant her wish for a divorce, although she is anxious to procure one.



St Basil's Cathedral. Moscow

St Petersburg to Moscow Express



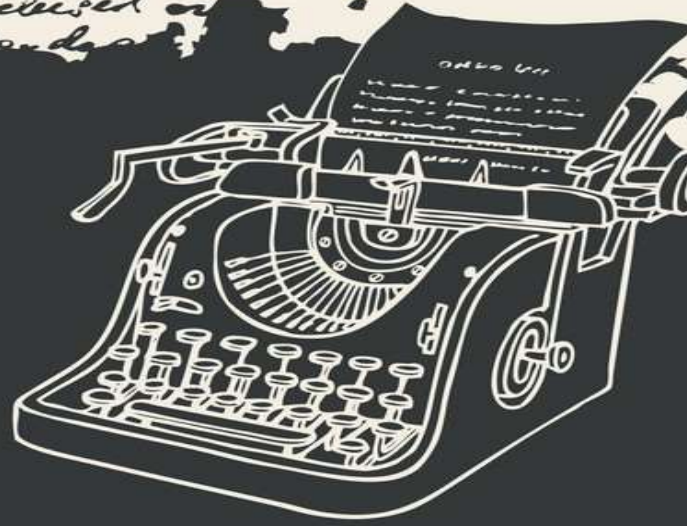
Throughout the novel, many characters shuttle between Moscow and the Russian capital, St Petersburg, on the country's new railway system.

Tolstoy, however, detested trains and in *Anna Karenina*, trains and railway stations are associated with runaway passion, adultery, and death. Ironically, in 1910, Tolstoy himself died in a railway station.



St Petersburg to Moscow Express

Letter from Tolstoy to N.N. Strakhov



Three years after first considering a story about a society woman, Tolstoy discovered a story fragment beginning with “The guests were gathering at the dacha”, in a volume of Pushkin, Russia’s most beloved writer. As he told his friend, N.N. Strakhov, in a letter dated 25 March 1873, Tolstoy promptly sat down and outlined the novel that became Anna Kareninan.

Альфонс, издатель. Неподобно, но я пишу
иногда и по-французски.
Меня поразило слово в
вашем и. Это значит
какая-то ошибка в
вашем, французском, языке.
Мне кажется, что вы
не совсем уверены в
вашем, но и потому
не можете быть уверены
в том, что вы не ошибаетесь.
Ваше письмо мне понравилось,
и мне кажется, что вы
очень хорошо знаете
французский язык.

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в том, что вы не ошибаетесь.

A. Толстой,

2 июля 1913

Letter from Tolstoy to N.N. Strakhov

“Involuntarily, unexpectedly, without knowing myself why or what would come of it, I thought up characters and events, began to continue it, then, of course, altered it, and suddenly it came together so neatly and nicely that there emerged a novel, which I have today finished in rough, a very lively, ardent and finished novel, with which I am very pleased and which will be ready, if God grants me health, in two weeks.”





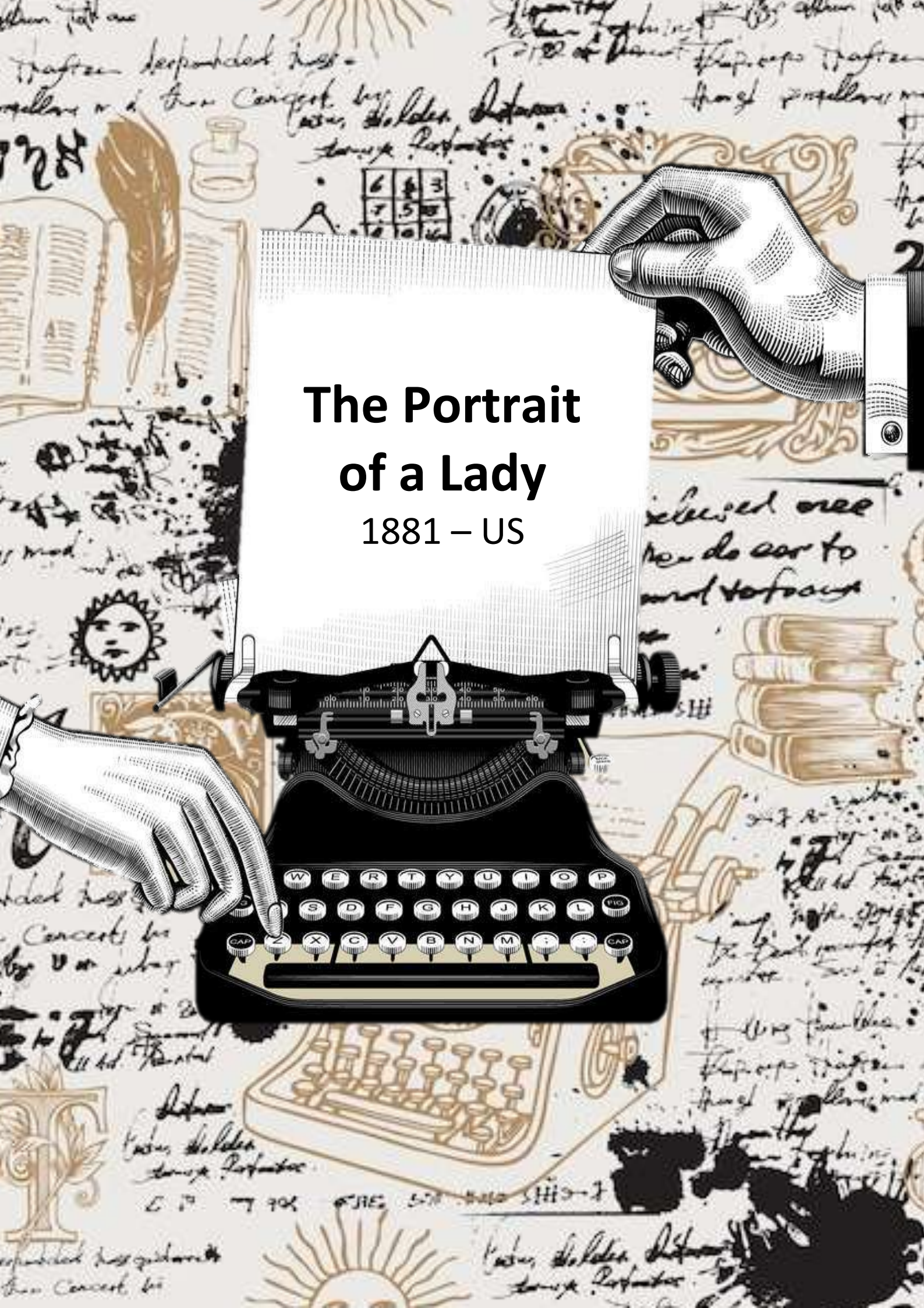
War and Peace

Leo Tolstoy's first big success, the massive *War and Peace*, first published in its entirety in 1869, made him Russia's most famous (and best paid) author, and the book is still regarded by many as the most sweeping historical novel ever to have been written. Set against the backdrop of the Napoleonic Wars, with vivid descriptions of the battles of Austerlitz and Borodino, *War and Peace* dramatizes the impact of the war on four aristocratic Russian families over a period of eight years.

Featuring a cast of thousands and told from a truly Olympian viewpoint, the principal characters are the sparkling Natasha, the philosophic Pierre and the brave but doomed Prince Andrei. The book's climax is Napoleon's 1812 invasion of Russia, the burning of Moscow and the French army's ill-fated retreat. The story is interleaved with Tolstoy's succinct reflections on the nature of history. It is a titanic reading experience.

The Portrait of a Lady

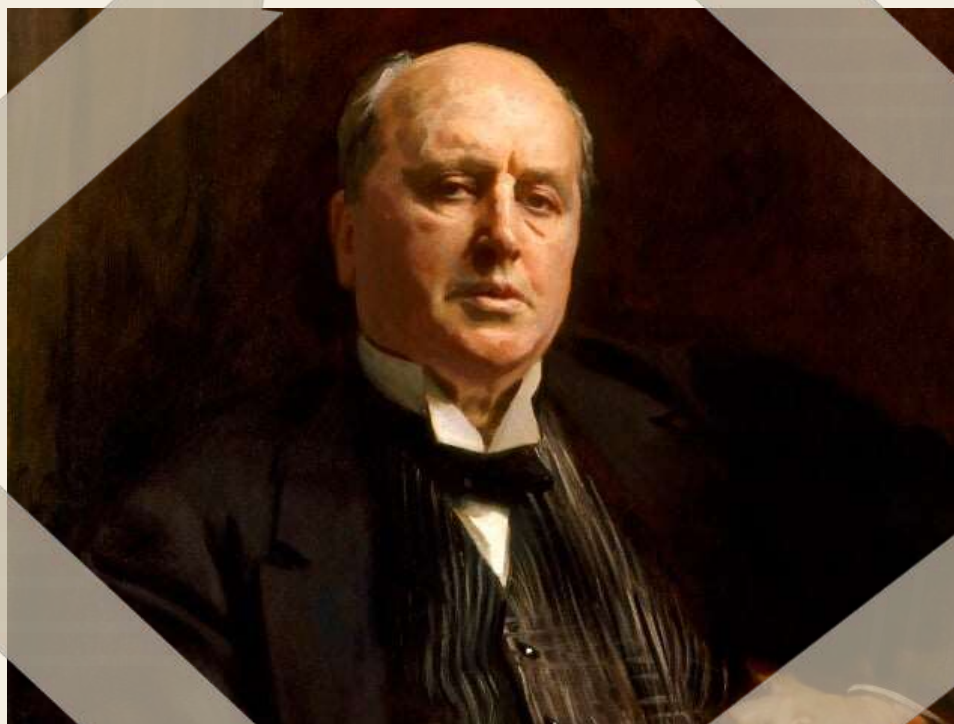
1881 – US





Henry James

(1842 - 1916)



The Portrait of a Lady was a pivotal work in the career of the American novelist Henry James. When he started to write it, James was a popular author of novels and stories about expatriate Americans in Europe.

The Portrait took his writing to new levels of subtlety and depth, both in terms of his descriptive language and his understanding of human consciousness and perception.

The book is about Isabel Archer, a wealthy young American woman who begins the story full of hope and independence of spirit, only to have her ambition and optimism crushed by the stifling values that she encounters abroad. She rejects two suitors, Lord Warburton and Caspar Goodwood, but accepts the proposal of Gilbert Osmond.



However, this relationship turns out to be a disaster for her, mainly due to the scheming of Osmond himself, but also due to that of Madame Merle, whose machinations lie at the heart of the tale.

These relationships and Isabel's friendships with her sickly cousin, Ralph Touchett, for whom she feels great tenderness and Madame Merle's daughter, Pansy, are meticulously described. James' skilful use of point of view helps the reader to penetrate his character's thoughts and emotions, and this is perhaps the most important aspect of the book.

His analysis of Isabel's character and the values of the people around her also give him the chance to question social norms, notably the roles of women.



By setting the book in Europe, particularly in England and Italy, James highlights the privileged social standing of these Americans, who have enough money and free time to enjoy extended periods abroad. He also shows, however, that money does not help Isabel to escape the suffocating society in which she finds herself.

She inherits a fortune, but instead of giving her freedom, it simply makes her life more complicated.

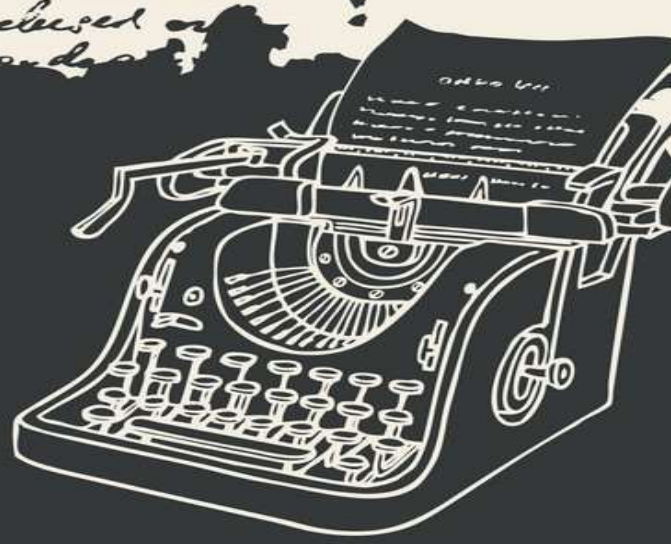
Henry James shows that being able to understand people's characters and motivations is far more important than gaining wealth or social status – and the insights that he provides the reader to do just that.





**Portrait of Isabel Archer By
Maud Taber-Thomas**

In Context – Americans Abroad



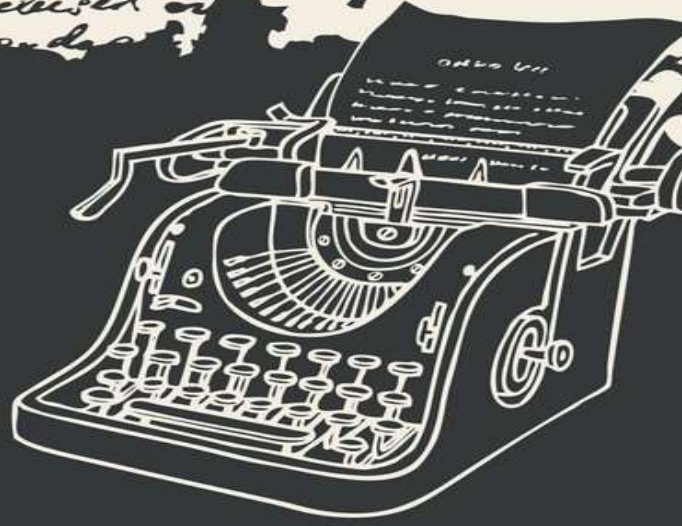
Several of Henry James' early novels, such as *The Europeans* and *Roderick Hudson*, are set in Italy, and James himself spent extended periods in France, Italy and England. *The Portrait of a Lady* is set mainly in Rome, and James lived in Florence and Venice while writing it.

The European setting of the novel gave James the opportunity to place his characters in a self-contained community far away from their families and the society to which they were accustomed. They establish new social networks, but these have shallow foundations.

*“What shall we call out ‘self’?
Where does it begin? Where does it
end? It overflows into everything
that belongs to us – and then it
flows back again. I know a large
part of myself is in the clothes I
choose to wear. I’ve a great respect
for things! One’s self – for other
people – is one’s expression of
one’s self; and one’s house, one’s
furniture, one’s garments, the
books one reads, the company one
keeps – these things are all
expensive.”*



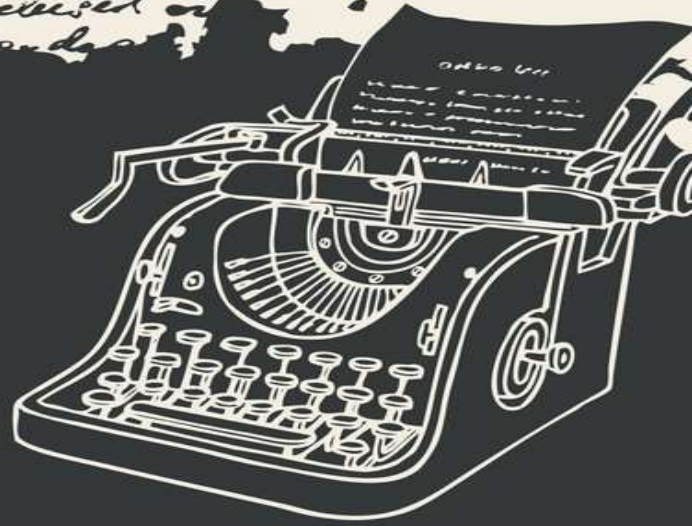
First Edition



First appeared in instalments in 1880-91 in *The Atlantic Monthly* and *Macmillan's Magazine*, before this first book edition came out in 1881. It was published in the US by Houghton, Mifflin and Company, and a UK edition soon followed, published by Macmillan. The US cover was very much of its time, featuring dark green cloth, golden ornamentation, floral and leaf motifs and decorative typography.

“You wish a while ago to see my idea of an interesting woman. There it is!”

Point of View



The Portrait of a Lady is narrated in the third person and the narrator's tone sometimes suggests an emotional distance from his characters. However, the novel is also often narrated from Isabel's point of view, shaped by her feelings and beliefs.

The reader gains a particularly close and compelling insight into Isabel's mind two-thirds of the way through the book, in Chapter 42, when she spends all night pondering the state of her life and relationships. James was a pioneer of intense focus on a character's point of view and this style of writing was to have a huge influence on writers throughout the 20th century.



Nicole Kidman as Isabel Archer in the film *The Portrait of a Lady* (1996)

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

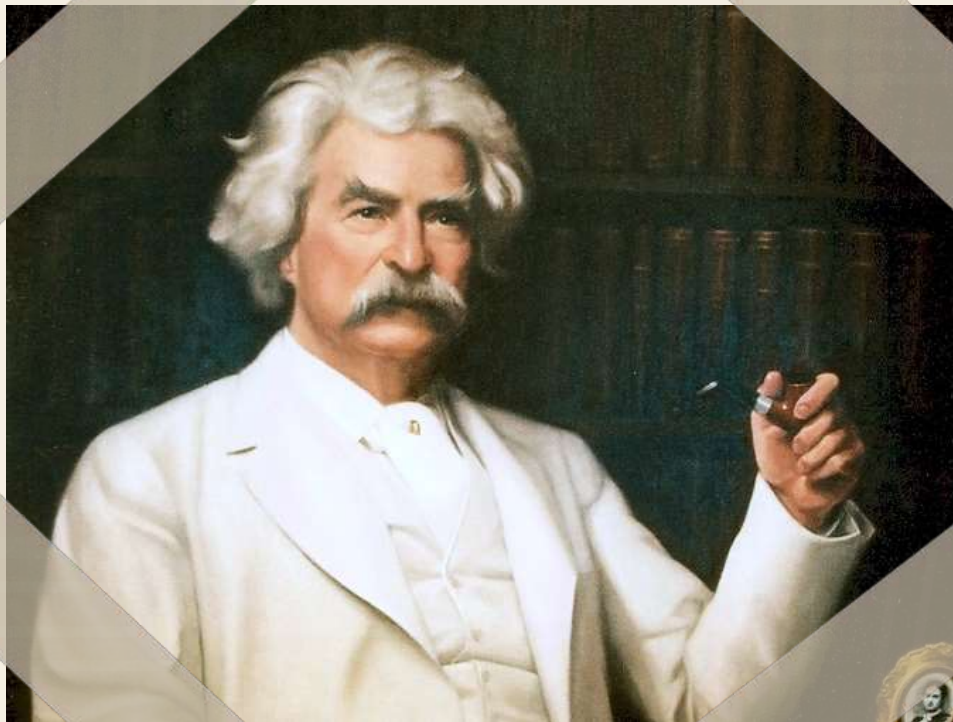
1884 – US





Mark Twain

(1835 - 1910)



Mark Twain's novel of the Mississippi River tells the story of a boy, aged 13 or 14, and his adventures with a fugitive from slavery named Jim. Huck Finn had played a minor role in Twain's earlier work *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876), but in this book, he narrates his experiences in his own, unique voice.

Speaking directly to the reader in a colloquial, everyday language full of humour and youthful insights, Huck guides us through his frustrations with domesticated life and schooling in a small Missouri township in the 1830s. He is wary about the return of his abusive and drunken father, and decides to escape by journeying down the Mississippi on a raft.

On the way, he meets Jim, a local African American who has fled slavery because he fears that he will be sold further south.



As the pair move down the Mississippi, Huck's narration captures the tranquil aspects of the journey, including the discussions he has with Jim on the nature of language, society, family and morality.

Occasionally they touch shore and become entangled in small-town escapades, such as a feud between two men, the drunken Boggs and Colonel Sherburn.

These exchanges introduce us to a diverse cast of characters, and facets of Mississippi culture that Twain experienced as a child.

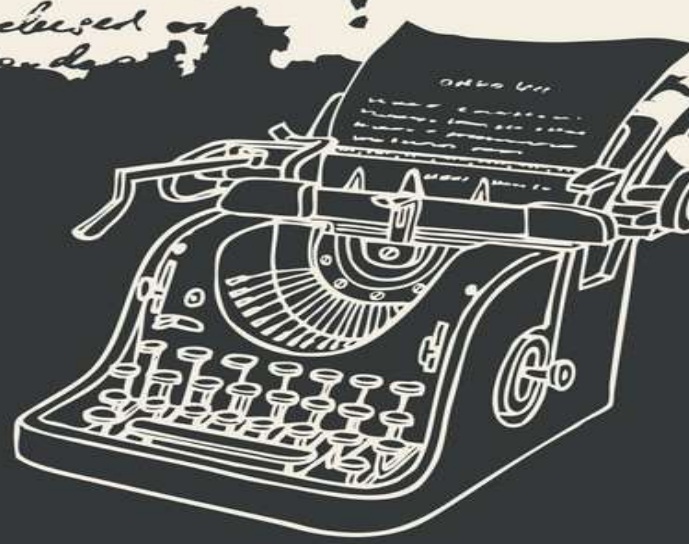
These enable Twain to examine the political, social, economic and cultural world of the American South in the early 19th century.



At first, Huck fear that he will go to hell for helping Jim to escape from slavery, but he finally decides to embrace damnation rather than betray his friend. Twain later explained that Adventures of Huckleberry Finn was a novel in which “a sound heart and a deformed conscience come into collision and conscience suffers defeat.”



First Edition



Huckleberry Finn was a controversial book when it was first published in 1994, and remains so today. Many early commentators attacked its earthly humour and everyday language, regarding it as improper for young readers; more recently, critics have pointed out that Twain's characterization of Jim draws on harmful racial stereotypes.

However, its publication has also been celebrated as a watershed moment in American literature. Ernest Hemingway later wrote that "All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called Huckleberry Finn."

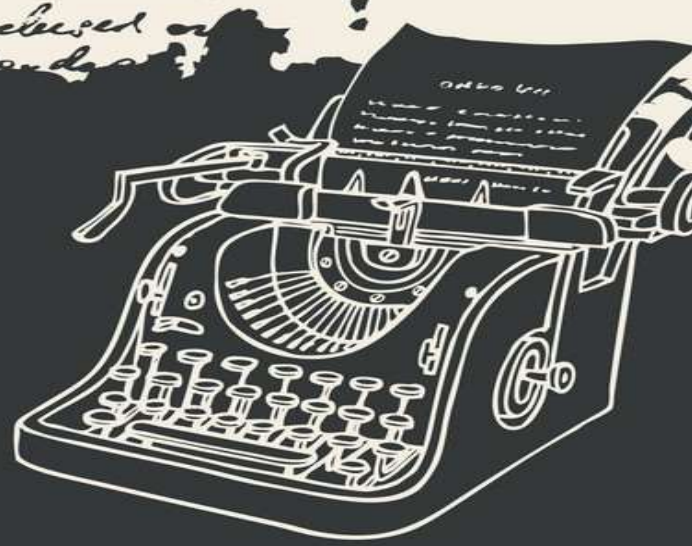
Twain's Other Works



Although best known for writing children's books, including *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and *The Prince and The Pauper* (1881), Mark Twain was also an influential journalist and essayist. His travel books, such as *A Tramp Abroad* (1880), gave him a reputation as an American traveller with a flair for irony.

He also explored inequalities in American society and politics, in works such as *The Gilded Age* (1873) and *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894), and later wrote anti-imperialist articles denouncing the US takeover of Cuba and the Philippines after the Spanish-American War of 1898.

Life on the Mississippi



The young Samuel Clemens (later known as Mark Twain) worked as a steamboat pilot on the Mississippi, taking his pen name from a phrase used by captains when measuring the depth of the water. In *Life on the Mississippi* (1883), he looked back with great affection on the characters and culture of the river, linking this experience to his own destiny as a storyteller.

Deception and lying about identity are persistent themes in *Huckleberry Finn*. They are brought to the fore when the raft is effectively hijacked by two Mississippi con men who go by the names of the Duke and the King, claiming – not very convincingly – to be descended from European royalty.

Actors and trickster, they rehearse for hastily assembled performances of Shakespeare's plays, relying on the ignorant excitability of their riverside audiences and their own outrageous acting to cheat people out of their money. Ultimately exposed as fraudsters, the Duke and the King kidnap Jim and sell him into captivity on a riverside farm, which happens to belong to relatives of Tom Sawyer – an event that sets the stage for the later part of the novel.

In the final chapters of the book, Tom Sawyer appears once again, and he and Huck hatch a variety of schemes to free Jim before he can be returned to his enslaver, all of which playfully draw upon European Romantic fiction, from the works of Walter Scott to Alexandre Dumas.

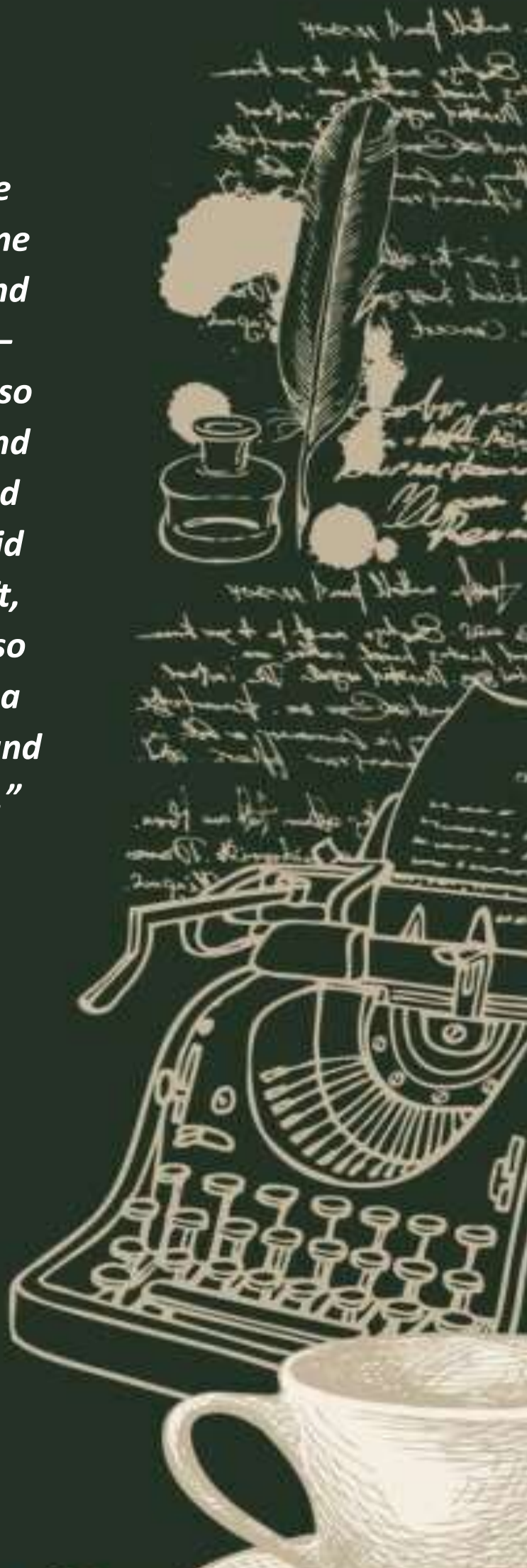


Tom's keen interest in solving mysteries comes to influence the plot of the novel and the focus shifts from the earlier expansive treatment of the river journey to the style that Twain had used previously in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. Stylistically, however, Huck's language remains the defining feature of the book, especially as it combined with the symbolism of the Black man and the white boy travelling together, outlined against the majesty of the Mississippi, during a period when slavery and racial bigotry seemed to predominate.

In the final passages of the novel, Huck remains untamed, claiming that he will "light out for the Territory ahead of the rest" to escape the clutches of those who want to school and civilise him. A true free spirit, he heads west for more adventures, and to take his place in the history of American literature.



“I hadn’t had a bite to eat since yesterday, so Jim he got out some corn-dodgers and buttermilk, and pork and cabbage and greens—there ain’t nothing in the world so good when it’s cooked right—and whilst I eat my supper we talked and had a good time. . . .We said there warn’t no home like a raft, after all. Other places do seem so cramped up and smothery, but a raft don’t. You feel mighty free and easy and comfortable on a raft.”



Huck and Jim

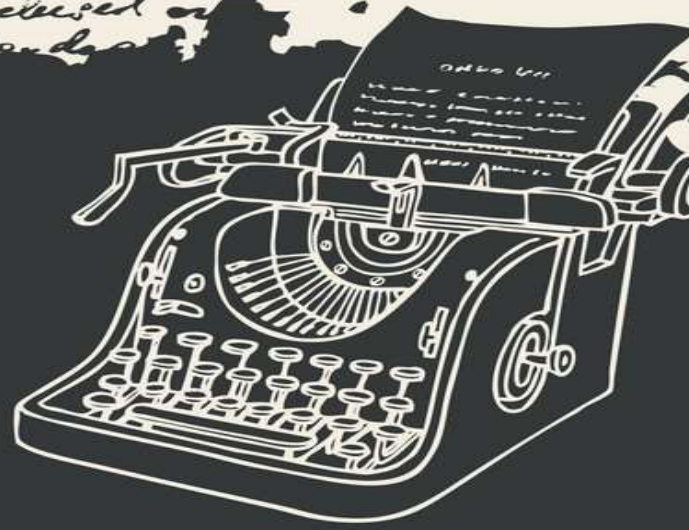


The relationship between Huck and Jim, depicted on the next page by E.W. Kemble, is one of the abiding images of the novel. Their friendship deepens on their journey down the Mississippi. As the shadow of slavery haunts Jim, so that of an abusive father pursues Huck. Jim becomes a surrogate father to Huck while Huck shields Jim from his captors.



**Illustration of Huck and Jim on a
Raft By E.W Kemble**

Abolition of Slavery



Slavery was the most divisive issue in the 19th-century US and debates about its continuation led to the American Civil War in 1861. Twain set the novel in the 1830s, a time when slavery was integral to the economy and culture of the southern states.

The Civil War of 1861-65 led to the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, issued by President Abraham Lincoln.

Although it freed Black people from bondage, and later amendments to the US constitution sought to enshrine the political and civil rights of African Americans, racism was still widespread: it re-emerged in other forms, such as racial segregation, during the 19th century.

Twain therefore had one eye on the past and one on the present when treating the issue of race. Jim remains a controversial character, and his depiction is inextricably linked to the legacy of slavery in the US.

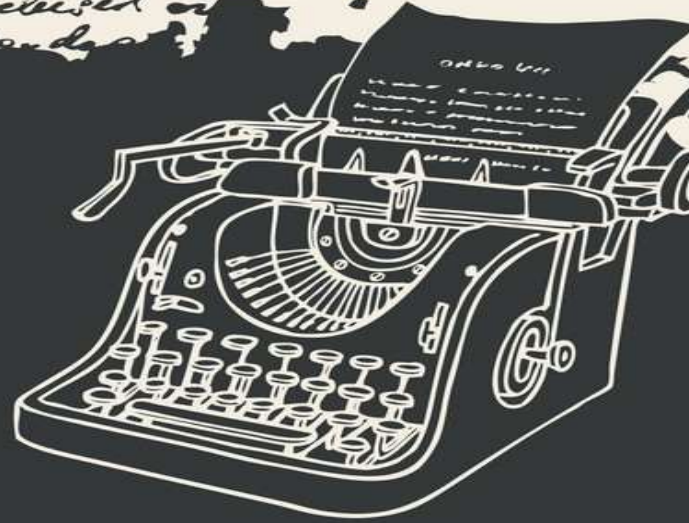
The novel argues for his freedom and humanity; at the same time, however, it draws on contemporary racial stereotypes that modern readers may find offensive.





A collection box of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society illustrates the plight of enslaved Black people in the early 19th century

Manuscript



Twain wrote *Huckleberry Finn* in several stages, often leaving it aside, uncertain how to finish it. He finally completed it in 1833.

The part of the text shown on the next page contains an early passage that describes Huck's awareness of nature and the sounds outside his window. It conveys his sensory perception in the authentic language of a child who is acutely receptive to the outside world.

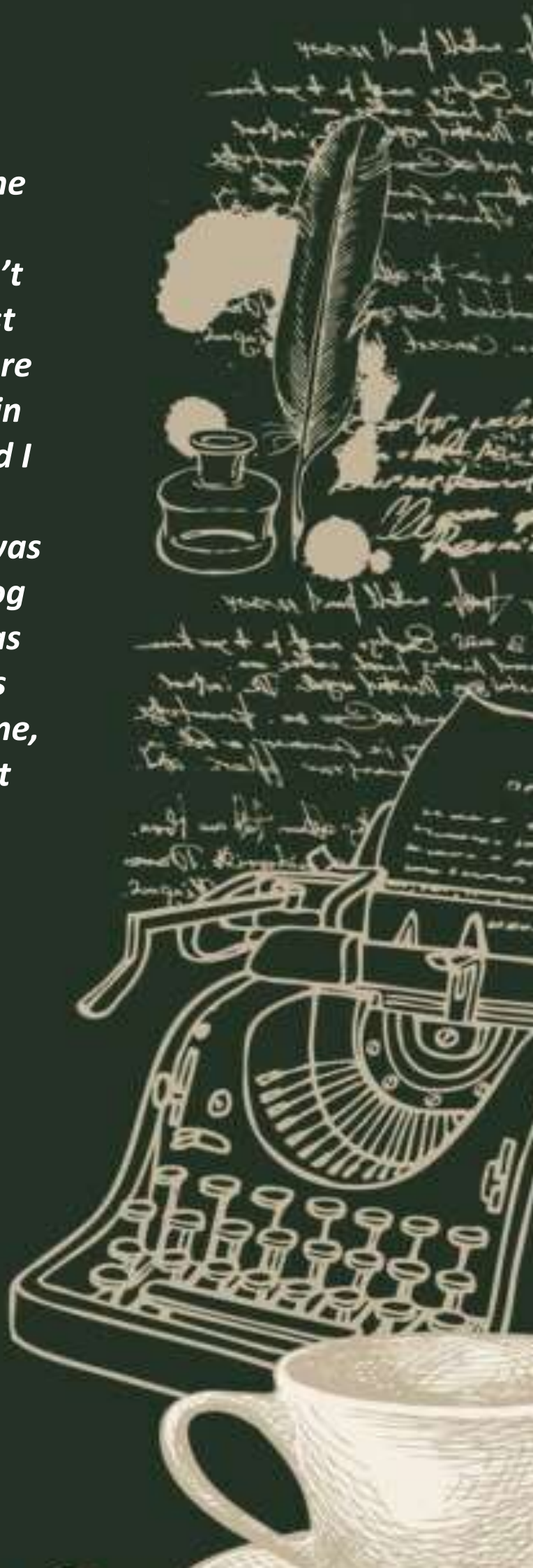
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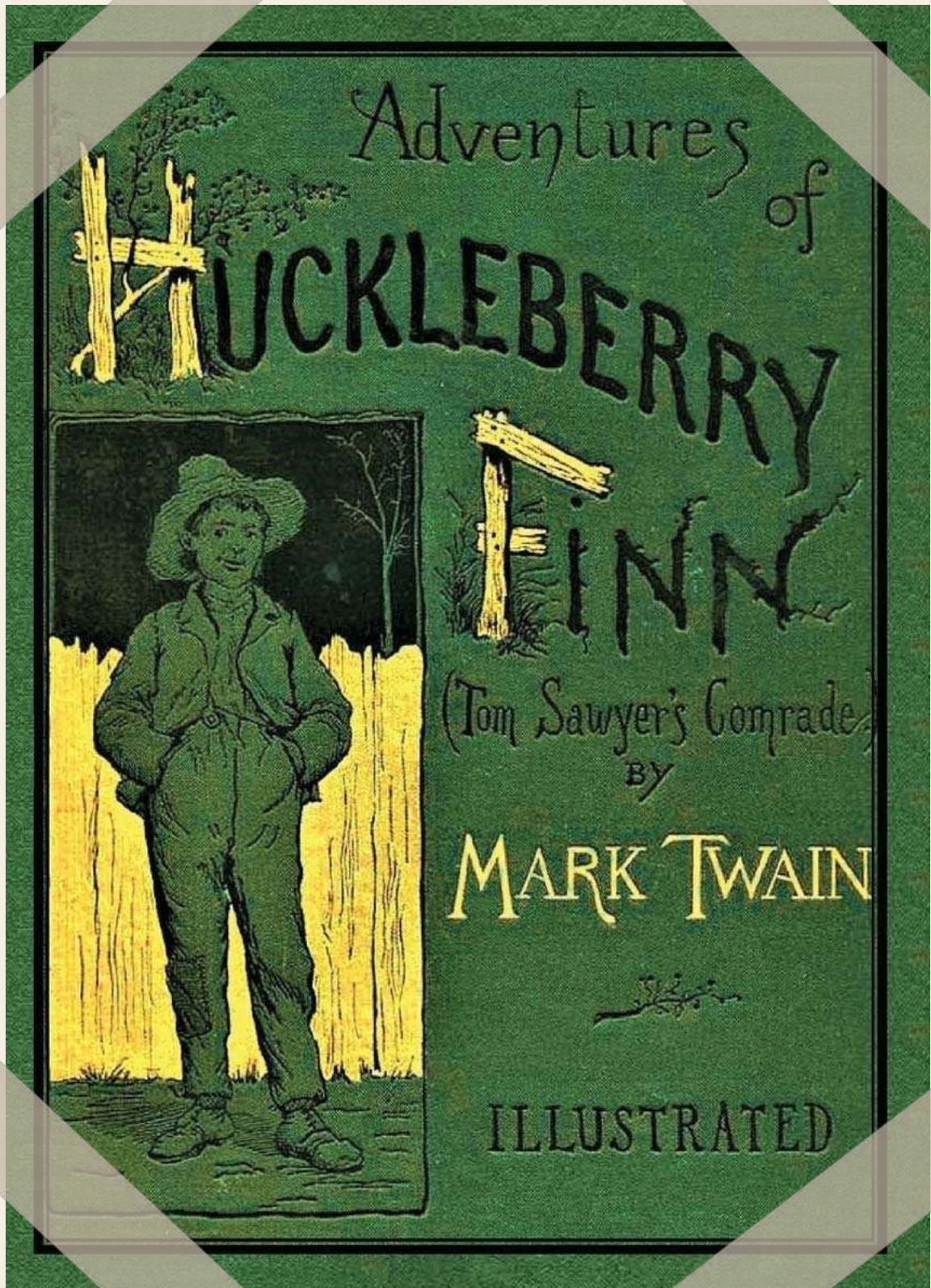
They went on a night along
on our knees, slow & care-
ful to the edge of the bank,
~~through the brush,~~
& there was the camp, a
little ways up, & right in the
dry bed of the river; two big
buffalo-skin ^{lodges,} ~~lodge,~~ a band of
horses tied, & eight men ca-
rouzing ^{around} around a fire -
all white men, & the roughest
kind, & prime drunk. Brace
said they had camped there so
~~long~~

There their camp could be
seen easy, but they might as
well camped in the open & so
I got drunk & made such a

A Page From the Manuscript of Huckleberry Finn

"Then I set down in a chair by the window and tried to think of something cheerful, but it warn't no use. I felt so lonesome I most wished I was dead. The stars were shining, and the leaves rustled in the woods ever so mournful; and I heard an owl, away off, who-whooping about somebody that was dead and a whippowill and a dog crying about somebody that was going to die; and the wind was trying to whisper something to me, and I couldn't make out what it was, and so it made the cold shivers run over me."





The First Edition of Huckleberry Finn



THINK

DIGITAL ACADEMY

