

Blood on the Hills: The Hatfields and McCoys and Feuding Families in *Huckleberry Finn*
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"When the legend becomes fact, ... print the legend."

—*The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence*

Abstract: In the spring of 1880, two events occurred whose synchronicity of detail suggests a more than coincidental connection. Mark Twain wrote chapters seventeen and eighteen of his novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, describing Huck's encounter with a family feud along the Mississippi, and his departure from that place after the elopement of two children from the rival families precipitates a devastating battle between their relatives. In the hills of West Virginia, Roseanna McCoy met Johnse Hatfield. She left her family to live with him, even though the bitter enmity between their families had already led to bloodshed and would lead to far more before the decade was out.

Yet, despite the readiness of contemporary material to inspire his feud story, Twain chose to credit it to a different real-life incident which occurred some twenty years earlier, and to which he himself was, in his own words, "near being an eye-witness." However, this particular feud, the Darnell (or Darnall)-Watson conflict, has little in common factually with either the *Huckleberry Finn* episode or Twain's earlier version of the story, which appeared in *Life on the Mississippi*. Though Twain never mentions the Hatfields and McCoys, his feud story in *Huckleberry Finn* follows their history in many large and small details, especially the "history" presented by the semi-legendary versions published in newspapers. This correlation suggests a direct connection between the two stories, a connection that cannot be proven but provides much useful food for thought in approaching the interpretation and teaching of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

In the spring of 1880, two events occurred whose synchronicity of detail suggests a more than coincidental connection. Mark Twain wrote chapters seventeen and eighteen of his novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, describing Huck's encounter with a family feud along the Mississippi, and his departure from that place after the elopement of two children from the rival families precipitates a devastating battle between their relatives. In the hills of West Virginia, Roseanna McCoy met Johnse Hatfield. She left her family to live with him, even though the bitter enmity between their families had already led to bloodshed and would lead to far more before the decade was out.

The real-life elopement hit the nation's presses rapidly, where it was quickly blown out of proportion into a sort of mountain Romeo and Juliet affair. The nation, astounded that such primitive violence could exist in their modern age, paid close attention to each forthcoming report of the feud. Twain's account met with similar incredulity, as his correspondence indicates:

On 12 March 1885, Reginald Cholmondeley wrote Mark Twain from England: ...

"Is it possible that blood-feuds really existed in Arkansas within 50 years[?]"

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Mark Twain explained that "indeed, feuds existed in Kentucky, Tennessee and Arkansas, of the nature described, within my time and memory. I came very near being an eye-witness to the general engagement detailed in the book. The details are historical and correct." (Twain 423)

Yet, despite the readiness of contemporary material to inspire his feud story, Twain chose to credit it to a different real-life incident which occurred some twenty years earlier, and to which he himself was, in his own words, "near being an eye-witness." However, this particular feud, the Darnell (or Darnall)-Watson conflict, has little in common factually with either the *Huckleberry Finn* episode or Twain's earlier version of the story, which appeared in *Life on the Mississippi*. Though Twain never mentions the Hatfields and McCoys, his feud story in *Huckleberry Finn* follows their history in many large and small details, especially the "history" presented by the semi-legendary versions published in newspapers. This correlation suggests a direct connection between the two stories.

While many critics have questioned Twain's claim for basing his feud account on the Darnell-Watson troubles, only one has suggested the Hatfields and McCoys as an alternative. This scholar, Robert H. Sykes, applies a careful attention to similarities of detail between the documentation of the West Virginia feud and the one Huck encounters, yet Sykes undercuts his evidence with a tendency to cite sources published (or events occurring) *after* the publication of *Huckleberry Finn* as possible influences upon Twain. This may explain the dearth of other works comparing the two feuds. Indeed, the overlap between the real-life events of the Hatfield-McCoy feud and Twain's writing makes such comparisons rather tricky; if chapters 17 and 18 really were completed by, and never revised after, 1880, then the Hatfield-McCoy influence upon Twain would have been negligible at best. Yet if there is no connection between the two accounts, how to explain their almost eerie mirroring of each other?

In chapter 17, Huck swims ashore after an accident on the river destroys his raft. He is taken in by a genteel yet suspicious family, the Grangerfords, whose son Buck explains that they have been feuding with a neighboring family, the Shepherdsons, from time immemorial. Huck stays on with the Grangerfords, observing their ways (including Buck's sister Sophia's strange reaction to hearing that her brother nearly killed a certain Harney Shepherdson). One day Huck returns to the Grangerford home to be told by the servants that Miss Sophia and Harney Shepherdson have eloped, and that the enemy families are now battling it out on the riverbank. Huck himself is not uninvolved in the elopement, since he carried a note from Harney

left in Miss Sophia's Bible designating the time of their rendezvous. Huck feels a mixture of emotions similar to his torments at whether or not to turn in his escaped-slave friend Jim: guilt at having unwittingly contributed to bloodshed by not revealing his suspicions of the elopement, and gladness that the two lovers have escaped. At the end of the episode, Huck is forced to watch his friend Buck's death at the hands of Shepherdsons, as the two families obliterate each other because of their children's romance.

The Hatfield-McCoy facts are these: shortly after the Civil War, Asa Harmon McCoy returned to his home in the Tug Valley, an area dominated by his family and another, the longer-established Hatfield clan. Asa found himself slightly unwelcome; he was one of the few returning soldiers who had fought for the Union. He hid out in a cave, where he was murdered, probably by the hot-tempered Hatfield patriarch, Anderson, better known as "Devil Anse." Asa, however, seems to have been unchampioned, for despite the possibility that old resentments lingered, no further violence broke out until 1878, when Asa's older brother Randolph (also spelled Randal; always referred to as "Old Ranel") brought Floyd Hatfield to court on charges of hog-stealing. A jury of six Hatfields and six McCoys decided in favor of Floyd; the determining vote was cast by a McCoy, who surprised all by siding against his kin. Later, a witness who was related to both families (there was a fair amount of intermarriage between the "enemies") was killed by two McCoys, who were arrested by Ellison Hatfield, tried by a jury of Hatfields—and acquitted on grounds of self-defense.¹

Into all this complexity stepped romance. Roseanna (sometimes spelled Rose Anna, Roseanne or Rose Anne) McCoy, Old Ranel's daughter, met Johnson ("Johnse") Hatfield, son of Devil Anse, at election festivities in the spring of 1880. She was twenty, he eighteen. At the end of the day, she went home with him instead of with her family. Accounts of the families' reactions vary, but no violence took place during their cohabitation, and no record exists to suggest that Devil Anse was unkind to the McCoy living under his roof, though he refused to consent to their marriage.

This may or may not have presented a problem to the young couple; Johnse was notoriously unfaithful, and Roseanna moved out again after six months. Shortly thereafter, Johnse married Roseanna's cousin Nancy McCoy, the daughter of the murdered Asa (Waller 3).

¹ This and the following historical information is a composite of accounts published by G. Elliott Hatfield, Truda Williams McCoy, Otis Rice, and John Ed Pearce in their respective books addressing the Hatfield-McCoy feud.

Roseanna may have been pregnant when she left Johnse, but conflicting reports exist about the possible miscarriage, birth, or early death of her baby; and no one seems to know for certain whether it was a boy or a girl. The only truly legend-worthy element to this rather sordid family melodrama involves a heroic ride Roseanna made through the night (after she had left Johnse) to warn the Hatfields that certain McCoys were planning to arrest Johnse on moonshining charges, which plans the Hatfields were therefore able to thwart. Johnse probably was a moonshiner.

In 1882, however, the feud took a horrific turn. Three McCoy sons butchered Ellison Hatfield, who had earlier issued the arrest of Sam and Paris McCoy for the death of the witness in the hog trial. A company of Hatfields, led by Devil Anse, met the lawmen escorting the three murderers to jail and relieved them of their charges. Devil Anse told the McCoys that he would let them go if Ellison, who had somehow survived the attack, lived. The next day, Ellison died. Devil Anse tied his captives to some bushes and brutally executed them.

The McCoys turned to the law, calling in as much legal attention as possible, but to little avail, for few were willing to try and catch Hatfields on their own land. (One of the more—relatively—effective deputies was Frank Phillips, who had the distinction of stealing Nancy McCoy Hatfield away from her husband Johnse.) Still, Devil Anse grew anxious and sent a contingent to destroy Old Ranel and his family. On New Year's Day, 1888, a group which included Johnse Hatfield and a Hatfield relation named Ellison Mounts, set fire to Old Ranel's house and shot his daughter Alifair and his son Calvin to death, and beat his wife Sarah unconscious; Johnse Hatfield may have been one of those who beat her. Old Ranel escaped. Sarah recovered under the ministrations of her daughter Roseanna, who had moved in with an aunt shortly after she left Johnse, and so had not been present for the New Year's attack.

Retribution for the atrocities was almost non-existent. Frank Phillips killed Devil Anse's uncle Jim Vance, who had led the attack, and later Ellison Mounts, a minor player in the grand scheme of the feud, was hanged for the murder of Alifair McCoy. Mounts, as it happened, bore the punishment of the whole clan, for the feud caused no more deaths, either by murder or execution. It simply faded away.

The execution of the McCoy sons in 1882 drew national attention to the feud; newspapers started to publish the story (Crawford 84; Sykes 198). Twain would thus have had access to information of a sufficiently sensational nature to intrigue him even if he had not been, as we know he was, "a voracious reader of newspapers" (Sykes 198). Three of the most

important episodes of the feud, Roseanna and Johnse's elopement, Ellison Hatfield's murder, and the deaths of the three McCoy sons, had all occurred by the time of *Huckleberry Finn*'s publication, and all three elements, along with several other significant features unique to the Hatfield-McCoy tale, recur in that novel.

Robert H. Sykes pinpoints a number of circumstantial and descriptive details which correlate between Twain's fictional account of the Grangerford home, family and feud with the Shepherdsons, and contemporary newspaper reports of the Hatfields and McCoys. Observing the elaborations Twain made to the version of the feud told in *Life on the Mississippi*, he writes,

Furthermore, details have been added to the original journalistic version, and these details have an outstanding resemblance to the historical facts in the Hatfield-McCoy warfare. ... These suggest that in the intervening two years between publication of *Life on the Mississippi* [in 1883] and *Huckleberry Finn* [1885] Twain received additional information about the feud. (Sykes 193)

Sykes itemizes the correlations. First, Buck explains to Huck, "There was trouble 'bout something, and then a lawsuit to settle it; and the suit went agin one of the men, and so he up and shot the man that won the suit" (Twain 146). Likewise, the first significant bloodshed of the Hatfield-McCoy troubles came as a result of Old Ranel's lawsuit against Floyd Hatfield because of purported pig-thievery, though it is possible to credit the roots of the feud to Asa Harmon McCoy's earlier murder (Sykes 193-194). "Thus Twain's feud and the actual Hatfield-McCoy feud have these three things in common: obscurity of origin, a dispute over ownership of an animal, and a lawsuit" (Sykes 194).

I take the comment regarding "obscurity of origin" to display remarkable subtlety on Sykes's part. Less subtle is his notice that the families of both feuds dwell beside rivers (Sykes 194); in the Hatfield-McCoy case, the river actually and symbolically divided the two families' territory, and Roseanna crossed the river with Johnse when she left her father's home for his. In Twain's version the lovers escape both families and indeed leave their generations-bloodied land behind by crossing the Mississippi (153). Twain capitalizes on the placement of the Mississippi in his Romeo and Juliet's escape, which follows one dominating character of *Huckleberry Finn*, the river itself. Roseanna and Johnse's river really did exist in its precise separation of their families, a feature almost too laden with potential metaphor to be real. But it was. Did Twain use it?

Another similar feature between the fictional and real-life feuds is the nature of the violence. Buck reports that Bob Grangerford had been "carved up some with a Bowie" (Twain 146), and "Ellison Hatfield was similarly slashed with a knife by Tolbert McCoy and then stabbed repeatedly by a host of Tolbert's relatives" (Sykes 194). When itemizing the Grangerfords, Huck tells us that three of their sons have died in the feud, which echoes execution of the three McCoy boys who killed Ellison Hatfield (Sykes 195). Twain's mention of three sons' murder slips by in *Huckleberry Finn*; it occurs in its own paragraph, just following Huck's description of the Grangerfords' genteel ways. "This was all there was of the family, now; but there used to be more—three sons—they got killed; and Emmeline, that died" (143). This small paragraph is barely noticeable, and, as Sykes observes, it does not add anything to the plot (195). Furthermore, this detail does not appear in the feud account in *Life on the Mississippi*, which ostensibly covers the same fight, the Darnell-Watson troubles.

Twain actually elaborated on his feud in *Huckleberry Finn*, the second occasion of its telling, with details he neglects to mention (because their real-life counterparts had not yet occurred?) in *Life on the Mississippi*, but would have had a chance to learn from accounts of the Hatfield-McCoy feud in the time between the publication of the two books. "The stranger" in *Life on the Mississippi*, who tells the narrator about the feud,

could not have included [the execution of the three McCoy boys] in his account because it happened after he told Twain of the feud. As a matter of fact, coming as it did in the late summer of 1882, it occurred at just about the time Twain was making final preparations of his *Life on the Mississippi* manuscript for the publisher. Within the next two years, however, Twain had ample time to have heard of the massacre; for the feud reached its apogee after that, and newspapers throughout the country began to carry regular accounts of the carnage. (Sykes 195)

One of the reporters sent to the scene of the crimes was T. C. Crawford, who had the dubious honor of interviewing Devil Anse in the Hatfield home. Crawford writes of an ominously dark room filled with tall mountaineers, Winchesters, and hovering women, and dominated by the presence of Devil Anse himself (Crawford 84). In the course of the interview, Devil Anse dwells with scorn upon ambushes, suggesting that such behavior is far beneath him and his. This scene, Sykes points out, is virtually identical to Huck's entrance into the Grangerford home at night, surrounded by guns, angry men and anxious women (Sykes 198). Devil Anse's words

against sneak attacks issue again from Col. Grangerford's mouth after Buck almost ambushes Harney Shepherdson (Sykes 198):

The old gentleman's eyes blazed a minute—'twas pleasure, mainly, I judged—
then his face sort of smoothed down and he says kind of gentle:

"I don't like that shooting from behind a bush. Why didn't you step into the road,
my boy?" (Twain 145)

Crawford published his recollections of these interviews in book form in 1889, five years after *Huckleberry Finn's* publication. Still, "it is not outrageous to assume that Crawford and Twain had access to the same background material" (Sykes 198), particularly if Crawford and other reporters were hurrying out shorter newspaper accounts which were later converted into book form. Whether through Crawford's writings or some other source, Twain could easily have gained enough information about the feudists to incorporate details about them into his own story.

The physical similarities between the fictional and real-life characters are also worthy of note. Roseanna, like Miss Sophia, was twenty at the time of her romance, tall and dark-haired, with a beautiful, serious face. One of Colonel Grangerford's descriptions (Twain gives us two conflicting descriptions of him) could be written about the photographs we see of Devil Anse, tall, dark, beak-nosed and hollow-eyed (Twain 142). The names of the lovers involved also echo each other. "Sophia" and "Roseanna" are both rather elegant names for backwoods girls, and both are comprised of three syllables; and "Harney" and "Johnse" (pronounced "Johnsie") are both two-syllable shortened names. As a final touch, Sykes notes that Devil Anse, like Col. Grangerford, had a military title, left over from his Confederate days, and liked to be called "Cap'n" (195). We must also recognize, though, that Twain's purported source for his feud, the Darnell-Watson troubles, also involved a title for one of its leaders, General Henry M. Darnall (as he liked to spell his name). Twain's specific choice of these details might be mere chance, but their existence adds fuel to suspicions of their relationship with the real-life drama.

Twain, himself, however, never mentions the Hatfields or McCoys in his references to *Huckleberry Finn*; instead, he specifically identifies the Darnell-Watson feud as his basis for the Grangerford-Shepherdson episode. He did unquestionably base one scene, in which Buck and his cousin are shot down in the river by enemies on horseback, on a tale Twain associated with the Darnell-Watson feud:

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Mark Twain's model for this incident in *Huckleberry Finn* and in the nearly identical scene in *Life on the Mississippi* was manifestly the incident at Compromise, Kentucky, a flare-up in the Darnell-Watson feud [in which "a youth of 19" who wanders to the wrong side of the river is shot down, first behind woodpiles, and then in the river] to which Clemens told Cholmondeley he had come "near being an eye-witness." (Twain, Branch and Hirst 45)

But historical and scholarly reports find no reference to this story, and certainly none to an inter-feudal romance.

While it would be foolish to simply disregard Twain's assertion of the inspiration for his feud, the material on the Darnell-Watson troubles that survives bears little resemblance to either of Twain's feud accounts. In 1859, at Compromise, Kentucky, a dry goods merchant named Starr got into a fight with a schoolteacher by the name of Shultz, at the end of which Starr and Shultz had shot each other to death; Starr's death may have been assisted by drowning when he fell into the river (Twain, Branch and Hirst 43-44). "The quarrel was general in the neighborhood, and grew out of a dispute between Henry M. Darnell and A. F. Beckham [Starr's relative] in reference to certain outrages alleged to have been perpetrated by a negro belonging to Mr. Beckham" (Twain, Branch and Hirst 45-46). Mr. Beckham was related by marriage to a clan named the Watsons (Twain, Branch and Hirst 56). He indicated, during the dispute over the slave's alleged attack, that hostilities between himself and the Darnells had gone on for some time, insisting that their accusations about his slave were really designed to further this conflict (Twain, Branch and Hirst 60). Edgar Marquess Branch and Robert H. Hirst speculate that the aggressions were not limited to Beckham's immediate family, but probably took in the entire Watson clan, even as more than one branch of the Darnells was involved (Twain, Branch and Hirst 60-61). Violence resumed in 1869, when an unfortunate schoolteacher was shot by Darnells; the Darnells also tried to shoot a Watson, but missed (Twain, Branch and Hirst 61-63).

Today, the Darnell-Watson feud is remembered primarily as the source for the Grangerford-Shepherdson episode; far less documentation exists for it than even for the Hatfields and McCoys, who kept no personal records of their conflict and so live on mostly through the sensationalized newspaper accounts of their time and the romantic and highly conflicting write-ups done by later generations. In fact, some doubt remains as to whether the Darnell-Watson feud occurred at all. "Loren K. Davidson [in the *Duquesne Review*, Fall 1968, p. 78] ... concludes that whatever feud did exist, it did not 'involve altercation between the

Darnalls and the Watsons" (Twain, Branch and Hirst 84), an assessment all the more surprising because "the Darnalls managed, it would seem, to quarrel at one time or another with many other families in the Bend" (Twain, Branch and Hirst 52-53). Sykes, ever incendiary, goes him one better and declares that the Darnell-Watson never took place at all in any form. He observes,

Now, if there were Darnells and Watsons engaged in a notorious feud of the dimensions the stranger described, some record to substantiate his story should have been preserved. Yet a careful search of newspaper files, chronicles of American feuds, and court records fail to uncover any. (Sykes 192)

He further quotes one researcher, Harold Wilson Coates, who "searched newspaper files for the 1880s and 1890s and discovered that there were thirteen major private wars in Kentucky, which he termed 'feuds,' but no Darnell-Watson feud is mentioned in his study" (Sykes 192)—a fruitless search indeed, since the Darnell-Watson troubles, by Twain's report, took place between 1859 and 1869.

Branch and Hirst review the details of the Darnell-Watson troubles in their study of the Grangerford-Shepherdson feud, and conclude that the documented instances of violence among people with connections to either family are enough to indicate that a feud between the clans did indeed take place (Twain, Branch and Hirst 52-53). Branch and Hirst also maintain, justly, that Twain's word about his sources is worth something. Perhaps Twain had sources that the twenty-first century scholar may never be able to track down. "We take it for granted," they write,

that Mark Twain's resources in the case were, at least in 1859, much greater than ours can be, ranging from gossip in the pilothouse and along the river, to newspaper reports of varying reliability, to personal testimony of eyewitnesses. . . . Newspapers to which he had regular access . . . routinely carried reports of this and similar "feuds," either from "the telegraph," or by reprinting the accounts of newspapers with reporters on the scene. (Twain, Branch and Hirst 51-52)

Branch and Hirst conclude that the main point of all this, as far as Twain was concerned, was not the actual occurrences of the feud, but the fact that they occurred at all, and over a number of years involved the same families, thus showing him that such extended animosity could exist (Twain, Branch and Hirst 45).

Even so, Branch and Hirst express surprise at the number of obvious inaccuracies between newspaper accounts of the Darnell-Watson fights and Twain's recollection of them both in the two novels and in his journals. In one instance, Twain repeats a story he credits to a friend in *Life on the Mississippi*, in which he inverts the assailants and victims and changes the number of people involved, as well as simplifying the attack so that it involves only Darnells and Watsons, when in reality other families figured more prominently than they (Twain, Branch and Hirst 68). "If Clemens were familiar with these 1869 events through the newspapers he read², it may seem odd that he accepted Horace Bixby's summary of the event in 1882 without a demur, even reproducing it nearly verbatim in *Life on the Mississippi*" (Twain, Branch and Hirst 68). Far more similarities exist between the Grangerford-Shepherdson feud and that of the Hatfields and McCoys; Twain's feuds and the Darnell-Watson troubles really only reflect each other in that both were feuds. Other than Twain's reproduction of a youth's murder in the death of Buck, which may or may not be factually based in any case, no other particulars support a specific connection between the Darnell-Watson feud and Twain's versions of it.

Partially discrediting Twain's claim for the basis for the feud, however, does not automatically place the Hatfields and McCoys at the forefront of likely inspirations. In fact, several circumstantial details appear to stand against the likelihood of a Hatfield-McCoy / Grangerford-Shepherdson correlation. The timeline, the all-but-overlapping of some of the events, means that Twain would have had to have been reading the newspapers as they came out (and it is unlikely that much mention was made of a bit of backwoods fighting before the murders of 1882) or, and this is both a more intriguing and less defensible possibility, have had non-print sources for reports on the troubles. He would thus have to have added elements of the feud episode in *Huckleberry Finn* bearing any similarity to the Hatfield-McCoy feud no earlier than 1882, based on the late-breaking news.

Branch and Hirst maintain in their notes on *Huckleberry Finn* that Twain had finished the manuscript through the middle of chapter 18³ and thus included the first hints of a romance between Harney Shepherdson and Miss Sophia (Twain 145) by the summer of 1876, long before Johnse had ever laid eyes on Roseanna (Twain 554-555). "The second physically distinct part of the manuscript (MS1b) [written between November 1879 and March 1880] comprises ... the remainder of chapter 18 through the end of chapter 21" (Twain 555), and so

² Certainly, as familiar as he claimed to be, with near eye-witness status.

³ "stopping only after Buck Grangerford asks Huck if he knows what a feud is and Huck replies, 'Never heard of it before—tell me about it'" (Twain 554-555).

covers the lovers' escape and the bloody denouement Huck witnesses, as well as the period of time during which Johnse and Roseanna eloped. Branch and Hirst, however, do admit, "It must be acknowledged that revision and addition to these chapters was *possible* even after Mark Twain acquired three maps of the Mississippi in April 1882" (Twain, Branch and Hirst 84-85). The emphasis is Branch and Hirst's; while Twain continued research of the area even after, according to their timeline, his work on the subject would have been complete, they hesitate to step away from the traditional allocation of Twain's writing periods.

Walter Blair takes issue with Branch and Hirst's interpretation of Twain's various compositional periods. Their time frame follows that of Bernard DeVoto, who "in 1942 . . . published a careful study of the writing of *Huckleberry Finn* which held that the novel was written in the summer of 1876 and the summer of 1883 in Elmira" (Blair 199). Blair studied the manuscripts, comparing types of paper and ink that Twain used at different periods of writing, and came to the conclusion "that Mark Twain wrote chapters xvii and xviii between mid-October, 1879, and mid-June, 1880, in Hartford" (Blair 199). Blair also cites Twain's correspondence for indications that sections of *Huckleberry Finn* were written slightly later than DeVoto assumes.

The first piece of evidence consists of a group of remarks about the writing of *Huck* which the author made, indicating that he worked on it during more than two periods. . . . On July 20, 1883, writing to Howells, he called *Huck* "a big one that I half-finished two or three years ago." That would mean that he half-finished it not in 1876 but in 1880 or 1881. Finally, on July 21, 1883, in a letter to his mother, Orion, and Orion's wife, he spoke of *Huck* as "a book which I have been fooling over for 7 years." If "fooling over" implies anything, surely it is that he worked on the book between 1876 and 1883. (Blair 199, 200)

I find it implausible that Twain would make notes to himself to stop off at the home of the Darnells and Watsons (Twain, Branch and Hirst 40) during his reconnaissance tour down the Mississippi in 1882, with the specific intention of revisiting the scene of the feud⁴, if his feud segments were written with no intention of revision by that time. Furthermore, Twain was given no opportunity to get close to people who might have given him first-hand accounts, since the riverboat did not put ashore at Compromise after all. Instead, Twain's journal reports that, "Traveling on *The City of Baton Rouge*, captained by his old friend and mentor Horace Bixby,

⁴ Twain wrote in his journal, "Stop at Cairo, Hickman or New Madrid (1 hour) and ask about old feuds" (Blair 225).

Clemens reminisced with him about what Bixby called "a long quarrel" between the "Darnall & Watson" families" (Twain, Branch and Hirst 40-41). Twain's continued interest in and notation of the feud stories indicates that perhaps he did not consider his research on the subject closed. His inability to gain information from a first-hand source, and thus his reliance on his own memory and that of another riverboat captain of events which took place twenty years earlier, suggests the possibility of embellishment or inaccuracy in the information he was able to glean.

It is likely this conversation which Twain re-works in *Life on the Mississippi* as a dialogue between himself and a stranger who tells him about the feud. Or perhaps there really was a stranger who spun tales to Twain of love and death in the backwoods. Assuming the storyteller existed (and I see no reason why Twain might not have invented him to set the scene for his story and possibly take the pressure off himself for accuracy), either as a stranger with whom Twain actually had this conversation, or in the form of Horace Bixby with the name removed, the possibility still remains that the feud they discuss involves, in fact, the Hatfields and McCoys; if that is the case, Twain may have received information more promptly by word of mouth in this case than he would have gained even from newspapers and other contemporary reports.

Sykes, as mentioned earlier, takes the extreme position "that there was no Darnell-Watson feud and that the traveller was really telling Twain about the Hatfields and the McCoys" (Sykes 192). Such an argument looks inherently silly in light of the fact that the Darnells and Watsons did inhabit the area Twain mentions, and violence occurred around and between them for a long enough time to constitute a feud. Still, Sykes makes a valid point about the chance of a confusion or possible misapplication of the names and details involved. Twain's own memory for names failed at times⁵, and also,

Twain's fellow passenger, by his own confession, had a faulty memory ("Don't remember whether it was the Darnells and Watsons, or one of the other feuds.") Hence, he may have remembered details of the feud while forgetting the proper names of the participants. Or, he may have made up the names in order to make his general knowledge about the feud more interesting to Twain. (Sykes 193)

Or, since the Hatfield-McCoy troubles were actually occurring at the time, Twain may have intentionally used the names of characters of a more distant feud to avoid the possibility of a libel suit (Sykes 193). This would carry the double benefit of adding authenticity to his story,

⁵ While writing *Tom Sawyer*, Twain forgot Becky Thatcher's name and started writing it as "Bessie" (Twain 558).

and removing it a step from real-life incidents. In any case, these questions indicate that even Twain's reference to the Darnell-Watson feud as the source for his own does not close the argument definitively.

The most compelling link between the Grangerford-Shepherdsons and the Hatfield-McCoys comes from Twain's inclusion of the romance, not only the fact that he includes it but the particular spin he puts on the story. The mountain Romeo-Juliet theme is missing from *Life on the Mississippi*, and again we are reminded that Roseanna and Johnse's relationship was not yet common knowledge at the time of that book's publication. But the inter-feudal romance holds a vital place in the *Huckleberry Finn* feud. Like the legendary versions of Roseanna and Johnse's romance, Twain's story of Miss Sophia and Harney presents the pure love of enemies' offspring, whose elopement drives their families to mutual bloodshed because of the families' unquenchable pride. But Twain abandons the usual framework of such stories—and follows instead the actual working-out of the Hatfield-McCoy affair—by presenting the children's love as the cause of more violence, rather than the catalyst of reconciliation between their families. Thus, both stories differ in this way from the classic feud narrative established by Shakespeare and frequently popularized in literature in Twain's time, in which the love of the children shows their parents the error of their ways.

The *Huckleberry Finn* feud also diverges here from the two sources commonly thought to have inspired it. The first is John W. DeForest's 1871 novel *Kate Beaumont* (Blair 218-219; Twain, Branch and Hirst 70), wherein two southern families long at war with each other are brought together through their children's romance⁶, which, of course, echoes the end of *Romeo and Juliet*. The other is Mark Twain's own earlier unfinished novel, *Simon Wheeler* (1878), which begins to explore the love-between-enemies premise. Branch and Hirst, contradicting their earlier statement that Twain's feud must have been based entirely on what he took to be facts about the Darnell-Watson case, suggest that Twain left the romantic element out of *Life on the Mississippi* because, as *auteur*, he was "wary of 'copying in part a character already drawn by another'" (Twain, Branch and Hirst 70). This does not explain why for *Huckleberry Finn*'s later feud story, presumably founded upon the same set of facts, Twain would revisit what he considered to be a tired plot element. In any case, Twain's use of a romance as the excuse for more violence between the feudists was new to that genre of literature. It was not, however,

⁶ Actually, this was a theme of many post-Civil War novels, many of which featured romantic relationships forming between members of North and South.

new to the public consciousness about feuds, since such a romance had just (as far as the public was concerned) led to such violence in the Tug Valley of West Virginia.

What role did Roseanna and Johnse's romance actually play in their families' feud? Opinions on this differ. For a generation after the feud, the families involved were silent about it, and by the time the grandchildren began to reconstruct their stories, most of the original generation were dead and those who were left were unwilling to talk. Devil Anse himself, the "thug ... who not only engineered the two instances of brutal murder but lacked the backbone to commit them himself and sent his underlings out to do the slaughtering" (Pearce 7) and had once boasted to Crawford about his exploits, repented and was baptized in a creek in 1911, effectively closing the door on his past. Two descendants, G. Elliott Hatfield and Truda Williams McCoy, each wrote a version of the story in novel form. Their books cast all the characters with completely different personalities, different motivations and occasionally different actions.

What conclusions are we to draw about the connection between Twain's feud story and the Hatfield-McCoy troubles? In the end, it is as hard to establish an unquestionable link between the Hatfield-McCoy feud of folklore and the Grangerford-Shepherdson feud of fiction as it is to formulate a definitive analysis of the Hatfield-McCoy relations—romantic and otherwise—in real life. Uncanny similarities are all one can point to, legends and speculations. Twain has escaped the scholar's clutches and his writings are as silent about the Hatfields and McCoy's as those families were themselves. Roseanna and Johnse offered their contemporaries the germs of legend in everyday life, and for this they are remembered, probably with more credit than they deserve for the roles they played in their families' drama. In this way, they not only mirror Twain's fictional characters but also stand beside them in the realm of myth.

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Huckleberry Finn parodies adventure novels, politics, religion, the Hatfields and the McCoys, and even Hamlet's soliloquy. But most memorable may be the character of Emmeline Grangerford, the 15-year-old poet. Emmeline is a parody of Julia A. Moore, the "Sweet Singer of Michigan," who wrote bad poetry about death. 6. Many consider *Huckleberry Finn* the first American novel. "All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*," Ernest Hemingway wrote in *Green Hills Of Africa*. "There was nothing before. There has been nothing as good since." While this statement ignores great works like *Moby-Dick* and *The Scarlet Letter*, *Huckleberry Finn* was notable because it was the first novel to be written in the American vernacular.