



Mark Twain

A terrible enemy of injustice and confusion, Mark Twain wrote scores of attacks on the villainous and fraudulent pursuits of dishonest people, and on the weak, insipid facades of hypocrisy.

I was a trembling, because I'd got to decide, forever,
betwixt two things, and I knowed it. I studied a minute,
sort of holding my breath, and then says to myself:
"All right, then, I'll *go* to hell[.]"



Excerpt from
The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn



THE BETTMANN ARCHIVE/(p) 1992 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

American writer and humorist Mark Twain demonstrated an uncanny understanding of childhood and human nature, often writing in the vernacular of the American South. Twain's biting social and political satires reflect his abhorrence of social and moral injustices. In the moral climax of Mark Twain's quintessential American novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Huck is deciding to help Jim, a runaway slave, escape.

•Mark Twain wrote the classic story *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* in 1876 about a boy's escapades along the Mississippi River.

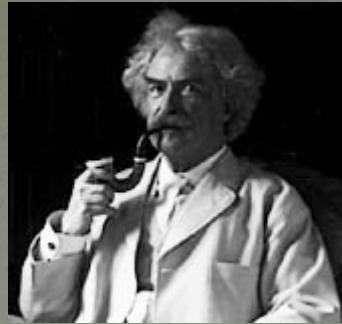
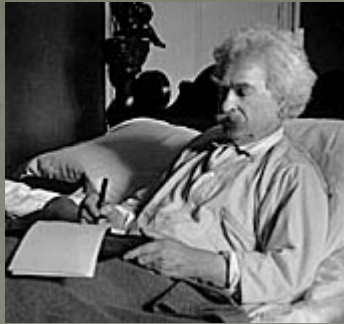
•In this illustration from the book Tom tricks his friend into finishing his job of whitewashing a fence by making the work appear like fun.





Phil Schermeister/Corbis

American writer Mark Twain lived from 1874 to 1891 in a 19-room house built for him in Hartford, Connecticut. The picturesque house, wrapped in porches, has a painted brick exterior and interiors created by the American design firm of Louis Comfort Tiffany.



"All you need
is ignorance and
confidence; then
success is sure."



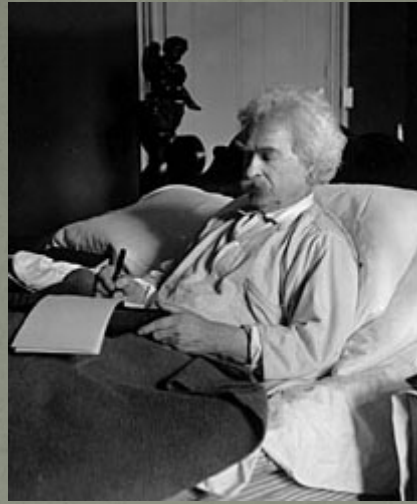
"Every one is a moon, and has a dark side which he never shows to anybody."



"Let us endeavor so to live that when we come to die even the undertaker will be sorry."



"The man who does not read good books has no advantage over the man who can't read them."



"Man will do many things to get himself loved; he will do all things to get himself envied."



"Of all the animals, man is the only one that is cruel. He is the only one that inflicts pain for the pleasure of doing it."

His Influence

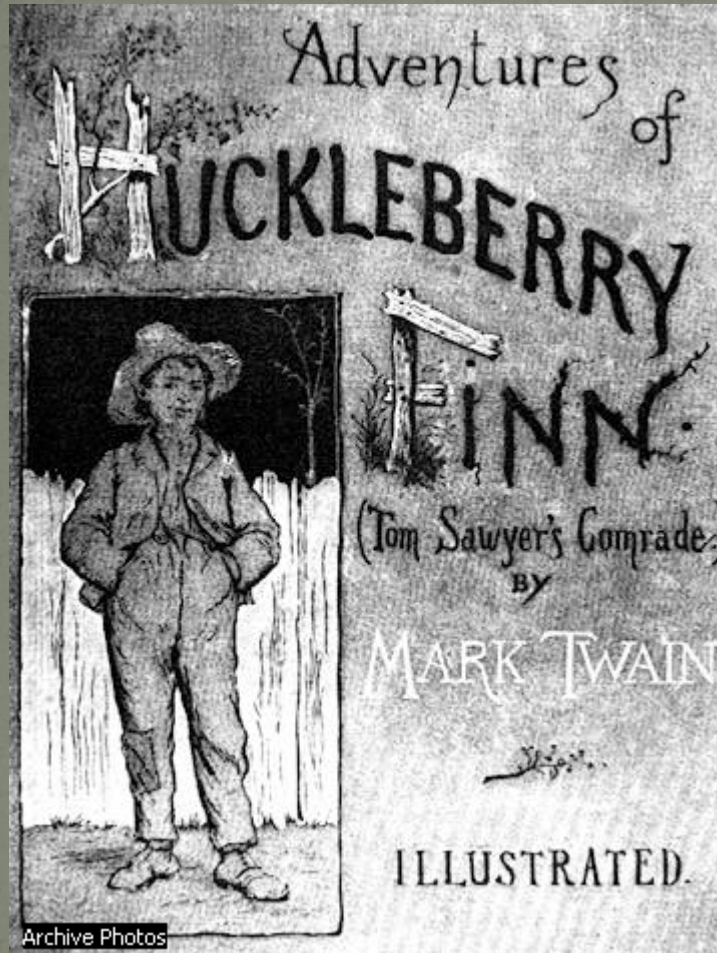
- Successive generations of writers, however, recognized the role that Twain played in creating a truly American literature.
- He portrayed uniquely American subjects in a humorous and colloquial, yet poetic, language.
- His success in creating this plain but evocative language precipitated the end of American reverence for British and European culture and for the more formal language associated with those traditions.
- His adherence to American themes, settings, and language set him apart from many other novelists of the day and had a powerful effect on such later American writers as Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner, both of whom pointed to Twain as an inspiration for their own writing.
 - "Twain, Mark." Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2001. 1993-2000 Microsoft Corporation.

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn



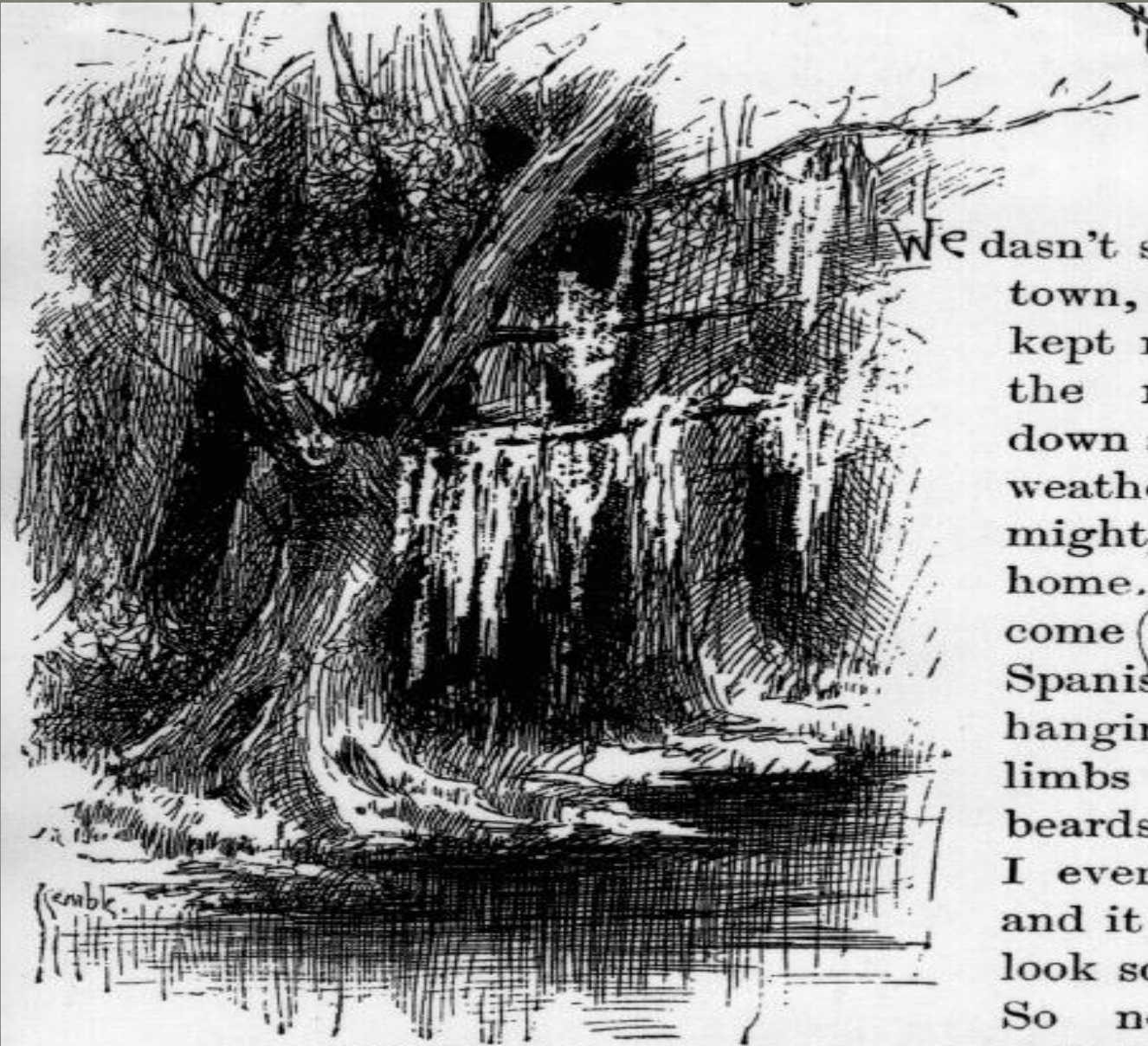
HUCK STEALING AWAY.





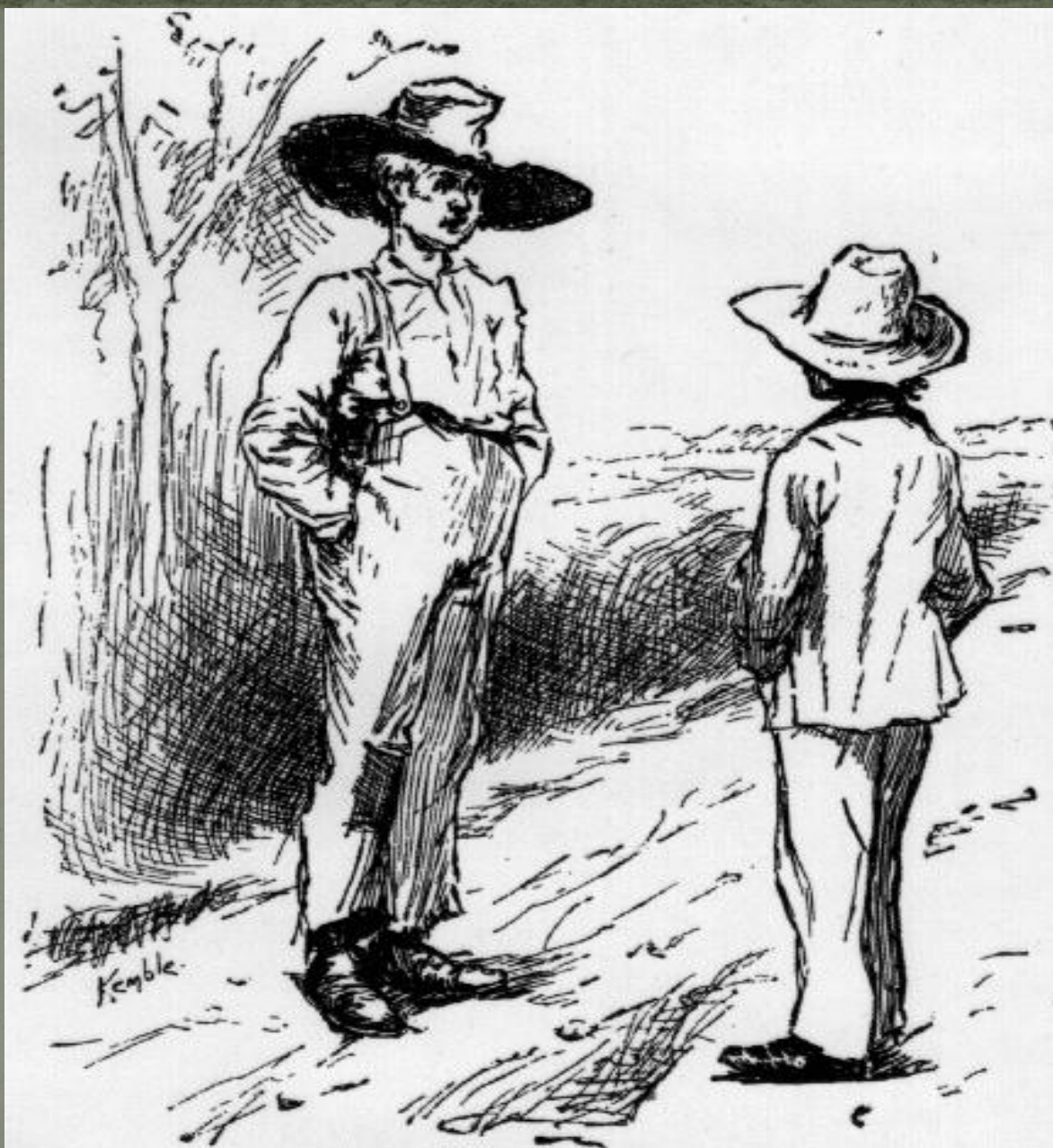
Summary:

American literary critic Lionel Trilling called Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) "one of the world's great books and one of the central documents of American culture." In this excerpt, Huck, a runaway teenage boy, and Jim, an escaped slave, are traveling down the Mississippi River with two confidence men called "the king" and "the duke," who perform their fractured versions of Shakespeare and other dramas under the guise of the Royal Nonesuch theater troupe.



We dasn't s
town,
kept n
the n
down s
weathe
might
home.
come
Spanis
hangin
limbs
beards
I ever
and it
look so
So ne
reckon

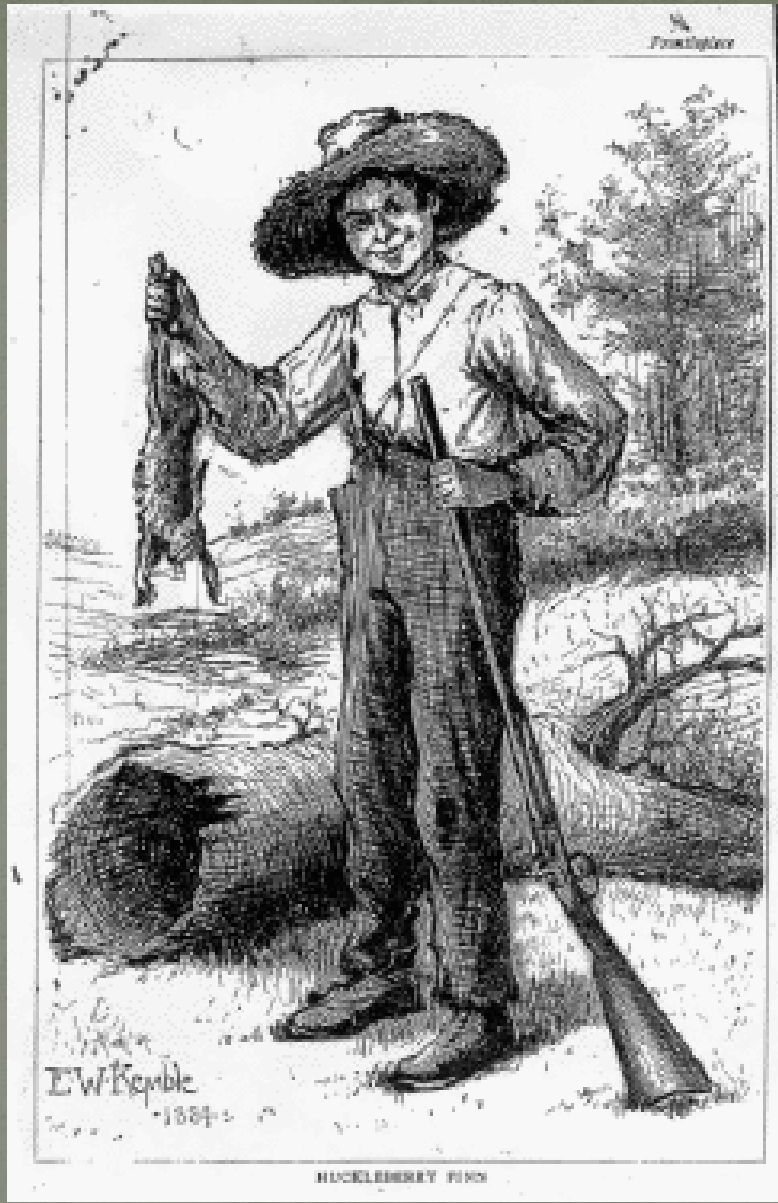
SPANISH MOSS.



“ WHO NAILED HIM ? ”



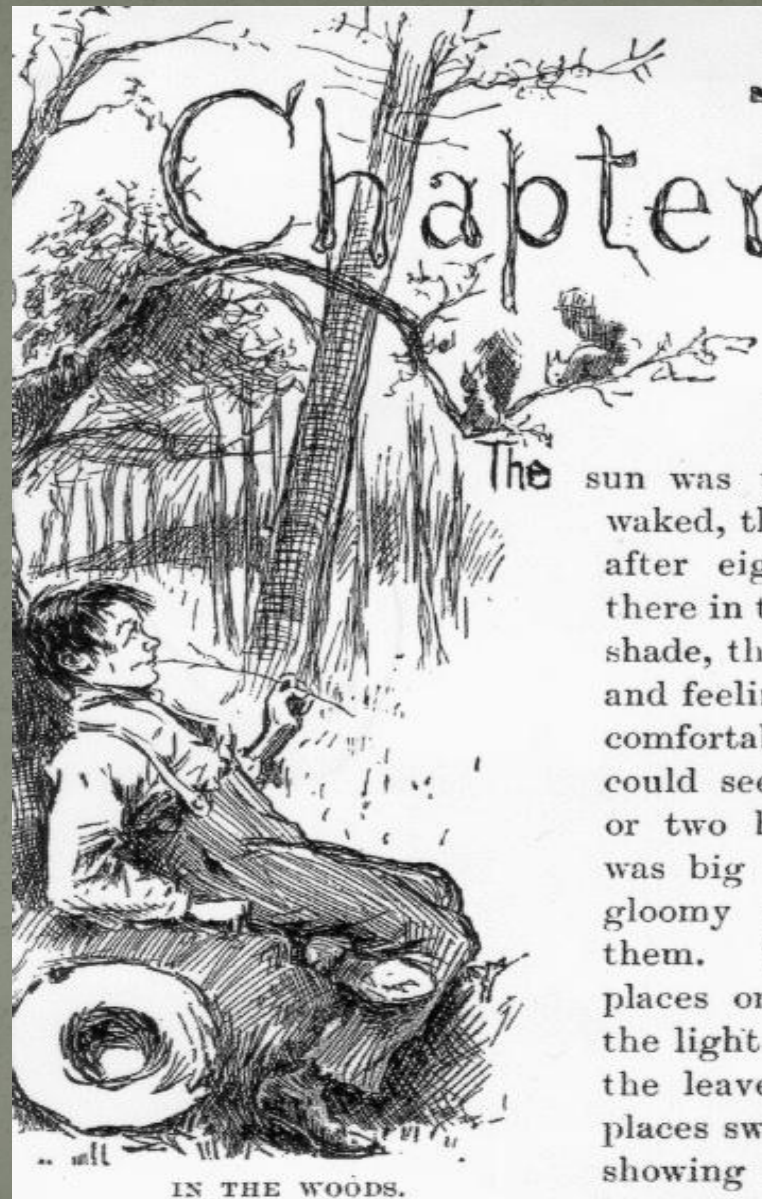
THINKING.



BUCKLEBERRY FISH



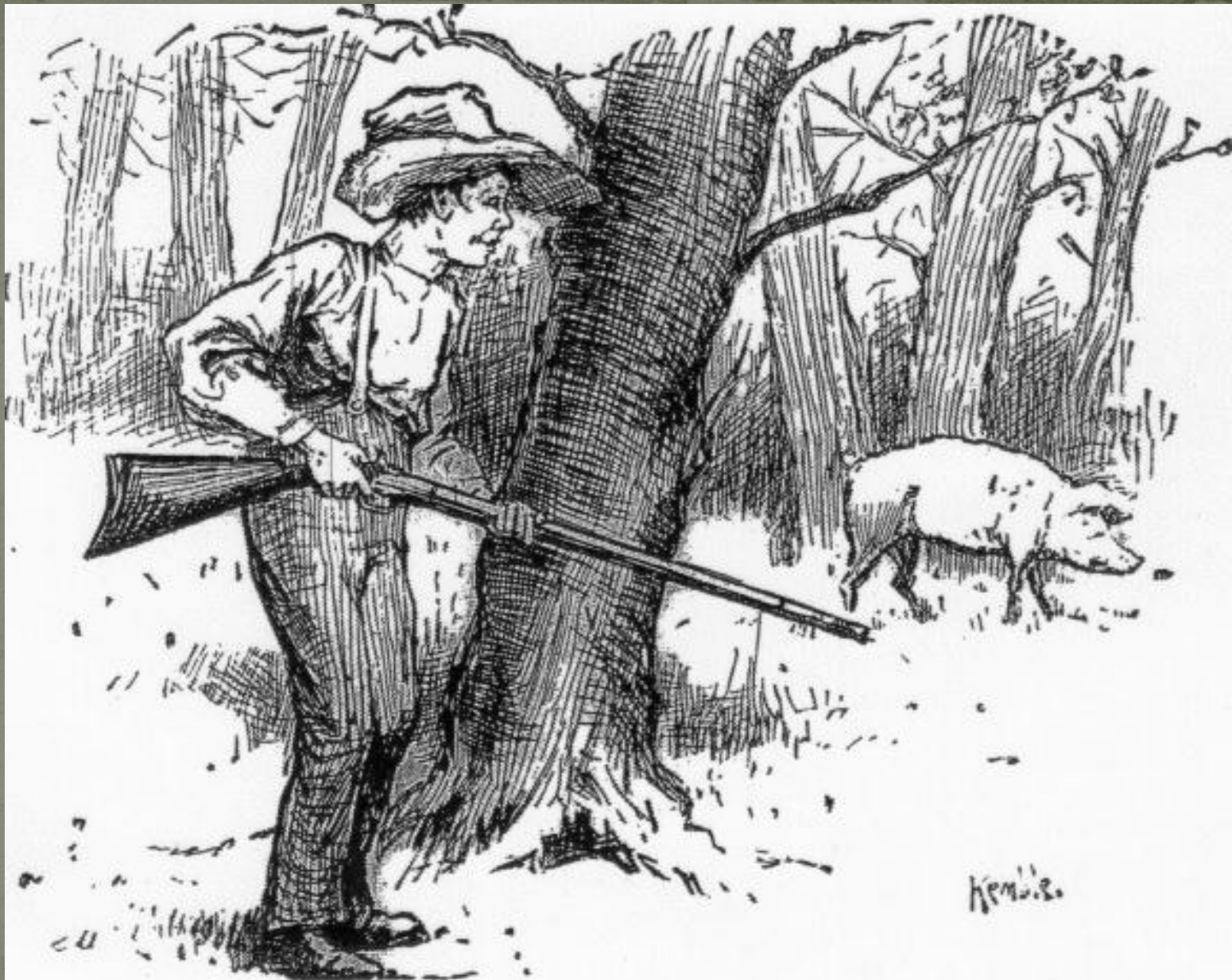
WATCHING THE BOAT.



IN THE WOODS.

Chapter

The sun was u
waked, th
after eig
there in t
shade, th
and feelin
comfortab
could see
or two h
was big
gloomy
them. 7
places on
the light
the leave
places sw
showing



SHOOTING THE PIG.



TOM SAWYER'S BAND OF ROBBERS.



RUBBING THE LAMP.



HUCK AND HIS FATHER.



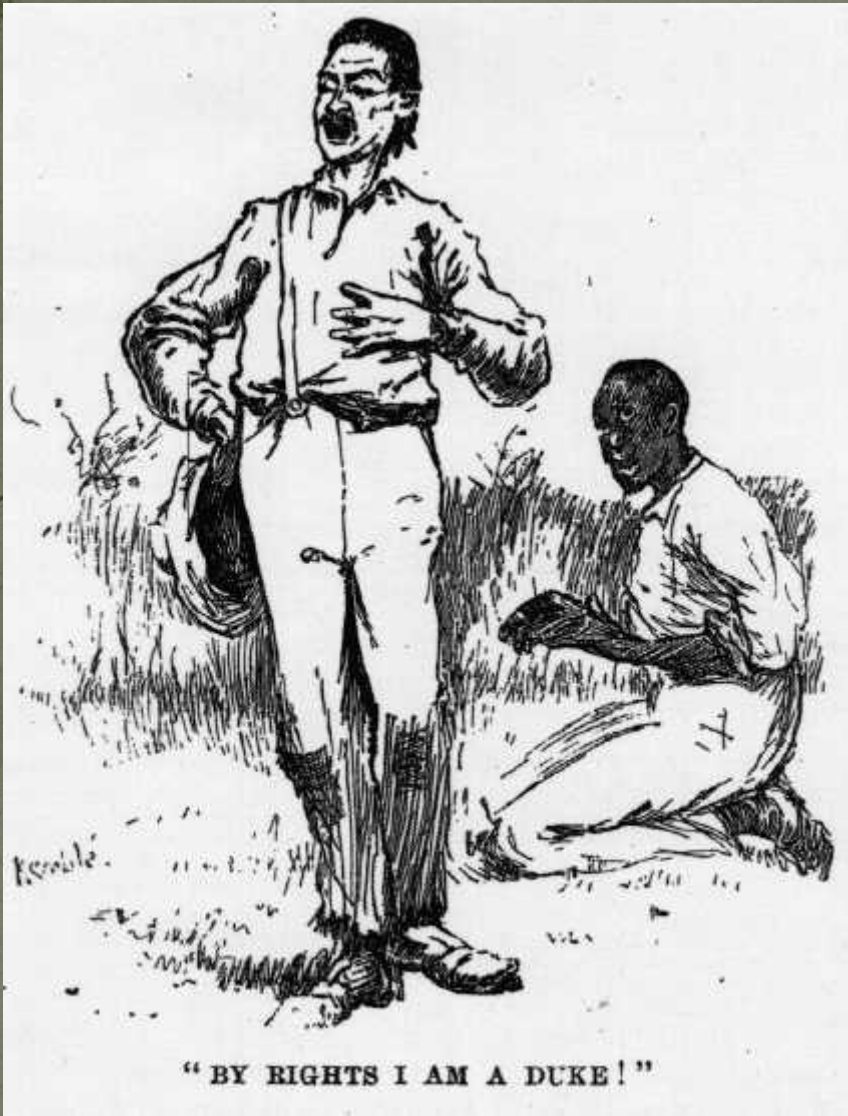
JIM AND THE GHOST,



JIM AND THE SNAKE.



ON THE RAFT.

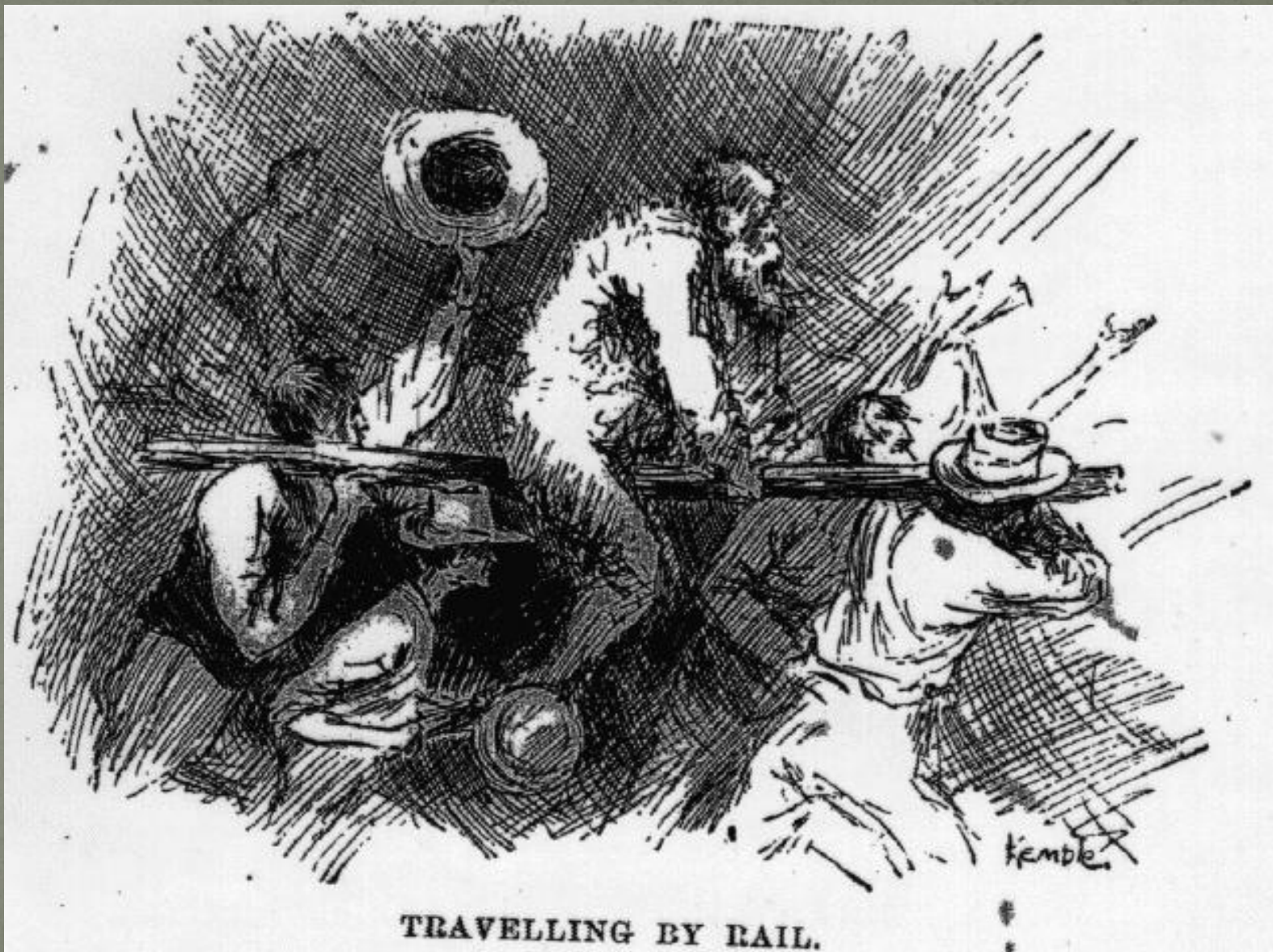




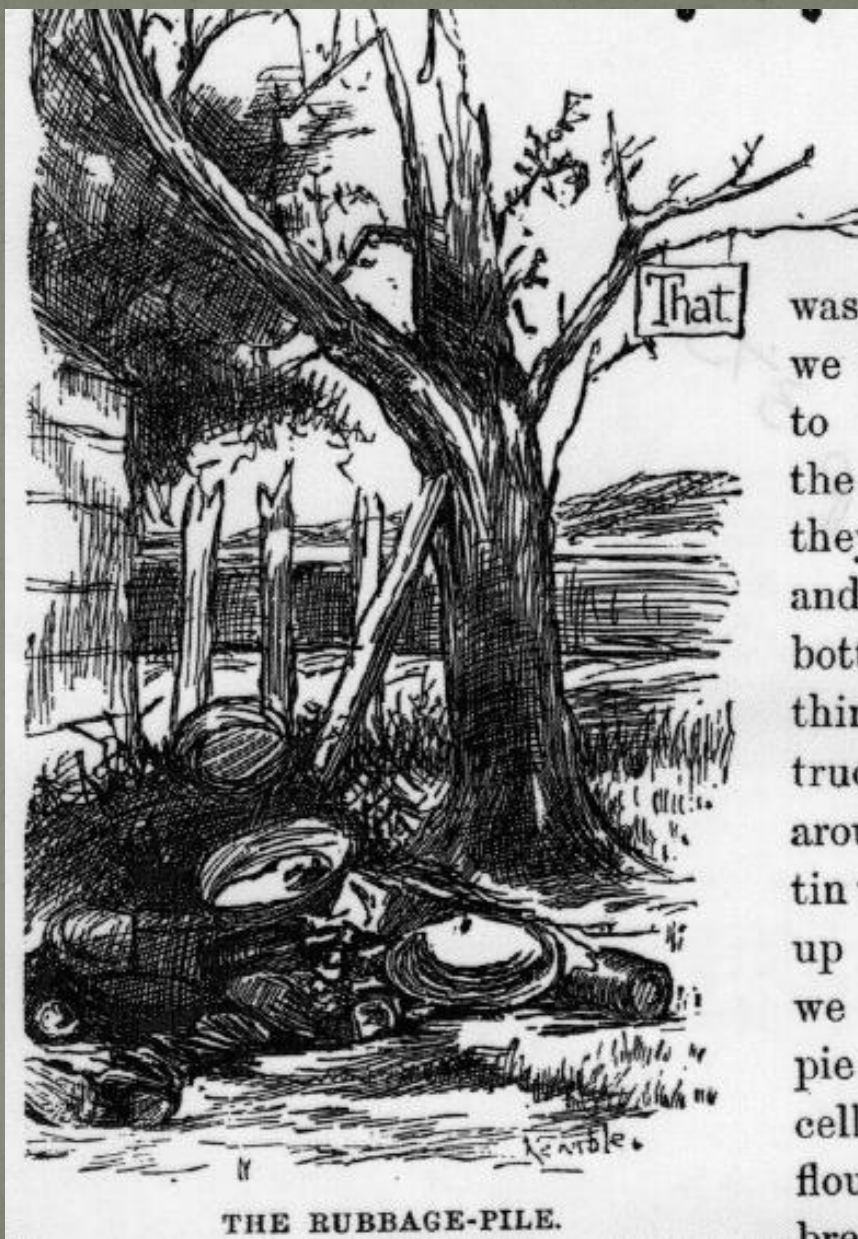
THE DUKE WENT FOR HIM.



“IT WAS TOM SAWYER.”



TRAVELLING BY RAIL.



That was
we
to
the
they
and
bott
thin
truc
arou
tin
up
we
pie
cell
flou
bro



TOM SAWYER WOUNDED.



OUT OF BONDAGE.



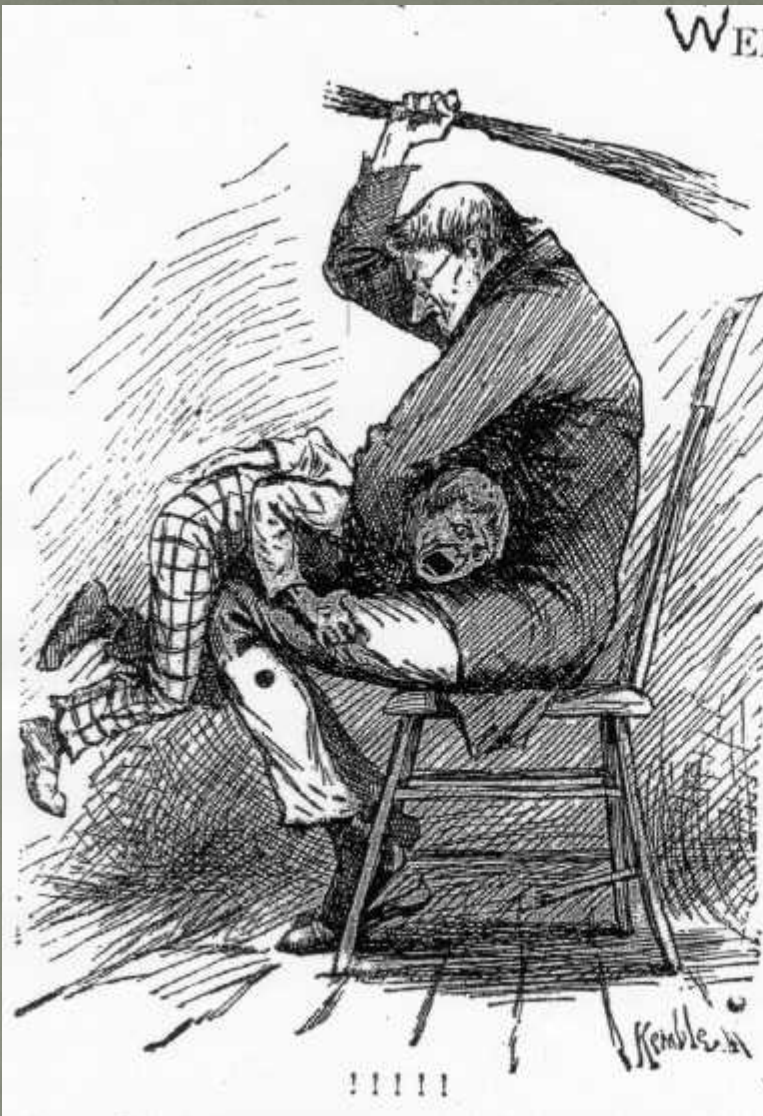
TOM'S LIBERALITY.



THE END, YOURS TRULY, HUCK FINN.

Miss Watson





WELL, three or four months run along, and it was well into the winter, now. I had been to school most all the time, and could spell, and read, and write just a little, and could say the multiplication table up to six times seven is thirty-five, and I don't reckon I could ever get any further than that if I was to live for ever. I don't take no stock in mathematics, anyway.

At first I hated

Huck Finn" And The Picaresque



- The story of Huck Finn's adventurous journey down the Mississippi River on a raft is really a series of short adventures.
- This is the kind of plot that is known in literature as **episodic**.
- Each event is an episode, a self-contained little story.
- Plots like this are characteristic of a certain kind of novel, the picaresque novel.
- (This type of novel had its beginning in Spain during the sixteenth century. Among the first of these novels is one called Lazarillo de Tormes.)
- To say that *Huckleberry Finn* is simply a picaresque novel is incorrect, however, because there is something missing from it that would be necessary in a picaresque novel.

Huck Finn" And The Picaresque:

- In addition to having an episodic plot, picaresque novels have as their chief characters the low-life and criminal classes of a nation.
- While it is true that Huck Finn is not of the upper or even the middle class, he is not a proper picaresque hero because he is not hard-hearted and cruel and selfish enough.
- Perhaps Huck's pap might be a picaresque here; certainly the king and the duke would be. But not Huck.

the picaresque novel

- There is no doubt that Mark Twain borrowed from the traditions of the picaresque novel, particularly from *Don Quixote*, the novel by Cervantes that sprang from the picaresque tradition.
- But as with any literary genius, Mark Twain changed and shaped what he borrowed until it was something a little different, and good in its own way.

the picaresque novel

- The story was begun in 1876, but not completed until 1884 when it was published in England.
- The history of its composition has been told by Walter Blair in his book, *Mark Twain and Huck Finn*.
- When Twain got as far as Chapter 16, he ran into trouble.
- First, he didn't know what to do with the plot; it had gotten out of hand.
- There was no way to get Jim and Huck upstream once the raft and canoe were lost, and they were past Cairo.
- He had been working so hard he lost his inspiration to continue the book.

Shifts Of Viewpoint

- So he laid it aside for a while.
- But notice how the first sixteen chapters of the book deal with **Jim's escape from slavery**.
- Every time freedom is talked about, Jim's freedom is meant.
- After the sixteenth chapter, Jim recedes into the background.
- He disappears from the story altogether in the Grangerford chapters, coming in only to save Huck from the "civilization" of plantation feuds.
- After this, even though the two travelers have a canoe, they make no effort to go back north to Cairo.
- Once the king and the duke come aboard, Jim is of no importance to the story until he is sold off.
- Then, when Tom Sawyer makes his appearance, Jim is no more than a minstrel-show-Negro until he sacrifices his freedom, and is picked up as a human character again.

Shifts Of Viewpoint

- This shifting around would be a major flaw in the novel if Jim were the central figure, or if his escape from slavery were the central theme of the story.
- But neither of these is true.
- **The central figure of the story is Huck Finn: the story is told to us from his point of view-in the first person.**
- Huck sees and reports; sometimes he understands what he sees, and so he interprets it.
- Sometimes he doesn't understand, and this too is significant.
- **The central theme of the story is the theme set by the first and last chapters: Huck's fight against getting "sivilised."**
- The civilization he is running from is peopled by characters like the Widow, Miss Watson, Pap, Aunt Sally, and Tom Sawyer, although Tom attracts Huck in a way.

Contrast

- The story is full of striking comparisons, many of which are pointed out in the section of "Comment" following the summary of each chapter.
- Indeed, there are so many of these comparisons and contrasts that at times Mark Twain seems to be burlesquing his own story.
- The swearing in of Tom Sawyer's robber-gang, for instance, is a clear foreshadowing of the events that take place on the wrecked Walter Scott.
- Tom's love of adventure and Huck's search for adventure (in the Walter Scott episode) are obvious parallels.

Contrast

- There is also an obvious contrast in the character of Tom Sawyer and that of Huck Finn.
- Tom's ambition is to become famous without counting the cost to himself or others.
- The adventure's the thing; the hurt and anguish of Aunt Sally, the pain and discomfort of Jim, these never occur to him.
- But Huck, involved in real adventures, is continually bothered by his **conscience**.
- All during the trip down river, he tries to answer the question whether he's doing right by the Widow's sister and by Jim, or not.

Contrast

- The preoccupation with justice has him on the horns of a dilemma.
- Whatever he chooses to do, he's wrong.
- He's wronging Jim if he returns him to slavery; he's wronging Miss Watson if he helps Jim escape.
- Huck has no way of knowing what is right.
- He must follow the dictates of his feelings every step of the way.
- The only thing he can do is learn by experience. And he does.

Huck And Jim

- He learns from Jim, who is in some ways his substitute father.
- He doesn't believe in Jim's superstition until the superstition proves itself true.
- Note how he scoffs at the snakeskin, until the snakeskin does its work. Huck rises to Jim's level.
- By accepting Jim's superstitions, Huck enters Jim's primitive world which, though crude, is much more sincere and honest than Miss Watson's world.
- Beyond it he cannot go.
- He won't pray because he has not experienced any benefits from prayer.

Second Part

- In the second part of the story - the chapters dealing with the Grangerford feud and the adventures of the king and the duke - we are taken on a tour of the Mississippi River valley.
- We see the romantic ideas of Tom Sawyer in their practical applications.

Second Part

- The Grangerfords, with their senseless pride and basic crudity, are held up as examples of the real culture of the South.
- Huck describes them, their house and its decorations.
- These descriptions seem to us to be descriptions of ignorant and arrogant people.
- We understand this, and we laugh at the sentimentality of Emmeline's poetry and paintings; but Huck, who also sees all this, doesn't understand what it means, and he doesn't laugh at it.
- He thinks it's noble.
- And so do all the members of the Grangerford family, and all their neighbors.

Second Part

- The king and the duke are illustrations of Tom Sawyer's desire to "promote" things when that desire has taken hold of grown-ups.
- These two men choose their own comfort at the expense of those around them.
- They trade on the ignorance, pride, and laziness of the residents of the villages along the mighty river's shore.
- They do just what Tom does when he draws up a coat of arms for Jim, a coat of arms that he himself doesn't understand, let alone Jim.
- And Huck accepts the king and the duke just the same way he accepts Tom.
- He shrugs an intellectual shoulder and murmurs something about how you can't get Tom to explain a thing to you if he doesn't want to.
- **Tom's ambition is to become famous; the frauds want to get rich.**

Third Part

- Finally, the third part of the novel brings us back to Tom Sawyer as the focus of the plot. Huck is still the main character in the novel, however.
- He is reporting all that goes on; and even if he doesn't seem to understand the action, he is involved in it and he colors what he reports by just being what he is.
- But it is this part of the novel that ties together all that comes before it.



Third Part

- We see Tom as he is, a romantic, a muddlehead, but bound to be a successful community leader.
- He has visions of grandeur; he is capable of stupidly leading an escaped slave into a Southern village and having all the slaves who are still bound hold a torchlight parade in honor of the escaped slave.
- The only logical outcome of such goings-on would be the hanging of most of the slaves in the village.
- And this is undoubtedly what would have happened if Tom had not caught the bullet that night at the Phelps' farm.

The Realist

- We also see **Huck** as he is, the opposite of Tom.
- He is a realist, and generally level-headed except when he goes off after Tom Sawyer's adventure, or when he follows Tom's lead.
- He is not "civilizable."
- The end of the book makes this clear.
- He is where he was in the beginning: he left the Widow's house, and he will leave Aunt Sally's.
- Something in civilization appalls Huck Finn.

The Realist

- So far as the mechanics of composition are concerned, Mark Twain was considerably limited by the fact that Huck Finn is a living, breathing personality who shines through the pages of the book.
- Since Huck Finn tells the story himself, in the first person, Mark Twain had to put himself in the place of this thirteen-year-old son of the town drunkard.
- Twain had to see life as Huck saw it.
- He had to conceive a character who could believably see life as Mark Twain saw it.
- But Huck is more than Twain's **mouthpiece**.
- As a living character he is capable of shaping the story.
- The very language Huck uses colors what he sees and how he will pass it on to us.

The Realist

- Very obvious is the fact that the humor of the book often depends on Huck's language. However, it is through his use of language that Twain creates character and sets down objective truth.
- The very innocence of Huck is reflected through his credulous explanations of what he sees-explanations couched in language characteristic of primitive, basic society.
- Huck is capable of making Twain write something merely because it is the kind of thing Huck would do or say; and he can force Twain to leave something out because Huck would not do or say that kind of thing.

Dialects

- So far as the dialects of the characters are concerned, we can only remark that Mark Twain was a master at reproducing the speech of his day. He doesn't need to indicate the speaker's name. The dialect indicates him just as exactly as if he were named.
- Twain uses, he says, "The Missouri negro dialect; the extremest form of the backwoods South-Western dialect; the ordinary 'Pike-County' dialect; and four modified varieties of this last."
- The careful and consistent attention to details of speech is one of the many characteristics of this book which make it worth serious and careful reading.
- Mark Twain drew his knowledge of these dialects from personal experience.
- And it is the concrete and graphic products of experience which make this story so appealing.

Question

- The river plays an important role in this novel. Can you explain its role with some textual details?

Question

- Mark Twain is a great humorist. Can you give some humorous examples?

Question

- Compare Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn.

Links

- Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*:
Text, Illustrations, and Early Reviews
<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/twain/huckfinn.html>
- UCR/California Museum of Photography
<http://www.cmp.ucr.edu/site/exhibitions/twain/>