

American Literature (M.A. English Sem. III)



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UNIT-2

Self-Reliance

Self-Reliance was first published in 1841 in his collection, *Essays: First Series*. However, scholars argue the underlying philosophy of his essay emerged in a sermon given in September 1830 - a month after his first marriage to Ellen (who died the following year of tuberculosis) - and in lectures on the philosophy of history given at Boston's Masonic Temple from 1836 to 1837.

The essay, for which Emerson is perhaps the most well known, contains the most thorough statement of Emerson's emphasis on the need for individuals to avoid conformity and false consistency, and instead follow their own instincts and ideas. The essay illustrates Emerson's finesse for synthesizing and translating classical philosophy (e.g., self-rule in Stoicism, the *Bildung* of Goethe, and the revolution of Kant) into accessible language, and for demonstrating its relevance to everyday life.

While Emerson does not formally do so, scholars conventionally organize *Self-Reliance* into three sections: the value of and barriers to self-reliance (paragraph 1-17), self-reliance and the individual (paragraph 18-32), and self-reliance and society (paragraph 33-50).

The Value of and Barriers to Self-Reliance (paragraph 1-17)

Emerson opens his essay with the assertion, "To believe in your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men, - that is genius." His statement captures the essence of what he means by "self-reliance," namely the reliance upon one's own thoughts and ideas. He argues individuals, like Moses, Plato, and Milton, are held in the highest regard because they spoke what they thought. They did not rely on the words of others, books, or tradition. Unfortunately, few people today do so; instead, "he dismisses without notice his thought, because it is his."

If we do not listen to our own mind, someone else will say what we think and feel, and "we shall be forced to take with shame our own opinion from another." Emerson thus famously counsels his reader to "**Trust thyself.**" In other words, to accept one's destiny, "the place the divine providence has found for you, the society of your contemporaries, the connection of events." If such advice seems easier said than done, Emerson prompts his reader to recall the boldness of youth.

Their mind being whole, their eye is as yet unconquered, and when we look in their faces we are disconcerted. Infancy conforms to nobody; all conform to it; so that one babe commonly makes four or five out of the adults who prattle and play to it. So God has armed youth and puberty and manhood no less with its own piquancy and charm, and made it enviable and gracious and its claims not be put by, if it will stand by itself.

The difficulty of trusting our own mind lies in the conspiracy of society against the individual, for society valorizes conformity. As a youth, we act with independence and irresponsibility, and issue verdicts based on our genuine thought. We are unencumbered by thoughts about consequences or interests. However, as we grow older, society teaches us to curb our thoughts and actions, seek the approval of others, and concern ourselves with names, reputations, and customs. What some would call "maturity," Emerson would call "conformity."

To be a self-reliant individual then, one must return to the neutrality of youth, and be a nonconformist. For a nonconformist, "No law can be sacred to me but that of my nature. Good

and bad are but names very readily transferable to that or this; the only right is what is after my constitution; the only wrong what is against it.” Emerson does not advocate nonconformity for the sake of rebellion per se, but rather so the world may know you for who are, and so you may focus your time and efforts on reinforcing your character in your own terms.

However, the valorization of conformity by society is not the only barrier to self-reliance. According to Emerson, another barrier is the fear for our own consistency: "a reverence for our past act or word because the eyes of others have no other data for computing our orbit than our past acts, and we are loth to disappoint them." Rather than act with a false consistency to a past memory, we must always live in the present. We must become, rather than simply be. Emerson famously argues, "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines." While acting without regard to consistency may lead to us being misunderstood, the self-reliant individual would be in good company. "Pythagoras was misunderstood, and Socrates, and Jesus, and Luther, and Copernicus, and Galileo, and Newton, and every pure and wise spirit that ever took flesh. To be great is to be misunderstood."

Self-Reliance and the Individual (paragraph 18-32)

In this section, Emerson expounds on how individuals can achieve self-reliance.

As mentioned earlier, to live self-reliantly with genuine thought and action, one must "trust thyself." In other words, one must trust in the nature and power of our inherent capacity for independence, what Emerson calls, "Spontaneity" or "Instinct" - the "essence of genius, of virtue, and of life." This Spontaneity or Instinct is grounded in our Intuition, our inner knowledge, rather than "tuitions," the second hand knowledge we learn from others. In turn, Emerson believed our Intuition emerged from the relationship between our soul and the divine spirit (i.e., God). To trust thyself means to also trust in God.

To do so is more difficult than it sounds. It is far easier to follow the footprints of others, to live according to some known or accustomed way. A self-reliant life "shall be wholly strange and new. It shall exclude example and experience. You take the way from man, not to man."

As such, one must live as courageously as a rose.

Man is timid and apologetic; he is no longer upright; he dares not say, "I think," "I am," but instead quotes some saint or sage. He is ashamed before the blade of grass or the blowing rose. These roses under my window make no reference to former roses or to better ones; they are for what they are; they exist with God today. There is no time to them. There is simply the rose; it is perfect in every moment of its existence... But man postpones or remembers; he does not live in the present, but with reverted eye laments the past, or, heedless of the riches that surround him, stands on tiptoe to foresee the future. He cannot be happy and strong until he too lives with nature in the present, above time.

To live in the present with nature and God, one must not worry about the past or future, compare oneself to others, or rely on words and thoughts not one's own.

Self-Reliance and Society (paragraph 33-50)

In the concluding paragraphs of *Self-Reliance*, Emerson argues self-reliance must be applied to all aspects of life, and illustrates how such an application would benefit society. "It is easy to see that a greater self-reliance must work a revolution in all the offices and relations of men; in their religion; in their education; in their pursuits; their modes of living; their association; in their property; in their speculative views."

In regard to religion, Emerson believes a lack of self-reliance has led prayers to become “a disease of the will” and creeds “a disease of the intellect.” People pray to an external source for some foreign addition to their life, whereby prayer acts as a means to a private end, such as for a desired commodity. In this way, prayer has become a form of begging. However, prayer should be a way to contemplate life and unite with God (i.e., to trust thyself and also in God). Self-reliant individuals do not pray for something, but rather embody prayer (i.e., contemplation and unification with God) in all their actions. “The prayer of the farmer kneeling in his field to weed it, the prayer of the rower kneeling with the stroke of his oar, are true prayers heard throughout nature, though for cheap ends.”

Emerson also believes true prayer involves an avoidance of regret and discontent, which indicate a personal “infirmity of will,” as well as of sympathy for the suffering of others, which only prolongs their own infirmity, and instead should be handled with truth and health to return them to their reason.

As for creeds, his critique focuses on how those who cling to creeds obey the beliefs of a powerful mind other than their own, rather than listen to how God speaks through their own minds. In this way, they disconnect with the universe, with God, because the creed becomes mistaken for the universe.

In regard to education, Emerson asserts the education system fosters a restless mind that causes people to travel away from themselves in hope of finding something greater than what they know or have. Educated Americans desire to travel to foreign places like Italy, England, and Egypt for amusement and culture. They build and decorate their houses with foreign taste, their minds to the Past and the Distant. Artists imitate the Doric or the Gothic model. Yet, Emerson reminds us, “They who made England, Italy, or Greece venerable in the imagination, did so by sticking fast where they were, like an axis of the earth.” One should not yearn for or imitate that which is foreign to oneself, for “Your own gift you can present every moment with the cumulative force of a whole life’s cultivation; but of the adopted talent of another you have only an extemporaneous half possession... Every great man is unique.” (Emerson develops these ideas further in his essay, *The American Scholar*, which calls for the creation of a uniquely American cultural identity distinct from European traditions.)

Finally, Emerson addresses the “spirit of society.” According to Emerson, “society never advances.” Civilization has not led to the improvement of society because with the acquisition of new arts and technologies comes the loss of old instincts. For example, “The civilized man has built a coach, but has lost the use of his feet... He has a fine Geneva watch, but he fails of the skill to tell the hour by the sun.” Society merely changes and shifts like a wave. While a “wave moves onward... the water which it is composed does not.” As such, people are no greater than they ever were, and should not smugly rest on the laurels of past artistic and scientific achievements. They must instead actively work to achieve self-reliance, which entails a return to oneself, and liberation from the shackles of the religious, learned, and civil institutions that create a debilitating reliance on property (i.e., things external from the self).

Emerson concludes, “Nothing can bring you peace but yourself. Nothing can bring you peace but the triumph of principles.”

The Over-Soul

Introduction

“The Over-Soul” was published in 1841 in *Essays: First Series*. The essay elaborates upon the relationship between the soul and God that he first explored in *Nature*. Unsurprisingly, scholars consider the essay as the classical statement of his religious ideas.

Emerson prefaces his essay with two poetic epigraphs: “Psychozoia, or, the Life of Soul” by Henry More and a selection by Emerson (later published as “Unity”). The selection from More’s poem raises the idea of not only the soul of the individual, but also the intimate relationship of all souls to God. They are bound to one another. Emerson’s selection builds on this idea, drawing attention to both the constitutive relationship between opposite pairs (e.g., “east and west” and “Night and Day”) – like the relationship between the individual soul and God – and the unifying “power / That works its will on age and hour” and infuses “Every quality and pith” (i.e., God, or the “Over-Soul”).

While Emerson does not explicitly do so, his essay can be divided into four sections as a guide: 1) defining the Over-Soul (paragraphs 1-10), 2) the relationship between the Over-Soul and society (paragraphs 11-15), 3) revelation of the Over-Soul (paragraphs 16-21), and 4) the relationship between the Over-Soul and individuals (paragraphs 22-30).

Defining the Over-Soul (paragraphs 1-10)

Why, asks Emerson, do we have such extraordinary hopes for human life? Where does our “universal sense of want and ignorance” stem from? Emerson argues they derive from our connection to the Over-Soul. The Over-Soul contains and unites all individual souls, and acts as the animating force behind each individual. “When it breathes through his intellect, it is genius; when it breathes through his will, it is virtue; when it flows through his affection, it is love.”

If such a description sounds opaque, Emerson admits to describe the Over-Soul in words is an act of futility, for one can only understand if one yields to and experiences the Over-Soul for oneself. Yet to a certain extent, we are all aware of its presence intuitively in those moments the soul contradicts all normal experience by abolishing time and space. Such moments overpower the human mind, so convinced of the absolute reality of time and space. For example, we are aware of a certain sense of universal and eternal beauty, which “belongs to ages than to mortal life.” When we think of a verse of Shakespeare, profound quote by Plato, or the teachings of Jesus, we feel the reach of their divine thought across the centuries in the present.

Nonetheless, our soul can grow to more intimately connect with and experience the Over-Soul. Such growth occurs not by gradation, but by evolution or ascension into a new state of virtue.

The Over-Soul and Society (paragraphs 11-15)

As the Over-Soul unites all individual souls, so it unites all of society. Such unification manifests itself in the idea of a common nature. When we refer to our common nature in conversations with one another, we do not refer to a social connection, but rather an impersonal one -- in other words, a connection to God.

Revelation (paragraphs 16-21)

Beyond our implicit awareness of the Over-Soul though, how do we recognize our soul and its connection to the Over-Soul? Emerson argues the soul manifests itself through revelation. While the popular conception of revelation is of fortune telling, such a practice is low, sinful, and ultimately futile. God will provide no answer to questions of the future, for humans should

live in the present and accept “the tide of being which floats us into the secret of nature.” Revelation properly understood is instead the “influx of the Divine mind into our mind,” and can be seen all across the history of religion. When our soul mingles with the Over-Soul in a moment of revelation, we receive a new truth or perform a great feat. Such moments are filled with the sublime, which leads to obedience to and insight into the Over-Soul.

Our capacity for revelation also allows us to see and know each other. For as we connect with the Over-Soul, we also connect with one another. We can perceive the spirit of our fellow humans. We place our faith in some, yet not others, based on their character, even if we have no foreknowledge of or significant acquaintance with them. “We are all discerners of spirits.”

The Over-Soul and the Individual (paragraphs 22-30)

As such, the state of our soul “we shall teach, not voluntarily, but involuntarily.” Regardless of superficial qualities like age, actions, or learning, we can distinguish when one has “the tone of seeking” or “the tone of having” an intimate connection with God. In particular, one whose soul has ascended to God is plain and true; has no rose-color, no fine friends, no chivalry, no adventures; does not want admiration; dwells in the hour that now is, in the earnest experience of the common day, — by reason of the present moment and the mere trifle having become porous to thought, and bibulous of the sea of light.

Such an individual experiences ongoing revelations.

As all can achieve such intimacy with God, Emerson advises we all recognize how God dwells within us. Such recognition does not occur through (established) religion, but rather a personal effort and belief. Indeed, Emerson ends with a critique of established religion, which appeals to the number of its followers, and thus stands on authority, rather than faith itself. To connect with the Over-Soul, one must have faith in oneself, and thus in the soul.

UNIT-3

"O Captain! My Captain!"

Summary

The poem is an elegy to the speaker's recently deceased Captain, at once celebrating the safe and successful return of their ship and mourning the loss of its great leader. In the first stanza, the speaker expresses his relief that the ship has reached its home port at last and describes hearing people cheering. Despite the celebrations on land and the successful voyage, the speaker reveals that his Captain's dead body is lying on the deck. In the second stanza, the speaker implores the Captain to "rise up and hear the bells," wishing the dead man could witness the elation. Everyone adored the captain, and the speaker admits that his death feels like a horrible dream. In the final stanza, the speaker juxtaposes his feelings of mourning and pride.

Analysis- Whitman wrote this poem shortly after President Abraham Lincoln was assassinated. It is an extended metaphor intended to memorialize Lincoln's life and work. The Captain represents the assassinated president; the ship represents the war-weathered nation following the Civil War; the "prize won" represents the salvaged union. The speaker, torn

between relief and despair, captures America's confusion at the end of the Civil War. It was a time of many conflicting sentiments, and Whitman immortalizes this sense of uncertainty in "O Captain! My Captain!"

Whitman's poetry places a lot of emphasis on the individual. This particular poem explores a variation on that theme: the self vs. the other. The speaker struggles with balancing his personal feelings of loss with the celebratory mood resulting from the successful voyage. While the Civil War claimed many lives, it led to the reunification of the Union, so many Americans felt similarly divided. In Whitman's poem, the speaker believes that he should be part of the "other" group, celebrating the return to safety. However, his inner thoughts set him apart from the crowd as he tries to reconcile his emotional reaction to the Captain's death.

"O Captain! My Captain!" is the only Walt Whitman poem that has a regular meter and rhyme scheme. Often hailed as "the father of free verse," Whitman tended to write his poems without following any kind of ordered poetic form. However, "O Captain! My Captain!" is organized into three eight-line stanzas, each with an AABBCDED rhyme scheme. Each stanza closes with the words "fallen cold and dead," and the first four lines of each stanza are longer than the last four lines. Because this poem is an elegy to the dead, the more traditional format adds to its solemnity. Additionally, the regular meter is reminiscent of a soldier marching across the battlefield, which is fitting for a poem that commemorates the end of the Civil War.

"The Road Not Taken" BY ROBERT FROST

The narrator comes upon a fork in the road while walking through a yellow wood. He considers both paths and concludes that each one is equally well-traveled and appealing. After choosing one of the roads, the narrator tells himself that he will come back to this fork one day in order to try the other road. However, he realizes that it is unlikely that he will ever have the opportunity to come back to this specific point in time because his choice of path will simply lead to other forks in the road (and other decisions). The narrator ends on a nostalgic note, wondering how different things would have been had he chosen the other path.

Analysis-This poem is made up of four stanzas of five lines, each with a rhyme scheme of ABAAB.

Along with "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," this poem is one of Frost's most beloved works and is frequently studied in high school literature classes. Since its publication, many readers have analyzed the poem as a nostalgic commentary on life choices. The narrator decided to seize the day and express himself as an individual by choosing the road that was "less traveled by." As a result of this decision, the narrator claims, his life was fundamentally different that it would have been had he chosen the more well-traveled path.

This reading of the poem is extremely popular because every reader can empathize with the narrator's decision: having to choose between two paths without having any knowledge of where each road will lead. Moreover, the narrator's decision to choose the "less traveled" path demonstrates his courage. Rather than taking the safe path that others have traveled, the narrator prefers to make his own way in the world.

However, when we look closer at the text of the poem, it becomes clear that such an idealistic analysis is largely inaccurate. The narrator only distinguishes the paths from one another after he has already selected one and travelled many years through life. When he first comes upon the fork in the road, the paths are described as being fundamentally identical. In terms of

beauty, both paths are equally “fair,” and the overall “...passing there / Had worn them really about the same.”

It is only as an old man that the narrator looks back on his life and decides to place such importance on this particular decision in his life. During the first three stanzas, the narrator shows no sense of remorse for his decision nor any acknowledgement that such a decision might be important to his life. Yet, as an old man, the narrator attempts to give a sense of order to his past and perhaps explain why certain things happened to him. Of course, the excuse that he took the road “less travelled by” is false, but the narrator still clings to this decision as a defining moment of his life, not only because of the path that he chose but because he had to make a choice in the first place.

"After Apple-Picking" (1914)

At the end of a long day of apple picking, the narrator is tired and thinks about his day. He has felt sleepy and even trance-like since the early morning, when he looked at the apple trees through a thin sheet of ice that he lifted from the drinking trough. He feels himself beginning to dream but cannot escape the thought of his apples even in sleep: he sees visions of apples growing from blossoms, falling off trees, and piling up in the cellar. As he gives himself over to sleep, he wonders if it is the normal sleep of a tired man or the deep winter sleep of death.

Analysis

In terms of form, this poem is bizarre because it weaves in and out of traditional structure. Approximately twenty-five of the forty-two lines are written in standard iambic pentameter, and there are twenty end-rhymes throughout the poem. This wandering structure allows Frost to emphasize the sense of moving between a waking and dream-like state, just as the narrator does. The repetition of the term “sleep,” even after its paired rhyme (“heap”) has long been forgotten, also highlights the narrator’s gradual descent into dreaming.

In some respects, this poem is simply about apple picking. After a hard day of work, the apple farmer completely fatigued but is still unable to escape the mental act of picking apples: he still sees the apples in front of him, still feels the ache in his foot as if he is standing on a ladder, still bemoans the fate of the flawless apples that fall to the ground and must be consigned to the cider press.

Yet, as in all of Frost’s poems, the narrator’s everyday act of picking apples also speaks to a more metaphorical discussion of seasonal changes and death. Although the narrator does not say when the poem takes place, it is clear that winter is nearly upon him: the grass is “hoary,” the surface of the water in the trough is frozen enough to be used as a pane of glass, and there is an overall sense of the “essence” of winter. Death is coming, but the narrator does not know if the death will be renewed by spring in a few months or if everything will stay buried under mindless snow for all eternity.

Because of the varying rhymes and tenses of the poem, it is not clear when the narrator is dreaming or awake. One possibility is that the entirety of the poem takes place within a dream. The narrator is already asleep and is automatically reliving the day’s harvest as he dreams. This explanation clarifies the disjointed narrative — shifting from topic to topic as the narrator dreams — as well as the narrator’s assertion that he was “well upon my way to sleep” before the sheet of ice fell from his hands.

Another explanation is that the narrator is dying, and his rambling musings on apple picking are the fevered hallucinations of a man about to leave the world of the living. With that in mind, the narrator's declaration that he is "done with apple-picking now" has more finality, almost as if his vision of the apple harvest is a farewell. Even so, he can be satisfied in his work because, with the exception of a few apples on the tree, he fulfilled all of his obligations to the season and to himself. Significantly, even as he falls into a complete sleep, the narrator is unable to discern if he is dying or merely sleeping; the two are merged completely in the essence of the oncoming winter, and Frost refuses to tell the reader what actually happens.

"Birches" (1916)

When the narrator looks at the birch trees in the forest, he imagines that the arching bends in their branches are the result of a boy "swinging" on them. He realizes that the bends are actually caused by ice storms - the weight of the ice on the branches forces them to bend toward the ground - but he prefers his idea of the boy swinging on the branches, climbing up the tree trunks and swinging from side to side, from earth up to heaven. The narrator remembers when he used to swing on birches and wishes that he could return to those carefree days.

Analysis

This poem is written in blank verse with a particular emphasis on the "sound of sense." For example, when Frost describes the cracking of the ice on the branches, his selections of syllables create a visceral sense of the action taking place: "Soon the sun's warmth makes them shed crystal shells / Shattering and avalanching on the snow crust — / Such heaps of broken glass to sweep away..."

Originally, this poem was called "Swinging Birches," a title that perhaps provides a more accurate depiction of the subject. In writing this poem, Frost was inspired by his childhood experience with swinging on birches, which was a popular game for children in rural areas of New England during the time. Frost's own children were avid "birch swingers," as demonstrated by a selection from his daughter Lesley's journal: "On the way home, I climbed up a hi birch and came down with it and I stopt in the air about three feet and pap cout me."

In the poem, the act of swinging on birches is presented as a way to escape the hard rationality or "Truth" of the adult world, if only for a moment. As the boy climbs up the tree, he is climbing toward "heaven" and a place where his imagination can be free. The narrator explains that climbing a birch is an opportunity to "get away from earth awhile / And then come back to it and begin over." A swinger is still grounded in the earth through the roots of the tree as he climbs, but he is able to reach beyond his normal life on the earth and reach for a higher plane of existence.

Frost highlights the narrator's regret that he can no longer find this peace of mind from swinging on birches. Because he is an adult, he is unable to leave his responsibilities behind and climb toward heaven until he can start fresh on the earth. In fact, the narrator is not even able to enjoy the imagined view of a boy swinging in the birches. In the fourth line of the poem, he is forced to acknowledge the "Truth" of the birches: the bends are caused by winter storms, not by a boy swinging on them.

Significantly, the narrator's desire to escape from the rational world is inconclusive. He wants to escape as a boy climbing toward heaven, but he also wants to return to the earth: both "going and coming back." The freedom of imagination is appealing and wondrous, but the narrator

still cannot avoid returning to “Truth” and his responsibilities on the ground; the escape is only a temporary one.

UNIT-4 Mourning Becomes Electra

Character List

Brigadier General Ezra Mannon

Ezra Mannon is the son of Abe, brother of David, husband of Christine, and father of Lavinia and Orin. He is a handsome and stately man with the classic Mannon mask-like expression. He has a problematic relationship with his son, is very close to his daughter, and wishes to have a deeper relationship with his wife. Ezra is beloved by the townsfolk although the Mannons are considered a very curious family. He was estranged from his brother because David sired a child by a French nurse, and refused to help the woman when she needed money. Thus, his discovery of Adam Brant's true identity as the son of Marie Brantome causes him to despise the man even more than he did just knowing Christine loves him. Christine and Adam conspire to kill Ezra by replacing his heart medication with poison.

Christine Mannon

Christine is Ezra's wife and mother to Lavinia and Orin. She is stunningly beautiful and sensuous woman who falls into a romantic relationship with Adam Brant. Christine possesses an unhealthy affection for her son but hates her daughter, who reminds her of her grotesque wedding night with Ezra. Christine plots, schemes, lies, and manipulates to get rid of Ezra, preserve her relationship with Brant, and protect her secrets. She commits suicide after Brant's murder.

Lavinia Mannon

Lavinia, the daughter of Ezra and Christine and sister to Orin, is initially a thin, dour young woman. She loves her father excessively and despises her mother, especially when she discovers her mother's relationship with Brant and when Christine tries to manipulate Orin. After her parents' deaths she experiences a sexual awakening on a trip to the South Sea Islands, but has trouble retaining that joie de vivre when she returns to the Mannon home and Orin's mental illness and despair over Christine's death make him want to expose the family secrets and ruin Lavinia's chances for love with Peter. After Orin commits suicide, Lavinia realizes she has to live alone in the Mannon house for the rest of her days and put the curse to rest.

Orin Mannon

The son of Ezra and Christine and brother of Lavinia, Orin is a newly-returned soldier of slight build and sternness of demeanor. He has an unhealthy fixation on his mother and hates his father; he vacillates between loving his sister and accusing her of terrible things. The mental perturbations he suffered in the war haunt him throughout the play and intensify his reaction to his mother's death and Lavinia's sexual behavior. Although he knows he should marry the pure Hazel, he is so racked with guilt over his assumption that he was to blame for his mother's suicide that he sexually propositions his sister so she will never leave him. When she refuses and he realizes what he has done, he shoots himself.

Captain Adam Brant

A clipper ship captain and a handsome, roguish man. He is the son of David Mannon and the French nurse Marie Brantome, Adam nurses a hatred of the Mannon family for the way they treated his mother. He falls in love with Christine, though, which is a way to revenge himself on Ezra. After she convinces him that they must rid of Ezra, he procures the poison that kills the man. He is later murdered by Orin with Lavinia's aid.

Peter Niles

A friend of Orin's and brother of Hazel, Peter works in the US Artillery corps. He is kind and family-oriented; he loves Lavinia and wishes to marry her, but her shocking behavior at the end of the play and her insistence that she is bad for him eventually convince him otherwise.

Hazel Niles

Peter's kind and beautiful sister. She is in love with Orin and he, in turn, is entranced by her purity, but Orin rejects her because he is too tortured by the war and the events within the Mannon household.

Seth Beckwith

A trusted handyman of the family. Seth is loyal to the Mannons, particularly Lavinia, and helps her when she requests it. He seems to be a leader of the townsfolk and can often be found singing "Shenandoah."

Marie Brantome

A beautiful and vivacious French Canuck nurse who took care of Abe Mannon and fell in love with his son David. She gave birth to Adam Brant and took care of him on her own after David spiraled into drunkenness and violence. She struggled at the end of her life and asked Ezra for help but he refused; she died in her son's arms.

Abe Mannon

The patriarch of the Mannon family. He is father to David and Ezra, grandfather to Lavinia and Orin. He is a stern Puritan figure, unyielding in his ideas of rightness and rectitude. He expels David from the family after his affair with Marie is discovered.

David Mannon

Ezra's brother and Abe's son, David falls in love with Marie and sires Adam Brant. His exile from the family ruins his life and he turns to drink. He beats his wife and quarrels with his son.

The Chantyman

A drunken singer whom Adam Brant meets right before his death. He complains about his money being stolen, sings snippets of songs, and asks Brant to take him on his next trip. Brant considers the man's singing of a dirge a bad omen, which it certainly is.

Amos Ames

A friend of Seth's and a local carpenter. Amos is portly and gossipy and is married to Louisa.

Louisa Ames

Amos's wife and a woman prone to malicious gossip.

Minnie

Louisa's cousin, a rather silly and gossipy woman.

Josiah Borden

The manager of the Mannon shipping company.

Emma Borden

Wife of Josiah.

Doctor Joseph Blake

The kindly but opinionated elderly physician who attends to Ezra's body. He admires the General greatly and does not tolerate criticism of him.

Everett Hills

The Congregational minister. He is prosperous, self-important, unctuous, and timid.

Mrs. Hills

The minister's wife.

Joe Silva

A Portuguese fishing captain with a loud voice, portly body, and dark hair. A friend of Seth's.

Ira Mackel

An elderly farmer and friend of Seth's.

Abner Small

A hardware clerk with a raspy voice, thin frame, and bright eyes. He takes a bet to stay in the empty Mannon house but is too afraid of ghosts to last long.

Themes

Revenge

At its most elemental level, *Mourning Becomes Electra* is a revenge tragedy. At times over the course of its long, exhaustive narrative, it seems like every character is out for revenge: Christine wants payback for a crappy marriage, Orin is headlong into a Hamlet complex over Brant going to bed with his mother Lavinia is out to settle her dead father's score with the person responsible for killing him: her mother. Family intrigue is everywhere and the breakdown of the family unit is creating primitive psychological responses.

Post-Civil-War America as Ancient Greece

While he may not have been first to look back to the Greek drama of the past as suitable framework within which to work within the milieu of the American Civil War, one cannot argue that O'Neil made the connection viable for future authors and works like *Cold Mountain*. What is actually a trilogy of separate plays set at the close of the Civil War is a contemporary updating of another set of plays known collectively as the Oresteia by Aeschylus.

Incest

Incest is prevalent as a theme throughout the play and is manifested both literally and figuratively. It is not merely coincidence that the family at the center of the play seems to be disintegrating before our very eyes. The sins of the present can be traced to the sins of the past and the guiding iniquity driving all is willingness of the clan to remain insulated from much of the outside world. While the incestuous desires and emotions are literally present, it is the repression of the drive to act upon them that becomes perhaps an even insidious force of division within the family structure.

The Destructive Power of Deceit Lying in Wait

Deception and lies run as rampant as thoughts of revenge among this brooding, self-involved clan and the queen of this fair is really self-delusion rather than the deception of others. The theme of self-deception is impossible to extricate from the larger thematic concern of the consequences of insularity. The ability to believe your own lies and those told by others is exponentially enhanced when the others are telling the same lies to themselves as you. The unfortunate thing about self-deception is that it usually has a shelf life and gradually loses its power to hold together over time, making it just a waiting game for the negative impact to arrive.

The Past's Effects on the Present

There is no sense in this play that the characters feel that they can break free from the past and live their lives as they see fit. They are constantly oppressed by the weight of the past as seen in Marie's exile and shame, Brant's torturous upbringing, Christine's traumatic wedding night, Orin's childhood, Lavinia's childhood, and more. The Mannon history is dark and heavy and no one escapes from it. The Mannon destiny is to constantly grapple with the sins of the

father/mother, and it is fitting, then, that the last scene is Lavinia shutting the door to the house and closing herself off from the world outside so she can bear this fate alone.

The Absence of Gods

There is certainly a sense of fate, or destiny, that moves the characters inexorably toward their doom. However, unlike traditional Greek tragedies, this is not orchestrated by gods. In fact, there are no gods in the text despite the allusions to Puritanism. O'Neill wrote in his letters of "the Force behind" and how he desired to create a "tragic expression in terms of transfigured modern values." The fatalistic forces do not exist in the present, though; they are firmly within the past—they are the family ancestors, the sins of the father. There are no forces beyond the family itself; the family contains the seeds of its own destruction. Critic Miriam Chirico notes that O'Neill had a "theory that the forces that determine one's fate are no longer external to the human being's world." The religious obsession, sexual frustration, selfishness, and trauma are more than powerful enough to guide characters to their ignoble deeds and ends.

Puritanism

Puritanism is a particularly harsh and rigid religious doctrine that has an intense focus on sin, guilt, and punishment. As traditional Puritans, the Mannons espoused these stringent beliefs on morality and sought to stamp out any behavior or belief that did not adhere to them. As a result, Mannons such as Christine and Lavinia struggle with their subjugation and repression of their normal sexual impulses. They are crushed under this patriarchal structure that demands they submit to their husbands and to God; it is no wonder Lavinia revels in the freedom and openness of the Blessed Isles. Puritanism is part of the familial curse, and the ancestors who carry out that curse use it to deleterious effects.

Summary

Eugene O'Neill's famed Mourning Becomes Electra is a complex and tragic play in three parts. Set in New England at the close of the Civil War, it was first published and staged in 1931. The play is based off Aeschylus's Greek tragedy *The Oresteia* and its three sections "Homecoming," "The Hunted," and "The Haunting" mirror Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*, *The Libation Bearers*, and *The Eumenides*. The townspeople in O'Neill's work take the role of the Greek chorus. Regarding the title, O'Neill explained, "By the title *Mourning Becomes Electra* I sought to convey that mourning befits Electra; it becomes Electra to mourn; it is her fate; black is becoming to her and it is the color that becomes her destiny." As early as 1926, O'Neill wondered in his journal if it were possible to "get [a] modern psychological approximation of Greek sense of fate into such a play, which an intelligent audience of today, possessed by no belief in gods or supernatural retribution, could accept and be moved by." In October 1928 he wrote in his work diary that he had an idea for a "Greek tragedy plot notion." The next month he said the same thing but for "modern surroundings." He was familiar with the Greeks, with Nietzsche, and psychoanalysis—all things he would incorporate into this new work. O'Neill called *Mourning* "the most ambitious thing I've tackled."

Once he began writing, it took 533 days to complete; this is notable given the fact that *Desire Under the Elms* only took 62 days and *Strange Interlude* took 231. During the process of writing O'Neill also explored the idea of a play on Aeschylus's life but eventually abandoned it. The six-hour play premiered at the Guild Theater on Broadway on October 29th, 1931 and ran for 150 performances. It was revived at the Alvin in May 1932 and the Circle in the Square in 1972. *Mourning Becomes Electra* is considered an iconic work of American drama and was and is critically acclaimed. It was adapted into a 1947 film of the same name, which unfortunately did not see much box office success. It was also adapted into a TV miniseries that aired in 1978 on PBS.

The play is set at the close of the Civil War in New England at the imposing Mannon estate. General Ezra Mannon is due back home soon, as is his son Orin, who fought in the Union army. Ezra's beautiful wife, Christine, is having an affair with a clipper ship captain, Adam Brant. At the beginning of the play Ezra and Christine's daughter Lavinia, a thin and cold young woman, talks with the family gardener, Seth, and realizes that Brant has been coming around the house not to court *her* but to see her mother. She also realizes that Brant is the child of David Mannon, Ezra's father Abe's brother. David had an affair with Marie Brantome, Abe's French nurse, and, as a result, was exiled from the family. It seems that their child is now seeking revenge. Lavinia confronts Brant and he angrily confirms her suspicions. Later Lavinia confronts her mother and warns her that she must desist from her adulterous relationship. Christine, who has no love for her daughter, nevertheless lies and promises to do so. When she sees Adam again she convinces him that they must poison Ezra; they can do this because Ezra has heart trouble and they can replace his medicine with poison.

A week later Ezra returns home from the war. Lavinia is elated, having an intense and passionate love for her father. Ezra is pleased to see Christine and tells her he wants to break down the wall between them. They retire to their bedroom, which distresses Lavinia. After their lovemaking, Christine steals away but Ezra is awake and accuses her of wanting to get away from him. They quarrel and Christine reveals the truth about Brant. Ezra's heart begins to act up and Christine slips him the poison. As he is dying, Lavinia rushes in. Ezra manages to say that it is not medicine and that Christine is guilty. After he expires Lavinia is shocked and devastated. Without Christine noticing, Lavinia finds the box of poison.

Orin arrives home from the war. He is accompanied by Peter, a neighbor who is in love with Lavinia (Peter's sister Hazel is in love with Orin), and Lavinia. Lavinia warns Orin to be careful of Christine and not let her manipulate him. He is confused, but he is thrilled to see his mother. Mother and son embrace, and the unsettling closeness of their relationship is apparent. Orin asks her about this Brant fellow and Christine lies, saying he was courting Lavinia. Orin tells her

how much he missed her and how he used to dream of sailing away to the South Sea Islands with her.

When Orin and Lavinia are alone again, Lavinia tells him about Brant and Christine's affair. Orin is furious but loath to believe his sister. He agrees, though, to follow Christine and see if she goes to Brant.

The night after Ezra's funeral Brant walks aboard the deck of his ship. He converses with a Chantyman and feels a chill of foreboding as to his own fate. Christine surprises him and tells him Lavinia seems to know about the murder and that they must go away. Brant agrees, and the two plan to sail to China as soon as possible. Christine departs.

While Christine and Brant were talking, Lavinia and Orin had hidden themselves and listened to their mother's conversation. After her departure, Orin shoots and kills Brant. He and Lavinia make it look like a robbery.

Back at the house, Christine is nervous about Brant, and seeks comfort from the sweet and innocent Hazel. When Orin and Lavinia return, they tell their mother about Brant's death. Christine is undone, and even though Orin tries to tell her that the two of them can be happy now, she goes inside and shoots herself. Lavinia believes it justice, but Orin is tortured by what he sees as his role in her death.

A year later, Seth, Peter, and Hazel discuss the imminent return of Orin and Lavinia, who had traveled to China. When the brother and sister arrive, Orin looks haggard and old but Lavinia now looks beautiful and sensuous like her mother. Peter marvels at her changed appearance and disposition, and she tells him excitedly that they can marry and have happiness now. Orin, though, needles Lavinia about how much she liked the South Sea Islands that they visited and how she cavorted with the natives. Lavinia is angry with her brother but tries to help him leave the past behind.

A month later, though, it is clear that Orin is still bitter and guilt-ridden. He tells Lavinia he wrote a manuscript detailing all the Mannon crimes, and that a large portion of it is about her. She is furious but he accuses her of untoward behavior with a native, Avahanni. When she admits she engaged in lust with him, Orin attacks her.

Meanwhile, Hazel and Peter are growing concerned with Orin and Lavinia, respectively. Hazel wonders why Lavinia seems to control Orin so much. Peter dismisses her concerns and departs.

Orin rushes to Hazel and thrusts the manuscript in her hands, warning her that if Lavinia goes through with marrying Peter, Peter must read this. Hazel agrees. Lavinia sees the two of them and notices the manuscript. She tells Orin she will

do anything if he surrenders it. Orin gives pause, and grimly tells Hazel it is over between them. He sends her away, confused and upset.

Orin turns to Lavinia and tells her that she must know what he wants, insinuating that the two of them will have a sexual relationship. Lavinia cannot believe this and cries out that he is insane. He insists it is the only way to stay together. Lavinia bursts out that she wishes he was dead, which makes Orin realize this would be just. He goes into his study, telling the newly returned Peter that he is simply going to clean his pistol. In the other room, he shoots himself dead.

A few days later Lavinia appears like her old self—dour, dark, and grim. Hazel confronts her and tells her to leave Peter alone, as she has influenced him and made him crueler. When Peter joins Lavinia she frantically tries to hold onto their love, even proposing a quick marriage. Peter is suspicious, and Lavinia clings him and accidentally calls him “Adam.” Peter cannot understand and asks about the native man. Lavinia suddenly realizes her fate is neither love nor happiness, but rather to live out her days closed up in the Mannon house. She orders Peter away and tells Seth to board up the house. There she will be with the Mannon ancestors and see the curse to its end. She goes inside and shuts the door behind her.

UNIT-5 Huckleberry Finn

Themes

Conflict between civilization and "natural life"

The primary theme of the novel is the conflict between civilization and "natural life." Huck represents natural life through his freedom of spirit, uncivilized ways, and desire to escape from civilization. He was raised without any rules or discipline and has a strong resistance to anything that might "civilize" him. This conflict is introduced in the first chapter through the efforts of the Widow Douglas: she tries to force Huck to wear new clothes, give up smoking, and learn the Bible. Throughout the novel, Twain seems to suggest that the uncivilized way of life is more desirable and morally superior. Drawing on the ideas of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Twain suggests that civilization corrupts, rather than improves, human beings.

SHonor

The theme of honor permeates the novel after first being introduced in the second chapter, where Tom Sawyer expresses his belief that there is a great deal of honor associated with thieving. Robbery appears throughout the novel, specifically when Huck and Jim encounter robbers on the shipwrecked boat and are forced to put up with the King and Dauphin, both of whom "rob" everyone they meet. Tom's original robber band is paralleled later in the novel when Tom and Huck become true thieves, but honorable ones, at the end of the novel. They resolve to steal Jim, freeing him from the bonds of slavery, which is an honorable act. Thus, the concept of honor and acting to earn it becomes a central theme in Huck's adventures.

Food

Food plays a prominent role in the novel. In Huck's childhood, he often fights pigs for food, and eats out of "a barrel of odds and ends." Thus, providing Huck with food becomes a symbol of people caring for and protecting him. For example, in the first chapter, the Widow Douglas feeds Huck, and later on Jim becomes his symbolic caretaker, feeding and watching over him on Jackson's Island. Food is again discussed fairly prominently when Huck lives with the Grangerfords and the Wilks.

Mockery of Religion

A theme Twain focuses on quite heavily on in this novel is the mockery of religion. Throughout his life, Twain was known for his attacks on organized religion. Huck Finn's sarcastic character perfectly situates him to deride religion, representing Twain's personal views. In the first chapter, Huck indicates that hell sounds far more fun than heaven. Later on, in a very prominent scene, the "King", a liar and cheat, convinces a religious community to give him money so he can "convert" his pirate friends. The religious people are easily led astray, which mocks their beliefs and devotion to God.

Superstition

Superstition appears throughout the novel. Generally, both Huck and Jim are very rational characters, yet when they encounter anything slightly superstitious, irrationality takes over. The power superstition holds over the two demonstrates that Huck and Jim are child-like despite their apparent maturity. In addition, superstition foreshadows the plot at several key junctions. For instance, when Huck spills salt, Pap returns, and when Huck touches a snakeskin with his bare hands, a rattlesnake bites Jim.

Slavery

The theme of slavery is perhaps the most well known aspect of this novel. Since its first publication, Twain's perspective on slavery and ideas surrounding racism have been hotly debated. In his personal and public life, Twain was vehemently anti-slavery. Considering this information, it is easy to see that *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* provides an allegory to explain how and why slavery is wrong. Twain uses Jim, a main character and a slave, to demonstrate the humanity of slaves. Jim expresses the complicated human emotions and struggles with the path of his life. To prevent being sold and forced to separate from his family, Jim runs away from his owner, Miss Watson, and works towards obtaining freedom so he can buy his family's freedom. All along their journey downriver, Jim cares for and protects of Huck, not as a servant, but as a friend. Thus, Twain's encourages the reader to feel sympathy and empathy for Jim and outrage at the society that has enslaved him and threatened his life. However, although Twain attacks slavery through his portrayal of Jim, he never directly addresses the issue. Huck and Jim never debate slavery, and all the other slaves in the novel are very minor characters. Only in the final section of the novel does Twain develop the central conflict concerning slavery: should Huck free Jim and then be condemned to hell? This decision is life-altering for Huck, as it forces him to reject everything "civilization" has taught him. Huck chooses to free Jim, based on his personal experiences rather than social norms, thus choosing the morality of the "natural life" over that of civilization.

Money

The concept of wealth or lack thereof is threaded throughout the novel, and highlights the disparity between the rich and poor. Twain purposely begins the novel by pointing out that Huck has over six thousand dollars to his name; a sum of money that dwarfs all the other sums mentioned, making them seem inconsequential in contrast. Huck demonstrates a relaxed attitude towards wealth, and because he has so much of it, does not view money as a necessity, but rather as a luxury. Huck's views regarding wealth clearly contrast with Jim's. For Jim, who is on a quest to buy his family out of slavery, money is equivalent to freedom. In addition, wealth would allow him to raise his status in society. Thus, Jim is on a constant quest for wealth, whereas Huck remains apathetic.

Mississippi River

The majority of the plot takes place on the river or its banks. For Huck and Jim, the river represents freedom. On the raft, they are completely independent and determine their own courses of action. Jim looks forward to reaching the free states, and Huck is eager to escape his abusive, drunkard of a father and the "civilization" of Miss Watson. However, the towns along the river bank begin to exert influence upon them, and eventually Huck and Jim meet criminals, shipwrecks, dishonesty, and great danger. Finally, a fog forces them to miss the town of Cairo, at which point there were planning to head up the Ohio River, towards the free states, in a steamboat.

Originally, the river is a safe place for the two travelers, but it becomes increasingly dangerous as the realities of their runaway lives set in on Huck and Jim. Once reflective of absolute freedom, the river soon becomes only a short-term escape, and the novel concludes on the safety of dry land, where, ironically, Huck and Jim find their true freedom.

Summary

Throughout the twentieth century, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* has become famous not only as one of Twain's greatest achievements, but also as a highly controversial piece of literature. In certain Southern states, the novel was banned due to its extensive criticism of the hypocrisy of slavery. Others have argued that the novel is racist due to the many appearances of the word "nigger." Unfortunately, the connotations of this word tend to override the novel's deeper antislavery themes, and prevent readers from understanding Twain's true perspective. In Twain's time, this word was used often and did not carry as powerful a racist connotation as it does currently. Therefore, in using the word, Twain was simply projecting a realistic portrayal of Southern society. Undoubtedly, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is highly significant due to its deep exploration of issues surrounding racism and morality, and continues to provide controversy and debate to this day, evidencing the continued relevance of these concepts.

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is often considered Twain's greatest masterpiece. Combining his raw humor and startlingly mature material, Twain

developed a novel that directly attacked many of the traditions the South held dear at the time of its publication. Huckleberry Finn is the main character, and through his eyes, the reader sees and judges the South, its faults, and its redeeming qualities. Huck's companion Jim, a runaway slave, provides friendship and protection while the two journey along the Mississippi on their raft.

The novel opens with Huck telling his story. Briefly, he describes what he has experienced since, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, which preceded this novel. After Huck and Tom discovered twelve thousand dollars in treasure, Judge Thatcher invested the money for them. Huck was adopted by the Widow Douglas and Miss Watson, both of whom took pains to raise him properly. Dissatisfied with his new life, and wishing for the simplicity he used to know, Huck runs away. Tom Sawyer searches him out and convinces him to return home by promising to start a band of robbers. All the local young boys join Tom's band, using a hidden cave for their hideout and meeting place. However, many soon grow bored with their make-believe battles, and the band falls apart.

Soon thereafter, Huck discovers footprints in the snow and recognizes them as his violent, abusive Pap's. Huck realizes Pap, who Huck hasn't seen in a very long time, has returned to claim the money Huck found, and he quickly runs to Judge Thatcher to "sell" his share of the money for a "consideration" of a dollar. Pap catches Huck after leaving Judge Thatcher, forces him to hand over the dollar, and threatens to beat Huck if he ever goes to school again.

Upon Pap's return, Judge Thatcher and the Widow try to gain court custody of Huck, but a new judge in town refuses to separate Huck from his father. Pap steals Huck away from the Widow's house and takes him to a log cabin. At first Huck enjoys the cabin life, but after receiving frequent beatings, he decides to escape. When Pap goes into town, Huck seizes the opportunity. He saws his way out of the log cabin, kills a pig, spreads the blood as if it were his own, takes a canoe, and floats downstream to Jackson's Island. Once there, he sets up camp and hides out.

A few days after arriving on the island, Huck stumbles upon a still smoldering campfire. Although slightly frightened, Huck decides to seek out his fellow inhabitant. The next day, he discovers Miss Watson's slave, Jim, is living on the island. After overhearing the Widow's plan to sell him to a slave trader, Jim ran away. Jim, along with the rest of the townspeople, thought Huck was dead and is frightened upon seeing him. Soon, the two share their escape stories and are happy to have a companion.

While Huck and Jim live on the island, the river rises significantly. At one point, an entire house floats past them as they stand near the shore. Huck and Jim climb aboard to see what they can salvage and find a dead man lying in the corner of the house. Jim goes over to inspect the body and realizes it is Pap, Huck's father. Jim keeps this information a secret.

Soon afterwards, Huck returns to the town disguised as a girl in order to gather some news. While talking with a woman, he learns that both Jim and Pap are suspects in his murder. The woman then tells Huck that she believes Jim is hiding out on Jackson's Island. Upon hearing her suspicions, Huck immediately returns to Jim and together they flee the island to avoid discovery.

Using a large raft, they float downstream during the nights and hide along the shore during the days. In the middle of a strong thunderstorm, they see a steamboat that has crashed, and Huck convinces Jim to land on the boat. Together, they climb aboard and discover there are three thieves on the wreck, two of whom are debating whether to kill the third. Huck overhears this conversation, and he and Jim try to escape, only to find that their raft has come undone from its makeshift mooring. They manage to find the robbers' skiff and immediately take off. Within a short time, they see the wrecked steamship floating downstream, far enough below the water-line to have drowned everyone on board. Subsequently, they reclaim their original raft, and continue down the river with both the raft and the canoe.

As Jim and Huck continue floating downstream, they become close friends. Their goal is to reach Cairo, where they can take a steamship up the Ohio River and into the free states. However, during a dense fog, with Huck in the canoe and Jim in the raft, they are separated. When they find each other in the morning, it soon becomes clear that in the midst of the fog, they passed Cairo.

A few nights later, a steamboat runs over the raft, and forces Huck and Jim to jump overboard. Again, they are separated as they swim for their lives. Huck finds the shore and is immediately surrounded by dogs. After managing to escape, he is invited to live with a family called the Grangerfords. At the Grangerford home, Huck is treated well and discovers that Jim is hiding in a nearby swamp. Everything is peaceful until an old family feud between the Grangerfords and the Shepherdsons is rekindled. Within one day all the men in the Grangerford family are killed, including Huck's new best friend, Buck. Amid the chaos, Huck runs back to Jim, and together they start downriver again.

Further downstream, Huck rescues two humbugs known as the Duke and the King. Immediately, the two men take control of the raft and start to travel downstream, making money by cheating people in the various towns along the river. The Duke and the King develop a scam they call the Royal Nonesuch, which earns them over four hundred dollars. The scam involves getting all the men in the town to come to a show with promises of great entertainment. In the show, the King parades around naked for a few minutes. The men are too ashamed to admit to wasting their money, and tell everyone else that the show was phenomenal, thus making the following night's performance a success. On the

third night, everyone returns plotting revenge, but the Duke and King manage to escape with all their ill gotten gains.

Further downriver, the two con men learn about a large inheritance meant for three recently orphaned girls. To steal the money, the men pretend to be the girls' British uncles. The girls are so happy to see their "uncles" that they do not realize they are being swindled. Meanwhile, the girls treat Huck so nicely that he vows to protect them from the con men's scheme. Huck sneaks into the King's room and steals the large bag of gold from the inheritance. He hides the gold in Peter Wilks's (the girls' father) coffin. Meanwhile, the humbugs spend their time liquidating the Wilks family property. At one point, Huck finds Mary Jane Wilks, the eldest of the girls, and sees that she is crying. He confesses the entire story to her. She is infuriated, but agrees to leave the house for a few days so Huck can escape.

Right after Mary Jane leaves, the real Wilks uncles arrive in town. However, because they lost their baggage on their voyage, they are unable to prove their identities. Thus, the town lawyer gathers all four men to determine who is lying. The King and the Duke fake their roles so well that there is no way to determine the truth. Finally, one of the real uncles says his brother Peter had a tattoo on his chest and challenges the King to identify it. In order to determine the truth, the townspeople decide to exhume the body. Upon digging up the grave, the townspeople discover the missing money Huck hid in the coffin. In the ensuing chaos, Huck runs straight back to the raft and he and Jim push off into the river. The Duke and King also escape and catch up to rejoin the raft.

Farther down the river, the King and Duke sell Jim into slavery, claiming he is a runaway slave from New Orleans. Huck decides to rescue Jim, and daringly walks up to the house where Jim is being kept. Luckily, the house is owned by none other than Tom Sawyer's Aunt Sally. Huck immediately pretends to be Tom. When the real Tom arrives, he pretends to be his younger brother, Sid Sawyer. Together, he and Huck contrive a plan to help Jim escape from his "prison," an outdoor shed. Tom, always the troublemaker, also makes Jim's life difficult by putting snakes and spiders into his room.

After a great deal of planning, the boys convince the town that a group of thieves is planning to steal Jim. That night, they collect Jim and start to run away. The local farmers follow them, shooting as they run after them. Huck, Jim, and Tom manage to escape, but Tom is shot in the leg. Huck returns to town to fetch a doctor, whom he sends to Tom and Jim's hiding place. The doctor returns with Tom on a stretcher and Jim in chains. Jim is treated badly until the doctor describes how Jim helped him take care of the boy. When Tom awakens, he demands that they let Jim go free.

At this point, Aunt Polly appears, having traveled all the way down the river. She realized something was very wrong after her sister wrote to her that both Tom and Sid had arrived. Aunt Polly tells them that Jim is indeed a free man, because

the Widow had passed away and freed him in her will. Huck and Tom give Jim forty dollars for being such a good prisoner and letting them free him, while in fact he had been free for quite some time.

After this revelation, Jim tells Huck to stop worrying about his Pap and reveals that the dead man in the floating house was in fact Huck's father. Aunt Sally offers to adopt Huck, but he refuses on the grounds that he had tried that sort of lifestyle once before, and it didn't suit him. Huck concludes the novel stating he would never have undertaken the task of writing out his story in a book, had he known it would take so long to complete.
