[00:00:00]

**Matt Seybold:** What's a feud? Well, where was you raised?

Don't you know what a feud is? Never heard of it before. Tell me about it. Well, Buck says, a feud is this way. A man has a quarrel with another man, and he kills him. Then the other man's brother kills him, and then the other brothers on both sides goes for one another, and then the cousins chip in, and by and by everybody's killed off, and there ain't no more feud.

But it's kinda slow, and it takes a long time.

**Jim Phelan:** This is Jim Phelan, Director of Project Narrative at The Ohio State University, and I'd like to welcome you to the Project Narrative Podcast. Today's episode is a little different from our usual fare because my guest, Matt Seybold, has his own podcast called The American Vandal. And though we're recording this podcast on my home [00:01:00] court, that is a recording studio at Ohio State, Matt will also send it out as an episode of his podcast, The American Vandal.

So, it's a crossover. We'll both follow and tweak the usual format for the Project Narrative podcast. We'll begin by reading a short narrative chosen by the guest, and Matt has selected Chapter 18 of Mark Twain's Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, and then we'll discuss it. But rather than Matt reading the whole chapter, he'll read the first half, and I'll read the second half.

During the discussion, I'll start in the role of host and ask Matt some questions, and then we'll switch roles. The bridge between the two halves of the discussion will be a short conversation about the kinds of close reading we each find ourselves drawn to. Matt Seybold is Associate Professor of American Literature and Mark Twain Studies at Elmira College, where he's also a resident scholar at the Center for Mark [00:02:00] Twain Studies and the director of the Media Studies, Communications, and Design program. Matt is the founding editor of MarkTwainStudies. org and the executive producer of the American Vandal podcast. Matt is also a co editor with Michelle Chihara of the Routledge Companion to Literature and Economics and co editor with Gordon Hutner of the 2019 special issue of American Literary History on Economics and Literary Studies in the New Gilded Age.

Other recent publications can be found in American Literary Realism, Leviathan, the Los Angeles Review of Books, Mark Twain Annual, and the Cambridge Companion to Literature and Economics. Matt, is there anything you'd like our listeners to know about the context of Chapter 18 of Huck Finn or anything you'd particularly like them to pay attention to as we read?

**Matt Seybold:** I think [00:03:00] we'll cover some of the contexts in our conversation afterward, but the one piece that's maybe important here is that Jim and Huck have just been dropped off the raft, by a collision with steamboat and separated for the first time since about chapter 10 of the novel. And so we're, we're going to spend most of this chapter with Huck and then have, you know, have a reappearance of Jim later on.

**Jim Phelan:** Yeah. Okay, great. Alright, so here's Matt Seybold reading the first half of Chapter 18 of Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.

**Matt Seybold:** Colonel Grangerford was a gentleman, you see.

He was a gentleman all over, and so was his family. He was well born, as the saying is, and that's worth as much as a man as it is to a horse. So the Widow Douglas said, and nobody ever denied, that she [00:04:00] was of the first aristocracy of our town. And Pap, he always said it too, though he weren't no more quality than a mudcat himself.

Colonel Grangeford was very tall and very slim, and had a darkish, paley complexion, not a sign of red in it anywheres. He was clean shaved every morning, all over his thin face. And he had the thinnest kind of lips, and the thinnest kind of nostrils, and a high nose, and heavy eyebrows, and the blackest kind of eyes, sunk so deep back, that they seemed like they was looking out of caverns at you, and you may say.

His forehead was high, and his hair was black and straight, and hung to his shoulders. His hands was long and thin, and every day of his life, he put on a clean shirt and a full suit from head to foot, white it hurt your eyes to look at it. And on Sundays, he wore a blue tailcoat with brass buttons on it.

[00:05:00] He carried a mahogany cane with a silver head to it. There weren't no frivolousness about him, not a bit, and he weren't ever loud. He was as kind as he could be. You could feel that, you know, and so you had confidence. Sometimes he smiled, and it was good to see, but when he straightened himself up like a liberty pole and the lightning began to flicker out from under his eyebrows, you wanted to climb a tree first and find out what the matter was afterwards.

He didn't ever have to tell anybody to mind their manners. Everybody was always good mannered where he was. Everybody loved to have him around, too. he was sunshine most always. I mean, he made it seem like good weather. When he turned into a cloud bank, it was awful dark for half a minute, and that was enough.

There wouldn't nothing go wrong again for a week. When him and the old lady come down in the morning, all the family got up out of their chairs and give them good [00:06:00] day. And then sat down again, so they had sat down. Then Tom and Bob went to the sideboard where the decanter's was and mixed a glass of bitters and handed it to him.

And he held it in his hand and waited till Tom's and Bob's was mixed. And then they bowed and said, Our duty to you, sir and madam. And they bowed the least bit in the world, And said thank you. And so they drank, all three, and Bob and Tom poured a spoonful of water on the sugar and the mite of whiskey or apple brandy in the bottom of their tumblers, and gave it to me and Buck, and we drank to the old people too.

Bob was the oldest, and Tom next, tall, beautiful men, with very broad shoulders and brown faces, and long black hair and black eyes. They dressed in white from head to foot like the old gentlemen, and wore broad Panama hats. Then there was Miss Charlotte. She was 25 and tall and proud and grand, but as good as she could be, and [00:07:00] she weren't stirred up.

But when she was, she had a look that would make you wilt in your tracks, like her father. She was beautiful. And so was her sister, Miss Sophia. But it was a different kind. She was gentle and sweet like a dove. And she was only 20. Each person in the family had their own slave to wait on them. Buck too. My slave had a monstrous easy time because I weren't used to having anybody do anything for me.

But Bucks was on the jump most of the time. This was all there was of the family now, but there used to be more. Three sons. They got killed. And Emmeline that died. The old gentleman owned a lot of farms and over a hundred slaves. Sometimes a stack of people would come there horseback from 10 or 15 mile around and stay five or six days and have such junketings round about and on the river and dances and picnics in the woods, daytimes, and [00:08:00] balls in the house nighttimes.

These people was mostly kinfolks of the family. Men brought their guns with them. It was a handsome lot of quality, I tell you. There was another clan of aristocracy around there. Five or six families, most of them named Shepherdson. They was as high toned and well born and rich and grand as the tribe of Grangerfords.

The Shepherdsons and the Grangerfords. Used the same landing, which was about two mile above our house. So sometimes, when I went up there with a lot of our folks, I used to see a lot of the Shepherdsons there, on their fine horses. One day, Buck and me was away in the woods hunting and heard a horse coming.

We was crossing the road and Buck says, Quick, jump for the woods. We done it. And then peeped down the woods through the leaves. Pretty soon a splendid young man came galloping down the road, setting his horse easy and looking like a soldier. He had his [00:09:00] gun across his pommel. I had seen him before. It was young Harney Shepardson.

I heard Buck's gun go off at my ear and Harney's hat tumbled off from his head. He grabbed his gun and rode straight to the place where we was hid, but we didn't wait. We started through the woods on a run. Woods weren't thick, so as I looked over my shoulder to dodge a bullet, and twice I seen Harney cover Buck with his gun, and then he rode away the way he come.

To get his hat, I reckon. But I couldn't see. We never stopped running till we got home. The old gentleman's eyes blazed for a minute. It was 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?

The Shepherdsons don't, father. They always take advantage. Miss Charlotte, she held her head up like a queen while Buck was telling his tale, and her nostrils spread and her eyes snapped. The two young [00:10:00] men looked dark, but never said nothing. Miss Sophia, she turned pale, but the color came back when she found out the men weren't hurt.

Soon as I could get Buck down by the corn cribs under the trees by ourselves, I says, Did you want to kill him, Buck? Well, I bet I did. What did he do to you? Oh, him? He never done nothing to me. Well then, what do you want to kill him for? Why, nothing. Only it's on account of the feud. What's a feud? Well, where was you raised?

Don't you know what a feud is? Never heard of it before. Tell me about it. Well, Buck says, a feud is this way. A man has a quarrel with another man, and he kills him. Then the other man's brother kills him, and then the other brothers on both sides goes for one another, and then the cousins chip in, and by and by everybody's killed off, and there ain't no more feud.

But it's kinda [00:11:00] slow, and it takes a long time. Has this one been going on long, Buck? Well I should ruckin It started 30 years ago, or summers along there. There was trouble about something and a lawsuit to settle it, and then the suit went against one of the men, so he up and shot the man that won the suit, which he would naturally do, of course.

Anybody would. What was the trouble about, Buck? Land? I reckon maybe, I don't really know. Well, who done the shooting? Was it a Grangerford or a Shepardson? Laws, how do I know? It was so long ago. Does anybody know? Oh yes, Pa knows, I reckon. And some of the other old folks. But they don't know now what the row was about in the first place.

Has there been many killed, Buck? Oh yes, right smart chance of funerals. But they don't always kill. Pa's got a few buckshot in him. But he don't mind it, cause he don't weigh much anymore. Bob's been carved up with some [00:12:00] Bowie. Tom's been hurt once or twice. Has anybody been killed this year Buck? Oh yes. We got one and they got one about three months ago.

My cousin Bud 14 year old was riding through the woods, the other side of the river. Didn't have no weapon with him, which was blamed foolishness. And in the lonesome place, he hears a horse are coming behind him and sees old Baldy Shepardson and Lincoln after him with his gun in his hand and his white hair are flying in the wind.

Instead of jumping off and taking to the brush, Bud allowed himself he could outrun him. So they had it, nip and tuck, for five mile or more. Old man a gainin all the time, so at last Bud seen it weren't any use. So he stopped and faced around so he could have the bullet holes in his front. You know, and the old man he rode up and shot him down.

But he didn't get much chance to enjoy his luck, for inside a week our folks laid him out. I reckon that old man was a coward, Buck. I reckon he weren't a coward, not a blamesight. There ain't a coward among them Shepherdsons, not a one. There ain't no cowards among the Grangerfords either. [00:13:00] Well, that old man kept his end of the fight one day for half an hour against three Grangerfords and come out winner.

They was all a horseback. He lit off on his horse and got behind a little wood pile, kept his horse before him to stop the bullets. But the Grangerfords stayed on their horses and capered around the old man and peppered away at him and he peppered away at them. Him and his horse both went off pretty leaky and crippled, but the Grangerfords had to be fetched home.

One of them was dead, and the other died the next day. No, sir, if a body's out hunting for cowards, you don't want to fool away any time among the Shepherdsons, because they don't breed any of that kind. Next Sunday, we all went to church. About three mile. Everybody a horseback. The men took their guns along, and so did Buck, and kept them between their knees, and stood them handy against the wall.

Shepardson's done the same. was pretty ornery preaching, all about brotherly love and such like tiresomeness. [00:14:00] But everybody said it was a good and they all talked it over going home. It had a powerful lot to say about faith, and good works, and free grace, and pre foreordination, and I don't know what all.

That it seemed to me to be one of the roughest Sundays I had run across yet. About an hour after dinner, everybody was dozing around. Some in their chairs and some in their rooms, and it got pretty dull. Buck and a dog were stretched out on the grass in the sun, sound asleep. And I went up to our room and judged I would take a nap myself.

I found that sweet Miss Sophia standing at her door, which was next to ours, and she took me in her room and shut the door very soft and asked me if I liked her, and I said I did. And she asked me if I would do something for her and not tell anybody, and I said I would. Then she said she'd forgotten her testament and left it in the seat at church between two other books, and would I slip out quiet and go there and fetch it to her [00:15:00] and not say nothing to nobody.

And I said I would. So I slid out and slipped off up the road. There weren't anybody at the church, except maybe a hog or two. For there weren't any lock on the door, and hogs likes a punchin floor in the summertime because it's cool. If you notice, most folks don't go to church only when they've got to.

But a hog is different. Says I to myself, something's up. It ain't natural for a girl to be in such a sweat about a testament. So I give it a shake, and out drops a little piece of paper with Half Past Two wrote on it with a pencil. I ransacked it, but couldn't find anything else. I couldn't make anything out of it, so I put the paper back in the book again, and when I got home and upstairs, there was Miss Sophia and her door waiting for me.

She pulled me in, shut the door, and she looked at the Testament till she found the paper, and as soon as she read it, she looked glad. And before a body could think, she grabbed me and gave me a squeeze and said I [00:16:00] was the best boy in the world and not to tell anybody. She was mighty red in the face for a minute, and her eyes lighted up and it made her powerful pretty.

I was a good deal astonished, but when I got my breath, I asked her what the paper was about, and she asked me if I had read it, and I said no. And she asked me if I could read writing, and I told her no, only coarse hand. And then she said the paper weren't anything but a bookmark to keep her place. And I might go out and play now.

**Jim Phelan:** I went off down to the river, studying over this thing, and pretty soon I noticed that my slave was following along behind. When we was out of sight of the house, he looked back and around a second, and then comes a runnin and says, Mars Jawge, if you'll come down into the swamp, I'll show you a whole stack of water moccasins.

Thinks I, that's mighty curious. He said that yesterday. He ought to know a body don't love water [00:17:00] moccasins enough to go around hunting for them. What is he up to, anyway? So I says, alright, trot ahead. I followed a half a mile and he struck out over the swamp and waded ankle deep as much as another half mile.

We come to a little flat piece of land which was dry and very thick with trees and bushes and vines and he says, You shove right in there just a few steps Mars Jawge. That's where day is. I've seen him before. I don't care to see him no more. Then he slapped right along and went away and pretty soon the trees hit him.

I poked into the place a ways, and come to a little open patch as big as a bedroom, all hung around with vines, and found a man laying there, asleep. And by jings, it was my old Jim! I waked him up, and I reckoned it was going to be a grand surprise to him to see me again, but it warn't. [00:18:00] He nearly cried he was so glad, but he warn't surprised.

Said he swum along behind me that night. And heard me yell every time, but that's an answer because he didn't want anybody to pick him up and take him into slavery again, says he. I got hurt a little couldn't swim fast, so I was a considerable ways behind you toward the last. When you landed, I reckoned I could catch up with you on the land without having to shout at you.

But when I see that house, I begin to go slow. I was off too far to hear what they say to you. I was afraid of the dogs, but when it was all quiet again, I know it uses in the house. So I struck out for the woods to wait for a day. Early in the morning, some of the slaves come along, go into the fields, and they took me and showed me this place where the dog can't track me and I counts of the water and they brings me truck to eat every night.

[00:19:00] And tells me how you were getting along. Why didn't you tell my Jack to fetch me here sooner, Jim? Well, Twarn no use disturb you, Huck, till we could do something. But we's all right now. I better buy pots and pans and vittles, as I got a chance. And I patched up the raft, Knights, when What raft, Jim? Our old raft.

You mean to say our old raft wasn't smashed all to flinders? No, she weren't. She was tore up a good deal. One end of her was, but there weren't no great harm done, only our traps was most all lost. If we hadn't dived so deep and swum so far underwater, and the night hadn't been so dark, and we weren't so scared, and been such pumpkin heads, as the saying is, we'd have seed the raft.

But it's just as well we didn't, cause now she's all fixed up again, most as good as [00:20:00] new, and we's got a new lot of stuff in the place of what was lost. Why, how did you get hold of the raft again, Jim? Did you catch her? How I gonna catch her and I out in the woods? No, some catched on a snag along here in the bend.

And they hit her in a creek amongst the willows, and they were so much drawn about which of them she belonged to the most that I come to hear about it pretty soon. So I ups and settles the trouble by telling them she don't belong to none of them but to you and me. And I asked if they're going to grab a young white gentleman's property and go get a hiding for it.

Then I give them ten cents apiece. And Day is mighty well satisfied, and wished the mole rafts would come along and make him rich again. Day is mighty good to me, these slaves is, and whatever I wants him to do for me, I don't have to ask him twice, honey. Dat Jack's a [00:21:00] good slave, and pooty smart. Yes, he is.

He ain't ever told me you was here, told me to come, and he'd show me a lot of water moccasins. If anything happens, he ain't mixed up in it. He can say he never seen us together, and it'll be the truth. I don't want to talk much about the next day. I reckon I'll cut it pretty short. I waked up about dawn and was a going to turn over and go to sleep again, when I noticed how still it was.

Didn't seem to be anybody's stern. That were unusual. Next, I noticed that Buck was up and gone. Well, I gets up a wondering and goes downstairs. Nobody around. Everything is still as a mouse. Just the same outside. Thinks I, what does it mean? Down by the woodpile I comes across my Jack and says, what's it all about?

Says he, don't you know Mars Jawge? No, says [00:22:00] I, I don't. Well then, Miss Sophia's run off. Indeed she has. She run off in the night sometime. Nobody don't know, just when. Run off to get married to that young, horny Sheppardson you know. Least way so they speck. The family found it out about half an hour ago, maybe a little more, and I tell you, they weren't no time lost.

Such another hurrying it up, guns and horses you never see. The women folks has gone for to stir up the relations, and Omar saw, and the boys tucked the guns and rode up the river road for to try to catch that young man and kill him, for he can get across the river with Miss Sophia. I reckon day's going to be a mighty rough times.

Buck went off without waking me up. Well, I reckon he did. They weren't going to mix you up in it. Mars Buck, he loaded up his gun and allowed he's going to fetch home a Shepherdson or bust. Well, there'll be plenty of them there, I [00:23:00] reckon. And you bet you he'll fetch one if he gets a chance. I took up the river road as hard as I could.

By and by, I began to hear guns a good ways off. When I came inside of the log store in the woodpile where the steamboats lands, I worked along under the trees and brushed till I got to a good place, and then I clumb up into the forks of a cottonwood that was out of reach and watched. There was a wood rank four feet high a little ways in front of the tree, and first I was going to hide behind that, but maybe it was luckier I didn't.

There was four or five men cavorting around on their horses in the open place before the log store. Cussing and yelling and trying to get at a couple of young chaps that was behind the wood rank alongside of the steamboat landing, but they couldn't come it. Every time one of them showed himself on the riverside of the wood pile, he got shot at.

The two boys were squatting back to back behind the pile so they could watch both ways. By and [00:24:00] by, the men stopped cavorting around and yelling. They started riding toward the store, then up gets one of the boys, draws a steady beat over the wood rank. and drops one of them out of his saddle. All the men jumped of their horses and grabbed the hurt one and started to carry him to the store.

And that minute, the two boys started on the run. They got halfway to the tree I was in before the men noticed. Then the men see them and jumped on their horses and took out after them. They gained on the boys, but it didn't do no good. The boys had too good a start. They got to the woodpile that was in front of my tree and slipped in behind it, and so they had the bulge on the men again.

One of the boys was Buck, and the other was a slim young chap about 19 years old. The men ripped around a while and then rode away. As soon as they was out of sight, I sung out to Buck and told him. He didn't know what to make of my voice

coming out of the tree at first. He was awful surprised. He told me to watch out sharp and let him know when the [00:25:00] men come in sight again, said they was up to some devil men or other, wouldn't be gone long. I wished I was out of that tree, but I dasn't come down. Buck began to cry and rip and loud that him and his cousin Joe, that was the other young chap, would make up for this day yet.

He said his father and his two brothers was killed and two or three of the enemy. Said the Sheversons laid for them an ambush. Buck said his father and brothers ought to have waited for their relations. The Shepherdsons was too strong for them. I asked him what was become of young Harney and Miss Sophia.

He said they'd got across the river and was safe. I was glad of that. But the way Buck did take on, because he didn't manage to kill Harney that day he shot at him, I hain't ever heard anything like it. All of a sudden, bang, bang, bang. It was three or four guns. The men had slipped around through the woods and come in from behind without their [00:26:00] horses.

The boys jumped for the river, both of them hurt, and as they swum down the current the men run along the bank shooting at them and singing out, kill them, kill them. It made me so sick I almost fell out of the tree. I ain't gonna tell all that happened. It would make me sick again if I was to do that. I wished I hadn't ever come ashore that night to see such things.

I ain't ever gonna get shut of them. Lots of times I dream about them. I stayed in the tree till it begun to get dark, afraid to come down. Sometimes I heard guns away off in the woods, and twice I seen little gangs of men gallop past the lock store with guns. So I reckoned the trouble was still a goin on.

I was mighty downhearted, so I made up my mind I wouldn't ever go near that house again. Because I reckoned I was to blame somehow, I judged that that piece of paper meant that Miss Sophia was to meet Harney [00:27:00] somewheres at half past two and run off, and I judged I ought to her father about that paper and the curious way she acted, and then maybe he would have locked her up and this awful mess wouldn't ever happen.

When I got down out of the tree I crept along the riverbank a piece. And found the two bodies laying in the edge of the water, and tugged at them till I got them ashore. Then I covered up their faces and got away as quick as I could. I cried a little when I was covering up Buck's face, for he was mighty good to me.

It was just dark now. I never went near the house, but struck through the woods and made for the swamp. Jim Warren on his island, so I tamped off in a hurry for the crook and crowded through the willows, red hot to jump aboard and get out of that awful country. The raft was gone, my souls, but I was scared.

I couldn't get my breath for most a minute. Then I raised the [00:28:00] yell. A voice not 25 foot from me says, good land, is that you honey? Don't make no noise. It was Jim's voice. Nothing ever sounded so good before. I run along the Bank of Peace and got aboard, and Jim, he grabbed me, and he hugged me. He was so glad to see me.

He says, Laws bless your child. I was right down shore, you's dead again. Jack's been here. He say he reckon you's been shot, cause you didn't come home no more. So I just this minute is starting to raft down toward the mouth of the creek so as to be all ready for it to shove out and leave as soon as Jack comes again and tells me for certain you is dead.

Lousy, I's a mighty glad to get you back again, honey.

I says, all right, that's mighty good. They won't find me and they'll think I've been [00:29:00] killed and floated down the river. There's something up there that'll help them think so. So don't you lose no time, Jim, but just shove off for the big water as fast as ever you can. I never felt easy till the raft was two mile below there and out in the middle of the Mississippi.

Then we hung up our signal lantern and judged that we was free and safe once more. I hadn't had a bite to eat since yesterday, so Jim, he got out some corn dodgers and buttermilk and pork and cabbages and greens. There ain't nothing in the world so good when it's cooked right. And whilst I ate my supper, we talked and had a good time.

I was powerful glad to get away from the feuds, and so was Jim to get away from the swamp. We said, There weren't no home like a raft after all. Other places do seem so cramped up and smothery, but a raft don't. You feel mighty free and easy and comfortable on [00:30:00] a raft.

Okay, so that's chapter 18. it gives a, it's a very rich chapter. There's a lot to talk about. And so where would you like to start, Matt?

**Matt Seybold:** Well, I think there's two ways that I would come at this chapter, that I sort of do come at this chapter, at least in terms of close reading. The first is it's kind of rich intertextuality, right?

That there, there are a number of allusions being made here, most obviously to the Hatfields and McCoys and to the, Romeo and Juliet plotline but I think more comprehensively to a kind of tradition of American Romanticism, or perhaps more accurately of Southern Romanticism founded on an Anglophile tradition.

I want to turn to the beginning of the [00:31:00] chapter to sort of get at that.

**Jim Phelan:** Okay, yeah.

**Matt Seybold:** And the other thing that I think we might want to sort of track back to is what I would call a kind of interpretive gap, a kind of Esurian gap in the latter stages of the chapter that Twain draws our attention to a change in Huck's storytelling, right?

And Huck says, explicitly, I don't want to talk about these things. There's certain things I'm not going to talk about. And I'm going to, I'm going to start telling this story a lot more quickly. And although it's pretty clear, at least sort of the, you know, the basic thing that he doesn't want to describe is the death of Buck, right?

There's nonetheless this gesture that Twain is making through Huck's changing of his own storytelling mode That I think we have to grapple [00:32:00] with, right? What are the the implications of that change?

**Jim Phelan:** Okay, yeah.

**Matt Seybold:** But to start, you know, to start at the beginning, I think we start with Colonel Grangerford and a very long, very elaborate description of his characterization of him that then in transitions into a characterization of the rest of his family and the rituals around their house, all of which for me is Twain signaling to us that we have entered a kind of fantasy of sort of plantation romanticism.

**Jim Phelan:** Okay.

**Matt Seybold:** Right?

**Jim Phelan:** Yeah.

**Matt Seybold:** That, that, you know, Twain will talk about the affectation of the title colonel, of, kind of militaristic dress and formality and ritual that we get here, the kind of codes of honor.

**Jim Phelan:** Yeah, the ritual, I mean, just, just to, you know, to pick up on what you're saying.

And some things that, you know, strike, stick [00:33:00] out to me, the way in which the ritual kind of reinforces the patriarchal authority of the colonel.

**Matt Seybold:** Yes.

**Jim Phelan:** You know.

**Matt Seybold:** Absolutely.

**Jim Phelan:** Everybody's got their place, but he's at the head and everybody, you know, all that stuff- that people don't sit down until he comes in.

**Matt Seybold:** Absolutely.

**Jim Phelan:** So, anyway.

**Matt Seybold:** Yeah, that they're maintaining literally a kind of aristocratic tradition. And that word aristocracy is used at least twice to describe that, this plantation system, right? Which is, of course, a kind of affectation that was associated with antebellum Plantation culture, this sort of aspiration to reform a kind of a feudal system.

**Jim Phelan:** Yeah, exactly. And then you get the sort of that strong juxtaposition of that with. The feud.

**Matt Seybold:** Yes.

**Jim Phelan:** Right?

**Matt Seybold:** Yes. Yeah.

**Jim Phelan:** Well, wait, how do these things go together, right, I mean. [00:34:00]

**Matt Seybold:** Right. There's two kinds of feudalism here. Yeah. And, yeah, I think, you know, for me, the larger argument that I make, or I want to make about this chapter is that this is the moment where Twain signals a death of romanticism.

**Jim Phelan:** Oh, okay.

**Matt Seybold:** And in order to do that, right, the moment of that death is the massacre, that takes place while Huck's up in the tree. But in order to get there, we really have to dwell in the space of a plantation romance. We have to meet a character like, uh, like, Colonel Granger, so we have to see him exercise that, as you said, that patriarchal authority.

We have to understand the role that these women, beautiful, virtuous, right, uh, damsels, right, have to are playing within this as well as the role that the younger men are being forced to [00:35:00] play with them and within this and the way in which they have acclimated themselves, even Buck. One of Twain's peers, likely in his, you know, early teens or younger, who is, prepared to die, right, has taken for granted almost inevitability that this feud will end in my death and the death of everybody in my family, and he, you know, he talks about this nonchalantly, and, and so, you know, We, you know, the codes of honor of chivalry, the ways in which this whole family is embracing some very macabre version of the kind of Walter Scott romanticism that Twain blames for the civil war.

We have to see that in practice in order to then experience what Huck experiences up in the tree.

**Jim Phelan:** Yeah. Yeah, okay. Oh, great. that's one of framing things. And then the other, you want to go back to some of the intertextuality?

**Matt Seybold:** Yeah, yeah. And I think that, [00:36:00] you know, one part of that, or one of the places that I think it's always worthwhile turn with Twain and with many 19th century American writers is the appearance of text within the text.

**Jim Phelan:** Right.

**Matt Seybold:** And we have the, you know, the Bible being fetched by Huck, which is then going to be the way that he blames himself for his participation in this massacre. And his reading of the slip of paper that he doesn't fully understand, but he knows there's something About it. That doesn't strike him quite right, right. And then, and maybe just as importantly, Disguising his own ability to read.

**Jim Phelan:** Mm hmm. Yeah.

**Matt Seybold:** And this is something that Huck does throughout the novel But I think is particularly important on this occasion that he he [00:37:00] recognizes the power that comes with literacy, yeah, and sometimes that it's important as it would be for an enslaved person to withhold The, the accomplishment of that power, right?

That, uh, that on this occasion for him to admit his literacy is not going to work to his advantage.

**Jim Phelan:** Right, right. He recognizes it, yeah, puts him in some awkward or even maybe even perilous kind of position. Yeah, so he denies it.

**Matt Seybold:** Yeah, yeah, and then and that then sort of raises this question about literacy, about the Bible certainly, about books and narratives more generally, what, what is the effect that a literary tradition has had upon this set of circumstances that lead to tragedy, right?

That, you know, we know it's, it's easy for me to say, having read lots of Twain, we know that Twain blames Walter Scott [00:38:00] for the civil war. And I think, certainly blames Walter Scott for creating this dynamic of, uh, you know, violence and patriarchy within the plantation system.

**Jim Phelan:** It's also something I think about between relations to Christianity that's coming up here, right?

**Matt Seybold:** Yeah.

**Jim Phelan:** It's the Bible.

**Matt Seybold:** Yeah.

**Jim Phelan:** It's the Sunday, right? And, and what happens on Sunday? What's the, what's the sermon about? Absolutely. Brotherly love it, all that kind of stuff, yeah, right? And yet, what's going to happen, right?

**Matt Seybold:** And how can these things be reconciled, right? How can we have this, this sort of code of chivalry that is based upon violence and hatred and kind of eye for eye kind of mentality being sustained directly alongside the, very Protestant sermons about good works and faith, right?

**Jim Phelan:** Right.

**Matt Seybold:** And so there's, how, how can those things be reconciled?

**Jim Phelan:** I mean, there's sort of gaps in the, [00:39:00] in the culture, right?

**Matt Seybold:** Yeah, yeah. And I think it's, it's absolutely important that he fetches the Bible that we have as a kind of intermission in this narrative.

The trip to church, which he finds incredibly tedious and he's as he always does describing any kind of religious situation, right? But that tedium is all the more, it was one of the roughest Sundays I had run across yet. It's all the more difficult because it just It doesn't fit within everything else he's seeing, about this family and about this culture.

**Jim Phelan:** It's interesting that he, Twain doesn't have him directly articulate that, right? I mean, he, he described it and so on, and then Twain sort of, you know, pretty, it doesn't take a lot for us as readers to, to put together this, this discrepancy and so on. He doesn't, sort of, doesn't need Huck to do it.

He's just gonna have Huck describe it and describe his own reactions.

**Matt Seybold:** Huck's, Huck [00:40:00] can do a very Huck thing, which is the kind of aw shucks, I don't get this.

**Jim Phelan:** Yeah.

**Matt Seybold:** Clearly a failure on my part. I'm, you know, too stupid or, you know, or too immoral, you know, or, you know, or too low, low born to understand.

**Jim Phelan:** I'm not the quality, yes. Yeah.

**Matt Seybold:** And he takes for granted, I think that's a really important thing. And one of the questions I would ask is, like, we have the Widow Douglas and Pap, and this allusion to the people who we have left behind in St. Petersburg coming back in to frame Huck's, characterization of Colonel Grangerford, that who, what he knows about Colonel Grangerford, at least in part, before he starts living there, is, um, vicarious through the way this person, the fame this person has, more than just a local fame, at least a regional fame.

And that he's sort of [00:41:00] depending upon these people who he's broken away from, right? Who, you know, he, he's sort of in the process, certainly of Pap, with Pap, of sort of distrusting Pap's worldview.

**Jim Phelan:** Yeah.

**Matt Seybold:** And even with some of the other, you know, characters from St. Petersburg, Douglas and Watson and Thatcher and maybe eventually Sawyer, right?

He's starting to question their worldviews as well. And yet we have them called back here to establish the fame of the Grangerford family and also to show Huck sort of depending upon the values of a community.

**Jim Phelan:** Right, right.

**Matt Seybold:** In order to understand what's important, what's moral, what good behavior is, and he takes for granted, even though it's Pap that say that saying it, you know, even Pap said that Colonel Granger friend was the first aristocracy of our town, [00:42:00] that he's accepting that account, even though he has every reason by this point to discount everything that Pat says.

**Jim Phelan:** Yeah, right. And I think that's, you know, it's one of the things that recurs in the, in the novel, the way in which, sort of accepts all, all this. He's, he's being socialized into it, and he thinks, okay, this is, I should be thinking this because my elders are, and all that kind of stuff.

And at the same time, there's part of him that sort of intuitively sees through it, and can accept it, and, you know.

**Matt Seybold:** Yeah.

**Jim Phelan:** Sort of, we see it again and again.

**Matt Seybold:** Yeah, and, and that cycle, like you said, that cycle happens over and over again, that we, and usually it's associated with Going on to the river with Jim and then coming off of the river and reintegrating into some form of white society, right?

That when he back on the right river, he starts feeling thankful For being away from civilization and starts to question some of the [00:43:00] values that are being Civilized into him, right? But then when he finds himself back on land with the various families along the riverbank He very rapidly reintegrates readapts and as as you pointed out when we were talking about this last night he very easily forgets Jim, right?

We have, you know, until Jim reappears later in the chapter, more than halfway through the chapter, we have no indication that, Huck has been thinking about Jim at all. Worrying about him, wondering what happened to him, looking for him. Yeah.

**Jim Phelan:** Okay, good. We're going to talk a little bit about Huck up in the tree, and then maybe we'll switch.

**Matt Seybold:** Yeah.

**Jim Phelan:** Yeah, so.

**Matt Seybold:** Yeah, so, I think one of the things that we have happen at the beginning of the chapter is we, we have this kind of laborious narration of the rituals of living at the [00:44:00] house. And there is an extent to which Huck almost becomes a third person omniscient narrator, sort of setting the stage of the Grangerford plantation.

And time really telescopes out and it becomes very unclear how long he's been here, right? And he has, you know, he's able to describe Colonel Grangeford's moods on a timeline of weeks. And so there is this suggestion that he's dwelling with this family for an extended period of time, or at least he has so integrated himself into the family that he understands their dynamics as a member of the family would, right? And I think we have an, a kind of reversion of that omniscience when we get to the tree, right? That, [00:45:00] that one way of thinking about. Perspective, right, is, the extent to which we kind of get above the action, right? And, and, and Huck gets down into the action in the middle of the chapter when he's the one who delivers the note But then he gets back out of it and is viewing it from above, in a way that is mainly non participatory, except for the moment.

When he yells out to Buck, and Buck doesn't know where that voice is coming from. It's almost a voice of God. It's almost a kind of omniscient voice. And, and so the tree becomes Huck's sort of, move into a position of authority. From which we can see him change from being the kind of very humble, very self doubting narrator that he is elsewhere in the [00:46:00] chapter.

He still feels guilt certainly during that, section, but he, he also becomes our sort of figure of moral authority, right? He is, he is seeing everything that's happening. And he is also creating a kind of emotional palette through which we can understand those events, not in terms of the sort of honor codes of the feud, but in terms of his emotional response to actual violence and murder and death. And that, you know, for me, that, that's the moment, right, where, where we see Twain give us, like, you know, this is the end of Romanticism. And I use that end in multiple ways, right? We have to bring Romanticism, the Romantic tradition to a conclusion, but also because this is where it leads.

**Jim Phelan:** Exactly. This is the [00:47:00] end product of it.

Yeah. Yeah. Okay. Well, good. Anything else that you wanted to be sure we touched on before we turn it over to...?

**Matt Seybold:** Well, yeah, let's ... I know one of the things that we, you know, we wanted to talk about, that you wanted to talk about, that I wanted to ask you about was, do we interpret that within this chapter, there would be one way to create a chapter break here, where Huck Pulls the bodies out of the river and then we have a chapter break and we see him reuniting with Jim and those are made into two distinct episodes. But, Twain doesn't do that. He fuses them into a single chapter. He makes it a continuous linear narrative here. And, I think that's an interesting choice and it begs the question, what is the relationship between this Grangerfords [00:48:00] and Shepherdsons feud and how Huck experiences it, and then the return and reunion with Jim and their, going back to the river. And one of the sort of most quoted lines having to do with the, the sort of, the naturalist beauty of the river is at the very end, right? You feel mighty free and easy and comfortable on a raft, right? That's a line from Huckleberry Finn that kind of gets quoted a lot. And that closes this chapter that is mainly about horror.

So the fact that Dwayne puts those things in conjunction with one another, I think, is that's one of the things I wanted to talk about and, and it sounds as though you have an interpretation of like how Jim fits into this.

**Jim Phelan:** Yeah, yeah, so a couple things. So, I mean, maybe before I get into that exactly, [00:49:00] I could use that as a way to start talking a little bit about some of the kind of close reading I would be interested in doing.

**Matt Seybold:** Yeah.

**Jim Phelan:** You know, I think, it's very complementary to what you're doing and not opposed at all, but, uh, so, you know, I would be thinking about two kind of aspects of, um, what I would think of as resources for storytelling, you know, narrative resources. So, one is segmentivity, right, so where we make the breaks, and the other is space, right?

And so, the fact that he uses the single segment, of this chapter for, these spatial juxtapositions, I think is, you know, he's conveying something about his interest in this comparison contrast between, you know, life on shore and life on the raft with Jim, and, so that would, that would be sort of one of [00:50:00] the first things, I would think about.

And maybe, you know, I mean, it's a little bit...

**Matt Seybold:** And just to reiterate sort of the, there's, there's three key spatial juxtapositions, right? There's, there's the plantation, there's the wood pile and the tree, and then there's the raft.

**Jim Phelan:** Right, right, and then there's also the church.

**Matt Seybold:** Yeah, the church, absolutely.

**Jim Phelan:** And there's the swamp, right, where Jim is. So, so I think...

**Matt Seybold:** Which is more of a gap, right, where we don't, we don't, we get some very vague indications of what Jim's life has been like.

**Jim Phelan:** Right, right, but I think there too it's also like, you know, the implication of the difference between life in the plantation house, and life in the swamp, and, you know, out with the water moccasins, and, you know, and, and it just, it's also kind of like, Huck doesn't think, doesn't comment on that, you know, Twain doesn't do a lot to call attention to that, Although maybe, again, you'd say, alright, he's expecting us to, you know, make that, [00:51:00] comparison, and so on.

But I do think, you know, think about segmentivity in space and the, the, you know, ways in which, Swain's kind of juxtapositions of the spaces invites his, his audience to sort of make some, you know, interpretive judgments about how they relate to each other and, and so on, right?

And sort of more generally than I think, you know, I would go through other kinds of, how twin's handling narrative resources, Huck being one. the way Huck's narration, you know, some of the, the dialogue, right? It's really striking that the dialogue is, Twain turns to dialogue to, disclose to his audience all the key details of the feud, right? Buck gets to tell that story, right? He doesn't [00:52:00] have Huck narrate it, right?

**Matt Seybold:** Or Colonel Grangeford, right? Which would be the other logical...

**Jim Phelan:** Exactly, exactly, right, right. So, we have the, the participant in it, like, and one who's going to carry it on, if it's to carry on and then we have this disclosure of, he doesn't know anything about it. It's just, this is a given in my life, right? And, you know, Huck asks all these questions, and so on, right? But also, we get the kind of, the fact that Buck, gives the testimony about, you know, when Huck says, oh, but they're a bunch of cowards, right, and you might think that that's going to be the, you know, the attitude of, of the Granger for the Shepherds.

But no, no, no, you know, and you get this, this whole, this sense of, qualities that are potentially you know, valuable and productive, but being, you know, sort of used in the service of, of [00:53:00] violence ultimately, right? So, so those kinds of things, right? And, so we could go into some of those details, but I guess I would say, it would seem to me that what I like so much about what you're doing is that you are interested in these kinds of things too, but you are, you sort of, frame them with these bigger sort of historical and, you know, literary traditions and, and things like that, right?

And then you're thinking about, Walter Scott and, and Twain's attitude to romanticism in general. The tradition of that and so on.

**Matt Seybold:** Yeah, yeah, I think the, the sort of historicist in me is, always trying to, if not ask that question first, certainly make that part of the interpretation. Yeah. That as soon as we make some sort of, ask some sort of formal question, can we tie it to a biographical or historical phenomenon that might [00:54:00] explain the, you know, this, this set of choices, or at least reflect some of the sets of choices. And you know, to, to go back to, I think one of the moments that we, we might talk about is that there's, actually sort of two, and I hadn't really thought about this until we were reading it this time, there's two reunions here, right? That there's, there's the first reconnection where Jack brings Huck to Jim, right?

And the person who's most excited to see the amongst the two of them is Jim is excited to see Huck.

**Jim Phelan:** Yeah, right.

**Matt Seybold:** He's not surprised, but he's excited and we do have a moment of humanity from Huck. Where he says, why didn't you tell my Jack to fetch me [00:55:00] here sooner, Jim. And I think it's the only time in the narrative where he refers to the slave as Jack as opposed to using the N word, but other than that, we have a kind of unequal loyalty here. Where Jim is excited to see Huck, is pursuing a reconnection with him, and Huck is not cold, exactly, but is not treating Jim with that same level of loyalty and intimacy. But then the second one, after we have the, you know, we go to the tree and we have the massacre, then things turn dramatically.

**Jim Phelan:** Right.

**Matt Seybold:** Where we have, you know, he hears Jim's voice and he says, Jim's voice, nothing sounded so good before I run along the bank of peace and got aboard and Jim grabbed me and hugged me and was so glad to see me. [00:56:00] And it's clear that Huck feels that same way, that he couldn't be happier to be back with Jim.

And that the world that they create on the raft, in these final couple of paragraphs, You know, feels utopian to him in the aftermath of what he's seen in amongst the very wealthy, very privileged Grangerford Plantation, right? He is only too happy to leave it behind and go back to living with, you know, a fugitive enslaved man.

**Jim Phelan:** Yeah.

**Matt Seybold:** Relative poverty.

**Jim Phelan:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Matt Seybold:** And itinerancy.

**Jim Phelan:** Right, right. How are we gonna, yeah, make it from day to day sort of, uh, yeah, yeah. And even, you know, there's also like they bracket the problem. They've gone past Cairo in the fog, right? That doesn't matter in this moment, right? Because we're, we're back together.

And, you know, and I'm, I'm free of that. I wished [00:57:00] I'd never come ashore, you know.

**Matt Seybold:** And it does also suggest the kind of cruelty of this novel that is going to cycle again and again that we've been talking about. That we will, we will see Huck in fits and starts recognize Jim's humanity.

**Jim Phelan:** Yes, right.

**Matt Seybold:** But then almost inevitably, he will take two steps back, right? In ways that are sometimes overtly cruel, right, but are certainly kind of unthinking.

And every time he gets more intimate and friendly and amiable and familiar with Jim, the retreat is more painful.

**Jim Phelan:** Yeah.

**Matt Seybold:** Presumably for Jim, but also for us as readers, right?

**Jim Phelan:** Yeah, absolutely, absolutely, right, right. And the, you know, most painful, I think, in the evasion section, right? Yeah. Yeah, I'd like to maybe just talk a little bit about Huck as character narrator here, [00:58:00] because I think, Twain's handling of Huck as a character narrator is just sort of brilliant, again and again and again, and it's like, you know, if I were teaching creative writing and I wanted to have my students sort of learn about what you can do with a character narrator, I would start with Huck Finn, partly because what he... what it does is shows sort of the range of things you can do with a character narrator.

So, you were talking, I think, you know, very aptly about the way in which, at the beginning, it's like omniscient narration, right? And, so the fact that this narration about Colonel Grangerford is coming from, you know, the 13 year old Huckleberry Finn with his history and so on. It doesn't really matter a whole lot, right?

This is, this is, this is information that, you know, it comes in [00:59:00] Huck's voice, absolutely, but, but, you know, Huck's voice is also, has a pretty good range, right? And so, he can say aristocracy, and he can, you know, do all this kind of stuff.

**Matt Seybold:** And if you picked up those few paragraphs and put them down in Adventures of Tom Sawyer, with in which we have an omniscient narrator-

**Jim Phelan:** You wouldn't notice.

**Matt Seybold:** You wouldn't notice a difference, right?

**Jim Phelan:** Yeah, right. So you got that on the one hand, and then you get, you get another thing, I think, where it is Huck, right? But it's, it's what I call restricted narration, where Huck is doing a lot of just reporting, right? And then everything he's saying is reliable, but he's not really interpreting it and, but Twain sort of allows us to interpret it, right?

So the, the interaction with, uh, Sophia is very much of that sort, right? Where he narrates what she says and, and what he does and so on, and we see it. So we get, we get that, that's [01:00:00] another, and, and then we get stuff that really. You know, the fact that it's Huck and this character in this situation telling, about these events matters so much, right?

And it's Huck and the tree and, I'm not going say a whole lot about all this, right? And then...

**Matt Seybold:** but he has the, he has the moral authority of a trauma, right?

**Jim Phelan:** Yeah. Yeah, he does. He does. And then there's this other thing that, sort of stands out, that's kind of amazing because, you know, the narration is really so much from Huck's perspective as the action is unfolding, right?

And that gives a kind of intensity to it and so on. Although we get these, you know, little framing, I'm not going to go into all the details, that kind of thing. But at the end, right, he says, I ain't gonna tell all, all that happened. It would make me sick again if I [01:01:00] was to do that. I wished I had never come.

So there's that kind of, okay, I'm, commenting on my own narration at the time of the telling, right. Then he goes back into his own perspective. I wished I hadn't at the time of the action, I wished I had never come ashore that night to see such things. And then he goes back. I ain't ever going to get shut of them.

Lots of times I dream about them, and then suddenly we have this sense of the interval, what's been happening between this action and the telling.

**Matt Seybold:** Yes.

**Jim Phelan:** It's just a phrase, right?

**Matt Seybold:** It is, yeah.

**Jim Phelan:** But it's very powerful.

**Matt Seybold:** It's very powerful because it's, and it's so unusual within the narrative.

**Jim Phelan:** Exactly.

**Matt Seybold:** There's very rare occasions where we have Huck remind us, other than at sort of the very beginning, and then maybe again at the very end, that, oh, I'm telling this story from some historical distance, right?

That, and, you know, I have learned some [01:02:00] things from this. I am a different person. I'm going to be a more mature person, at least a more aged person, right?

**Jim Phelan:** Right.

**Matt Seybold:** And, you know, he very often with, when we're actually in the process of reading the text, we don't think about that narrator. We think about Huck as the 13 year old or 12 year old or whatever he is.

**Jim Phelan:** It's the perspective of the time of the action.

**Matt Seybold:** Yeah, you know, just thick in the, thick in it. And then, but yeah, you're right. When is, when he says I'm never going to get clear of it, sometimes I dream about it. We're, you know, we have this recognition, right, that this is a traumatic incident.

And it's not just that we can forecast into the future that it's going to cause him trauma, it's that the person who's telling us the story is already experiencing the residue of that trauma.

**Jim Phelan:** Yeah, right, right. And it's, you know, and what's so great about it with I think from [01:03:00] sort of the craft perspective is that it just seems natural, I mean, that, that, you know, Twain makes it, okay, yeah, this kind of teller would, say this kind of thing, right?

And he's doing all this kind of stuff, so.

**Matt Seybold:** And he would start, he would start to get uncomfortable as he moved towards his climax, right?

**Jim Phelan:** Yeah.

**Matt Seybold:** That said, Huck is this really wonderful, vivid, detailed storyteller. But that as he moved towards what is going to be the climax of the action, you know, he kind of tenses up and, you know, unlike the romantic storyteller, which would give us this in all, you know, in kind of gruesome detail with, with all the implications it has on the, you know, the larger relationships between the characters and within the society and you know, the, the sort of just desserts, the cost benefit analysis of the moral code, right?

Huck's not going to be able to do any of that. He's just going to experience [01:04:00] the fright, the violence, and then that's what we experience.

**Jim Phelan:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. So maybe we should, sort of move toward the end, but maybe talk a little, just a little a bit about how we might see chapter 18 in relationship to the larger narrative.

**Matt Seybold:** So for me, and we talked about this a little bit last night, I think the reason why this is so important for both Huckleberry Finn, and then for me, for the larger understanding of Mark Twain's sort of literary, um, tradition and what he is throwing his shoulder into with a book like Huckleberry Finn is that as he has just written about in life on the Mississippi, he lays a lot of the blame for the civil war at the foot of specifically, he says, Walter Scott, but it's obviously more generally [01:05:00] a kind of romantic cultural tradition that was pervasive in the South and which gave dignity to the system of enslavement and gave righteousness to slaveholders and particularly to plantations. And, I think one of the, the aims of this book is, to kill that off, right? Is to, to make a mockery of that kind of aspiration to aristocratic, superiority.

But I think in order to do it, right, not only do we have to see the ends that we see here in the chapter, right, but we have to see the vulgarity of any attempt to bring back that romantic tradition. And this that's how I interpret the ending, right? Is that when we go to the Phelps's farm, when we have Thomas Sawyer reappear who [01:06:00] is in many ways the sort of personification of romanticism, right? This guy that just loves the library, loves reading books about pirates and knights and whatever, you know, kind of whatever romantic adventure literature he can find, he's not only going to absorb it, but he's going to try to recreate it in the world.

**Jim Phelan:** Reenactments, all that stuff, yeah.

**Matt Seybold:** And, after the experience of the Shepherdsons and the Grangerfords, the attempt to sort of, to do that, the return of Tom Sawyer as this burlesque, romantic, you know, boy figure, it feels crude, cruel. Certainly it's cruel towards Jim, and it feels as though Twain is kind of parading the corpse of a romanticist around Weekend at Bernie style, you know, in the final chapters of the novel, and they, they are cringeworthy in many cases, [01:07:00] as is the fact that in that cycle we've been talking about Huck goes along with it. He has moments of regret and resistance, but for the most part, he falls in line to being Tom Sawyer's sidekick and to accepting the ways in which Tom unthinkingly abuses Jim.

And that hurts as readers. And for me, that, that is, you know, that creates the allegory of reconstruction, right? That, that the reason why it makes sense for Twain to write a book set 20 years before the civil war and published 20 years after the war is because the system of enslavement, though perhaps superficially eliminated, has not gone away, right? And we see, even in this chapter, a kind of hint of that, [01:08:00] right? That the, you know, jurisdiction, law, like, none of that applies here, right? Like, the Shepherdsons and Grangefords are not going to care about an amendment to the Constitution, right? They murder according to a familial code, right?

They enslave according to a familial code, you know? That the kinds of people that Huck is encountering on these riverbanks are not going to be swayed simply by the Emancipation Proclamation, are not going to be swayed, into, to sort of, shirking off decades and generations of white supremacy and southern supremacy and patriarchy, just because they lost a war and were told so by their government.

And I think that sort of reminder that the judicial, the legal, the jurisdictional, like, these are ways that we might historicize the [01:09:00] moment of civil war and emancipation and reconstruction. But there's a certain kind of limitation to that, and that, that certainly what Twain sees when he returns to the South in, you know, this, moment between when he starts Huckleberry Finn and when he finishes it is that the share cropping system, the kind of ascendant Jim Crow system, you know, is barely better than what came before it.

And he's enraged by that. I was gonna, there's just one little sort of paratextual thing that I wanted to share with you. This is something that he writes in his notebook after seeing Frederick Douglass give a speech, a speech in which Douglass talks about the emergence of the sharecropping system. And this is what Twain writes: There is not hardly a single celebrated southern name in any of the departments of human industry [01:10:00] except those of war, murder, assassination, lynching, the duel, repudiation and massacre. There is not a single Southern celebrity in the arts today, nor in science, et cetera. That you can sort of feel his rage at all that was lost in order to get to emancipation, right? He lost his career, right? He lost a connection to his, his home, right? He certainly lost some friends and family members, right?

And the nation lost a lot more besides so much.

**Jim Phelan:** Right, right.

**Matt Seybold:** And yet, you know, he's coming to terms slowly but surely in the 1880s with the idea that we lost all that and the thing that was supposed to be gained was the end of enslavement. And while that may have happened in name, in practice, [01:11:00] right, so much still looks the same.

**Jim Phelan:** Yeah, yeah. We could talk about 2024 the same way, yeah, right, yeah, no, that's good. Yeah, I'll just say a few things, right, I mean, I like everything you're saying, but it also maybe gets at another difference in the kind of reading that we do or are drawn to, right? Which is that for me, I can't get over the cringe, right? And, and part of it is, you know, I think the way in which my reading is, attaches me so much to Huck and what he does and the kind of education he got and the, you know, sort of the culmination in that. All right, then I'll go to hell, right?

Where he, rejects, I mean, on the one hand he accepts, I mean, it's so brilliant, because on the one hand, he accepts his socialization into Christianity because he's, all right, I'm going to condemn myself, but, in accepting that, he's also rejecting it because the right thing to [01:12:00] do here is, you know, tear up this letter and so that, you know, this Watson can't come and reclaim Jim and yeah, take him back.

And so, you know, and it seems to me that that this chapter, and, you know, sort of the first, especially the end of it, is part of Twain's, giving a kind of education to Huck about the limitations of Christianity and short society and aristocracy and so on, right? And so to have him so easily, you know, fall back into Tom Sawyer, right?

Yeah, I can, again, I can see, I can see it sort of the logic of it at the thematic level, but I can't sort of see it at the level of the, you know, the unfolding action and, uh, the characterization of, of Huck and the way he's asked me to invest in, in that. So, but, you know, that's again, just not to say that one is better than the other, but just to point out the different kinds of...

**Matt Seybold:** And I think in [01:13:00] many ways you're right. And I, I sometimes feel when I'm reading this novel as though Twain's meta purpose with the novel, what I think of as his sort of meta purposes, the novel is sometimes compromised by how good he is at the episodic level.

**Jim Phelan:** Yeah.

**Matt Seybold:** Right, that, that he can really, I mean, this is, you know, Twain often gets sort of, I think, unfairly and inaccurately characterized as a great talent and humor, but I think he is at least equally good at sentiment.

He really knows how to make us feel, right? And when reading Twain works, I am as apt to have a tear brought to my eye as I am to laugh out loud. And that is certainly true, I don't think of Huckleberry Finn as really a funny book at all. There are maybe a few moments, but for the most part I, I don't think about it that [01:14:00] way, but it can make you cry on numerous occasions.

Of course, most famously in the all right, then I'll go to the hell moment, which is so rich with, it's so rich ideologically, it's so rich intertextually and it's so rich emotionally.

**Jim Phelan:** Absolutely. Yeah.

**Matt Seybold:** And I do think, his talent for producing those moments may actually work counter then to maybe the larger political project that he might be taking on in this novel, or that I think he's taking on in the novel, which is to sort of create a narrative that mimics the historical narrative of the failure of reconstruction.

**Jim Phelan:** Yeah, Right. And I think, I mean, you know, I could maybe connect that to something else, like that he's trying to do so many things, right? And so ...

**Matt Seybold:** Maybe too much.

**Jim Phelan:** Well, and that they don't always, they don't fully, you know, reinforce each other or come [01:15:00] together in a kind of, fully coherent way.

Um, and I think another, another way, that I see that, anyway, is the way he handles Jim, right? And as you were saying before, like, okay, you know, in, in Chapter 18, Jim disappears, and, and Huck doesn't seem to care about him, and then, then suddenly he's there, and it's like, okay, yeah, well, you know, what about, has he disappeared for Jim

and, uh, for Twain? And suddenly he's there, and I think, you know, part of what he's doing, is sort of giving primary, interest of the novel to Huck and Huck's experience and so on, but he's also making what happens to Huck so inextricably tied up to what happens to Jim. And so, he kind of creates this problem for himself when he, takes Huck to the point of, alright then, I'll go to hell.

**Matt Seybold:** Yeah.

**Jim Phelan:** They're down [01:16:00] south, and, you know, so what am I going to do? He has no power, you know, how am I going to do it? And then, you know, so what does he do? Well, he brings Tom Sawyer back and he can do all this kind of thematic stuff to send up Scott and the Romanticism and so on. But in the course of that, again, what happens to Jim, you know, and, and it's like, Jim is always secondary for, for Twain, which is not to say that, you know, he can't have a minor character or that minor characters should be equal to major characters, but, but there's just something about kind of the, way in which Twain kind of makes, does these things that are convenient for, for what he's doing with Huck that sort of sacrifice Jim that, that troubles me a little.

**Matt Seybold:** Yeah, the problem you hit upon that I think is, is genuinely a problem is that he's not always secondary.

**Jim Phelan:** Yes, exactly.

**Matt Seybold:** That we have these moments where Jim's voice breaks through and breaks [01:17:00] through very powerfully. And, you know, Twain really gives him autonomy and authority and humanity in a way that very few black characters by white novelists in the American 19th century are getting.

**Jim Phelan:** Right.

**Matt Seybold:** And certainly, you know, prominent white novelists like this. And, and then Jim suddenly retreats again and becomes archetypal and becomes a magical, stereotypical figure and, you know, becomes just a reflection of Huck's moral quandary and Tom Sawyer's play.

**Jim Phelan:** Yeah, yeah.

**Matt Seybold:** And for, you know, for, again, for Twain to give us the Jim who's thinking about his family on the raft to give us the Jim who's worried about what's happened to Huck and is waiting for him at his own, you know, endangering himself by doing so, at his own peril and is [01:18:00] calling Huck honey and...

**Jim Phelan:** Jim who speaks up when when Huck, you know, it sort of lies to him about what happened in the, you know, when they get lost in the fog.

**Matt Seybold:** Absolutely. Right. Yeah. And the, you know, the Jim who's, who's debating the Solomon parable, right? Like that, that, those are all episodes in which Jim is, is not a secondary character. He's a major voice in the novel, probably this, you know, the second most major voice to Huck.

**Jim Phelan:** Absolutely, right, yeah.

**Matt Seybold:** And that makes it all the more painful when I agree with you. It does seem as though Twain either forgets about him or he, you know, he forces him back into submission, you know, into the, uh, you know, the archetypal roles, the stereotypical roles, forces him back into enslavement.

Even when, you know, we find out, he was no longer enslaved. [01:19:00] And that's part of the cruelty of the Tom Sawyer section, right, is that Tom knows.

**Jim Phelan:** Yeah, exactly.

**Matt Seybold:** Tom knows that they don't have to go through all of this to emancipate.

**Jim Phelan:** And in fact, the only reason why Tom would do that is because he knows, right?

I mean, jeez, Tom.

**Matt Seybold:** Yeah. Tom's a real villain.

**Jim Phelan:** Okay. Well, great. Any final thoughts?

**Matt Seybold:** No, I don't, I don't think so. I think we hit on everything that we had, yeah, we had talked about.

**Jim Phelan:** Yeah, yeah, yeah, it's terrific. Well, thanks, Matt.

**Matt Seybold:** This was a pleasure. Yeah, thank you. This was a real, really enjoyable.

**Jim Phelan:** So, again, thanks to Matt. And I want to thank our listeners and say we appreciate your feedback. And you can send it to us at email address projectnarrative at osu. edu. Or on our Facebook page, or on our Twitter account, which is @PNOhioState. I also remind you that you can [01:20:00] find more than 20 additional episodes of the podcast at the Project Narrative website, or on Apple Podcasts.