

“My penchant for silence”: Mark Twain’s Rhetorical Art of the Unspoken



(Elisha Van Aken, 1874)

Twain writing in the study, 1874



(Edward Windsor Kemble, 1884)

Huck thinking on the raft.



“The boy . . . did not enjoy the prayer, he only endured it—if he even did that much.”

(True Williams, 1876)

Twain and Talk

“It is my custom to keep talking until I get the audience cowed.”

Mark Twain, A Biography

“... and I began to talk.”

Roughing It



“When he gave even the simplest order, he discharged it like a blast of lightning, and sent a long, reverberating peal of profanity thundering after it. . . .I wished I could talk like that.”

Life on the Mississippi



(John Harley, 1883)

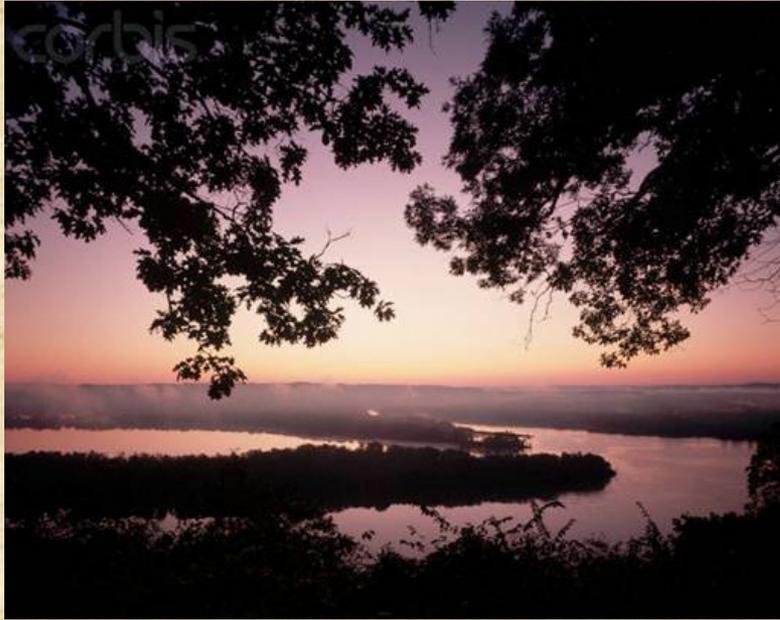
Quarry Farm Porch View



“I am going to shut myself up in a farm-house
alone, on top an Elmira hill, & *write*—on my book.”

To Elisha Bliss, March 17, 1871

Twain and Silence



“One cannot see too many summer sunrises on the Mississippi. . . . First, there is the eloquence of silence; for a deep hush broods everywhere. . . next, there is the haunting sense of loneliness, isolation, remoteness from the worry and bustle of the world.”

Life on the Mississippi



(1874)



A view from the porch



(1903)

“the quietest
of all places.”



(date unknown)

Rhetorical Relationship between Silence and Talk

- Generally, most language users agree that language is all; silence is nothing. That talk has supremacy over silence.
- Silence is often viewed as simple passivity, but it can be strategic, empowering, and engaging—thus, rhetorical.
- The four rhetorical arts initially were reading, writing, speaking, and listening (this requires silence).
- Speech comes out of silence which permeates our every moment and is perforated by sound; thus, silence remains on form of speech.
- Speech and silence maintain a reciprocal relationship not an oppositional one, often delivering complementary rhetorical significance.

Three Features of Pre-Huck Writings

1. Valuing Auralcentrism as much or more than Ocularcentrism.
2. Juxtaposing moments of silence and talk to create incongruity usually for comic and sometime satiric purposes. (There's always a talker whose verbalized language works as the comic and dialectical counterpart to silence.)
3. Employing the trope of silence for its contemplative or meditative power—revealing the sublime.

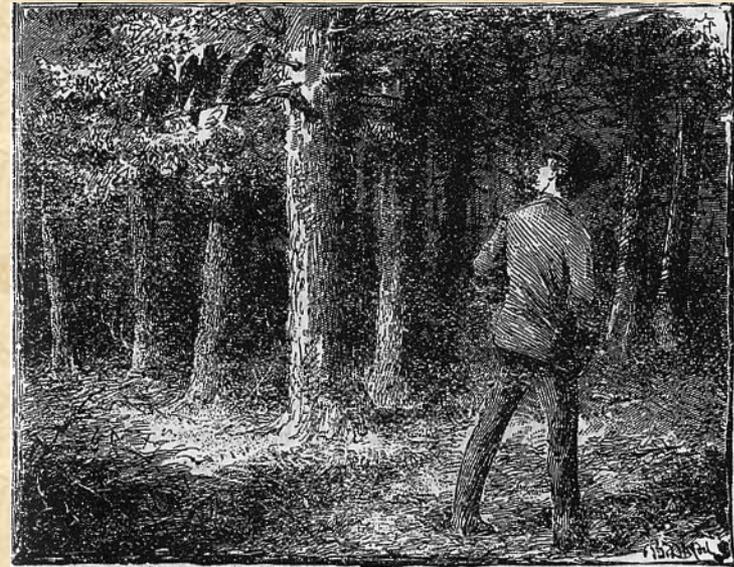
Valuing Auralcentrism over Ocularcentrism

(Manner over Matter—i.e., what is seen)



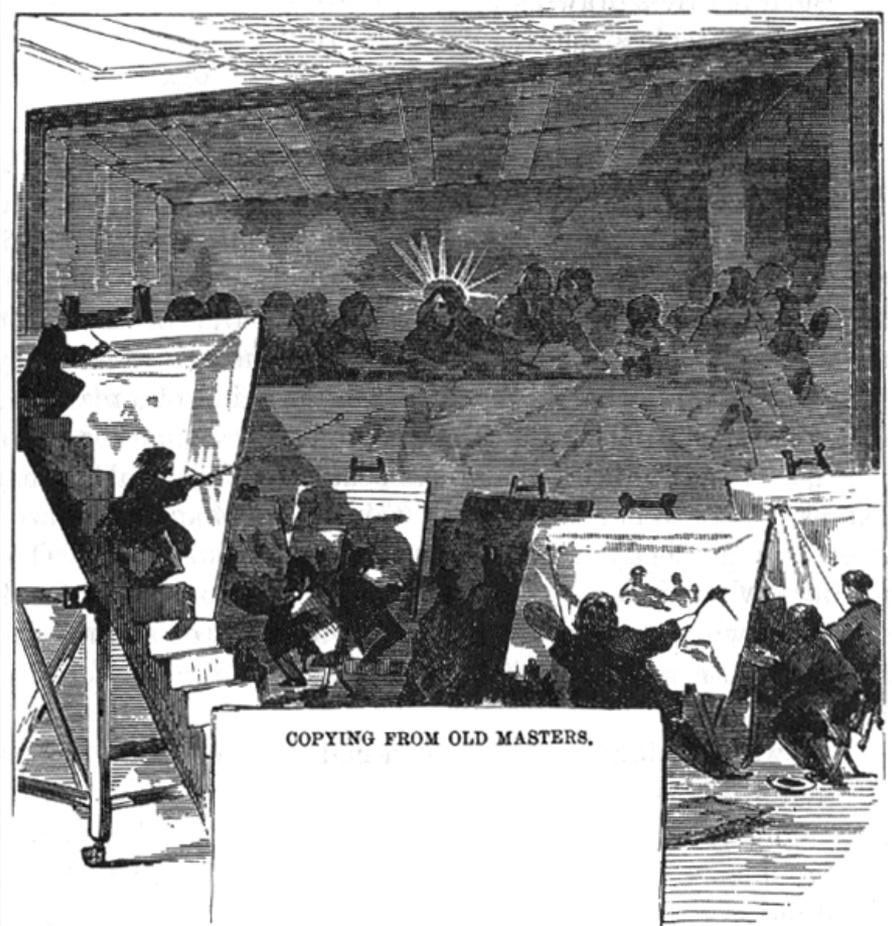
(True Williams, 1869)

“Jim Blaine’s Grandfather’s Ram”
from *Roughing It*



(Walter Francis Brown, 1880)

“Jim Baker’s Blue Jay Yarn” from
Tramp Abroad



COPYING FROM OLD MASTERS.

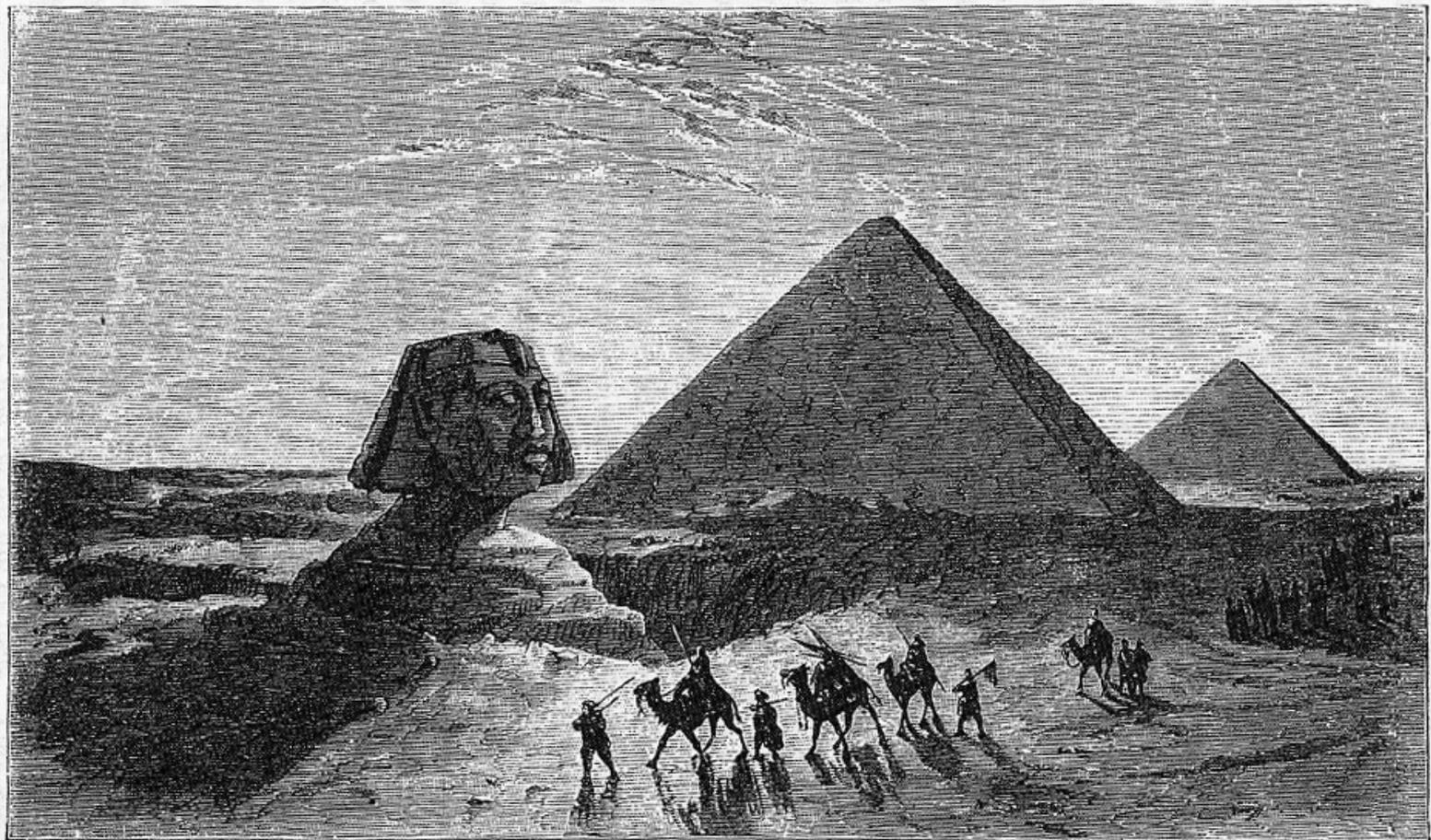
“How can they see
what is not visible?”

“... we cannot see
these things when they
are not there.”

(Innocents Abroad)

(True Williams, 1869)

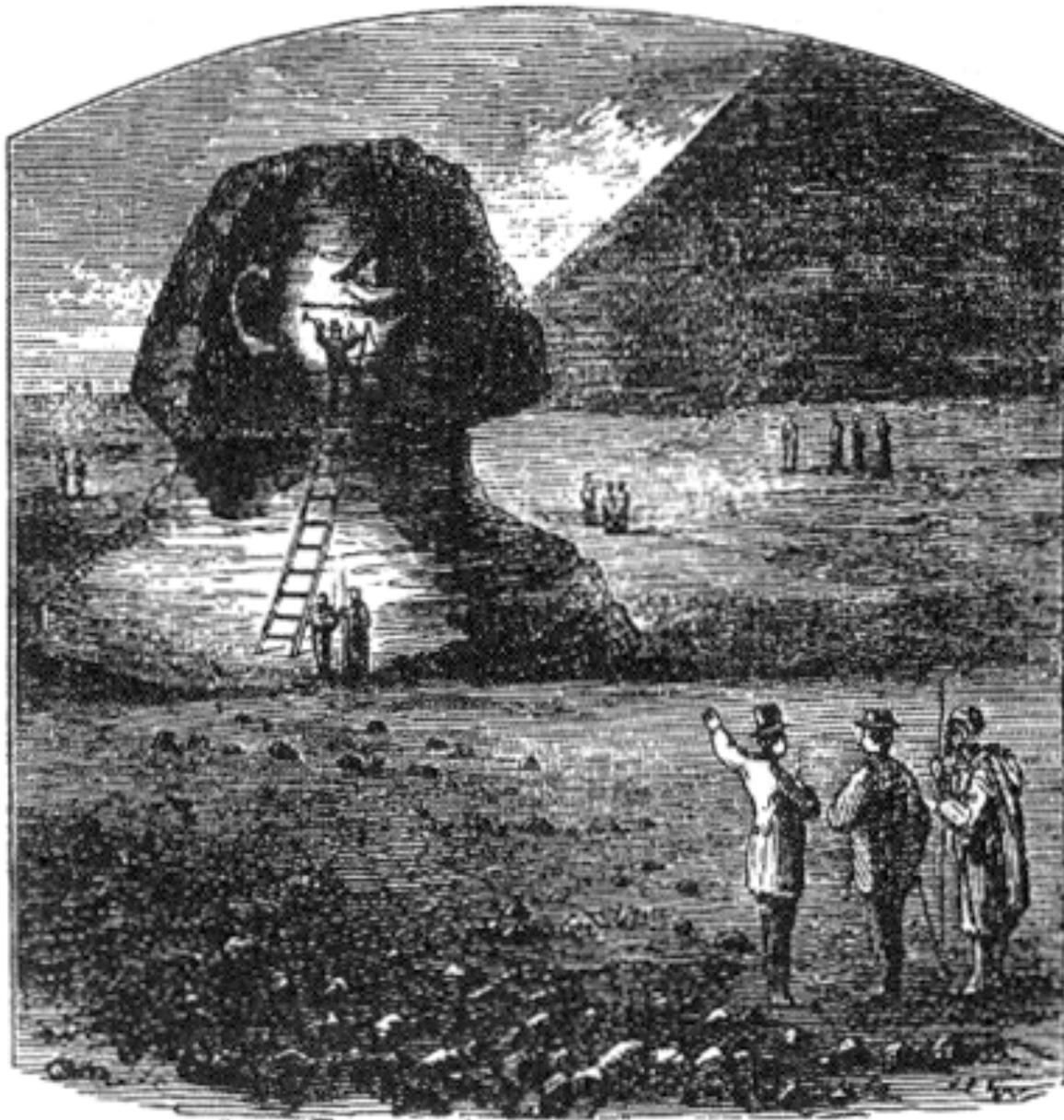
Occularcentrism juxtaposed with Auralcentrism



PYRAMIDS AND SPHYNX.

(True Williams, 1869)

“It was MEMORY—RETROSPECTION—wrought into visible, tangible form”



THE RELIC-HUNTER.

“While we stood looking, a wart, or an excrescence of some kind appeared on the jaw of the Sphinx. We heard the familiar clink of a hammer . . . our well-meaning reptiles—I mean relic hunters—crawled up there and was trying to break a specimen from the face of the most majestic creation man has wrought”

“TALKERS” for Comic/Satiric Purposes



(True Williams, 1869)

“How we suffered, suffered, suffered. She went on, hour after hour, till I was sorry I ever opened the mosquito question and gave her a start.”

(Roughing It)

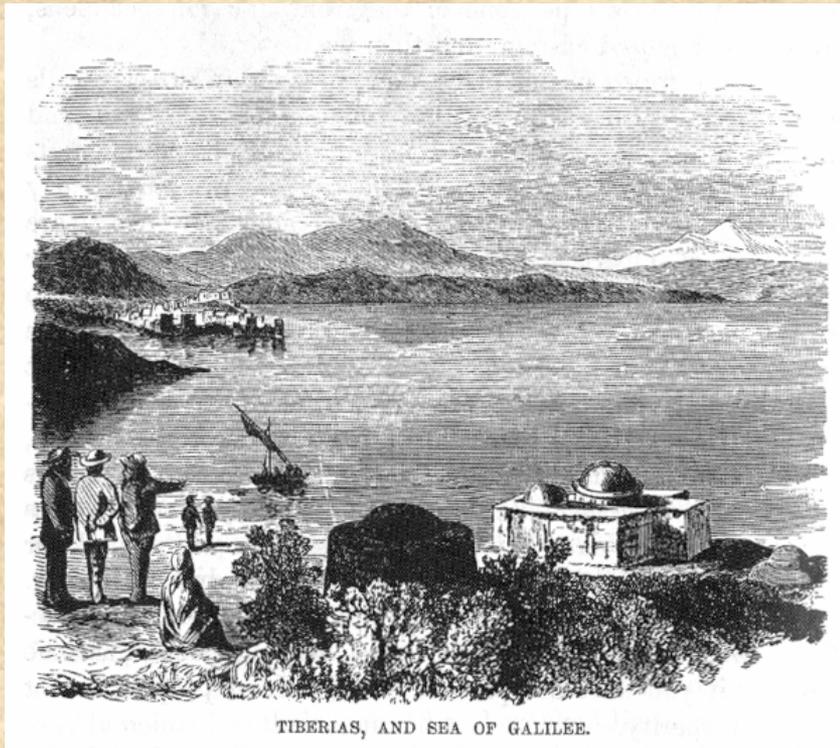


(True Williams, 1869)

“Slang was the language of Nevada.”

(Roughing It)

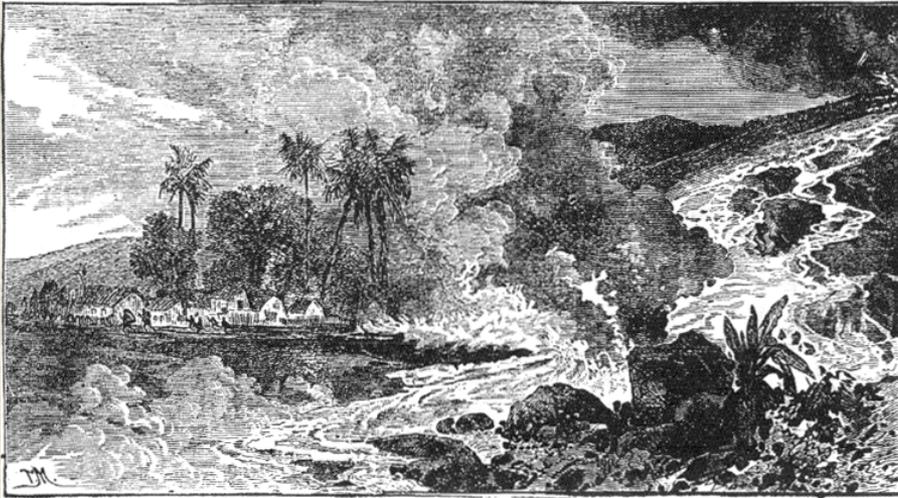
Revealing the Sublime: The Contemplative Power of the Trope of Silence



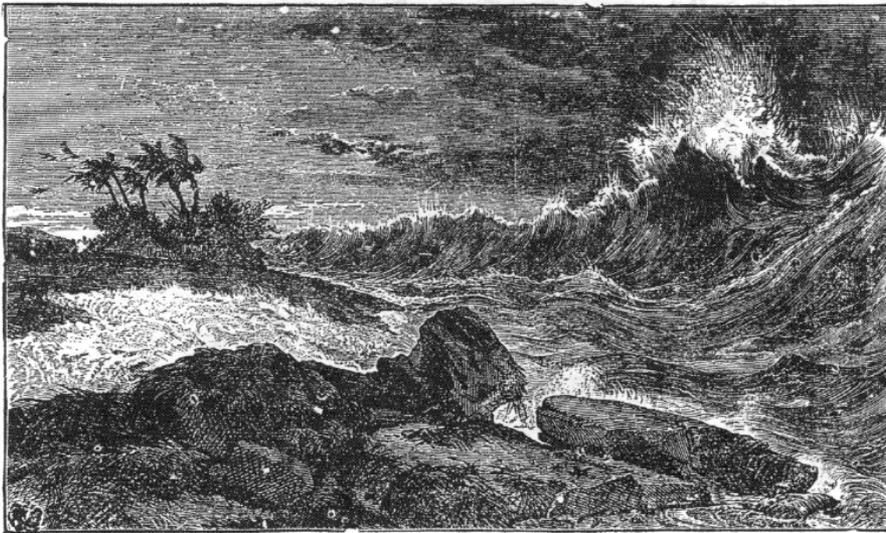
Only in contemplation can he **hear** the “**words** which were **spoken** in this little acre of rocks and sand eighteen centuries gone” (*Innocents Abroad*).

(True Williams, 1869)

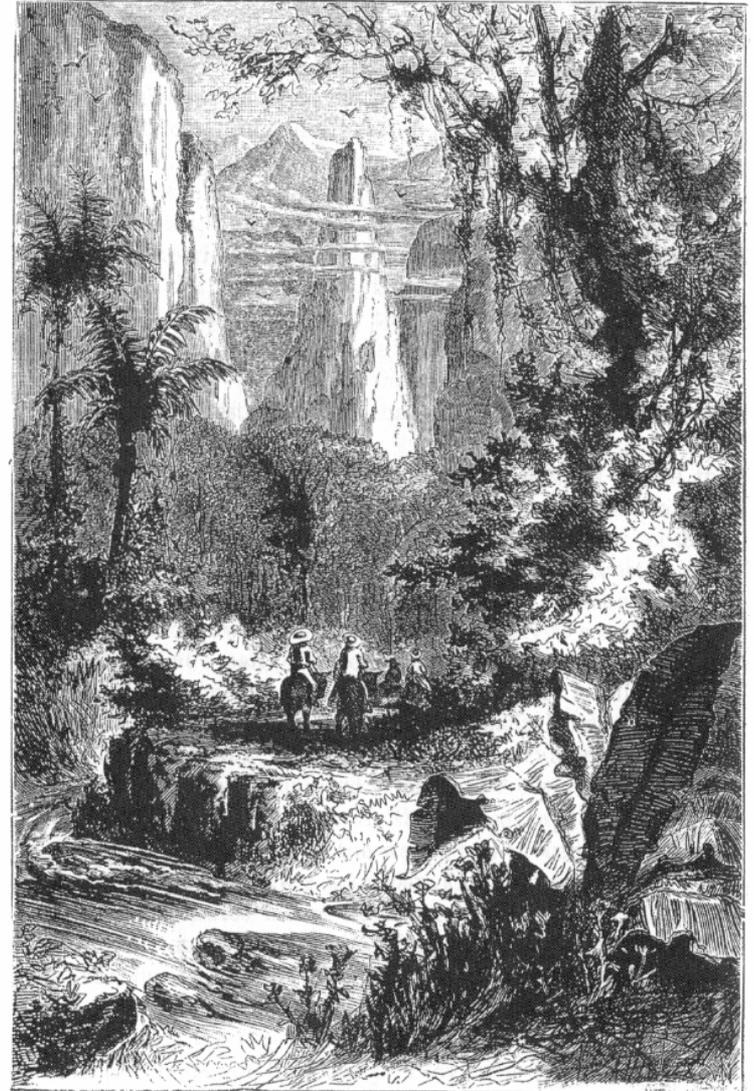
Images of sublimity from *Roughing It*



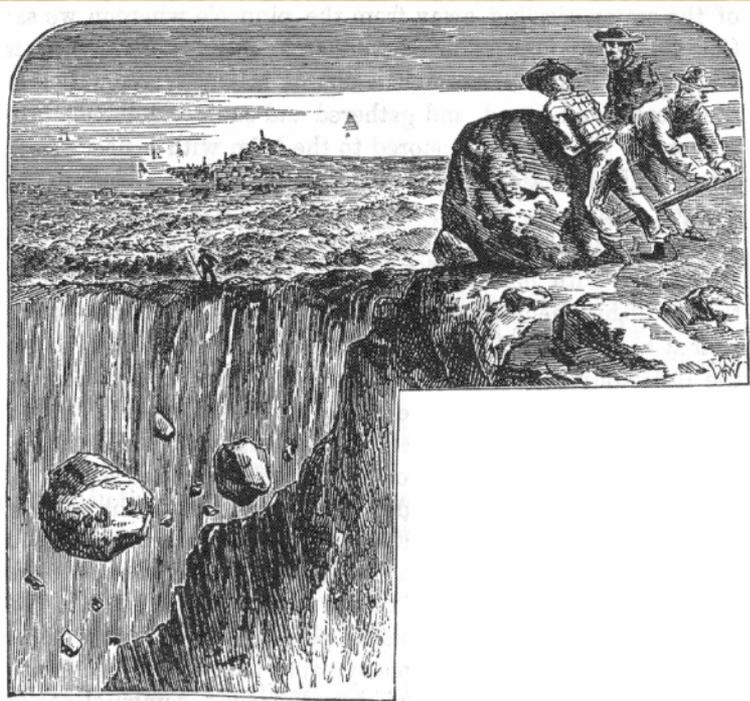
LAVA STREAM.



A TIDAL WAVE.



A VIEW IN THE IAO VALLEY.

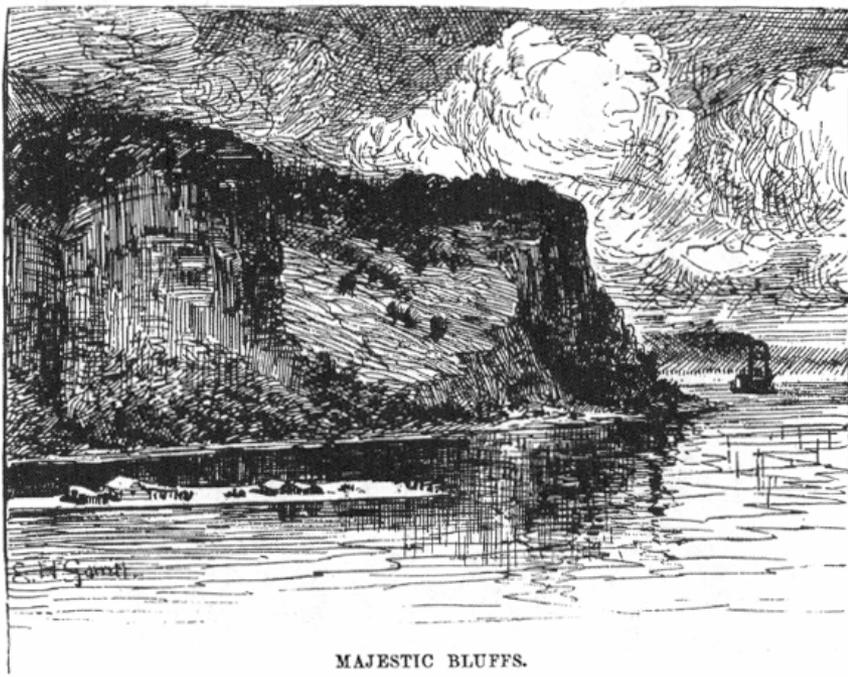


MAGNIFICENT SPORT.

“There was little conversation,
for the impressive scene overawed
speech . . . It was the sublimest
spectacle I ever witnessed.”

(Roughing It)

Sublimity destroyed by sound in *Life on the Mississippi*



“the unholy train . . . tearing along, ripping the sacred solitude to rags and tatters with its devil’s warwhoop and the roar and thunder of its rushing wheels— and straightaway you are back in this world.”

Key Terms for Twain's Rhetorical Power Silence and Talk

1. Eavesdropping: a rhetorical tactic of purposely positioning oneself on the edge of one's own knowing so as to overhear and learn from others, and from oneself.
2. Rhetorical Listening: a trope for interpretive invention and more particularly as a code for cross-cultural conduct.
3. Identification/disidentification: places wherein people may access agency to listen rhetorically not just for commonalities but also for differences.

Eavesdropping



(Frank Merrill, 1882)

Learning to be a prince



TOM'S EFFORT AT PRAYER.

(True Williams, 1876)

Witnessing Murder



A CRACK IN THE DINING-ROOM DOOR.

(Edward Windsor Kemble, 1884)

Hiding Money



WHAT TOM SAW.

(True Williams, 1876)

"His heart was full of pity for her."

Eavesdropping, Rhetorical Listening, and Identifying



(John Harley, 1883)

"We talked it over, and by and by Jim said it was such a black night, now, that it wouldn't be no resdk to swim down to That big raft and crawl aboard and listen --they would talk about Cairo."

(Adventures of Huckleberry Finn)



(John Harley, 1883)

"What's your name? . . . Charles William Albright, sir."

". . . if we let you off this time, will you keep out of these kinds of scrapes hereafter? . . . 'Deed I will, boss. You try me."

(Adventures of Huckleberry Finn)

Silence, Reflection, and Listening to Other Voices



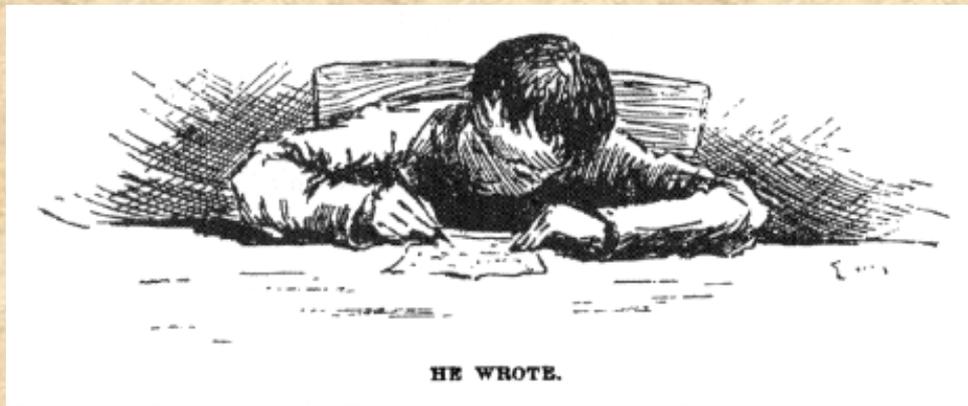
to Tom Sawyer



to Pap



to community



to Mary Jane



To Tom, Miss Watson,
and finally Jim

Wanting Silence, Wanting Talk

Extracts from Adam's Diary



8

“I wish it would not talk;
it is always talking. . . .and
any new and strange sound
intruding itself here upon the
solemn hush of the these
dreaming solitudes offends
my ear. . . .”

(Fredrick Stothman)

(*Extracts from Adam's Diary*, 1904)



(Lester Ralph)

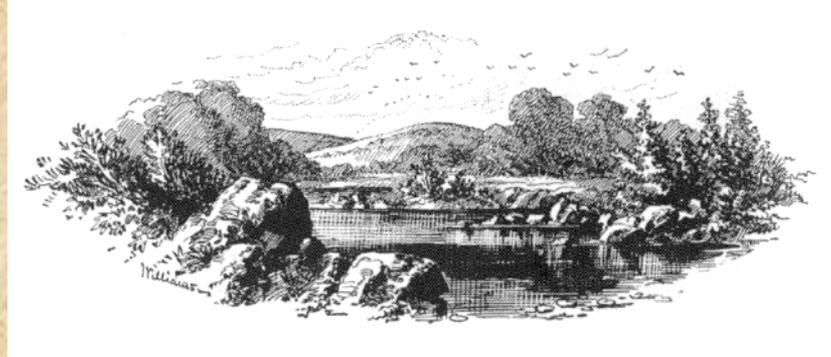
“Wheresoever she was,
there was Eden.”

(*Eve's Diary*, 1906)

Ultimate Union of Silence and Sound



(Edward Windsor Kemble, 1886)

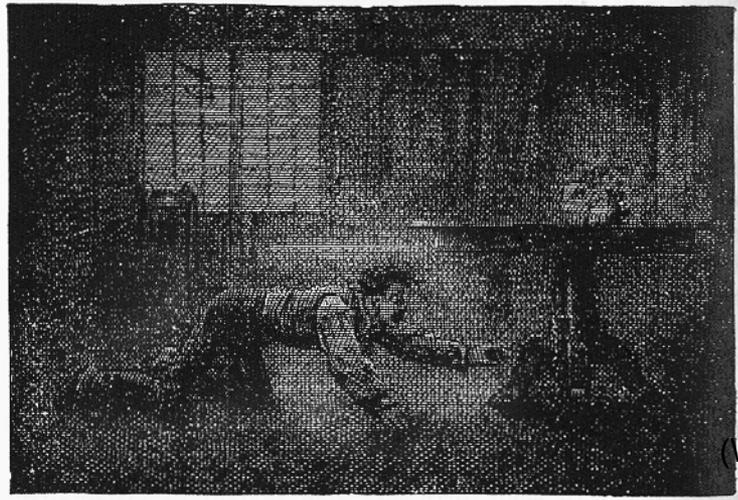




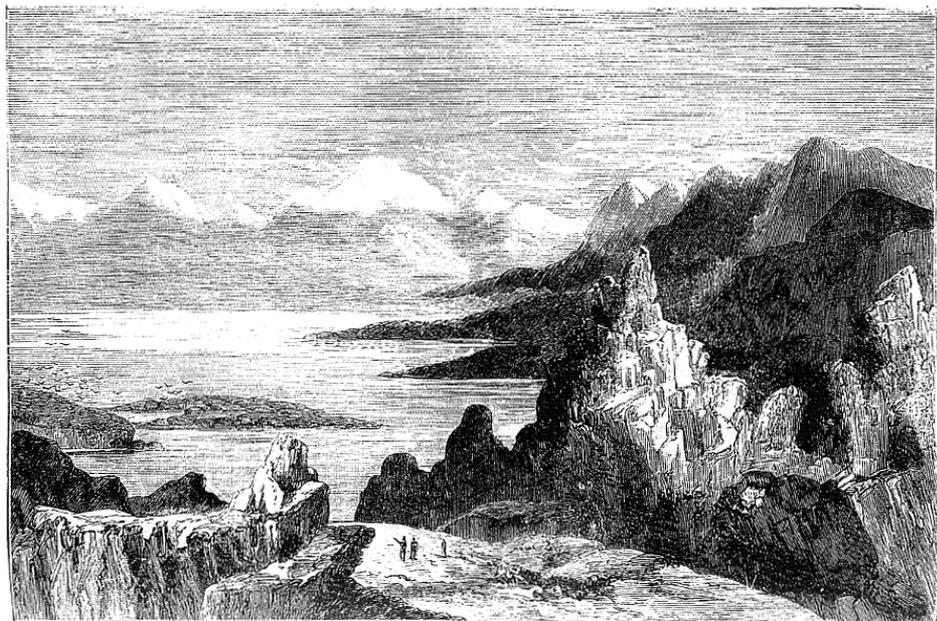
Edward Windsor Kemble, 1886)



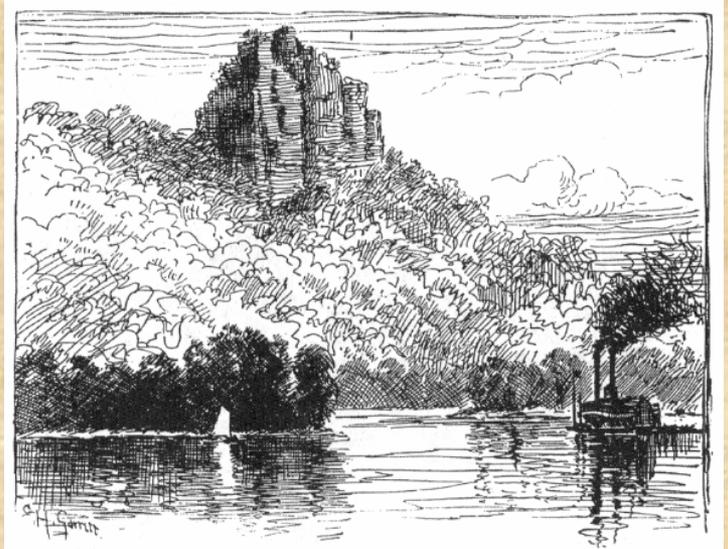
Edward Windsor Kemble, 1886)



(Walter Francis Brown, 1880)



LAKE MONO.



CHIMNEY ROCK.