

# THE ADVENTURES OF TOM SAWYER

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MARK TWAIN

*With an Introduction and Notes  
by H. Daniel Peck*

George Stade  
Consulting Editorial Director



BARNES & NOBLE CLASSICS  
NEW YORK

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## FROM THE PAGES OF *THE ADVENTURES OF TOM SAWYER*

Tom said to himself that it was not such a hollow world, after all. He had discovered a great law of human action, without knowing it—namely, that in order to make a man or a boy covet a thing, it is only necessary to make the thing difficult to attain.

(page 18)

If he had been a great and wise philosopher, like the writer of this book, he would now have comprehended that Work consists of whatever a body is *obliged* to do, and that Play consists of whatever a body is not obliged to do.

(page 18)

Breakfast over, Aunt Polly had family worship: it began with a prayer built from the ground up of solid courses of Scriptural quotations, welded together with a thin mortar of originality; and from the summit of this she delivered a grim chapter of the Mosaic Law, as from Sinai.

(page 26)

Tom was like the rest of the respectable boys, in that he envied Huckleberry his gaudy outcast condition, and was under strict orders not to play with him. So he played with him every time he got a chance.

(page 43)

“Dad fetch it! This comes of playing hooky and doing everything a feller’s told *not* to do. I might have been good, like Sid, if I’d a tried—but no, I wouldn’t, of course. But if ever I get off this time, I’ll just *waller* in Sunday schools!”

(page 69)

It seemed glorious sport to be feasting in that wild free way in the virgin forest of an unexplored and uninhabited island, far from the haunts of men, and they said they never would return to civilization.

(page 84)

Homely truth is unpalatable.

(page 126)

To promise not to do a thing is the surest way in the world to make a body want to go and do that very thing.

---

(page 130)

There comes a time in every rightly constructed boy's life when he has a raging desire to go somewhere and dig for hidden treasure.

(page 141)

“A robber is more high-toned than what a pirate is—as a general thing. In most countries they're awful high up in the nobility—dukes and such.”

(page 202)

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# MARK TWAIN

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Mark Twain was born Samuel Langhorne Clemens on November 30, 1835. When Sam was four years old, his family moved to Hannibal, Missouri, a small town later immortalized in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. After the death of his father, twelve-year-old Sam quit school and supported his family by working as a delivery boy, a grocer's clerk, and an assistant blacksmith until he was thirteen, when he became an apprentice printer. He worked for several newspapers, traveled throughout the country, and established himself as a gifted writer of humorous sketches. Abandoning journalism at points to work as a riverboat pilot, Clemens adventured up and down the Mississippi, learning the 1,200 miles of the river.

During the 1860s he spent time in the West, in newspaper work and panning for gold, and traveled to Europe and the Holy Land; *The Innocents Abroad* (1869) and *Roughing It* (1872) are accounts of those experiences. In 1863 Samuel Clemens adopted a pen name, signing a sketch as "Mark Twain," and in 1867 Mark Twain won fame with publication of a collection of humorous writings, *The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County and Other Sketches*. After marrying and settling in Connecticut, Twain wrote his best-loved works: the novels about Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn, and the nonfiction work *Life on the Mississippi*. Meanwhile, he continued to travel and had a successful career as a public lecturer.

In his later years, Twain saw the world with increasing pessimism following the death of his wife and two of their three daughters. The tone of his later novels, including *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson* and *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, became cynical and dark. Having failed as a publisher and suffering losses from ill-advised investments, Twain was forced by financial necessity to maintain a heavy schedule of lecturing. Though he had left school at an early age, his genius was recognized by Yale University, the University of Missouri, and Oxford University in the form of honorary doctorate degrees. He died in his Connecticut mansion, Stormfield, on April 21, 1910.

# THE WORLD OF MARK TWAIN AND *THE ADVENTURES OF TOM SAWYER*

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- 1835 Samuel Langhorne Clemens is born prematurely in Florida, Missouri, the fourth child of John Marshall Clemens and Jane Lampton Clemens.
- 1839 The family moves to Hannibal, the small Missouri town on the west bank of the Mississippi River that will become the model for the setting of *Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn*.
- 1840 American newspapers gain increased readership as urban populations swell and printing technology improves.
- 1847 John Clemens dies, leaving the family in financial difficulty. Sam quits school at the age of twelve.
- 1848 Sam becomes a full-time apprentice to Joseph Ament of the *Missouri Courier*.
- 1850 Sam's brother Orion, ten years his senior, returns to Hannibal and establishes the *Journal*; he hires Sam as a compositor. Steamboats become the primary means of transport on the Mississippi River.
- 1852 Sam edits the failing *Journal* while Orion is away. After he reads local humor published in newspapers in New England and the Southwest, Sam begins printing his own humorous sketches in the *journal*. He submits "The Dandy Frightening the Squatter" to the *Carpet-Bag* of Boston, which publishes the sketch in the May issue.
- 1853 Sam leaves Hannibal and begins working as an itinerant printer; he visits St. Louis, New York, and Philadelphia. His brothers Orion and Henry move to Iowa with their mother.
- 1854 Transcendentalism flourishes in American literary culture; Henry David Thoreau publishes *Walden*.
- 1855 Sam works again as a printer with Orion in Keokuk, Iowa.
- 1856 Sam acquires a commission from Keokuk's *Daily Post* to write humorous letters; he decides to travel to South America.
- 1857 Sam takes a steamer to New Orleans, where he hopes to find a ship bound for South America. Instead, he signs on as an apprentice to river pilot Horace Bixby and spends the next two years learning how to navigate a steamship up and down the Mississippi. His experiences become material for *Life on the Mississippi* and his tales of Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn.
- 1858 Sam's brother Henry dies in a steamboat accident.

- 1859 ~~Samuel Clemens becomes a fully licensed river pilot.~~
- 1861 The American Civil War erupts, putting an abrupt stop to river trade between North and South. Sam serves with a Confederate militia for two weeks before venturing to the Nevada Territory with Orion, who had been appointed by President Abraham Lincoln as secretary of the new Territory.
- 1862 After an unsuccessful stint as a miner and prospector for gold and silver, Clemens begins reporting for the *Territorial Enterprise* in Virginia City, Nevada.
- 1863 Clemens signs his name as “Mark Twain” on a humorous travel sketch printed in the *Territorial Enterprise*. The pseudonym, a riverboat term meaning “two fathoms deep,” connotes barely navigable water.
- 1864 After challenging his editor to a duel, Twain is forced to leave Nevada and lands a job with a San Francisco newspaper. He meets Artemus Ward, a popular humorist, whose techniques greatly influence Twain’s writing.
- 1865 Robert E. Lee’s army surrenders, ending the Civil War. While prospecting for gold in Calaveras County, California, Twain hears a tale he uses for a story that makes him famous; originally titled “Jim Smiley and His Jumping Frog,” it is published in New York’s *Saturday Press*.
- 1866 Twain travels to Hawaii as a correspondent for the *Sacramento Union*; upon his return to California, he delivers his first public lecture, beginning a successful career as a humorous speaker.
- 1867 Twain travels to New York, and then to Europe and the Holy Land aboard the steamer *Quaker City*; during five months abroad, he contributes to California’s largest paper, Sacramento’s *Alta California*, and writes several letters for the New York *Tribune*. He publishes a volume of stories and sketches, *The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County and Other Sketches*.
- 1868 Twain meets and falls in love with Olivia (Livy) Langdon. His overseas writings have increased his popularity; he signs his first book contract and begins *The Innocents Abroad*, sketches based on his trip to the Holy Land. He embarks on a lecture tour of the American Midwest.
- 1869 Twain becomes engaged to Livy, who acts as his editor from that time on. *The Innocents Abroad*, published as a subscription book, is an instant success, selling nearly 100,000 copies in the first three years.
- 1870 Twain and Livy marry. Their son, Langdon, is born; he lives only two years.
- 1871 The Clemens move to Hartford, Connecticut.
- 1872 *Roughing It*, an account of Twain’s adventures out West, is published to enormous success. The first of Twain’s three daughters, Susy, is born. Twain strikes up a lifelong friendship

with the writer William Dean Howells.

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- 1873 Ever the entrepreneur, Twain receives the patent for *Mark Twain's Self-Pasting Scrapbook*, an invention that is a commercial success. He publishes *The Gilded Age*, a collaboration with his neighbor Charles Dudley Warner that satirizes the post-Civil War era.
- 1874 His daughter Clara is born. The family moves into a mansion in Hartford in which they will live for the next seventeen years.
- 1876 *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* is published.
- 1877 Twain collaborates with Bret Harte—an author known for his use of local color and humor and for his parodies of Cooper, Dickens, and Hugo—to produce the play *Ah Sin*.
- 1880 Twain invests in the Paige typesetter and loses thousands of dollars. He publishes *A Tramp Abroad*, an account of his travels in Europe the two previous years. His daughter Jean is born.
- 1881 *The Prince and the Pauper*, Twain's first historical romance, is published.
- 1882 Twain plans to write about the Mississippi River and makes the trip from New Orleans to Minnesota to refresh his memory.
- 1883 The nonfiction work *Life on the Mississippi* is published.
- 1884 *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, a book Twain worked on for nearly ten years, is published in England; publication in the United States is delayed until the following year because an illustration plate is judged to be obscene.
- 1885 When *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is published in America—by Twain's ill-fated publishing house, run by his nephew Charles Webster—controversy immediately surrounds the book. Twain also publishes the memoirs of his friend former President Ulysses S. Grant.
- 1888 He receives an honorary Master of Arts degree from Yale University.
- 1889 He publishes *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, the first of his major works to be informed by a deep pessimism. He meets Rudyard Kipling, who had come to America to meet Twain, in Livy's hometown of Elmira, New York.
- 1890 Twain's mother dies.
- 1891 Financial difficulties force the Clemens family to close their Hartford mansion; they move to Berlin, Germany.
- 1894 Twain publishes *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson*, a dark novel about the aftermath of slavery, which sells well, and *Tom Sawyer Abroad*, which does not. Twain's publishing company fails and leaves him bankrupt.
- 1895 Twain embarks on an ambitious worldwide lecture tour to restore his financial position.

- 1896 He publishes *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc and Tom Sawyer, Detective*. His daughter Susy dies of spinal meningitis.
- 1901 Twain is awarded an honorary doctorate degree from Yale.
- 1902 Livy falls gravely ill. *Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn*, a stage adaptation of the novel, opens to favorable reviews. Though he is credited with coauthorship, Twain has little to do with the play and never sees it performed. He receives an honorary doctorate degree from the University of Missouri.
- 1903 Hoping to restore Livy's health, Twain takes her to Florence, Italy.
- 1904 Livy dies, leaving Twain devastated. He begins dictating an uneven autobiography that he never finishes.
- 1905 Theodore Roosevelt invites Twain to the White House. Twain enjoys a gala celebrating his seventieth birthday in New York. He continues to lecture, and he addresses Congress on copyright issues.
- 1906 Twain's biographer Albert Bigelow Paine moves in with the family.
- 1907 Twain travels to Oxford University to receive an honorary Doctor of Letters degree.
- 1908 He settles in Redding, Connecticut, at Stormfield, the mansion that is his final home.
- 1909 Twain's daughter Clara marries; the author dons his Oxford robe for the ceremony. His daughter Jean dies.
- 1910 Twain travels to Bermuda for his health. He develops heart problems and, upon his return to Stormfield, dies, leaving behind a cache of unpublished work.



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# INTRODUCTION

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*The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* is Mark Twain's "other" book, the one, it is said, that prepared the way for his masterpiece, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and in which the hero of that work was born as a secondary figure. There is much truth in this formulation. *Huck Finn* is indeed Twain's masterpiece, perhaps his only great novel. In directly engaging slavery, it far surpasses the moral depth of *Tom Sawyer*, and its brilliant first-person narration as well as its journey structure elevate it stylistically above the somewhat fragmentary and anecdotal *Tom Sawyer*. Yet it is important to understand *Tom Sawyer* in its own terms, and not just as a run-up to *Huck Finn*. It was, after all, Mark Twain's best-selling novel during much of the twentieth century; and it has always had a vast international following. People who have never actually read the novel know its memorable episodes, such as the fence whitewashing scene, and its characters—Tom foremost among them—who have entered into national folklore. The appeal of *Tom Sawyer* is enduring, and it will be our purpose here to try to locate some of the sources of that appeal.

*The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* was Mark Twain's first novel (the first he authored by himself),<sup>1</sup> but it is hardly the work of an apprentice writer. By the time this book was published in 1876, Samuel Clemens was already well known by his pen name Mark Twain, which he had adopted in 1863 while working as a reporter in Nevada. At the time of the novel's publication, he was in his early forties and beginning to live in an architect-designed home in Hartford, Connecticut. He had been married to his wife, Olivia, for six years, and two of his three daughters had been born.<sup>2</sup>

Up to this point, Twain had been known as a journalist, humorist, and social critic. His story "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County," first published in 1865, had made him famous, and the lecture tours he had given in the United States and England in these years had been well received. His books *The Innocents Abroad* (1869), which satirizes an American sightseeing tour of the Middle East that he covered for a newspaper, and *Roughing It* (1872), an account of the far west based on his own experiences there, were great successes. Both works were first published in subscription form, and they quickly advanced Twain's reputation as a popular writer. His publication in 1873 of *The Gilded Age*, a book coauthored with Charles Dudley Warner dramatizing the excesses of the post-Civil War period, confirmed his place as a leading social critic.

Indeed, the America reflected in *The Gilded Age*—an America of greed, corruption, and materialism—may have driven Twain back imaginatively to what seemed to him a simpler time—to "those old simple days" (p. 199), as he refers to them in the concluding chapter of *Tom Sawyer*. The first significant sign of such a return in his publications was his nostalgic essay "Old Times on the Mississippi," which appeared in 1875.<sup>3</sup> *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, published the following year, belongs to this return to antebellum America, and to the scene of Twain's growing up—Hannibal, Missouri. That the author was able to draw upon his deepest reserves of childhood imagination in this work certainly accounts for much of its appeal. A decade after its publication, he referred to the novel as a "hymn" to a forgotten era,<sup>4</sup> and while this characterization oversimplifies *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, it also points to key aspects of its composition and literary character.

In the novel, Twain renames Hannibal as St. Petersburg, thus suggesting, as John C. Gerber has said

St. Peter's place, or heaven.<sup>5</sup> But heaven, as Twain depicts it, is a real place. Many of the sites and topographical features are identifiable. Cardiff Hill, so important in the novel as a setting for children's games such as Robin Hood, is Holliday's Hill of Hannibal. Jackson's Island, the scene of the boys' life as "pirates," is recognizable as Glasscock's Island. And McDougal's Cave, so central to the closing movement of the novel, has a real-life reference in McDowell's cave. Human structures like Aunt Polly's house, as well as the schoolhouse and the church, were similarly modeled after identifiable buildings in Hannibal.

The autobiographical origins of the novel are also evident in the characters. In the preface, Twain says that "Huck Finn is drawn from life" (in part from a childhood friend named Tom Blankenship) and "Tom Sawyer also, but not from an individual—he is a combination of the characteristics of three boys whom I knew." Schoolmates John Briggs and Will Bowen probably were two of the three boys after whom Tom was modeled, and a good bet for the third is young Sam Clemens himself. Many of Tom's qualities resemble Twain's descriptions of his young self, and several of Tom's experiences—such as being forced by Aunt Polly to take the Painkiller and sitz baths—reflect the author's own. Aunt Polly herself has several characteristics that link her to Sam Clemens's mother, Jane Clemens. And scholars have found Hannibal counterparts for many of the other characters, including Beck Thatcher, Joe Harper, and Ben Rogers, as well as the widow Douglas and the town's minister, schoolteacher, and doctor.

But these reference points in the local history of Hannibal are just the surface aspects of the novel's autobiographical dimension. In 1890 Twain reported to his friend Brander Matthews that the writing of *Tom Sawyer* had been accompanied for him by a series of vivid memories from his youth in rural Missouri. These memories, Twain said, became a force in the composition of the novel as he "harvested" them, and brought them into his developing narrative.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the highly episodic character of the novel suggests a stringing together of remembrances. Some of the book's most evocative scenes clearly draw their power from childhood, which Twain filters through a vision of youth and nature reminiscent of Rousseau or even Wordsworth. For example, chapter 16, set on Jackson's Island, begins with Tom, Joe, and Huck in a scene of summer reverie:

After breakfast they went whooping and prancing out on the bar, and chased each other round and round, shedding clothes as they went, until they were naked, and then continued the frolic far away up the shoal water of the bar, against the stiff current, which latter tripped their legs from under them from time to time and greatly increased the fun. And now and then they stooped in a group and splashed water in each other's faces with their palms, gradually approaching each other with averted faces to avoid the strangling sprays, and finally gripping and struggling till the best man ducked his neighbor, and then they all went under in a tangle of white legs and arms, and came up blowing and sputtering, laughing, and gasping for breath at one and the same time (p. 97).

Twain's whole career, up to this point, had been characterized by his ability to turn scenes of romantic sensibility abruptly into burlesque. He follows this pattern at many points in *Tom Sawyer* but not here. Instead, he allows the moment to stand, unqualified and undiminished. There is perhaps no better instance in the novel of its sources in childhood reverie. The episode testifies to the fact that Mark Twain discovered childhood, during the writing of *Tom Sawyer*, as a particularly rich source of imaginative power. This power informs not just his "children's" books, like *Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn*, but all his works—such as *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889) and *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc* (1896)—that depend on a perspective of innocence in their center.

characters.

Yet, while we recognize a fundamental source of the novel's power in Twain's remembrance and recreation of childhood—and can find much of young Sam Clemens in Tom Sawyer—one of the most interesting things about the book's composition is how long the author remained uncertain of its proper audience. (This uncertainty is especially notable when we consider that *Tom Sawyer* has long been regarded a classic of children's literature.) As late as the summer of 1875, when Twain was completing a full draft of the manuscript, he wrote to his friend William Dean Howells, "It is *not* a boy's book, at all. It will only be read by adults. It is only written for adults."<sup>2</sup>

If Twain was, even at this late stage, imagining *Tom Sawyer* as a book for adults, then what kind of book did he have in mind? The answer is in the novel itself—in those scenes, especially, where the credulity, ignorance, hypocrisy, and class consciousness of the people of St. Petersburg are exposed. These scenes, were they to be excerpted and isolated from the narrative, would read as pure satire and social critique. In other words, they would have much in common with Twain's earlier works such as *The Innocents Abroad* and *The Gilded Age*.

Mark Twain's agent for exposing the shortcomings, and shortsightedness, of St. Petersburg's adult population is of course Tom, who consistently subverts the social order. His release during the church service of the pinch-bug whose bite sends the poodle "sailing up the aisle" (p. 39) is a literal disruption of that order, and his hilarious (to the reader) volunteering of David and Goliath as the first two disciples makes a mockery of Bible study. Tom disorders the society of St. Petersburg most dramatically by craftily organizing the public ridicule of one of its most austere members. The "severe" schoolmaster—whose wig is lifted from him, exposing his "gilded" head, in chapter 21—comes in for an uproarious put-down. This chapter is a good example of the way in which Tom Sawyer and Mark Twain are twinned protagonists, for here the narrator joins Tom in the fun. He cannot resist an extended authorial send-up of mid-nineteenth-century sentimentality, as expressed in the declamatory "compositions" performed by St. Petersburg's young people on Examination Evening:

A prevalent feature in these compositions was a nursed and petted melancholy; another was a wasteful and opulent gush of "fine language"; another was a tendency to lug in by the ears particularly prized words and phrases until they were worn entirely out; and a peculiarity that conspicuously marked and marred them was the inveterate and intolerable sermon that wagged its crippled tail at the end of each and every one of them. No matter what the subject might be, a brain-racking effort was made to squirm it into some aspect or other that the moral and religious mind could contemplate with edification (p. 126).

One can sense Samuel Clemens himself "squirming" over "the glaring insincerity of these sermons" (p. 126), and, as if to vent himself of their influence, he concludes this chapter by quoting verbatim several "compositions" taken from an actual volume of nineteenth-century sentimental literature.

In this satiric (adult) strain of the book's presentation, *Tom Sawyer* becomes the vehicle not only of childhood reverie and play, but also the vehicle of biting social criticism—and not just of Hannibal, Missouri, but of the whole of American rural life that it represents. In this sense, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* can be understood as a predecessor of early-twentieth-century works, such as Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919) and Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street* (1920), that depict the narrowness of life in the provinces. Perhaps Anderson, who was indebted to Twain for his cultivation of American vernacular language, is the better example, because Anderson's vision of small-town life is not solely critical. *Winesburg*, like *Tom Sawyer*, exhibits the author's affection for the lost world

that it recounts. But *Winesburg* is, in tone and structure, a far more unified literary presentation than *Tom Sawyer*, and this fact returns us to the issue of Mark Twain's divided agenda.

This divided agenda is reflected in Twain's plans for composition. On the very first page of the manuscript of the novel, he had made the following notation:

I, Boyhood & youth; 2 y & early manh; 3 the Battle of Life in many lands; 4 (age 37 to [40?],) return & meet grown babies & toothless old drivelers who were the grandees of his boyhood. The Adored Unknown a [illegible] faded old maid & full of rasping, puritanical vinegar piety.<sup>8</sup>

Scholars can tell from the manuscript's internal evidence that Twain made this note early in the novel's composition—possibly at the very beginning of that composition, and certainly before it had advanced beyond the fifth chapter. From the start, then, Twain had imagined “growing” Tom into adulthood, having him travel abroad and return, in his forties (Twain's own age when he was composing the novel), to St. Petersburg. Here, Tom would discover that his most enchanted objects of childhood memory had become disenchanting. Becky Thatcher, surely the “Adored Unknown,” would have become a “faded old maid & full of rasping, puritanical vinegar piety.”

In other words, Becky, and presumably every other aspect of village life that Tom had once valued would be shown up for the disappointing things they really are. Or, from another perspective, the disenchantment of a once enchanted world would show how small-town American rural life inevitably stifled the human potential for growth and change. It appears that the Tom Sawyer of this version of the novel would have been one of Twain's classic outsider figures, like Hank Morgan in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, whose status as an outsider is used to expose the failures of an established cultural order.

But we'll never know precisely how Twain would have handled this return to St. Petersburg and what precise purposes of social criticism he would have made of it, because this is the book he didn't write. The one he did write ended with Tom locked forever in childhood—a childhood that has lived timelessly in the American imagination for the past century and a quarter. Many readers have noted that Twain never discloses Tom's exact age, thus leaving him always in a state bordering late childhood and early adolescence, but never advancing beyond that point. The novel, as we have it, thus stands in stark contrast to Twain's early outline, where his hero voyages stage by stage (through an actual chronology of aging) on the river of life.

Whatever changed Mark Twain's mind remains mysterious. But it seems clear that sometime between the fall of 1874 and the spring of 1875 he decided to conclude the novel with Tom in childhood. (In the autumn of 1875, he confirmed the matter by writing to Howells, “I have finished the story and didn't take the chap beyond boyhood.”)<sup>9</sup> Even so, he continued to understand this story of a boy's life as fundamentally a vehicle for adult satire. As noted earlier, Twain had sent the recently completed manuscript to Howells during the summer of 1875, insisting that the book “is written only for adults.” Howells, after reading the manuscript, told Twain that he felt that the novel's satirical elements were too dominant, and he had some advice: “I think you should treat it explicitly as a boy's story. Grown-ups will enjoy it just as much if you do; and if you should put it forth as a study of boy character from the grown-up point of view, you'd give the wrong key to it.”<sup>10</sup>

Howells, as America's preeminent man of letters, had great influence on Twain, and his counsel—as well as that of Twain's wife, Olivia, who agreed with Howells about making this a children's book—must have weighed heavily on the author. Yet, while Twain made some changes toward greater

propriety in the language of certain passages, he does not appear to have extensively revised the novel beyond this point. When published the following year, it continued to betray a striking division between satire and romance. This division can be described along an axis that forms between the scene of the boys frolicking on the shore at Jackson's Island, and the devastating cultural critique of "'Examination' day" in chapter 21. Most chapters of the book contain both elements, in a sometimes uneasy relation to one another.

Twain's divided purposes, and uncertainty about his audience, are reflected in the novel's preface where he attempted to reconcile its disparate elements and perspectives: "Although my book is intended mainly for the entertainment of boys and girls, I hope it will not be shunned by men and women on that account, for part of my plan has been to try to pleasantly remind adults of what they once were themselves, and of how they felt and thought and talked, and what queer enterprises they sometimes engaged in."

In underestimating in his preface the satirical force of the novel, Twain attempted to soften the sharp division of elements that the book actually exhibits. (The preface thus represents a concession to Howells, at least in the way that Twain initially addresses his readers.) This division has led some critics to fault *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* for its apparent lack of narrative coherence. Part social critique, part boyhood reverie, the novel in this view never quite seems to know what it is or what it wants to say. Formally, according to this view, the division expresses itself in a randomness of selection and a highly episodic character. These qualities are certainly present in the first part of the novel (especially the first eight chapters), which contains some of the work's most famous set pieces including the fence whitewashing scene in chapter 2. Most of these early chapters seem to have been developed by Twain from previously written sketches, and the sketch, of course, is the form in which earlier he had honed his skills as a humorist, a lecturer, and a journalist.

What Mark Twain had not learned, up to this point in his career, was how to sustain a plot—that is, how to organize his material into a coherent narrative—and he may well have understood the writing of *Tom Sawyer* as just this kind of challenge. To the degree that the novel does ultimately hold together (I myself believe it does, for reasons I will offer shortly), *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* represents a significant turning point, and an artistic advance, in the writer's career. It prepared the way not only for his great work *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, which he was already conceiving as he concluded *Tom Sawyer*, but for all his longer works of fiction—including *A Connecticut Yankee* and *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894). And while the ordering of a plot would never become one of Twain's strengths, his writing of *Tom Sawyer* showed him that he was ready to move beyond the sketch, and that he was now capable of working in a more capacious and textured genre.

How, then, might this uneven and anecdotal novel—so dependent on specific childhood memories of the author, and so given to pointed critiques of social custom—be said to hold together as a narrative performance? The chief vehicle for unity is Tom Sawyer himself. To say that Tom dominates the book is an understatement; he is the central figure in every possible meaning of the phrase. Tom is both the principal actor and the stage-manager of the novel, and the theatrical metaphor applies in several respects.

The form of the novel as a series of individualized, and often self-contained, scenes has its counterpart in Tom's own theatricality. Life is a drama to him, and he has peopled it with figures and adventures from romantic literature and legend. That he often has the references wrong only adds



the fun, and does not make his imagination any less literary. Tom does everything “by the book” (58), which is to say that he gives a literary overlay to virtually every activity in which he engages—from his romance with Becky to his direction of games such as Robin Hood.

The games, in particular, reveal how important to the fictional world of this novel are language and speech. Nothing in these games can take on actual power, or legitimacy, unless the language is right. Tom is the insistent monitor of legitimacy, the novel’s gate-keeper of language. Speech casts a spell over everything (the children’s superstitions, expressed by verbal incantations at several points, are merely one aspect of that spell), and, like Ariel’s song in the *The Tempest*, Tom’s language charms the world he inhabits. In a broader sense, Tom lives by language, as can be seen in his various verbal encounters with the adult world. For example, his deft wordplay with Aunt Polly in extricating himself from numerous scrapes shows his brilliance at this game, the game of language. The juxtaposition implied in “wordplay” is one of the most important elements in the novel.

In all these ways, Tom’s gift for language—the way he spins a world into being and sustains it according to his “rules”—helps to hold this otherwise unruly narrative together. But it also holds Tom together. Without this distinctive aspect of his character, we would be left with an exceedingly unfocused view of him. His undeterminable age is but one aspect of the indefiniteness of his rendering by Twain. For example, Tom’s identity as an orphan is a fact begging for explanation, yet none is ever offered. And, as numerous commentators have observed, we never learn what Tom looks like; our visualization of him depends altogether on the work of generations of illustrators, who have fancied him variously in his overalls and straw hat.

If we as readers depend on Tom’s verbal gifts for our sense of his identity, he himself needs them to negotiate the social structure of St. Petersburg, because the actual power in this book lies overwhelmingly on the side of the adults. Aunt Polly, in fact, is among the more benign figures in the adult world of St. Petersburg, and one needs only to glance at that world to see what a disappointing gathering of humanity it is. From the respectable Judge Thatcher, at the top of the social scale, to the town drunkard, there is little here for a child to embrace. Top to bottom, this world is characterized by hypocrisy, social pretension, false piety, and self-interest. No one is spared, except perhaps some marginal figures like “the Welshman” whose benevolent presence and actions (rescuing the widow Douglas from Injun Joe) are necessary to furthering the plot.

For Tom and his friends, the most onerous adults in St. Petersburg are those, like the schoolmaster, with institutional authority, because their power over children has been officially sanctioned by society. And characteristically they use their power *against* the children, as the schoolmaster’s whipping of Tom in chapter 20 illustrates. Indeed, this is a novel structured by oppositions, and the opposition of children and adults, as Twain represents it, points to a larger one, that of civilization versus nature. Spatially, the boys retreat from St. Petersburg (from home and school and church) to Jackson’s Island and Cardiff Hill, and temporally they retreat from their school year into the freedom of summer.

The very word that titles the novel, “adventures,” suggests these twinned flights into time and space which in turn suggest Freud’s classic formulation of civilization and its discontents. Here, work is the enemy; it is, in the narrator’s words, “whatever a body is *obliged* to do,” and the self finds fulfillment and pleasure in the opposite of work, which is to say, “play”: “Play consists of whatever a body is not obliged to do” (p. 18). These phrases come from the chapter in which Tom, through deception, turns his own (onerous) work of whitewashing the fence into the pleasure of others (as well as his own).

profit), showing how deeply, if instinctively, he himself understands the formulation.

To accommodate a vision of retreat from the adult world of work and the confinement of institutional forms like school and church, Twain renders the world of his novel as one long summer idyll. This quality works to give *Tom Sawyer* a firm unity of time and place, another aspect of its scenic presentation. Unlike *Huck Finn*, which transports its hero relentlessly away from St. Petersburg into unknown and threatening worlds downriver, *Tom Sawyer* holds its characters within a tightly circumscribed field of action, never allowing that action to venture farther than a few miles from the community, which forms the moral center of the novel.

And while the community has many objectionable qualities for Tom and his friends, he is always drawn back to it. His opposition to the community, in fact, forms his relation to that community and, ironically, binds him to it. When Tom, Huck, and Joe camp on Jackson's Island, Joe soon becomes homesick, and even Huck begins to long for the familiar "doorsteps and empty hogsheads" (p. 90) that serve as his home in St. Petersburg. Tom alone appears to hold out for a pirate's life, yet, under the cover of darkness and unknown to Huck and Joe, he makes a return to Aunt Polly's house, where (we learn only later) he plans to leave her a signal that he is safe. This nighttime journey can serve to symbolize Tom's attachment to community and home, and this attachment has its climactic dramatization in the boys' surprise appearance at their own funeral. The members of the community are so glad and relieved at the boys' return that they don't mind being duped, give Tom exactly the kind of tumultuous approbation he most desires. This was, the narrator tells us, "the proudest moment [Tom's] life" (p. 107). As many commentators have observed, Tom's "rebirth" in this scene is figured specifically as a rebirth *into* society.

Tom's need for the community's approbation qualifies his status as a rebel. His subversive acts must always be seen within the context of his larger identification with the established order, an identification that Judge Thatcher acknowledges when he predicts for Tom enrollment in the National Military Academy and later in "the best law school in the country" (p. 200). There is nothing in Tom's actions that ever approaches the authentic subversiveness of Huck's decision, in *Huckleberry Finn*, to go to hell for trying to steal a black man, Jim, out of slavery. Unlike Huck, Tom is fundamentally a "good" boy, which is to say a boy acculturated to society's norms, though he acts out his goodness in "bad" ways.

There is a literary context for this kind of boy. In writing *Tom Sawyer*, Mark Twain was participating in a recently formed genre of American fiction that sought to unsettle the old "good boy/bad boy" dichotomy of earlier moralistic literature. Twain himself had worked in this genre in sketches he had written earlier, and in 1869 Thomas Bailey Aldrich published *The Story of a Bad Boy*, which demonstrated the suitability of the theme for longer narratives.

Such works, which turned the "bad boy" into a kind of American hero by showing his innate goodness, laid out several paradigms of youthful behavior, and all of them make their appearance in *Tom Sawyer*. Along with the "bad boy," represented by Tom, Twain gives us the "good boy" in the person of Tom's half-brother, Sid, who relentlessly reports Tom's misdeeds to Aunt Polly. Even more objectionable than "good boy" Sid is the "Model Boy of the village" (p. 10), Willie Mufferson, who took "as heedful care of his mother as if she were cut glass": "The boys all hated him, he was so good" (p. 35). A variation on the Model Boy is Alfred Temple, "that St. Louis smarty that thinks he dresses so fine and is aristocracy" (p. 114), whose presence in the novel serves to sharpen Twain's exploration of class issues, and of tensions between urban and rural life. Country boy Tom vying with the "S

Louis smarty” for Becky’s affections will bring to mind for some readers the novels of Jane Austen and other English novels of manners.

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On one level, the narrative proceeds by gradually revealing Tom’s inner goodness. The early chapters are organized by a series of his capers, which illustrate just how “bad” he can be. But later in the novel we learn about his “harassed conscience” (p. 139), which leads him courageously to testify at Muff Potter’s trial. And near the book’s conclusion we witness the sensitivity he shows toward Becky’s feelings when the two of them are lost in the cave. This episode illustrates not only Tom’s compassion and courage, but also his respectability; he and Becky in these scenes have about them the aspect of a middle-class couple.

While Twain did not invent American fiction of the good-bad boy (it has its still deeper background in European picaresque fiction, and in the novels of Dickens), he used it for his own distinctive purposes of social criticism. For these purposes, in the context of this novel, he needed a figure who systematically challenges the established order even as he firmly belongs to it. This role places Tom in a somewhat unusual position among Twain’s heroes. He is not an outsider figure in the radical way that Huck most certainly is in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, or the way that Hank Morgan is in *Connecticut Yankee*. Nor does he really resemble Twain’s classic outsider, the man that corrupted Hadleyburg, in Twain’s story of that title (1899). Unlike all of these figures, Tom is equally an outsider and an insider. He is the only character in the novel, for example, who consistently negotiates the divide between the worlds of children and adults, and is the only one who speaks to both sides.

At the end of the novel, Tom begins to move more fully toward the adult world, though never quite into it. As we have noted, the compassion he shows toward Becky when the two of them are lost in the cave exhibits a degree of maturity that we had not seen in him before. And his coming into wealth through his and Huck’s discovery of the treasure automatically elevates his social standing. Most telling, perhaps, is the closing scene, in which Tom persuades Huck (through trickery) to return to the home of the widow Douglas and to live under her civilizing influence. Tom’s heart is, in his own words, “close to home” (p. 191).

That Tom is ultimately a conciliating figure has partly to do with the form of the novel. As we have said, before the writing of *Tom Sawyer* Twain’s most characteristic form had been the sketch, which required neither full and convincing characterizations nor an extended plot. In its informality and highly vernacular qualities, the sketch (with its origins in southwestern humor and the tall tale) offered Twain a large measure of freedom. It encouraged his most unruly impulses and his boldest humor. Beyond the punch line, or the outrageous turn of events, nothing had to be followed up or made coherent. The novel, on the other hand, necessitated the coordination of character and plot, and the coordination of one subplot with another.

*Tom Sawyer* is flawed in this respect (the five or so subplots relate to one another only imperfectly) and Twain knew that this was true. At one point in the composition of the work, he wrote to Howell “There is no plot to the thing.”<sup>11</sup> But overall this was the fullest narrative that Twain had ever written and ultimately it does hold together. In relation to his character Tom Sawyer, whose presence gives the novel its coherence, this fullness of narrative meant the obligation to “plot” an actual life and its continuity, and to render some form of convincing development. And while this development, contrary to Twain’s initial plan, ended with Tom still in childhood, that childhood itself demonstrated a certain measure of growth.

In a sketch Tom Sawyer might well have been less respectable than he ultimately turns out to be. H



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