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MARK TWAIN

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MARK TWAIN was born Samuel Langhorne Clemens in 1835. When Sam was four, the family moved to Hannibal, Missouri, on the Mississippi river, where he spent an idyllic boyhood. His father died when he was twelve, and he was apprenticed to a printer, which began his career of reporting and writing entertaining, humorous sketches. But in 1857 he yielded to his boyhood ambition and trained with the great Horace Bixby as a river-boat pilot (from which experience he took die name Mark Twain). The Civil War, however, put an end to the river traffic – and an end to Twain's career as well. After a brief, hilarious war experience (chronicled in 'The History of a Campaign that Failed') he turned his hand to silver prospecting, went back to journalism, and finally published his first short story in 1865.

Mark Twain's career was a central, representative one in American letters, making die already established role of humorist into a central post of social observation. His worldwide reputation was based on a gift for mixing the boyish mischief and innocence of a naive, vernacular vision with a dark, bitter view of man as hypocrite, victim and self-deceiver. His finest works are generally considered to be *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876); *Life on the Mississippi* (1883), not a novel but a superbly evocative memoir, a brilliant account of pilotage and a criticism of the South; *A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court* (1889); *The American Claimant* (1892); *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894); and his masterpiece, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), one of the world's great books. Mark Twain died in 1910.

JOHN SEELYE is Graduate Research Professor at the University of Florida, where he teaches American Studies. He is die author of *The True Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Mark Twain in the Movies: A Meditation, Prophetic Waters: The River in Early American Life and Literature,*

Beautiful Machine: Rivers and the American Republic and *Memory's Nation: The Place of Plymouth Rock.* He has also written fiction, including *The Kid*, a Western.

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The Adventures of Tom Sawyer

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
JOHN SEELYE

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INTRODUCTION

Tom Sawyer is a name familiar to us as our own, part of our collective memory, his tale stored away like a remembered experience. If one of the pleasures in rereading *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is the discovery of new, sometimes startling dimensions — for Huck, as Lionel Trilling long ago observed, grows up as we grow, changes as we change — one of the joys of rereading Tom's *Adventures* is rediscovering things just as they were. Unlike Huck, Tom remains pretty much the boy we remembered, and critics are apt therefore to shrug him off as a lesser creation, an instance of arrested development. Yet it won't do to turn Tom Sawyer away with a shrug. Both boy and book exert a powerful hold upon the reader.

Louis Rubin, Jr, has said that the reputation of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* would be far greater had the author never finished its sequel, for the problem is not so much that Mark Twain went on to write a continuation, in which Tom plays a lesser and even a foolish role, but that the second book is superior to the first. A marvelous amphibian, *Huckleberry Finn* is a book that can be read and enjoyed by both adults and children, an accomplishment next to which *Tom Sawyer*, a book primarily intended for young readers, can only suffer by comparison. But it is unfair to judge the early novel by the standards of adult literature: Mark Twain himself declared to William Dean Howells that *Tom Sawyer* was 'professedly and confessedly a boy's and girl's book,' and toward that end he cut out certain parts that Howells found offensive. Thus, where in *Huckleberry Finn* Mark Twain told the story through Huck himself, achieving a lyric power that he was never again to match, the point of view in *Tom Sawyer* is that of an adult narrator, who at times can be caught talking condescendingly to the reader over his little hero's head. One such occasion is the episode in which Mark Twain describes the process by which the 'pirates' of Jackson's Island become homesick children. Yet we need only as adult readers to reach the Jackson's Island episode — the literal as well as the symbolic midpoint in the book — to acknowledge the power of the genius who is arranging the action.

At that point in the narrative, Tom Sawyer is literally in charge of the plot: a prankster from the start, by the middle of the book Tom has mounted a huge hoax, a scenario that will bring the residents of St Petersburg to the threshold of tragedy only to yank them back into comic relief and laughter. Where Huck Finn seems to be a projection of something mysterious deeply hidden in Mark Twain's psyche, Tom Sawyer is clearly an active agent of the author. What is 'prank' for Tom is craft for Mark Twain, both being consummate artists at playing upon the emotions of their audiences – which for Tom is the town, and for Twain, his reader.

If in the marvelously flexible voice of Huck Finn there is abstracted the eternal innocence that was the Romantics' notion of childhood, then in the actions of Tom Sawyer we have something akin to the Feast of Misrule, that medieval day of ritualistic mayhem over which children held sway. Tom seems to evince the kind of creatively destructive energy that we associate with poltergeists and juvenile delinquents. Yet, as in the Jackson's Island episode, he generally marshals his antisocial activities toward some perceived objective, in this instance an assertion of his real value in the hearts of the townspeople. Whether aping the lovesick Romeo, convincing his friends that no childhood game is as glorious as whitewashing a fence, playing at Robin Hood on Cardiff Hill, or swindling his way to a prize Bible, Tom Sawyer is a showman, an autobiographical projection of a consummate master of lecture-platform histrionics. Though *Tom Sawyer* may lack the powerful psychological drama of *Huck Finn* (we never do gain any real insight into Tom's inner motivation), it shares with the other book a high degree of theatricality, and is in that regard much more tightly constructed than its picaresque sequel. *Huck Finn* has great lyrical and dramatic power, but *Tom Sawyer* radiates a theatrical energy unmatched perhaps in the works of any of Mark Twain's contemporaries save Charles Dickens.

Like Dickens, Samuel Langhorne Clemens lived a life approximating melodrama. Fortunate to have escaped the childhood miseries that provided the basis for *Oliver Twist* and *David Copperfield*, young Sam Clemens grew up in a river town on the Mississippi that often reflected the turbulent spirit of the frontier. His boyhood was a relatively happy period, but life in Hannibal, Missouri, was not an uninterrupted idyll: Sam occasionally witnessed episodes of violence, and the unrealistic ambitions of his father, John Clemens — gently satirized as Squire Hawkins in *The Gilded Age* —

resulted in a degree of financial uncertainty and psychological instability. John Clemens died when Sam was only twelve, making it necessary for the boy to go to work for his older brother, Orion, as a printer. Typesetting was a craft that provided an outlet for Sam's earliest creative efforts but one that he considered insufficient for his ambitious and restless psyche. Seeking, as he tells us, a glorious future in South America, at that time a platform for all kinds of imperialistic adventures, Sam Clemens settled for the more modest but still grand stage provided by the wheelhouse of a Mississippi riverboat, an experience that he recorded — with some elaboration — in 'Old Times on the Mississippi.' By his own account, a river pilot in the 1850s was the cynosure of all eyes along the great Mississippi, and in later years Mark Twain — who took his pen name from the leadsman's cry for 'safe water' — would look back on his riverboat career as the happiest period of his life.

The Civil War put an end to the Golden Age of Piloting, and after a brief and unfortunate venture with a Confederate guerrilla band (parodied in 'The History of a Campaign That Failed'), Clemens headed west with Orion (who had been appointed secretary to the governor of the Territory of Nevada) in hopes of striking it rich in the silver-mine bonanza. His disillusioning experience eventually provided the basis for *Roughing It* (1872), and resulted in his signing with the Virginia City *Enterprise* as a reporter, a position that permitted considerable creative license and provided the kind of personal freedom and male camaraderie that Clemens associated with his days as a river pilot. Choosing his celebrated pen name, he associated it with several journalistic hoaxes that brought him a degree of notoriety and nearly placed him at the business end of a dueling pistol. Circumstances and career opportunity took him to San Francisco, where his literary fame increased, thanks largely to a talented bullfrog named 'Daniel Webster' ('The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County'), the star of a story that was widely reprinted in the East. Seeking a more exotic locale, Clemens traveled to Hawaii, and then signed aboard the transatlantic cruise that became the basis for his first book, *The Innocents Abroad* (1869), which placed him on the highly visible (and popular) stage he held for the rest of his life. But first Mark Twain had to be content with the lecture platform, delivering comic and highly successful performances that demonstrated his mastery over audiences but that he felt were personally demeaning.

The publication of *Innocents Abroad* changed all that. Sam Clemens's rise to fortune and high social place was assisted by his marriage in 1870 to Olivia ('Livy') Langdon, daughter of a wealthy coal magnate in Elmira, New York. With help from his father-in-law, Mark Twain once again associated himself with newspaper work – now as an editor-publisher – in Buffalo, but the newlyweds soon moved to Hartford, Connecticut, where Clemens would thenceforth devote his talents to the writing of books. He chose Hartford because it was a convenient location, halfway between the publishing centers of Boston and New York. Not only did Hartford have its own respectable literary establishment, but the Clemens home became a stopping-off place for writers en route from one city to the other. The Clemenses entertained lavishly in a flamboyantly executed mansion (often compared to a Mississippi river-boat) built with the profits from Mark Twain's writings, and there they raised three daughters, having lost a son in infancy, the only dark disruption of an otherwise happy existence.

With his fellow writer and Hartford neighbor Charles Dudley Warner, Mark Twain co-authored his first extended work of fiction, *The Gilded Age* (1873), shortly followed by the book by which – after *Huckleberry Finn* – he is best known, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876). Though Mark Twain would regularly return to the genre that first made him famous, travel writing, he is known today for his fiction, the best of which is, like his other great work, based on the experiences he had before coming to Connecticut. And yet, theatrical as that early life was, the drama did not end with his arrival in Hartford. By 1890, Mark Twain had become perhaps the most beloved author in America, displacing those venerable fireside figures Longfellow and Whittier. But with old age – and the famous white hair and white suit – came something other than good grayness, an infernal dimension symbolized by his eternally present cigar or pipe.

Caught up in the speculative mania of the age — not much different from the bonanza mentality he recorded in *Roughing It* — Clemens had invested his literary earnings unwisely, and by 1894 he was bankrupt, forced to rebuild his fortune by taking once more to the lecture circuit, which he loathed but which had served him so well during his first rise to literary fame. Clemens regained his wealth, but the shock of the experience left its mark, and after the death of his favorite daughter, Suzie, at a time when the Clemenses were traveling in Europe, he and his wife could not bring themselves to return to the Hartford house. Following a long period of

illness, his wife also died, leaving the man who to most people was the waggish Mark Twain to live out the remaining years of his life a lonely, bitter, even paranoiac wanderer. The buoyant good humor of his earliest books was replaced by the cynical, sardonic manner of his last works, most of which are incomplete fragments. His final home, 'Stormfield,' which he built in Redding, Connecticut, was never more than a halfway house on the path to the grave. Another daughter, Jean, plagued for years by epilepsy, died in 1909, and Clemens followed soon after, to be survived by only one child, Clara, from whom he had long been estranged. Mark Twain's last years have justly been depicted by Hamlin Hill as an American version of *King Lear.*

And yet, as Justin Kaplan has demonstrated, the tragic last act of Sam Clemens's life was no sudden eruption of cruel fate. Kaplan distinguishes between 'Mark Twain,' the public man of letters – the beloved funmaker – and 'S.L.C.,' the private citizen, tormented by insecurity, driven to self-destructive acts, obsessed with making money, convinced he was surrounded by conspiratorial business rivals. Even his daughters, on whom he lavished so much attention, and his adored wife seem to have regarded him with something less than unreserved affection. As a theatrical figure, the public man Mark Twain is associated with the comic stage, starring in a series of picaresque travel narratives based on his own adventures, while the drama of his private life increasingly tended toward the inexorable decline of tragedy. Certainly, a careful reading of Mark Twain's nonfiction reveals something of the private man — xenophobia in *Innocents Abroad*, lust for wealth in *Roughing It*, nostalgia for a simpler rural past (mixed with a commitment to an industrialized, mechanized future) in *Life on the Mississippi* — but it is in his fiction that we can get even closer to the impulses that gave such driving energy to a deeply divided man.

Like Dickens, once again, Mark Twain derived his literary art from the world of the theater, and if Huck Finn is a picaro, he is also a kind of traveling actor who, as he drifts with Jim down the great river, becomes involved in one set piece after another, which often approximate melodrama — most particularly when the two fall in with those bona fide (if atrocious) actors, the King and the Duke. Still, the episodic structure of *Huckleberry Finn* disallows a strict dramatic 'reading,' while the book to which it provides a sequel, *Tom Sawyer*, is so theatrical in form and mood that an apocryphal tradition exists that it was once framed as an actual play. If in

Huckleberry Finn Mark Twain reveals to a careful reader the anxieties that troubled his psyche, erupting as episodes of violence with interludes of idyllic freedom, the whole shadowed by the uncertain fate awaiting not only Huck and Jim but the action of the book itself, so *Tom Sawyer*, in its very tightness, its high degree of authorial control, can be regarded as an antithetical but nonetheless revealing exercise. It is one of the most 'literary' of Mark Twain's works, informed to the point of plagiarism by the novels of other writers. Yet, as Leslie Fiedler has observed, it is a subversive book, and enlists the works of others in order to undercut the conventions those earlier stories established.

Let us begin with the dramatic form of Mark Twain's greatest contribution to children's literature. Where most of his works, fiction or otherwise, are 'travel books,' whose narratives cover a considerable amount of geographical territory, the adventures of Tom Sawyer take place in or near the town of St Petersburg, and all of the hero's excursions, whether to Jackson's Island or McDougal's Cave, eventually end with his return home. As a result, the action of *Tom Sawyer* has the conventional limits of a stage play, even to a loose observance of the classical unities, including not only place but time, for the story is limited to the late spring and (mostly) the summer of one year in Tom's life. The cast of characters is limited as well, and no new 'actors' are introduced after what amounts to the climax of the first 'act,' the graveyard episode (Chapter 9). In contrast to the rambling, improvisational shape of *Huckleberry Finn*, Mark Twain's first celebration of boyhood's free spirit is one of his most carefully controlled (and contrived) fictions, thanks to the same dramatic organization that warrants the use of melodramatic conventions, both unified action and melodrama resulting in considerable narrative power.

The theatrical aspect of the book is apparent in the opening pages, wherein Aunt Polly delivers a dramatic monologue as from a stage. At a critical point Tom is dragged out of a closet, and by a clever boy's stratagem he escapes punishment. This first scene ends when Tom streaks over the backyard fence with the agility of a small animal — an action that has the visual effectiveness of a stage device — and he will be seen performing this trick several times in succeeding chapters, ending with his flashing vault over Judge Thatcher's fence, escaping the consequences of having thrown a rock through a window. This repetitious action is pure theater – albeit of the vaudevillian stage – and serves to identify Tom with

both mischief and precipitous escape, much as the fence itself will serve as the centerpiece in perhaps the most famous scene in the book – the whitewashing episode – where it figures as a symbol of the societal demands against which Tom is in perpetual rebellion while providing a demonstration of his abilities to contravene those demands by means of trickery. * The fence, thenceforth, will disappear as a stage prop, having demonstrated the extent to which Tom can perform within the arena in which he appears.

Much else that follows is likewise the stuff of theater, whether the comedy of grade-school graduation ceremonies or the sentimental set piece of Muff Potter's pathetic praise of his loyal little 'friends.' Most notable, perhaps, is Tom's series of invented, self-starred dramas, most of which embody the spirit of misrule. Though the action is set in the summertime world, the charmed zone of Vacation, as a childhood arena Tom's playground more often than not features the kind of impromptu 'games' we now associate with Halloween. As revealed in the loving complaint by Aunt Polly that opens the book, what Tom produces by way of entertainment is mostly mischief, not a little of which involves supernatural machinery. Up on Cardiff Hill, the 'Delectable Land' that is free of village repression, Tom playacts at being Robin Hood, the prototypical outlaw, but many of his most important subsequent actions take place against a gothic backdrop: the Graveyard that becomes a Haunted House that opens into a Haunted Cave. As a consequence, the Halloween aspect of the book, often associated with boyish superstitions or mischievous pranks, can be seen as a connection between the bona fide world of real children and much more serious – and highly 'literary' – business. Thus Tom and Huck are in search of a 'remedy' for warts when they stumble into the grave-robbing episode and subsequent murder which will lead to the often unrealistic and melodramatic action that follows.

We shall return to the Halloween element – and melodrama — presently, but first it is important to place *Tom Sawyer* in its contemporary literary context. For if Tom is something of an actor-manager, much of what he manages to enact was, by 1875, a matter of convention. As mischief-maker, as 'bad boy,' he had been preceded in American fiction by a number of youthful pranksters, the grand original of which seems to have been Ike Partington — the invention of a Yankee humorist, B. P. Shillaber — whose

tormented aunt, ‘Mrs Partington,’ was a comic favorite of the 1850s and a predecessor to Tom’s Aunt Polly. Mark Twain’s debt to Shillaber has long been acknowledged, as has the resemblance (even to first name) between Tom Sawyer and Tom Bailey of T. B. Aldrich’s *The Story of a Bad Boy* (1870). Aldrich’s Tom lives in the harbor town of ‘Rivermouth’ (Portsmouth, New Hampshire), which like St Petersburg provides a village backdrop to a series of episodic pranks. Like Mark Twain’s Tom, Bailey is a boy whose ‘badness’ is mostly a matter of misdirected energies and inventiveness, a tradition dating all the way back to Ben Franklin’s account of his own boyhood in his *Autobiography.* Yet, unlike Ben Franklin, both ‘Toms’ can be seen as avatars of misrule, boys whose mischief calls into question the conformist rigidity of village norms.

Mark Twain makes a subtle point when he shows that Tom Sawyer, who even under duress cannot commit the simplest bit of sacred Scripture to memory, has easily memorized the adventures of Robin Hood so he can ‘play by the book.’ Within the village confines, whether in schoolroom, church, or parlor, he constantly resists playing by the rules of society — that is left to such ‘good’ boys as Sid, Willie Mufferson, and Alfred Temple — and he is not much of a student in school. But out in the forest, on the island, or, eventually, in the cave, Tom excels in everything he does, inventing his own games derived from his favorite books — which do not include the Bible. *His* scripture is the story of Robin Hood and like romances, much as his religion is associated with the greenwood, his liturgy with superstitions. There is something here of primal, archetypal oppositions, associating Tom with outlawry and paganism, the Town with rigid, Protestant-ethic conformity. And yet the chief of Tom’s pranks, like his Jackson Island scheme, may disturb the tranquility of the town but they also result in elevating the ‘bad’ boy to the role – if only temporary – of village hero.

Again, the boys of Aldrich and Mark Twain are not really ‘bad,’ merely fun-loving, their pranks expressing the healthy subversiveness of boyhood. Both Twain and Aldrich were writing against the traditional ‘Good Boy/Bad Boy’ dichotomy of Victorian children’s literature, which had assisted for a century in the enforcement of society’s repressive — if well-intentioned — norms. Begun by Thomas Day’s popular and much imitated *Sandford and Merton* (1783–89), which in its day was a radical pedagogical innovation inspired by Rousseau’s theories of child rearing (stressing the use of good

examples instead of forcible coercion), the tradition by the mid nineteenth century had become reduced to the level of Sunday school literature. Mark Twain several times declared his intention to burlesque Day's tediously moralizing text, and wrote hilarious parodies in which Good Boys come to bad ends and Bad Boys prosper. But as early as Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (1837—38), the Day tradition had been dealt a deathblow in serious literature by the Artful Dodger and Charley Bates, 'bad' boys who are really good at heart. In Dickens's novel, young Bates actually undergoes a transformation, inspired by the excesses of Bill Sikes's villainy to mend his ways, whereas the Dodger, presumably incapable of self-reform, is transported to Australia. Horatio Alger's *Ragged Dick* (1867) manages to combine the Dodger with Master Bates, for Alger created a likable street urchin who is inspired, not by a bad example but by a good one, to reform and become a hard-working and responsible young citizen. Aldrich's Tom Bailey likewise ends his days of boyhood pranks by taking a position in his uncle's counting-house, much as Jo March, in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1868—69), sets aside her tomboyish and rebellious ways for marriage and respectability. In the stories of Alger, Bailey, and Alcott, therefore, the revelation of true 'goodness' is equated with shouldering the adult responsibilities that lie beyond the world of childhood. Something similar happens at the end of *Tom Sawyer*, when Tom's sterling worth is acknowledged by the town, but there is a difference in Tom's transformation that is definitive.

In many of Alger's novels the hero is not a streetwise ragamuffin who reforms but a poor yet hardworking and honest country lad who performs a heroic act – stopping a runaway horse, rescuing a drowning child, halting a train before it collides with an obstacle on the track – for which he is rewarded by a substantial citizen with a modest but promising position in a business office. Tom likewise saves Judge Thatcher's daughter from a terrible fate, earning the Judge's prediction that he will grow up to be 'a great lawyer or a great soldier some day,' and the Judge does promise to 'look into' having Tom entered at West Point. But Tom's actual reward is not given to him by the Judge, and it far exceeds that of most Alger heroes, for his share of the recovered treasure, $6,000, transforms him into a citizen of considerable substance. As Twain points out, though there were some men in St Petersburg worth more than $12,000 in terms of 'property,' none had liquid assets on that scale, and the allowance that Tom and Huck enjoy,

a dollar a day, is ‘just what the minister got’ — when he could get it. Moreover, having been promoted from rapscallion to rich boy, Tom is relieved of the responsibilities normally attending the transformation from ‘bad’ to ‘good.’ Instead, he goes to work on his next theatrical production, converting the cave into a stage set for his ‘Robbers Gang’ drama. When we last see Tom, he has successfully convinced Huck that he must return to the care of the Widow Douglas and become a ‘good boy’ so that he may be admitted to the secret society of ‘bad boys’ playing the game of ‘Robbers.’ Though Mark Twain ended the book by promising a sequel in which he would portray his characters after they had grown up (an idea expressed in his earliest notes for the book that became *Tom Sawyer)*, he never did carry out the promise, but went on to further celebrations of Tom Sawyer as unredeemable — as opposed to Huck Finn, the eternal child. Both Tom and Huck embody the spirit of irresponsibility, but where Huck is a permanent refugee from civilization, Tom needs the conventions of society in order to stage the games he delights in. Having become a Rich Boy at story’s end, Tom is a Good Boy only in the eyes of the town: instead of picking up the burden of adult responsibility, he becomes a Play Boy in the most literal sense of that term. He talks of marrying Becky, but when we see him last he is busy organizing an exclusive club of boy outlaws.

Set against the dominant myth of success as celebrated by Horatio Alger, the story of Tom Sawyer is clearly subversive, having less to do with hard work than with good luck abetted by a quick wit. Ben Franklin, the archetype for Alger’s boys, had plenty of luck and the native wit to use it to his best advantage, but Ben had to work long and hard to attain the ‘competency’ that enabled him to retire in early middle age. Tom Sawyer, by contrast, realizes the American Dream at the threshold of adolescence. He does so, moreover, by ‘striking it rich’ California-style, imitating in miniature the Gold Rush that Mark Twain persistently lamented as the national event that signaled an end to the old American dream of pastoral, rural contentment, even while, as Sam Clemens, he did everything he could to increase his personal fortune, whether prospecting for silver in Nevada or plowing the profits from his books into ill-fated investments, most of which were aberrant expressions of the technological spirit that Ben Franklin had personified.

It will not do to make too much of what are mostly circumstantial coincidences, yet the conditions under which Tom first ‘discovers’ the gold

lend a certain meaning to his eventual recovery of the treasure. Setting out with Huck in search of buried treasure, Tom clearly operates under the influence of such fictions as Poe's 'The Gold Bug,' and after laboring in vain, the boys try their luck in the Haunted House. Their foray is interrupted by Injun Joe and his accomplice, and as the boys cower upstairs, Joe comes by accident across the gold as he seeks to hide some contraband of his own. A combination of folly and good luck allows Tom to be present, but it is Injun Joe, not Tom, who finds the gold. The second time around, having saved both himself and Becky through genuine heroics, Tom figures out where Joe has hidden the treasure. This time he actually 'earns' the gold, much as he has truly deserved the adulation of the town, in contrast to the undeserved welcome he got earlier by returning to his own funeral. Tom, in short, may not have matured much, but he has proved himself in terms of the theatrical world within which he operates.

That world is best denned as melodrama. Though the book begins with what can be called domestic comedy, a series of funny episodes in which Tom pits himself against village norms, the author and his young hero soon run out of domestic materials. Both book and boy head for the familiar gothic graveyard and the world of violent crime, departing from a relatively realistic depiction of life in the American Midwest of the 1840s to life as it was led in the kind of dime novels that were just beginning to appear as a staple of popular literature. Here again Horatio Alger led the way, for Alger had the genius to give his inspirational stories a dime-novel element, involving his young heroes in escapades featuring not only street criminals and detectives ('Cops and Robbers') but Indians (if not cowboys). In effect, Alger took what was for most children of the 1870s (and afterward) forbidden literature and made it acceptable by adding a strong moral emphasis. Dickens once again was the grand innovator, adapting the conventions of popular stage melodrama to serious fiction, and Mark Twain may have been more indebted to Dickens than to Alger. Matters of influence aside, the fact remains that in American literature, from James Fenimore Cooper's *The Pioneers* (1823) to E. W. Howe's *Story of a Country Town* (1883), fiction with a small-town setting soon resorts to melodramatic plot elements in order to hold the reader's interest.

The extent to which he is able to unite the games of boyhood to the elements of melodrama is an element of Mark Twain's genius. Once again, Tom and Huck are in the village graveyard to test a superstitious cure for

warts when they witness the murder of 'young Dr Robinson' (an episode lifted from Dickens's *Tale of Two Cities)*, an accident that will involve them in the further machinations of Injun Joe. Playing at hunting treasure, the two boys again move into the orbit of the villainous half-breed, and the most melodramatic episode of all, the terrifying encounter with Injun Joe that occurs when Tom and Becky are lost in McDougal's Cave, begins with an innocuous picnic excursion. It is the episode in the cave that brings together what appear to be disparate plot elements, the events centered on Injun Joe and the small-town romance in which Becky Thatcher plays the definitive role. Tom's courtship of Becky provides a considerable element of charm, but it is his involvement with the dark world of Injun Joe that gives the book its most powerful dimension.

Much as there was a cave outside Hannibal, so Injun Joe had a real-life counterpart, but Dixon Wecter, the scholar who has given us the most detailed study of Sam Clemens's boyhood, relates that the half-breed who provided the basis for Mark Twain's villain was actually a respectable member of the lower levels of Hannibal society. Once again, the process of transformation was effected by a purely literary agent, in this case the Leatherstocking Tales of James Feni-more Cooper, most particularly *The Last of the Mohicans.* Mark Twain disdained Cooper's 'Literary Offenses,' for the most part violations of verisimilitude, and it is ironic that when *Tom Sawyer* makes its most dramatic departures from the life that was really lived in Hannibal, it is with the help of Fenimore Cooper, most particularly the 'Cooper Indian' Mark Twain loved to ridicule.

'The Injun blood ain't in me for nothing,' declares Joe as he demands that young Dr Robinson 'settle,' paying an additional five dollars not only for robbing a grave but because Injun Joe has carried a five-year grudge against the Doctor, whose father once had him jailed for vagrancy. 'Injun blood' may be traditionally associated with vengefulness, but in this instance it seems to have been piped directly from *Last of the Mohicans.* Injun Joe's insatiable thirst for settling old scores also threatens Tom Sawyer's life, but it is against the Widow Douglas that the half-breed aims his crudest scheme for revenge. Having been horsewhipped by her late husband, Joe plans on tying the widow to her bed and mutilating her, an episode linked by Dixon Wecter to an incident in which an actual rape (not by an Indian) may have been threatened — a theme hardly suited, as Wecter notes, to a children's book. Yet, to an adult reader, the image of a woman tied to a bed is hardly

subliminal, and the episode has its literary counterpart in *Mohicans*, where the evil Huron named Magua seeks revenge against Colonel Munro, who has had him horsewhipped for drunkenness, by kidnapping Munro's daughter Cora and attempting to force her into marrying him, a 'cruel fate' with a clearly sexual dimension.

But Injun Joe is much more than a social menace: he is evil personified, doing bad things because he likes to, a dark escapee from melodrama haunting the boyhood Eden, the summertime world of green and gold. The money dug up in the fireplace of the Haunted House links Injun Joe with the legendary river 'pirate' James Murrell, a vicious Mississippi cutthroat, who is described by Mark Twain in *Life on the Mississippi* as a leader of 'a colossal combination of robbers, horse-thieves, negro-stealers, and counterfeiters, engaged in business along the river some fifty or sixty years ago.' (Mark Twain ranked Murrell much higher on the scale of villainy than the already legendary Jesse James: 'James was a retail rascal; Murel [sic], wholesale.') Murrell and his gang were associated with Island 39 on the Mississippi River, while Injun Joe's 'den,' encoded 'Number Two,' is McDougal's Cave. In associating caves with bandits and stolen gold, Mark Twain had the real-life example of Cave-in-Rock, near where the Ohio joins the Mississippi, which was the sanctuary of the Brothers Harpe, notorious river pirates like Murrell, who operated in the early years of the nineteenth century. But, as in Sir Walter Scott's *Rob Roy*, caves and bandits have traditional literary associations and, having appropriated Injun Joe's treasure, Tom plans to take over his 'den' as yet another literary playground, the underground equivalent of Cardiff Hill.

The actual name of Injun Joe's 'den,' located south of Hannibal, was McDowell's Cave. Named for its owner, a Dr McDowell, the cave is still a tourist attraction, enhanced today by the use to which it was put in *Tom Sawyer*. There it provides a gothic backdrop for one of the most memorable episodes in American fiction, a melodramatic sequence that has its high point of terror when Tom, seeking to find a way out of the cave, encounters Injun Joe. Having expended all his candles, Tom is exploring a 'side-passage' in total darkness, a kite string as his guide back out, when he comes across a 'pitfall' or jumping-off place, an opening in the cave floor that 'might be three feet deep' or 'a hundred.' On his knees, he is feeling about to gauge the width of the pit, when 'not twenty yards away, a human hand, holding a candle, appeared from behind a rock!' Tom shouts for joy,

thinking it is a rescuer, but then 'that hand was followed by the body it belonged to — Injun Joe's!' Frightened by Tom's shout, the half-breed flees, and Tom's subsequent exploration of another 'side-passage' leads to his discovery of 'a speck of daylight' and escape, but for the moment Tom is paralyzed with terror, his fears of starvation overwhelmed by his reluctance to 'run the risk of meeting Injun Joe again.' In the end, it is Injun Joe who starves to death, providing the occasion for Mark Twain's solemn digression on the workings of fate and a grimly ironic finale to the gothic plot line:

> Has everything a purpose and a mission? Did this drop [slow water drip from a stalactite overhead] fall patiently during five thousand years to be ready for this flitting human insect's [Injun Joe's] need, and has it another important object to accomplish ten thousand years to come? No matter. It is many and many a year since the hapless half-breed scooped out the stone to catch the priceless drops, but to this day the tourist stares longest at that pathetic stone and that slow-dropping water when he comes to see the wonders of McDougal's cave. Injun Joe's cup stands first in the list of the cavern's marvels.

Among the chief marvels of McDowell's Cave near Hannibal (called 'McDougal's Cave' by Tom) was the owner's dead daughter, embalmed by the doctor in a copper cylinder, but such matters are beyond the periphery of fiction, which when dealing with marvels rests within the comfortable confines of literary convention. Though we are to accept the reality (as threat) of Injun Joe, unlike the pitiful Muff Potter he is almost purely a literary creation, not only in terms of his 'Injun blood' but of his easy success at fooling the townspeople by disguising himself as a 'deaf-and-dumb Spaniard,' surely one of the tiredest of literary conventions. Likewise, behind Joe's lingering death lie a number of equally horrible and ironically fitting fates in the novels of Scott and Cooper, and Tom's exploration of the cave, his encounter with Injun Joe on the rim of a dangerous pit, and his eventual escape take us back to the origins of American fiction, to Charles Brockden Brown's *Edgar Huntly*, where a cave, a deep pit, and an escape combined with an encounter with Indians provides a signal episode. We know that Edgar Allan Poe borrowed Brown's pit for a famous tale of terror, but it is less likely that Mark Twain was well read in the fiction of that early American gothic novelist – his taste tended to run toward nonfiction. Nevertheless, the coincidence helps to place the gothic dimension of *Tom Sawyer* where Leslie Fiedler insists it belongs, in the great tradition of American romance writing, in which the ruined castles

and monasteries of European gothic novels were replaced by equivalent manifestations of American scenery: ravines, cliffs, and caves.

And yet, as with the conventions of children's literature, Mark Twain seems to be having some subversive fun with romantic conventions. The typical hero of a Scott novel, for example, is led into misadventures by attempting to act out his life along the lines of chivalric romances, a modernized version of the Don Quixote story. But one of the controlling ironies of *Tom Sawyer* is the extent to which Tom's book-derived fantasies either turn into or are resubstantiated by the fictional 'reality' of the plot. His dime-novel imagination is perhaps most fully indulged during the episode on Jackson's Island, playing at 'Pirates' and 'Injuns,' yet the sequence culminates in Tom's most successful 'literary' creation, the sentimental excesses inspired by the return of the 'drowned' boys. Unlike the disillusioned heroes of the Waverley Novels, Tom repeatedly finds his literary expectations verified, even rewarded and celebrated, by the 'real' world.

The merging of literary dream and fictional 'reality' has its high point when Tom, like the heroes of his favorite reading, leads Becky to safety from the cave, his ordeal providing a three-day rite of passage from which he emerges a true champion. Yet it is a ritual that sets the conventions of romance aside, for having rescued the heroine, Tom should marry her, or at least, like the hero of a Scott romance, re-enter and accept the norms of middle-class society. But Tom resists absorption into the dominant culture, and why shouldn't he? Not only has the treasure bought him absolute freedom, eliminating the Alger element of work-and-wage; it has verified his romantic dream-life: unlike a Waverley hero, who mistakes a romantic ideal for reality but then discovers his error, Tom's romantic 'illusion' has been verified. The actual money is invested at six per cent, but Tom invests his successful fantasy in yet another romantic game, turning the scene of his very real adventure into a stage set for his next 'outlaw' scheme. Suspended between the worlds of nightmare and wish fulfilment, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* is a book of dreams.

It is this fulfilled-fantasy element that children find appealing, but adult readers can see the extent to which Mark Twain's 'fantasies' are derived from and turned against the contemporary literary context within which he was working. That, perhaps, is the single most interesting aspect of an

apparently simple but really complex novel: a story about a ‘bad’ boy’s ‘revolt’ against village conformity that is not a revolt at all is ultimately a story that *as* a story is in revolt against the literary norms within which it seems to be working. That is why Mark Twain gave his ‘boy’s book’ a theatrical shape, the stage being a consummate place of illusion and reversed expectations that so suspends our sense of reality that we find ourselves drawn into the action. In the hands of a master hypnotist we join the line of children waiting for the chance, and glad to pay for the privilege, of helping Tom Sawyer whitewash Aunt Polly’s fence.

John Seelye