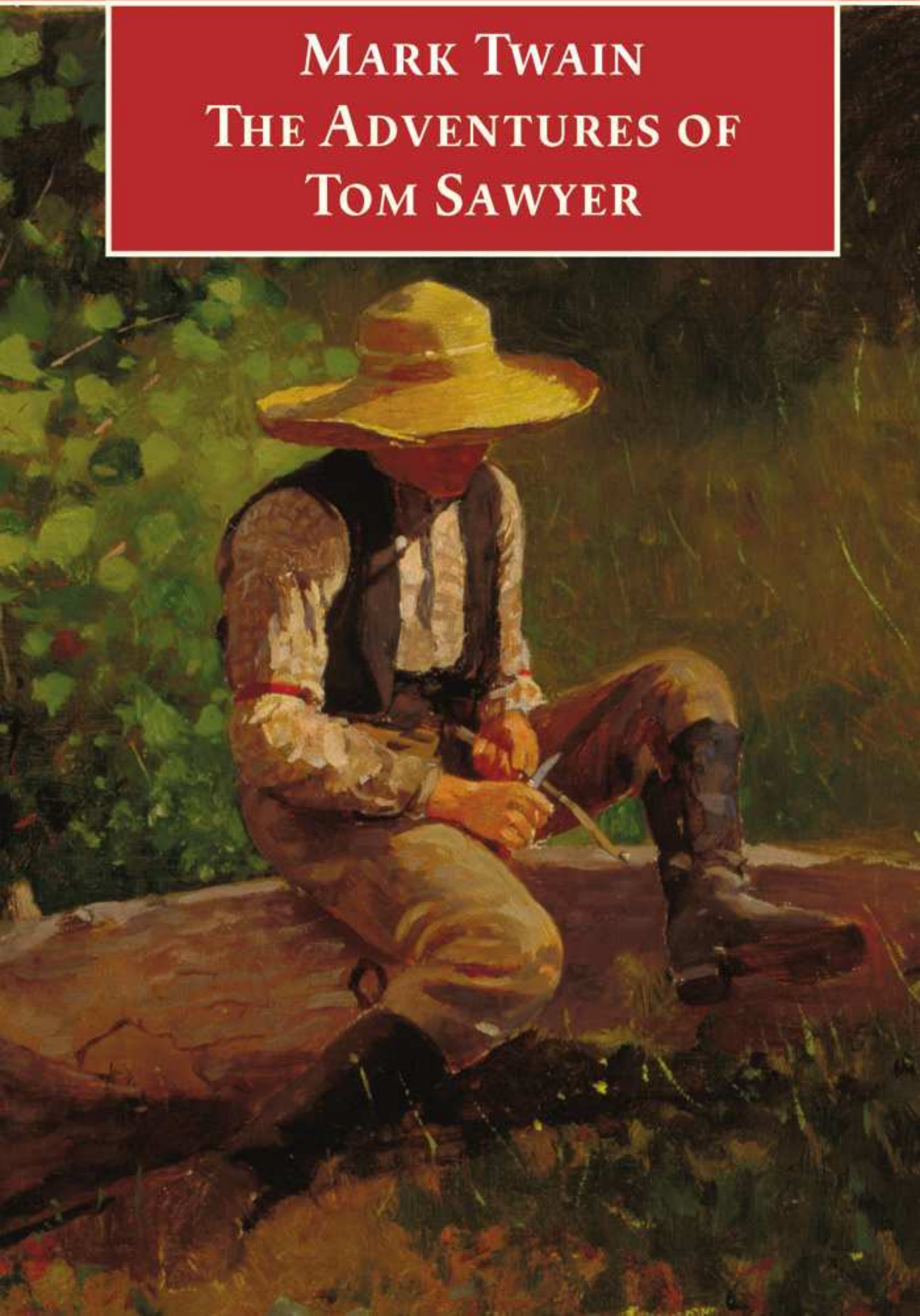


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MARK TWAIN
THE ADVENTURES OF
TOM SAWYER



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THE ADVENTURES OF TOM SAWYER

MARK TWAIN, the pen-name for Samuel Langhorne Clemens (1835–1910), drew his identity from life along the Mississippi River during the years immediately preceding the Civil War, which inspired the characters and incidents in his best-known works, including *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884). Born in Florida, Missouri, but raised in Hannibal, Clemens first trained as a printer, but in 1857 he became an apprentice pilot on the great river. At the start of the Civil War, he went to Nevada with his brother Orion, and was briefly involved in mining ventures before taking up a journalistic career (under the name Mark Twain) which eventually carried him to California and Hawaii, experiences recounted in *Roughing It* (1872). He next travelled to Europe and the Holy Land with an excursion party, the basis for *The Innocents Abroad* (1869), a humorous narrative that quickly established his reputation and launched his career as a comic lecturer. After marrying Olivia Langdon in 1870, Clemens abandoned the lecture circuit and moved to Hartford, Connecticut, where he wrote most of the books by which he is known, in a period of great prosperity that was ended in 1894 by bankruptcy resulting from incautious investments. Returning to the lecture circuit, Clemens recovered his fortune, but his later life was darkened by tragedy, including the deaths of his favourite daughter, Susy, and his wife. Another daughter, Jean, suffered from epilepsy and died in 1909, followed shortly by her father.

PETER STONELEY is Professor of English and American Literature at the University of Reading. His books include *Mark Twain and the Feminine Aesthetic* (1992) and *Consumerism and American Girls' Literature, 1860–1940* (2003).

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MARK TWAIN

*The Adventures of
Tom Sawyer*



Edited with an Introduction and Notes by
PETER STONELEY

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INTRODUCTION

IN 1866 in Hawaii, after an evening on which Twain had become very drunk, he was subjected to an improving lecture by the diplomat and politician Anson Burlingame: 'You have great ability; I believe you have genius. What you need now is the refinement of association. Seek companionship among men of superior intellect and character. Refine yourself and your work. Never affiliate with inferiors; always climb.'¹ At this point in his career, Twain had a national reputation as the new figure in the often impolite genre of humour. He wrote brief sketches, featuring jokey, rough-hewn characters; and, in an age in which the distinctions were marked, his medium was the popular press, not literature. By the time of writing *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* in the early 1870s, he had married into a wealthy, genteel northern family. He was still best-known as a humorist, but he had extended the limits of the genre, making national fables out of his experiences as American tourist, in *The Innocents Abroad* (1869), and as gold and silver prospector in *Roughing It* (1872). Increasingly, alongside the humour, he styled himself as a serious man of business, and as an upper-middle-class paterfamilias. Whether he had tried to 'climb' or not, he had certainly risen.

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer was the first novel Twain wrote without a collaborator, and to look at its appearance and its preliminary pages is to get some sense of the cultural distances that Twain sought to cross. Far from being available as part of the price of a newspaper, Twain was now quite grandly packaged. The first United States edition, published by the American Publishing Company in 1876, was available in three different bindings, from cloth at \$2.75, to cloth with gilt edges at \$3.25, to 'half-turkey, elegantly bound' at \$4.25. This made even the cheapest copies quite expensive, especially compared with the pirated Canadian edition, which was available for less than a dollar. The book had a popular audience, and the pirated edition sold well. The authorized edition, too, was aimed at a wide readership, in that it was published by subscription, a

¹ As Albert Bigelow Paine puts it in his polite, authorized version, *Mark Twain: A Biography* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1912), i. 285: 'They had a hilariously good time.'

door-to-door method that was designed to reach less educated and less cosmopolitan buyers. And yet, *Tom Sawyer* was also being pitched at a more affluent and aspirational audience, an audience that had disposable income and was willing to spend it on stately, embossed, and gilded books.²

If the initial production of the book indicates uncertainty as to audience, with the pirate publisher outperforming the approved publisher, the combined sales in the early years were probably not very impressive by Twain's own standards. The American Publishing Company edition sold fewer than 24,000 copies in the first year, whereas Twain's first book, *The Innocents Abroad* (1869) had sold nearly 70,000 in its first year. The status and popularity of the novel only really developed with the growing recognition of the sequel, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884). With the gradual rise to fame of both books, *Tom Sawyer* seemed the safer, easier option, and by Twain's death in 1910, *Tom Sawyer* had outsold all of the author's other works. Since Twain's death, though, *Huckleberry Finn* has emerged as a defining text in the tradition of the novel, and it has overtaken *Tom Sawyer* in sales. But *Tom Sawyer* has remained popular; it has been translated into over twenty languages, and has never been out of print.³ Today, it seems to hold its status (a status it did not have in its early years) as a classic and perennial vision of boyhood. From the late nineteenth century onward, some of its incidents have had an existence as archetypes, in that they are taken to illustrate some of the deeper truths of human nature. The scene in which Tom induces his friends to whitewash the fence has a proverbial life, known to people who have never read the novel. Tom himself is a mythical figure, in that he seems to encapsulate certain essential features of boys' lives. For other readers, though, *Tom Sawyer* is not a classic vision of boyhood itself, but a classic instance of the nostalgia with which boyhood is viewed by adults. The book is an example of the fact that archetypes are not so much fundamental

² For an account of the pricing, see John C. Gerber's introduction to Gerber, Paul Baender, and Terry Firkins, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, Tom Sawyer Abroad, Tom Sawyer, Detective* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980) 29. Gerber also estimates the impact of the Canadian edition.

³ Again I rely on Gerber here (*ibid.* 29–30). For a stronger sense of the place of Twain, and of his characters, in American culture, see Louis J. Budd's *Our Mark Twain: The Making of his Public Personality* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1983).

embodiments, as ours by adoption. We set them up retrospectively, so as to organize and give meaning to our sense of ourselves in the present.

I want to consider these various possibilities, and to look in more detail at contemporary and modern responses, but let us return at this point to the book itself, and how it seems to construct readers and readerly expectations. The title page gives *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* as by Mark Twain, a name that announced itself as a joke ('Mark twain' was a leadsman's call on the Mississippi, signifying two fathoms, or the intermediate point between the safely deep and the worrying shallow). If the copyright notice—which implies the authorship of Samuel L. Clemens—sounds a note of social and legal propriety, this is affirmed by the succeeding words, 'To My Wife This Book is Affectionately Dedicated.' The dedication is a public declaration of private feelings, but it is offered in the slightly hushed and controlled register of an 'affectionate' tribute.

There is an interplay of different possibilities here, between the crude and generic 'adventures' by the larger-than-life Mark Twain, and a more formal Clemens. The subsequent Preface seems to mitigate the promise of madcap or sensational events. The book, we are informed, 'is intended mainly for the entertainment of boys and girls,' but it is hoped that 'it will not be shunned by men and women on that account; for part of [the] 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'. This cautious statement is signed not by 'Mark Twain' but, more grandly, by 'The Author', who locates himself in the comfortable northern city of 'Hartford'. The Preface is a self-consciously literary and measured discourse, offering 'pleasant reminders' rather than sensations. Perhaps, then, we already know that we should read 'adventures' in a gently ironical light, before we have reached the beginning of the novel. And yet, Twain also signals the discomfort that lies in store for his readers, as they are obliged to acknowledge 'odd superstitions' and 'queer enterprises' as part of their own history. A curious, rough-hewn past is, it would seem, common to us all, and it is not to be left entirely behind.

The delicately equivocal Preface is followed, almost shockingly, with an altogether different voice. It is a shouting voice, which casually and unhesitatingly uses slang: 'Tom! . . . What's gone with that

boy, I wonder? You TOM!' (p. 11). The eruption of Aunt Polly's vernacular might seem all the more dissonant after the decorum of the Author's Preface, and yet the vernacular was very much a part of 'Mark Twain'. The representation of local, non-standardized speech was crucial to his identity as a humorist. The success of the humorous narrative depended less on any joke as such, as on the way the characters commanded the reader's attention with their vigorous particularity. The vernacular would subsequently be construed as Twain's major achievement in fiction. He was proud of his skill in simulating the rhythms and accents of dialect, and he is usually credited with having brought a new range and subtlety to the 'writing of the spoken'. Further, in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Twain presented his readers with a vernacular narrator, Huck himself. The choice of underclass boy as narrator has compounded the idea of Twain as a democratic author who freed himself from received notions of literary politeness. The argument is perhaps a simplification. In its studied difference from standard English, the vernacular narrative fixes different modes of speech in relation to each other, rather than producing some instance of linguistic freedom. And yet, one wonders at the potential joy, at this point, for the child-reader or the anxiously aspirational reader, coming upon an improperly loud and direct entry into the story. The very 'book culture' that one had approached in a spirit of self-improvement actually grants a happy existence to incorrect lives. In the process, the novel offers to articulate an easy relationship between one's 'improved' and 'unimproved' selves.

The bridging between the raw and the polite, between the backwoods and the literary, is an important feature of the book as a whole. It is often observed—and rightly—that Twain's writing is most exciting and distinctive when he deals with the material of his mid-Western past. The contemplation of the past induces a climactic energy. When a letter from a childhood friend stirred up his memories, Twain wrote in reply that '[t]he fountains of my great deep are broken up & I have rained reminiscences for four & twenty hours'.⁴ He was writing shortly after his marriage, and the letter seems an unambiguous celebration of a life that is now closed. But the

⁴ Letter to Will Bowen, 6 Feb. 1870; see *Mark Twain's Letters*, vol. iv: 1870–1871, ed. Victor Fischer and Michael B. Frank (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 50.

expression is more curiously evocative than that, with the implicit acknowledgement that the earlier self is stronger than its subsequent overlays. The experience—of a later self being ‘broken up’ by the powers from one’s ‘great deep’—is exhilarating, and has elements of pleasure and anxiety. At other times, Twain was much less willing to admit a past self any renewed existence, and the balance was more on the side of anxiety or shame. Once, when asked why we hate the past so, he replied, ‘It’s so damn humiliating.’⁵ *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* is an extended and broadened version of this personal drama, where the mature, professional man is obsessively ‘broken up’ and reassembled. The narrative is an attempt to permit and to govern the disruptive potential of a past life. And, given the enduring popularity of the novel, there is the question of how it deals not only with Twain’s past, but also with how the nation understands and represents its ‘infancy’.

We might begin to think about these issues by recognizing that the story itself is disrupted, in the sense that it is put together out of disparate parts. Some episodes draw out Tom’s character, as he starts fights, seeks to cure himself of warts, and falls in love. There is a more sustained narrative strand with Injun Joe’s crimes and Tom’s part in his demise. The interplay of episodes seems brilliantly calculated in some instances, as when a scene of courtroom drama is followed by a quiet, inconsequential morning. More generally, however, the narrative unevenness might be seen as a problem, as the story seems to fall to pieces, only to be revived by an unlikely turn of events. Even if we have no difficulty in suspending our disbelief, the critical viewpoint might be that the most interesting fiction is that which does not prolong itself by a succession of events, but by more subtle and more diverse means. It has often been argued that Twain’s work suffers for his failure to design compelling and progressive narrative structures, and this failure is symptomatic not only of how Twain worked, but of the place of writing in his life. He tended to write very quickly, and usually with the hope of making quick money to cover the many investments and expenditures to which he committed himself. But as he seldom had a developed plot-line on which to fall back, he often experienced a crisis when his inventiveness failed him. At such moments, his rapid production would cease

⁵ Willam Dean Howells, *My Mark Twain* (London and New York: Harper & Brothers, 1910), 30.

altogether, and he would turn his mind to other projects for months and even years. Twain's imagination worked in relatively short, opportunistic bursts, and his creative habits suggest a temperamental correspondence with his protagonist. Tom, too, is consumed with enthusiasm for his plans, and when one fails, he starts up another. But author and character are taken to be all the more representative for this trait. Twain once wrote in his notebook, 'I am not an American, I am *the* American,'⁶ and Tom too seems to bespeak certain characteristics that are often defined as 'national'. Tom, like his author, seeks to fulfil his dreams of great wealth, and he is endlessly ingenious—if also very naïve—in his pursuit of his goal. There is, though, an interesting ambivalence on the part of the author for this infant national self. Tom's 'American' traits are the source of pride and shame: pride, that Tom's ingenuity will always see him through; shame, that his ingenuity is a sign of the fact that he acts more in terms of expedience than principle. These ambivalences do not lead toward some sort of conclusive developmental drama. Instead, Twain leaves his hero enclosed within infancy. For all his experiences, Tom seems as young, vain, and resilient at the end as at the beginning.⁷

The idea of enclosures and disruptions, then, is present in the studied, worldly Preface (and the equally worldly Conclusion), and in the values of the main character. In the first American edition, it was also apparent in the presentation, in that the text was decoratively enclosed by illustrations. The chapter headings were surrounded by attractive sketches and motifs, and especially by profuse little bundles of flowers. There is a sense that the 'odd' and 'queer'

⁶ Although scholars have often assumed that Twain was referring to himself, there is some question as to whether he was recording the comment of a friend. For a summary of the arguments, and for an electronic facsimile of the notebook page, see Jim Zwick, 'Mark Twain and *the* American', on <http://boondocknet.com/twainwww/essays/american011.htm/>.

⁷ In his subtle and persuasive essay, Lee Clark Mitchell argues that the unevenness or heterogeneity is what contemporary readers would have found so enjoyable. He writes that the 'abrupt tonal shifts' are 'an essential part of its narrative appeal'. It is hard to come to any secure conclusion as to why or how readers may have enjoyed a text, but Mitchell makes the point that 'unevenness' may also constitute an appealing variety. He comments: '*Tom Sawyer* appeals to readers precisely through its contradictory mix, invoking horror as well as humour, indulging high and low styles, satirizing yet championing the venal impulse of wanting something for nothing.' See 'Introduction', *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. xiii.

past is not truly odd, or not so odd that it may not be garlanded in retrospect.

The idea of permitting and governing the 'odd' or 'queer' potential of the past is continued in the early chapters, and in the first mid-Western character we meet, the woman who ponders on what's 'gone with that boy'. This 'old lady' is Tom's Aunt Polly, and in looking for Tom, she looks over and under her spectacles: 'She seldom or never looked *through* them for so small a thing as a boy; they were her state pair, the pride of her heart, and were built for "style," not service—she could have seen through a pair of stove lids just as well' (p. 11). Twain gently mocks Aunt Polly's pretensions to 'style'; her vanities are so small and naive that we may regard them fondly. As she is an 'old lady', her 'pride' will not result in a 'climb', but is a pleasure that is complete in itself. Even in her small, distant world of St Petersburg, though, she is engaged in her own comical negotiation of old and new. She worries if she is raising Tom correctly, and remembers the Old Testament proverb about sparing the rod and spoiling the child. But she is also interested in every new medicine that comes along, and has studied all the latest fashionable 'treatments' (she subjects Tom to a 'water cure' in Chapter XII).

With naive, lovable characters, Twain describes a past that is evocative but also closed. As several earlier commentators have noted, the novel offers a pastoral vision of a pre-industrial society to a more urbanized and 'incorporated' America. There is reassurance in the connectedness to older ways, but the past is made present in such a way as to allude to our own present-day maturity. Twain establishes his—and implicitly our—maturity via this tolerant enjoyment of the petty hopes and vanities of an earlier age. This is especially the case in the depiction of Tom himself. Twain exposes all Tom's vainglorious impulses—Tom is almost relentlessly defined by his immaturity—but in exposing Tom with knowing and rueful clarity, the narrative emphasizes the grown-up qualities of 'The Author'. This authorial maturity involves a certain pretentiousness in turn, in that it is established in part via the command of literary culture. Scenes and characters are repeatedly described as through the lens of literary knowledge. When Tom has to work on a Saturday morning, and Cardiff Hill seems a 'Delectable Land', Twain alludes to the 'Delectable Mountains' of Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678). When we are told in the same chapter that Tom's friends

'came to jeer, but stayed to whitewash' (p. 21), Twain offers his readers an echo of Goldsmith's 'The Deserted Village' (1770), in which fools 'who came to scoff, remained to pray'. When Tom's sister Mary has cleaned him up, Tom is once again 'a man and a brother', a description that reproduces the anti-slavery motto in which the African-American man asks for his freedom on the grounds, 'Am I not a man and a brother?' Finally, when Tom makes endless mistakes in his geography class until 'chaos was come again' (p. 52), Twain makes an ironic gesture toward Shakespeare's Othello, who, when he is mistrustful of Desdemona, feels that 'chaos is come again'. Elsewhere, Twain deals in 'fine writing' that may not cite any particular text, but that exhibits its poetical skills with a worldly nuance. The allusions and the fine writing do not help us to envisage the scene more clearly, but they do remind us of the gulf between 'The Author' and his material. The sense is that the narrator has a comfortable command of culture, and he can overlay the stories of the simple village with the literary dignity that, it is implied, is his own natural medium. None of the references is particularly *recherché*, and one might expect many of the villagers to have read Shakespeare, Bunyan, and Goldsmith. It is the playfulness of the narrator's redeployment of these moral and literary 'greats', more than anything, that signals the narrator's removal from the anxiously moralistic world of his youth. With his literary knowingness, he also seems to invite his readers to adopt the same gently indulgent attitude towards the naive characters of the past.⁸

What, though, is maturity, beyond the authorial condescension toward the archetypal small town? We do not get a fuller sense of the Clemens behind 'The Author'—the dynamic, desperately ambitious man revealed in letters and autobiographical dictations. Occasionally, however, the mask of leisured wisdom slips, and a different narrative voice appears—a voice that is angry and cynical. There is, for instance, the prolonged and savage satire in the description of the School Evening. A series of young women recite their painfully trite 'compositions':

⁸ My argument here echoes that of Richard Lowry, who observes in *'Literary Man': Mark Twain and Modern Authorship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), that 'the indirect discourse frames Tom's musings with an irony even as it invites a kind of nostalgic indulgence in the naïveté of youth . . . The result is a writing that, in effect, produces two characters—the youthful victim of borrowed fantasies and the sophisticated, worldly narrator' (p. 78).

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 (p. 127).

Twain also observes that ‘the sermon of the most frivolous and least religious girl in the school is always the longest and the most relentlessly pious’. Twain had an eye for bad writing, and he produces some spectacular instances here. He accompanies his examples with some wonderfully sharp reproaches, and concludes: ‘It may be remarked, in passing, that the number of compositions in which the word “beauteous” was over-fondled, and human experience referred to as “life’s page,” was up to the usual average’ (p. 129). The authorial judgement here is clever and amusing, but there is none of the tolerant fondness for the naive pretensions of the past that is to be found elsewhere in the novel. Twain, in this literary lesson, seems a counterpart to the novel’s own violently aggressive schoolmaster, who flogs Tom for his misdemeanours. And yet, Twain’s own style in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* is relatively *unadventurous* and clichéd. Characters ‘wend’ and ‘sally forth’; breezes are described as ‘zephyrs’, and large trees as ‘solemn monarchs of the forest’; the dawn is ‘great Nature’s meditation’. Like Tom mimicking the heroes from storybooks, Twain has a tendency to rely on prescribed models of ‘elegant’ prose. Equally, earlier editors have revealed the extent to which Twain was recycling characters and scenarios as much as fine phrases. In the relationship between Tom and Aunt Polly, there is extensive borrowing from B. P. Shillaber’s Mrs. Partington and her nephew, Ike; and, Gerber notes, ‘[o]ther episodes—one is tempted to say all other episodes—also show the effects of wide reading’.⁹

⁹ See Gerber *et al.*, pp. 4–5. Of Shillaber’s influence, Gerber notes: ‘Both widows are good Calvinists whose belief in stern discipline inevitably gets betrayed by their soft heart. Both nephews successfully “work” their aunts, snatch doughnuts, play tricks on cats, misbehave in church, feign sickness to avoid school, and find inspiration in *The Black Avenger, or The Pirate of the Spanish Main*.’ Twain was on friendly terms with Shillaber. Baender, drawing on Blair’s scholarship, notes (*ibid.* 458) that one of the illustrations of Mrs. Partington, in Shillaber’s *Life and Sayings of Mrs. Partington* (New York: J. C. Derby, 1854), was lifted to serve as an illustration of Aunt Polly in the first US edition. Shillaber himself is assumed to have lifted aspects of Mrs. Partington from English writer Sydney Smith’s Dame Partington.

The result of Twain's various borrowings—and especially his borrowing of literary or poeticized phrasings—is a reassuringly familiar, cosy aspect, which is, on occasion, disrupted by a more acerbic satire or by cynicism. The alternative, cynical voice is somewhat mean-spirited, but it is also altogether more exciting. The duality of the novel—and of much of Twain's work—is obvious, and it has provided a staple of Twain criticism. The polite, conformist Twain is seen as in conflict with a more original, independent self. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* has often been twinned with *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* on the same grounds: the safe, regularly literary *Tom Sawyer* is seen as a mere preparation for the more radical stylistic and satiric ventures of *Huckleberry Finn*. But even treating *Tom Sawyer* in isolation, the dualities have been a point of departure for some of the most influential criticism. Cynthia Griffin Wolff, in particular, draws attention to the fact that, behind the pretty surfaces, Tom Sawyer's world is filled with violence. The cosy village scene has an underlying aspect which denotes an extreme and frightening moral universe: 'No stores are mentioned in the novel. No blacksmiths. No livery stable. No bank . . . the only downtown buildings that actually do appear in the St. Petersburg of Twain's creation are those few grisly emblems of crime and punishment. Two taverns, a courthouse, a jail, and a deserted slaughterhouse.'¹⁰ Wolff tends to sympathize with the otherwise often unlikeable Tom. For her, he is smothered by emotionally manipulative women, and has no suitable and attractive role-models. She notes that the 'one "respectable" man whom Tom sees regularly, [the schoolteacher] Mr. Dobbin, is a sadist'. The only defiantly passionate man is the villain, Injun Joe. The movement of the book is consequently toward the 'shutting away' of a justified anger and rebellion. For Wolff, the final tragedy of this otherwise comic novel

¹⁰ Wolff's essay, 'The Adventures of Tom Sawyer: A Nightmare Vision of American Boyhood', was first published in *Massachusetts Review*, 21 (1980), 637–52. I cite Stuart Hutchinson (ed.), *Mark Twain: Critical Assessments* (Robertsbridge: Helm Information, 1993), iii. 225–36, where the essay is reprinted (p. 226). Wolff echoes earlier commentary in this respect, as for instance DeVoto, who wrote that '[I]f Mark could not analyze the ferments of the mind's dark side, he has given them enduring symbols.' DeVoto cites Tom's guilt during a thunderstorm, and his and Huck's hiding behind a tree while a murder is committed. DeVoto's comments are from his *Mark Twain at Work* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1942), as reprinted by Hutchinson (ed.), *Mark Twain*, 209–13 (pp. 211–12).

is that Tom capitulates to his environment and becomes himself the conformist and genteel 'Model Boy'.¹¹

The duality of *Tom Sawyer* has been read, then, in terms of a suppressed or mediated violence, and other scholars have offered subtle variations on this socio-psychological approach. Glenn Hendler has analysed the novel as a study of disciplinary authority. Hendler notes how the homosocial violence of *Tom Sawyer*—as the schoolteacher repeatedly beats Tom—has a paradoxical effect. It has the socially approved outcome of confirming a dominant, male, heterosexual subjectivity. The most severe beating that Tom receives is the one he takes for his love, Becky, and this establishes Tom as the manly hero. At the same time, this beating establishes Becky as the female who must be protected, and who is therefore excluded from power. It is through violence, Hendler would say, that Tom will become an adult, while Becky, being spared, will retain the status of a child. Hendler does not, like Wolff, see this tragically. For him, it is simply an instance of how 'bad-boy books' delineate an accepted idea of development. The boy's diversity and instability—his 'oddness' and 'queer enterprises'—are violently reduced to a functional, authoritative, recognizably manly identity. As Hendler phrases it, 'radical self-loss is the prerequisite for the attainment of normative masculinity'. This is also the source of the excitement of the 'bad-boy books', in that they offer 'an uneasy proximity between masculine individuality and its dissolution'.¹²

Modern discussion of the book, then, from Wolff to Mitchell to Hendler, often turns on the fact that it is both 'strong' and 'weak', both idyllic vision of small-town America and evocation of the terrors that lie beneath. A complicating factor here is the fact that the book is both about children and, to some extent, for them. Twain was uncertain whether he was really writing for children or not, and as we have seen, while the Preface explains that the work is 'intended mainly for the entertainment of boys and girls', he seems more keen to claim the attention of adults and, perhaps especially, the attention of adult men. In letters to William Dean Howells, and in discussions with his wife, he equivocated about whether the book should be marketed as for one group or the other, but clearly he wished to

¹¹ Hutchinson (ed.), *Mark Twain*, iii. 230, 235.

¹² See Hendler, 'Tom Sawyer's Masculinity', *Arizona Quarterly*, 49/4 (1993), 33–59 (p. 46).

strike both readerships. He was generally dismissive of fiction for children because it tended to be threadbare, moralistic stuff. His own work was part of a new development in literature for and about children, in that, like *Little Women*, it introduces a greater degree of realism. But in *Tom Sawyer*, Twain mediates between the 'realistic' and the 'sensational'. Tom's goals invite adult amusement—he longs for 'treasure' and his fantasies seem far-fetched—and yet Twain requites the desire, whether in adults or children, for 'adventures' and even for the discovery of treasure. In another curious twist, while we tend to assume that, given the child readership, the writer would restrict the treatment of certain matters, it is precisely because the book is about children that it is as realist as it is in its handling of intimate feelings. There is a lengthy, detailed section that falls in Chapters XVIII and XIX, in which Tom and Becky, at alternate moments, wish to put their differences behind them and 'make up'. But when one wishes to reconcile, the other seeks to triumph and to make the other pay for the slights of the past. They become caught up in a repeated cycle of sadistic indifference and masochistic longing. We might see this as a harmless series of trivial spites and woundings, except that this sequence is so long and detailed, and Twain does not mask the strength of feeling that it involves. In the face of Becky's desperate attempts to feign gaiety and indifference, we are told that it 'gratified all the vicious vanity that was in [Tom]' (p. 114). Tom, meanwhile, uses a former love, Amy, to spur Becky's anguish, while Amy herself is, of course, being set up for renewed rejection and disappointment. The depiction of such 'viciousness' would have been questionable in a book featuring adult characters. But Tom and Becky do not break adult vows or contracts, and the 'treachery' is not a sexual betrayal but a betrayal of the affections. Their intimate cruelties and seductions are allowable because the participants are 'only' children.

For all his narratorial suavity, however, Twain could not quite get his 'strong' material—whether sensational or realist—past the guardians of polite, literary morality. A lengthy review in the *New York Times* complained that the murder of Dr. Robinson was 'over-minutely described and too fully illustrated'. While the reviewer claimed not to object to 'rough boys' being 'the heroes of a story-book', he or she clearly believes that Twain offers crude and unimproving material. The review concludes:

In the books to be placed into children's hands for the purposes of recreation, we have a preference for those of a milder type than *Tom Sawyer* . . . With less, then, of Injun Joe and 'revenge,' and 'slitting women's ears,' and the shadows of the gallows, which throws an unnecessarily sinister tinge over the story, (if the book really is intended for boys and girls), we should have liked *Tom Sawyer* better.¹³

Even before the much-reported 'banning' of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by school and library officials, then, Twain was caught up in the debate as to what children's literature should and should not do. The debate was often staged in terms of whether children's reading should be 'true to life' or 'improving', and, as noted, Twain had little regard for the 'improving'. The implication for those such as Twain, who offered 'truth to life', was that 'improving' fiction was a falsification of what children actually knew; that 'improving' fiction was so obviously a form of lying that it only confused or repulsed its readers, who were best-served by fiction that had a greater degree of realism. Interestingly, the reviewer for the *New York Times* is careful to object to the sensational, dime-novel aspects (murder and extravagant vengeance), and not to the realism ('rough boys'). There is the sense in the review that, while a realist element might have some claim to moral and literary respectability, Twain was in fact bringing in elements from the populist press—with its focus on 'low life'—under the guise of such respectability. The earliest and most influential reviewer—and a close friend and associate of Twain—was William Dean Howells. His was a more complex, and perhaps more strategic response, and it is interesting that he does not object to or defend the sensational elements. He is more concerned to guard against criticism of an excess of realism. His argument is that realism is truthful, and that a cautious representation of a genuine character is more rewarding and, perhaps, more improving, than the presentation of an unlikely role model. Howells wrote of Tom:

He is cruel, as all children are, but chiefly because he is ignorant; he is not mean, but there are very definite bounds to his generosity; and his courage is of the Indian sort, full of prudence and mindful of retreat as one of the

¹³ Anonymous review, *New York Times* (13 Jan. 1877), 3; repr. in Hutchinson (ed.), *Mark Twain*, ii. 64.