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THE SWEET SUCCESS OF TWAIN'S TOM

For almost a century Mark Twain's novel of American boyhood, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, has enjoyed great popularity and earned a place as one of our foremost popular "classics". Its sequel, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, may justifiably be held in greater esteem by the learned reader but has probably not yet usurped the honored place of *Tom Sawyer* in the popular imagination—nor, perhaps, in the heart of many a learned reader. Everybody knows Tom's story whether he has actually read the book or not: it is somehow un-American not to know it. Critics have been ready to account for and justify the book's popularity; certain explanations are now familiar and fully persuasive, yet some other features remain to be noted—especially the informing pattern of this charmingly "artless" novel. Those other features cast an instructive light on the society which has delighted in the fable of *Tom Sawyer* and taken it to its heart. And in rehearsing the familiar features we can prepare to appreciate the "other" features I mention.

There is, to begin with, the charming nostalgia of the novel's setting—a rural summer scene of boyhood days. The golden glow of an almost Edenic atmosphere pervades *Tom Sawyer*, making St. Petersburg and its environs seem a kind of midwestern land of lotus eaters. The initial paragraph of the famous whitewashing episode (Chapter II) well exemplifies that atmosphere:

Saturday morning was come, and all the summer world was bright and fresh, and brimming with life. There was a song in every heart; and if the heart was young the music issued at the lips. There was cheer in every face and a spring in every step. The locust trees were in bloom and the fragrance of the blossoms filled the air. Cardiff Hill, beyond the village and above it, was green with vegetation; and it lay just far enough away to seem a Delectable Land, dreamy, reposeful, and inviting.¹

Tom enters the clear sky of that darling Saturday morning like a dark cloud full of storms: he has the fence to whitewash. But like all the clouds in the

novel, this one proves to have a silver lining; the sweet atmosphere is soon re-established. The fence finished, Tom repairs to Aunt Polly to claim his release; and Chapter III begins as Chapter II did:

Tom presented himself before Aunt Polly, who was sitting before an open window in a pleasant rearward apartment. . . . The balmy summer air, the restful quiet, the odor of the flowers, and the drowsing murmur of the bees had had their effect, and she was nodding over her knitting—for she had no company but the cat, and it was asleep in her lap. [etc.]

Clearly, this is "a land in which it seemed always afternoon". Aunt Polly would have been satisfied with 20 per cent of the job and expects less, so we thrill sympathetically with Tom's little triumph: he has put one over on his aunt as he has on all the neighborhood boys. The peaceful life and the gratifying boyish triumphs characterize the novel's tone and are responsible for much of its appeal. Tom, we feel, is a real boy and therefore warmly sympathetic: we recognize our boyish selves in him as he goes through his typical adventures of Robin Hood and piracy, of falling in love, and of unjust but unsevere punishment (and how readily we understand his wish for temporary death to make everyone feel sorry for him!). There are, to be sure, threatening dark clouds in the novel—the horrors of the graveyard and the cave—but even these turn out to be lined with silver, or, indeed, with gold.

Here, then, is another reason for the novel's attractiveness: in addition to the Edenic atmosphere of the scene there is the fact of the happy issue of every one of Tom's adventures. Every escapade ends happily. Since William Dean Howells made the observation in 1876, many critics have recognized that Tom's adventures are wonderfully wish-fulfilling—his dreams come true: "he is a boy, and merely an ordinary boy on the moral side. What makes him delightful to the reader is that on the imaginative side he is very much more, and though every boy has wild and fantastic dreams, this boy cannot rest until he has somehow realized them".² Again and again Tom's play becomes real; the romance hardens into reality. Not only, then, does Tom act out for us the dreams of our own boyhood, the course of the novel moves them from the frivolous realm of play to the serious realm of real life.³ And as Tom's imagination involves him in play at romantic heroism, so the actual realization of his dreams results in heroic achievement.

This aspect of *Tom Sawyer* has led critics like Walter Blair to conclude that the novel is a working out in fictional form of the notion of a boy's maturing, that its structure reveals "a way of characterizing and a patterning of

action which showed a boy developing toward manhood".⁴ Not only do Tom's adventures begin in play and end in reality but, Mr. Blair points out, adventures begun as some gesture of social rebellion end as acts which earn Tom the approval of the society of St. Petersburg. Whether or not the novel is indeed the depiction of a boy's maturing we can attempt to decide in a moment; it is clear, however, that insofar as the reader has identified sympathetically with the heroic young Tom, the social approval Mr. Blair mentions is additionally gratifying and further contributes to the book's appeal.

Yet one of the odd features of the novel discourages accepting Mr. Blair's appraisal at face value. There is some sense of Tom's developing and maturing, all right, but it is a development that occurs outside of time. Mr. Blair is almost aware of that fact, as he seems to imply in his puzzling explanation of Tom's unspecified age: "The fact that the action of the book requires only a few months seems irrelevant, since fictional rather than actual time is involved."⁵

But the real point to be recognized is that Tom's age is unspecified because he is of no particular age—or rather that he is all ages that a boy can be. Tom is young enough to be still losing his baby teeth yet old enough to be as interested as he is in Becky Thatcher: if he finds buried treasure he plans to buy "a new drum, and a sure-nough sword, and a red necktie and a bull pup, and get married"; yet the nature of his attention to Becky suggests some years' more maturity than that. The pleasant summer of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* is in truth a palimpsest of all the summers of boyhood. That feature of the novel is largely responsible for giving the adventures a universal and timeless dimension, and to Tom himself a truly representative role. Tom emerges, James Cox rightly observes, "as the figure, the *character*, of the Boy".⁶ Dwight Macdonald carries the idea a step further in calling Tom the All-American Boy: "The first chapters [of *Tom Sawyer*] are fascinating, for here . . . we can see a mass-culture hero taking form."⁷ (The value of that particular extension we will consider below.)

Now while Tom is of unspecified but all-encompassing age and his adventures a palimpsest of all ideal boyhood summers, the illusion of single summer is artfully created by Twain's specific and indeed meticulous attention to superficial chronology at three instances in the novel. The convincing realism of the passing days of a specific summer in one boy's life depends on Twain's carefully counting off days and even hours for us. The first eleven chapters lead us step by apparent step from Friday to Tuesday. The first chapter opens with Tom's escaping Aunt Polly's clutches by a simple ruse,

which surprises and then delights her until she worries about her failure of responsibility: "I'll just be obleeged to make him work, tomorrow, to punish him. It's mighty hard to make him work Saturdays. . . ." After supper Tom is out again, meets the well-dressed stranger—"He had shoes on—and it was only Friday"—licks him and gets home late. The chapter ends with reiteration of Aune Polly's "resolution to turn his Saturday holiday into captivity". Chapter II begins "Saturday morning was come", and relates the whitewashing episode. Chapter III sees Tom free, his view of the new girl (Becky), and his elaborate attempts to impress her: he hangs about the Thatchers' "till nightfall". He is unjustly punished at supper and wishes he might die, picturing himself "brought home from the river, dead"; returns to the Thatchers' at "half-past nine or ten o'clock", and goes home to bed. Chapters IV and V treat of Sunday School ("from nine to half past ten") and church service ("About half past ten the cracked bell of the church began to ring"). Chapter VI begins "Monday morning found Tom Sawyer miserable", and relates the episode of the loose tooth and the beginning of his romance with Becky; Chapter VII depicts their first lovers' quarrel "when school broke up at noon". And so on, into Chapter XI (which begins "Close upon the hour of noon"—we know it is Tuesday), the latter half of which blurs chronology—"at breakfast one morning Sid said"; "Every day of two, during this time", etc.

The strict account of chronology picks up again in Chapter XIII, just at noon on a Tuesday, as Tom, Joe, and Huck plan their escapade on Jackson Island. They meet and set off at midnight; "About two o'clock in the morning" they are landed and finally fall asleep. Chapter XV begins "When Tom awoke in the morning", and tells of the hunt on the river for someone drowned and of Tom's excited realization that "it's us!" Twilight draws on, the night deepens, and Tom makes his stealthy visit home: "This was Wednesday night". And so on through the eight chapters devoted to the boys' adventures on Jackson Island, ending on Monday afternoon, in Chapter XX, where Tom takes Becky's punishment. (Chapter XVII contains the funeral and the triumphant resurrection of the three "dead" boys on Sunday; Chapter XVIII allows Tom his ruse of the dream "At breakfast on Monday morning"; etc.)

The chronology grows vague again through chapters XXI-XXVIII, although some specific references occasionally occur; Chapter XXVIII hustles us through several days in a few lines ("Tuesday the boys had the same ill luck. Also Wednesday. But Thursday night promised better.") as Tom and Huck pursue Injun Joe. Then with Chapter XXIX strict chronological accounting

is resumed and maintained until the end of XXXII, wherein Tom and Becky are found—i.e. from Friday to the Monday ten days later. The brief concluding chapters (XXXIII-XXXV and Conclusion) are again chronologically vague and generally timeless.

It is evidently not mere caprice that prompted Twain to attend so carefully to accounting for the passing hours and days in these three sections of the novel. In addition to heightening the realism and making the story more convincing and immediately dramatic, the particularity of the quotidian chronology lends pace and peculiar emphasis to those sections of the novel. It is appropriate in the opening chapters to move us quickly and convincingly into the story within a familiar temporal framework. The Jackson Island episode, which is physically central in the book, is thematically and functionally central as well; it enacts in terms of play, romance, rebellion, and escape, the concluding episode of the novel; and it prepares by anticipation and forecast the comedic resolution of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. By the same token, the particularity of chronology in Chapters XXIX-XXXII paces and emphasizes the important comedic ending. The brief remaining chapters and the Conclusion serve as a kind of coda.

Chronological emphasis given to the opening, central, and climactic episodes of the novel indicates the existence of a formal patterning in the novel that is somewhat less obvious than that provided by the sketchy and lately developed "plot". The realistic detailed chronology serves to "anchor" the mythic or mythopoeic (or at least heuristic) material. Those sections where chronology is most strictly followed are the crucial sections of the novel in that they concern the important stages of development of the novel's meaningful pattern. Principal items in the formal patterning—which carries the burden of the novel's significant expression—include the three main narrative themes.⁴ First, the romance of Tom and Becky; second, the escapades of Injun Joe; third, Tom's relation to Huckleberry Finn.

This third item needs an additional word of explanation. The other side of the coin is, to give it a complementary title, Tom's relation to society or to civilization. Huck obviously enough represents the wild (not the bad, mind you) side of Tom Sawyer: Huck belongs in the heart of Nature—not quite that Nature in the bosom of which Hawthorne's Hester and Arthur plan their escape from society ("that wild, heathen Nature of the forest, never subjugated by human law, nor illumined by higher truth"), but certainly a Nature very like it. His polar opposite in the novel is Sid—almost the other extreme. Huck's characterization in the novel makes it clear why Tom must succumb

at last to civilization and respectability. The frightened exchange between the two boys on the occasion of the dire prophecy uttered by the howling dog (Bull Harbison), after Tom and Huck have witnessed the murder of Dr. Robinson, offers an example of that characterization:

"Dad fetch it! This comes of playing hooky and doing everything a feller's told *not* to do. I might'a 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 lay I'll just *waller* in Sunday schools!" And Tom began to snuffle a little.

"*Yow* bad!" and Huckleberry began to snuffle too. "Confound it, Tom Sawyer, you're just old pie, 'longside o' what I am. Oh *lordy*, lordy, lordy. I wisht I only had half your chance."⁹

Amidst all the romance and make believe of Tom's play there is something dreadfully real about Huck. While Tom thinks it would be great naughty fun to smoke a pipe, Huck regularly smokes; while Tom thinks it splendid to escape (now and then) the bonds of home and society, Huck is already really quite outside those bonds. In a word, while Tom plays at rebellion against social mores, Huck is the rebel succeeded—willy-nilly. And so on. Tom's relationship to Huck is, then, a narrative theme of crucial importance in the novel's pattern of development, and we shall return to it again.

These three principal narrative themes are developed concurrently in the novel; they frequently cross and finally merge for their related resolution and denouement in the splendid concluding episode of the book. All three themes are begun in the initial block of strict chronological narration in Chapters I-VIII. The first four chapters establish Tom in our eye, and in Chapter III Becky Thatcher is seen to float into Tom's ken. In Chapter VI, however, all three narrative themes together are actually set in definite motion: en route to school on Monday morning Tom meets (for the first time in the novel) "the juvenile pariah of the village, Huckleberry Finn . . . cordially hated and dreaded by all the mothers of the town because he was idle and lawless and vulgar and bad . . ."—and the theme of Tom and Huck is begun. Their conversation about Huck's dead cat leads to their plan to go to the graveyard—"when it's midnight a devil will come, or maybe two or three . . . [and] you heave your cat after 'em . . ."—where Tom becomes involved in the escapades of Injun Joe. Third, as the chapter heading promises, "Tom meets Becky"; and the chapter ends with Tom's written profession to Becky "I love you".

The pattern of the novel is reinforced by three recurrent motifs which predominate in the story's progress: the motif of death, the motif of quest for

hidden treasure, and the motif of romantic heroic adventure. These motifs are developed, like the principal narrative themes, according to the system that obtains in the episodic progress of the story: each motif begins as play or romance or rebellion; what is playful becomes earnest, romance hardens into reality, the rebellious is regularized into the respectable. The motifs, furthermore, are interwoven and coalesce with each other and with the main narrative themes—(Tom and Becky, Tom and Injun Joe, and Tom and Huck)—and especially during the three sections of strictly chronological narration.

The motif of death is introduced early in the opening block of chapters, with Tom's typically boyish wish that he might die and make people feel sorry that they had been mean to him. In Chapter III—where he catches his first glimpse of Becky—he is unjustly whacked for breaking a sugar bowl (Sid actually did it) and wishes for death, especially by drowning: "He pictured himself brought home from the river, dead, with his curls all wet and his sore heart at rest". He imagines himself dying from toothache, in Chapter VI, but is sent on his way—he meets first Huck and then Becky. Repulsed by Becky after their first lovers' quarrel (at the end of Chapter VII), Tom flees in Chapter VIII to the solace behind Cardiff Hill—the Delectable Land—and there yearns to die, to die temporarily. (Incidentally, our sympathies are humorously enlisted with Tom as we recall our own childish wishes for our death as punishment to those who loved us; and Twain's indulgent narrative tone contributes wonderfully to this effect.)

But in the next chapter (IX) Tom and Huck are witnesses to the very real and permanent death of Dr. Robinson at the hand of Injun Joe in the graveyard. This horror is quickly enough submerged, and by Chapter XII Tom's interest is again turned to Becky Thatcher, who has stopped attending school. Yet that horror lurks just below the surface, is reflected playfully in the Jackson Island episode, and will soon thereafter reappear and persist to its finale in the adventure in the cave.

The Jackson Island episode gives (as I say) a playful, wish-fulfilling realization of Tom's yearnings: along with Huck and Joe Harper, Tom has *died* in the eyes of society—and, furthermore, only temporarily! Another rebuff by Becky has determined Tom's escape, notice; and much of the satisfaction of this episode derives from the boys' early recognition that St. Petersburg does indeed believe they have drowned. They set off at the outset of Chapter XIII and gain the island; before the end of the next chapter Tom has determined the significance of the flotilla on the river and the firing of the

cannon from the ferryboat: "Boys, I know who's drowned—it's us!" Not only does this second block of chapters fulfill Tom's wish for a "temporary" death, it also anticipates Tom's adventure in McDougal's Cave—the concern of the third block of strictly chronological narration—which ends the book.

The motif of heroic romance begins in Chapter VIII (after Becky's first rebuff of Tom) and is there associated with the motif of death: Tom wants to die "temporarily". The romance suggests itself as an escape from the life of St. Petersburg: Tom decides to be a pirate, to become famous as the Black Avenger of the Spanish Main and return one day in all his grisly finery to astonish his old village. But on the appearance of Joe Harper Tom becomes Robin Hood to Joe's Guy of Guisborne, and they play out that romance until Guy refuses to fall dead. Once again this motif is entwined with the death motif when these two boys join Huck and set sail as pirates for Jackson Island.

Becky's rebuff of Tom has again sent him off (at the end of XII as at the end of VII), and she is quite definitely in Tom's mind as he sails away: "The Black Avenger [that's our Tom] stood still with folded arms, 'looking his last' upon the scene of his former joys and his later sufferings, and wishing 'she' could see him now, abroad on the wild sea, facing peril and death with dauntless heart, going to his doom with a grim smile on his lips". And while on the island the question of real pirates comes up and the possibility of discovering real treasure there: "I bet there's been pirates on this island before, boys. . . . They've hid treasures here somewhere. How'd you feel to light on a rotten chest full of gold and silver—hey?"

And thus the third major motif is also stated in the central episode of Jackson Island. This motif has perhaps begun in a somewhat different form as early as the whitewashing episode of Chapter II, when Tom discovers unexpected treasure in the pockets of boys who came to jeer but remained to whitewash. It is picked up again in Chapter XXV as Tom and Huck start their quest for buried treasure that leads them again into contact with Injun Joe; and it reaches its culmination in the episode of McDougal's Cave when the real treasure is finally discovered.

The development of these major motifs runs parallel to and reinforces that of the principal narrative themes; and that combined development in the novel is comedic—and seriously so, I take it. Quite consistently, playful action matures into earnest action; the romantic hardens into reality; rebellion is regularized into respectability. Thus, wishes are fulfilled (Tom's and, con-

sequently, the reader's) and initially naughty behavior turns into praiseworthy achievement in the eyes of St. Petersburg. After the triumphant return of the "drowned" boys Tom soon finds it does not follow that Becky falls at his feet. Two chapters later, however, Tom performs a more legitimate act of heroism in taking Becky's punishment for the torn book. The reality of that act does bring Becky back to him—"Tom, how *could* you be so noble!—and their romance is on again. And then further, in Chapter XXIII, Tom courageously testifies in Muff Potter's trial against Injun Joe, thereby putting himself in earnest on the side of right and justice and opposed to the Satanic figure of evil in the novel. "Tom was a glittering hero once more", but this time far more seriously than ever before; and there is nothing playful or simply romantic in this achievement.

Almost immediately afterward the motif of quest for hidden treasure is given similar development and joined in grim earnest to the motifs of death and heroism as all three coalesce with the narrative theme of Injun Joe's escapades (and, of course, with that of the Tom-Huck relationship). The romantic game of treasure hunting (Chapter XXV) turns terrifically real as the boys are confronted by real robbers and real treasure—and Injun Joe. As this turn of events seems about to achieve its climax (in Chapter XXVIII), the strict chronological accounting begins to reappear, and at the outset of Chapter XXIX the concluding episode is set in motion—but with an apparent collapse of thematic unity:

The first thing Tom heard on Friday morning was a glad piece of news—Judge Thatcher's family had come back to town the night before. Both Injun Joe and the treasure sank into secondary importance for a moment and Becky took the chief place in the boy's interest.

But the collapse of unity is merely apparent, for with the completion of the episode that runs from XXIX—Friday morning—to the end of Chapter XXXII, we find that the principal narrative themes and the major motifs of the novel have indeed tightly coalesced and been brought to a neat comic resolution. Tom's romantic interest in Becky, which takes precedence over other interests no matter how serious (as the quotation above clearly specifies), leads him and Becky into the depths of McDougal's Cove, confronts them with the horror of being lost and the threatening evil of Injun Joe, and gives Tom the opportunity *really* to act out the pattern of the typical career of the Hero.¹⁴ As usual, Tom is ever ready to play the hero:

at once the ambition to be a discoverer seized him. Becky responded to his call, and they made a smoke mark for future guidance, and started upon their quest. They wound this way and that, *far down into the secret depths* of the cave, made another mark, and branched off in search of novelties to tell the upper world about.

The language of this paragraph—especially the words I have italicized—assumes a significant resonance that echoes the mythic narrative of the questing Hero. Tom's chivalrous care of Becky—far beyond his endearing gesture of taking her punishment in school—is put to the ultimate test (in the novel's terms) at the confrontation with Injun Joe:

... a human hand, holding a candle, appeared from behind a rock! Tom lifted up a glorious shout, and instantly that hand was followed by the body it belonged to—Injun Joe's! Tom was paralysed; he could not move. He was vastly gratified the next moment to see the "Spaniard" take to his heels and get himself out of sight.

Not only is Injun Joe put to flight here, he will never leave the lower world of McDougal's Cave. Tom's triumph over Injun Joe gains in significance from the novel's persistent association of Injun Joe and Satan; the act of triumph then has a familiar mimetic quality. Joe and Satan are associated in the reader's eye from the outset of the Injun Joe theme (Tom and Huck go to the graveyard with the wart-fetching dead cat and await the arrival of the Devil—Injun Joe appears), to the last word about Joe, in Chapter XXXIII ("Injun Joe was believed to have killed five citizens of the village, but what of that? If he had been Satan himself . . . [etc.]"). In Chapter XI Tom and Huck are amazed at Joe's lying testimony and refrain from interfering for "this miscreant had sold himself to Satan and it would be fatal to meddle . . . [They were] confirmed in their belief that Joe had sold himself to the devil". And so on. This would seem to add up to the imitation of the action of the Hero overcoming Evil.

Particular emphasis is given the final features of the ordeal of Hero Tom and his consort—emphasis which contributes further to the defining of Tom as familiar Hero. Twice Twain specifies the duration of Tom's sojourn in the cave: at the close of Chapter XXX ("Three dreadful days and nights dragged their tedious hours along . . ."), and again at the close of Chapter XXXII ("Three days and nights of toil and hunger in the cave were not to be shaken off at once".) This insistence on the three-day duration of the adventure recalls the famous three-day experience of Christ. Then, the treasure's

being found "under the cross" tends further to lend the particular cachet of the Christian Hero to our Tom.

And of course his triumphant return with Becky at his side clinches the successful, comic ending of the Hero's career.

But where has Huck been all this time? Huck has been safely left to his own devices, and is following, on his own, a line roughly parallel to Tom's. The significance of his being separate from Tom at this crucial juncture is that Huck can, so to speak, be trusted; he is redeemed. Since Tom has left him keeping watch for Injun Joe and the treasure, Huck is led to the point of wonderfully saving the Widow Douglas. The dramatic presentation of Huck's achievement is eloquent. At the close of Chapter XXIX Huck, the outcast from society, "the juvenile pariah of the village", bangs on the Welshman's door—

"Let me in—quick! I'll tell everything."

"Why, who are you?"

"Huckleberry Finn—quick, let me in."

"Huckleberry Finn, indeed; it ain't a name to open many doors, I judge! But let him in, lads, and let's see what's the trouble."

Then, at the beginning of Chapter XXX, almost the same scene is reenacted; but the minor difference is instructive:

As the earliest suspicion of dawn appeared on Sunday morning, Huck came groping up the hill and rapped gently at the old Welshman's door. . . .

"Who's there?"

Huck's scared voice answered in a low tone.

"Please let me in! It's only Huck Finn!"

"It's a name that can open this door night or day, lad!—and welcome!"

These were strange words to the vagabond boy's ears, and the pleasanter he had ever heard. He could not recollect that the closing word had ever been applied in his case before.

Huck raps softly; he says "Please"; he is welcomed *in*—and not only into the Welshman's but into the Widow Douglas's finally as well. This is of course a new Huck—good, certainly, but not as opposed to his earlier "bad": the point is that his wildness is tamed, he is civilized and redeemed for respectable society. The old Huck is gone.

The sense of that is expressed first as Chapter XXX develops. The Welshman notices that Huck is "white and jaded—you ain't well a bit". At

the chapter closes we find that Huck's career has also realized the motif of death: he is, we can well believe, at death's doorstep. "The widow burst into tears. 'Hush child! I've told you before, you must *not* talk. You are very, very sick!'" This is the result of his heroic gesture, the gesture that earns him society's admiration. Huck's illness is, of course, almost symbolic: that Huck who has represented all the attraction that Tom's "wild" side responded to, that has indeed threatened to win Tom away—away from respectability, from his "better" self—that Huck is overcome.

This impression is reinforced by Tom's watching over Huck's recovery. The turn of events in the careers of both boys has left Tom strong and Huck weak. Tom assists at Huck's recovery—his virtual resurrection or rebirth. Once Huck can get about again, Tom takes him to the treasure so that he can share in Tom's good fortune—the Hero's boon. Then Huck's acceptance by society is reenacted as he and Tom are given new clothes by the Widow Douglas—"Now wash and dress yourselves. Here are two new suits of clothes—shirts, socks, everything complete"—at the end of Chapter XXXIII. Of course a certain reluctance persists, vestiges of the old pariah personality remain in Huck and he wants to "slope". But the assurance given him by our hero rings with peculiar eloquence. Tom says, "It ain't anything. I don't mind it a bit. *I'll take care of you*" (XXXIV; my italics). Huck's old ways raise their head once again, and Tom must once again "take care" of him—and his persuasion involves the telling bargain in the book's final chapter.

We have passed beyond the last attention to strict chronology and back into that timeless summer that is all summers, in which Tom is forever redeeming Huck—capturing him for respectability. Chapter XXXV and the Conclusion are simply a coda, the gentle unwinding and letting down after the climax has been reached and the myth's point established.

The principal narrative themes have been brought together in the final chapters for satisfactory resolution. Tom has won his Becky, at the same time he has ended (by triumphing over them) the escapades of Injun Joe, and by the same token he has triumphed over and redeemed Huckleberry Finn. This is the goal toward which the episodic movement of this apparently formless novel has been urging us. And there the major motifs are likewise joined for comic (though serious) resolution. To say it again, the development of narrative themes and motifs has followed the pattern of dream realization: the playful, the romantic the rebellious turn to the serious, the real, the respectable; the heroic game becomes impressively the Heroic reality.

And we recognize in all this that the charmingly artless and casually informal novel is rigorously informed by the consistently developed themes and the steadily sustained motifs (death, quest for treasure, and romantic heroism) which complement them. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* is, then, quite formally organized despite its "relaxed" appearance. Its formality is also aided by the careful attention to chronology in the three large sections of the novel, as I have indicated.

The strict chronology, furthermore, gives an impressive edge of realism to the adventures which the novel narrates; it lends conviction as well as dramatic pace to those adventures and, most important, it effectively *contains* the nostalgia and romance that give those adventures their appeal and makes them even more deliciously palatable. But it also contains and anchors that figure of the timeless and ageless boy-hero and his palimpsest career: it seems to bring to us with dramatic, temporal immediacy the mythic account of that perennial heroic figure. That combination, I contend, has been largely responsible for the profound appeal of Tom Sawyer and his wonderful adventures.

Let us take another look at our hero and attempt to see more clearly what his defining features are—and so recognize what he has to show us about ourselves in our fond admiration. He is first of all, and indeed last of all, a *regular* boy. In spite of Twain's early intentions, Tom is the working out of the idea of the *good* bad boy—with a vengeance; he plays the right games ("by the book"), acceptably breaks the rules like a regular guy, and reaps his merited reward—the Judge's daughter and a nest egg of \$6,000.00. So he can safely be trusted to fulfill our nostalgic wishes because as his dreamy play hardens into reality his acts of pseudo-rebellion mature into strict respectability. And we recognize in grateful joy the accents of his rhetoric, especially as it swells to persuasive eloquence in overcoming Huck, taming him, capturing him for us. Huck lingeringly complains—

"The widdler eats by a bell; she goes to bed by a bell; she gits up by a bell—everything's so awful reg'lar a body can't stand it."

Tom is ready with his antiseptic reply: "Well, everybody does that way, Huck". He adds the grateful assurance—"if you'll try this thing just a while longer you'll come to like it". Then he turns to his bargain: Huck can join Tom Sawyer's robber gang if and only if he remains civilized and respectable.

"Huck, we can't let you into the gang if you ain't respectable, you know."

"Now, Tom, hain't you always ben friendly to me? You wouldn't shet me out, would you, Tom? You wouldn't do that, now, would you, Tom?"

"Huck, I wouldn't want to, and I *don't* want to—but what would people say? [1]

(Chap. XXV)

And all opposition falls, as it must, before this compelling rhetoric.

So there he stands, Tom triumphant; and we rejoice as we inhale the sweet smell of his success. It is the safe and acceptable and respectable realization of our dreams—perhaps indeed of the American dream. And at the same wonderful time it is the resolution of the great American paradox. The ideal hero is the stout individualist, the non-conforming natural man, American Rousseau, who yet lives snugly in suburbia as a regular fellow. He will assert his individual heroic self by dressing in distinctive and exclusive clothing (as the ads. tell him)—just like everyone else. His American name is legion!

That is the statement of Twain's almost too-divine comedy. It is the romance we are brought up on. We love its hero, who may well grow up to be president, or one of us precisely, or at least George Babbitt (whom Sinclair Lewis loved as Samuel Clemens loved his Tom). *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, from its disarming surface to its alarming depths, is as American as quick-frozen, ready-mixed, "home-made" apple pie. And in the appeal of its telling authenticity it is a major reflection of ourselves.

NOTES

1. Several critics have observed and commented on this extra-realistic quality of the setting of the novel and of its general atmosphere, none more instructively than James M. Cox (perhaps the most perceptive of Twain's critics) in *Mark Twain: The Fate of Humor* (Princeton University Press, 1966), pp. 131-133. The Delectable Land beyond Cardiff Hill has a further contributive function, as we shall see.
2. Review of *Tom Sawyer*, *Atlantic Monthly*, XXXVIII (May 1876), 621.
3. James Cox eloquently argues his thesis that "Tom's play defines the world as play". He asserts: "What every episode of *Tom Sawyer* exacts is the conversion of all 'serious' community activity—all duty, pain, grief, and work—into pleasure and play". This is true of *Tom Sawyer* in the sense that it is approximately true of all comedy, i.e. that serious comedy always finds a pleasurable resolution to its problems. "Play", however, has connotations of frivolity and lack of seriousness which render it inappropriate here as a descriptive and defining term: there is something much more serious and earnest in Tom's witnessing Injun Joe's act of murder, his fear of Joe's vengeance, his confrontation with Joe in the cave, etc., than what the term "play" suggests. (See Cox, *The Fate of Humor*, pp. 141-146.)
4. "On the structure of *Tom Sawyer*", from *Modern Philology*, XXXVII (August 1939), 75-88, in *Discussions of Mark Twain*, ed. Guy Cardwell (Boston: D. C. Heath and Co., 1963), p. 42.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
6. Cox, p. 134. Cf. Henry Nash Smith, *Mark Twain: The Development of a Writer* (New York 1967), p. 88: "Tom is a kind of embryonic Everyman".
7. "Mark Twain: An Unsentimental Journey", *The New Yorker*, April 9, 1960.
8. Walter Blair suggests (*op. cit.*) there are four units of narrative or lines of action in the novel: 1) the story of Tom and Becky, 2) the story of Tom and Muff Potter, 3) the Jackson Island episode, 4) the series of happenings (which might be called the Injun Joe story) leading to the discovery of the treasure.
9. The suggestion that Sid functions for Tom both as detested model and nagging conscience is rather emphatically presented a few paragraphs after this; the insistent parallelism is quite effective:

It seemed to Tom that his schoolmates would never get done holding inquests on dead cats, and thus keeping his trouble present to his mind. *Sid noticed* that Tom never was coroner of one of these inquiries, though it had been his habit to take the lead in all new enterprises; *he noticed*, too, that Tom never acted as witness—and that was strange; and *Sid did not overlook* the fact that Tom showed a marked aversion to these inquests, and always avoided them when he could. *Sid marvelled*, but said nothing. [Good brother is watching him! The italics are mine.]

10. See, e.g., Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*; see also Robert Regan, *Unpromising Heroes* (University of California Press, 1966), p. 110: "Tom Sawyer is . . . squarely situated in the Unpromising Hero tradition . . . [etc.]"