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## Reflections of Realistic Life in Mark twain's *The Adventure of Tom Sawyer*

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### **Abstract**

The Adventure of Tom Sawyer, the novel taken for analyzing the realistic aspects portrayed by twain, represents the memories of his childhood. The novel tells about two young boys who are interested in adventures and teaches the readers about the moralities and values at the time. The themes dealt with in novel are fundamental ones and often universal ideas explored in a literary work. This paper explains in general what realism is and how Mark Twain has introduced the aspects of realism in his novel. Special emphasize has been given to the language used in the novel, local colour, depiction of real situations and characters giving relevant examples from the next to support the arguments. The study is analytical and aims at driving home the point, that there is no necessity for a philosopher, teacher or a person of high station to teach morality and values and that even an everyday happening in life and an ordinary character can make a great impact on the society.

**Keywords:** realistic aspects, realism, adventure, morality

### **Introduction**

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, Twain portrays an accurate depiction of society during the pre-civil war time. Twain paints a picture of a boy's world along the Mississippi River, where two mischievous boys, Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn, go on various mini adventures from running away from home to help putting an evil murderer, Injun Joe, behind bars. Though the novel is considered as a fantastical adventurous novel, the novel illustrates and represents Southern society regarding its cultural and racial aspects during the pre-civil war era. The Adventure of Tom Sawyer effectively assesses realism through a hypocritical portrayal of the colonial South through institution of religion, satire, and vernacular speech. Both the characters Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn have been enjoyed both by grown-ups and children for generations, but it is an interesting fact that according to Mark Twain himself he "wrote them for adults exclusively" The book teaches about the morality and Values at that time. Tom and his friends are portrayed with the diverse personalities typical of real humans, good and bad, kind-hearted and mischievous at the same time. Consequently, they were not seen as good role models for small children who were supposed to learn the values of a Christian morality. However, through the negative side also, one can figure out morals are. The Adventures of Tom Sawyer is based on Mark Twain's own happy boyhood, and is told in a third person perspective. In an episode-like narrative it is understood that Tom and his friends were on their adventures in the neighborhood. The narration of the story is in Twain's typically humorous style, but it takes a more disturbing turn as the boys witness a murder when they visit a churchyard one night. An innocent man is arrested and the boys must testify in court. The story is dramatic, funny, and brilliantly composed. In addition, it is realistic; because that is what children are like. Though the book had been banned for it could be a bad influence on children, the ban had been later lifted for this kind of realism is what makes good literature, also for children.

Twain is realistic in his description of nature. He is accurate and precise while describing some ants on Jackson's Island, Yet another remarkable thing in his writing giving local color to the novel which appeals to the readers even today. Twain changed the norms of the

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characterization. Unlike the elite sort of characters used by the other writers, he introduced a revolutionary concept of incorporating unremarkable characters from the common walk of life, especially special emphasis was given to middle and lower class characters.

While writing about a contemporary Southern American village to his original readers, Twain instead of portraying elegantly on his subject matter by writing about a more well-known location or glamorous characters, he aimed towards realism in describing the daily lives of average people living on the Mississippi River. By this way he felt that the readers could recognize in the story. His preface explains that much of the book is based on his own experiences of growing up. When Twain tells the stories of ordinary villagers with beliefs and values representing mid-nineteenth-century Americans, he describes an exaggerated, strange village life. A more realistic view of a community would give importance to things such as, unresolved injustices, the inequality between rich and poor, or the life of a slave in St. Petersburg as Twain has depicted in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

There are elements of realism in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, for example Twain's descriptions of Huck's life as a homeless boy is looked down upon by his elders. The setting of the book is the world of boyhood which is realistically portrayed with the description of historical and geographical background wherein, Tom Sawyer a replica of Mark Twain is living in St. Petersburg, a small Missouri village on the Mississippi River. Tom Sawyer, the main protagonist, is a mischievous and thrill-seeking boy who despises anything that places restrictions on his boyhood freedom including school, church and chores. In the beginning of the novel, Tom is frightened to go to Sunday school due to the fact that he has little or no interest in learning about the bible. Due to that, Tom does not have any knowledge on religion. Despite that Tom is being showered with compliments and rewards for impressing Judge Thatcher, the most reputable person in town.

The children seemed to have an advanced system of economics in the neighborhood of the River Mississippi. Their system was brought to limelight when Tom convinced the boys that whitewashing a fence was such an entertaining amusement that he was hesitant to allow anyone else to take over the fun. Tom learnt a lesson in supply and demand, "that in order to make a man or boy covet a thing, it is only necessary to make the thing difficult to attain". Because Tom was so convincing, the boys were willing to pay to whitewash. The children did not have money; their currency consisted of valuable objects such as marbles, a piece of glass, tadpoles, firecrackers, a bitten apple and four pieces of orange peel, all of which Tom acquired in trade for a chance to whitewash. Their economics indeed is realistic.

In *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, Twain has dealt with the themes connected to his early life as a child and to realistic beliefs he developed as he grew up by observing the American society. The frail nature of the humans, both goodness and wickedness became the interesting topic for him and many writers too have been influenced by this theme, for these natures only bring about unhappiness and discord in the society. The structure of the story, setting, plot, characters and style, reveal the fact that 'everyman has a good nature "but as well, evil and imperfect nature"'. In the small village Mississippi, everybody knew everyone

and adults together to watch out for each other's children and to discipline them by forcing them to go to school and to memorize bible verses so that they lead a good life. Twain considered this attitude as hypocrisy, one of the evil natures of man. He does not like anyone to pretend to be someone else than actually be one.

Twain also exhibited the natural goodness of man when the villagers worked together to help search for Tom and Becky when they were lost in a cave. It is one of the examples for aspects of human nature. Tom fought for Becky's heart and risked his life for the treasure, and thus revealed his good nature. Furthermore, the characters of the adventures of Tom Sawyer all have their own natural goodness in a human, especially Aunt Polly since she decided to take care of his nephew Tom and to endure all the difficulties in dealing with his stubbornness because she loved him like her own child. Widow Douglas's voluntarism in rearing up Huck to become a decent individual is an example of yet another natural goodness of man.

However, he also pictured man's evil nature when he went to Jackson's island without informing his aunt. As a child, he showed his thoughtlessness and inconsideration to his aunt, that even though he knew his aunt was suffering for supposing he was killed, he didn't inform her of where he went and how he was. He exposed his selfishness, not thinking of how he affects other people. Becky Thatcher allowing the teacher to whip Tom for a sin she committed is a reflection of bad nature. The plot structure of the life Tom and the characters related to him display Mark Twain's realistic idea of humans' weakness in the midst of fear and materialism.

Growing up in a small town, working at different jobs, and meeting different kinds of people from various walks of life made Mark Twain discover the society's good, evil and imperfect natures and convinced him to write about them by touching each of the characters of this story with his realistic views about men. Tom went away from the society for a short time on different occasions, which enabled him to grow morally and socially. When he left the town and hid himself out on Jackson's Island with his pirates, his departure prepared him to return with a more mature outlook. His adventures change his character a lot. He embarked on an unintentionally dangerous outing with Becky Thatcher to the cave, and when he emerged out, it was clear that Tom had undergone a rebirth. At the beginning of the novel, Tom looked up to Huck as more mature, but by the end of the novel Tom's mental maturity was far better than Huck's. Otherwise he would not have insisted on Huck's stay with the Widow Douglas. He wanted Huck to become "Civilized".

Other than these aspects discussed above, every other small details like Aunt Polly discovering Tom stealing jam, Tom keeping himself out of the school on account of his loose tooth, pretending to be sick, going for a swim, having a love affair with Becky Thatcher, his sojourn to Jackson Island without Aunt Polly's knowledge to play the pirate's game, hunting for the treasure and various such pranks described picturesquely denote the realistic growing up of a boy. The incidents such as, Huck's effort to save Widow Douglas, both Tom and Huck tracking Injun Joe's guilt and Tom turning Huck to a good civilized person project them as normal and realistic characters. The contribution of the character Tom Sawyer in the novel creates a realistic picture mirroring the life in America at that period. It is not

only relevant for that age; it is for all ages.

### **Conclusion**

“Tell it like it is” was a slogan for artists during the period as they refer to Realism. This seemed to be the driving force of Mark Twain and in his effort; he has turned to be successful. The speciality of his fiction is his choice of characters. The characters are down to earth personalities reflecting all the aspects of human nature. This is especially evident in Huck Finn who tries to come to terms with his moral dilemmas, and in Tom Sawyer who possesses human qualities we can recognize. Descriptions of natural sights, smells and sounds of Missouri, especially in the novel, the adventures of Tom Sawyer display Twain’s true craftsmanship as a novelist. Twain’s works aren’t just written text, but noticeable articles of both American literary and cultural, history. Twain’s critical eye and ear of social observation and political injustices of an often prejudiced America, along with a clever tongue establishes him as an inimitable icon of American culture. The effective portrayal of his characters, situations and his use of appropriate language reflecting the image of realistic life projects him as a universally acknowledged writer for all ages.

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