

Mark Twain's Further use of Huck and Tom

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In 1885, Mark Twain published *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, his best and most successful novel. Twain was obviously convinced that the protagonists of his novel carried within themselves the potential for further literary adventures. In all, Twain attempted four sequels to his most famous novel. Two of these, *Tom Sawyer Abroad* and *Tom Sawyer, Detective*, were published, while "Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer Among the Indians" and "Tom Sawyer's Conspiracy" remained unfinished. None of these attempts, however, comes remotely close to the quality of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. This essay will consider the four sequels in turn and attempt to discover why they failed so greatly in comparison to the original novel.

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn indicates the possibility of Huck and Tom going West in a sentence five paragraphs before the end of the novel: "And then Tom he talked along and talked along, and says, le's all three slide out of here one of these nights and get an outfit, and go for howling adventures amongst the Injuns, over in the Territory, for a couple of weeks or two; and I says, all right, that suits me."¹ In July 1884, when *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* was still several months away from publication, Twain asked his agent to send him accounts by people who had been to the West because "I mean to take Huck Finn out there."² The result of Twain's efforts is a fragment of eight and a half chapters, entitled "Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer Among the Indians." The narrative starts right where the novel ended. After the events narrated in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* are over, Tom Sawyer suggests the three friends look for excitement among the Indians in the western territories where "life is just simply a circus" (96).³ Neither Huck nor Jim want to leave the easy life on the Phelps farm. Huck's argument is typical: "We hadn't ever had such comfortable times before, and we reckoned we better let it alone as long as Providence warn't noticing; it would get busted up soon enough, likely, without our putting in and helping" (93).

Jim's arguments are more specific and introduce the theme of the story: "Dey's [the Indians] a powerful ornery lot, anyway. . . . Ef deys ketches a body out, del'll take en skin him same as dey would a dog. *Dat's* what I knows 'bout 'em" (93). Huck and Jim are, however, not clever enough to withstand Tom's rhetoric, and so, more or less against their conviction, they accompany Tom into Indian country. On the first two days, "everything was simply pleasant. We never run across anybody, and hardly ever see a light" (98). The three seem to have completely escaped from society and civilization. On the Mississippi, Huck and Jim were also outside

¹ Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1899) 374.

² Walter Blair, ed., *Hannibal, Huck & Tom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969) 373n.

³ Mark Twain, "Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer Among the Indians," in 92-140. All references are to this edition.

of civilization—except when they had to establish contact with the riverbanks—but the trip was clearly one from one part of civilization to another. "Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer Among the Indians" appears to differ in this respect. Sneaking down the lightning rod and riding out "into the big moonlight and start[ing] west" (98) appears to be an effective departure from all civilization. However, they soon join the Mills family, pioneers moving west to establish civilization in Oregon.

When they meet the first Indians, the whole party comes to the conclusion that Tom's notions about the Indians are much more correct than those of Brace Johnson, Peggy Mills's absent fiancé. Johnson spent many years among Indians and "hated them like snakes, and always said he wouldn't trust one any how or any where" (103). Johnson's warnings turn out to be appropriate. Without apparent reason, the Indians raid the family's camp, kill the parents and sons, and kidnap the two daughters and Jim. Huck and Tom have to watch the massacre helplessly. Later, the basis for Tom's misunderstanding of the real situation becomes clear: "Cooper's novels" (109). "Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer Among the Indians" thus forms part of Twain's ongoing attack on Cooper's romanticism which culminates in the statement, "Cooper seldom saw anything real. He saw nearly all things as through a glass eye, darkly."⁴

After this experience the departure from civilization is no longer so precious. Huck realizes that in leaving behind society he has also given up something valuable: "There warn't a living thing stirring, anywhere. . . . The lonesomes place there ever was; enough to break a body's heart; just to listen to the awful stillness of it" (108). The importance of human company becomes evident when Huck and Tom meet a man who was alone on the prairie for several weeks: "He's as crazy as a loon, and . . . all used up" (125). The man is a mental and physical wreck, reduced to muttering "Lost, my God, lost." Huck and Tom would be similarly lost on the prairie had Brace Johnson not caught up with them. In appearance and action, Johnson is "pure dime-novel stereotype."⁵ Stone concludes that the book was planned to cash in on the trend for western literature at the time. Although this conclusion cannot serve as the only explanation considering the enthusiasm with which Twain began this project, it nevertheless underlines an important aspect of the text: the whole fragment is marred by Twain's heavy reliance on other people's writing.

With the appearance of Johnson, the nature of "Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer Among the Indians" changes drastically. Tom is reduced to a totally unimportant marginal figure, and Huck does little more than report the events, all of which have Brace Johnson at their center. The sequel thus moves away considerably from the successful model, and the question arises whether the text was still fulfilling the expectations with which Twain's readers were likely to receive it. Twain introduced further problems into the narrative when he has Johnson explain his personal religion to Huck and Tom, who conclude that this concept—derived from actual Indian religions—is coherent and sensible. The concept is also decidedly anti-Christian, and it may be one of the reasons why Twain chose not to

⁴ Mark Twain, "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses," in *The Unabridged Mark Twain*, ed. Laurence Teacher (Philadelphia: Running Press, 1976) 1244.

⁵ Albert E. Stone, *The Innocent Eye: Childhood in Mark Twain's Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961) 175.

complete the story. "Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer Among the Indians" includes much cultural comment, and Twain may have concluded that Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer were not the right characters to convey it.

Another element of the story also has to be considered if we are to look for its failure. Johnson's main motive for pursuing the Indians is to take revenge for Peggy Mills's death. Huck does not dare tell Johnson that she disobeyed his order to commit suicide should she fall into the hands of Indians. When he asks him why he hopes Peggy is dead, "he explained it to me, and then it was all clear" (113). Johnson explains to Huck, who later explains "it" to Tom, that the Indians rape their female captives. Toward the end of the fragment, the whole story hinges on this problem, particularly after they find some evidence that a rape has taken place. Such events could not very well be included in an American novel of the 1880s, and Mark Twain would have been the least likely person to attempt it. Initially, it seems, Twain set out to demonstrate to his readers the lesson that Tom Sawyer eventually learns, "book Injuns and real Injuns is different" (138), but he was in fact only replacing one stereotype with another. Not only was that not enough to provide the material for a whole novel, but the direction in which the story developed turned "Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer Among the Indians" into an unfinishable project.

After the failure of "Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer Among the Indians," Twain seems to have lost the conviction that he could use Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer to express his personal opinions. The three further sequels were written only for financial reasons. In 1892, Twain wrote *Tom Sawyer Abroad* in only four weeks to sell the serial rights of the story to a children's magazine.⁶ The plot of *Tom Sawyer Abroad*, significantly indebted to Jules Verne's *Five Weeks in a Balloon*, is extremely thin. After the events narrated in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Tom's glory gradually fades and he is dissatisfied. He suggests going on a crusade but cannot persuade Huck, who once again narrates the story. Huck is unwilling to give up his easy life, but he doesn't blame Tom for his ideas: "Now Tom he got all that notion out of Walter Scott's books which he was always reading" (18).⁷

Eventually, Tom, Huck, and Jim go to St. Louis to see a balloon that is supposed to sail to Europe. The three are accidentally on board when it takes off. After throwing the lunatic inventor overboard with surprisingly few problems for their conscience, the three decide to go to England by themselves and then to return home in unsurpassable glory as world travelers. By accident, the balloon takes them to Egypt where they leave Jim on the head of the Sphinx and Tom walks around Cairo "finding" buildings mentioned in the Bible. A few pages later, the story is over. Tom breaks his pipe on Mount Sinai and sends Jim home in the balloon to bring a new one. Jim returns a few days later with a message from Aunt Polly to come straight home. They do, and Huck just remarks, "So then we shoved for home, and not feeling very gay neither" (136).

⁶ O.M. Brack, "Mark Twain in Knee Pants: The Expurgation of *Tom Sawyer Abroad*," *Proof 2* (1972): 145.

⁷ Mark Twain, "Tom Sawyer Abroad," in *Tom Sawyer Abroad, Tom Sawyer Detective and Other Stories, Etc. Etc.* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1910) 7-136. Subsequent references are to this edition.

Although officially a sequel to *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *Tom Sawyer Abroad* can hardly be compared to the former work. It was intended strictly as a children's book but fails as such because of much philosophizing. These passages are, however, the only aspect of the book that makes it interesting to an adult audience since they allow some conclusions about Twain's stance. The best example of this element is a discussion about the phenomenon that time is not the same everywhere, which culminates in Jim's question, "is he [God] gwine to scriminate 'twixt 'em [His children]" (35). The only remarkable aspect of *Tom Sawyer Abroad* is the change in the protagonists. The story appears as a sequel not to the whole of *Huckleberry Finn* but only to its last eleven chapters. The roles in *Tom Sawyer Abroad* are the same as in the slave-stealing burlesque. Tom Sawyer is the mastermind inspired by romantic literature, Huck is little more than narrator and admirer of Tom Sawyer, and Jim is also very much the Jim of the last few chapters of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. He seems to have forgotten all about his family and comes along with Huck and Tom simply for fun. Moreover, Jim seems to have developed backward from the sensible and intelligent human being he had been throughout *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Twain turns him into nothing but a butt of jokes, so that Arthur Pettit's characterization of him as a "sideshow darcy"⁸ is no exaggeration.

The most significant changes take place in Twain's portrait of Tom Sawyer. In *Huckleberry Finn* Tom is primarily a romantic dreamer, interested in enjoyment first and glory second. But in *Tom Sawyer Abroad* he is very conscious of society and the way in which he can advance his fame in it. He appears to be thoroughly integrated into this society, and at times he is as obnoxiously arrogant as the adults. Tom is still the romantic egotist of the earlier novels, but his innocence has been replaced with arrogance. The reason seems to be his insight into the workings of the world.

The need to earn money and the hope of making it by using his well-known characters Huck, Tom and Jim led Twain to write a story marred by "essential featurelessness" and "lack [of] a central purpose."⁹ All that the three characters do is drift across the earth in a balloon and look down upon its problems without ever getting involved. Twain's perspective appears to have been the same. He, too, did not seem to care very much about the story, seemingly unaware that he was undermining his credibility as a serious artist. Yet, even before *Tom Sawyer Abroad* appeared, Twain began "Tom Sawyer, Detective," published in 1896, in which Huck Finn again narrates Tom Sawyer's exploits. On a riverboat Huck and Tom gain the confidence of a mysterious passenger named Jake Dunlap, a twin brother of Silas Phelps's neighbor and an escaped convict. Twain devotes two chapters to Jake Dunlap's story about a diamond theft which could have appeared in any mystery novel and may have been culled from one. After this interlude, the narrative returns to the two characters to whom Twain gave the names Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn but who can hardly be compared to the equally named characters of previous novels. Albert Stone called the characters of "Tom Sawyer, Detective,"

⁸ Arthur J. Pettit, *Mark Twain & the South* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1974) 161.

⁹ Claude M. Simpson, "Huck Finn after Huck Finn," *American Humor: Essays Presented to John C. Gerber* (Scottsdale, AZ: Arete Publications, 1977) 64.

"dull caricatures of themselves,"¹⁰ but even that may be too gentle a description for these completely bland and faceless figures.

A note with which Twain prefaces the story explains the basic problem of "Tom Sawyer, Detective": "Strange as the incidents in this story are, they are not inventions. . . . I take them from an old-time Swedish criminal trial, change the actors, and transfer the scenes to America. I have added some details, but only a couple of them are important ones" (137).¹¹ Twain apparently hoped to cash in on the fashion for crime stories that swept the USA in the 1890s but was unable to develop a mystery plot of his own. Thus he utilized Steen Blicher's novel *The Minister of Veilby* (1829).¹² At times it seems that Twain attempted a parody of the genre, but the plot is so complicated and tedious that the reader is barely able to follow it. The satiric intent, if there is any, is buried under unanswered questions. Twain missed the opportunity of saving the story by allowing Huck frequent narrative comments. But Huck is reduced almost exclusively to reporting Tom's achievements. Just as in *Tom Sawyer Abroad*, only Huck's idiosyncratic style saves the text from total failure. His description of the defense lawyer as "a mud-turtle of a back-settlement lawyer" (205) and of the attorney as the "lawyer for the prostitution" (205) are more or less the only comic touches in an otherwise extremely serious, sometimes even depressing story.

"Tom Sawyer, Detective" becomes critically interesting only through the development of Tom Sawyer, who has become an even less likeable character than in *Tom Sawyer Abroad*. His success at the Phelps trial has the same effect on him as the Muff Potter trial, but by now Tom has learned that he can achieve his goal best if he works up an "effect" (214), even if that means an unnecessary prolongation of the defendant's agony. Tom's hunger for fame has so corrupted his morals that he is almost frighteningly cynical and insensitive. His development from *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* to "Tom Sawyer, Detective" shows the deterioration of an innocent boy into an amoral adolescent.

In 1897, Twain began another story about Huck and Tom, entitled "Tom Sawyer's Conspiracy." He worked on the story sporadically until 1902, then gave it up. While in the previous stories Huck and Tom's adventures were set only shortly before the narration, here we have an adult Huck reminiscing about events from before the Civil War: "And it don't seem right and fair that Harriet Beacher Stow and all them other second-handers gets all the credit of starting that war and you never hear Tom Sawyer mentioned in the histories ransack them how you will, and yet he was the first one that thought of it" (167).¹³ The events narrated in "Tom Sawyer's Conspiracy" are very close in time to those of the earlier stories: "Well, we was back home and I was at the Widow Douglas's up on Cardiff Hill getting sivilized some more" (163). The story is a return to the childhood world of Huck and Tom much more strongly than any of the previous sequels. Huck and Jim, who now works for wages to buy his wife's and children's freedom, are content

¹⁰ Stone 190.

¹¹ Mark Twain, "Tom Sawyer, Detective" 137-228.

¹² J. Christian Bay, "Tom Sawyer, Detective: The Origin of the Plot," in *Essays Offered to Herbert Putnam*, eds. William W. Bishop and Andrew Keogh (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1929) 80-88.

¹³ Mark Twain, "Tom Sawyer's Conspiracy," in Blair 163-242.

with their relaxed lives, but Tom is bored. Following his usual romantic notions about an adventurous life, Tom proposes a civil war (to which Jim objects because war is never civil), a revolution (which Huck and Jim reject because they cannot think of a new government which would not be as much of a nuisance as the old one), and a conspiracy. Tom proposes an adventurous plan: he will dress up as a runaway slave, let Huck sell him to a slave trader, and then escape, blaming the escape on a fictitious gang of abolitionists. The plan seems promising but is in danger when "Jim's morals began to work again" (175). But Tom is able to trick Jim with a lie that Huck admires as "grandeur of wisdom" (176). Even in the environment of an antebellum Petersburg childhood, morals have little chance against amoral cleverness.

Unfortunately, things become very complicated, not only for Huck and Tom, but for Twain as well. While the boys try to work their elaborate and rather fantastic scheme, they find out that somebody else had exactly the same idea. At that point, the story reaches a state from which it can be saved only through "genius and penetration and marvelousness" (206). However, Twain applies none of these qualities, and the events in the story get totally out of hand when Twain has the slave trader murdered and Jim arrested as a suspect. Tom's remarkable response to the murder shows how differently Twain perceived him thirty years after *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*: "It's a kind of a pity, becuz there warn't any real harm in Bat Bradish, but as long as it had to be somebody I reckon it's as well it's him, and it does give this conspiracy a noble lift" (212). Huck, once again only the narrator, reveals remarkable cynicism when he expresses the idea that seems to underlie the whole story: "It's people's way; they're mostly puddnheads" (217).

To bring the story to an end, Twain resurrects the Duke and the King and has things develop at an incredible pace. Eventually, Tom identifies the King as the murderer of the slave trader, and the manuscript ends quite abruptly. Although Twain would have needed just another page or two to wrap up the plot, he never wrote them. We can only speculate about Twain's reasons. Macnaughton suggests that after the failures of *Tom Sawyer Abroad* and "Tom Sawyer, Detective" "it may have come to seem to Mark Twain almost a sacrilege . . . to consider compelling his boys to risk further public adventures."¹⁴ This is quite likely, but there are also other possibilities. The story is generally entertaining, but it suffers from an almost total lack of organization. The Duke and the King are clearly *dei ex machina*, but they seem to be the only possibility of bringing the story to a conclusion at all. Also, the existing fragment is no more than a first draft that would have required considerable reworking. It seems possible that in 1902 Twain was no longer sure that he could successfully recreate his boyhood in fiction.

Mark Twain failed four times trying to write a sequel to *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. The genesis of the sequels suggests that Twain himself never took them as seriously as his major novels. He wrote them primarily for financial reasons, often using other people's writing rather than his own imagination. But even if Twain had put as much effort into the sequels as into *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, it remains doubtful whether the results would have been of

¹⁴ William R. Macnaughton, *Mark Twain's Last Years as a Writer* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1979) 185.

equal quality, since the sequels share certain features which make them quite different from the original novel. In *Huckleberry Finn*, Huck and Jim were at the center of events, and Tom Sawyer played a significant role only in the last eleven chapters. But in the sequels, the pattern of those last chapters is repeated. As the titles indicate, Tom Sawyer is the focus of the events, but the harmless romantic adventurer of the novels has been transformed into an arrogant and frequently cruel person concerned primarily with advancing his own fame, regardless of the cost for others. Huck Finn, too, has changed. Twain has reduced him from a fully developed character to an idiosyncratic mode of narration, but his position as amoral arbiter of morality is lost through his lack of a critical distance to a society which he now seems able to tolerate.

The most drastic and lamentable change, however, can be found in Twain's portrayal of Jim. In the course of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Jim developed from a nondescript figure into a character of high integrity and humanity. Hardly anything of this maturity is left in the sequels; he is reduced to the role of amusing sidekick and victim of Tom's jokes. In "Tom Sawyer's Conspiracy" Jim's deterioration is complete: "At the end of his career Jim has become a banjo-plucking, cakewalk nigger. . . . It is almost as if Mark Twain deliberately took the half-man, half-buffoon he had created in *Huckleberry Finn*, spilt him down in the middle, and saved only the slapstick darky half."¹⁵ In *Tom Sawyer Abroad* Huck can still say, "He was only a nigger outside; inside he was as white as you be" (113) and mean it as a compliment, but in "Tom Sawyer's Conspiracy" not even that would be possible.

In the sequels Twain sacrificed art to commerce and produced texts that failed both artistically and commercially. The fact that two of the stories remained unpublished and the other two are hardly known today can in retrospect be considered a blessing in disguise since the texts did not do the damage to Twain's reputation they likely would have done had they gained wider circulation. At the same time, the flawed character of the sequels also reflects upon the quality of the original *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. The fact that the quality of the sequels does not match that of the original suggests that *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is significantly informed by an element of personal involvement and artistic genius.

¹⁵ Pettit 165.