
CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE FREQUENTED IN MARK TWAIN'S CHOSEN WORKS

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Abstract

Mark Twain's reputation is based firmly on the unparalleled achievement of his books on the childhood days. The Adventures of Tom Sawyer and The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn his renowned works are created in the world of childhood and adolescence. The character of Tom Sawyer takes the reader on a light hearted, sentimental trip to a simpler times whereas it through Huck Finn that Mark Twain draws on the complexity of society in the eyes of the adolescent boy. Mark Twain's portrayal of the two lovable characters in juxtaposition elucidating the dilemma of adolescence is subtly mirrored reflecting the constraints infused by the social order in our lives. This article deliberates upon the element of childhood and adolescence in two very popular works by the American author, Mark Twain.

Keywords: *Tom Sawyer, Huckleberry Finn, childhood, adolescence, adventures.*

The age of adolescence as portrayed by media today indulges in youngsters with alcohol related accidents, rash driving, suicides and more critical issues in American like their frequent school shootings. All these are reflected regularly in the electronic media newspaper headlines and movie plots. In the psychology related literature, too, adolescence is normally depicted as a destructive stage of life wherein storm and stress needs to be endured and survived (Arnett, 1999). The negative terms, such as "rude," "wild," and "irresponsible," first came to mind when general public were asked what they thought about American teenagers (Public Agenda, 1999). The development of adolescent begins in a realistic sense of seeking identity which also involves experimenting with different ways of appearing, sounding, and behaving.

In literature accessible on developing adolescents, there is an in-depth reference to the physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and behavioural development of the child during that period. Their physical changes are obvious but it is how adolescents think, reason, and understand that is more dramatic in nature. This age is explicitly drawn by many accomplished literary authors to compose universal characters and themes. Dickens presented a view through the child's eyes, creating a profound and palpable experience of childhood for his readers. Charlotte Brontë (1847) explored the

harassment, isolation, and seclusion of children within a intimidating setting in her *Jane Eyre*. Henry James in his *What Maisie Knew* (1897) and *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) explored the innocence of childhood and of how this innocence can be corrupted when children are exposed early to sexuality and the early contact with death. Indulging in his imagination that is influenced by autobiographical inputs Mark Twain gave the world his much popular novels *Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. These works are constructed in the world of childhood and adolescence.

Element of Childhood

J.-J. Rousseau saw the child as a paradigm of innocence, unlike the puritans, he applied the thought that children at birth are innately good, not evil, and that their natural tendencies should be protected against the corrupting impacts of society. He believed in an inherent goodness of children. Rousseau's writings profoundly influence Romanticism in English literature.

Childhood has been one of the central themes of English literature. With the novel *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, Twain walked into the zone of childhood where he made the most impactful contributions. His depiction kept alive the essence of boyhood and struck a chord within the phase of the forgotten days of childhood aligned with their deepest feelings and pulsations among his readers. His charm induced in revisiting the days of child's innocence blended in childhood through adolescence found universal patronage.

The image of *Huckleberry Finn* from the famous novel by Mark Twain "*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*" was a significant milestone in the creation of the image of the child in the world of fiction. Huckleberry's naivety, both critical and ironic can be viewed as a natural and unrefined teenager, which justifies the important role of Mark Twain in world fiction of child image.

Mark Twain's novels and works for which he is most celebrated for are: *The Gilded Age*, 1873; *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, 1876; *The Prince and the Pauper*, 1882; *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, 1884; *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, 1889; *The American Claimant*, 1892; *Tom Sawyer Abroad*, 1894; *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson*, 1894; and *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc*, 1896. He also wrote some famous travel books and memoirs. His travel books: *The Innocents. Abroad*, 1869; *Roughing It*, 1872; *A Tramp Abroad*, 1880; and *Following the Equator*, 1897, are based on his many foreign excursions. His personal recollections are blended with biography and can be found in *Roughing It*, 1872; *Life on the Mississippi*, 1883; and *Autobiography*, 1924.

First published in 1876, Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, is a youngster's adventure story that moves through a young boy's transition into a young man rather adolescence. The main subject of this novel is the moral, emotional, and intellectual

development of the main character, Tom Sawyer. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* is one of the America's favourite tales that continues to charm worldwide readers. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* takes the reader on a light hearted, sentimental trip to a simpler time, painted through the eyes of a distinctive boy named Tom Sawyer. It is a summer time world of hooky and adventure, pranks and punishment, sprinkling villains and soft young love. Each adolescent in the novel approaches life within his or her own unique way. In fact, in his preface to the first edition, Mark Twain wrote:

Although my book is intended mainly for the entertainment of boys and girls, other part of my plan has been to pleasantly remind adults of what they once were themselves and what they felt and thought. (T. Mark).

Element of Adolescence

Twain's works are an artistic blend of reality and fantasy. It holds appeal to the young adolescents as the exciting adventures of a typical boy during the mid-nineteenth century, adventures that are still captivating and delightful because they appeal to the basic instincts of nearly all young people of any time or any culture. Adolescents are by and large a stage of creative, energetic, and challenging phase for children. Secondly, the novel appeals to the grown-up readers who look back on his or her own childhood with fond memories. Twain depicts a world of common folk of the era that is based on day to day life experience

The nature of adolescents' association with peer groups changes over the course of adolescence. The stories of Huck and Tom Sawyer in Mark Twain's works depicts the life of the youngsters. Mark Twain takes the reader with him in order to visualize the mind-set of his characters. His stories present the deeper layers of human psyche a nightmarish world of guilt, violence and appalling dismays as well. Tom engages in imitative games for the sake of entertainment. His imaginative play is often based on and limited to literary sources such as Robin Hood. Huck is set as an antithesis to Tom, who has received a more stable upbringing and has been raised by Aunt Polly in a more structured home. Tom who has received a formal education, flaunts his exposure to literature repeatedly. The element of culture and education is illustrated quite deftly through the natural learning of Huck versus Tom's classified education. Twain has highlighted the child's imagination within the lens of pragmatism. The realism element is presented in the characters of Tom Sawyer and Huck to bring in the contrast of the copied imagination of normal child's play with the more creative, functional imagination upon which the troubled child depends on. In doing so, Mark Twain created a new theme to utilize more expansive concerns of the childhood related literature.

The protagonist in the *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is at slightly different plane of defining adolescence. The character transforming from innocence to maturity is more of experience from innocent lure to the lure of the outside world. Contrasting his friend

Tom Sawyer, who reads chivalric adventure stories and loves to play games of make believe, Huck is a realist. Just like other teenage boys around the world here is a protagonist Huck wanted freedom and unhampered life. Huck escaped from the family attracted by the free-standing world of wilderness which he aspired greatly His sense of love and security were not meet by the surrounded family. Huck is frequently forced to survive on his own wits. He learns to draw conclusions about important matters, even if they contradict society's norms. With Huck Finn, Twain created not just a literary character, but also an "American epic hero". The focus in the novel *Huckleberry Finn* projects on Huck's struggles with Tom's literary-based play. Huck resists playing a game with Tom based on Don Quixote, identifying the fake guns and swords as "only lath and broomsticks and comparing Tom's play with dishonest. Tom frequently calls Huck "ignorant" for not applying the literary rules to his games and relating to cause and sense. The story presents in the incident of freeing Jim, Tom's imagination as simply cruel, or counterproductive to the undertaking at hand. Huck's imagination on the contrary is original, creative, and more functional than Tom's. Huck displays mastery in role-playing in various villages along the river, skilfully assessing the people he encounters and creating a suitable character. Through self-education, Huck gets a more and better understanding of the society and human beings. The adventure experience shows the growth and maturity of Huck.

Conclusion

Through his characterization, best in anecdotal pieces of narration Mark Twain created laughable figures who breathed the breath of life. He could make them Huck, Tom, Jim, and Joe come to life quiet naturally. Twain, himself, called Tom Sawyer a "hymn" to boyhood and almost all his readers experience the friendliness and naturalness of growing up in a Missouri river town in the mid-nineteenth century.

Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn, in their adventures decipher the adolescent phase, defining what freedom is and their sojourn to the island rejects conformity to the societal norms and culture. However, Mark Twain underlines the human nature in his characterization of his boys getting bored and yearning to return to the mainland. The kernel of universal childhood is written in a universal tongue. Tom and Huck are not limited to a specific time and place.

A recurring element in which a protagonist's adult identity is framed by events and points towards alienation conditioned by social obligations and expectations The characters of Tom and Huck project the dilemma that they dream about evolution but are afraid of growth, they yearn to choose independence but worry about the consequences. It is in *Twain's Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* that this element reaches a critical level. Twain's *Tom Sawyer*, transformed the course of adolescent literature portraying deeply the phase of boyhood that regaled American literary world both for the boyhood portrayal and for Twain's depiction of the pre-Civil War South.

The sociocultural implications that are the basis of many a debate among scholars finds its projection through the characterization of Tom and Huck seeking to ground their identity and expectations. Mark Twain's portrayal of the two lovable characters in juxtaposition dived into the dilemma of adolescence subtly mirroring the constraints infused by society. *Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn* is viewed by many of us as characters revealing about the disconnection we continue to relate with our children's inner lives and our ways of raising and teaching them. Ernest Hemingway spoke of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* as the beginning of American fiction and said then, that nothing superior has been written since. Samuel Clemens aka Mark Twain never did renounce his boyhood, he carried it with him in life and beyond.

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