

The Two Worlds of Tom Sawyer

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Walter Blair maintains that Tom Sawyer grows to maturity as we follow him. But a close examination shows that the process of his maturation is not so clearly depicted as he suggests. Throughout the story, Tom appears as a mixture of child's innocence and adult's wisdom and the incongruous elements in him allow the author to present a boy who indulges in childish plays and, at the same time, cleverly tricks adults.

The relationship between Tom and his community is similar to that between the actor and the audience. He acts aggressively on the stage playing planks and often deceiving his audience, but they tolerate him and even enjoy his egoistic acts. It is not only because they experience pleasure and excitement in his deceptive play, but also because they are willing to cooperate with him in creating the illusion that their community has hope, unity and a bright future. The illusion thus created by the whole village's hypocrisy constitutes an affirmation of their values.

There are two clearly separated worlds in the story. The first world is the idyllic world of Tom and his villagers and another is the dark world of Injun Joe. The people maintain the social order of their world by excluding him from the light sphere into the dark realm of violence and death. His bitter hatred toward the community shows how discriminatively he has been treated.

Tom bears a certain resemblance to Injun Joe in that he, as a child, also stays out of the social order. Because of this similarity Tom draws to Injun Joe and makes him more visible to the eyes of the villagers. But they evade facing the problems Injun Joe has posed and shut him up in the cave to death. According to William Scheick, the half-blood Indian, who was a very immediate reality as a unique manifestation of frontier, belonged to the future of America, whereas the full-blood Indian could be (in the White American mind) safely confined to the past. If so, the society of St. Petersburg has postponed solving the vital problems of America's present

and future.