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GIVEN SOME of Mark Twain’s comments about his novel The Adventures of Tom Sawyer (1876), it is somewhat surprising that the structure of the work has been the focus of many substantive articles. “Since there is no plot to the thing,” Twain wrote William Dean Howells, “it is likely to follow its own drift, & so is as likely to drift into manhood as anywhere—I won’t interpose” (MTHL 1: 87–88). Of course, Twain made other comments belying this disingenuous assertion, and beyond his claims of artlessness stands the novel itself; scholarly commentary, too. Considering the tendency to neglect or even deny Twain’s literary competence, one is inclined to think that the number of analyses addressing the novel’s structure says something about the power of a successful work to command respect. John Seelye finds himself in the uncomfortable position of arguing both that the work “testifies to the unconscious artistry that was [Twain’s] greatest gift” and that the novel is “one of the most carefully controlled (and contrived) of his fictions . . . nearly neoclassical in rigidity” (419, 413). Even Forrest Robinson, who generally portrays Twain as

{ CHAPTER 3 }

MARK TWAIN’S HYMNS IN PROSE:

Doxology and Burlesque in The Adventures of Tom Sawyer and Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

It is a slander to suppose that God can enjoy any congregational singing.
—MARK TWAIN (MTNJ 2: 338)

Parody is a road that leads to something else.
—BORIS EICHENBAUM (“O. Henry and the Theory of the Short Story” 268)
an incompetent hack, finds it possible to “attempt to adumbrate and
defend a plot structure for the novel” (Bad Faith 19). Traditionally—and
correctly—the novel is also viewed as a burlesque of the Sunday-school
book, much in the way the previous chapter explores the influences of
that form on Roughing It. Walter Blair suggests that “Tom Sawyer then
is a humorous—though not burlesque—version of ‘The Story of a Bad
Boy Who Did Not Come to Grief’” (MTHF 66).

A comment Twain made after the book’s publication deserves closer
analysis than his earlier claim about the work’s lack of plot. In 1887,
when approached by a producer hoping to dramatize the book, Twain
deprecated with this telling statement: “Tom Sawyer is simply a hymn, put
into prose form to give it a worldly air” (Mark Twain’s Letters, Paine edi-
tion II: 477). Such language might, of course, simply be the convention-
al praise of youth, but the identification of the work as a “hymn” res-
ontes with a number of the book’s structural elements. Twain’s
comments on The Adventures of Tom Sawyer underscore a compelling peculiarity of the novel and its companion Adventures of Huckleberry
Finn (1885). Notable for their burlesque depiction of religion as the last
refuge of hypocrites, both works contain a single instance of pure, unde-
filed worship involving the singing of a particular hymn, the Doxology.
In Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, this unique point in the narrative
occurs during the Peter Wilks funeral, a scene “all full of tears and flap-
doodle,” as Huck tells us (213). Yet, within this hypocritical church ser-
vice, the Doxology is sung spontaneously with remarkable, even singu-
lar, effect in the novel:

And the minute the words was out of his mouth somebody over in the
crowd struck up the doxolojer, and everybody joined in with all their
might, and it just warmed you up and made you feel as good as church
letting out. Music is a good thing; and after all that soul-butter and hog-
wash, I never see it freshen things up so, and sound so honest and bully.
(213)

The ironies of the passage are many, for the “doxolojer” restores Huck’s
soul, one might say, to a post-Sabbath condition; he feels as “good as
church letting out” when singing the song, and in a sense church has
let out. Singing the Old Hundred forces a cessation of the “soul-butter
and hogwash” that make church services in the novel deceitful and
hypocritical. Singing the hymn on the spur of the moment restores the
spontaneity of worship, for it is an honest and uncalculated worship that—for a moment—supplants the plotting hypocrisies of the king and duke.

The genetic link between *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and its prequel is most profound in the singing of the Doxology. In *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, another congregation spontaneously sings the Doxology at a funeral, and if music can “freshen things up” in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, here the music suggests rebirth. In *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, the Doxology is truly a hymn of rejoicing after Tom Sawyer, Joe Harper, and Huck Finn materialize at their own funeral service. In Tom’s case, the hymn plays an even more important role, for in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, the chapter in which the hymn is sung is central to the thematic concerns of the novel. Clark Griffith views the novel as having a five-tiered structure and notes that “of Tom’s five principal feats in Sawyer, two (winning a Bible, attending his own funeral) take place inside the village church, while a third (prophesying for Aunt Polly) stresses religious terminology and raises Biblical echoes, and the two others (rescue from the cave, finding buried treasure) either begin as churchly activities or result in celebrations that lead back to the church” (131). The church is indeed central to the novel’s structure, but it is also a looming presence that any healthy boy wishes to avoid—until the funeral. Only at that point is Tom truly anxious to go to church. Fittingly, the preacher takes his funeral text from John 11:25, “I am the resurrection and the life.” Like the funeral in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, in which the primary mourners impersonate a relationship to the deceased, the funeral in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* is fundamentally dishonest, a swindle, for no one has even died. Tom is culpable, but more significant than the boy’s dishonesty is the hypocritical behavior of the congregation who can remember only the boys’ “sweet, generous natures” and utterly forget their “rank rascalities, well deserving of the cowhide” (140–41). Forrest Robinson suggests that the singing of the Doxology at this moment is a “happy brand of hypocrisy . . . in which the suspension of disbelief is proportional to the perceived social dividends of knowing gullibility” (*Bad Faith* 41). Harold Aspiz, too, sees Twain as “taunting” his readers and coming close to “sacrilege” (145). Is the singing of the hymn just a wink at the hypocrisy of the characters and a taunt to readers, or is something more transcendent occurring?

The boys’ return to the church shocks the community, especially the preacher, who first catches sight of them:

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There was a rustle in the gallery, which nobody noticed; a moment later the church door creaked; the minister raised his streaming eyes above his handkerchief, and stood transfixed! First one and then another pair of eyes followed the minister’s, and then almost with one impulse the congregation rose and stared while the three dead boys came marching up the aisle, Tom in the lead, Joe next, and Huck, a ruin of drooping rags, sneaking sheepishly in the rear! (141)

As the shock deepens, the preacher exhorts the congregation, “Praise God from whom all blessings flow—SING!—and put your hearts in it!” (141). A “triumphant burst . . . shook the rafters” as the congregation, perhaps for the only time, sings the old hymn with gusto and honesty (141). Albert Stone observes that while the passage “begins as a prank on sentimental townspeople” it ends by resurrecting not boys who were never dead at all, but a “sense of community” (82).

The singing of the Doxology is part of the parodic funeral in the novel, an example of carnival grotesque that, in Bakhtin’s words, “permit[s] the combination of a variety of different elements and their rapprochement” (RW 34). The parodic funerals in both works do celebrate deaths, not of Tom or even the really dead Peter Wilks, but of the hypocritical worship services. The singing at the parodic funerals represents a temporary cessation of hostility between the artificial world of adults and the natural world of children, allowing temporary harmony between civilization and nature. In *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* in particular, the text actually suggests such a union immediately before the funeral: “When the Sunday-school hour was finished, the next morning, the bell began to toll, instead of ringing in the usual way. It was a very still Sabbath, and the mournful sound seemed in keeping with the musing hush that lay upon nature” (140). This alliance between the world of people and the natural world is further developed by the funeral text from John: “And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die” (11:26). In characters like Tom Sawyer, Twain separates the idea of “living in me” from the concept of “believing in me.” Twain’s allusion to John is an important one, for it occurs within passages discussing baptism, resurrection, and also “Thomas Didymus,” or “Thomas the Twin,” which suggests perhaps Tom’s duplicity in the scene (11:16). In any event, children like Tom and his playmates contrast to the world of adults, where *profession* of belief is paramount, in that they unreflectively, spontaneously *live*. The words of the hymn are simple and powerful.
Praise God from Whom all blessings flow,
Praise Him all creatures here below,
Praise Him above ye heavenly host,
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Singing the Doxology, whose ancient words remind us of the difference between God and humans, the “creatures here below,” endorses the spontaneous world of “creatures” over the complex world of adults. Twain interweaves the plot, the Doxology, and the text from John to imagine a parodic funeral service for dead forms of worship that dominate religious life in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. Implicitly, the hymn recognizes that people are “creatures here below” and should have forms of worship that recognize that fact.

Why these singular moments in the two novels should both involve this old hymn in strikingly similar ways might be due to some biographical explanation. Twain did enjoy singing hymns, even assisting with the group singing on the *Quaker City* excursion. For Twain, hymns were synonymous with joy, and he wrote Livy in 1873, during the years that he composed *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, that “I feel as gay as a hymn” (MTL 5: 358). The Doxology is specifically important, however, not just generically, for it is an important part of the order of service in the Presbyterian and other churches. It is summative, providing a précis of Christian doctrine and obligation. It is a creed. The Doxology expresses theology simply and clearly. Compared to abstruse points of Calvinist doctrine like predestination, parodied in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* as “preforeordestination,” the Doxology is unsullied by doctrinal dispute (147). In terms of content, the hymn very plainly asserts the Trinitarian view of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit, outlining in almost archetypal terms the obligation that the creatures down here have to the God up there.

In *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, the Doxology contributes to the sabbatical structure of the work, for the book insistently focuses on the days of the week in such a way as to highlight the religious calendar—Sunday is always in the offing, always the inevitable threat to a boy’s natural freedom. With very few exceptions, the reader always knows where the action is relative to the Sabbath, and many chapters gain their thematic significance from their position relative to the Sabbath. While *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* is often viewed as having no serious thematic concerns, in fact the entire structure of the book looks toward a redefinition of worship, moving toward the Doxological moment visible in
the funeral scene. Centering on the weekly calendar with the first day of the week as Sunday, the novel’s structure insistently contrasts the natural, spontaneous worship of children with the formalized, hypocritical worship of adults. As Tom Towers suggests, “In nature the children intuit a spiritually vital world which seems to oppose that of adult society at every point” (“Never” 512). Joseph Coulombe notes the use of nature in the book, but seriously understates its structural importance by arguing that Twain “sought to capitalize on current trends, and he made occasional use of romantic notions of nature as a moral sanctuary” (123). These “notions” are not simple stylistics, but provide the work’s “dominant,” a term Jakobson defines as “the focusing component of a work of art: it rules, determines, and transforms the remaining components” (“Dominant” 41). The contrast between natural worship and formal religion is the central and pervasive determinant of the novel’s ethical force. One should, then, take seriously Twain’s description of The Adventures of Tom Sawyer as “a hymn, put into prose form,” for like hymns, the book anticipates a communal outpouring of worship. While Twain often burlesques congregational singing, moments such as the singing of the Doxology demonstrate an acceptance of Calvin’s defense of such singing: “In this way the God whom we serve in one spirit and one faith, we glorify together as it were with one voice and one mouth” (II:181). In select, central moments, Twain’s texts support such ideas. Twain’s burlesque of the Doxology in the 1863 piece “A Sunday in Carson,” in which he heard “the Rev. Mr. White give out a long-metre doxology, which the choir tried to sing to a short-metre tune,” contains a description that seems pure fun (222). Yet Twain, writing in the tradition of parodia sacra, makes the point that “this rendered the general intent and meaning of the doxology considerably mixed, as far as the congregation were concerned, but inasmuch as it was not addressed to them, anyhow, I thought it made no particular difference” (222). In this burlesque, one can see that the reason a hymn like the Doxology can unify is that the focus is on praise of God, not on self-aggrandizement and jockeying for social position that one sees so much of in The Adventures of Tom Sawyer or the attempts to bilk believers out of their money in Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. While Twain observes that the “meaning of the doxology” was disturbed, in reality the fact that the Doxology was addressed to God is the meaning.

One could argue that Twain does envision a structure to The Adventures of Tom Sawyer much like the structure of the hymn itself, for initially, at least, Twain had sketched out a four-part plot for the novel:

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I, Boyhood & youth; 2 y & early Manh; 3 the Battle of Life in many lands; 
4 (age 37 to 40,) return to meet grown babies & toothless old drivellers 
who were the grandees of his boyhood. The Adored Unknown a [illegible 
cancellation] faded old maid & full of rasping, puritanical vinegar piety. 
(Gerber, Introduction, 8–9)

Although Twain discarded this particular plan, many scholars have 
commented on the quaternary structure of the narrative. Most famous-
ly, Walter Blair has argued that Twain founds his structure on four 
“units of narrative” (Tom and Becky, Tom and Muff Potter, Tom on the 
island, and Tom and Injun Joe), each of which begins with childish 
behavior and ends with a “mature sort of action . . . directly opposed to 
the initial action” (“Structure” 84). Thus, by book’s end, Tom is more 
adult than child having, in Blair’s memorable estimation, “gone over to 
the side of the enemy” (88). Albert Stone notes a similar structure, but 
with satirical force: “each escapade is rounded out with a mock moral” 
(61). Although he identifies different elements, John C. Gerber sees as 
well an “interweaving of four oppositions” in the book (“Adventures” 
14). The four-line structure of the Doxology and the presence of the 
fourth commandment, “Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy,” 
are central to The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, but one need not look for 
stanzaic structure and repeated chorus in the novel. If there is a chorus 
and response in the narrative, it is an embedded dialogic structure that 
constantly compares Sunday with the other days of the week; the struc-
ture embodies a search for a resurrected definition of hymn and worship. 
The boys’ attitude at the end of church, at least when school is not in 
session, is to exult that they face a week of freedom. The Sabbath is the 
primary temporal determinant of the culture depicted in the novel. This 
fact is ironic, because the Sabbath is not the primary spiritual determi-
nant of the culture.

The insistent contrast between Sunday and other days provides the 
basic structure of the novel and, along with the burlesque of the Sun-
day-school books, one can see how much The Adventures of Tom Sawyer 
owes to discussions of what true worship is. Twain himself states in his 
preface that the character Tom Sawyer, and presumably his novel, “be-
longs to the composite order of architecture.” Such a structure is no 
accident, but has its roots in the earliest manuscript of The Adventures 
of Tom Sawyer, the “Boys Manuscript,” begun around 1870. Byers 
oberves that “in setting up the ‘Boy’s Manuscript’ as a diary with the 
day of the week preceding each entry, Twain foreshadowed the form of
Tom Sawyer” (81). John C. Gerber calls the manuscript “almost a dress rehearsal” for the novel he eventually did write (Introduction 7). In Mark Twain’s Burlesque Patterns, Franklin Rogers contends that

He has used the plot of ‘The Boy’s Manuscript’ for his ‘running narrative-plank’ and inserted episodes and subplots, a number of which are burlesques or near-burlesques, to make his novel. Structurally the result is quite like Roughing It in that the inserted material is neatly fitted into place and connected to the frame plot. (109)

The roots are perhaps even deeper, for in the “Boy’s Manuscript,” Twain adheres to the essentially chronological diary form he burlesqued in chapter 59 of The Innocents Abroad (1869), in which he compares a notebook he kept while at sea with an earlier notebook he kept as a boy. In both instances, the records were dismal failures and Twain gets some humor out of the absurdity of recording mundane details inherently unworthy of recording. In the boy’s diary, he records the following:

Monday—Got up, washed, went to bed.
Tuesday—Got up, washed, went to bed.
Wednesday—Got up, washed, went to bed.
Thursday—Got up, washed, went to bed.
Friday—Got up, washed, went to bed.
Next Friday—Got up, washed, went to bed.
Friday fortnight—Got up, washed, went to bed.
Following month—Got up, washed, went to bed. (508)

Once Twain has the weekly order established, he uses the last three entries to indicate both having little to say and forgetting to record even such minimal entries. One difference between his adult journal and the boy’s diary is worth mentioning, and that is the insistent imposition of Sunday into the adult calendar. Indeed, while Sunday is entirely absent from the boy’s diary, it dominates the journal Twain suggests he kept aboard ship, providing in fact the first entry:

Sunday—Services as usual, at four bells. Services at night, also. No cards. (507)

Both journals are of particular importance to the structure of The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, begun just a few years after the publication of
The Innocents Abroad. Both chart the essentially boyish character of the journal keeper for whom “[s]tartling events appeared to be too rare” (509). Dominoes and the Lord’s day dominate the adult shipboard journal, which records an essentially dreary existence. One sees in The Innocents Abroad the same craving for excitement that marks Tom’s character in the later work, but one sees as well the emphasis on Sunday as an
especial chronological marker in the week. In *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, Twain adapts the diary form fruitfully for the larger thematic point. Tom attempts a diary of the sort Twain burlesqued in *The Innocents Abroad*: “He attempted a diary—but nothing happened during three days, and so he abandoned it” (165). Twain did not abandon the structure, however, for the insistent progression from one day to the next, visible in the “Boy’s Manuscript” as “Tuesday—Wednesday—Friday—Saturday—Tuesday—Tuesday Week—Tuesday Fortnight—Saturday” is essentially the same type of structure Twain employs in his novel. One signal difference is striking. Twain adds Sunday to the calendar, a day that plays the same role in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* as it does in the burlesque calendar of *The Innocents Abroad*.

One can see the debt, then, that Twain owed to these early forms, but the divergences are perhaps more significant. Twain rejects first-person narration and exploits the temporal structure to much greater ends. The structure in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* moves beyond the prosaic description of a boy’s life to a structure that has embedded within it the significant thematic concern of contrasting natural and artificial forms of worship that are attached to the weekly calendar. Looking at the chart (Figure 3.1) for *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, one can see the movement from the regimented life of chapters 1–21 through the change in the experience of time that accompanies summer vacation. The shift from one understanding of time to another is accomplished by changes in how chapters are introduced.

The chart reveals some intriguing structural aspects of the book. One point made immediately obvious is the progression from day to day that Twain adheres to very closely throughout the work. The days marked in black correspond to chapters where Twain precisely indicates what day or days are included. The gray marks indicate chapters that do occupy specific days, but in which Twain does not say it is a “Tuesday” or “Friday,” for example. One notes, too, in the novelistic structure that chapter 21, “Examination Day,” marks a decisive break between two different conceptions of time in the work. Moving from chapter 1 through chapter 21, Twain progresses day by day from Friday—Saturday—Sunday—Monday—Tuesday by chapter 11. Chapters 12–15 are not linked to named days, but are specific, and when Twain picks up the temporal markers in chapter 16, it is as if only one day has gone by. Chapters 12, 13, 14, and 15 thus function as exemplary days, specific but unnamed. Chapter 12 features the “Pain-Killer” episode. Chapter 13 tells of “Tom Sawyer, the Black Avenger of the Spanish Main” as he retreats to Jack-
son’s Island (115). Chapter 14 details Tom’s adventures on the island. Chapter 15 has Tom swimming to town to overhear Aunt Polly and Joe Harper’s mother commiserating. Twain begins specifying the days again in chapter 16, and chapter 17 is Sunday, the funeral sermon where the Doxology is sung.

Strikingly, the days Twain does not specify correspond to the days the boys spend on the island after escaping from civilization. It is as if time has ceased to have meaning, for the meaning of time is imposed by civilization. While on the island, the boys hear the sound of a cannon attempting to make their presumably drowned bodies float to the surface. The boys become gradually aware of the sound, “just as one sometimes is of the ticking of a clock which he takes no distinct note of” (123). One should note the contrast of time in these chapters, for it parallels the change in time after examination day and the onset of summer. With the exception of the island chapters, the first twenty-one chapters of the novel are quite specific about time.

After the boys return to St. Petersburg, time resumes its normal course. The chapters between their return in chapter 17, the funeral Sunday, and chapter 21, Examination Day, occur on Monday after their return. With Examination Day in chapter 21, the school year ends and summer begins. With the arrival of summer, however, comes a fundamental shift. Chapters 22, 23, and 24 cover many days and many weeks, creating the impression of a much longer narrative time than they actually account for. Twain employs markers like “for three days,” “[d]uring two long weeks,” and “[t]he next day and the day after” to show the fundamentally different conception of time when school—and to a surprising degree church—is out of session (165, 169). “The slow days drifted on,” Twain concludes chapter 24, “and each left behind it a slightly lightened weight of apprehension” (174).

Even after these three chapters, one notes the acceleration of the plot, contrary to the idea that these are “slow days.” Such acceleration is visible on the chart’s quick saltatory black lines that contrast with the drawn-out treatments early in the book. Before Examination Day, for example, Twain slows the pace, spending five chapters (6–10) discussing one single Monday. A single Sunday in chapters 4 and 5 is so drawn out, (delightfully so) that it threatens to become the “Sabbath that has no end” Satan derides in “Letters from the Earth” (1909) as the eternal counterpart to the earthly Sabbath people “quickly weary of” (410). After Examination Day, Twain reverses the procedure, designing several chapters that cover multiple days instead of multiple chapters covering
single days. The acceleration is most notable in chapter 28, which covers four entire days.

One would rightly anticipate that during these summer months, the onerous activities of Sunday would continue even though the onerous activities of school had ceased. In surprising ways, Twain creates the contrast between the two sections of the book by reducing Sabbatical activities after chapter 21. While chapter 21 is specified only as Examination Day, it resembles earlier church services, even featuring “a sermon so destructive of all hope to non-Presbyterians that it took the first prize” (162). After this the Sundays simply cease in all but name. “There was no Sabbath school during day-school vacation,” Twain’s narrator informs us (205). Even that central symbolic chore is removed, as if to protect the purity of the summer as a counterpoint to the rest of the year. The chart indicates, too, that Twain plays tricks on the reader to remove Sabbath from the weekly structure after chapter 21. In chapter 26, Tom goes to sleep on a Saturday night, only to wake up the very next day in chapter 27—on a Monday! This is truly a boy’s summer dream!

The resumption of temporal markers in the latter half of the book coincides with Injun Joe’s return to the plot in chapter 26. Injun Joe kills Dr. Robinson in chapter 9, a chapter in which Tom hears “the ghastly ticking of a death-watch” and begins to believe that “time had ceased and eternity begun” (92). With the resumption of the temporal markers indicating specific days, one sees a similar quickening of the plot. As Joe’s plot line increases in importance, time is both demarcated and confused. While in the cave, for example, Tom and Becky lose track of time, thinking “it must be Wednesday or Thursday or even Friday or Saturday” (216). Injun Joe’s “half-breed” identity places him between two definitions of time, and the plot lines in which he appears exist between measured and unmeasured time.

To recap, then, the book begins in a regimented way during the school year, where the tyranny of the weekly calendar is most felt. The regimentation ceases precisely with Examination Day. Even Sabbath school stops. In the summer months, time wallows around and becomes almost atemporal. Twain then resumes temporal markers with the assertion of justice for Injun Joe and the confused identification of time in the cave. These temporal markers function, in Eichenbaum’s expression, as an “endeavor to predicate a unity of device over a diversity of material,” a difficulty Twain addressed with Roughing It as well (“Formal Method” 10).

To comprehend this structure, one must understand what John Byers
calls the “author’s almost obsessive notation of the passage of time” (81). “If Twain did attempt to use any controlling scheme in the novel,” Byers suggests, “it is the often slow but steady progression of the days of the weeks and the weeks of the months of a very long Hannibal summer” (86–87). In fact, Twain creates such an impression by his creative use of temporal markers after Examination Day, but in reality the bulk of the book occurs before summer. Not until the end of chapter 21 does vacation begin. In both sections, Sunday is the crucial day, the essential temporal marker in the work, particularly when Twain notably curbs its influence in the second section. Sunday is as notable in its presence in chapters 4, 5, and 17 as it is in its absence in chapter 27. Numerous writers have noted the binary distinctions in the work, light and dark, life and death, youth and adult, and these are part of the essential structure of the novel that sets Sunday against the rest of the week. Sunday, as the day set apart for worship, becomes the temporal structural unit that embodies other binaries and other criticisms, for Sunday is the world of adult obligation and is the centrally onerous task required of children. It is the vehicle for the novel’s social satire.

Twain links the two definitions of worship with two different conceptions of time. In his exemplary analysis of Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, John Bird concludes that “we can read the whole novel as Huck’s failed attempt to escape the confinement of time’s pervasiveness” (263). Susan K. Harris suggests, too, that “[o]ut on the river Huck in effect abandons human time” (Escape 71). Spiritual time in Adventures of Huckleberry Finn occurs in the natural world, always in stark contrast to the regimented sense of time in the social world of religious hypocrisy. Structurally, the work oscillates between the hypocrisy of organized religion with natural worship. The sermon Huck hears at the church where the Grangerfords and Shepherdsons hold a very temporary truce in their deadly feud is on the subject of “brotherly love and such-like tiresomeness” (147). The situational irony is followed immediately by the famous reverie of chapter 19, with Huck and Jim adrift on the raft. Huck’s desire to gain freedom from social conceptions of time is apparent in many details in the scene, as John Bird discusses, but the sense of time is also connected with a renewal of worship. Huck and Jim find themselves discussing “spirits,” leading to an even more theological conversation.

It’s lovely to live on a raft. We had the sky, up there, all speckled with stars, and we used to lay on our backs and look up at them, and discuss
about whether they was made or only just happened—Jim he allowed
they was made, but I allowed they happened; I judged it would have took
too long to make so many. Jim said the moon could a laid them; well, that
looked kind of reasonable, so I didn’t say nothing against it, because I’ve
seen a frog lay most as many, so of course it could be done. We used to
watch the stars that fell, too, and see them streak down. Jim allowed
they’d got spoiled and was hove out of the nest. (158)

The moment is one of very few moments in the work associated with
theological discussion in a positive way. In the Grangerford’s church,
sermons were hypocritical, but also involved doctrine that Huck could
not begin to follow. One recalls his reference in that previous chapter to
“preforeordestination” (147). The theology of chapter 19’s raft scene is
really akin to the Doxology, with the natural world creating within the
“creatures here below” a natural desire to discuss the deity, doing so in
the most natural of terms, such as frogs and bird eggs. Twain makes the
contrast obvious by sandwiching the scene between the Grangerford’s
church and the arrival of the king and the duke. The king specializes in
“workin’ camp-meetin’s; and missionaryin’ around” (161), and in the
Pokeville Camp-meeting of chapter 20, he takes over the meeting in a
scene that, for a moment, proffered a rapprochement between the worlds
of religion and nature. The outside service with the singing of hymns is,
as Huck says, “kind of grand,” but devolves into groaning, shouting,
and becomes “just crazy and wild” (171–72). The “wildcat” religion is
obviously no substitute even for the hypocrisy of the church attended
by the Grangerfords and Shepherdsons. The discussion of stars on the
raft is a moment when “the whole world was asleep” and the days and
nights “swum” by (156). Nature, Time, and Childhood form a trinity of
worship in Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.

In The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, a similar thematic function of time
governs the novel. “In a very real sense,” argues Louis Rubin, “Tom
Sawyer arrests the progression of time, holds onto childhood instead of
conforming to the values and habits of adults” (214). To accomplish this,
Twain employs different conceptions of time, undermining through his
burlesque the usual definition of Sabbath as a spiritual-idyllic time.
Bakhtin’s use of the term “chronotope” to describe the connectedness of
space and time is useful, for clearly The Adventures of Tom Sawyer is, as
so many have suggested, a kind of idyll in which one experiences time
as a “dense and fragrant time, like honey . . . a time saturated with its
own strictly limited, sealed-off segment of nature’s space” (“Forms of
“The chronotope,” Bakhtin argues, “is the place where the knots of narrative are tied and untied” (“Forms of Time” 250). In Twain’s St. Petersburg, the time is of two sorts, on the one hand the spiritual-idyllic time and on the other quotidian time. Twain’s aptly named city is the gateway between these two conceptions of time, the locus of dialogue between the spiritual and the mundane, between aevum and tempus, kairos and kronos. Twain reverses the usual definitions, however. One thinks of the theological distinctions between the special observances of Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter, and what is known in the liturgical calendar as “ordinary time.” Usual definitions proclaim that Sabbath provides privileged access to transcendence, but in this burlesque, the Sabbath is governed by oppressive ordinary or quotidian time with transcendent moments restricted to the young while in the natural world. The only exception is the spontaneous singing of the Doxology. Indeed, two different types of time provide the structure of the novel, which can be interpreted as a dialogue between two types of time and the types of worship associated with them. The clearest example of this is the beginning of chapter 4. The first paragraph of the chapter contains two sentences, one describing natural worship, the other, formal worship. The first line introduces the inherently worshipful aspect of nature: “The sun rose upon a tranquil world, and beamed down upon the peaceful village like a benediction” (57). It is Sunday, and one should point out the irony in beginning the day and beginning the Sabbath with the benediction. This parodia sacra inverts the usual temporal associations with the order of service, implicitly suggesting the order of service and the natural order are not the same. In the order of service, the benediction, of course, is given at the end as a formal blessing on a congregation; it is, one might say, the reward one gets for sitting still for the sermon. In contrast, Twain’s line stands alone at the beginning of the chapter, implicitly asserting that one need not attend services to obtain the blessing—it is given freely by God through nature.

Against this backdrop, we have the second sentence of the chapter: “Breakfast over, aunt Polly had family worship; it began with a prayer built from the ground up of solid courses of Scriptural quotations welded together with a thin mortar of originality; and from the summit of this she delivered a grim chapter of the Mosaic Law, as from Sinai” (57). Twain brilliantly equates lack of originality with lack of real feeling in this sentence, illustrating it stylistically through carefully selected mixed metaphors. He also contrasts the building of the prayer “from the
ground up” with the benediction that “beamed down” from above in the first sentence (57). Aunt Polly’s prayer is “grim,” bereft of the joy inherent to the natural benediction. Twain characterizes quotidian time as divorced from any sense of joyous worship by associating it with Mosaic law. “Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy,” states the fourth commandment, but Twain’s fourth chapter examines just what “keeping it holy” might mean. One might suggest that Twain here associates a Calvinist church service with an Old Testament sense of obligation dating back to the Decalogue. Calvin notes that observation of the Sabbath “was abolished with the other types on the advent of Christ” (II: 339), but then provides various reasons for continuing to set aside one day for the Lord. Twain depicts Aunt Polly’s sermon delivered “as from Sinai,” that is, as belonging to a different age and not to the new covenant. Christ has come to the world, been crucified, risen, and yet, Twain seems to suggest, the form of worship has remained as exacting as before. This disjuncture fascinated Twain. In an unpublished notebook entry, he contrasts the two: “God, so atrocious in the Old Testament, so attractive in the New—the Jekyll & Hyde of sacred fiction” (unpublished notebook 47, 18). Twain’s depiction of the shift from Old to New Testament is similar in The Prince and the Pauper (1881) when Edward Tudor reacts to the law that an Englishman can be sold as a slave. Proclaiming “Thou shalt not!—and this day the end of that law is come!” he uses Old Testament language to herald the arrival of a New Testament leader (197). Calvin suggests that the Lord’s Day is associated with rest, creation, and resurrection, but it is clear in The Adventures of Tom Sawyer that “the end of that law” is not yet come to St. Petersburg (II:343).

In Chapter 2, Twain similarly associates nature and the natural world of children with a spontaneous form of worship. “Saturday morning was come, and all the summer world was bright and fresh, and brimming with life,” Twain writes. “There was a song in every heart; and if the heart was young the music issued at the lips” (46). A natural outpouring of song marks spontaneous and youthful worship, just as in spontaneous congregational singing, and Twain connects the play of the young with the progress of pilgrims toward Bunyan’s “Delectable Mountains” through his allusion of describing Cardiff Hill as a “Delectable Land, dreamy, reposeful and inviting” (46; see also “Explanatory Notes” 471; see also the “Explanatory Notes” section in the California edition of The Adventures of Tom Sawyer). Similarly, John Halverson connects Tom’s retreat to the forest in Chapter 8 as a reenactment of the Man in Black in Chaucer’s Book of the Duchess (51). While there certainly are some paral-
lels to Chaucer’s text and to the Christ story, Halverson misses the point of the retreat to the woods, in that the location is used to discuss Tom’s relationship to the church as much as it is a place to explore alternatives to it. Tom hears Joe Harper’s horn, for example, and reacts by grabbing a wooden sword and preparing to play Robin Hood. Halverson argues that “Tom’s reaction to the sound of the horn is that of a faithful Christian” (54), but it seems more reasonable to suggest that Tom’s retreat to the woods and his play there is set in contrast to the world of regimented time and Sabbath obligations. Bakhtin’s comment is apropos: “In the provincial novel, as in the idyll, all temporal boundaries are blurred and the rhythm of human life is in harmony with the rhythm of nature” (“Forms of Time” 229). Once summer arrives, the temporal markers are present, but they are far less regimented. As mentioned earlier, Twain even has Tom go to sleep on Saturday night in chapter 26 but wake up on Monday morning in chapter 27. Sunday’s mysterious disappearance, whether an intentional device or not, brilliantly contributes to the spiritual-idyllic chronotope.

The burlesque structure of the novel, then, disassociates church time from the spiritual-idyllic chronotope. One goes to church, if one does, in order to enter the spiritual idyll, but consider the depiction that occurs in chapter 5. Beginning with the ringing of the “cracked bell,” Twain creates a carnival grotesque description of a church service. Twain’s strategy is to “make strange” a very ordinary situation, so ordinary in fact that his description of the church service seems very familiar to Presbyterians even today, from the minister who falls into “a peculiar style” of rising and sharply falling intonation as he sings, to the same character turning “himself into a bulletin board” to read announcements before the sermon (67). This carnival metamorphosis shows the truth of the church service, for the preacher is not a bearer of gospel, the good news, but a bearer only of news. Twain makes his satirical point clear by musing that “the less there is to justify a traditional custom, the harder it is to get rid of it” (67). While there is a great deal of comfort in reading about what one still experiences in church services, there is also a great deal of humor in the scene as readers recognize the truth of Twain’s burlesque. Desiccated form dominates the service and, as comforting as the usual, expected order can be, Twain points out the absurdity of turning what should be spiritual-idyllic time into quotidian time. This church service is not a special or spiritual time. Twain’s depictions in The Adventures of Tom Sawyer resemble his description of the services in “The New Wildcat Religion” (1866):
I do not take any credit to my better-balanced head because I never went crazy on Presbyterianism. We go too slow for that. You never see us ranting and shouting and tearing up the ground. You never heard of a Presbyterian going crazy on religion. Notice us, and you will see how we do. We get up of a Sunday morning and put on the best harness we have got and trip cheerfully down town; we subside into solemnity and enter the church; we stand up and duck our heads and bear down on a hymn book propped on the pew in front when the minister prays; we stand up again while our hired choir are singing, and look in the hymn book and check off the verses to see that they don’t shirk any of the stanzas; we sit silent and grave while the minister is preaching, and count the waterfalls and bonnets furtively, and catch flies; we grab our hats and bonnets when the benediction is begun; when it is finished, we shove, so to speak. No frenzy—no fanaticism—no skirmishing; everything perfectly serene. You never see any of us Presbyterians getting in a sweat about religion and trying to massacre the neighbors. Let us all be content with the tried and safe old regular religions, and take no chances on wildcat. (134)

Twain’s piece on spiritualism as a wildcat religion criticizes the wildcat as well as his own denomination. His humorous depiction of the Presbyterian church service suggests a lack of real religious feeling, and his metaphorical comparison of Presbyterians to horses in a harness creates a visual image that really gets at one of his favorite terms, “training.” Like horses, Presbyterians know what they are supposed to do, for it is all routine. These mundane elements of the service proceed in a thoroughly unexceptional way, as the parishioners make themselves comfortable by propping the hymn books up, catching flies, and most significantly, ticking off the verses one by one—in order. Twain suggests by these details that the main virtue of Presbyterianism consists in certain traits that are absent: emotion, feeling, and vitality. That is, Presbyterianism has the defect of its virtue and vice versa; bound by confining tradition, Presbyterianism is also “safe” and “tried and true.”

In *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, Twain accentuates the profane activities such as catching flies that are mentioned in “The New Wildcat Religion,” using such obviously inappropriate activities to pursue his definition of worship. The natural world of boys and girls contrasts to the forms that bore and the prayers that damn. Tom, for example, waits impatiently for his chance to catch a fly, which he does “the instant the ‘Amen’ was out” (68). Following this, Tom takes out a captive pinch-bug which, true to its name, first pinches him and then a dog who becomes
“a woolly comet moving in its orbit with the gleam and speed of light” (69). Tellingly, the parishioners suppress their “unholy mirth,” and it “was a genuine relief to the whole congregation when the ordeal was over and the benediction pronounced” (70). The structural ironies are obvious, with nature’s benediction, ordinarily given at the end of service, coming at the beginning of chapter 4—before the church service starts. At the end of the formal church service in chapter 5, the congregation receives the benediction with relief, not joy. The contrast between the long, tortuous road to the benediction at the end of chapter 5 and the brief, natural benediction at the beginning of chapter 4 illustrates the structural-thematic point Twain makes in the novel. The “all creatures here below” worship best when they worship naturally.

If the novel as a whole has its roots in *The Innocents Abroad* and “The Boy’s Manuscript,” the important chapters 4 and 5 have their roots in Twain’s 1871 letter to Livy while on the lecture circuit in Paris, Illinois. That day, Twain had attended services at a small country church. In this remarkable letter, Twain begins simply, telling Livy that “[i]t was the West & boyhood brought back again, vividly” (MTL 4: 527). Twain captures the order of service seen then and today, from the opening hymn to the announcements, prayers, and closing benediction. Twain singles out the choir for burlesque, calling it “a grand discordant confusion . . . & finally a triumphant ‘Oh, praise the L-o-r-d!’ in a unison of unutterable anguish” (MTL 4: 528). Grudgingly, Twain grants that the hymns, if “honestly & sincerely” sung are “approved in heaven” (MTL 4: 529), but the contrast between the “unison of unutterable anguish” and Calvin’s “one voice and one mouth” is delightfully grotesque; both may be in unison (literally, in one voice), but there the comparison ends. Twain’s suggestion that “it was Herod’s slaughter of the babes set to music” is hilarious, but in a way true, given his description of the children who suffer through the service (MTL 4: 528). Much of the letter contributes directly to the novel, including long sermons of a decidedly Calvinist flavor. In the church described in the letter, the effervescent energy of youth fizzes over, disturbing the sacred service. Describing not so much the sermon as the life that carries on during the sermon, Twain focuses on a particular “engaged couple” who are unable to repress the life welling up within them.

These two did nothing but skylark all through the sermon, & I really took just as much comfort in it as if I had been young & a party to it. Only—it was such a pity to think that trouble must come to that poor child, &
her face wither, & her back bend, & the gladness go out of her eyes. I harbored not a critical thought against her for her un-churchlike behavior. Lord! It was worship! It was the tribute of overflowing life, & youth, health, ignorance of care—it was the tribute of free, unscarred, unsmitten nature to the good God that gave it! I think it must have been recorded in heaven, above even the choir’s “voluntary.” And when these two giddy creatures stood up & bowed the head when the blessing was invoked, I made easy shift to believe that as fair a share of the benediction descended upon them from the Throne as upon me, who had been decorous & reverent & had only picked flaws in the minister’s logic and damned his grammar. (MTL 4: 529–30)

Here, “decorous & reverent” and doubtless with some caricature, Twain becomes the “model boy,” behaving just as Aunt Polly would have her Tom behave. Yet in this letter, Twain works toward a redefinition of worship—by burlesquing the worship service itself. The “unchurchlike behavior” of the young woman becomes not blameworthy, but praiseworthy as worship from “free, unscarred, unsmitten nature to the good God that gave it!” In The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, Twain radically redefines worship, suggesting in the novel, as well as in this formative letter, that true worship is the natural expression of joy, as when the congregation rises to sing the Doxology “with one impulse.”

The structure Twain devises in his novel serves the theme by relating church services to quotidian time and by drawing out the church-dominated time even through the churchy Examination Day of chapter 21. Twain emphasizes the artificial nature of the worship, linking it to the “smothy” world of adults. Perhaps because Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is rightly viewed as a book with so much to say about race in America, The Adventures of Tom Sawyer suffers by comparison and is viewed as the “boy’s book” that some thought it was. Twain, it should be remembered, did not so view the book, explaining his view in a letter to William Dean Howells: “It is not a boy’s book at all. It will only be read by adults. It is only written for adults” (MTL 6: 503). Alan Gribben has shown with his usual meticulous study that the book does owe much to the boy book genre (“Wish” 149–50). For these reasons, perhaps, some critics have a simplistic view of the book. Bernard DeVoto labels the book “the supreme American idyll” (304) and Jeffrey Holland calls the novel “a kind of religious reverie” (24), but both minimize the structural complexity of such an achievement. It would be more accurate to say that the novel proposes these states so visible in childhood as attainable
by adults. Perhaps most illustrative of this critical strain are the comments of Tony Tanner: “In Tom Sawyer where Clemens is recreating in idyllic form his own childhood, the latent challenging rebelliousness of Huck is allowed little scope. Writing rather whimsically and indulgently from an adult third-person point of view, Clemens allows the idealized cosiness of his childhood village and the safe pranks and naughtiness of Tom, who is basically a respectable youth, to dominate the tone of the book” (139). Tom, in this view, is the ultimate conformist, and the book in which he appears necessarily endorses the “soul-butter and hogwash” religion so obviously burlesqued in Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. Writers like Michael Oriard comment effectively on the later novel when contrasting the characters of Tom to Huck, but at the expense of overlooking the burlesque in the original. Oriard’s suggestion that The Adventures of Tom Sawyer “pleases because it validates juvenile play at the expense of seriousness” is simply not supported by the novel’s structure (184). James Cox argues along much the same lines when contending that the novel elevates “play itself” as the theme (147). Saying The Adventures of Tom Sawyer is about “play” is like saying Upton Sinclair’s The Jungle is about sausage; true as far as it goes, the idea ignores what the novel opposes. “Parody is a road that leads to something else,” as Eichenbaum suggests (“O. Henry” 268). Truly, the association of play with worship is precisely the point, for that is the most honest “worship” offered by the “creatures here below,” acknowledging as it does our creaturely nature. Twain sets the spirit of play, the “tribute of free, unscarred, unsmitten nature” against grim worship at every point in the novel.

The juxtaposition of two distinctly opposed modes of worship is inherently a burlesque on the more formal and traditional mode. A church service proposes to bring parishioners into worshipful appreciation, as the Doxology says, of God the father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Twain’s youthful protagonists, however, find the church service linked to the quotidian tyranny of time. Within them they carry the idyll, for the mundane and the hypocritical cannot totally destroy it. Twain provides very precise descriptions of the order of service in many works, and it is clear from all of these sources that Twain views the order of service as both a stolid presence in a sometimes chaotic world and as a potentially enervating and domineering social force. Even his masquerade as the Reverend Mark Twain embodies the conflict between the austere iconostasis of adulthood and the natural iconoclasm of childhood. Above the fray is the centuries-old Doxology, at once a formal

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creed and a song of praise born anew with each singing. The text proposes a unity, a synthesis of opposing views, just as opposing voices sometimes harmonize in congregational singing. In The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, one sees both sides of the equation, but most often Twain depicts the order of service negatively. Huck’s memorable complaint in the last chapter of The Adventures of Tom Sawyer connects socializing forces with the tyranny of Sabbath time:

I got to go to church and sweat and sweat—I hate them ornery sermons! I can’t ketch a fly in there, I can’t chaw, I got to wear shoes all Sunday. The wider eats by a bell; she goes to bed by a bell; she gits up by a bell—everything’s so awful reglar a body can’t stand it. (234)

It is the “body,” both as slang for person and as double-voiced language for the physical aspects of our nature, that can neither sit still nor “stand” the connection between Sabbath and quotidian time. “Which world,” asks Rubin, “is real: the daily life of St. Petersburg and of Tom Sawyer, or the natural world of Cardiff Hill? Both are real, and the boy Tom is a part of both” (213). The book contains both, but the narrative structure declares that worship can be free and unfettered. Congregants in moments of honest feeling truly can worship “with one voice and one mouth,” as Calvin proposes—and as readers witness at least once in The Adventures of Tom Sawyer and Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (II: 181). Parodia sacra resurrects social practices that are dead, even if ironically celebrating the death and rebirth at a parodic funeral where all praise God, “from whom all blessings flow.” Both The Adventures of Tom Sawyer and Adventures of Huckleberry Finn are “hymns in prose,” bringing natural worship immanent in youth into the formal church service, looking toward a resurrection of the dead formalities of worship, just as Twain resurrects the theological genres he burlesques. People worship best, the novel suggests, when they are at play in the fields, forests, and even the churches of the Lord.