

Joyful Children Soul: A Virtual Study of Roald Dahl's "Boy" and Mark Twain's "Tom Sawyer"

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Abstract

This paper tends to make a virtual study of classic child protagonists of the famous American novel "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer" and British autobiographical novel Boy: Tales of Childhood. This paper exhibits desires, school experiences and naughtiness of every little boy by making a comparative study of these two boys. Many great writers have dealt with the theme of childhood. Roald Dahl and Mark Twain are two great writers who dealt with this theme in their novels Boy: Tales of Childhood and The Adventures of Tom Sawyer. Both Dahl and Twain take us to the innocent and fantasy world of children. The two child heroes, Boy and Tom, have difference in their characteristics because they are from different countries, cultures, and they lived in different times. Boy can be admired as an embodiment of English boyhood while Tom can be revered as the quintessence of American boyhood. But irrespective of their cultural difference both the boys shows some common characteristics. Their relationship with their friends, hatred towards their school, combats with their teachers, the problems they face due to their interference with the adult world, rivalry with their peers, fear of examination and fun loving nature are not culture specific

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It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men. - Frederick Douglass

The mind of the children is wonderful. Children are the picture of innocence and everybody loves children. We must provide chance for them to blossom. The literature created for children is called as Children's Literature. Hunt says Children's Literature "is not inferior to other types of writing, it is different". (Introduction to Children Literature 11). Critics who study children's literature have found that what is viewed as appropriate reading for children adheres

closely to a culture's notion of what a child is (i.e) a notion that may change considerably from epoch to epoch. Hunt suggests that an appropriate expression for referring to literature that is primarily targeted at children would be "texts for children" (Children Literature 3).

The theme of childhood is vastly admired by both the children and adults. These books take us to the innocent world of children and entertain us greatly with several adventures and fantasies. Some of the famous juvenile classics were Roald Dahl's Charlie and the

chocolate factory& Matilda, J.M. Barrie's Peter Pan, Miguel de Cervantes' Don Quixote, Rudyard Kipling's The Jungle Book, Mark Twain's The Adventures of Tom Sawyer and The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, R. M. Blantyre's The Coral Island, Robert Louis Stevenson's Kidnapped, France Hodgson Burnett's A Little Princess, Charles Dickens' David Copperfield and Oliver Twist, Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland etc. Many of the child heroes represented by readers are Huck Finn, Tom Sawyer, Charlie Bucket, James Trotter, David Copperfield, Peter Pan, and Sara Crew. Two great writers who have portrayed the juvenile world with great precision and understanding are Roald Dahl and Mark Twain.

Samuel Langhorne Clemens whose pseudonym is Mark Twain is one of America's best loved writers who is best known for his humorous and satirical writings. He is one of the leading story tellers in the world and both adults and children admire his writings. The timeless The Adventures of Tom Sawyer and its sequel The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn are classics of American literature. The Adventures of Tom Sawyer first published in 1876 is a novel which portrays the life of a young boy growing up along the Mississippi River. Twain in the preface says that most of the adventures recorded in this book really occurred and one or two were his-own experiences and the rest of those boys who were his schoolmates he adds that: "Huck Finn is drawn from life; Tom Sawyer also, but not from an individual- he is a combination of the characteristics of three boys whom I knew, and therefore belongs to

the composite order of architecture."(Tom Sawyer) The novel is a picturesque description of nineteenth century American society; their culture, life style, superstitious belief etc are depicted in this novel.

Roald Dahl was born in 1916 Llandaff, Cardiff, Wales, in 1916. Roald Dahl was a children's author who wrote the kids' classics Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, James and the Giant Peach and The BFG, among other famous works. He lived a long and fulfilling life and was once a fighter pilot in World War 2. He is the great story teller of 20th century. Roald Dahl in the preface says that the things recorded in this book are full of his young days at school. All are his true experiences. Roald Dahl has a humorous writing style for children. He is very creative, using unique adjectives in his descriptive writing. Roald Dahl is more than humorous. He uses certain characters to teach a lesson about how the other children are not being respectful and obedient. He puts a twist on his words and arranges the sentence structure to a point of wackiness at times.

Both Tom and Boy not only characterized by their friendship, love, petty quarrels with their peers, their hatred towards the school, their skirmishes with the teachers, fear of examination and the problems they face due to their involvement with adult world but also by their attachment with adults around them. Attachment behavior is a biological response designed to get children into close relationships with, particularly, adults. Being in a close relationship with one or more adults brings a number of potential benefits to the child such as discipline, morality etc. Both the writers portray the

innocent world of children with all its excitement and reality. There are several common habits seen between these heroes, Tom and Boy though there is some dissimilarity.

Tom is the epithet of American society while Boy is the incarnation of British society. Irrespective of their cultural difference, both the boys shows some common characteristics. We can see Dahl's hatred towards his school in his novel *Boy: Tales of Childhood*. In St. Peter's school Roald Dahl pretends to have appendicitis in order to be sent home. He is allowed to stay home for 3 days but told not to do it again. "My idea was that I should all of a sudden develop an attack of acute appendicitis" (Boy, 109). In the novel *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* we can see a similar situation, Tom's reluctance to go to school "Monday morning found Tom Sawyer miserable. Monday morning always found him so — because it began another week's slow suffering in school." (Tom Sawyer, 37). Like adults, children too have embarrassments in their lives. They too have periods of disorder in their life.

The first impediment that a boy faces is the problem of adjusting to the routine-bound life in school. In order to escape from this routine-bound life of school fugitive becomes essential part of these boys' lives. Both Roald and Tom are masters in it. They play tricks to evade school and when compared to Roald Tom is a trouper for he is successful in fooling Aunt Polly while Boy is always caught. Tom acts sick and scare Aunt Polly, just to elude school. Even though Boy's idea of appendicitis works, his doctor at home knows he is faking. He is

allowed to stay home for 3 days but told not to do it again.

Both Tom and Boy love adventures. They love to roam and play with their friends. Friends add zest to their life. Tom's first adventure occurs as a result of him playing hooky, stealing snacks, sneaking in late, and various other misdeeds. We can see Boy's four friends in the great mouse plot dropping dead mouse in candy jar. There is strong bond between these boys. Huck is standing abashed and uncomfortable after their return from their feigned death while Tom and Joe Harper are pampered by their parents seeing this Tom tells Aunt Polly: "Aunt Polly, it ain't fair. Somebody's got to be glad to see Huck." (Tom Sawyer, 109). Tom's love for Huck is evident in this incident. He can't see his friend in an awkward condition.

These protagonists travel towards maturation. Though Tom's mischievous nature is the source of the novel's many humorous anecdotes, the overall arc of the novel charts Tom's maturation into adulthood as he leaves behind his boyish ways to become a responsible member of society. Tom realizes that his actions can have serious consequences and he makes several moral, empathetic decisions over the second half of the novel. In the same way Boy gains maturation and joins the RAF and dedicated himself to his country as a fighter pilot.

The children in these novels are in constant conflict with the adult world. Both Boy's headmaster and Aunt Polly are strict disciplinarians and want their children to be part of the unadventurous society to which they belong. But the children are not able to

abide by to system so they play several pranks to escape from the adult world. They suffer due to the desire and immorality of the adult world. As a result these children shows a tendency to leave their place in search of an ultimate world which is an aspect of juvenile heroism seen both Roald and Twain. Boy wants to leave the boarding school and wants to come home. Both heroes are suffered by homesickness (i.e) Tom in an island and Boy in the boarding school.

Boy is the story of Roald Dahl's childhood which shows the British boyhood

throughout his young days at school and afterwards that made such a tremendous impression on readers.

Tom can be revered as the quintessence of American boyhood. Twain beautifully portrays American society: customs, life style, beliefs, superstitions, social hierarchy etc. This paper exhibits desires, school experiences and naughtiness of every little boy by making a comparative study of these two boys. "Adventure is not outside man; it is within" (George Eliot). Here we can feel the adventures within us by reading these two classics.

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