the value of reading texts closely. *Tom Sawyer* is such an entertaining book it is easy to read it repeatedly without noticing important things going on between the lines. One of the salutary effects these essays should have will be encouraging readers to go back and read the novel again more carefully.

Written by another seasoned veteran of Mark Twain studies, John Bird, “The *Tom Sawyer* Franchise: The Evolution (and Devolution) of a Character,” is an iconoclastic survey of Tom Sawyer’s history through *Tom Sawyer*, *Huckleberry Finn*, and Mark Twain’s finished and unfinished sequels—*Tom Sawyer Abroad*, *Tom Sawyer Detective*, “Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer among the Indians,” “Tom Sawyer’s Conspiracy,” and “Schoolhouse Hill.” Bird looks at that history as if it were a Hollywood film franchise that Mark Twain kept going after realizing he had in the character of Tom both a literary gold mine and a financial one. Kept alive for two decades, Tom underwent positive and negative changes that reveal Mark Twain’s understanding of human psychology and seem to mirror contradictory traits in his own personality. This essay will naturally be compelling reading for those already familiar with all the Tom and Huck stories. For others, the essay may well forever change the views of those who see Tom Sawyer as a hero.

Is *Tom Sawyer* a “boy book,” a “coming-of-age” novel, or something else? That is a central question expert researcher Kevin Mac Donnell’s addresses in “Tom Sawyer: From Boy-Book Hero to Coming-of-Age-Hellion.” The essay is a thoughtful analysis of how *Tom Sawyer* reflects Mark Twain’s efforts to exploit genre writing, contrasting the boy-book *Tom Sawyer* with the coming-of-age novel, *Huckleberry Finn*. It pays special attention to how the Tom in his own book differs from the Tom in *Huckleberry Finn* and helps illuminate the differences between the two novels themselves. Along the way, the essay also offers insights into why modern readers are apt to view Tom differently than how readers of earlier generations viewed him.

In 1980, Cynthia Griffin Wolff published an article arguing that *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* offers such a “nightmare vision of American boyhood” that the book is inappropriate for children to
in terms of slavery to the “three negro men” belonging to the old Welchman (chapter 30). There are just two occasions when the rights and wrongs of slavery are implicitly and very briefly raised. One is a footnote about distinguishing a slave from a dog in the way they are named after their owner (chapter 10). The other is when Huck tells of Uncle Jake, the Rogers’ slave, admitting: “Sometimes I’ve set right down and eat with him. But you needn’t tell that. A body’s got to do things when he’s awful hungry he wouldn’t want to do as a steady thing” (chapter 28). There is also one brief joke alluding to Josiah Wedgwood’s anti-slavery medallion, “Am I not a man and a brother” (chapter 4). And nothing more.

Slavery was definitely on Clemens’s mind at the time of writing Tom Sawyer, and it was still, even after Emancipation, a matter of major national concern and debate. The South, in theory, was learning to live without slavery. Too often, in practice, it effectively resisted the various changes to the antebellum racial order that the Civil War and its aftermath had brought. The 1875 federal Civil Rights Act, passed under Radical Republican pressure as the climax of Reconstruction legislation, may have granted African Americans equality in their use of public accommodation and transportation (but not schools). African American civil rights, however, were generally unenforced in the South with white-on-black violence commonplace. The act itself was subject to constitutional challenge from the time it was passed, to be declared unconstitutional just eight years later. Reconstruction dramatically waned in the latter decades of the 1870s. By 1876 only three southern states, Florida, Louisiana, and South Carolina, remained under Republican control. In the American South, the African American gains from the war and early postbellum period were accordingly demolished.

For Clemens himself the status of African Americans in his country was increasingly an issue. In 1874, two years before Tom Sawyer’s publication, he broke away from the comic straight-jacket that had previously defined him to write “A True Story.” In this powerful short piece, the African American vernacular voice of “Aunt Rachel” carries the majority of the narrative and is—in a radical formal move—given full authority once the more conventional
Growing Up at a Dangerous Time

Despite Clemens’s professed memory lapses, his own boyhood was the foundation for Tom Sawyer’s story, and one thing is certain: Samuel Clemens grew up at a dangerous time for children. He observed that it was typical for one or two Hannibal boys to drown every year, and he reports that he had to be “pulled out in a 2/3 drowned condition” on nine different occasions before he could swim (Leary 115). No one drowns in Tom Sawyer, though Tom plays the town’s worry about his drowning to add to his own amusement.

Infections were another common cause of death, at a time when bacteria were yet to be identified and antibiotics did not exist. In 1847, in Sam Clemens’s twelfth year of life, the Hannibal Gazette reported the chilling statistic that half of the children born in that era died before their twenty-first birthday. This pervasive worry about childhood death in Sam Clemens’s day spills over into the pages of Tom Sawyer, where it begins to affect Tom’s mood after Becky stops coming to school. At first, he tries to shut her out of his mind (“whistle her down the wind”), but Tom is not able to repress his thoughts about the possibility of Becky’s death. “He began to find himself hanging around her father’s house, nights, and feeling very miserable. She was ill. What if she should die!” (chapter 12). The nightmare of seeing the death of another child was a reality of Sam Clemens’s youth; his sister Margaret died when he was three years old, and his brother Benjamin died when he was six. Clemens was kinder in creating Tom Sawyer’s boyhood. No children die in Tom Sawyer.

The risk of childhood death in Clemens’s youth is exemplified by a virulent measles epidemic that struck Hannibal in the spring of 1844. The epidemic “made a most alarming slaughter among the little people,” Clemens remembered. “There was a funeral almost daily, and the mothers of the town were nearly demented with fright” (Autobiography 420). The maternal anxiety spilled over to affect the children. Clemens recalls that “no romping was allowed, no noise, no laughter, the family moved spectrally about on tiptoe, in a ghostly hush . . . My soul was steeped in this awful dreariness—and in fear” (“Turning Point” 458). Sam Clemens lived in a real nightmare.
The most prominent real-world geographical feature in the novel is the Mississippi River. Its presence is felt throughout the novel, but it is, curiously, mentioned by name only twice—in chapters 13 and 32. The river plays its largest role in chapters 13 through 18, when Tom and his pals Huck Finn and Joe Harper spend several days playing pirates and other games on Jackson’s Island. As the site of some of the boys’ merriest frolics, the island has been of great interest to tourists. There is a problem, however, in satisfying visitors’ aspirations. In *Tom Sawyer*, Jackson’s Island is “[t]hree miles below St. Petersburg, at a point where the Mississippi river was a trifle over a mile wide . . .” (chapter 13). There is no such island around that distance from Hannibal, and even if there were, it would not be an easy place for tourists to reach. By 1902, the city began identifying an island immediately across the river that broadly fit the novel’s description of Jackson’s Island. Originally called Glascock’s Island, that island was later sliced in half by the uncooperative river. Maps made in the 2020s have given the shrinking fragments of Glascock’s Island different names, but for about 120 years, Hannibal residents have been satisfied that Clemens himself would not have minded their moving his island up the river in the interest of literature. He himself, after all, had moved his uncle’s Florida, Missouri, farm to Arkansas in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. In any case, if the novel’s depiction of Tom’s escapades on Jackson’s Island had anything to do with any island adventures Clemens himself had experienced as boy, those adventures probably occurred on Glascock’s Island.

One more major site in the novel to consider is “McDougal’s cave,” just south of St. Petersburg, near the river. Clemens modeled it on McDowell’s cave, just south of Hannibal, near the river. Originally named after its owner, Dr. Joseph Nash McDowell, the cave is now known as “Mark Twain Cave.” Clemens explored it as a boy and later at least mentioned it in several of his books, including *Huckleberry Finn*.

Most of the principal characters in *Tom Sawyer* are based on real people whom Clemens knew as a boy, starting with himself, as Tom is clearly based partly on him, with elements of his boyhood
One of the novel’s most precise descriptions matching a section of the real cave appears in chapter 33, in which Tom and Huck are searching for the place where Injun Joe has hidden the pirate treasure: “Tom went first, cutting rude steps in the clay hill as he descended. Huck followed. Four avenues opened out of the small cavern which the great rock stood in.” The boys continue on, hoping to find the treasure “under the cross,” though not sure exactly what that phrase means. Immediately after the drop-off, or “jumping-off” spot, in the real cave, a cross of sorts can be seen on the ceiling overhead where two “lifelines” of the cave intersect above a unique rock formation, presumably the “great rock” mentioned in the novel. This area also leads directly into a spot in the cave called “Five Points.” Counting the “four avenues” that spider out from the drop-off, there are exactly five points from which to continue exploring the cave.

The silence inside the cave can be deafening when one is not near a tour group, or especially in dry sections where no water seeps down from lifelines—the incipient ceiling cracks that eventually grow large enough to admit the water that carves out limestone caverns. One can