

A Modification of the Idea of Implied Reader

—With Some Examples from Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*—

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Mark Twain wrote *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876)¹ in the third person and he chose to write *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) in the first person. This seems to drive us to a comparative study of the two novels from the viewpoint of relationship between the author, the text and the reader. This will involve examining the “rhetoric of text” and the “rhetoric of discourse.” Although a considerable number of studies on the stylistic features of the two novels have been made so far, most of them have been on the textual level and little seems to be observed on the discourse level. In the present article, as a step toward a comparative study of rhetoric of discourse we will make a stylistic approach to *Tom Sawyer* by modifying the idea of “implied reader.”

It is well known that “author and reader are not the only figures involved in the discourse situation”² and an author assumes that with him his readers share a common fund of knowledge of the world. Such a reader is traditionally called an implied reader. In this paper we will extend the idea of implied reader a little further and try to make some possible interpretations of scenes in *Tom Sawyer* by focusing our attention on the rhetoric of discourse. In doing so, we may come to understand the reason why Mark Twain employed the first person narrator Huck in *Tom Sawyer*'s companion volume *Huckleberry Finn*.

I CURRENT IDEA OF IMPLIED READER

First of all, let us look at the tasks a traditional implied reader is supposed to perform. When Mark Twain wrote *Tom Sawyer* he obviously assumed that his readers would be well acquainted with the society at the period of the story. But for the modern readers it sometimes seems difficult to share knowledge and value with Mark Twain and they may have to examine the contents carefully. The following conversation between Tom and Becky gives us such a typical task:

He (Tom) said :

“Do you love rats?”

“No! I hate them!”

“Well, I do too--live ones. But I mean dead ones, to swing round your head with a string.”

“No, I don't care for rats much, anyway. What I like is, chewing gum.”

“O, I should say so! I wish I had some now.”

“Do you? I've got some. I'll let you chew it a while, but you must give it back to me.”

That was agreeable, so they chew it turn about, and dangled their legs against the bench in excess of contentment.

(Ch.VII)

Many modern readers may notice for the first time that the people of Tom Sawyer's days enjoyed *chewing gum*. The readers have to input this piece of information as it is and then put themselves in the position of Mark Twain's assumed reader by imagining Tom and Becky enjoying chewing gum. (The next information to put in may be that they chew the gum “*turn about*.”) These seem to be orthodox reactions of the modern readers and the effort to share the knowledge, value and experience of chewing gum with Mark Twain here is a typical task of the implied reader.

Some of the earnest implied readers of today may make an encyclopedic approach to “chewing

gum” and find that “Chewing gum made with chicle and other latex products was developed in the 1860’s and soon attained wide popularity (*Encyclopedia Americana.*)” Perhaps the most earnest of them may even have discovered that Tom Sawyer was set in a period about fifteen or twenty five years before 1860:

PREFACE	
...	
The odd superstitions touched upon were all prevalent among children and slaves in the West at the period of this story--that is to say, thirty or forty years ago	
...	
	The Author
Hartford, 1876.	

This piece of information appears to spark them to start reinterpreting the chewing gum episode in many ways and explore further into the possibilities of thinkable interpretation of the description by examining the history of chewing gum etc.⁴

These are the main roles of a traditional implied reader. Let us stop discussing them here. What we wish to do in this article is to develop the idea of implied reader and present new aspects of it.

II EXTENDED IDEA OF IMPLIED READER

What we will consider in the following is not the shared knowledge / experience / value between author and reader as we have seen it in the previous pages. Our extended idea of implied reader will be founded on a basic notion that while reading stories readers are always forced to notice the rules of reading which the author sets and must follow them.

Shared Point of View

In *Tom Sawyer* the author employs the third person narrative and the point of view shifts variously through the course of the novel. The main point of discussion in the following is about how the reader is forced to make an effort to share a point of view with the author.

Level of Discourse

As critics have stressed, the first page of the novel is important and this is certainly true of the novel currently under discussion. To see how the implied readers are expected to notice the shifting of point of view, let us consider the opening passages. At first glance they look simple but in reality they are not so from the viewpoint of discourse:

“*TOM!*”
No answer.
“*TOM!*”
No answer.
“What’s gone with that boy, I wonder? You *TOM!*”
No answer.

This demonstrates “Free Direct Speech (FDS)--Narrative” pattern three times. In all FDS parts the boy’s name “Tom” is emphasized by the italicized form, the capital letters and the exclamation mark, while the three narrative parts simply repeat the same phrase of “No answer.” without any special graphological devices. All these may help amplify the contrastive tone between the utterer’s hysterical temper and the silence.

It is clear that the FDS parts are being uttered by someone appearing in this fiction, while the

true character of the phrase “No answer.” seems to be vague: Is it on the level of narrator’s (Twain’s) discourse? For example, a description by the narrator, or a commentary or report of the narrator. Or is it on the level of character’s (not Twain’s) discourse? For example, a thought presentation of a character. These questions are concerned with narrative types (the first or the third person). And in the phrase of “No answer.” the lack of verbs expressive of tense and demonstrative nouns indicative of author’s standpoint makes it more difficult for the implied reader to know if the novel is in the first person or in the third person narrative.

The story continues as follows:

The old lady pulled her spectacles down and looked over them about the room; then she put them up and looked out under them. *She seldom or never looked through them for so small a thing as a boy; they were her state pair, the pride of her heart, and were built for “style,” not service--she could have seen through a pair of stove-lids just as well.* (The italics are the author’s and the underlines mine.)

In the first sentence the old lady’s actions are described one by one, but we still do not know if the narrator is depicting them or a character in the fiction is standing near her and is reporting them. Moreover, how should we think about the use of “the” for “the old lady”? Is it used as an aspect of *in medias res* technique? Or is it suggesting that the utterer of the DS parts is her?

By reading on we notice that the narration is in the third person because the underlined parts expressive of the lady’s history, emotion, values etc. cannot be told by anybody but the omniscient author. In this way the implied reader is forced to gather many pieces of information on the level of discourse and work them out for himself.

Shift of Point of View

In *Tom Sawyer* a point of view sometimes changes phrase by phrase, sentence by sentence, or even within a sentence and the implied readers need to follow every change. So next let us see how we are led to follow such a change by illustrating the examples in which the author’s standpoint revolves around the author’s commentary, thought presentation and description.

Thought Presentation and Commentary

In the following example we find a mingled pattern of the author’s commentary with characters’ thought presentation. This passage happens after the description of the scene where the parents visit the class and the pupils are showing them the exercises. All these six sentences have a large proportion of nouns and adjectives expressing some element of value. Through the course of this passage some kind of emotion will be introduced through the words *melancholy*, *worn out*, *conspicuously*, *intolerable* etc. and they are expressive of negative emotive attitude toward “compositions”:

(1) A prevalent feature in these compositions was a nursed and petted melancholy; another was a wasteful and opulent gush of “fine language”; another was a tendency to lug in by the ears particularly prized words and phrases until they were worn entirely out; and a peculiarity that conspicuously marked and marred them was the inveterate and intolerable sermon that wagged its crippled tail at the end of each and every one of them. (2) No matter what the subject might be, a brain-racking effort was made to squirm it into some aspect or other that the moral and religious mind could contemplate with edification. (3) The glaring insincerity of these sermons was not sufficient to compass the banishment of the fashion from the schools, and it is not sufficient to-day; it never will be sufficient while the world stands, perhaps. (4) There is no school in all our land where the young ladies do not feel obliged to close their compositions with a sermon; and you will find that the sermon of the most frivolous and the least religious girl in the school is always the longest and the most relentlessly pious. (5) But enough of this. (6) Homely truth is unpalatable.

(The underlines are mine.)

(Ch. XXI)

Sentences (1), (2) and half of (3) are dominated by the verbs of past tense, while the rest of the

passage by those of present / future form. Considering the context before this passage and the employment of the past form, we understand that a conceivable interpretation of (1), (2) and the first half of (3) is that they are some characters' thought presentation without a reporting clause, namely, Free Indirect Thought (FIT). FIT usually happens for one character, but FIT of this case seems to portray the negative emotive attitude of the pupils, parents and also the teachers. In the above shown description there is no direct complaint from these people, but the FIT surely implies that they are bored with the "composition" and are pretending to like it.

In the middle of sentence (3) where Mark Twain appears by using the present / future forms the content of FIT becomes a general statement (commentary) or "truth." And here the author is taking the role of a mentor and controlling the implied readers' response and leading them to accept such a truth as acknowledged.

In *Tom Sawyer* Mark Twain often regulates the implied reader's response toward subject matter and the following example shows a similar case:

(In the middle of Mr. Walters speech.)

And so forth and so on. It is not necessary to set down the rest of the oration. *It was of a pattern which does not vary*, and so it is familiar to us all.

(The italics are mine.)

(Ch. IV)

If we take account of respects in which the author uses both past and present tense in the italicized part, we may say it is a mixture of description and commentary. The authorial tone here is rather frank and honest and Mark Twain seems to be taking the role of a guide who invites the readers to accept his idea on a speech at church. Mark Twain's controlling the implied reader's response as in the commentaries above may be one of the characteristics of this novel.

Description and Commentary

In the example below description and commentary are mixed but in the commentary Mark Twain does not follow his usual style or break away from the narrative past in favor of generic present. He does something quite different. The commentary parts drive the implied reader into a vague position in which Mark Twain's message appears to overlap with Tom's thought:

(1) *The summer evenings were long*. (2) It was not dark, yet. (3) Presently Tom checked his whistle. (4) A stranger was before him--a boy a shade larger than himself. (5) *A new-comer of any age or either sex was an impressive curiosity in the poor little shabby village of St. Petersburg*. (6) This boy was well dressed, too--*well dressed on a week-day*. (7) *This was simply astounding*. (8) His cap was a dainty thing, his close-buttoned blue cloth roundabout was new and natty, and so were his pantaloons. (9) He had shoes on--*and it was only Friday*. (10) He even wore a necktie, a bright bit of ribbon.

(The italics are mine.)

(Ch. I)

On the surface the italicized parts seem to be the author's commentary and the rest of the passage description. Though the author does not employ the generic present, obviously he is talking to his reader in (1) and (5)--note the use of plural forms "evenings" and that of indefinite article "A" which help make the statements sound like general truths. At this point the reader must assume that the author is stating a 'truth' and must accept it, otherwise it will be difficult to understand why Tom gets extremely curious about the stranger. The use of the demonstrative pronoun "This" in (6) and (7) helps invite us to see the stranger from Tom's point of view. And it seems possible to take the italicized parts in (6), (7) and (9) as Tom's thought presentation. Moreover, the repetitive mentions of the stranger's neat outward appearance in (8) (9) and (10) may serve to give us another possible interpretation that (8), (9) and (10) are not description but Tom's FIT.

Shared Writing Device

Tom Sawyer is about boys' adventures and it abounds in vivid scenes where the implied reader is supposed to follow the author's writing devices. In the following sections we will observe some writing devices shared between Mark Twain and the implied reader. A new understanding of these seems to propose new ways of reading. Our attention will be mainly on the cases in which the devices are closely related with the implied reader's imaginary perception (auditory or visual) and co-experience of fictional events with the characters.

Dramatic Device

One of the typical devices making the scene vivid is found in the opening passage:

"TOM!"

No answer.

"TOM!"

No answer.

"What's gone with that boy, I wonder? You TOM!"

No answer.

The combination of the aunt's Free Direct Speech (FDS) and the repetitive phrase of "No answer." may be rewritten as in the following:

Aunt Polly: *Tom!*

No answer.

Aunt Polly: *Tom!*

No answer.

Aunt Polly: What's gone with that boy, I wonder? You TOM!

No answer.

This rewriting may lead us to think that the phrase "No answer." may be a stage direction of a drama. It is possible for the implied reader to imagine the opening scene from a play and visualize the aunt's walking around on a the stage, standing with arms akimbo and so on. By using our imagination here we can interpret this scene like a director of a drama or play.

The next example also invites the reader to a drama situation:

(Tom and Huck are busy in making an oath not to mention the murder.)

A figure crept stealthily through a break in the other end of the ruined building, now, but *they (Tom and Huck) did not notice it.*

(The parenthesis and italics are mine.)

(Ch. X)

The use of "now" in the middle of this sentence may serve to give us the impression that the two things are happening at the same time. This sentence is not an example of "dramatic irony" but is close to it because Tom and Huck are in the circumstances where they are assumed not to be "in the know."

Modification of Austin's Speech Act Theory

In the following we will turn our attention to some examples of conversation between various characters and consider the implied reader's task in reading them. For our better understanding of the characters' conversation it will be necessary to modify Austin's speech act theory. Speech act theory applies basically to the utterers and the hearers. In fiction the hearers (addressees) are both the characters and the readers. So the illocutionary force and perlocutionary force are toward both of the addressees but will not affect them in the same way. Let us consider this by looking at the

following example:

(Tom and Huck are in the graveyard at night.)

Presently Tom seized his comrade's arm and said:

"Sh!"

"What is it, Tom?" And the two clung together with beating hearts.

"Sh! There 'tis again! Didn't you hear it?"

"I --"

Tom's order "Sh!" has illocutionary force to Huck but not to us, the readers, on the other hand Tom's constative sentence "There 'tis again!" has some illocutionary force to us, inducing us to imagine Tom hearing some faint noise. The conversation continues as follows:

"There! Now you hear it."

"Lord, Tom, *they're coming! They're coming, sure.* What'll we do?"

"I dono. Think they'll see us?"

"Oh, Tom, they can see in the dark, same as cats. I wisht I hadn't come."

"Oh, don't be afeard. I don't believe they'll bother us. We ain't doing any harm. If we keep perfectly still, maybe they won't notice us at all."

"I'll try to, Tom, but, Lord, I'm all of a shiver."

"Listen!"

The boys bent their heads together and scarcely breathed. A muffled sound of voices floated up from the far end of the graveyard.

"Look! See there!" whispered Tom. *"What is it?"*

"It's devil-fire. Oh, Tom, this is awful."

(The italics are mine.)

(Ch. IX)

The italicized FDS parts have illocutionary force to the implied readers and in these parts their imaginary (auditory / visual) perception is needed. In other words, the way of perception is not through the characters' eyes and ears. The implied reader should try to hear "it" and see the "devil-fire" with them (as if our protagonists were on the stage and we were watching them from our seats.)

Cinematic Device

Some of the visualization by the modern readers can be categorized as cinematic. In this example Aunt Polly is checking Tom's teeth:

(1) "There, there, now, don't begin the groaning again. Open your mouth. Well--your tooth is loose, but you're not going to die about that. Mary, get me a silk thread, and a chunk of fire out of the kitchen."

(2) Tom said:

"O, please auntie, don't pull it out. It don't hurt any more. I wish I may never stir if it does. Please don't, auntie. *I* don't want to stay home from school."

(3) "Oh, you don't, don't you? So all this row was because you thought you'd get to stay home from school and go a fishing? Tom, Tom, I love you so, and you seem to try every way you can break my old heart with your outrageousness."

(4) By this time the dental instruments were ready. (5) The old lady made one end of the silk thread fast to Tom's tooth with a loop and tried the other to the bedpost. (6) Then she seized the chunk of fire and suddenly thrust it almost into the boy's face. (7) The tooth hung dangling by the bedpost now.

(Ch. VI)

This passage is dominated by speech parts {FDS (1) and (3), DS (2)} and description parts (4)–(7). From the standpoint of the implied reader's task as we have discussed in the previous example of conversation, it is clear that we can draw a line in the speech part between section (1) on the one hand and (2)–(3) on the other. (1) is not only the aunt's utterance to Tom and Mary but also a

report on Tom's behavior, an expression of the condition of his teeth and a set of orders to Tom and Mary. The speech act force to the characters and the reader may be shown as in the following :

There, there, now, don't begin the groaning again.

Illocutionary force to Tom:	Order to keep quiet
Illocutionary force to the reader:	Request to imagine Tom's beginning and stopping groaning

Open your mouth.

Illocutionary force to Tom:	Order to open his mouth
Illocutionary force to the reader:	Request to visualize Tom's opening his mouth

Well--your tooth is loose,

Locutionary force to Tom (constative sentence):	Report of her judgement on the condition of the tooth
Illocutionary force to the reader:	Request to visualize Tom's tooth condition

but you're not going to die about that.

Locutionary force to Tom (constative sentence):	Report of her judgement on the condition of the tooth
Illocutionary force to the reader:	Request to visualize Tom's opening his mouth

Mary, get me a silk thread, and a chunk of fire out of the kitchen."

Illocutionary force to Mary:	Order to fetch things
Illocutionary force to the reader:	Request to visualize Mary's going out

On the other hand, in (2) and (3) the implied reader is not so busy. In (2) we find that Tom's imploring for his aunt's mercy is stressed by "O," "please (2)," "I wish" and "I don't want to" (notice the italics.) and in (3) the aunt's imploring is emphasized by "Oh," "Tom, Tom," "I love you, so," "every," "my old heart" etc.

Description (4) means that Mary has come back with a silk thread and a chunk of fire. In (5) and (6) our visualization is supposed to go on. The agent of all actions is Aunt Polly. The verb "thrust" and the preposition "into" in (6) suggest the action is toward Tom and the reader's imagination zooms in on Tom's face, by which his face dominates our imaginary screen. So the sudden appearing of the dangling tooth in (7) is somehow shocking to us as if we were experiencing the abrupt and brutal scene change of a film. Moreover, the implied reader also should think about the logical connection between sentence (6) and (7).

III FINAL REMARKS

The examples we have discussed so far involve both stylistic features of *Tom Sawyer* and discourse theory.

On the stylistic features of *Tom Sawyer* we have taken a look at some passages in which the implied readers are charged with many tasks. Mark Twain writes in the preface of the story "Although my book is intended mainly for the entertainment of boys and girls, . . .", so his main assumed readers are children. But we might legitimately ask if the rules of reading we have been examining with regard to this novel are suitable for boys and girls? Mark Twain says in one of his letters⁴:

I perhaps made a mistake in not writing it (*Tom Sawyer*) in the first person. . . . By and by I shall take a boy of twelve and run him on through his life but not Tom Sawyer—he would not be a good character for it.

In *Huckleberry Finn* the author stabilizes a point of view by way of employing the first person narrator Huck and he unloads the readers' burden.

On the theory level we have extended the idea of implied reader from the idea of shared knowledge to that of shared point of view and shared writing device. In doing so, we also have adopted Austin's speech act theory and modified it for the better understanding of the novel. In other words, these proposed ideas concern the role and task of implied readers and we have considered how the readers respond to Mark Twain's writing and then how the readers are supposed to decode his messages.

This kind of approach to Mark Twain's language will be necessary because his works often force the readers to respond to his writing in his assumed way. His demand for our proper response is sometimes strong enough to ask our "pause" in reading:

The pause is an exceedingly important feature in any kind of story, . . . ; for it must be exactly the right length — no more and no less — or it fails of purpose and makes trouble.

Extracted from "How to Tell a Story"

We would like to go on to an even more detailed study of Mark Twain's language of laughter and realism by creating and developing the theory which encompass both text and discourse analyses.

Notes

- 1 . All quotations are from *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).
- 2 . G. N. Leech & M. H. Short, *Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose* (London: Longman, 1981).
- 3 . We may content ourselves to think that Tom and Becky are not enjoying "chewing gum" but they are chewing "gummy stuff."
- 4 . Mark Twain, *Mark Twain's Letters* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1975).