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**Tom Sawyer's Tables in**  
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## Tom Sawyer's Tables in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*

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*The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) is nostalgically received even now from the viewpoint of white people<sup>1</sup>, but very few mentions and scholarships are devoted to the food culture in the old Missouri. The kind of dishes and foods in the old rural Missouri are actually less attractive than those of today, and Tom Sawyer's mischievousness in stealing jam draws much more attention than the questions, for example, why he does not steal corn pone and what kinds of foods Aunt Polly arranges on her table. The traditional foods in the old West are beans, corns, squash, potatoes, and pork<sup>2</sup>, and they do not seem attractive. Andrew Hoffman reports Samuel Clemens's miserable food in his apprentice days in Hannibal: "He formed a close alliance with one journeyman in Ament's shop, Wales McCormick, with whom he pilfered potatoes and onions from the Aments' cellar to cook on the stove at work." (Hoffman 26) Gary Scharnhorst reveals a dangerous custom: "Sam also drank Mississippi River water for its purported medicinal benefits, a variation on the custom of clay eating practiced in the South." (Scharnhorst 55) James S. Leonard and James Wharton Leonard discuss the Anti-Doughnut Party<sup>3</sup>, but this Party was a political group, not edible.

*The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, however, abounds in impressive episodes depicting foods, drinks, medicines, and starvation, though nobody knows what kinds of dishes are on Aunt Polly's table. What the people in St. Petersburg take to their mouths are: jam, apples, sugar, doughnuts, tobacco, watermelon, melon, loaves of bread imbedded with quicksilver, turtle eggs, whisky, ice cream, pie, soda, candles, bats, quack cure-alls, and Pain-Killer. Aunt Polly does not arrange her tables with many delicious dishes, but her commanding attitude around her table is very overbearing. Muff Potter is always drinking whisky. Injun Joe eats candles and bats while enclosed in the cave, and starves to death. When they brings them to their mouths, their surroundings are,

probably, more important than those foods.

In Twain's fictions, tables construct clear contrast between what is on table and those foods under table or without table. *The Prince and the Pauper* (1881) provides this contrast between Tom Canty's first Royal Dinner and the cheerful feasting by the people on the street around a bonfire<sup>4</sup>. *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889) is based on King Arthur's Round Table. In *Personal Recollections of Joan Of Arc* (1896), Joan of Arc gives her bowl of porridge to a ragged road struggler, and he eats it all rapidly under table. Tables, including their connoting meanings, have deep significance in Twain's literary world.

## Chapter 1

### Tom Sawyer is *Not* Given Any Lunch

In *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* Aunt Polly sets several tables, but nobody knows what kinds of food are on her tables. Especially, she does not cook any lunch for the children. At the beginning of this fiction, on Friday noon, Tom Sawyer comes back to Aunt Polly's house, supposedly, for lunch, but she does not prepare any lunch for anybody. After the morning lesson Tom comes home, but there is no lunch on her table, as usual. Having understood Polly's poverty incapable of giving lunch to the children, Tom does nothing but steal into the pantry and sitting room to find something to eat. On Polly's table there is no slice of corn bread, nor any gravy left in the bottom of a frying-pan on the stove<sup>5</sup>.

On Friday, especially in the afternoon, perhaps some superstitious traditions or religious learnings prohibit the people in St. Petersburg to cook or perform certain works. In Chapter 26 Tom and Huck suggest they should obey the taboo just before going to the haunted house:<sup>6</sup>

“Lookyhere, Tom, do you know what day it is?”...

“Blame it, a body can't be too careful, Huck. We might a got into an awful scrape, tackling such a thing on a Friday.”

“*Might!* Better say we *would!* There's some lucky days, maybe, but Friday ain't.” (*Tom* 184)

The boys are on the way to treasure hunting and are impatient to go to the haunted house, but they decide to enjoy Robin Hood play, instead. What they would avoid is a tiny thing, since they are to tackle “such a thing,” but they believe it will become troublesome. Jesus is believed to be crucified on Friday, and among the pious Christians it may be a bad thing to do something impious on Friday. To share only a little agony of the Crucifixion, some Christians fare little or nothing on Friday even now. Either way, the boys are very superstitious and rigid with their common taboos about Friday in St. Petersburg.

Even on Saturday, however, Aunt Polly does not give lunch to the whitewashing boy, and then Tom eats only the core of an apple taken from Ben Rogers. The whitewashing lasts from the Saturday morning to “the middle of the afternoon,” (*Tom* 15) during which Tom never goes into the house to take any food, nor does Aunt Polly call him in to give lunch. After the surprising result of the whitewashing, Aunt Polly gives him “a choice apple.” (*Tom* 18) During her improving lecture, Tom pilfers a doughnut, perhaps, from the table. An apple and a doughnut are all that Tom eats during Saturday noon. Aunt Polly has cooked doughnuts for the children or only for Tom, but not lunch.

About a hundred and fifty years ago, in the rural side of the Old West some people might customarily have two meals a day: breakfast and supper. Still, some pupils brought lunches of bread and butter with themselves to school, and Samuel Clemens remembers, in his *Autobiography*, he had brought his lunch while in Florida, Missouri<sup>7</sup>. It is safely said that almost all the families both in St. Petersburg and in northern Missouri could afford to get lunch and have three meals a day, everyday, in the middle of the nineteenth century.

Twain's world of fictions shows that having three meals a day is common. In *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger* (posthumously published in 1969) the family of Heinrich Stein enjoys themselves with lunch in his printing shop, together with their journeymen and apprentices, since “the noon meal was about finished.” (*No. 44* 17) Like Aunt Polly's family, Stein's is “a mixed family” (*No. 44* 12), as is suggested in this fiction, in such a family some members are not given proper meals or abused, possibly sometimes, but Heinrich Stein gives three meals a day to all the members under his roof.

Aunt Polly's family is exceptionally poverty-stricken, and she is not able

to serve themselves with three meals a day, though she subscribes for “Health” (*Tom* 92) periodicals and orders “quack medicines.” (*Tom* 93) Aunt Polly’s house has “his aunt’s cow-stable” (*Tom* 19), there is no cattle in it. In her garden, “the tomato vines and ‘jimpson’ weeds” (*Tom* 1) grow in luxuriance. Samuel Clemens is known as his unfavorable opinion about tomato. It may be possible for Aunt Polly to rear cattle and produce food crops in her garden, but she will not. She can afford to order Pain-Killer “a lot at once” (*Tom* 94) and wear a pair of spectacles “for ‘style,’ not service” (*Tom* 1), and she does not prepare any lunch for the children. Aunt Polly reduces the number of mouths she has to feed, through Sid’s apprenticeship and Mary’s working out at a country house. The author sends piercingly critical eye to Aunt Polly’s policy of her house economy.

Tom, Sid, and Mary get breakfasts and suppers at Polly’s table, but they have to find foods for lunch, respectively. Sidney Sawyer, as an apprentice boy<sup>8</sup>, gets lunch at his work place. Even in the Saturday morning Sid has to work and eats something, and comes home in the middle of the afternoon, just after Tom receives a choice apple from Aunt Polly and steals a doughnut from the table. The narrator hints Tom’s vengeance on Sid and explains, “he had settled with Sid for calling attention to his black thread and getting him into trouble.” (*Tom* 18) Yet, at the bottom of his heart, Tom holds hidden envy against Sid’s full stomach. Sid, conscious of Aunt Polly’s poverty and of Tom’s spite on his contented belly, secretly takes “the outside stairway that led to the back rooms on the second floor.” (*Tom* 18) If he is conscious that he will be always welcomed into Aunt Polly’s home, he must dance in through the front door, like Mary, “all alive with the joy of seeing home again.” (*Tom* 23) Sid understands his vulnerable situations in Aunt Polly’s home and her miserable domestic income.

Mary has to work, perhaps regularly, at a country house just around St. Petersburg, staying a whole week, and gets food there. Mary also comes back to Aunt Polly’s on the Saturday afternoon, after having lunch at her own place of work, like Sid. While the two boys are eating supper at Polly’s table on Saturday evening after nightfall, Mary dances in, “all alive with the joy of seeing home again after an age-long visit of one week to the country.” (*Tom* 23) Her joy is suggestive of her comfortableness in home.

Aunt Polly makes her home comfortable, surely, but she does not let the children satisfied with foods. The children undoubtedly want to eat something

substantial at the noon table on Sunday, but nobody knows if they are able to get food on Sunday noon in Aunt Polly's house. Aunt Polly's table does not perform its essential role at noon.

## Chapter 2

### Tom Sawyer's Adventures Stride on the Table

On the opening episode of Tom's stealing jam we find no table, but at that evening Tom and Sid sit at table, and there lies a sugar bowl on the table as below. Here again Tom steals sugar "under his aunt's very nose." (*Tom* 21)



Figure 1 A GOOD OPPORTUNITY<sup>9</sup>

These two stealing scenes form a clear contrast from the point of communal acceptance; Tom's stealing jam is socially disapproved and he has to hide himself, but his second stealing is perceived beforehand. The opening sentence of this fiction, "TOM!" suggests Tom conceals himself in a small house. On his second stealing Tom's mischief is approved, in a sense, by Aunt Polly. On symbolical reading, he is not given a proper social position at the lunch time, but Aunt Polly accepts Tom and Sid at her table in the evening. She is aware of Tom's pilfering sugar and reveals her secret attitude to accept Tom's mischievousness by confessing, at table, "You'd be always into the sugar if I warn't watching you." (*Tom* 21) Tom's stealing sugar on table is, figuratively, his first step into the community of St. Petersburg.

She represents the communally established values, and controls her table, though her control sometimes loses its justice and power even over her own table. On scolding for breaking the sugar bowl, Aunt Polly mistakes Tom

for Sid. Aunt Polly is representative of the justice of the white people, even though that justice seems doubtful to Tom. Tom's advance from food storage to table constitutes his first communal step from the unknown to the socially accepted, but his step pounds along with the fact that St. Petersburg is not always flawless.

Tom's adventures take the same step from the socially unknown to the communally accepted. Tom's adventures are divided into two kinds: what is openly talked about and what is secretly told only to the audience. One of his open adventures is the whitewashing. This punishment for Tom's stealing jam reversedly provides him with a way to the social acceptance, whether it is successful or not.

A case in point of Tom's secret adventures is his melancholic musing and his meditation on death. In Chapter 8, in the center of a dense wood, he drops into melancholy and envies "Jimmy Hodges, so lately released." (*Tom* 63) His dark side is covered with his cheerful but childlike adventures by Tom and his friends, but it has no relation with the social position in St. Petersburg, since it is shown only to the audience. And his melancholic side comes to the surface mainly in the first half of the fiction. Tom's outward adventures find a way into the community, but his inner melancholic feelings drop under the surface of this village.

Before the Jackson's Island episode Tom's adventures are not talked over the table, but during and after that, their adventures become a serious topic of the table conversation among the members of the Polly's family and Joe Harper's mother, and then, perhaps among most of the families in St. Petersburg. Soon after the three boys go to the Jackson's Island, Aunt Polly, Mary, Sid, and Ms. Harper talk about the boys over Aunt Polly's table, believing they have already drowned, and they mourn for the dead. On the text we find no words of table, but True Williams, the illustrator of this fiction, draws a table surrounded by those four people as follows:

Ms. Harper cries with her elbow on the table, and Aunt Polly and Mary lament Tom's death, with sitting at the table. Ms. Harper glorifies her son, and says, "Only last Saturday my Joe busted a fire-cracker right under my nose and I knocked him sprawling. Little did I know then, how soon—O, if it was to do over again I'd hug him and bless him for it." (*Tom* 116) Joe Harper, another





Figure 2 WHAT TOM SAW<sup>10</sup>

mischievous boy, becomes a good boy through the table conversation. The children's loss, or their sorrowful news, is brought on Aunt Polly's table, and then it is possibly taken from table to table of almost all the families in the village soon. Through this sad news the boys become known and received even in a curious way, and accepted as the good dead boys. The unknown boys grow good boys, and curiously admired.

Of course, no food is on this table of Aunt Polly's, but, contrastingly enough, at this evening, on the Jackson's Island the boys enjoy "a side of bacon," "corn porn," and "half cured leaf tobacco." Aunt Polly, Mary, Sid, and Ms. Harper do not eat anything in this evening, but the boys are satisfied with name-given foods and take sound sleep on the island. This contrast gives us a key to understand the meaning of Aunt Polly's table; the table is a social place at home to confirm their thoughts and values, not a place for food. Then, it is unnecessary to show particular names of food, even at breakfast and supper. Yet, the hungry children need concrete and substantial foods, such as bacon, corn bread, and apple pie, even at table or without table.

Under Aunt Polly's tables there lies child abuse. Aunt Polly puts on airs with her glasses for her style, and they are "the pride of her heart." (*Tom* 1) She can afford to purchase several patent medicines and subscribe for healthful periodicals. As a guardian, Aunt Polly has to accumulate necessary knowledge and medicines beforehand, and she has bought many bottles of Pain-Killer, a notorious medicine that was mainly composed of highly concentrated alcohol and morphine. It was a really dangerous medicine. Tom usually delivers a



spoonful of it into a crack in the sitting-room floor, since he keeps his control of the territory under the table. Then he administers it to Peter, a cat, and reminds Aunt Polly of her own cruelty.

From her family economy, Aunt Polly is cruel. Her family is based on very poor income, since she herself has neither lucrative jobs nor self-sufficient farming works, and since their economy is presumably on Mary and Sid. Still, Aunt Polly spends money on such useless things as her glasses and patent medicines, and she has to pay Tom's tuition fees in addition. Tom is expected to be a patriarch of this family, since he has blood relationship with Aunt Polly<sup>11</sup>. Then, Tom is given a chance to go to school. Sid, who is Tom's half-brother and therefore who is not related by blood with Aunt Polly, has to work as an apprentice. Sid is always turning critical attention to Tom's school activities, since Sid understands his money is repeatedly wasted on Tom's education. Aunt Polly's stupid economic policy leads to maltreatment of the children under her wings. Then, Tom seeks to find out a way to get money of his own to solve all these problems.

Tom makes treasure hunting with Huck Finn to get married to Becky Thatcher, and his persistent desire to get quick rich surprises us. He shows "a raging desire to go somewhere and dig for hidden treasure." (*Tom* 195) Tom and Huck witness Injun Joe and his comrade unearth John Murrel's money in the haunted house. It stimulates Tom's desire more and more, and finally they find it in the cave. This unimaginably lucky discovery strikes us stunning, but this astonishing development of the story, with the overwhelming help of the narrator, seems to be welcomed to the villagers in St. Petersburg and to most of the readers.

### Chapter 3

#### Twelve Thousand Dollars on the Table

Through his adventures, Tom comes to provide reckless but enjoyable news for the villagers, and the process of this curiously agreeable acceptance is enhanced through the tables. His fatally dangerous adventures on the Jackson's Island are brought on the table of Aunt Polly's on Thursday night, and then the boys walk into the church on Sunday to be communally accepted. After that their adventures are finally on the Monday morning table of Aunt Polly's. Here

again, Polly provides nameless food at breakfast, but, after breakfast, Tom proudly narrates and makes a touching story of his adventure, and he comes to be welcomed as a lovable member of the family, and then becomes a hero among his schoolmates.



Figure 3 TOM TRIES TO REMEMBER<sup>12</sup>

Aunt Polly, gossiping with Sereny Harper about the children's adventures on the Jackson's Island during Monday noon, comes to doubt the truthfulness of Tom's remembering their sorrowful conversation around the table on Thursday night. Early morning on Tuesday she gets through the hesitation to seek for Tom's bark letter in his jacket pocket, and eventually finds it and decides to accept Tom wholeheartedly:

Once more she ventured, and this time she fortified herself with the thought: "It's a good lie—it's a good lie—I won't let it grieve me." So she sought the jacket pocket. A moment later she was reading Tom's piece of bark through flowing tears and saying: "I could forgive the boy, now, if he'd committed a million sins!" (*Tom* 146)

Tom Sawyer gets accepted into St. Petersburg completely.

Tom takes the similar step from table to town hero through his witnessing on the Dr. Robinson murder case. Tom becomes a wholly accepted town hero of poetic justice, and nobody asks why he is in the cemetery at midnight. Tom's advance makes Huck silent about the oath between Tom and Huck, even though it is signed by their own blood. Tom's witnessing reveals his self-centeredness,

since Tom himself proposes to make an oath but he eventually destroys it. Before his standing on court, Tom feels very sorry for Muff Potter and miserable, since his dream is “full of horrors.” (*Tom* 169) Tom, however, becomes “a glittering hero” (*Tom* 173), and some villagers praise and believe that “he would be President.” (*Tom* 173) Yet, behind Tom’s progress, Huck loses his confidence in human race, which is “well nigh obliterated.” (*Tom* 173) Tom takes very important steps into St. Petersburg, but Huck remains obscure even until Injun’s attack on Widow Douglas in Chapter 29.

Furthermore, Tom gives breath-taking news to the drowsily peaceful village of St. Petersburg through his losing himself in the cave with Becky Thatcher. St. Petersburg is actually a monotonously tiresome and eventless village of about hundreds of white people, free African Americans, and slaves. Once having become a town hero, Tom is searched for by all the village people. With the mysteriously repeated help and omniscient plan by the hand of the narrator to a happy ending, Tom leads Becky to their miraculous escape out of the cave, and gives astonishing news to the villagers again. Tom confirms his steady position in St. Petersburg.

Tom puts twelve-thousand-dollar gold coins on the table of the widow Douglas’s and makes the prominent citizens of St. Petersburg believe that the money belongs to Tom and Huck since they find it:



Figure 4 TOM BACKS HIS STATEMENT<sup>13</sup>

Tom and Huck may be able to claim a part of the money on account of their efforts of discovery, but it is difficult to accept their full ownerships only through

placing it on the table. It is John Murrel's money, or at least, Injun Joe's. Yet, Tom takes advantage of the table and gets the money, and nobody complains about the ownership. As seen in the illustration above, just behind Tom there stand several influential villagers and they are willing to approve of Tom's claim.

Originally, it is Injun Joe who finds the money, but nobody in St. Petersburg will admit his ownership, since he is supposed to be a wild vagrant and, eventually to be a murderous body snatcher. He is finally believed "to have killed five citizens of the village" (241), which is created on spiteful rumors among the villagers. Basically, he is a half breed between Native Americans and African Americans and his social position is the totally basest. In St. Petersburg, it is completely impossible for him to claim the money. When Injun Joe spends it secretly, he will be able to buy only such a cheap thing as a cigar, a bottle of whisky, and a plate of food, cent by cent.

Contrastingly, Tom pours the money on the table and counts it, though Injun Joe has no table to confirm his ownership of it. The town hero Tom has already become an influential member of St. Petersburg and comes to gain the total support from the white adult villagers, suggested by their standing behind Tom around Widow Douglas's table.

In *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* the tables perform a function of communal approval of Tom's dangerous adventures and self-centered actions, and they lead directly to the white supremacy since the white people control the tables. Injun Joe and Huck Finn have no table at all. The tables in this fiction have an important function as a gateway to the white-supremacy establishment in St. Petersburg.

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<sup>1</sup> Bruce Michelson says:

The Tom Sawyer in *Tom Sawyer* is in many ways nobody, which might underlie the pleasure of this book as a children's novel, and its guilty pleasures as adult fiction. Either way, this is a story about triumph not only over childhood trauma but also over thinking and being. When Tom introduces himself to Becky, he announces to her that Thomas Sawyer is "the name they lick me by. I'm Tom, when I'm good." (80) A long way from being "licked" by experience or moral education, this boy certainly is not Thomas Sawyer; and since he is rarely "good" by local moral standards he might mean "good" in some other sense: good as a boy of improvisations, a



boy as yet unmade. The fun is that we cannot be sure what he means, or what he is. (Michelson 107)

Alan Gribben stands favorably for Tom Sawyer's and says:

Based on the evidence of what Huck says in his own novel, he chooses to stay around Tom because he finds his stunts and rhetorical skills utterly entertaining. To elevate one of these characters too grandly above the other, or to forget the balance, the elasticity, or the mortising in their relationship, is to leave behind certain subtle effects that Twain achieved in connecting their individual volumes. In many cases, the vilification of Tom Sawyer's traits and role has proceeded too far. (Gribben 306)

<sup>2</sup> For foods and dishes in the old West these books are consulted: Ferris, Marchie Cohen, *The Edible South; The Power of Food and the Making of an American Region* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), Hilliard Sam Bowers, *Hog Meat and Hoecake; Food Supply in the Old South, 1840-1860* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1972), Veit, Helen Zoe ed., *Food in the Civil War Era: The North* (East Lansing: Michigan State University press, 2014), Eden Trudy, *The Early American Table; Food and Society in the New World* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008), Wallach, Jennifer Jensen and Lindsey R. Swindall eds., *American Appetites; A Documentary Reader* (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 2014), and Diner, Hasia R. *Hungering for America; Italian, Irish, and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> James S. Leonard and James Wharton Leonard, "Mark Twain and the Anti-



"TOM ATE WITH HIS FINGERS."

P&P 53



"A GRIM AND UNSIGHTLY PICTURE."

P&P 146



Doughnut Party," *The Mark Twain Annual* (2011, Volume 9), 10–19.

<sup>4</sup> In *The Prince and the Pauper* Tom Canty and Prince Edward have quite different experiences of eating respectively, illustrated as follows:

Tom Canty (left) eats alone with his hands, which surprises the nobility waiting on him, but Prince Edward (right) is astonished at the cheerfulness and frankness of the people on the street while eating.

<sup>5</sup> In *The Gilded Age* (1873) Clemens depicts a miserable scene of poverty-stricken kitchen of the Hawkins':

His wife was there, constructing some dried apple pies; a slovenly urchin of ten was dreaming over a rude weather-vane of his own contriving; his small sister, close upon four years of age, was sopping corn-bread in some gravy left in the bottom of a frying-pan and trying hard not to sop over a finger-mark that divided the pan through the middle—for the other side belonged to the brother, whose musings made him forget his stomach for the moment; a negro woman was busy cooking, at a vast fire-place. Shiftlessness and poverty reigned in the place. (*GA* 22–23)

<sup>6</sup> It is noteworthy that Huck himself points out it is Friday, which shows Huck shares common values of the white establishment in St. Petersburg. Furthermore, he understands a blue ticket of the Sunday school since he "Bought it off'n Ben Rogers two weeks ago for a hoop-stick." (*Tom* 49)

<sup>7</sup> In *Autobiography*, Samuel Clemens remembers his happy days in Florida, Missouri:

The country schoolhouse was three miles from my uncle's farm. It stood in a clearing the woods, and would hold about twenty-five boys and girls. We attended the school with more or less regularity once or twice, in summer, walking to it in the cool of the morning by the forest paths, and back in the gloaming at the end of the day. All the pupils brought their dinners in basket—corn dodger, buttermilk and other good things—and sat in the shade of the trees at noon and ate them. It is the part of my education which I look back upon with the most satisfaction. (*Autobiography* 1 216)

This is Clemens's happy memory of Florida at his uncle's home, but in Hannibal, especially after John Marshall Clemens's death in 1847, the Clemens family economically ruined, and Samuel Clemens had to find bread, both figuratively and concretely, by himself.

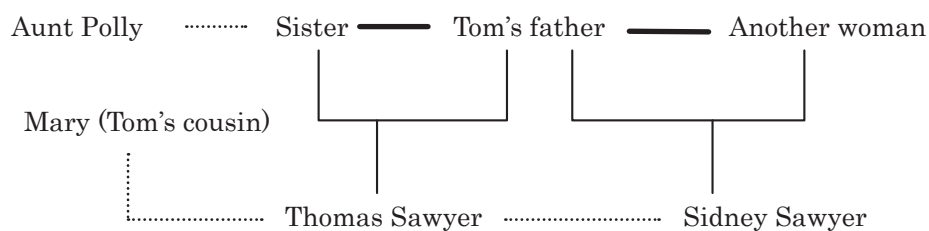
<sup>8</sup> See Waguri, 「『トム・ソーヤーの冒険』におけるポリーおばさん家のなぞ：シッド・ソーヤーの見るトム・ソーヤーの冒険」.

<sup>9</sup> *Tom*, 3.

<sup>10</sup> *Tom*, 115.

<sup>11</sup> Waguri make clear family tree of Aunt Polly as below (Waguri 38):

Family Tree of Aunt Polly



— Marital relationship

— Parental relationship

..... Brother, sister, and cousin

<sup>12</sup> *Tom*, 134.

<sup>13</sup> *Tom*, 252.