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Mark Twain's Humor: A Study Of Situational And Character-Centric Techniques

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Mark Twain, celebrated as a pioneering American humorist, skillfully integrates humor into his literary works, employing situational and character-centric techniques that have captivated readers for generations. This paper delves into the multifaceted ways in which Twain crafts humor through the intricate interplay of situations and character development, offering a comprehensive analysis of selected texts, including The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, and A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court.

The study begins by exploring situational humor, examining how Twain uses everyday scenarios, unexpected events, and ironic circumstances to evoke laughter and highlight the absurdities of human nature and societal norms. These situational constructs often serve as a vehicle for Twain's satirical commentary on issues such as racism, social hierarchy, and human folly.

Parallel to this, the paper investigates character-centric humor, focusing on how Twain's vivid and memorable characters—ranging from the innocent mischief of Tom Sawyer to the shrewd cunning of the Duke and the King—serve as sources of comedic relief and critical reflection. Through detailed character analysis, the paper illustrates how Twain's characters embody exaggerated traits, engage in witty dialogue, and find themselves in ludicrous predicaments, all of which contribute to the rich tapestry of humor in his works.

By juxtaposing these two techniques, the paper highlights Twain's mastery in blending situational context with character-driven humor to create a dynamic and enduring literary style. Ultimately, the analysis underscores the significance of humor in Twain's narratives, not merely as a source of entertainment but as a profound tool for social critique and human insight.

Keywords: Mark Twain, Humor, Situational Humor, Character-Centric Humor, Satire, Literary Analysis, Social Critique, American Literature, Irony, Character Development

1. INTRODUCTION:

Mark Twain, born Samuel Langhorne Clemens, is celebrated as one of America's greatest literary figures, renowned for his distinctive use of humor to critique society and explore the human condition. His works, filled with wit and irony, continue to resonate with readers, offering both entertainment and profound insights into the complexities of life in 19th-century America. This paper delves into Twain's masterful integration of humor through situational contexts and character dynamics, focusing on the select works of Mark Twain.

Humor in literature serves multiple purposes, from engaging and entertaining the audience to providing a vehicle for social commentary. In Twain's time, America was undergoing significant transformations, including the aftermath of the Civil War, the challenges of Reconstruction, and the rapid expansion westward. Against this backdrop, Twain's humor offered a unique lens through which to view and critique societal norms, human behavior, and the contradictions inherent in American life. His ability to infuse humor into his narratives not only captivated readers but also invited them to reflect critically on the issues of their day.

Twain's approach to humor is distinguished by its reliance on both situational context and character

development. Situational humor in his works often arises from the absurdities and incongruities of everyday life, exposing the folly and hypocrisy of societal conventions. For example, in The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, the comedic escapades of Huck and Jim highlight the contradictions and moral ambiguities of a society grappling with issues of race and identity. These situational constructs enable Twain to use irony and satire to challenge and critique the established norms of his time.

Equally significant is Twain's use of character-centric humor, where the humor emanates from the personalities and exaggerated traits of his characters. In The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, Tom's mischievous and adventurous spirit, combined with his cunning and resourcefulness, provides a continuous source of humor and entertainment. Twain's characters, with their diverse and often ludicrous traits, engage in witty dialogue and find themselves in comically absurd situations that satirize both the medieval setting and contemporary American society. Through these characters, Twain not only entertains but also offers a critique of human nature and social constructs.

By examining these two forms of humor in Twain's selected works, this paper aims to highlight the author's ability to blend situational context with character-driven humor to create a dynamic and enduring literary style. The analysis underscores the significance of humor in Twain's narratives, not merely as a source of amusement but as a powerful tool for social critique and deeper understanding of human nature. Through this study, we gain a deeper appreciation of Twain's literary genius and the lasting impact of his humorous yet incisive examination of society.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

1. To analyze how Mark Twain employs situational humor in his works to critique societal norms and human behavior through various literary techniques.

2. To explore the role of character-driven humor in Twain's literature, focusing on the exaggerated traits and dialogues of his characters as a means of social commentary.

3. To compare and contrast the use of situational and character-centric humor across the select works and identifying the similarities and differences in Twain's approach.

4. To assess the social and cultural impact of Twain's humor by examining how it reflects and critiques the societal contexts of 19th-century America and its relevance to contemporary issues.

5. To contribute to the scholarly understanding of Mark Twain's literary style by providing an in-depth analysis of his humor techniques, enriching the discourse on his works and their significance in American literature.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW:

Mark Twain, born Samuel Langhorne Clemens, has been the subject of extensive scholarly exploration, particularly concerning his unique approach to humor. Twain's humor is not merely a means of entertainment but a complex tool for critiquing society and exploring human nature, as reflected in the abundant academic literature on the topic. Scholars have highlighted how Twain's humor is deeply embedded in the socio-political context of 19th-century America, a period marked by significant issues such as racism, slavery, and social inequality. Fishkin (1995) emphasizes that Twain's humor serves not just as comic relief but as a critical examination of societal norms, making his works both engaging and intellectually stimulating.

The concept of situational humor, where the comedic elements arise from specific scenarios and contexts, is a prevalent theme in Twain's literature. Eble (1974) discusses how Twain's situational humor often underscores the absurdities of everyday life and societal conventions, creating a satirical lens through which readers can scrutinize their own beliefs and behaviors. For example, in The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, the humorous predicaments of Huck and Jim are crafted to critique the moral contradictions of a society that upholds both freedom and slavery. These scenarios are not just entertaining but also serve as a vehicle for Twain's satirical commentary, prompting readers to reflect critically on the issues of their time.

Similarly, Robinson (2011) examines situational humor in A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court, noting how Twain employs anachronistic scenarios to juxtapose medieval and contemporary American values. This comparison creates a satirical contrast that highlights the absurdity of romanticizing the past while critiquing the lack of progress in contemporary society. Robinson's analysis suggests that Twain's humor, in these contexts, is a sophisticated tool for examining and challenging societal norms.

Character-centric humor, which arises from the exaggerated traits and interactions of characters, is another fundamental aspect of Twain's comedic style. Kaplan (1966) explores how Twain's characters are often larger-than-life figures whose exaggerated traits provide both comic relief and critical commentary on human nature. In The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, for instance, Tom's mischievous and adventurous nature is a continuous source of humor, reflecting the complexities of moral development and the youthful spirit. These character traits not only entertain but also offer a deeper exploration of human behavior and societal expectations.

Budd (2007) delves into Twain's use of character-driven humor in The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, highlighting the complex and often ironic relationship between Huck and Jim. Budd argues that the humor in their interactions serves to undermine racial stereotypes and present a nuanced critique of societal values. The wit and irony in their dialogues reveal deeper truths about friendship, freedom, and moral integrity, demonstrating Twain's skill in using character-centric humor to address serious social issues.

Several scholars have conducted comparative studies on Twain's use of situational and character-centric humor across his works. Baender (1965) notes the contrast between the light-hearted, character-driven humor in The Adventures of Tom Sawyer and the more somber, situational humor in The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. Baender suggests that while Tom's humor is rooted in his playful character, Huck's humor often arises from the absurd and contradictory situations he encounters, reflecting a deeper engagement with societal issues. This comparative analysis highlights Twain's versatility in employing different humor techniques to address a range of themes and contexts.

Twain's humor has also been analyzed for its social and cultural impact. Blair (1999) explores how Twain's humor serves as a form of social critique, using both situational contexts and character interactions to engage with important societal issues. Blair argues that Twain's ability to blend humor with serious social commentary has made his works enduringly relevant, allowing readers to engage with critical issues in an accessible and thought-provoking way. For instance, the humor in A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court critiques the idealization of the past and challenges readers to reflect on their own societal progress and shortcomings.

The study of Twain's humor extends beyond literary analysis to appreciate his lasting impact on American culture and literature. Scholars like Bush (2001) have highlighted how Twain's innovative use of humor, combining situational irony and character-driven wit, has influenced subsequent generations of writers and comedians. Bush argues that Twain's humor, with its ability to entertain and critique, has cemented his place as a central figure in American literary history. His works continue to inspire and challenge readers, demonstrating the enduring power of humor as a tool for social reflection and critique.

Overall, the existing literature on Mark Twain's humor underscores its complexity and multifaceted nature. Scholars have examined how Twain's humor serves not only to entertain but also to critique societal norms and offer deeper insights into the human condition. This literature review provides a comprehensive foundation for further exploration into Twain's use of situational and character-centric humor, highlighting its significance in his literary oeuvre and its lasting impact on American literature and culture.

4. RESEARCH ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION:

4.1. Humour of situation in Mark Twain's works:

One of Mark Twain's celebrated short stories, "The Million Pound Bank Note," revolves around a whimsical bet between two wealthy and eccentric Londoners who argue whether merely possessing a million-pound bank note would be sufficient to secure one's future without the need to ever cash it. To test their hypothesis, they hand the note to an impoverished American passer-by, instructing him to return it in a month to claim his reward. Almost instantly, the once-destitute man transforms into a figure of respect and admiration—not because he spends the money, but due to the perceived wealth that the note symbolizes. It's the illusion of wealth, rather than actual wealth, that holds the true power. As long as he possesses the note, his credit seems boundless. The finest restaurants, tailors, and hotels welcome him with open arms, and merely showing the note is enough to secure his status. He even becomes the most sought-after bachelor in England. Through these comedic situations, Twain humorously demonstrates how societal respect is often tied to the illusion of wealth, emphasizing the superficiality and pretense that govern social interactions (Twain, The Million Pound Bank Note, pp. 28-35).

In "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg," Twain presents a brilliant psychological and social critique of how money influences human nature, highlighting the universal prevalence of greed when temptation is introduced. When a mysterious stranger leaves a sack of gold in the town, the initially virtuous Mrs. Richards

immediately locks the doors and bars the windows, her thoughts turning to potential thieves (Twain, The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg, p. 12). This simple act underscores how quickly fear and greed can reshape one's behavior. The greed of the Richardses is paralleled only by their tortured anxiety—not over the morality of their deceit, but over the consequences of being found out. The entire town's concern shifts from moral integrity to the fear of exposure. Mary Richards expresses this internal struggle, saying, "God forgive me—it's awful to think such things" (Twain, The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg, p. 17), yet she continues to act on her greed, unable to resist the lure of potential wealth. Through these situations, Twain satirizes the hypocrisy and moral compromises people make when faced with financial temptation. Despite their previous honesty, their actions now reveal how powerfully the prospect of wealth can influence behavior.

Through these narratives, Twain cleverly exposes the folly of valuing appearance over substance and highlights the moral ambiguities that arise in the face of financial temptation. His humor not only entertains but also provides a sharp critique of societal attitudes towards wealth and integrity.

In "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg," the town of Hadleyburg serves as a microcosm of America, already corrupted by greed and deceit even before the arrival of Satan. Although Satan's initial aim is revenge, his actions inadvertently lead to a measure of moral reckoning within the town. This theme of corruption by money and greed is further explored in "The $30,000 Bequest," a sort of sequel to the earlier story.

In "The $30,000 Bequest," the setting shifts to the Far West town of Lakeside, where Saladin "Sally" Foster works as a bookkeeper. His wife, Electra Aleck, is a capable partner who has engaged in minor real estate investments using their modest savings from a life of frugality. Their daughters, Clytemnestra and Gwendolyn, make up a loving, virtuous family. However, their peaceful existence is dramatically altered by the promise of unearned wealth. The anticipation of the bequest leads them to fantasize about extravagant purchases and a life of luxury, which ultimately results in discontent and disillusionment when the promised money fails to materialize. Through these scenarios, Twain humorously explores how the prospect of sudden wealth can disrupt lives and reveal underlying greed and vanity, emphasizing the transient and often destructive nature of such dreams.

The Fosters are nearly overwhelmed with joy when they receive word that Sally's distant relative, Tilbury Foster—a seventy-year-old bachelor—will soon die and leave Sally thirty thousand dollars in cash. Tilbury's bequest is not out of love but rather as a final act of spite; having suffered many troubles and annoyances due to money, he wished to leave it where it could continue to wreak havoc. The inheritance would be detailed in his will and paid out, on the condition that Sally does not acknowledge the gift in any way, avoids inquiring about Tilbury's health, and refrains from attending the funeral.

Blinded by greed, Sally and Electra overlook the irony and potential sorrow of the situation, and they immediately start planning how to spend their anticipated fortune. This sudden shift in the family's dynamics underscores the destructive power of greed, echoing the moral lessons seen in the corruption of Hadleyburg.

In The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, Mark Twain crafts numerous scenarios that evoke laughter among the characters and readers alike. Tom, a mischievous boy, often engages in humorous and childlike antics early in the novel. Twain frequently highlights the reactions of the townspeople, portraying their behavior in a way that arouses humor.

For instance, Twain humorously depicts them at church, where they are both moved by the minister's thrilling sermon and amused by an incident involving a poodle and a pinch-bug. When Dr. Robinson is murdered, the townspeople's excitement leads them to abandon their daily routines, rush to the crime scene, and spread all sorts of rumors. Their behavior is portrayed humorously once again during the supposed funeral of Tom, Huck, and Joe, where they nearly convince themselves that the boys were noble heroes rather than mischievous troublemakers.

The townspeople also play a prominent role during the school examination day, where they are easily taken in by sentimental and trivial writings. At Muff Potter's trial, they circulate malicious rumors until his innocence is proven, at which point they quickly change their stance and praise him. Twain's depiction of these situations and characters not only provides comedic entertainment but also critiques societal tendencies to quickly judge and sensationalize events.

When Becky and Tom become lost in the cave, the villagers drop everything to search for them, spending several days and nights in the effort. Their dedication underscores the tight-knit nature of the community, where every member's well-being is of shared concern. After Tom and Huck discover treasure, many of the villagers,

driven by greed, attempt to find treasure themselves, even going so far as to tear up abandoned houses in their quest.

These townspeople add depth and substance to Tom's world. He is part of a specific social group that reacts in predictable ways due to their shared backgrounds and traditions. Tom's growth and adventures are framed within this communal context, and the villagers' behaviors and actions reveal universal human qualities, contributing to the realism of the novel.

In The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Mark Twain infuses the narrative with various forms of humor, each serving a unique purpose. In the third chapter, for instance, Huck ventures into the woods to reflect on the Widow Douglas's teachings about prayer. Huck's mental confusion is humorously portrayed, highlighting the contrast between his innocence and the Widow's complex religious concepts. His earnest yet naive attempts to understand prayer provide a comedic insight into the gap between Huck's simple worldview and the sophisticated moral lessons he's trying to grasp.

A different kind of humor is evident in Huck's description of the Grangerford parlor. Through Huck's unsophisticated perspective, the room is described in meticulous detail, inadvertently exposing its inherent tackiness. However, Huck's admiration for the parlor, based on his misunderstanding, lends an unconscious humor to his description. This naivety makes readers more sympathetic toward the Grangerford family, despite the irony of Huck's misplaced admiration. Twain's clever use of humor here not only highlights Huck's innocence but also satirizes the pretensions of the Grangerfords, blending warmth and irony to create a richly textured narrative.

Huck frequently employs unconscious humor to extricate himself from difficult situations. At one point, he fabricates a story about being an orphan apprenticed to a cruel farmer. His lies, though intended to protect himself, create a comic effect for the reader, who is well aware of the truth. Huck says, "My father and mother was dead, and the law had bound me out to a mean old farmer in the country... he treated me so bad I couldn't stand it no longer... so... cleared out" (Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, p. 60). Later, when questioned by some men on the river, he claims, "It's pap that's there, and maybe you'd help me tow the raft ashore where the light is. He's sick—and so is mam and Mary Ann" (Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, p. 90).

Twain's use of humor, whether through Huck's earnest musings or his clever fabrications, enriches the narrative, providing both levity and depth to Huck's adventures. Much of the humor in Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is rooted in the rich tradition of Western humor. Huck Finn emerges as the Mississippi River's greatest yarn spinner, able to concoct stories for any situation. His propensity for lying, though frequent, is not meant to be taken too seriously, as the comedic tone often mitigates any grave moral implications.

In one outlandish scenario after another, Huck spins fantastic tales. For example, when he encounters two slave hunters, Huck, casting aside his conscience, tells them that the man in the wigwam on the raft is white and is his father. When the hunters insist on verifying his story, Huck "confesses" that his father is sick and that others have refused to help. Believing that "Pap" has smallpox, the hunters advise Huck on how to deceive others in the next town and even give him forty dollars to continue down the river (Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, p. 90). Meanwhile, Jim, hidden on the raft, is prepared to flee to shore if necessary, but returns once the men depart. Huck reflects, "Give a nigger an inch and he'll take an ell" (Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, p. 88), showcasing his growing awareness of the liberating effect of freedom on Jim.

Shortly after this encounter, Huck tells another tale, claiming his sister and parents are stricken with smallpox. A few pages later, he changes his story, stating that his siblings have left him and his parents have died, leaving him nothing (Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, p. 94). Finally, when speaking to the King and the Duke, Huck invents an even more tragic tale (Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, p. 106). These instances highlight Huck's adeptness at tailoring his stories to suit his audience, creating a comic effect for readers who are aware of the truth.

These ever-changing narratives underscore Huck's cleverness and adaptability, amusing readers with each inventive and fantastical story he tells. After the adventure on the wrecked steamboat Sir Walter Scott, Huck and Jim plan to sell their raft and take a steamboat up the Ohio River from Cairo, into the free states. However, a dense fog separates them, with Huck in the canoe and Jim remaining on the raft. Huck wishes "the fool would think to beat a tin pan" (Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, p. 85). They drift apart further, navigating through a maze of towheads. Exhausted and lonely, Huck tries to nap. He wakes up to a clear night under the starlight and eventually finds the raft again, now "littered up with leaves and branches and dirt" from the rough journey through the towheads, with Jim sitting exhausted and asleep, holding the steering oar (Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, p. 86).

Upon waking Jim, who is profoundly relieved that Huck has returned, Huck pretends he has been asleep on the raft the entire time and suggests that Jim must have been drunk or dreaming. Despite Jim's disbelief about a dream filled with such anxiety and fatigue, he recounts what happened and "interprets" it as a warning from Providence. As the dawn light grows, Huck points to the leaves and rubbish on the raft and asks Jim what they stand for. Jim, who is described as "the easiest nigger to laugh that ever was," realizes the truth and the deception. Unsurprisingly, Jim responds with profound hurt and seriousness:

"What do dey stan' for? I's gwyne to tell you. When I got all wore out wid work, en wid de callin' for you, en went to sleep, my heart wuz mos' broke bekase you wuz los', an I didn'k'yer no mo' what become er me en de raf'. En when I wake up en fine you back agin, all safe en soun', de tears come en I could a got down on my knees en kiss' yo' foot I's so thankful. En all you wuz thinkin' 'bout wuz how you could make a fool uv ole Jim wid a lie. Dat truck dah is trash; en trash is what people is dat puts dirt on de head er dey fren's en makes 'em ashamed" (Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, p. 86).

Huck feels deeply ashamed after his deceit is revealed. Following a sharp struggle with his conscience, he humbles himself to Jim, admitting, "but I done it, and I warn't ever sorry for it afterwards, neither" (Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, p. 86). He tells the reader that he played no more "mean tricks" on Jim, and indeed, he does not thereafter.

The impact of Jim's rebuke and the entire episode is crafted with exquisite dramatic and verbal artistry. Jim's interpretation of his "dream" encapsulates much of the novel's thematic essence. The towheads symbolize contentious and unkind individuals, while the river's current represents a force that can either aid or hinder them; if they proceed calmly, they will "get out of the fog and into the big clear river, which was the free states" (Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, p. 85).

As they approach Cairo, another significant moral turning point occurs. Huck, who has been learning and growing throughout their journey, witnesses Jim becoming "all over trembly and feverish to be so close to freedom" (Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, p. 87). Jim passionately discusses his plans to save money once free, purchase his wife's freedom, and eventually reunite with their children. The thought of violating moral principles, such as "Thou shalt not steal," and defying the Fugitive Slave Law unsettles Huck deeply. His conscience compels him to take the canoe with the intent to betray Jim to the authorities on shore. However, he recoils at the thought and is spared from carrying out his plan when two armed men in a skiff pass by, hunting for runaway slaves.

Bricksville emerges as a town rife with colorful characters who exemplify humanity's complex interactions. Among them are town loafers, a recurrent drunk named Boggs, a tall man with a cane, the ostentatious Colonel Sherburn who owns the largest store, and the deceptive King and Duke. The town attracts crowds of "Arkansaw lunkheads" eager to witness the King's antics in "The Royal Nonesuch," advertised with the exclusionary notice, "LADIES AND CHILDREN NOT ADMITTED" in bold letters (Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, p. 150).

Huck paints a vivid picture of the town, populated by a "mighty ornery lot" of tobacco-chewing loafers who entertain themselves by cruelly tormenting animals. On this circus day and weekend, the town is bustling with families from the countryside. Among them is Boggs, a periodic drunkard who, although good-natured and harmless when sober, becomes belligerent and threatens others when intoxicated. When Boggs insults Colonel Sherburn and threatens to kill him, Sherburn calmly gives him until one o'clock to leave town. Despite efforts from Boggs's daughter and friends to remove him before the deadline, they are unsuccessful. At one o'clock, Sherburn fulfills his warning by firing both barrels of his pistol into Boggs's chest. Boggs dies in a nearby drugstore, with a large Bible under his head and another on his chest, while his gentle sixteen-year-old daughter mourns inconsolably.

The incident draws a large crowd around the drugstore, eagerly pushing and shoving to catch a glimpse of the deceased Boggs. A tall, lanky man in a grand white fur stovepipe hat, wielding a cane, seizes the opportunity to reenact the killing for their amusement:

"[He] marked out the places on the ground where Boggs stood, and where Sherburn stood. The people followed him around from one spot to another, nodding in understanding, stooping slightly with hands resting on their thighs as they watched him mark the ground with his cane. Then he stood upright where Sherburn had stood, scowling with his hat-brim pulled low over his eyes, and shouted, 'Boggs!' He brought his cane down slowly to aim and said, 'Bang!' staggering backwards. 'Bang!' again, and collapsed flat on his back. Those who had witnessed the actual event declared his performance flawless, insisting it mirrored the real incident perfectly. In response, a

dozen onlookers pulled out their bottles and treated him" (Twain, pp. 144-145).

The undertaker's accommodating response at Peter Wilks's funeral, where he excuses himself from the mourners to quell a disturbance in the cellar caused by a barking dog, humorously echoes later events. He returns and explains in a gruff whisper, "He had a rat!" The rowdy loafers, who find joy in a dogfight, are undoubtedly among the enthusiastic crowd that quickly rallies behind Buck Harkness's call for Sherburn's lynching.

The townspeople, now transformed into a mob armed with clotheslines, swarm over Sherburn's fence. However, they freeze in their tracks when Sherburn steps onto his front-porch roof, brandishing a double-barreled gun. Sherburn's scathing rebuke, delivered before he silences them by cocking his weapon, perhaps offers the clearest glimpse in the novel where Mark Twain's persona slips to reveal Samuel Clemens beneath. Nevertheless, Sherburn's speech is fitting for a man who, secure in a misguided code of personal honor, has just taken a life. He tells the crowd they possess enough bravery to torment "poor friendless cast-out women" with tar and feathers but are spineless when confronted head-on. If they intend to lynch him, he challenges, they must come under the cover of darkness, masked and prepared.

The same townspeople who face Sherburn's defiance are the very ones duped by the King and the Duke in their indecent stage act, which nets them a profit of $465 over two nights. The evolving bond between Huck and Jim, juxtaposed against the dark undercurrents of human cruelty embodied by characters like the King and the Duke, are two dominant themes intertwining to shape the fabric of Huckleberry Finn. Yet, these alone fail to capture the novel's true essence or the lasting impact it leaves on readers. A third vital thread is the pervasive humor that imbues the narrative from its opening pages, ensuring the work retains its comedic spirit. Initially appearing as sympathetic rogues akin to Falstaff, the two con men gradually reveal their true colors.

For instance, after Huck, the self-proclaimed Biblical scholar, imparts to Jim his knowledge about King Solomon's vast harem, Jim humorously responds with his native wit:
"A harem's a boarding-house, I reckon. Most likely they have a racket in the nursery. And I reckon the wives quarrel considerable, and that increases the racket. Yet they say Solomon was the wisest man that ever lived. I don't take no stock in that. Because why would a wise man want to live amidst such a clamor all the time? No—indeed he wouldn't. A wise man would build a boiler factory; then he could shut himself in the boiler factory when he wants to rest" (Twain, p. 77).

Huck, continuing in his role as the self-appointed historian, regales Jim with his version of Henry VIII's misdeeds during a war that occurred more than two centuries after Henry's death:
"Well, Henry takes it into his head he wants to stir up some trouble in this country. How does he go about it—give notice? Hold a country fair? No. All of a sudden he dumps all the tea in Boston Harbor, issues a declaration of independence, and challenges them to come at him. That was his style—he never gave anybody a chance. He had suspicions about his father, the Duke of Wellington. So what did he do? Invite him to come forward? No—he drowned him in a butt of malmsey, like a cat. Suppose people left money lying around where he was—what did he do? He grabbed it. Suppose he agreed to do something, you paid him, and didn't stay to watch him do it—what did he do? He always did the opposite. Suppose he opened his mouth—what then? If he didn't shut it up real quick, he'd tell a lie every time. That's the kind of bug Henry was; and if we'd had him instead of our kings, he'd have fooled this town worse than ours ever did" (Twain, p. 154).

Although Huck's speech exposes him as an overly confident pretender to knowledge, he concludes with sound horse sense: "All I say is, kings are kings, and you've got to make allowances. Take them all around, they're a mighty ornery lot" (Twain, p. 155). In other words, right after concocting his historical mishmash, this muddled thinker arrives at a shrewd judgment.

Often, humor arises from the situations themselves. Huck, having just swiped a chunk of cornpone and a slice of butter from the Phelpses' pantry and shoved them into his ragged straw hat, wears it atop his head. When Aunt Sally discovers him up during the middle of the night and the butter melts, running down his forehead, she exclaims, "He's got the brain fever as sure as you're born, and it's oozing out!" (Twain, p. 273), before realizing Huck was only pilfering from the pantry.

More seriously, Jim is terrified by the sight of Huck's ghostly figure at daybreak on Jackson's Island, just before Huck narrates how he "got killed" (Twain, p. 42)—a situation that foreshadows Tom Sawyer's fright upon encountering Huck at the Phelps farm: "Don't you play nothing on me, because I wouldn't on you. Honest Injun, now, you ain't a ghost?" (Twain, p. 225). Aunt Sally's distressed state of mind and the boys' beliefs in hauntings and ghosts make such situations possible.

In their very first encounter, Tom Sawyer plays a characteristic prank on the sleeping Jim by taking his hat from his head and hanging it on a tree limb. Jim's interpretation of the event as the work of witches, his consultation of the hairball to predict Huck's future with Pap, his knowledge of signs—including the folk belief that a hairy breast signifies future wealth—and even the anecdote about his bank and speculation, all reveal the depth of knowledge and superstition of this slave who "knowed most everything" (Twain, p. 45). Despite his superstitious beliefs, Jim demonstrates courage by fleeing when his mistress mentions selling him "down to Orleans" for "a big stack o' money" (Twain, p. 43).

Another subtle satirical element in Tom's efforts to free Jim is his insistence on elaborate plans. Tom refuses to join Huck's straightforward plan to free Jim directly, insisting they must find a way that is "twice as long" (Twain, p. 235). According to Tom, the "best authorities" (Twain, p. 240) suggest it takes prisoners "weeks and weeks and weeks" (Twain, p. 244) to dig out, with one prisoner allegedly taking "thirty-seven year" to escape from "Castle Deef" (Twain, p. 244). While Tom acknowledges they will eventually need to release Jim, he insists it should take a couple of years. Huck is willing to exaggerate, claiming they were at it "a hundred and fifty years" (Twain, p. 245), as long as they free Jim promptly. Yet Tom persists in his fantasy. After an evening of digging that leaves their hands "looking like they'd been chewed," Tom is exhilarated: "He said it was the best fun he ever had in his life, and the most intellectual; and said if he only could see his way to it we would keep it up all the rest of our lives and leave Jim to our children to get out; for he believed Jim would come to like it better and better the more he got used to it. He said that in that way it could be strung out to as much as eighty years, and would be the best time on record. And he said it would make us all celebrated that had a hand in it" (Twain, p. 249).

The epitome of this "gradualist" theme reaches its peak in Jim's imagined coat of arms as envisioned by Tom. The concluding chapters, dominated by Tom Sawyer, often exhibit a shallower humor and disrupt the story's framework, yet they remain integral to its humorous plot.

4.2. Humour of character in Mark Twain's works:

Characters in literature often seize the spotlight, commanding greater attention with detailed descriptions and nuanced revelations. Protagonists are typically fully fleshed-out, while secondary characters are sketched in to enhance the narrative backdrop. Literary characters endure and remain stable over time, though readers' perceptions of them may evolve. Those characters that resonate across generations become truly universal figures.

When analyzing characters, it's beneficial to assume their development is coherent. This doesn't imply that every detail is predetermined from the outset; characters can evolve within a story while maintaining internal consistency. However, coherent characterization presumes consistent values, motives, and beliefs that dictate their actions and speech. Deviations from this consistency suggest either narrative inconsistency or a shift in the character's worldview. Characters are pivotal in dramatic literature, often serving as the central focus of the narrative.

Mark Twain believed that comedy largely hinges on societal manners, ideas, and prejudices. Each person possesses unique characteristics, oddities, and eccentricities by which others identify and classify them. According to Bergson, humor begins where a person's character no longer affects us; it arises from a rigidity that compels individuals to persist along a singular path, ignoring alternative perspectives.

Twain, drawing from his vast personal experiences, asserted in a letter dated 1890 that personal life experiences provide the most valuable foundation for constructing novels. His life encompassed diverse roles such as a Mississippi river steamboat pilot, Western miner, newspaper reporter, lecturer, and publisher. These varied experiences equipped him to vividly depict characters and compress their traits into succinct descriptions.

In his mature works, Twain's keen observations of human behavior enabled him to present vivid portrayals of "the damned human race." While his characters serve to entertain, Twain's primary aim often included imparting social lessons and encouraging societal improvement (Twain, 1890, p. 147).

Emerson posited that the role of the artist in society is to seek the elemental and to renew primitive experiences within the collective consciousness. Mark Twain found such an opportunity in the Tuolumne hills, where he escaped the ostentatious wealth and artificiality of Gold Hill and Nob Hill. There, he encountered "natural" men untouched by societal affectations, living simple lives far removed from the political corruption, racial tensions, and social pressures of urban environments. Twain felt no compulsion to moralize among them.

At Angel's Camp, he began jotting down notebook entries that later served as the foundation for his stories. In 1865, Twain resumed writing burlesques and extravaganzas for the Californian, many of which carried moral messages. One day, due to the scarcity of reading material, Twain attempted to borrow a book from Ben Coon, "a nice bald-headed man." Coon hesitated briefly before regaling Twain with tales of his travels involving the "mighty responsible old Webster-Unabridged" dictionary, which circulated among the camp at Angel's. Despite its popularity, no one praised the dictionary.

The story of the "old Webster-Unabridged" served as a precursor to "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" and "Jim Baker's Blue-jay Yarn." In this sketch, Twain's focus shifted to character, particularly on Ben Coon and his complex relationship with his environment and experiences. The remainder of the sketch reverted to Twain's earlier style of burlesque, blending social criticism with satire, highlighting the shortage of reading material at Angel's Camp to lampoon "machine politics."

Mark Twain's literary work is characterized by a profound naturalness, a quality that suggests artlessness yet is achieved through meticulous attention to detail. He engaged with native materials with a sense of freedom, appreciating the drama inherent in everyday life without embellishing scenes with heightened dramatic intensity. Twain recognized that even the most peculiar individuals, set against the backdrop of mountains and seas, were fundamentally human underneath. This same naturalness permeates his portrayal of even the most eccentric characters.

Twain's ability to capture snapshot impressions of people is evident in his humorous sketches starting from 1865. His greatest efforts in character creation were devoted not to urban dwellers or foreigners, but to the simple yet dedicated individuals of the frontier. Growing up in Missouri, he was undoubtedly influenced by the distinctive personalities of Southwestern frontier originals. From these figures, Twain learned to extract characters imbued with what he termed "the principle of life."

There was something about the primal quality of frontier life that resonated deeply with Twain's imagination. He focused on individuals drawn from the vast common masses, seeking to capture their essence without the overlay of social critique. "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" stands as a testament to Twain's skill in pure character portrayal, unadulterated by moralizing or social commentary.

When Twain listened to Ben Coon spinning yarns by the fire at Angel's Camp, he realized the literary value inherent in such narratives, which he had previously overlooked. Over time and through experience, Twain came to favor these genuine, unvarnished materials over his more typical subjects.

Mark Twain chose to focus his literary attention on the masses of common men, who became not only the center of his artistic consciousness but also the focus of his ethical reflections. As he delved into humanity and depicted village life, Twain's role evolved from a mere character painter to a novelist.

In Twain's farcical tale "The Million Pound Bank Note," he masterfully satirizes a system where appearances of wealth often outweigh actual wealth itself. Through the story, Twain critiques the notion that a person's social standing is determined more by their possessions than by their character. The possession of vast wealth in the story fails to bring true happiness to the American protagonist, serving as a cautionary tale about the pitfalls of sudden, undeserved wealth.

Twain's portrayal of the protagonist also serves as a critique of the rise of a new class of cunning, ruthless, and morally dubious financial magnates in American society. Through irony and parable, Twain highlights the transformative impact these figures have on American life, challenging conventional values and norms.

Overall, Twain's work blends nostalgic reminiscence of the past with a biting critique of contemporary American society. It reflects both a yearning for simpler times and a harsh condemnation of the societal changes wrought by greed and ambition.

The character of the stranger in "Hadleyburg" is likened to Satan in the Bible. This "bitter and revengeful" man spends "a whole year" laying his trap for the people of Hadleyburg. He is portrayed as the father of lies, leading Richards into his first deception to his wife and ultimately exposing the falsehood that the entire town had embraced. He serves as the tempter who hastens Hadleyburg's downfall by enticing them with gold, knowing well that "the love of money is the root of all evil." He carefully hints to the citizens during the town-hall meeting, "I have dealings with persons interested in numismatics all over the world." The story embodies Twain's cynicism about humanity through the character of this vengeful stranger.

Richards laments, "It is dreadful to be poor," but Twain suggests that it is even more dreadful to be rich. Initially, Richards considers destroying the stranger's written bequest to keep the sack of gold for himself, revealing how quickly his frontier virtue crumbles under temptation. Hadleyburg is depicted as an "honest, narrow, self-righteous, and stingy" town, as declared by the town rebel, Barclay Goodson. The stranger in the story represents not only the constant deception of others but, more insidiously, the continuous and unconscious self-deception of the townspeople.

In "The $30,000 Bequest," the story begins by introducing the main characters, Saladin and Electra Foster, through the retrospective narration of an omniscient speaker. Electra's assertive, masculine traits are aptly reflected in her nickname, Aleck. Conversely, her husband's submissive character aligns with his feminine nickname, Sally. This reversal of traditional family roles suggests impending trouble for the Fosters, heightened by the fact that the entire family, including their two daughters, indulges in reading romances to each other.

Upon learning about their anticipated fortune, Aleck becomes immersed in strategizing investments for their imaginary wealth, while Sally focuses on planning how to spend it. The children's daily lives suffer as their parents fixate on multiplying their fictional capital to astronomical sums. Through speculative margin trading, they elevate their imagined wealth to a hundred thousand dollars, neglecting their children, friends, and home life in the process. Even their affectionate daughters are diverted from potential matches with mechanics and shopkeepers, as their wealthy and esteemed parents now associate with lawyers, doctors, and successful financiers. The Fosters assume a newfound dignity as proprietors of significant means.

In The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, Tom exhibits remarkable courage. He ventures into a graveyard late at night to test whether swinging a dead cat can cure warts. He testifies in court during Potter's trial despite the menacing presence of Injun Joe. Spending nearly a week on a deserted island with two peers and exploring a haunted house in search of treasure further showcases his bravery. His persistence and courage, essential traits of a hero, are evident throughout his adventures. Additionally, Tom's resourcefulness shines through as he adeptly navigates challenging situations, always finding a solution. His testimony ultimately exonerates Potter without compromising his own safety.

Tom Sawyer's character is also distinguished by his nobility. He wins our admiration through his generosity, as seen when he gives away half of the substantial treasure to his outcast friend Huck. He willingly accepts punishment that was originally meant for Becky, demonstrating his sense of responsibility and compassion. Alongside his generosity, Tom displays deep sympathy for others and a strong commitment to justice and fairness. He embodies democratic values, treating everyone equally regardless of their background.

Within his own family, Tom exhibits profound affection and consideration, especially in his charming relationship with his aunt. Tom's ability to form lasting friendships is another notable trait. The Thatchers, Widow Douglas, and the old Welshman all embrace him as part of their families.

Tom also shows a keen understanding of human nature, quickly grasping the thoughts and emotions of others. This is evident in his clever whitewashing scheme and the "Pain-Killer" incident. Like any healthy boy his age, Tom enjoys mischief, but his pranks are never mean-spirited; they are always lighthearted and harmless. His love for drama is equally significant, whether he's attending his own "funeral" in church, testifying at Potter's trial, or dramatically pouring gold on Widow Douglas's table.

Tom Sawyer's character is marked by an insatiable curiosity about everything around him. His love for adventure drives many of the incidents in the book. Tom's yearning to be a pirate leads to the Jackson Island escapade. His desire to explore results in getting lost in the cave with Becky. His ambition to uncover buried treasure sets off the adventure with Huck and Injun Joe.

Throughout the book, Tom's character evolves. Initially portrayed as childish and irresponsible, he matures into someone more responsible and thoughtful by the end of the four main stories. While Tom is depicted as a real boy living in a specific time and place, he also symbolizes eternal boyhood. His dreams mirror those of every boy: finding treasure, saving his beloved, and triumphing over adversaries, which ultimately turn him into a hero in his world.

In The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, Huck and Joe Harper are Tom's companions. Joe, one of Tom's closest friends among the respectable boys in town, shares Tom's mischievous nature, plays hooky from school, and joins him on Jackson Island. Unlike Huck, Joe becomes more homesick during their escapades. His similarity

to Tom underscores Tom's typical boyish behavior, interests, and aspirations. However, compared to Joe, Tom displays greater intelligence, courage, resourcefulness, and leadership qualities.

Injun Joe stands out as the primary antagonist in the book, depicted with a multifaceted character that includes cleverness, deceitfulness, wickedness, bravery, ruthlessness, resourcefulness, and formidable presence. His significant role lies in his impact on Tom and Huck, influencing their progression toward maturity throughout the narrative. Moreover, Injun Joe contributes to the novel's elements of horror, fear, suspense, and violence, reflecting the darker aspects of life through his character.

A novelist's greatest achievement often lies in portraying genuine character development through external actions or internal conflicts and resolutions. This transformation may involve changes in knowledge, hope, despair, or understanding through empathy, and it typically carries moral implications. Such novelistic principles are evident in the evolving friendship between Huck Finn and Jim in Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, where their bond grows amidst reminders of Huck's orphaned status and the pervasive injustice of slavery.

In Twain's Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Huck Finn emerges as the most fully developed character. As the narrator, Huck provides readers with a perspective shaped by his experiences. Nevertheless, the novel is notable for its rich tapestry of characters, each contributing uniquely to the unfolding story.

Huck is the central character in the novel, approximately fourteen years old, residing initially with Widow Douglas in the riverside town of St. Petersburg. He values his freedom immensely and finds life with the widow stifling. Throughout the narrative, Huck's quest for freedom serves as a pivotal theme, exploring the possibility of individual autonomy within society. He is inherently a fugitive, repeatedly fleeing from societal constraints to preserve his integrity and independence.

Jim, on the other hand, is an enslaved man belonging to Miss Watson, representative of the enslaved class in pre-Civil War America. Jim lacks personal rights and fears being sold to a New Orleans farmer, prompting his escape. His journey towards freedom becomes the central dramatic event driving the story forward. Jim, portrayed by Twain with respect and dignity, embodies nobility and sensitivity. He cares for Huck paternalistically, and their relationship forms the heart of the narrative. Huck feels most secure and genuine when on the river with Jim, away from societal expectations.

Despite Jim's superstitions about signs and omens, Twain portrays him without condescension. Jim's character underscores the novel's exploration of race, freedom, and friendship. Huck's evasion of his abusive father and the confines of St. Petersburg necessitates assuming false identities and faking his death. His true liberation, both literal and metaphorical, unfolds as he journeys down the Mississippi River with Jim.

Huck emerges as a truly unique fictional character, embodying genuine goodness and nobility in a deeply convincing manner. His portrayal is striking due to the stark contrast between his ragged physical appearance and his highly civilized nature, which ironically contrasts with the prevalent hypocrisy and corruption depicted throughout the novel. It is his unlikely embodiment of humane values that captures the reader's sympathy. Huck's goodness is innate and spontaneous, stemming from the depths of his character. He consistently demonstrates concern for others, unable to bear witnessing anyone's suffering. This compassion is evident in his empathy towards the drunken circus performer and his sympathy for the nieces of Peter Wilks. Remarkably, Huck even extends his compassion to those who do not deserve it, such as the stranded robbers and the deceitful King and Duke. Reflecting on the latter's humiliating punishment, Huck remarks, "Well, it made me sick to see it; and I was sorry for them poor pitiful rascals, it seemed like I couldn't ever feel any hardness against them any more in the world. It was a dreadful thing to see. Human beings can be awful cruel to one another" (Twain, p. 231).

Huck's innate goodness is profoundly tested by his moral dilemma regarding Jim, an enslaved man seeking freedom. Raised in St. Petersburg's conventional morality, Huck struggles with conflicting values when aiding Jim's escape. This inner conflict highlights society's power to corrupt individuals and suppress their innate compassion.

The journey down the river with Jim becomes a voyage of moral awakening for Huck. Initially conditioned by St. Petersburg's racial prejudices, Huck gradually recognizes Jim as a fellow human being with ordinary hopes and desires. As they traverse the river, Huck witnesses numerous instances of cruelty, brutality, and hypocrisy in the towns they encounter. His response to these displays of inhumanity is one of sorrow and revulsion.

With the reappearance of Tom Sawyer, Jim's full humanity once again takes a backseat as he assumes the role of a superstitious slave who goes along with Tom's fanciful schemes of imprisonment and escape. In Tom's company, Huck reverts to his demeanor from the opening chapters—a willing participant in Tom's antics. However, despite the humorous tone of these episodes, the issue of slavery continues to be subtly woven into the narrative. It becomes evident to the reader that Tom can only "help" Jim escape because Tom knows Jim is already legally free due to Miss Watson's will.

When Aunt Sally Phelps mistakes Huck (whom she believes to be Tom) for her nephew, Huck observes a scene that highlights the stark racial divide: "a little nigger girl and two little nigger boys, without anything on but two linen shirts," who "clung to their mother's gown, and peeped out from behind her at me, bashful," followed by Aunt Sally's white children mimicking the behavior of the black children (Twain, p. 220). Uncle Silas then quotes a passage affirming equality among all men, indicating his kind-heartedness towards Jim, who is kept in a shed from which he could easily escape. The Phelpses are genuinely good people, yet the ingrained influence of slavery is evident in their unconscious attitudes.

This is exemplified when Aunt Sally attributes a steamboat delay to an explosion, prompting Huck to ask if anyone was hurt. Her response—"No'm. Killed a nigger."—reveals a sharp paradox in Southern attitudes towards race and life's value (Twain, p. 221). This incident underscores a societal paradox and reflects Tom Sawyer's characteristic casualness. However, Huck, being clever as ever, fabricates the story to fit in, knowing full well there was no explosion and no one was harmed. This illustrates Twain's subtle critique of societal norms through Huck's deft manipulation of the truth.

The development of understanding, respect, and even love between Jim and Huck is a central theme that resonates strongly throughout the novel, particularly in its first half. However, with the introduction of the King and the Duke in the latter half, and with Jim often relegated to the background, the narrative shifts focus to the antics of these con men in towns like Pokeville, Bricksville, and Pikesville along the river. The Duke and the King stand out as some of Twain's most memorable comic characters, providing many of the story's humorous moments. These charlatans serve as vehicles for Twain's satire on Southern society and culture, exposing its flaws and pretensions, particularly evident in episodes like the camp meeting where they exploit people's vulnerabilities to falsehoods and ostentation.

In stark contrast to the Duke and the King, Huck's father, Pap Finn, emerges as a wholly despicable figure—drunken, brutal, and ignorant, devoid of any redeeming qualities. While Pap Finn can be darkly humorous, his actions are often offensive and violent, portraying a quintessential depiction of the shiftless, morally bankrupt loafer of the Midwest. His attack on the educated free black man from Ohio offers Twain a platform for ironic humor, yet Pap's defining trait is his propensity for violence, foreshadowing further conflict.

The characters encountered by Huck along the river vary widely in moral stature. The two men in the skiff searching for runaway slaves display a mix of fear and conscience, offering Huck forty dollars in gold despite their apprehensions. In contrast, the Grangerfords, a well-to-do family engaged in a feud with the Shepherdsons, initially appear as genteel and hospitable. Huck finds companionship with Buck Grangerford, near his age, amidst their refined social life of church attendance and social gatherings. However, the underlying tension of their feud is palpable, as evidenced by the guns kept close during their interactions, even in the church during a sermon on brotherly love.

Huck's first taste of the feud occurs when Buck ambushes Harney Shepherdson, who refrains from retaliating despite having the opportunity. Harney, deeply in love with Sophia Grangerford, elopes with her, escaping the conflict. However, their elopement reignites the feud with intense violence, leading to a tragic confrontation where Huck witnesses Buck and his cousin Joe attempting to avenge their family's deaths. As they flee by swimming down the river, they are mercilessly pursued by Shepherdson men, who fire upon them, chanting "Kill them, kill them!" Huck, devastated by the loss of Buck, whom he considered a friend, retrieves their bodies from the water, deeply shaken and tearful (Twain, p. 115). The horrors of these events haunt Huck for weeks afterward, plaguing him with nightmares. Witnessing "gentlefolk" descending into such savagery and moral decay leaves a lasting impression on him.

If Pap Finn epitomizes the worst of humanity in Huckleberry Finn, the King and the Duke embody similar moral degradation. Their behavior worsens as they travel down the river with Huck and Jim under their control. An egregious example of their depravity is their decision to remain in the Wilks's town to sell off the Wilks sisters' slaves. The true extent of the King's betrayal is revealed when Huck discovers that Jim has been sold for forty dollars, an act of treachery the King had planned all along (Twain, p. 116).

Twain ensured that Huck wouldn't treat his misdeeds or sin lightly by employing two strategies. Firstly, he gave him a troubled conscience that often tormented him. Secondly, he crafted a character who lacked humor, much like a solemn country ham, reflecting Twain's own seriousness. Huck rarely found cause to laugh, even amid countless amusing adventures, and when he did, it was usually at a joke that fell flat. Twain depicted Huck as possessing qualities beyond mere "modest merit"; he portrayed him as inherently innocent and morally sound, leaning closer to sainthood than to mischief. Twain understood that straying into lighthearted satire could spell disaster for such a character, so he limited Huck's moments of levity to just a few instances.

The age-old stereotypes of impoverished whites helped make Huck relatable to American readers. In a pivotal scene lauded by critics, Huck makes a profound decision—to help slave Jim escape bondage—and chastises himself for being a fool:
"The more I thought about it, the more my conscience tormented me, and the more wicked and despicable I felt. Finally, it struck me all at once that this was a clear sign from Providence, showing me how my wrongdoing was being watched from heaven. Here I was, stealing away a poor old woman's slave who had never harmed me, and now I was being shown that there's always someone watching, and they won't tolerate such despicable deeds going unpunished. I nearly collapsed with fear. I tried to justify my actions by blaming my upbringing for making me wicked, but a voice inside me kept saying, 'You could have gone to Sunday school. If you had, they would have taught you that people who act like I did about that slave are doomed to eternal damnation.'" (Twain, pp. 212-213) .It's a sharp, ironic twist to have Huck, instead of pretending to be worse than he is, genuinely believe he's a lost sinner.

5. CONCLUSION:

Mark Twain's humor, is a multifaceted and sophisticated blend of situational and character-centric techniques. Through his keen observations of human nature and society, Twain masterfully employs humor not only to entertain but also to critique and illuminate the underlying hypocrisies and absurdities of his time.

Twain's situational humor often arises from the circumstances in which his characters find themselves. For example, the comedic episodes involving Huck’s clever manipulation of situations, such as the infamous whitewashing scene, showcase Twain’s ability to create humor through irony and cunning reversals of expectations. These situations are meticulously crafted to reveal deeper truths about human nature and societal norms. Huck’s fabricated stories and quick thinking to avoid trouble often lead to humorous outcomes, yet they also underscore his resourcefulness and wit, highlighting the absurdity of the societal constraints he navigates.

Moreover, Twain’s character-centric humor is pivotal in bringing his narratives to life. Characters such as Tom Sawyer, with his elaborate and often ridiculous plans, and Jim, with his endearing superstitions and earnestness, are depicted with a balance of humor and respect. Twain’s humor often springs from the idiosyncrasies and eccentricities of his characters, making them memorable and relatable. Tom Sawyer’s insistence on creating convoluted schemes to free Jim, for instance, is both a humorous exaggeration of childhood play and a subtle critique of romanticized notions of heroism and adventure.

Through characters like the King and the Duke, Twain satirizes the gullibility and pretensions of society. Their fraudulent schemes and the ease with which they deceive entire communities expose the moral and intellectual failings of the people they exploit. The humor in these characters’ actions lies in the ridiculous extremes to which they go to maintain their deceptions, ultimately serving as a mirror to the societal flaws Twain aims to critique.

Twain’s humor also possesses a darker, more reflective edge, particularly when addressing serious themes such as slavery, racism, and human cruelty. The situational humor involving Aunt Sally’s casual racism, or the ironic depiction of the Grangerford-Shepherdson feud, serves to highlight the ingrained prejudices and violence of the society Twain is portraying. This blend of humor and social commentary is a hallmark of Twain’s style, allowing him to address serious issues while maintaining a light-hearted narrative tone.

Importantly, Twain’s humor is not merely for amusement; it is a vehicle for deeper reflection and criticism. His characters, from the innocent and morally sound Huck to the despicable Pap Finn and the comically corrupt King and Duke, embody a spectrum of human behaviors and societal attitudes. Through their interactions and the situations they navigate, Twain crafts a narrative rich with humor that simultaneously challenges readers to reflect on their own societal norms and prejudices.

In conclusion, Mark Twain’s humor is a complex interplay of situational and character-centric techniques that serve to both entertain and critique. His ability to weave humor into the fabric of his narratives allows him to address profound social issues with a light touch, making his works enduringly relevant and impactful. Twain’s

humor, rooted in the authentic depiction of human nature and societal absurdities, transcends mere comedy, offering a profound commentary on the human condition. As such, his humorous techniques remain a powerful tool for engaging readers and provoking thought, ensuring his place as one of the foremost humorists in American literature.

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