

American Humour And Realism In Mark Twain's Narrative Technique

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Abstract

This article explores the intertwining of American humour and literary realism in the narrative style of Mark Twain, one of the most iconic figures in American literature. Through the analysis of Twain's most representative works—particularly *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and various short stories—the study examines how Twain's humour emerges not only from comic situations but also from sharp social observation, dialectal authenticity, and psychological insight. The research argues that Twain's humour, rooted in regionalism and vernacular speech, serves as both entertainment and critique, enhancing the realism of his characters and settings while offering commentary on broader socio-political issues in 19th-century America.

Key words: lexical gaps, degrees of comparison, adjectives, English, Uzbek, contrastive linguistics, comparative structures.

Introduction. Mark Twain (Samuel Langhorne Clemens) is widely regarded as a pioneer of both the humorous story genre and literary realism in the United States. His writing style, characterized by colloquial language, regional dialects, and vivid characterization, broke away from the rigid conventions of earlier literary traditions. Twain's humour is not merely for comic effect; it is a complex tool used to critique social norms, human folly, and institutional hypocrisy. This article seeks to investigate how Twain's narrative technique skillfully blends humour and realism, contributing to the development of a distinctly American literary voice.

Methodology. The literary movement of realism, emerging in the mid-19th century, sought to portray life accurately and truthfully. It rejected romantic idealism and instead focused on everyday experiences, ordinary characters, and social issues. In the American context, realism was often accompanied by regionalism and vernacular speech, with humour becoming a powerful vehicle for social commentary.

Mark Twain, who began his literary career as a journalist and lecturer, stood at the crossroads of this movement. His deep familiarity with American dialects, customs, and rural life allowed him to present a vivid and humorous portrayal of American society while engaging with serious themes such as slavery, racial prejudice, and class inequality.

Results. Twain's humour is grounded in the everyday. It emerges through the absurdity of human behavior, the use of irony, satire, and exaggeration, and the deliberate mimicry of speech patterns. This realistic portrayal of characters, especially children and common folk, brings authenticity to his narratives.

In *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Twain uses Huck's naïve but observant voice to reveal the hypocrisies of adult society. Huck's reflections on religion, slavery, and morality often reveal truths more profound than the official doctrines of the time. The humour here is subtle and layered—it arises not from jokes, but from the ironic contrasts between Huck's understanding and societal norms.

Similarly, in *The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*, Twain parodies the storytelling habits of rural Americans. The humour lies in the elaborate digressions and the deadpan delivery of absurd tales, a style that Twain perfected and that contributed to the realist portrayal of American speech and storytelling traditions.

The Role of Dialect and Narrative Voice. One of the most innovative aspects of Twain's narrative technique is his use of regional dialects. Twain famously stated that he had painstakingly recorded various

dialects in *Huckleberry Finn* with careful accuracy. This linguistic realism not only enhances the authenticity of his characters but also becomes a source of humour, as readers navigate the peculiarities of regional speech and the often ironic mismatch between language and meaning.

Twain's choice of child narrators or unsophisticated storytellers is also crucial. These voices offer fresh, unfiltered perspectives on adult concerns, social injustice, and absurdity. The tension between the narrator's innocence and the reader's awareness generates situational and verbal irony—a hallmark of Twain's humour.

Discussion. The interplay between humour and realism in Twain's works reflects a deep understanding of the human condition. Twain's characters are not caricatures but multidimensional figures caught in a world of contradictions. His humour never undermines the seriousness of his themes; rather, it underscores the absurdity of injustice and moral rigidity. In portraying slavery, religious hypocrisy, and social conformity, Twain does not preach. Instead, he uses humour as a subtle weapon to expose flaws and suggest reform.

Mark Twain's narrative technique is deeply rooted in the socio-cultural fabric of 19th-century America, reflecting both its richness and contradictions. His blend of humour and realism is not incidental but intentional—each element serving to heighten the reader's understanding of character, setting, and theme.

Twain's humour, though often light-hearted on the surface, carries a serious subtext. He employs irony, satire, exaggeration, and parody not merely to amuse but to reflect societal hypocrisies. For instance, in *Huckleberry Finn*, the character of Pap Finn—an abusive, racist, and neglectful father—is both comical and horrifying. Twain exaggerates Pap's ignorance and belligerence to the point of absurdity, yet Pap's views on race and government reflect real attitudes of the time. This duality—the ability to laugh at Pap while also being disturbed by him—captures the complexity of Twain's social critique.

One of Twain's greatest contributions to American literature is his use of dialect. By capturing the linguistic nuances of different American regions, Twain creates voices that are immediately recognisable and believable. These voices are not only realistic; they are sources of humour through malapropisms, idiomatic quirks, and narrative digressions. For example, Jim's speech in *Huckleberry Finn* is filled with grammatical deviations that, while humorous to the reader, also humanize and dignify him. Twain's rendering of dialects underscores the diversity of American speech while reinforcing realism and individual identity.

Twain's use of youthful narrators—most notably Huck Finn—allows for a form of storytelling that is both innocent and incisive. Children, in Twain's view, see the world without the filters of social conditioning. Huck's moral dilemmas, such as whether to turn in the runaway slave Jim, are presented in simple terms but are freighted with ethical significance. Huck's observations, often humorous due to their simplicity, expose the absurdity of societal norms, such as slavery or religious dogma. The humour thus arises from the contrast between Huck's straightforward logic and the twisted rationalizations of adult society.

Another dimension of Twain's narrative technique is the coexistence of humour and tragedy. While his stories often provoke laughter, they are not devoid of pathos. In *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, episodes such as Tom and Huck attending their own funeral blend comedy with deeper emotional truths about loneliness, guilt, and the human desire for recognition. This balance between comic relief and psychological depth reflects Twain's mastery in capturing the totality of human experience.

Twain's humour is also distinctly regional. His characters are rooted in specific places—the Mississippi River, Missouri towns, frontier mining camps—which he depicts with affectionate realism. Humour emerges from the cultural peculiarities of these regions, including local customs, folk beliefs, and storytelling traditions. By drawing attention to the idiosyncrasies of rural American life, Twain not only entertains but preserves the linguistic and cultural identity of these communities. His stories serve as both comic fiction and cultural documentation.

Twain's narrative strategy—humour rooted in realism—has influenced generations of writers. Authors such as Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, and Langston Hughes acknowledged Twain's impact on American prose. Hemingway famously declared that “all modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*.” The combination of vernacular authenticity, sharp social critique, and humorous observation has become a defining characteristic of American literature, with Twain as its foundational figure.

Lastly, it is important to recognise that Twain's humour has philosophical implications. It embodies a form of scepticism about human nature and institutions. Twain often presents characters who, through humour

or foolishness, reveal universal truths. His wit is not escapist but interrogative—it questions authority, tradition, and progress. This makes his humour both a stylistic choice and an epistemological tool, probing the limits of what society claims to know and believe.

Furthermore, Twain's use of humour reflects a uniquely American sensibility—irreverent, democratic, and regionally diverse. He democratizes literature by giving voice to those previously unheard: children, slaves, the poor, and the uneducated. His commitment to linguistic realism not only enhances the verisimilitude of his settings but also celebrates the richness of American speech.

The success of Twain's narrative technique lies in its dual appeal. On one level, it entertains with its comic sketches and lively dialogue. On another, it challenges readers to confront uncomfortable truths about society. This complex layering of meaning through humour and realism places Twain not just as a humorist but as a literary innovator and cultural critic.

His influence persists in the works of later writers such as Kurt Vonnegut, J.D. Salinger, and even contemporary authors like George Saunders—who similarly blend humour with social critique. Twain's legacy thus extends beyond the 19th century, informing modern explorations of identity, power, and morality.

Conclusion. Mark Twain's narrative technique exemplifies a powerful fusion of American humour and literary realism. His use of regional dialects, child narrators, and ironic commentary enables him to present a vivid, honest, and often hilarious portrait of American life. Yet beneath the laughter lies a serious critique of societal flaws and moral contradictions. Twain's humour, far from being superficial, is a sophisticated narrative strategy that continues to resonate with readers and scholars alike.

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