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# Decoding Laughter: A Linguistic Categorization of Humor in The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

# تفكيك أبجديات الفكاهة: دراسة لغوية تحليله لأنماط الفكاهة في مغامرات هاكلبيري فن

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**الملخص:**

تُقدم هذه الورقة البحثية تحليلاً لغويًا لآليات الفكاهة في رواية "مغامرات هاكلبيري فن" لمارك توين، التي تشتهر بتوظيفها المعقّد للعديد من أساليب الفكاهة ونقدها الاجتماعي والثقافي للسياسات السائدة في المجتمع الأمريكي. تُبين الدراسة الأساليب التي يستخدمها توين لدمج الفكاهة في نسيج الرواية وتصنيفها بطريقة منهجية، مع تسليط الضوء على وظائفها ودلالاتها التي تتجاوز الغاية الترفيهية. تعتمد الورقة البحثية في تصنيف الأنماط والعناصر الفكاهية الواردة في الرواية على العديد من الدراسات العلمية الحديثة في مجال لغة الفكاهة والموروث النقدي لأعمال مارك توين. يُظهر التحليل نجاح توين في استخدام مجموعة متنوعة من العناصر اللغوية في سياق الرواية مثل السخرية، والهجاء، والمبالغة، والاستهانة، والتهكم، والمحاكاة الساخرة، والتلاعب بالألفاظ، والخدع، والمقالب، والنكات، والألغاز لإثارة الفكاهة وتحقيق نواياه الموضوعية. يخلص البحث إلى أن توين نسج هذه التقنيات بسلاسة ومهارة عالية في طيات الرواية، مما يؤكد على أهمية العلاقة بين الفكاهة والتطور الموضوعي للرواية. وقد اتضح أن الكاتب من خلال توظيفه لهذه الآليات لم يهدف إلى تقديم التسلية للقراء فحسب، بل توجيه نقد ساخر وقوي للمجتمع الأمريكي وصياغة شخصيات معقدة ومركبة تحاكي الواقع المجتمعي. كما يكشف التحليل عن الدور الأساسي للأساليب الفكاهية التي استخدمها توين في تعزيز الأثر الدائم للرواية على المستوى الأمريكي والعالمي وأهميتها في فهم التطور السردي لأحداث الرواية والأهداف الموضوعية للكاتب .

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الفكاهة، عناصر الفكاهة، مغامرات هاكلبيري فن، توين.

**Abstract:**

Mark Twain's celebrated novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* has long been recognized not only for its profound socio-cultural critique but also for its intricate and varied deployment of humor. This research paper aims to provide a linguistic study of the humor mechanisms Twain employs in his masterpiece. It systematically categorizes the various humor devices and elements found within the text, grounding its framework in recent scholarly contributions to the fields of humor research and Twain criticism. The study critically articulates how Twain integrates humor within the fabric of the novel, underscoring its function and significance beyond mere entertainment. The paper determines that Twain employs numerous techniques such as irony, satire, hyperbole,

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understatement, burlesque, parody, wordplay, hoaxes, pranks, jokes, and riddles to evoke humor and fulfill his thematic intentions. It concludes that Twain seamlessly interweaves these techniques into the tapestry of the novel, fostering a symbiotic relationship between humor and thematic development. In doing so, Twain not only entertains readers but also delivers powerful social commentary and crafts complex character portrayals. The analysis reveals the integral role of Twain's humor in reinforcing the novel's enduring impact and contributes to a greater understanding of its narrative sophistication and Twain's thematic objectives.

**Keywords:** humor, humor devices, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Twain.

## 1. Introduction

Humor is a difficult and challenging subject to define and categorize. A precise definition of humor has remained elusive despite nearly twenty-five years of discussion (Attardo, 2020, p. 3). The classification of humor, much like its definition, is a complex and diverse topic. Over the course of history, there has been extensive debate surrounding the categorization of humor types (McGhee, 1979, p. 19), and reaching a consensus on how to divide the realm of humor has proven to be challenging (Attardo, 1994, p. 3). Scholars have put forth diverse approaches to classifying humor based on various criteria. However, given the controversial and dynamic nature of humor, no single theory has successfully encompassed all its aspects.

Bergson (2013) suggests dividing humor into situational humor and language humor (p. 25), while Schmitz (2002) classifies humor into universal humor, cultural humor, and linguistic humor (p. 93-94). Hay (1995) provides further categories such as anecdotes, fantasy, insults, irony, jokes, observational humor, quotes, role-play, self-deprecation, vulgarity, wordplay, and others (p. 80). However, she notes that any taxonomy claiming to encompass every possible example of humor would either be excessively large or consist of overly general categories.

Esar presents a seven-type classification of humor, including wisecracks, epigrams, riddles, conundrums, gags, jokes, and anecdotes (as cited in Raskin, 1984, p. 29).

Guidi (2017) outlines four common elements found in various humor classifications—verbal, codified, bilateral, and aggressive humor—which are posited to form a structure shared across cultures (p. 24). However, given that Guidi's research primarily examines indigenous Mayan cultures like Zinacantan and Tzotzil, the theory's applicability to a broader range of cultural contexts may be limited.

Attardo (2017), in his General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH), outlines six essential knowledge resources required for humor, including the structure and semantics

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of jokes and the joke-telling process (p. 128-138). Although their theory provides a valuable structure for understanding and translating verbal humor, it fails to encompass the intricacies and diverse forms of humor that go beyond verbal expression and are deeply rooted in cultural context.

Zabalbeascoa categorizes jokes into seven types from a translation perspective, including those based on international appeal, cultural references, popularity in certain countries, linguistic wordplay, non-verbal cues, national humor styles, and those that mix various types (2005, p. 189-194; 1996, p. 251-54). Though comprehensive, this taxonomy may hold limited relevance for broader research that extends beyond the scope of jokes.

While these classifications provide useful frameworks for understanding humor, Attardo (2020) suggests their limitations, as the dynamic creativity of language often defies rigid categorization (p. 108). Humor often involves multiple layers, blending different mechanisms, targets, and dynamics, which may not fit neatly into the predefined categories.

*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is a remarkable masterpiece of humor, serving as Twain's vehicle to challenge social ills and expose absurdities such as hypocrisy, discrimination, racism, and slavery. Twain believes that humor has the power to both entertain and provoke social change, stating that "humor must not profess to teach, and it must not profess to preach, but it must do both if it would live forever" (Twain, 2012, p. 153). He assumes that laughter could dismantle even the most horrifying situations, asserting, "Against the assault of laughter, nothing can stand" (as cited in Holm, 2017, p. 43) .

Twain's concept of humor extends beyond mere entertainment; it becomes a powerful tool against human prejudice, folly, and cruelty. To achieve his humorous intentions, Twain employs a wide range of linguistic whimsicalities, including puns, burlesques, understatements, exaggerations, parodies, illiteracies, absurd spellings, ironies, satires, hoaxes, riddles, etc. The novel's rich variety of humorous techniques and masterful wordplay make it challenging to classify Twain's devices in a definitive manner.

Despite the extensive critical attention that *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* has received, there has been a notable absence of studies specifically addressing the classification of humor devices in this great novel. Therefore, this research aims to fill this gap by conducting a comprehensive analysis of the novel and available critical literature. By examining all the humor categorizations mentioned, this paper finds out that the humor devices and techniques employed by Mark Twain in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn can* be classified as follows:

### 1.1. Exaggeration

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Exaggeration is, no doubt, one legitimate species of humor (Anderson, 1997, p. 179). Exaggeration is a strategy of expression for a humorist, but it was more than that for Mark Twain, since it came to him naturally (H. & Jr., 2015, p. 88). Speaking specifically of the exaggeration in the novel, Gray (2001) confirms that the novel presents the technique of violent exaggeration, which makes it simultaneously elegiac and critical, a humorous masterpiece and a piece of social history" (p. 250). Twain's major objective is to entertain his presumed audience by exaggerating situations and character actions to create surprise, unexpected twists, and occasionally even shock.

One type of exaggeration employed in the novel lies heavily in Twain's casual use of incredible images and their unexpectedness and disparity. Twain is a writer whose lifelong mode of perception is essentially humorous, a writer who sees the world in the sharp clash of contrast and whose native language is exaggeration (H. & Jr., 2015, p. 7). That means the device of comic exaggeration used by Twain differs from that employed by his predecessors, contemporaries, and followers "in the sense that the placing of their subject is based upon almost contrary premises" (Gray, 2001, p. 250). Through extremely exaggerated language, Twain creates a kind of disharmony between the subjective impression and the objective facts, from which the sense of humor comes out. While reading *Huckleberry Finn*, readers will always find themselves made to laugh by the extensive use of exaggerative narrations in the text and the reality they hide.

At the beginning of the novel, Huck goes back to stay with the widow. During the day, he has to bear the various ways in which the widow and Miss Watson "sivilize" him, while at night, Huck feels very lonely. He describes his loneliness in an exaggerated manner:

> I felt so lonesome I most wished I was dead. The stars were shining, and the leaves rustled in the woods ever so mournful; and I heard an owl, away off, who-whooing about somebody that was dead, and a whippowill and a dog crying about somebody that was going to die. (Twain, 2014, p. 8)

Huck's statement that he "most wished" he was dead is an extreme exaggeration of his feelings of loneliness. This hyperbolic statement adds a touch of humor to the scene, as it portrays Huck's exaggerated reaction to his solitude. Furthermore, this hyperbolic expression also serves to emphasize the dark and melancholic atmosphere surrounding Huck's situation. The description of the stars, rustling leaves, owl, whippowill, and crying dog all contribute to a sense of foreboding and impending doom. This exaggeration heightens the tension and sets the stage for the challenges and dangers that Huck will face on his journey to freedom.

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In Chapter XXIX, Twain uses one of the most beautiful exaggerations that calls for laughter and satirizes racial stereotypes prevalent in society when Huck reacts to Jim's sudden appearance after their separation by the storm.

> Jim lit out, and was a-coming for me with both arms spread, he was so full of joy; but when I glimpsed him in the lightning my heart shot up in my mouth and I went overboard backwards; for I forgot he was old King Lear and a drownded A-rab all in one, and it most scared the livers and lights out of me. (Twain, 2014, p. 279)

The humorous exaggeration reaches its peak here when Huck sees Jim in the lightning and compares him to "old King Lear and a drownded A-rab all in one." This comparison is absurd and comical, as it combines two completely unrelated characters and adds a humorous twist to the situation. Huck's reaction to this exaggerated image is also exaggerated, as he describes his heart shooting up in his mouth and falling overboard backwards, and the event scaring the livers and lights out of him. The humor of this exaggeration lies in its portrayal of the stark contrast between Huck's initial fear and the reality of Jim's harmless presence. It highlights Huck's ingrained prejudices and stereotypes about Jim, as he momentarily forgets that Jim is just an ordinary person and not a threatening figure. This exaggeration serves to underscore the irrationality of Huck's fears and the absurdity of the racial stereotypes prevalent in the society depicted in the novel.

Often, Twain uses every possible opportunity to overstate the typical external traits of his characters to achieve the desired humorous effect, whether it is for fun or for satire. In Chapter II, Twain, using Huck's narrative voice, amplifies Jim's portrayal of Jim's beliefs in superstations in an unexpected way:

> …Afterwards Jim said the witches be witched him and put him in a trance, and rode him all over the State, and then set him under the trees again, and hung his hat on a limb to show who done it. And next time Jim told it he said they rode him down to New Orleans; and, after that, every time he told it he spread it more and more, till by and by he said they rode him all over the world, and tired him most to death, and his back was all over saddle-boils…Niggers would come miles to hear Jim tell about it… (Twain, 2014, p. 12)

In this example, Jim's words and actions are greatly exaggerated to expose and satirize superstitious beliefs. Tom plays a prank on Jim by hanging his hat over him, leading Jim to believe it's witchcraft. Jim spreads this belief to others, and despite lacking evidence, they believe him. Twain uses Jim's naïve hyperbole and the other characters' credulous

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acceptance to highlight Jim's limited understanding and to convey a deeper, satirical message about gullibility.

Twain also uses exaggeration as a tool to provide comic relief in the most serious parts of his novels. An example of such an exaggeration is Huck's description of trying to scramble out of Watson's window to meet Tom Sawyer when he describes his feelings in a way in which one cannot help but laugh at the clever use of exaggeration.

> There was a place on my ankle that got to itching, but I dasn't scratch it; and hen my ear begun to itch; and next my back, right between my shoulders. Seemed like I'd die if I couldn't scratch. (Twain, 2014, p. 10)

The extremely exaggerated image of his itching body parts creates a sense of humor. This exaggeration also serves as a commentary on societal expectations and rules, highlighting their absurdity and mocking their triviality.

Overall, the novel is full of exaggeration that is used as a humorous device to enhance the comedic elements of the story, highlight absurdity, and satirize certain aspects of society. It adds an entertaining layer to the narrative while also allowing Twain to comment on various social issues. Twain's use of embellishments and exaggerated portrayals adds a lively element to the story and creates an entertaining juxtaposition between reality and imagination.

### 1.2. Irony

The charm of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* lies in its unique and humorous effect created through the skillful use of irony. Twain employs irony to expose various crimes committed by the bourgeoisie, all while evoking laughter from readers. The humor in irony arises from the contrast between what is said and what is actually meant.[1] As a crucial element in Twain's writing style, irony plays a pivotal role in producing humorous effects and captivating readers with its engaging plots. Throughout the novel, Twain portrays society on shore as a structure governed by illogical and degraded rules. He criticizes the hypocritical gentility of the aristocracy, the injustice of slavery, and the follies and violence prevalent in pre-war southern society. Twain utilizes humor as a tool to serve his purpose, and irony can be found woven throughout the text. As Twain himself once remarked, "The human race has one really effective weapon, and that is laughter "(as cited in Douglas, 2016, p. 16). Therefore, the irony in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

[1] For more details on irony as the definition of irony & irony as a humorous device, see Arthur Asa Berger, A Glossary of the Techniques of Humor: Morphology of the Joke-Tale. *Anatomy of Humor* (pp. 40, 2017); Peter Newmark, The Translation of Verbal Irony. *Paragraphs on Translation* (pp. 131, 1993).

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serves both as a source of amusement and as a means of criticism. Twain skillfully creates powerful humorous effects by deftly manipulating the irony found in almost every episode, effectively satirizing the flaws and absurdities of Southern society in America.

A perfect example of humorous irony is Huck's description of the church, which is one of his funniest brief speeches that recasts experience in terms of frontier social irony:

> There warn't anybody at the church, except maybe a hog or two, for there warn't any lock on the door, and hogs like a puncheon floor in summertime because it's cool. If you notice, most folks don't go to church only when they've got to; but a hog is different. (Twain, 2014, p. 154)

A church is typically seen as a sacred place for religious practices such as mass, sermons, and prayer. Readers envision Christians being solemn and pious in the church. However, the church Huck runs into is completely different from the usual perception. Inside the church, he does not find any serious preachers, but rather dirty hogs sleeping on the puncheon floor. The scene is humorous because it is rare to see pigs sleeping in a church. The unlikely occurrence of such an event adds to the comedic effect of the dramatic scene. The incongruity between such a ridiculous, exaggerated scene and the familiar daily scenes to which people are accustomed has become the source of humor. The greater the contrast between the normal and the abnormal, the more humor readers may experience and enjoy. Readers may find even more humor by imagining a further, yet relevant, funny scene where the hogs in Huck's eyes are preaching instead of sleeping. However, readers should delve deeper beyond laughter. Mark Twain's creation of this humorous scene conveys more messages than just humor and laughter. The contrast between hogs sleeping in a church and people who "don't go to church unless they have to" is meant to satirize the religious hypocrisy of the local citizens. For them, going to church and engaging in religious practices is merely an obligation done to be seen by others. The entire church lacks an atmosphere of piety. It is evident that these adults use religion as a tool to defend their vulgar tastes and present themselves as people of high morals.

Another example of Twain’s artistry in humorous irony can be seen in Chapter XXXII, when Huck creates his backstory to help solidify his impersonation of Tom Sawyer at the Phelps farm. The passage is humorous, and it offers an ironic incongruity that, for many of Twain’s readers, captures the horror central to the novel and thus central to its satiric aspirations. He accomplishes this formidable goal in three simple lines (Melton, 2018, p. 154). Huck reports that an explosion occurred on his steamboat, and Aunt Sally responds:

> Aunt Sally: “Good Gracious! Anybody hurt?”

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> Huck: "No'm. Killed a nigger."
> Aunt Sally: "Well, it's lucky; because sometimes people do get hurt." (Twain, 2014, p. 280)

Readers can appreciate Twain's artistic talent in this passage, as well as the irony and the intellectual and emotional impact of its contrast. In the beginning, Aunt Sally shows her concern and empathy for the well-being of others when she exclaims, "Good Gracious! Anybody hurt?" However, when Huck replies that a black person has been killed, she finds it fortunate that no one else was hurt, completely disregarding the fact that a life has been lost. Her ironic statement implies that it is better for a black person to be killed than for anyone else to be harmed. The irony lies in the stark contrast between the initial concern for anyone being hurt and the lack of empathy or value placed on the life of a black person. This highlights the racial prejudice and dehumanization prevalent in American society, as depicted in the novel. Melton (2018) confirms that this exchange between Huck and Aunt Polly exposes for mockery a social system's inherent cruelty and justifies its obliteration. It is exactly Twain's type of weapon that could rhetorically "blow... to rags and atoms," the inherent and disgusting lie of American slave culture and its apologists (p.156). The humor arises from the unexpected and callous response of Aunt Polly, with her nonchalant tone and matter-of-fact treatment of a person's death as inconsequential. Twain uses this kind of dark humor to highlight the absurdity of the situation and to criticize the deeply ingrained racism and indifference prevalent in society.

In Chapter I, Tom Sawyer, who is known for his mischievous and rebellious nature, requires Huck to be respectable in order to join his gang of robbers.

> But Tom Sawyer he hunted me up and said he was going to start a band of robbers, and I might join if I would go back to the widow and be respectable. (Twain, 2014, p. 5-6)

A band of robbers is not supposed to be respectable, so therefore it is ironic that Huck could only join if he goes back to the widow and becomes respectable. The humor arises from the contrast between Tom Sawyer's absurd plan to start a gang of robbers, presented as exciting and desirable, and his requirement for Huck to adhere to societal norms by being respectable. It satirizes the contradictions and hypocrisies within society's expectations, challenging the notion that respectability equates to moral righteousness. This irony adds a humorous element to the novel, allowing readers to reflect on the flaws and arbitrary nature of societal norms.

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Similarly, in Chapter XIII, Huck's ironic description of his assistance to the two swindlers, the duke and the king, who are playing fraud through tricking and fake performances, evokes laughter.

> I wished the widow knowed about it. I judged she would be proud of me for helping these rapscallions, because rapscallions and dead beats is the kind the widow and good people takes the most interest in. (Twain, 2014, p. 106)

The humor in the passage above arises from the contrast between what Huck says about the widow's reaction to his actions and what he truly believes. It is ironic and striking that Huck describes the widow as good and suggests that she would be proud of him for helping "rapscallions" and "dead beats." This irony arises from the fact that these are the very types of people that the widow and other supposedly good individuals are expected to take the most interest in. The humor lies in the sharp contrast between Huck's expectations and the likely reality, highlighting the hypocrisy of the widow and other supposedly respectable people who would typically approve of associating with such characters. This striking contrast adds a humorous and ironic twist to the passage.

In Chapter XIII, as Huck and Jim steal the skiff of two would-be murderers on the stranded wreck of the Walter Scott ship, Huck realizes that by depriving them of their means of escape, he may cause the deaths of the two men along with that of their victim. He then resolves to land the skiff on shore and "get somebody to go for that gang and get them out of their scrape, so they can be hung when their time comes" (Twain, 2014, p. 102). There is grim humor in the irony that the purpose of rescuing the gang members from drowning would be just to enable them to be hanged.

It is clear that irony serves as a powerful device of humor throughout Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, exposing societal flaws and eliciting laughter from readers. The contrast between expected norms and absurd situations creates humorous effects, allowing readers to reflect on the absurdities and hypocrisies of society. However, beyond the laughter, Twain's use of humorous irony carries deeper messages and social critiques. Being able to understand Twain's artistry of irony in the novel will help translators effectively transform the humor of such a thought-provoking and humorous literary masterpiece.

### 1.3. Satire

Satire is a technique of humor that generally pokes fun at those in power and attacks the status quo of society (Berger, 2017, p. 50). "It is one of the most important literary forms of humor and has been used by writers and engaged the attention of scholars and critics for thousands of years" (50). In *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, satire, which is irony's tough cousin, is abundantly present as well, and the novel is rich in humorous

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satire. Highly specific satire exists side-by-side with grim irony, and both are leavened by comedy (H. & Jr., 2015, p. 215). Therefore, it is essential to clarify the difference between irony and satire as devices of humor. In very basic terms, irony is situated in the space between what you say and what you mean, as embodied in an utterance like "You're a fine friend!" when said to someone who has just let you down (Simpson and Bousfield, 2017, p. 161). Satire gently, or rather aggressively, mocks, stings, or bites, depending on the degree of the exaggeration and the distortion of the recognized image (Klein, 2014, p. 64). It is often associated with the superiority theory, in that we find something funny because we take pleasure in it and feel superior to seeing someone else in a compromising position.

Satire is difficult to identify since its identification effectively relies on intentionality, whether or not the humor in question possesses moral seriousness (Davis, 2014, p. 265). In a manipulative way, Twain evenly balances irony and satire to generate humor and utilize a method of social critique. The inclusion of satire with irony can sometimes make it more serious, and this is the case of Twain's most comic satire in *Huckleberry Finn*. However, humor is "an element that appears in satire with varying degrees and is understood not necessarily as being related to laughter" (Zekavat, 2017, p. 29). Twark explains that this kind of humor is called black humor, whereby "sinister objects like death, disease, or warfare are treated with bitter amusement, usually in a manner calculated to offend and shock" (as cited in Zekavat, 2017, p. 29). Zekavat, therefore, asserts that this means that the absence of laughter does not mean the absence of humor in satire. *Huckleberry Finn* is full of such satires, but Twain utilizes satires through a little boy talking in an adult-like, serious manner incongruous with his age, which would definitely trigger the reader's laughter.

It is only through Huck that the satire is created, but to Huck himself, there is no satire. The reader can smile at Huck's confusion and share his pleasure in recounting his disparagement of many social norms and institutions. Throughout the novel, Huck faithfully reports what he sees while being capable of entertaining and evoking laughter from the audience through the detailed accounts of his observations.

One of the funniest satires is Huck's observation of the social attitudes in the prewar Mississippi Valley that denied common humanity to black people. The attitude is ridiculed in Pap's political oration, which is narrated through Huck's voice.

> Well, that let me out. Thinks I, what is the country a-coming to? It was 'lection day, and I was just about to go and vote myself if I warn't too drunk to get there; but when they told me there was a State in this country where they'd let that nigger vote, I drawed out. (Twain, 2014, p. 40)

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In the example above, Twain uses humor to point out the most disturbing aspects of the racial stereotypes of African Americans and white society's hypocrisy. Pap's tirade against a government that allows a free Negro to vote is humorous because of the dissimilarity between the elegant black college professor and scroungy white Pap, who "was just about to go and vote, myself, if I warn't too drunk to git there." This contrast expands to suggest the larger incongruity of allocating human rights on the basis of skin color in a country dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Another amusing example of humorous satire lies in Huck's observations of the hypocrisy of the feuding Grangerfords and Shepherd sons, who carry out a violent feud six days of the week and act peaceful and "brotherly" on Sundays.

> Next Sunday we all went to church, about three mile, everybody a-horseback. The men took their guns along, so did Buck, and kept them between their knees or stood them handy against the wall. The Shepherdsons done the same. It was pretty ornery preaching — all about brotherly love, and such-like tiresomeness; but everybody said it was a good sermon, and they all talked it over going home, and had such a powerful lot to say about faith and good works and free grace and preforeordestination, and I don't know what all, that it did seem to me to be one of the roughest Sundays I had run across yet. (Twain, 2014, p. 153)

Twain humorously mocks the Christian faith as the family clans forget everything they were taught in church right after leaving it and do not realize that their everyday lives contradict their religious conviction. The so-called religious and noble people who have been in decades-long feuds with one another go to church for the preaching on brotherly love, but they attend with their guns and put them within their reach. The color of humor arises from the judgment made by a fourteen-year-old boy who is innocent and detached enough to make the right judgment.

Previously in the same chapter, Twain humorously satirizes the concept of feud in a conversation between Huck and the youngest child of the Grangerfords;

> 'Did you want to kill him, Buck?'
> 'Well, I bet I did.'
> 'What did he do to you?'
> 'Him? He never done nothing to me.'
> 'Well, then, what did you want to kill him for?'
> 'Why, nothing — only it's on account of the feud.'
> 'What's a feud?'

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> 'Why, where was you raised? Don't you know what a feud is?'
> 'Never heard of it before — tell me about it.'
> 'Well,' says Buck, 'a feud is this way: A man has a quarrel with another man, and kills him; then that other man's brother kills HIM; then the other brothers, on both sides, goes for one another; then the COUSINS chip in — and by and by everybody's killed off, and there ain't no more feud. But it's kind of slow, and takes a long time.' (Twain, 2014, p. 151)

Huck is shocked to hear such a bloody and awful description of Buck's mouth, and thus he wonders about the reason. However, Buck says that nobody knows "what the row was about in the first place" at present. That is, the grand and high-tone clan of the aristocracy kills dozens of people for something they even do not know, which underlines the absurdity of the feud. The humor in this passage stems from Huck's unawareness of the feud and Buck's shocking way of answering Huck and explaining the feud to him. Twain ends the conversation with a satirical exaggeration that raises laughter: "By and by everybody's killed off, and there ain't no more feud." The feud has escalated to the point where everyone involved ends up dead, and after all the violence and death, the feud simply ceases to exist. Buck explains that a feud starts with a quarrel between two men, leading to a cycle of revenge killings among their respective family members. Through humor, Twain satirizes the concept of feuds and highlights the absurdity of violence. He uses humor to emphasize the senselessness and futility of such violence.

The list of satires in *Huckleberry Finn* is virtually endless, and satire is an endlessly effective tool of humor and social critique. Twain is a genuine and powerful humorist with a bitter vein of satire on the flaws of humanity. His satire can be both thought-provoking and amusing. Having a vernacular-speaking child tells Twain's own story, and having Huck's voice combined with Twain's satiric genius creates an impeccable work of humor.

### 1.4. Wordplay

Wordplay refers to a range of textual techniques that playfully exploit the structure of language to create a meaningful overlap of two or more different interpretations or meanings that share similar forms or sounds (Delabastita, 1993, p. 57). Wordplay is a humorous technique that derives its humorous power from the ambiguities apparent in its language of origin. Some wordplay relys on the ambiguity of sound; some rely on the ambiguity of word meaning, while still others rely on the ambiguity of syntactic interpretations in context (Seewoester, 2011, p. 71). Although wordplays are usually embedded in words, they can also work on other levels of language. Hence, there is variation in their properties. Delabastita (1993) uses pun and wordplay interchangeably (p.

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56). According to him, wordplay is based on different features of the language(s) involved, such as pronunciation, morphology, spellings, vocabulary, or syntax (Delabastita, 2014a, p. 1-2; Delabastita, 2014b, p. 130). Wordplay can be expressed with ambiguous verbal wit, breaking grammar rules, and other linguistic forms. The actualization of a wordplay or pun is highly dependent on the context, which specifies its pragmatic role.

One of the most remarkable and captivating sources of *Huckleberry Finn*'s humor lies in its clever utilization of pun and wordplay. Mark Twain, leveraging his mastery of language, employs various techniques and forms of wordplay that may not be seen in the works of other American writers.

The first notable source of humorous puns in *Huckleberry Finn* is homonyms and intentional misspellings or malapropisms. Twain skillfully crafts the narrative in the vernacular English of three distinct local dialects in Missouri. By intentionally incorporating his characters' dialects, Twain not only brings forth amusing wordplay that provokes laughter but also sharply critiques societal absurdities and norms. He allows his characters to speak in various slangs and purposefully plays with their pronunciation of certain words, resulting in new meanings that align with his intentions and themes of social change and satire. Upon first reading the novel, readers may think that all kinds of errors made in the spelling of words are just due to the variation of the dialects Twain allows his characters to use in the novel. These misspellings are sometimes called malapropism and are used by literary writers to produce comic effects and captivate the attention of the readers to certain messages. In reality, these kinds of errors are by no means haphazard; Twain carefully places such errors to bring some other meanings to the words than their usual meanings in their correct form (McKay, 1985, p. 64). Readers may initially think of the meaning of such misspelled words based on their correct pronunciation and spelling, which they have inherently acquired, but when they quietly read them based on Twain’s spelling, they realize new words with new evoked meanings .

For example, Twain writes at the beginning of the novel a strikingly humorous Notice, telling readers not to search for a motive or moral in his novel and concluding the Notice with “BY ORDER OF THE AUTHOR, Per G.G., Chief of Ordnance” (Twain, 2014, p. 2). The word “ordnance” is a pun. On a surface level, it appears to be a misspelling of "ordinance," which typically refers to a law or regulation. However, it is not just a colloquial misspelling but has a deeper meaning. "Ordnance" technically refers to cannons or artillery used in warfare. By designating the author as the "Chief of Ordnance," the pun suggests that the author is ready to metaphorically blow readers to bits for the offense of seeking a plot in the narrative. This play on words adds a humorous and satirical element to the passage, highlighting the exaggerated consequences imposed by the author for such

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a seemingly innocuous offense. Overall, wordplay serves to reinforce the subversive and satirical tone of the Notice, as well as the author's mockery of pompous authority.

In Chapter XXXIII, Aunt Sally uses the word "putrified" instead of "petrified" when she says, “I was most putrified with astonishment” (Twain, 2014, p. 312). Instead of expressing her astonishment and shock, she mistakenly uses a word that means to decay or rot. This contributes humor to the scene by creating a comical misunderstanding and highlighting Aunt Sally's tendency to misuse words. However, Twain uses the word “putrified” to indicate racial repression that is dominated by Aunt Sally’s voice. Readers may understand Twain’s truly intended meaning when the narrating goes on and they perceive through the voice of Aunt Sally itself that narrative data are transformed into disease, as in her initial description of a case in which "mortification set in, and they had to amputate him. But it didn't save him. Yes, it was mortification—that was it. He turned blue all over" (Twain, 2014, p. 287).

In chapter XXV, the king, upon hearing that two daughters of a rich man are waiting for their uncle to come from England and arrange for the funeral ritual of their dead father, claims himself to be the elder brother of the daughters’ father in order to steal their inherited money. During the arrangement of the funeral rituals, the king repeatedly uses the pun "funeral orgies" for "funeral obsequies” (Twain, 2014, p. 231). The pun of the word “orgies” is a play on the term "obsequies," which means funeral rites or ceremonies. Twain intentionally allows the King to use the term "orgies" instead of "obsequies" to create a comical effect and emphasize the extravagant nature of the funeral, which indicates pretention and stupidity. In the same chapter, the king uses the term "diseased," which is used as a pun, referring to both the deceased person and the king's poor choice of words. The pun produces a humor effect and plays a part in Twain's satire, for it focuses on the King's ignorance and on the ignorance of those who hear him and still believe his ruse. Thus, Twain's adept manipulation of vernacular speech to create homonyms or malapropisms, leading to unexpected interpretations for readers, solidifies *Huckleberry Finn* as a masterpiece and positions it as one of the most significant works of humor in American literature.

The second source or technique that Twain adopts to create wordplay is word substitution, new word combinations, or the juxtaposition of two incongruous meanings to amuse his readers and criticize specific issues in Southern society. For example, Jim says that he invests his money in “live stock” (Twain, 2014, p. 66), creating a pun through playing on the notion of stock in which he confuses capital stock with cattle. Twain allows Jim to make this pun to satirically highlight the moral degradation imposed by slave ownership in American society. Despite the reader’s expectation that the stock market

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would signify an institution such as Wall Street, Twain undermines that notion by replacing it with “live” stock. Jim, the slave capitalist, instinctively understands that market because he himself has been a victim of a “live stock” economy—one that relies on the institution of slavery. In Chapter XIX, the king humorously and ironically presents himself as the "rightful King of France,” attributing his "prema- ture bal-ditude" to the troubles he has faced (Twain, 2014, p. 172). The pun here is evident through using the word "balditude" as a humorous combination of "baldness" and "attitude." In Chapter VIII, Huck says people will call him a "low-down Abolitionist" (Twain, 2014, p. 62) because he helps a slave be free. This phrase combines wordplay and irony; "low-down" means despicable or morally reprehensible, while "abolitionist" refers to someone who advocates for the abolition of slavery. The pun here lies in Huck’s use of the derogatory term "low-down" to describe himself as an Abolitionist, highlighting the societal disapproval and conflict surrounding the issue of slavery. In Chapter XXXI, Huck describes the absurdity of the King and the Duke trying to play fraud on people: "They didn't yellocute long till the audience got up and give them a solid good cussing" (Twain, 2014, p. 285). The pun here combines the words "yellow" and "eloquent" to create "yellocute," which is a sarcastic term implying that their attempts at public speaking were far from eloquent. Upon reading such wonderful combinations, readers laugh and get shocked by Twain’s clever wordplay .

Sometimes Twain creates puns by playing on words’ double meanings or by using specific words to create new meanings and unexpected associations. Twain, the humorist, has an extraordinary perception of the uses that words ought to have, by analogy with their ordinary use. He possesses an exceptional understanding of how words should be used, drawing upon their ordinary meanings to create new and unexpected associations. An example of this technique of puns is when Twain describes a small town in the West where each Protestant sect had its own "plantation” (Twain, 2014, p. 307). By using the strikingly figurative pun of "plantation," Twain cleverly implies a connection between the spiritual and the mundane. After the king delivers his deceptive speech at the camp meeting, Jim tells Huck that, the king “do smell so like de nation” (Twain, 2014, p. 213). Here, the pun lies in the words "smell and nation" which have double meanings. On one hand, they can refer to a literal odor or scent. On the other hand, it can be used metaphorically to imply that the king's behavior or actions resemble those of the entire nation. By allowing Jim to comment on how a white man smells, Twain depicts the nation as reeking of aristocratic pretense, greed, and exploitation. The pun adds a humorous touch to the conversation between Huck and Jim, highlighting the king's unpleasant qualities and the irony of his claim to royalty. It also adds depth, as it suggests the richness and complexity of Twain's portrayal of society as a whole. Another example of word combination is Huck and Jim’s

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repeated use of the phrase “Honest INJUN” in the novel. This phrase is a play on words, using the term "INJUN" as a colloquial and abbreviated form of "Indian." The pun lies in the word "honest," which can mean truthful, but here it also refers to the stereotype of Native Americans being honest and trustworthy. At the end of the novel, Huck says that Tom “got his bullet around his neck on a watch-guard for a watch” (Twain, 2014, p. 396), which contains a pun with double meanings. Here, the pun lies in the double meaning of "watch." On one hand, it refers to a timekeeping device, indicating that Tom is always concerned about knowing the time. On the other hand, it also refers to keeping watch or being vigilant, which is ironic considering Tom's mischievous nature. In the same paragraph, Huck also displays the most important pun in the novel when he says, “But I reckon I got to light out for the Territory ahead of the rest” (Twain, 2014, p. 396). The pun is a play on the word “territory,” which may mean the Indian Territory or freedom—the notion that Americans usually attribute to “the territory.” In this later case, the word “territory” can have other familiar interpretations of “open land,” not as expropriation but as promise, opportunity, and hope (Bercovitch, 2007, p. 85).

The last remarkable form of pun in the novel lies in Twain's use of grammar irregularities, particularly double negatives. Twain frequently employs double negatives in the dialogue of his characters to create humorous and unexpected meanings with ironic effects. For instance, when Huck discusses freeing Jim from slavery and the potential backlash he may face, he states, "That don't make no difference" (Twain, 2014, p. 62). This phrase utilizes double negatives for emphasis and colloquial effect. The pun lies in the humorous and ungrammatical use of the double negative, which adds an ironic tone to Huck’s statement. Furthermore, when Huck encounters the con men, King and Duke, he discovers their fraudulent and trivial game. However, he chooses to remain silent and not inform his friend Jim to avoid any quarrels with the two con men. Twain allows Huck to use multiple double negatives in this passage to emphasize the absurdity of Huck's internalized beliefs and behaviors while infusing humor and wit into the narrative. To fully understand Twain's use of double negatives in the novel, it is essential to quote the entire passage, as it may provide further clarity on their usage throughout the story.

> It didn’t take me long to make up my mind that these liars warn’t no kings nor dukes at all, but just low-down humbugs and frauds. But I never said nothing, never let on; kept it to myself; it’s the best way; then you don’t have no quarrels, and don’t get into no trouble. If they wanted us to call them kings and dukes, I hadn’t no objections, ‘long as it would keep peace in the family; and it warn’t no use to tell Jim, so I didn’t tell him. If I never learnt nothing

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> else out of pap, I learnt that the best way to get along with his kind of people is to let them have their own way. (Twain, 2014, p. 173-74)

In the passage above, *Huckleberry Finn* employs double negatives to describe his reaction to the con men, the King and Duke, and his reluctance to challenge societal norms by confronting corruption. At the beginning, Huck states, "liars warn't no kings nor dukes at all," using the double negative "warn't no" to emphasize that the liars were not royalty. This double negative creates a humorous effect by intensifying the denial and highlighting Huck's disbelief.

However, Huck then says, "kept it to myself; it's the best way; then you don't have no quarrels, and don't get into no trouble," employing multiple double negatives to convey the idea that keeping quiet and avoiding conflicts is the best approach. The use of double negatives in this passage serves to emphasize Huck's nonchalant attitude towards the fraudulent behavior of the con men. By repeatedly negating his actions and thoughts, Huck humorously downplays the significance of his own awareness and the potential consequences of his silence. This technique highlights the satirical tone of the novel and criticizes the societal norms that prioritize maintaining peace over confronting corruption and injustice. It exposes the absurdity of such norms and challenges readers to question them.

As shown in the examples above, puns take various forms and techniques in *Huckleberry Finn*, serving as a device to infuse wit, satire, and humor into the narrative. Mark Twain's skillful use of puns extends beyond mere wordplay and homophony, encompassing different aspects of language such as manner of speech, logic, word combinations, malapropisms, deliberate misspellings, grammar irregularities, double meanings, and ambiguities. These puns not only entertain readers but also serve as a satirical tool, exposing the absurdities of societal norms, prejudices, and the characters' perspectives.

### 1.5. Parodies and Burlesques

Burlesque and parody are both "popular humor-producing devices of nineteenth-century American humorists" (Covici, 1962, p. 120). They both involve imitation of some sophisticated literary forms, characters, and social stereotypes to mock or cast ridicule upon existent social habits, emotional attitudes, or literary forms that the reader is persuaded to belittle (Covici, p. 113). However, they have distinct differences in terms of their approach and style. Burlesque can be seen as an alteration of content within a given form (Covici, p. 118). It is a comically distorted imitation of another work, writer, or genre (Rasmussen, 2014, p. 614). It does not stick closely to the original text but uses characters and incidents

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from a story as a means to comment on unrelated topics. Like satire, burlesque employs laughter as criticism, but burlesque finds humor primarily in artistic pretentions and moral posturings, not in the faults and foibles of individuals (Davis, 2014, p. 95). As such, burlesque has been a tactic of the low, ridiculing pomposity, false dignity, and the moral posturing of high culture. It can take various forms of prose, poetry, or drama and can be categorized into high burlesque (parody), which treats trivial subjects with exaggerated seriousness, and low burlesque, which treats serious subjects with exaggerated levity. Burlesque focuses more on humorous effect than arousing indignation, and it becomes parody when it consciously imitates a particular work, author, or school (Hill, 2001, p. 140-141). The humor of burlesque is created through the contrast between the original and the distorted version, a juxtaposition of high burlesque and low burlesque.

Parody, on the other hand, involves preserving the content while altering the form. It mimics a well-known work of literature, oratory, or drama, focusing on the content of the original work. It derides a specific literary work or style by imitating and exaggerating its particular features and using them in trivial contexts to highlight the absurdity and travesty of such work (Berger, 2017, p. 26). Parody is the emotional opposite of satire. It employs exaggeration or bathos to ridicule and tease without satire's indignation and anger (Hill, 2001, p. 140). Parody is considered a more sophisticated form of humor, requiring high intelligence and a good ear to execute effectively. Two key elements are involved in a parody: reproduction of a familiar source or literary work and comedic transformation. For this reason, parody is widely regarded as one of the most effective and frequently employed techniques for creating humor, and some comedy theorists argue that all humor originates from parody (Berger, 2017, p. 44). Parody generates humor by exaggerating or preserving elements or words of the original subject to highlight its flaws, absurdities, or contradictions. It surprises people by mimicking the original subject with a humorous twist, catching them off guard and leading to laughter. Parody also relies on the audience's familiarity with the original subject, imitating or referencing well-known styles, characters, or situations to create a shared understanding and appreciation for the comedic imitation's cleverness or wit.

Twain achieves his humorous effects and satirical intentions through his combined use of parody and burlesque in a single episode (Covici, 1962, p. 118). He utilizes such techniques in *Huckleberry Finn* to undercut conventional social values and bring his readers to his side against the values of Mississippi Valley society. Through parody, Twain pokes fun at existing systems of sentimentality, materialism, and hypocrisy, while through burlesque, he externalizes evil in villains and melodramatic events, simplifying moral choices.

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An example of burlesque in *Huckleberry Finn* is the duke's version of Hamlet's soliloquy, where the King and the Duke present scenes from Romeo, Juliet, and Richard III and rehearse a botched version of Hamlet's soliloquy. They force Shakespeare on small-town yokels and expose their own cultural and aristocratic pretensions. Burlesque, as described above, involves altering the content within a given form. In the example given, the duke's version of Hamlet's soliloquy can be considered a burlesque because it preserves the form of the original while drastically altering the content. This alteration creates a humorous effect and adds a new layer of meaning to the scene. The King's lack of understanding of the play, his comical mispronunciations, and the audience's reactions create a humorous contrast between the lofty ideals of Shakespearean drama and the reality of the situation.

An example of parody is the rituals of "Tom Sawyer's Gang," where Tom preserves the words that signify the machinations of a cutthroat band while forcing them into a context, a form, of boyish pranks. Twain effectively employs parody to poke fun and ridicule the impracticality of Romanticism, particularly by associating Romantic ideals with the character of Tom Sawyer. In the presence of the newly formed Tom Sawyer's Gang, dedicated to robbery and murder, Tom recites an oath that is partly inspired by pirate and robber books, as well as other high-toned gangs:

> 'Now, we'll start this band of robbers and call it Tom Sawyer's Gang. Everybody that wants to join has got to take an oath, and write his name in blood … Everybody said it was a real beautiful oath, and asked Tom if he got it out of his own head. He said some of it, but the rest was out of pirate books and robber books, and every gang that was high toned had it" (Twain, 2014, p. 10)

This choice of unrealistic models for the adventures of Tom's gang generates laughter and demonstrates Tom's inclination towards Romanticism and sentimentality. The reader couldn't help but burst with laughter at the exaggerated importance Tom places on his oath and the contrast it creates between an oath that is typically associated with solemnity and sincerity and pirate and robber books, which are often associated with dishonesty and lawlessness.

In Chapter XII, through Jim and Huck's engagement in the possibility of finding "virgin" territory and reinventing a new world, Twain creatively displays his parodic treatment of Christopher Columbus, the renowned explorer of new worlds. When Jim and Huck discover a wrecked ship on the river and decide to "borrow" whatever supplies might

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come in handy, Huck imagines how Tom Sawyer would feel were he to participate in their adventure:

> I can't rest, Jim, till we give her a rummaging. Do you reckon Tom Sawyer would ever go by this thing? Not for pie, he wouldn't. He'd call it an adventure — that's what he'd call it; and he'd land on that wreck if it was his last act. And wouldn't he throw style into it? — wouldn't he spread himself, nor nothing? Why, you'd think it was Christopher C'lumbus discovering Kingdom-Come. I wish Tom Sawyer WAS here. (Twain, 2014, p. 95)

The parody in these lines lies in the contrast between Huck's objective way of speaking and Tom Sawyer's exaggerated and romanticized view of adventure. Huck wants to search a wrecked steamboat for supplies, but he doesn't see it as a grand adventure like Tom would. Instead, Tom would turn it into a heroic gesture, full of drama and flair. Huck's comment that Tom would make the discovery seem like "Christopher C'lumbus discovering kingdom-come" pokes fun at Tom's tendency to exaggerate and melodramatize everything.

Near the end of the novel, Tom's parody and absurd means of adventure also continue when Huck and Tom devise plans to rescue Jim from the Phelps' farm. Huck suggests a practical method of rescuing Jim, but Tom harshly criticizes Huck and reveals his own plan:

> 'Well, if that ain't just like you, Huck Finn. You CAN get up the infant-schooliest ways of going at a thing. Why, hain't you ever read any books at all? — Baron Trenck, nor Casanova, nor Benvenuto Chelleeny, nor Henri IV., nor none of them heroes? Who ever heard of getting a prisoner loose in such an old- maidy way as that? No; the way all the best authori- ties does is to saw the bed-leg in two, and leave it just so, and swallow the sawdust (Twain, 2014, p. 324).

Rather than choosing a practical method of saving Jim from captivity, Tom bases his strenuous plan for saving Jim on the adventures of his absurd imagination and sentimentality. Using parodies, Twain assumes a common moral ground through laughter and unites his readers and himself against such a threatening world.

Biblical allusions are also subjects of Twain's parodies and burlesques. As Biblical allusions can create multiple effects, Twain uses them as "types of extended allusion" (Covici, 1962, p. 118). Mark Twain plays every possible note in his use of the Bible as a literary source for his burlesque and parody. In Chapter V, for example, Pap's conversion

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parodies the story of the Good Samaritan. When Pap appears and demands Huck's money, a naive judge from the East attempts to reform the poor outcast drunkard (Pap).

> 'Look at it, gentlemen and ladies all; take a-hold of it; shake it. There's a hand that was the hand of a hog; but it ain't so no more; it's the hand of a man that's started in on a new life, and'll die before he'll go back. (Twain, 2014, p. 33)

Pap's conversion experience parodies the story of the Good Samaritan. When Pap reappears and demands Huck's money, a naive judge from the East tries to reform him. The judge takes Pap to his own house, provides him with clothing, food, and care, and Pap claims to have started "a new life," mocking the biblical verse from II Corinthians 5:17 that states a person becomes a new creature in Christ (Knight, 1973, p. 43). However, Pap's good intentions quickly fade as he goes out and succumbs to his old habits, trading his new coat for alcohol and losing his newfound respectability. The biblical reference here parodies the attitudes of the Southern Sunday-school society, which believes that good people could do whatever crimes and go wash their sins in possible converts.

Twain humorously parodies and burlesques Biblical references throughout the novel to emphasize "the contrast between the distorted Christianity of white Southern society and Huck and Jim's much more real, if untutored, practice of what may be thought true Christianity seen partly in their conversation but much more fully in their behavior" (Knight, 1973, p. 29). This contrast is evident not only in their conversations but also, more significantly, in their behavior, which embodies a truer form of Christianity. Consequently, the whole novel can be seen as an extended act of religious parody and burlesque that allows Twain to criticize nineteenth-century Americans who saw themselves as "God's Chosen People and kept talking tirelessly about morals while denying common humanity to black people" (Covici, 1962, p. 116). Translating Twain's biblical and religious allusions used in his parodies and burlesques into Arabic requires a delicate approach, as it has the potential to alter their humorous and satirical intentions if not handled with creativity and understanding.

Overall, Twain's skill in crafting parodies and burlesques is difficult to summarize concisely. The humorous impact of Twain's parodies and burlesques knows no bounds. In *Huckleberry Finn*, the use of burlesque and parody serves as a means to satirize different facets of society, such as social conventions, cultural pretensions, and human foolishness. These techniques inject a humorous element into the narrative while also providing insightful commentary on the human condition. Without grasping the underlying humor behind these devices, readers may not fully appreciate their thematic and satirical functions.

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### 1.6. Understatement

Understatement is a humorous device in which events and circumstances are downplayed to appear less significant, impressive, or serious than they truly are (Dynel, 2011, p.337). It is a form of sarcasm that captures humor by presenting a claim in a restrained and understated manner (Nash, 2013, p.152-3). This technique of excessive restraint is often seen as the opposite of hyperbole, known as overstatement. Both overstatement and understatement are key elements in creating comedic effects. A narrator may consistently employ overstatement to frame their story, or he can regularly use understatement to construct a different kind of humorous frame that elicits different assumptions and expectations from the audience (Nash, p. 169-170). The term "understatement" encompasses both tone and style, referring to the technique of diminishing a fact or reducing its intensity. Traditional terms like "meiosis" (meaning "a lessening") and "litotes" (a form of negative expression) are used to describe the modern concept of understatement (Baggett, 1987, p. 143).

Understatement is a widely practiced device in American literary humor (Baggett, 1987, p. 140). When utilizing understatement, the narrator often engages with the reader on an equal level rather than assuming the role of a detached observer. Even though the narrator may draw attention to themselves, particularly in cases where they are not indulging in wild exaggeration, they present the facts in a spontaneous and objective manner. Through their straight-faced and laconic style, they provoke humor by subtly modulating their tone, pausing tentatively, and casually dropping remarks. In essence, they highlight the humor by deliberately avoiding overt emphasis on it.

Instances of understatement are almost found in every episode of the novel. In Chapter II, an example of understatement arises as a result of one of Tom Sawyer's pranks on Jim. When Jim falls asleep under a tree, Tom hangs Jim's hat on a branch. Subsequently, Jim concocts an elaborate tale about having been hexed and ridden by witches. The tale grows more grandiose with each repetition, and eventually Jim becomes a local celebrity, sporting a five-cent piece on a string around his neck as a talisman. After "Niggers would come miles to hear Jim tell about it, and he was more looked up to than any nigger in that country," Huck reports that Jim's celebrity finally reaches the point that "Jim was most ruined, for a servant, because he got so stuck up on account of having seen the devil and been rode by witches" (Twain, 2014, p. 12-13). The understatement is evident in the statement that Jim was "most ruined for a servant." Which downplays the severity of the situation and the impact it has had on Jim's reputation. Instead of using stronger language to describe the consequences of Jim's encounter with the devil and witches, the narrator employs understatement to highlight the absurdity of the situation. Twain uses

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understatement to expose the absurdity of the situation and add a humorous effect. By downplaying the gravity of Jim's predicament, Twain satirizes the superstitious beliefs and exaggerated reactions of the characters, particularly those with black skin. He emphasizes the irrationality of their fears and the humorous nature of their responses.

In Chapter XVI, Huck, who helped Jim escape enslavement, appears to be deprecating Jim's hope to steal his children from their slave owner. Huck feels it is a shame for Jim to ask for the freedom of his children. When Jim becomes free, he shows indifference and asks for more, which is the freedom of his children.

> It most froze me to hear such talk…Give a nigger an inch and he'll take an ell. Thinks I, this is what comes of my not thinking. Here was this nigger which I had as good as helped to run away, coming right out flat-footed and saying he would steal his children—children that belonged to a man I didn't even know; a man that hadn't ever done me no harm. (Twain, 2014, p. 46)

Twain's use of understatement is evident in Huck's response to Jim's statement about stealing his own children. Instead of supporting Jim in his quest for freedom or showing empathy, Huck expresses surprise and shock at Jim's change in behavior, as he asks for more than Huck believes he deserves. To justify his prejudice and further diminish Jim's rights, Huck employs the saying, "Give a nigger an inch and he'll take an ell." This saying minimizes Jim's aspirations and rights, exposing the unjust societal norms of the time. Huck continues to explain his conclusion, reached through his own thoughts that Jim intends to steal his children from someone who has done no harm to him. By downplaying Jim's right to free his own children and framing it as a criminal act, Huck adds a humorous effect to the situation. Despite helping Jim escape and defying societal expectations, Huck still holds onto the ingrained belief that Jim's actions are morally wrong. With understatement, Huck's language humorously undermines Jim while also shedding light on the absurdity of the societal norms and prejudices that Huck has internalized. Thus, humor stems from the understatement of Jim's rights and aspirations, which reflects nothing but the absurdity of the institution of slavery and the distorted moral values it perpetuates.

In chapter XIV, Huck understates Jim's wisdom and intelligence by remarking, "He had an uncommon level head for a nigger" (Twain, 2014, p. 108), when Jim refuses to view their gang's road robberies as adventures. This understatement, laced with unconscious irony, reveals Huck's feeble attempt to maintain a sense of white superiority, while readers, with a hint of laughter, recognize the underlying message. Later, in the same chapter, Jim and Huck find themselves in a heated debate about the manner in which French people speak. Huck mistakenly equates the difference between languages with the distinction

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between human language and cat language. In response, Jim cleverly suggests that if Huck's claim were true, then a man should speak like a man. In a moment of humorous understatement, Huck laments, "You can't learn a nigger to argue" (Twain, 2014, p. 113). While Jim's response may reveal his limited understanding of cultural diversity, his argument remains perceptive and logically sound. The humor in Huck's understatement arises precisely from readers' recognition that Jim's argument is better than Huck's. Through Huck's use of understatement, despite its racist undertones, a rationalization emerges that highlights Jim's superior argumentative skills. In doing so, a profound ideological message is conveyed, emphasizing the inherent equality of all human beings.

As shown in the examples above, Twain skillfully utilizes understatement throughout the novel to evoke laughter in readers. In doing so, he sheds light on the subtle evil of inhumanity while revealing how inhumanity is a subtle evil and how the degradation of blacks is often a product of the indifference prevalent in American southern society. Twain's use of understatement is evident in every episode of the novel, humorously exposing and undermining the gullibility of Southern society and their tendency to accept arbitrary conventions as unquestionable truths, particularly in matters of racial difference. However, it should be noted that Twain's implementation of understatement is nuanced and dry, making it more sophisticated than other forms of humor. Non-American readers may need a profound comprehension of Twain's use of this technique to fully appreciate and recognize instances of understatement in the novel.

### 1.7. Hoaxes and Pranks

Hoaxes and pranks are prevalent in the American humorous literature of the 19th century. However, there are notable distinctions in their usage. Marks and Davis (2014) make an interesting analysis of the distinction between these two humorous devices based on their intentions and outcomes (p.337-340). A hoax involves deception and plays on the gullibility of its victims, often with a humorous or mischievous intent. It is more serious than a prank and does not draw attention to any play frame or prior signaling about its ultimate humorous purpose. In a hoax, audience members are made aware of their victimization and are provided with an opportunity to respond, potentially through humor, feedback, or revenge, as they simultaneously act as both victims and audience members, while the perpetrator remains present to receive direct messages from them. On the other hand, a prank is more focused on caprice and foolishness, with a physical aspect to the trickery. It is less serious than a hoax and typically directed towards a specific victim without necessarily involving an audience. In a prank, the victim may be let off the hook at the end, while in a hoax, the revelation is made to an audience that may be remote from the prankster. Both a hoax and a prank rely on creating false expectations and incongruity

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to generate humor, but a prank may lack critical or satirical intent, whereas a hoax aims to provoke reflection and correction of errors.

*Huckleberry Finn* is, indeed, a masterful display of hoaxes, frauds, and pranks. Twain masters the techniques of the hoax, skillfully varying its butts and forms in an amazing way.[1] He skillfully incorporates hoaxes as incidents to create a humorous effect and as a literary form to perform a hilarious satire of current events and social conventions. At the beginning of the novel, Huck fakes his own death and escapes to Jackson's Island to avoid his abusive father and the constraints of society. Huck perpetrates a hoax that fools all the other characters in the novel, making them believe what is not so. The effect on the reader, however, is simple: the reader laughs to see the gullible crowd taken in, but the reader himself is never made to question the validity of his own interpretation of reality. As the St. Petersburg ferry stands close to Jackson's Island and fires its cannon to bring Huck's body to the surface of the river, readers laugh at the passengers and chuckle with Huck when he reminds them that "if they'd 'a' had some bullets in, I reckon they'd 'a' got the corpse they was after" (Twain, 2014, p. 53).

In Chapter XIX, Twain plays a satirical hoax that revolves around a group of con artists (the King and the Duck) who pretend to be reformed pirates and claim to have recently converted to Christianity. They arrive at the camp meeting, where people gather for religious revival and spiritual enlightenment. Encouraged by the crowd's emotional response to a fiery sermon, the King tearfully declares himself a reformed pirate. He expresses his sole aspiration in life: to gather enough funds to evangelize other pirates who share his past. The townspeople, eager to display their religious piety and generosity, readily accept the con artists' claims without questioning their authenticity. They are easily swayed by the emotional speeches and religious fervor displayed by the impostors. The King's success stems from the fact that the people are unaware of their own nature, just as they are unaware of geography. Stuck in their monotonous town, they find excitement in the presence of the supposed pirate. The King concludes, ""It warn't no use talking,"… "heathens don't amount to shucks alongsides of pirates to work a camp-meeting with" (Twain, 2014, p. 183). Readers cannot help but laugh at the striking contrast between the exaggerated claims and deception made by the con artists and the reality of the situation, which is the gullibility of the town's people.

[1] See Pascal Covici, *Mark Twain's Humor: The Image of a World*, chap. 4, pp. 159–185. In this chapter, Covici dedicates a thorough discussion to Twain's use of hoaxes in Huckleberry Finn and concludes that Twain's humor ultimately guides us towards self-discovery, with the core of this humor lying not in the more apparent parody and burlesque but in the art of the hoax.

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In Chapter XXIII**,** the king and the Duke perpetrate hoaxes again when their last deceptive acts attract only a handful of theatergoers. The Duke decides to scrap original plans and proceeds to advertise a three-night engagement of something called "The King's Cameleopard or The Royal Nonesuch," accompanied by a cautionary message stating "LADIES AND CHILDREN NOT ADMITTED" (Twain, 2014, p. 207). The first night is a sellout, and the all-male audience roars with laughter as the King appears on stage naked, painted from head to toe, and walking on all fours. However, when, after two encores, the Duke brings the curtain down, the crowd immediately realizes that it has been cheated. Yet, rather than admitting their gullibility to those not in attendance, the hoodwinked patrons agree to get their comrades to attend the following night so that all will be "in the same boat." The second night too is a sellout, and the sham is repeated. On the third night, both audiences return, armed with rotten eggs and vegetables under their clothing. But the two rogues catch on to the scheme right away and manage to escape to the raft with another night's proceeds.

Huck and Tom Sawyer perpetrated the most hoaxes and pranks in the novel, and the victims were Jim and other characters. In Chapter I, Tom pretended to be a witch and took Jim's hat off his head while he was sleeping. He then hung the hat on a tree branch directly above Jim. When Jim woke up and realized that his hat was on the tree, he told a story about how the witches bewitched him, put him into a trance, and then rode him all over the state before returning him to the same spot under the tree. To further illustrate what happened, Jim claimed that the witches hung his hat on a tree limb to indicate that they were responsible for the strange occurrence.

In chapter XV, Huck played two hoaxes on Nigger Jim with a dead snake and by teasing him about the night of the fog when Huck attempted to convince Jim that he had had a nightmare. In both instances, the element of humor is present because Huck was having fun and did not intend to hurt Jim. Yet physical cruelty resulted in the first instance when the live mate of the dead snake bit Jim, and mental cruelty occurred when Huck's prank emotionally disturbed Jim, despite its initial intention of good-natured teasing. However, Twain chooses such particular hoaxes to have a different outcome than the majority of his other hoaxes. It is Huck, the perpetrator of the prank, who becomes the victim and feels guilty about his actions. That means the person who plays the trick, Huck, is punished for his actions by Jim, who was having the trick played on him. Huck's hoaxes backfire, and Jim reacts to the hoaxes with anger and witty revelations, through which Huck learns to be conscious of Jim's freedom and humanity. Huck apologizes to Jim and explains, "I didn't do him no more mean tricks, and I wouldn't done that one if I'd a knowed it would make him feel that way" (Twain, 2014, p. 98). These hoaxes are different

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from the majority of the hoaxes played in Twain's other stories. Twain expects the readers who might have laughed along with Huck at Jim's gullibility to at least share Huck's new sensitivity to the ridiculed underdog, even if they still cannot help but appreciate that Huck has gotten better at hoaxes (Li, 2015, p. 45). In reality, Jim's response to the prank once again takes center stage in this episode; it marks as Trilling (1962) demonstrates "the beginning of the moral testing and development" to Huck (p. 316).

Twain uses the whole novel as a hoax, fooling readers in such a way that they have only themselves to blame (Bilbro, 2011, p. 211). Branch concludes about Twain's hoaxes: "Although their true significance was hidden and their true purpose unrelated, both meaning and purpose were skillfully accomplished... The illusion of truth was momentarily achieved, and criticism sneaked in unnoticed through the clever use of deception and surprise" (Bilbro, 2011, p. 211). Twain masters the techniques of hoaxing to cleverly engage his readers with plausible details while simultaneously ensuring that his hoaxes ultimately expose themselves as false. Just as Tom fools Huck into thinking that "respectable" Tom will actually help to free a slave, so Twain fools the reader into thinking exactly the same thing. In an insightful study of Mark Twain's humor, Covici (1962) highlights the significance of the hoax technique in *Huckleberry Finn* as a means of challenging the readers (p. 160-61). Covici (2013) emphasizes that the hoax serves as a sudden blow to the reader's perception of truth and self, particularly when the author intentionally conceals and then reveals his and Tom's deceit in fooling both the reader and Huck into believing that Tom will assist in freeing a slave. Readers, even upon rereading, find themselves drawn into Tom's elaborate antics. Despite labeling them as lengthy or tedious, readers still anticipate that Tom will defy society and liberate a slave (Covici, p. 379). When Tom's scheme fails due to his own unconscious resistance to openly challenging respectability, readers nod their heads, understanding the underlying reason. However, the truth eventually emerges, revealing that readers were misled into assuming that the theatricals, which originate from society itself, both reflect society's desire for sensational amusement and embody a genuine rebellion against slavery, society's most significant institution.

It is clear that through the masterful art of Twain's hoaxes, readers come to realize Twain's shocking "Notice" at the beginning of the novel, which warns against seeking a motive, moral, or plot. Twain's humorous hoaxes serve to reveal the morals and motives of his characters and the reality of the Southern community. With his artistic sword of hoaxes and pranks, Twain not only evokes laughter in his readers but also exposes the harsh reality of slavery, legal injustices, societal conventions, and the hypocrisy of the South. As Twain maps the growth of Huck's consciousness and conscience in relation to Jim, his raft

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companion and fellow adventurer, he cautions readers against seeking motive, moral, or plot within the conventions and subtly fabricated morals of a white hypocritical society.

### 1.8. Jokes and Riddles

Mark Twain seldom uses jokes and riddles for humor in Huckleberry Finn. Mark Twain's humor in Huckleberry Finn is indeed multifaceted, extending beyond the use of jokes alone. Twain masterfully employs techniques such as exaggeration, understatement, unexpected turns, puns, irony, satire, parody, burlesque, and literary and historical allusions to create a rich tapestry of humor throughout the narrative. These techniques, combined with Twain's sharp wit and clever storytelling, ensure that the novel remains a humorous and entertaining read, even without an abundance of traditional jokes. As Bird (2007) suggests, in The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, “Mark Twain is at the height of his powers, comic and otherwise, but the humor in that novel is not based primarily on what we would call jokes” (p. 168).

An instance of riddles appears in chapter XVII when Buck Grangerford poses a riddle about Moses to Huck: "Where Moses was when the candle went out?" Huck, not knowing the answer, attempts to find one but fails. Buck then triumphantly reveals the answer: "He was in the dark" (Twain, 2014, p. 137). However, Huck cleverly responds, "If you knowed where he was, what did you ask me for?” (Twain, 2014, p. 138). This joke of Moses and its punch line “in the dark” has been described as one of the novel’s extended metaphors, where Huck really is “like Moses,” repeatedly compared to him. Additionally, some scholars suggest that this joke, along with Huck's reactions to Aunt Sally's teachings about Moses, may allude to the betrayal of Southern blacks by Johnson in the post-war era, which contributed to their later hardships (Niemeyer, 2016, p. 50).

There are a few other instances in which Huck tells jokes, such as when he claims he “could say the multiplication table up to six times seven is thirty-five” (Twain, 2014, p. 24). Another example is when Huck mentions Jim's belief about bees: “Jim said bees wouldn’t sting idiots; but I didn’t believe that, be- cause I had tried them lots of times myself, and they wouldn’t sting me” (Twain, 2014, p. 66). However, these humorous remarks can be categorized more as comic statements than traditional jokes. Freud, referring to Huck's character and his literal perspective, describes the first remark as a "naive joke" and considers the second example to fall under "the comic" rather than a joke in the conventional sense (as cited in Bird, 2007, p. 168). Therefore, Twain rarely expresses his humor through jokes but uses different styles and forms in a creative manner that captures the reader’s attention and strikes his mind at the same time, resulting in an everlasting effect.

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## 2. Conclusion

In light of the vital role humor plays in *Huckleberry Finn*, this research undertakes the challenging task of classifying the novel's humorous devices. This classification serves as a crucial foundation for comprehending the novel and contributing to evolving studies of humor.

Twain's humor in *Huckleberry Finn* is primarily derived from his unique writing style, which encompasses various techniques such as exaggeration, understatement, unexpected turns, puns, irony, satire, parody, burlesque, and literary and historical allusions. While it may be true that there are relatively few jokes in *Huckleberry Finn*, Twain's use of humor is still prevalent throughout the novel. Twain's techniques of humor work in harmony to entertain readers, provide comic relief, and address sensitive issues in a thought-provoking manner. In addition, Twain's creation of humor retains some mystery due to his employment of a new and diverse range of devices in the novel. Using parody, wordplay, burlesque, irony, satire, exaggeration, hoaxes, jokes, riddles, local dialects and other linguistic potentials, Twain manages to smoothly integrate his humor into the structure of his novel, exposing the dark aspects of society and embodying a variety of themes, creating for generations of readers the pleasures and joys of an incredibly moral masterpiece.

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