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HUMOR AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN MARK TWAIN AND CHARLES DICKENS

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ABSTRACT

Humor has long served as a lens through which writers critique society, exposing social inequalities, moral shortcomings, and human folly. In the works of Mark Twain and Charles Dickens, humor is not merely a source of entertainment; it functions as a powerful tool for social commentary. Twain's satirical depictions of Southern society and racial prejudice in novels like *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* highlight injustice, hypocrisy, and the contradictions of moral codes, while Dickens' use of comic characterization and situational irony in works such as *Oliver Twist* and *Great Expectations* reveals the struggles of the poor, child laborers, and marginalized individuals in Victorian England. This study examines how both authors employ humor to address social problems, arguing that satire and comedy in their works serve as mechanisms for moral reflection, empathy, and societal critique.

Keywords: *Humor, Satire, Social Critique, Mark Twain, Charles Dickens, Social Inequality, Literary Analysis.*

INTRODUCTION. Mark Twain and Charles Dickens are celebrated for their unique ability to combine humor with incisive social criticism. While Twain focuses on the American context, especially the South's racial and cultural tensions, Dickens addresses the social inequities and moral contradictions of Victorian England. Both authors utilize comic techniques—satire, irony, exaggeration, and comic characterization—to illuminate social injustices, from systemic racism and slavery to child labor, poverty, and bureaucratic inefficiency. By analyzing selected works of Twain and Dickens, this study explores the dual role of humor: as a literary device that entertains readers and as a tool for moral and social reflection. The comparison highlights the universality of literary humor in exposing human folly and advocating social awareness across different historical and cultural contexts.

TWAIN'S SATIRICAL HUMOR AND SOCIAL CRITIQUE

Mark Twain's wit is closely linked to his examination of American society, especially the social and racial disparities in the Southern United States during the 19th century. In pieces like *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Twain uses satire to reveal the inconsistencies of morality, laws, and societal expectations, frequently underscoring the hypocrisy within "civilized" society.





Huck's viewpoint as a young, ethically conscious yet socially unconventional character enables Twain to examine social systems—slavery, religious beliefs, and deep-rooted racism—through humor and irony. For instance, the ridiculous explanations characters provide for slavery or discrimination frequently evoke laughter while also encouraging readers to acknowledge the ethical shortcomings inherent in societal standards.

Twain employs exaggeration, dialect, and humorous scenarios for various reasons. On one side, it captivates, rendering the story approachable and interesting. Conversely, it exposes the irrationality of unexamined social customs, urging readers to evaluate the dominant social and moral principles critically. Satirical scenes, like the conflicts between the Grangerfords and Shepherdsons, demonstrate the futility of inherited social grudges, while the schemes of con artists such as the Duke and the Dauphin emphasize naivety and ethical ambiguity in people's actions. Twain's humor is thus not trivial; it serves as a conscious literary tactic that merges laughter with moral and societal contemplation, showing how satire can highlight injustice and human foolishness in a socially conscious, effective way.

DICKENS' COMIC TECHNIQUES AND SOCIAL AWARENESS

The humor of Charles Dickens is a key aspect of his critique of Victorian society, serving as both amusement and social critique. His works, including *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield*, and *Great Expectations*, showcase how humorous methods can highlight social issues, ethical shortcomings, and human absurdities. Dickens frequently employs exaggerated characters, bizarre situations, and situational irony to emphasize problems like poverty, child labor, class oppression, and bureaucratic inefficiency. For example, Mr. Bumble, the arrogant and self-important parish beadle in *Oliver Twist*, represents the ridiculousness and harshness of the workhouse system, amusing readers while also encouraging thoughtful consideration of systemic injustice. In a like manner, Uriah Heep's excessive servility and cunning actions in *David Copperfield* reveal the deceit and moral duplicity of social ascension in Victorian England.

Dickens' humor is multifaceted: it merges verbal cleverness, irony, and physical comedy to captivate readers while emphasizing ethical teachings. He often contrasts humorous moments with scenes of deep emotion, thus emphasizing the human impact of social neglect and inequality. For instance, the Artful Dodger's wit and savvy tricks in *Oliver Twist* amuse readers, while also highlighting the fragility of children living in urban poverty. Dickens' storytelling style, frequently ironic and morally conscious, leads the audience to identify injustice and feel compassion for individuals marginalized by society. Using humor, Dickens makes his characters relatable, prompting readers to reflect on moral obligations and the societal systems that sustain hardships.





Moreover, Dickens' use of humor contributes to social awareness by making complex social critiques accessible and memorable. Comedy allows readers to confront uncomfortable truths about societal flaws without alienating them, and the exaggerated, sometimes absurd elements of Dickens' humor make social critique more vivid and persuasive. Ultimately, Dickens demonstrates that humor is not merely a literary ornament; it is a powerful vehicle for examining social inequities, exposing moral failings, and fostering empathy. His comic techniques exemplify the capacity of literature to combine laughter with serious reflection, showing that entertainment and ethical engagement can coexist to inspire both thought and emotional response.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: HUMOR AS A VEHICLE FOR SOCIAL REFORM. Mark Twain and Charles Dickens, while operating in different historical and cultural settings, utilize humor as a deliberate means to highlight social issues and encourage contemplation. Twain's satire mainly addresses the American South, highlighting racial bias, enslavement, and ethical hypocrisy. His employment of local dialect, first-person perspective, and episodic humorous scenarios allows readers to recognize the absurdity and injustice inherent in societal conventions. Characters such as Huck Finn, the Duke, and the Dauphin represent moral uncertainty, human foolishness, and the repercussions of unthinking adherence to societal norms. Twain's humor captivates audiences by merging amusement with criticism, encouraging awareness of inequality while promoting ethical reflection.

In contrast, Dickens tackles the structural inequalities of Victorian England, emphasizing poverty, child exploitation, bureaucratic dysfunction, and social stratification. His comedic methods—absurd exaggeration, irony, and vividly entertaining characterization—highlight institutional corruption and societal disregard. Figures like Mr. Bumble, Uriah Heep, and the Artful Dodger are both amusing and educational, showing how comedy can bring compassion to those wronged by systemic injustice while mocking the powerful. Dickens' wit also promotes empathy by contrasting comic elements with scenes of sorrow, enabling readers to tackle social issues in a captivating and contemplative way. Regardless of these disparities, Twain and Dickens possess a core appreciation of humor's capability to act as a means for social change. Both writers acknowledge that humor can be influential, exposing ethical inconsistencies and human foolishness while keeping the audience engaged. Humor acts as a bridge between amusement and moral contemplation, facilitating a critical evaluation of social conventions, cultural principles, and personal conduct. Their research indicates that literature's societal influence is enhanced when humor is paired with ethical awareness, showing that comedy can act as both an artistic and a transformative power. By comparing the approaches of Twain and Dickens, it becomes evident that humor transcends cultural and temporal boundaries, offering a powerful lens





through which writers can illuminate social injustice, stimulate empathy, and inspire ethical awareness.

CONCLUSION. In their individual writings, Mark Twain and Charles Dickens showcase that humor serves as a powerful literary device for exploring societal issues and encouraging ethical contemplation. Twain's satirical wit highlights the inconsistencies, hypocrisies, and inequities of 19th-century American culture, especially in relation to race, slavery, and Southern societal conventions. Dickens' humorous strategies highlight the struggles of Victorian England, such as poverty, child labor, and bureaucracy, employing exaggeration, irony, and rich characterization to emotionally and intellectually engage readers. Although varying in historical context and narrative approach, both authors possess a mutual insight: humor serves not just as amusement, but as a tool to stimulate critical thinking, cultivate empathy, and question societal conventions. Their creations show that humor, when paired with ethical and societal understanding, can provoke contemplation, consciousness, and, in the end, a wish for change. Through the comparison of Twain and Dickens, it is clear that literary humor has a universal ability to uncover human foolishness, challenge social injustices, and foster moral involvement across different cultures and periods

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