



Style and Technique in The Novels of Mark Twain

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Mark Twain was one of the most famous American writer, famous for his wit and humor. His wit, humor and wisdom helped his lectures to be well received and the characteristics of his novels have continued to make mark twain a widely beloved writer. He was proud of his own style as he was the master of style that escapes the fixity of the printed page, that sounds in our ears with the immediacy of the heard voice, the very voice of the unpretentious truth. A[most every contemporary writer who deals conscientiously with the problems and possibility of American prose must feel the influence of Mark Twain. Through his prose we hear the voice of a man speaking to another man. For his appeal to mass imagination, he has been compared with Washington and Abraham Lincoln. He is the first American who spoke in American idiom. His language throbs with the vernacular warmth and vigour which kindles the imagination of millions. Twain raised the rank and function of vernacular. He adapted the resistant vernacular for purposes of art. He was the first to establish the virtues of regional dialect in matters of literary style.

The most remarkable thing in Twain's style is his penchant for story telling. This enabled him to hold his readers enthralled and to entertain auditoriums with equal felicity Mark Twain was an adept at carefully leading his readers and audiences through calculated effects and contrived suspense of effective climaxes. He writes in a conversational style which is amazingly controlled.

The colloquial style of Twain has not only swept American literature but has spilled over into world literature. Mark Twain early literary preoccupation was with folklore, newspaper writing and the platform-lecture but he was not a mere reporter of the newspaper incidents, he was rather gifted with imaginative faculty of the mind, even in his best works, Twain could not keep away the elements of melodrama and burlesque and sensational episodes. He was not altogether an unconscious artist. His style was greatly influenced by the pulpitmanship and the after dinner speaker in him. He was conscious craftsman and one of the most efficient generals in the field of literature. Twain's life was remarkable in its triumphs and tragedies and his works are remarkable in their depth and perception of human experiences. He abundantly draws material from memory and interprets reality in an intensified degree. He supports his observation with his personal and deep

felt experiences. Sometimes he employs the literary devices of irony and contrast and exaggeration to strike his point home very often. Twain has been found his best in describing squalor and ugliness. Ugliness was sometimes real to him. Though he loves the western society, particularly the American society, he makes no move to hide its ugly manifestation. He rather exposes them in a threadbare analysis. When he depicted nature he saw beauty in it, but when depicting mankind he as a rule, drew ugliness. Geismer observes: -

"Sam Clemens knew himself better than anybody else would even know him. He remains in literary history as a prime example of the outgoing and life gathering spirit combined with the most acute sense of self-knowledge and self-vision"¹

Twain was widely travelled and deeply experienced man. During his travels abroad, he come across the seamy sides of life. One might think that the author took delight in describing the stark and naked realities of life. He could talk, about a drowned man lying naked, swollen and purple, with water ceaselessly trickling over hideous face. with greater ease and facility than about a lovely face that might have launched a thousand ships. Twain has been called a realist and a romantic, a humorist and a satirist. His mark on American literary history can not be overstated. The popularity of his work has been met with an equal portion of controversy with Huckleberry Finn as one of the most banned and debated books in American literature. Twain was more successful than any previous American writer in breaking away from the English literary tradition and modeling his style on American speech. Most of Twains works expressed the gloomy view that all human motives arc ultimately selfish. Even so Twain is best remembered as humorist who used his sharp wit and comic exaggeration to attack the false pride and self-importance he saw in humanity. Such humour already partakes of satire. There is a subtlety in it and sometimes bitterness. It is no longer a matter of rough laughter, but the amusing epilogue invoking laughter to castigate men, manners and morals. One recognizes in it the complex and impassioned personality of the author. He is an embittered sentimentalist who simply hide his deep pessimism beneath the mask of humour.

There is a basic conflict of themes in Mark Twain's works. In his discovery of his own American representative comman man to the top of his bent, to the height of his ability but with an unswerving devotion, integrity and purity of purpose and style, he was one among Walt Whitman, Sherwood Anderson and Thomas Wolfe, who saw American with a poet's vision. Twain's theme of fleeting love exploitation betrayal, injustice, murderous violence, all lurking in the promise of New world space still speak to us as freshly in the closing years of the twentieth century as they did when they were penned in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The central drama of Mark Twain's literary career was his discovery of a series of usable pasts which enabled him to flirt with the nausea of the day to escape the day-to-day business and political harassments of the present. Mark Twain's early days passed in Hannibal were very formative. He became imaginative and adventurous. This was the place where he saw a mile-wide river Mississippi up and down the river flowed the life of America. Mark Twain's novels especially Huckleberry Finn shows deep influence of the river on his works.

Now, in this chapter 'Style and Technique' I would like to describe the various styles and experiments that Twain has made in all his famous plays as he was a great stylist in the field of American drama, he deserves the praise for the naturalness and simplicity of his prose. No other writer contemporary with Twain has touched American life in so many varieties. The striking features of Twain's style are his fusion of personal and universal element, use of humour and satire, symbolism, Allegory, use of American Vernacular, Informality Gaudiness, perfect colloquial touch, simple and unaffected tone, description of squalor, use of metaphor and fire images, and complexity and variety. Some of Mark Twain's works are autobiographical as *The Innocent Abroad*, *'Roughing It'*. *'A Tramp Abroad and life on the Mississippi*. These are the records, more or less, embellished by humour of his adventures and experiences on the Mississippi, in the west, and Europe. They are the result of a sifting of his observations of his fellow-traveler through life and of his reflections upon them. Even in his boy-books. Twain has drawn upon himself time and again. *The Innocent Abroad* (1869) is structurally an autobiographical narrative. It is undoubtedly a new kind of travel book that made Mark Twain a national figure and which established him, as an outstanding popular humorist. It shattered the traditional approach of Romantic Attitude to European culture. It was a strong plea for American nationalism. The work shot up into fame and made the name of Mark Twain reverberate everywhere in the English speaking world. Twain shows a little gaudiness in this travel book. In it while describing the ascent of Vesuvius he heaps up adjective upon adjective in order to be impressive but in overdoing it he fails to achieve the desired effect.

In 1872 Twain wrote *'Roughing It'* which is vivid record of his experience in Nevada and in California. It is merely a personal narrative, and not a pretentious history or a philosophical dissertation. It's a record of several years of variegated vagabondizing and its object is rather to help the resting reader while away an idle hour than afflict him with metaphysics or good him with science. Twain's strange mixture of styles is incorporated in his book *'A Tramp Abroad* (1880) including American and German folklore, satire, journalism, poetry and even four facetious recipes. It marks the beginning of a period of abundant productivity. It is an account of the harassed traveller losing his tickets, browbeaten by porters and shopkeepers, falling foul of the authorities.

Most of *Life on the Mississippi* is autobiographical. Chapter IV- XVII were written for the Atlantic, Fresh, vivid, humorous, they recall the great days of river traffic: the problems of navigation, the race, the pilot's association, the resourcefulness and glory of the old-time pilot. The first two chapters are based on the history of the river. In the very first chapter he says

"it is not a commonplace river but on the contrary is in all ways remarkable. Considering the Missouri its main branch, it is the longest river in the world four thousand three hundred miles".²

Really this river is the life line of America. About its history Twain writes, "we can glance briefly at its slumberous first epoch in a couple of short chapters; at its second and wider awake epoch in a couple more; at its flush and widest-awake epoch in a good many succeeding

chapters; and then talk about its comparatively tranquil present epoch in what shall be left of the book".³

In this book Twain has written of his own experiences as a cub-pilot in learning channels and shallows, he has written of the history and the geography and the fickle personality of the river. And about the people who lived along its banks and in the rafts and barges and boats on its surface. In the early chapters of the book he describes his ambition to be a pilot 'Coz in his view the pilot was the highest position of all. For him the best thing was to be a pilot on a Mississippi steamboat. The river held all adventure and the pilot was its master. After twentyone years he comes back and how he writes in chapter 21 'A section in my Biography'

"in due course I got my license . I was a pilot now, full fledged ... but by and by the war came, commerce was suspended, my occupation was gone"⁴

Then he writes about other occupations he joined in. After spending twenty one years when he comes back he desired to see the river and the steamboat again. About the structure of this book. Miller writes:

"Life of the Mississippi can thus be devided in to two parts: the river remembered and the river reencountered. The first part is dominated by the material that had already been published in the Atlantic, the second which can be said to begin at chapter twenty-two, tells the story of Twain's return to the river as a successful writer who is recognized and feted wherever he goes"⁵

This book marks Twain's emergence as a great modern writer. It contrasts the present with the past. Twain frequently seems to be an apostle of progress, delighting in the effect twenty years have had upon the Mississippi Valley. After twenty years Twain finds that the river he used to see from a first class cabin is no longer the same as the river Twain remembered from his youth. After so many years he found it difficult to finish this book but when he finally finished it, he wrote to his business manager that he not wanted anything more to do with this book but undoubtedly it is life on the Mississippi that established" Twain as something more than a western humorist; upon its publication it was quickly recognized as a "most solid books", in the words of an early reviewer, "more novel in its character, and even more American" than anything else Twain had yet written"⁶

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