

"the adventures of
tom sawyer": twain's
extensive use of
sarcasm



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Sarcasm by definition entirely changes the way a comment or sometimes whole event is interpreted, often flipping a subject on its head, altering the original obvious meaning and revealing it to be the near opposite. In *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, Mark Twain uses sarcasm throughout the text to add humor, change reader's perspective of events, portray a theme or moral, and also just to express his thoughts on a certain subject. The place of satiric sarcasm in the novel may be more important and more complex than might appear at first glance.

In these scenes, one overarching reason that Twain uses sarcasm throughout the story is to add humor. Sarcasm makes the story as a whole much funnier, humor being a quality that *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* is famous for. Without such remarkably funny moments, the novel would likely not have become so popular with such a diverse group of readers, especially of a younger age. Such laughable parts in the novel make the story much more attractive, but they have another purpose other than for pure enjoyment. Heavy sarcasm makes the book not just much more interesting, but also adds a layer of depth. Sarcasm turns the novel into a story you can get more easily caught up in and ponder certain events. For example, Tom's hiding under the bed when the ladies are crying over his death makes the scene a lot different. The ladies are crying over their dead boy, who of course is right there, under his bed. The sentence, " I hope Tom is better off wherever he is" (Twain 130). is even said by one of the broken hearted women. Tom being under the bed makes that statement highly ironic, the scene absurd, and the ladies' speech extremely sarcastic, and their emotions impossible to take seriously. As they are weeping, rather than just two ladies

crying over the death of a child, a none too funny occurrence, the scene is given new depth and a hidden idea is revealed. The scene is now hilarious and idiotic, and the ladies real sorrow histrionic. You can't possibly see the scene as sad and serious because because of the extreme sarcasm and black humor present. This satire makes you wonder what it is that makes something despondent in the first place and question if there is always a reason for such sorrow, as is the case with the two ladies. Their sorrow could have been easily avoidable, ending if they had just peaked under the bed. Sarcasm adds to the notion particularly that events are not always as they first seem, making the reader open their mind to a deeper assessment of various parts of life.

A single concept Twain loves to make fun of in the novel is romance. Twain frequently uses sarcasm to do it. This is shown in how he constantly plays on the romance between Tom Sawyer and Becky Thatcher. As the town is preparing for the seemingly dead boy's' funeral, Becky is moping around the schoolyard, apparently overwhelming depressed. She soon begins to sob, unable to stop thinking about Tom. She says to herself, " Oh if only I had a andiron brass knob again; I haven't got anything to remember him by." (146). Here events are made sarcastically funny because this romance mocks the typical love story plot. Tom and Becky are only children, and instead of a ring Tom presented Becky with a doorknob. " Oh if it was to do all over again I wouldn't say that, but he's gone now, and I'll never see him no more" (146). Becky cried. Again making fun of the predictable love novel, Twain has Becky reject Tom, and only now that he is " gone forever" (244). Becky of course realizes how much she cares for Tom and would vow to love him forever if he

came back. And unsurprisingly, he does. Mark Twain puts a silly twist on this affair that makes it clever, funny and enjoyable to follow through the narrative. Also once again a rather sad scene becomes laughable due to implied sarcasm, making it clear how drastically sarcasm can change a scene and its perspective, and then so its impact. Twain portrays love as ridiculous and by doing so, makes his statement love and relationships are not the serious emotional rollercoaster and life changing experience many make them out to be, and instead are only particularly significant to the inappropriate mindset of the two involved, revealing Twain's own scorn of romance. A further theme of how foolish people can be is presented by Twain's making fun of this childhood romance, as the children attempt to imitate real love.

Another scene that is laced with sarcasm is the fence whitewashing scene. Twain uses a single short paragraph to rapidly change your whole view of the scene. Here, Tom needs to whitewash a fence, a chore he really does not want to do. Eventually, he manages to cons his friends into doing this chore for him by pretending to have great interest in the task, faking acute focus, and acting as if it was of the utmost importance it is completed. Afterwards, Tom realizes " he had discovered a great law of human action, without knowing it." (19). that "...to make a man or boy covet a thing, it is only necessary to make that thing hard to attain."(19). Something so profound as the application of knowledge of human nature is reduced to a child getting his friends to do his chores for him. This idea could be a complex theme explored this case. Yet, instead of hinting at it and opening it up for analysis, Twain just tells it to you straight out, turning the whole scene into rather a

simple gag. "The boy mused awhile over the substantial change which had taken place in his worldly circumstances, and then wended toward headquarters to report" (20). Twain adds "If he had been a great and wise philosopher, like the writer of this book, he would have now comprehended that work consisted of what a body is obliged to do, and play consists of whatever a body is not obliged to do." (19). Such commentary is made into higher satire especially because Tom Sawyer is meant represent a younger Mark Twain. Even more now that the book has become so widely read and analyzed, this passage mocks the real book critics and such who consider themselves the actual so called 'wise philosophers', perhaps people who thought they were so very smart figuring out the theme of the scene. From one point of view, this scene is funny because of the sarcasm, but some people might wonder if Twain had any serious deeper point in portraying this theme, such as questioning the merits of analysis by those who consider themselves knowledgeable on such topics.

Sarcasm in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* changes how the reader interprets certain parts of the book, but also allows for deeper contemplation without making events too serious, complex, or dismal, as in other adult novels. Noted here, because of the sarcasm in the fence whitewashing and hiding under the bed scene, and how Twain incorporates sarcasm using Tom and Becky's relationship, the book becomes more entertaining and compelling. These two scenes create added depth as well, by making the themes questionable. Sarcasm additionally allows Twain to showcase his personal ideas or thoughts on the matter, as he does with regard to mocking his own intelligence. (This tactic of Twain's is even more ironic today, as he

is hailed as one of the greatest writers of all time). Twain's sarcasm is complex, and like modern day comedians and social critics, serves to entertain as well as provide otherwise unseen insight into important worldly events and human society as a whole.