

Satire faithful,” is the
way twain sums up



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Satire is an effective device for criticizing the follies and foibles of humanity.

When it manifests in literature, it can take several forms. Horatian satire pokes holes in philosophical positions and criticizes prevailing social attitudes with light-hearted mockery. On the other hand, Juvenalian satire goes beyond and exposes moral transgressions and attacks the hypocrisy in the institutions that govern society.

For this reason, writers are expected to use stronger doses of irony and sarcasm in the latter. Novelists often deliver pointed critiques through this literary convention, but their executions and purposes vary. Twain and Austen, both satirists, grapple with similar themes in their novels *Pride and Prejudice* and *Pudd'nhead Wilson*. However, Twain's satire is Juvenalian as he aims to dismantle views towards the institution of slavery in the Antebellum South, while Austen's satire is Horatian as she lampoons the way relationships and marriages are perceived during the Regency Period in a tongue-in-cheek fashion. Their varying approaches towards satire are best distinguished by their portrayal of higher society from their time periods and in the construct of their narratives. A common thread between *Pudd'nhead Wilson* and *Pride and Prejudice* is that the nobility is used as a mechanism for Austen and Twain to point out societal absurdities.

In *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, Twain sharply conveys his contempt for the slavocracy ideology in the Antebellum South through his ironic portrayal of the Southern Code of Honor. "To be a gentleman—a gentleman without stain or blemish—was his only religion, and to it he was always faithful," is the way Twain sums up the philosophy of the leading slaveholder in the

community. For the gentleman, he notes further, "honor stood first," and if the laws of honor "required certain things of him which his religion might forbid him: then his religion must yield—the laws could not be relaxed to accommodate religion or anything else" (Twain 918). With such an aristocratic code of conduct to guide them, it is not surprising, Twain points out, that these "gentlemen" thought nothing of separating slave families by selling mothers, fathers, and children down the river. Conversely, Austen's satire directed towards the nobility in *Pride and Prejudice* is imbued with amusement, rather than condemnation.

As seen with her portrayal of Mr. Collins, Austen represents "superior society" as one that lacks self-concept and is "conceited, pompous, narrow-minded and silly" (Austen 133). Mr. Collins, a clergyman under the patronship of Lady Catherine de Bourgh, is used to mock the pseudo-gentry.

His self-importance is best exhibited in his comedic proposal to Elizabeth, after she rejects him the first time: "My situation in life, my connections with the family of de Bourgh, and my relationship to your own, are circumstances highly in my favour; and you should take it into further consideration, that in spite of your manifold attractions, it is by no means certain that another offer of marriage may ever be made you. Your portion is unhappily so small that it will in all likelihood undo the effects of your loveliness and amiable qualifications. As I must therefore conclude that you are not serious in your rejection of me, I shall choose to attribute it to your wish of increasing my love by suspense, according to the usual practice of elegant females," (Austen 106). In this scene, Collins is under the impression that he is entitled to Elizabeth solely based on his status alone, and assumes that is enough to

solidify a marriage with her. Collins' statements reveal the inflated reverence towards "superior society" and the prevailing view of marriage during the Regency Period: it was more of a business agreement rather than a union formed from love and connection. Moreover, *Pudd'nhead Wilson* is written as a farce dependent upon satire, while *Pride and Prejudice* uses satire as a supplement for its conventional story. It is important that Twain wrote *Pudd'nhead* as a slapstick comedy because this was the only way to elucidate the general ludicrousness of a slave holding culture in a democratic society to an audience that was still very much taking part in that culture. Twain's novel is centered around an absurd premise where a one-sixteenth black woman, Roxy, is subjected to the life of a house-slave, and her son, Chambers, who is only one thirty-second black, also becomes a slave merely by "fiction of custom and law," (Twain 921).

Twain is scoffing at the manifest absurdity of the slavocracy doctrine that justified enslavement of any person with the slightest infusion of Negro blood in his or her veins. Moreover, because Chambers is white-passing, Roxy switches him with the master's baby, Tom, to avoid the potential fate of being sent down the river. As fake-Tom grows older, he embodies his role as master, while fake-Chambers buys into the inferiority of his race. By depicting these two characters' disparate development as a result of their upbringings and not their genetics, Twain is ironically illuminating the fraud and myth of racial supremacy.

On the other hand, because of the inherent contradictions in Austen's narrative, her satire is more of an accessory to the novel, instead of a focal

point, emboldening its place as a horatian satire. For instance, a central theme in the novel is