

## Introduction

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Despite the great number of publications which appeared on the subject of Mark Twain's writing, there has not yet appeared a monograph focused entirely on the theme of play of which he often wrote. In the context of Twain's works, play is primarily mentioned in the publications which concern his books written for children, and which, not coincidentally, became the works for which he was most famous. Yet the theme of playing games and how they affect the position of the playing human, the *homo ludens*, extends to many other works, also those, which have very little humor in them or whose overall mood is pessimistic and dark. It is the theory of games and play which can grant researchers better insight into such works. It also makes apparent the parallels and intertextual as well as intra-textual connections with various aspects of play, which would have otherwise caused the said works to elicit conflicting interpretations.

This monograph builds on the theoretical foundation established in *Homo Ludens as a Comic Character in Selected American Films* (Skweres, 2017), which proposed the use of ludological theory in the analysis of narratives that on the surface had little to do with games. The method proved successful because it allowed for an interpretation of over ten film comedies which had very little in common, apart from the similarities in traits of main characters who could be identified as a new comic type: *a homo ludens* – the playing human, as well as the consideration of how players and nonplayers influence each other. This was made possible by the introduction of new categories describing the attitude of the player and his surroundings, which could be either oneiric or pragmatic in nature. As it will be demonstrated in the present monograph, these categories also find their direct application in the study of literature. Mark Twain's vast and varied oeuvre will present a perfect object of analysis for the test of applicability of the terms originating in game studies.

Due to its myriad of forms and numerous transformations, play is difficult to characterize. The same can be written about Samuel Langhorne Clemens, who throughout his life played the role of Mark Twain. He is primarily known for his humor, which partially developed from the western

tradition of the tall tale, yet which he refused to let define his entire literary output: "As tempting as it may be to see Twain's formulation of the art of humor as celebrating a tall-tale tradition of oral storytelling, it nevertheless remains the product of a professional performance." (Lowry, 1996, p. 19) This conflict between the spontaneity of play and predictable professionalism, tendency to follow the flight of fancy and the necessity to succumb to the urgency of practicality and work, will inform the interpretation of his writings. It is the purpose of this monograph to reveal and analyze the diverse meanings behind the overarching theme of attitudes and reactions caused by play in a selection of Samuel Clemens's private interviews, sketches, short stories, and novels.