The thesis attempts a comparative study of Mark Twain the peerless bard of humor whom nobody can excel, and Joseph Heller, who excels all others in his black humor. Both being artists of great calibre in evoking humor, a probe into their various artistic devices of humor is tried. This enables us to judge how they resemble, how they differ from one another and to know where they succeeded, where they failed and why they did so. The thesis aims to compare and contrast both the gifted artists though, in the course of it, it reaffirms the general accepted notion that the senior is a giant against whom anyone is a dwarf. it does not aim to undermine Heller as he is still to stand the test of time.

The thesis is divided into Six chapters. The first is entitled as "American Humor". This chapter, as it befits to look at humor in general before going any further into its annals, has looked into various types of humor. It tries to define humor, and then goes to American humor. American humor, as the critics say, is varied, rich, vivacious and is out and out American. It branches out into various genres each differing from one another yet looking alike sometimes. Humor has come to
mean comedy in broadest sense. It is irony, satire, buffoonery, clowning, farce and still it leaves all these far behind. Its scope and purpose are broader than all of them. Humor is not limited to one person or clan. It is all pervasive and it does not aim at correction. The humorist does not assign himself a superior place or position as he is well aware that he is one in the group at which he laughs. Neither it is a laughter of glee nor mirth but is of only pain and misery and the humorist laughs as he could not cry.

American humor is classified into many, like frontier humor, plantation humor, high humor, urban tall tale humor, backwoods humor, black humor, jewish humor etc. Critics and scholars group and regroup humorists with all these labels, as they perceive them. Most of critics labelled Mark Twain as a frontier humorist whose maine fort is exaggeration and understatement. Heller is a black humorist and his weapon is redundancy and unexpected statements.

Second chapter is entitled as "Humor in Mark Twain". Here a study of his melieu is made as it is believed that any artist is a product of his society and age though, he shapes them in his turn. Twain is a
child of those frontier days when America was like a fresh blossom of the wild jungle. The Americans of that age were in the fag end of their frontier days. They were adventurous, pioneering, and enterprising. But the depression started already and people were engrossed in the rat race for money, material gains. They were after riches and were great gamblers believing in sudden meteoric rise of rags-to-riches. Mark Twain had all these traits in him which he recreated in his beautiful enchanting novels. He is endowed with native talent and was shrewd to evolve a modus operandi of his own while imitating his predecessors.

Here in this chapter his various techniques of humor such as exaggeration, understatements, vernacular, repetition and others are looked into, with various illustrations from his novels. It is confined to four of his novels - Tom Sawyer, Huckleberry Finn, Prince and Pauper and Mysterious Stranger - as they are the best known of all his novels. These novels are summed up briefly for the convenience of the reader before citing the illustrations. All this is done with a view to pointing out his devices with which he produced all endearing novels of humor.
In the Third chapter, 'Humor in Joseph Heller', black humor is defined and its origin and development are traced. The circumstances that lead Heller to black humor are looked into. His major novels Catch-22, Good as Gold, God Knows are summed up, and passages from them are cited as illustrations of his devices. His devices are redundancy, repetition, unexpected statements, misjoinder of subject and tone, cyclic and linear repetitions which are his arms with which he disarms the readers.

The fourth chapter is 'A Comparison of Huckfinn and Catch-22' and the chapter does what the title says. It is tried to study why Huck Finn is a great world renouned, widely read and appreciated novel, and why Catch-22 though a great novel is not on par with the earlier and where does it fail? The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, apparently a charming simple novel for children, evolves into a world classic. The innocent eleven year oldboy grows to Homeric heights of a hero for all times. And with him he takes the nvoel onto those great heights that no one could reach. The charming idyllic village becomes an all time village and readers find new meanings with every rereading of it. The novel is symbolic, allegoric, existential, picaresque, and romantic and the uneducated poor,
ignorant pariah becomes a hero that fights for truth, that supports the meek and weak and champions the cause of good and honesty. All this is achieved in an unassuming disarming simplicity and innocence.

Heller's *Catch-22* is analysed in the same lines. The novel is out and out hilarious. It too is symbolic, picaresque and romantic. The hero Yossarian is also a crusader and wages a war against the dictatorial society, of course in his own way and to defend his own beliefs. But the novel falls short of *Huck Finn* due to its narrow vision. Heller fails in answering many questions that come to the readers. Moreover readers may not, and cannot identify with characters of the novel. Where lies his defect is discussed here in this chapter.

The fifth chapter is an estimation of Mark Twain against Heller. The differences between them - due to their age, their society, their outlook, their beliefs, and the treatment, are discussed here. Twain in spite of all his bitterness, pessimism, still retains hope, still loves the humanity and his laughter rings with faith, joy and cunning and awareness of the truth, whereas Heller reeks with nostalgia and despair. He lost the hope and he is sick with society knowing
he is in it. He, like Kafkesque hero, cannot help trying and knowing that it will lead him nowhere, and he is bound to fail.

Sixth chapter is "Conclusion" that sums up the whole thesis.

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