

# Strong Temptations By Mark Twain

Essay by  IvyPanda®

## Temptation and Exploitation in “Strong Temptation” by Mark Twain

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### Introduction

Mark Twain is a true word painter who can precisely convey the emotions and motives of characters in *the Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. The author seems to express his attitude toward the characters through the depiction of their actions, behavior, language, and clothes. However, there is no sign of condemnation or disapproval in Twain's writing. On the contrary, the writer shows what reality and people can be, thus encouraging readers to arrive at conclusions themselves. Thus, the ‘*Strong Temptations*’ story reveals the themes of temptations and exploitation of others through deceit, which are realistically depicted and encourage readers to draw their own conclusions regarding good and evil.

### Discussion

The theme of temptation is deeply rooted in Chapter II as it demonstrates what people are ready to do to receive the desired object or result. The central tempter of the story is Tom Sawyer because he is ready to give something valuable to the other boy rather than paint a thirty-yard fence (Twain 10). At the same time, the main character can hardly vanquish the temptation of dalliance and seeks different ways to abandon work. As one can see, the theme of temptation in the story is multi-faceted because it is depicted from the sides of the tempter and those who tried.

The reason for the inability to withstand temptation seems to have a range of explanations. Temptation is usually pre-conditioned by a specific context, and as a rule, it means the potential inability to have something wanted. Here, one can look at Jim, a slave boy, who was sent to fetch the water from the pump and was ordered

...not stop foolin' round wid anybody (Twain 10).

Although Jim could be punished for disobedience, he stops and talks with Tom, who in turn tries to buy him:

**Strong Temptations** is a short story written by Mark Twain, showcasing his signature wit and humor while also delving into the moral dilemmas faced by individuals. This piece reflects Twain's deep understanding of human nature and temptation, illustrating the conflicts between desires and ethical considerations that characterize our daily lives. As one of America's most celebrated authors, Twain skillfully combines satire and morality to engage readers both intellectually and emotionally. In this article, we will explore the themes, characters, and literary techniques used by Twain in "Strong Temptations," as well as its relevance in contemporary society.

## Summary of the Story

"Strong Temptations" revolves around a central character who is faced with a moral quandary. The narrative begins with a setup that highlights the protagonist's vulnerability to temptation. The story is set in a familiar American landscape that Twain often used in his writings, which adds a layer of relatability for his readers.

The main character, a man of modest means, finds himself at a crossroads when he comes into contact with a significant opportunity that could change his financial situation. This opportunity, however, comes with ethical implications that challenge his moral compass. The story unfolds as he grapples with the choices before him, illustrating the universal struggle between right and wrong.

## Thematic Exploration

### Temptation and Morality

One of the key themes in "Strong Temptations" is the conflict between temptation and morality. Twain presents the idea that humans are inherently susceptible to temptations that challenge their ethical beliefs. The protagonist's internal struggle is emblematic of the broader human experience, where individuals often have to navigate difficult choices that test their values.

- Human Nature: Twain suggests that temptation is an intrinsic part of human nature. The protagonist's desires reflect common human weaknesses, such as greed, ambition, and the yearning for security.
- Consequences of Choices: The story delves into the idea that every choice has consequences. The protagonist must weigh the potential benefits of succumbing to temptation against the moral implications of his actions.

### Social Commentary

Twain often used his writing as a platform for social commentary, and "Strong Temptations" is no exception. Through the protagonist's experiences, Twain critiques societal norms and the pressures individuals face in a capitalist society.

- Materialism: The story highlights the allure of material wealth and the lengths to which people will go to attain it. Twain critiques a society that often prioritizes financial gain over ethical behavior.
- Peer Pressure: The protagonist is also influenced by the expectations of those around him, illustrating how social dynamics can exacerbate the struggle with temptation.

# Character Analysis

## The Protagonist

The protagonist serves as a relatable figure for readers. His internal conflict and moral dilemmas resonate with the audience, making him a compelling character. Twain crafts the protagonist as an everyman, someone who could easily represent any individual facing temptation.

- Relatability: The protagonist's struggles are universal, making it easy for readers to empathize with him.
- Development: Throughout the story, the character experiences growth as he confronts his desires and the consequences of his potential actions.

## Supporting Characters

While the protagonist is the focal point of the story, supporting characters play a crucial role in shaping his journey. These characters often embody societal pressures or serve as foils to the main character.

- Antagonistic Forces: Some characters may represent societal temptations that challenge the protagonist's morals.
- Moral Guides: Others may serve as voices of reason, urging the protagonist to consider the ethical implications of his choices.

## Literary Techniques

Twain employs a variety of literary techniques to enhance the storytelling in "Strong Temptations." These techniques contribute to the overall impact of the narrative and its themes.

## Humor and Satire

As with many of Twain's works, humor and satire are prevalent in "Strong Temptations." Twain uses wit to engage readers while also critiquing societal norms.

- Exaggeration: Twain often exaggerates certain traits or situations to highlight the absurdity of human behavior in the face of temptation.
- Irony: The use of irony throughout the story serves to underscore the contradictions inherent in the human condition, particularly regarding morality and temptation.

## Symbolism

Twain employs symbolism to deepen the narrative and add layers of meaning. Various elements within the story may symbolize broader concepts related to

temptation and morality.

- **Objects of Temptation:** The opportunity that presents itself to the protagonist could symbolize the allure of material wealth and success.
- **Settings:** The environment in which the story takes place may also reflect the internal struggles of the protagonist, with contrasting elements representing moral choices.

## **Relevance in Contemporary Society**

"Strong Temptations" remains relevant today as it addresses universal themes that continue to resonate with modern readers. The moral dilemmas faced by the protagonist can be paralleled with contemporary issues such as:

- **Ethical Consumerism:** In a world driven by consumer culture, individuals often grapple with the challenges of making ethical choices.
- **Workplace Ethics:** The pressure to succeed in competitive environments raises questions about how far one is willing to go to achieve success.

Furthermore, Twain's exploration of temptation and morality encourages readers to reflect on their own values and the choices they make in their lives.

## **Conclusion**

In "Strong Temptations," Mark Twain masterfully navigates the complexities of human nature, temptation, and morality. Through the protagonist's journey, readers are invited to confront their own ethical dilemmas and consider the impact of their choices. Twain's blend of humor, satire, and poignant social commentary ensures that this story remains a timeless exploration of the human experience. As we continue to face temptations in our own lives, Twain's insights serve as a reminder of the importance of integrity and ethical decision-making in an ever-changing world.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What is the main theme of 'Strong Temptations' by Mark Twain?**

The main theme of 'Strong Temptations' revolves around the struggle between moral integrity and the allure of temptation, highlighting the complexities of human nature.

### **How does Mark Twain use humor in 'Strong Temptations'?**

Twain employs humor to expose the absurdity of human behavior and the contradictions in societal morals, making the narrative both entertaining and thought-provoking.

## **What literary techniques does Twain use in 'Strong Temptations'?**

Twain uses satire, irony, and vivid characterizations to illustrate the inner conflicts faced by individuals when confronted with temptation.

## **Who are the central characters in 'Strong Temptations'?**

The central characters include a conflicted protagonist who grapples with moral decisions, often influenced by other characters who embody different aspects of temptation.

## **In what ways does 'Strong Temptations' reflect Twain's views on society?**

The work reflects Twain's critical view of society, particularly its hypocrisy and the often contradictory nature of social norms regarding morality and temptation.

## **What role does setting play in 'Strong Temptations'?**

The setting serves as a backdrop that enhances the thematic elements of temptation and moral conflict, often mirroring the protagonist's internal struggles.

## **How does Twain portray temptation in his narrative?**

Twain portrays temptation as a powerful and often irresistible force that challenges the characters' values and leads to significant personal dilemmas.

## **What is the significance of the title 'Strong Temptations'?**

The title signifies the overwhelming nature of the temptations faced by individuals and the strength required to resist them, emphasizing the moral challenges within the story.

## **Can 'Strong Temptations' be considered a reflection of Twain's own life experiences?**

Yes, many critics suggest that 'Strong Temptations' reflects Twain's personal struggles with temptation and moral choices, mirroring his own conflicts in life.

## **What is the overall message of 'Strong Temptations'?**

The overall message of the work is a commentary on the human condition, illustrating that while temptations are innate, the ability to resist them defines one's character and integrity.

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