The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calavaras County Study Guide

The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calavaras County by Mark Twain

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites".

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers".

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Introduction

Mark Twain's "*The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*" was first published in the November 18,1865, edition of *The New York Saturday Press*, under the title ' *'Jim Smiley and His Jumping Frog*." The story, which has also been published as "*The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*," is set in a gold-mining camp in Calaveras County, California, and has its origins in the folklore of the Gold Rush era. It was one of Twain's earliest writings, and helped establish his reputation as a humorist. He eventually included it as the title story in his first collection of tales.

"*Jumping Frog*" was originally told in epistolary form—that is, as a letter—though some reprints of the tale have since omitted this letter-frame convention. In the story, Twain recounts his visit, made at the request of a friend back East, to an old man named Simon Wheeler in a California mining camp. Wheeler tells Twain a colorful story about another miner, Jim Smiley. According to Wheeler, Smiley loved to make bets; he would bet on nearly anything. Wheeler relates some of Smiley's more famous gambling escapades, one of which concerns a pet frog. Critics frequently cite this story as an example of a tall tale and note Twain's use of humor and exaggeration. They also emphasize the tale's satirical focus on storytelling and existing cultural differences between the western and eastern regions of the United States.

Author Biography

Mark Twain was born Samuel Langhorne Clemens in 1835 in Florida, Missouri. He spent much of his childhood in Hannibal, Missouri, a town located on the Mississippi River. He never finished school and instead became an apprentice to a printer at the age of 12. In the 1850s, he worked as a boat pilot and later briefly served in the Confederate Army during the Civil War. During this time he submitted his first journalism pieces, using the pseudonym Thomas Jefferson Snodgrass. He then traveled west and found work as a miner and a reporter. It was at this time that he first began to publish work under the name Mark Twain and establish himself as a sketchwriter and humorist. "Mark Twain" was a reference to his riverboat days; it was a term that the men who worked on the boats used to indicate the depth of the water.

Twain's first sketch to win widespread acclaim was the 1865 short story, "*The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*," which first appeared in the The *New York Saturday Press*. It later appeared as the title story in his first collection, *The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*, *and Other Sketches* in 1867. At the time this book was published, Twain began traveling abroad and often sent his satirical and humorous observations home for publication in American journals. Many of these pieces were later collected and published in 1869 as *The Innocents Abroad*; or, *The New Pilgrim's Progress*. Around this time, Twain also wrote pieces for the Sacramento Union newspaper, often employing the letter-writing and reporting techniques he used in "*The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*."

Incorporating memories of his boyhood and life on the Mississippi, Twain published his children's book *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* in 1876. Twain published the sequel to this American classic of American boyhood, the critically acclaimed and equally popular *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, in 1884. Like much of his work, Huck Finn made use of vernacular language and dialect, and emphasized the inherent injustice of American society. In the late 1800s, Twain suffered various financial and personal losses, and his satirical wit and often pessimistic outlook became overwhelmingly apparent in such classics as A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court, Pudd'nhead Wilson, and "*The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg*." When Twain died in Redding, Connecticut, in 1910, he was—as he continues to be—revered as one of the United States's greatest and most popular authors.

Plot Summary

"*The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*" has an "as-told-to" framework. A talkative man named Simon Wheeler relates to Mark Twain (the narrator) the story of a gambler named Jim Smiley and the amazing animals Smiley used in his schemes. Twain has gone to see Wheeler at the urging of a friend back East who is in search of information about a boyhood companion named Leonidas W. Smiley. Leonidas W. Smiley had supposedly become a minister and gone to a western mining settlement called Angel's Camp. The narrator notes he has come to believe there is no such person as Leonidas W. Smiley, and that the inquiry was designed to provide Wheeler with an excuse to talk about Jim Smiley. The narrator finds Wheeler in a run-down tavern in Angel's Camp and politely asks about Leonidas W. Smiley. The name means nothing to Wheeler, but he thinks almost immediately of Jim Smiley and begins filling his visitor with tales of this bizarre character.

Jim Smiley, according to Wheeler, was a man who would bet on anything. "Why, if there was two birds setting on a fence, he would bet you which one would fly first," Wheeler says. Wheeler recalls that Smiley had a slow, sickly horse that would surprise everyone by winning races, and Smiley frequently won money with that horse. Smiley's bulldog pup, named Andrew Jackson after the strong-willed U.S. president, also had an amazing talent. Andrew Jackson the dog was not very impressive in appearance, but remarkably tenacious when there was a bet riding on him. He would let another dog beat him savagely until the largest and final bet of the fight was on, then take one of his opponent's hind legs in his mouth and hold on until the other dog simply gave up. He continued winning in this manner until he went up against a dog with no hind legs. Unable to use his favorite tactic, Andrew Jackson became so disheartened that he just slunk off and died, Wheeler tells Twain.

Wheeler continues with a story about how Smiley once caught a frog and trained it to jump. The frog, named after famed nineteenth-century American politician Daniel Webster, developed incredible jumping ability. Smiley won many bets with Dan'l Webster and took great pride in him, Wheeler says. One day Smiley boasted to a stranger in the camp that Dan'l Webster could outjump any frog in Calaveras County, and he offered to bet forty dollars to prove it. The stranger had no frog to pit against Smiley's, so Smiley left Dan'l Webster with him and went to find another frog in a nearby swamp. While Smiley was gone, the stranger spooned buckshot into Dan'l Webster's mouth until the frog was weighted down. Smiley returned with the second frog and the jumping contest began, but Dan'l Webster could not move. After the stranger took his money and his leave, Smiley noticed that something appeared to be wrong with Dan'l. He lifted the frog, realized how heavy it was, and turned it upside down until it belched out the shot. He then chased after the visitor, but never caught him, Wheeler relates.

At this point in the tale, someone outside the tavern calls Wheeler's name, and Wheeler steps out after urging the narrator to wait for him to return. By this time, however, the narrator believes he will obtain no useful information from Wheeler, and he gets up to leave. As he reaches the door, Wheeler comes back and starts to tell him about Jim

Smiley's one-eyed, no-tailed cow. "Lacking both time and inclination" to hear this story, the narrator makes his escape.

Detailed Summary & Analysis

Summary

The short story begins with the narrator telling the reader that he has visited an old man named Simon Wheeler. This visit comes at the request of a friend who wanted the narrator to ask about Leonidas W. Smiley. The narrator lets the reader know that he suspected his friend of setting him up to hear a long and boring story from the old man about Jim Smiley, a notorious gambler from the area.

The narrator, finding Simon Wheeler napping in a tavern at a mining camp, is greeted cheerfully by the old man. Then, it is conveyed that his friend's request for information about Leonidas W. Smiley, who was said to have been a minister, at one time living in the camp. Upon hearing this request, Wheeler traps the narrator in a corner and tells a story. At that time, the narrator notes that Wheeler speaks in a monotone, without making fun of what is clearly an outrageous tale. Additionally, the narrator says that he does not interrupt or question Wheeler during the story that follows.

Once the narrator has introduced the setting, as well as Wheeler himself, the story shifts to Wheeler's narrative, which is reproduced, consisting of the old man's figures of speech and rambling style. Wheeler first says that while he does not remember a Leonidas W. Smiley, he does remember a Jim Smiley who lived in the camp sometime in1849 or 1850. Jim Smiley was known for betting on almost anything.

Wheeler gives several examples of Smiley's gambling activity, ranging from standard sporting events to more ludicrous occasions. These examples include horse racing, cat, dog, and chicken fights, betting on which pair of perched birds would fly away first, the number of people that a parson could convert to Christianity, or something as meaningless as where a crawling insect would go. He also notes that Smiley was very up front about his gambling, even to the point of telling Parson Walker that he was going to bet against the parson's wife recovering from a serious illness.

Wheeler then begins to tell the narrator about Smiley's pets. The first of these is a mare, which had a reputation for being sick with one condition or another. However, this mare is said to have earned Smiley a lot of money. The mare was typically given a head start in any race, says the old man, and was most often passed by the other horses but the mare would then summon her strength, and always win.

The second pet Wheeler describes is a fighting dog named Andrew Jackson that looked as though it was not strong enough to be in the dog ring. Wheeler tells the narrator that the dog would start its fights very badly, allowing Smiley to build up bets against his animal. Once the betting was finished, says Wheeler, Smiley's dog would clamp its jaws on the other animal's hind legs and stay fastened until the dog's handlers conceded the fight.

The old man goes on to say that Smiley and his dog won many fights, until the animal was pitted against a dog that resulted in the losing of its hind legs. Wheeler says that the dog looked sadly at Smiley, at which time it laid down and died. Wheeler then expresses regret at the dog's death, since it could have had a longer and greater career in dog fighting.

Wheeler notes that Smiley had a pet that would fight or race for any occasion. He then tells the narrator about Smiley's pet frog. Smiley had spent three months teaching the frog to jump high and even to do somersaults in the air. In addition, Smiley honed the frog's fly catching ability, and trained it to respond to voice commands to catch flies. Wheeler tells the narrator that the frog's name was Dan'l Webster, and relates how Dan'l Webster was gifted with unrivalled skill at jumping long distances. He proceeded to explain that this was something Smiley would bet with other on.

The next part of the story deals with how Smiley was tricked by a stranger. The stranger sees Smiley with his frog, asking what is special about Dan'l Webster. Smiley says that his frog can jump farther than any other frog in Calveras County. The stranger says that he cannot see the difference between Dan'l Webster and any other frog. Smiley offers to bet the man $40, proving that Dan'l Webster can out-jump any other frog in the county.

The stranger agrees to the bet, but notes that he does not have a frog of his own. Smiley then proposes to leave Dan'l Webster with the stranger while he goes to the swamp to find another frog. While Smiley is gone, the stranger feeds some shotgun pellets to Dan'l Webster to keep him from jumping.

Once Smiley returns, the jumping contest is held. The new frog jumps well, but for some reason, Smiley's frog is stuck at the start line. The stranger collects his winnings, and again points out that he cannot see a difference between Dan'l Webster and any other frog.

Smiley then wonders what kept Dan'l Webster from jumping, and soon discovers that his frog is heavier than usual. After discovering the shotgun pellets, Smiley starts to chase the stranger. Wheeler lets the narrator know that Smiley did not catch the stranger, and is then interrupted. Wheeler gets up and leaves the room briefly, telling the narrator that he will finish the story when he returns.

Realizing at this point that he is unlikely to hear about Leonidas W. Smiley from the old man, the narrator starts to leave. On his way out of the room, he again encounters Wheeler, who starts to tell him about Smiley's one-eyed cow that had no tail. The narrator quickly retreats.

Analysis

"The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" was one of Mark Twain's earliest published works. While initially it may appear to be a simple, funny tale about an amusing figure, the story contains several layers of subtle satire. The story also

contains elements of folklore, and is considered a valuable insight into the way stories were told and received on America's "frontier."

One target of Twain's satire is the narrator, who has been duped by his friend into having to listen to a seemingly endless story from the old man. The narrator may also be considered a victim of Wheeler, who may be telling a "whopper" or incredible story. Twain is also poking fun at the character of Smiley, a gambler who gets overconfident in his ruse.

Just as the narrator walks into a "trap" laid by his friend in the east, Smiley is trapped by the clever stranger. The final target of Twain's satire is the figure of Wheeler, who is mocked by the narrator for his backward ways and his reverence for both Smiley and the stranger.

Another important element of the story is the contrast between the narrator's apparently uptight values and the laid-back story telling of Wheeler. While Twain, may have been guilty of exaggerating Wheeler's style, the contrast between east and west gave many readers their first chance to compare the speech and customs of the different regions of the country. At the same time, the story celebrates and revels in the storytelling of the west.

Significance can also be attached to the names used for Smiley's bull pup and frog. Andrew Jackson, the dog, can be related to President Andrew Jackson. One of history's most tenacious figures, Jackson is credited with single-handedly changing the American political system. Thus, Wheeler's assertion that Jackson (the dog) "would have made a name for hisself if he lived" is a subtle joke that many readers would have noticed.

"Dan'l Webster" can easily be equated with Daniel Webster, one of Andrew Jackson's compatriots. The fight that both the dog and frog lose could thus be equated with Webster and Jackson's attempt to strengthen the union. Although each achieved great success, in the end, their efforts could not keep America from the Civil War.

While these layers of commentary on American historical figures and on regional diversity hover just below the surface of "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County," the story is mostly a humorous tale told to make people laugh and think. Twain certainly succeeds in these goals, and the result is a wonderful story that holds it humor even for modern audiences.

Characters

Andrew Jackson

Jim Smiley's bull-pup, Andrew Jackson, was used by Jim in various bets. The dog is described as a good dog that does not look like much, and other dogs often seemed to get the better of him in fights. The narrator notes, however, that Andrew Jackson never seemed to be bothered by these temporary setbacks because once a bet was involved, his behavior would change. As the stakes in the bets were raised, Andrew Jackson would bite the other dog in the hind leg and stay there, hanging on, until the owner of his opponent would give in and forfeit the fight. In this way, Jim's bull-pup would win his fights. Andrew Jackson died when Jim arranged for him to fight a dog that did not have any hind legs. The narrator implies that Andrew Jackson was a proud dog and died of embarrassment. Like the former President of the United States with whom he shares his name, Andrew Jackson is described as being determined and strong-willed.

The Fifteen-Minute Nag

The Fifteen-Minute Nag is the name given to Jim Smiley's horse. An old and rather sickly animal, The Fifteen-Minute Nag was used by Jim in many of his bets. The horse suffered from various ailments and did not look as if she could win a horse race. Nevertheless, Jim would frequently put her in races. Although she would start out slow, in the last leg of the race, the nag always seemed to get excited and typically found the energy to win the race.

Jim Smiley

Jim Smiley is the focus of Simon Wheeler's tale. A resident of Calaveras County's Angel's Camp in either 1849 or 1850, Jim is primarily known for his love for betting and will bet on almost anything—no matter how ridiculous. He has even bet on whether people will recover from an illness and on which of two birds will fly away first. It is said Jim would even make a poor bet just so that he could make a bet. Jim was considered a lucky man, however, and frequently won his bets. Jim has several pets: an old horse, a bull-pup named Andrew Jackson, cats, chickens, and a frog named Dan'l Webster, who is the "celebrated frog" mentioned in the title of this story. Jim uses these animals' abilities as the basis for many of his bets. He is tricked by the Stranger at the tale's end, which contrasts with the visitor Twain being tricked by the local, Simon Wheeler.

The Stranger

The Stranger is a con artist. He states that Dan'l Webster isn't the prized jumper that Jim says he is and bets that any other frog could beat Dan'l in a jumping contest. While Jim searches for another frog, the stranger feeds Dan'l Webster quail shot to make him

too heavy to jump and thereby swindles Jim out of his money. This situation—the Stranger duping the local (Jim Smiley)—contrasts with Simon Wheeler, the local, who dupes Twain, the visitor.

Mark Twain

Mark Twain is the author and narrator of the story, as well as one of its characters. He is portrayed as the butt of a joke, the joke being having to listen to the fantastic tales of a garrulous old man named Simon Wheeler. Twain allegedly was asked by a friend to find out about an acquaintance of that friend. Twain thinks that this was merely a trick, however, and is subsequently frustrated by his entire experience with Wheeler. Coming across as an impatient, condescending man unwilling to listen to Wheeler, he sneaks away when he gets the chance. Twain speaks in perfect English and may be viewed as a symbol of the snobbery associated with the eastern United States during the nineteenth century.

Daniel Webster

See Dan'l Webster

Dan'l Webster

Dan'l Webster is the "notorious jumping frog of Calaveras County." He is caught by Jim Smiley and trained by him to jump high, far, and on command. When jumping, he does somersaults and is described by the narrator as "whirling in the air like a doughnut." Despite his jumping prowess, he is described as being modest and straightforward. He is often used in Jim's bets and is the victim of the Stranger's prank. According to Jim, Dan'l Webster can out-jump any frog in Calaveras County. He shares his name with the famous nineteenth-century American statesman and orator.

Simon Wheeler

Simon Wheeler is an elderly resident of the Western mining operation known as Angel's Camp A fat, balding man whom Twain finds in a bar, Simon is described condescendingly as possessing "an expression of winning gentleness and simplicity." He remembers when much of the camp was being built and provides the actual story of the infamous betting man named Jim Smiley and his "notorious jumping frog." Though he seems comfortable with his role as storyteller, Simon seems oblivious to the fact that he is boring his listener, Mark Twain, and is seemingly unaware of the fantastic nature of his tale. For his part, Twain asserts that although Simon speaks for a very long time and with a lack of enthusiasm and emotion, he speaks sincerely and takes his stories seriously. Critics note, however, that Simon is well aware of his narrative abilities and is not as naive as he seems. Despite his supposed lack of sophistication, he immediately sizes up the cultured Easterner Twain and dupes him into hearing this fantastic tale.

Themes

Culture Clash

"*The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*," highlights various aspects of late nineteenth-century American society and culture through the retelling of a tall tale. Central to the story is the idea of conflicting cultures, particularly the clash between the settled, eastern portion of the United States and the still-developing West. At the time Twain wrote the story, the East and its inhabitants had a reputation for being civilized, cultured, and advanced. The West, on the other hand, was still being settled and was considered to be populated by a less-educated and less-refined group of people. By extension, Westerners were thought by Easterners to be naive and easily duped.

Twain presents these ideas in his story in various ways. Simon Wheeler, for instance, symbolizes the American Westerner—a garrulous old man who tells tales that are farfetched and highly improbable.

He speaks in monotone, supposedly having no knowledge of the techniques a good storyteller uses to keep an audience's attention. An uneducated man, Wheeler tells his story in the popular genre of the tall tale, rather than in one of the more accepted classic genres taught in eastern schools. He also speaks in the vernacular, that is, in common language, which contains idiomatic expressions, slang, and improper grammar and syntax. Wheeler's use of vernacular language reinforces the idea that the West was populated by crude barbarians who had little education or knowledge of good speech.

In stark contrast to Simon Wheeler, the narrator, Mark Twain, comes across as well-educated with refined tastes. This Mark Twain is a storyteller also, but in the passages that precede and follow Wheeler's tale, Twain speaks in proper English. It is obvious he has been educated in the finer points of grammar and syntax. Twain, however, also comes across as a snob- He is annoyed by Wheeler's diction and, because he finds Wheeler's quaint stories fantastic, he thinks they lack value. Indeed, when Wheeler is called away, Twain sneaks off, unwilling to listen any longer. Twain does not consider Wheeler to be an effective storyteller because the old man does not use the conventions that Twain prefers. He does not realize, however, that Wheeler is actually capitalizing on the stereotype of the uneducated Westerner. For instance, although Twain finds Wheeler's voice monotonous, it makes him believe Wheeler speaks with straightforward earnestness. Wheeler craftily balances the absurdity of his tale with the gravity with which he speaks to keep Twain in the listener's seat.

Deception

Deception is an integral part of' "*The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*" and occurs on many levels. In the opening paragraph Mark Twain, the narrator, voices his suspicion that he has been duped by a friend who orchestrated this "chance"

encounter with Simon Wheeler. His friend asked him to inquire about a childhood friend named Leonidas Smiley, knowing full well that Twain would instead be subjected to fabulous stories about the famous betting man of Angel's Camp— Jim Smiley, His friend additionally knew that Twain would be bored and frustrated by the entire experience. Wheeler likewise dupes Twain. He tells him the fantastic and improbable story of Jim—rather than Leonidas—Smiley with a grave demeanor that masks the genuine humor of his tale. By using this mask, Wheeler initially fools the snobby Easterner and convinces him that he will be told a serious story. Another instance of deception involves Jim Smiley's bet with the Stranger, who wagers that Dan'l Webster is not the best jumper in Calaveras County. Not only does the Stranger deceive Jim Smiley by pretending to be gullible, he cheats by stuffing Dan'l Webster with gunshot to weigh him down.

American Society

When first published, "*The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*" provided relevant and incisive commentary about ninteenth-century American society. While portraying Easterners as educated and refined and Westerners as uneducated and gullible on the surface, Twain upset these stereotypes on a deeper level. He depicted the Easterner (Mark Twain) as a snob and someone who could easily be duped, while portraying the Westerner (Simon Wheeler) as somewhat of a schemer who, despite his lack of formal training, tells highly original tales. The names of Jim Smiley's pets also had relevance for Twain's American audience. Daniel Webster was the name of a famous American statesman known for his speaking abilities. Andrew Jackson, a former president of the United States and war hero known for his determination and strong will, was a strong believer in democracy and the rights of the "common" people. In these and other descriptions found in the story, Twain provided a more complicated and multifaceted view of Americans. "*Jumping Frog*" asserted that Americans could simultaneously be resourceful, innovative, practical, and determined, as well as shortsighted, narrow-minded, and gullible.

Style

Structure

The frame tale structure of "*The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*" is one of its most important parts. In a frame tale, one story appears in—that is, it is framed by—another story. In "Jumping Frog" the outer tale focuses on Mark Twain and his meeting with the talkative old storyteller, Simon Wheeler. This meeting occurs at the request of a friend of Twain's, identified in some versions of the tale as A. Ward, who supposedly wants to find out about an old acquaintance named Leonidas Smiley. Twain reveals, however, that he suspects his friend's request was merely a practical joke designed to waste his time. Twain's suspicions about the meeting and his descriptions of Wheeler appear in the few paragraphs that open and close the entire story. Twain speaks in the first person in these passages. Because this portion of the tale first appeared in the form of a letter, the entire story also can be considered an epistolary tale.

The inner tale is the one Wheeler tells about Jim Smiley, his betting ways, and his run-in with the Stranger. Wheeler's stories seem largely exaggerated, and can be viewed as examples of a tall tale. Wheeler tells his tale in a third-person narrative voice.

Setting

"*The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*" takes place in die mid-to-late nineteenth century, shortly after the California Gold Rush of 1849. Mark Twain's experience with Simon Wheeler and Wheeler's stories about Jim Smiley both occur in Angel's Camp, a mining camp located in Calaveras County, California. Wheeler tells Twain his stories in a local bar, the type of place where stories are often shared.

Satire

Satire is an essential component of "*The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*." Satire is a technique that involves the manipulation of stereotypes and the use of exaggeration to point out the folly of a person or situation. In "Jumping Frog" Twain pokes fun at several things, including the tall tale genre, the American West, and the American East. Instead of merely using the tall tale for humorous effect, Twain also uses it to challenge various stereotypes held by many Americans at the time According to these stereotypes, individuals living in the western United States were often uneducated, gullible fools. By contrast, Americans living in the eastern part of the United States were supposed to be well-educated, sophisticated, and cultured. In a satirical twist, Twain's sophisticated Easterner actually comes across as an impatient and self-absorbed snob who gets fooled by both his friend and the garrulous Wheeler. Likewise, Wheeler is ultimately revealed to be not a rube, but a good-natured and experienced

storyteller whose deadpan delivery is merely a front used to fool his supposedly sophisticated listener.

Tall Tale

A tall tale features exaggerated, fabulous events. Characters in tall tales are often considered "larger than life," meaning they exhibit extraordinary qualities. Simon Wheeler's stories about Jim Smiley and his pets feature many such exaggerations, and thus fall into the tall tale category. For example, Wheeler describes Smiley as a man who will make a bet on anything, even something as mundane as which of two birds will fly off a fence first. Smiley's frog, Dan'l Webster, practically flies through the air when jumping and uses his legs like a cat to scratch himself. Finally, Andrew Jackson, Smiley's dog, will hold on to another dog—his preferred technique for fighting—for as long as a year to win a fight.

Anthropomorphism

Twain gives the animals in "*The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*" human traits, a technique called anthropomorphism. Andrew Jackson, Jim Smiley's dog, is described as proud, ornery, and determined. He likes to fight and likes to win his battles. When he fights a dog that he can't beat, he eventually dies from the humiliation. Both Andrew Jackson and the frog named Dan'l Webster are described as gifted. Dan'l Webster is additionally described as being modest and straightforward.

Diction

Authors frequently use dialect and vernacular language to establish the setting of their tales, as well as their characters' identities. In "*The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*," Twain uses language to highlight the differences between his characters. For example, when Twain speaks, he uses grammatically proper English. Simon Wheeler, however, tells his tale in the vernacular, or common-day language, of the American West. Wheeler ignores many grammatical rules, and speaks with an "accent" of sorts. He says "feller" instead of "fellow," "reg'lar" instead of "regular," and even "Dan'l" for "Daniel."

Historical Context

America in the Mid to Late Nineteenth Century

"*The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*" was first published in 1865, when Mark Twain was living in the American Southwest, which was still in the process of being settled. The Industrial Revolution had brought machinery and factories to the eastern United States, but most of the country, particularly areas west of the Mississippi River, still relied on the land for economic development Much of the land in the West was devoted to cattle, and the U.S. government was involved in battles and embroilments with various Native American tribes in order to obtain more land. The West's growing population was influenced by both the Homestead Act of 1862, which promised free farms to families, and by the discovery of gold in California in 1848. As a result of this discovery, mining towns and camps, such as Angel's Camp where Twain sets "*The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*," were established throughout California and the western United States.

Despite the increasing growth out West, there was still a great divide between the eastern and western parts of the United States. The West was thought to be wild and woolly, and populated by rough, uneducated pioneers. Easterners, on the other hand, were assumed to be more educated, polite, cultured, and sophisticated—in a word, "genteel." Although trains and steam boats were popular modes of transportation, the transcontinental railroad had not yet been completed. This made travel between the two regions difficult, and this fact added to the sense of separation between them.

Literature in the United States

At the time Twain wrote "*The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*," distinctly American literature was still in its infancy. Henry James was beginning an acclaimed literary career and influencing the development of the modern novel form. Representing the cultured East, James often wrote of transplanted Americans in Europe and the tradition-bound Europeans who looked down on them for lacking sophistication. In direct contrast to James, Twain was busy forging an American identity in literature—based on the rugged and independent individuals who lived outside the East. Twain's writing style forsook eloquence to focus on addressing situations unique to the United States and Americans. Classics such as Huckleberry Finn featured familiar American characters and settings, while commenting on the growing nation's social issues.

Critical Overview

"*The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*" was a popular success upon its first publication in The *New York Saturday Press* in 1865. Some of its success can be attributed to Twain's use of popular storytelling conventions and references to contemporary figures. For example, Twain adopted the humorous tall tale of the American Southwest, a popular genre at the time, to tell this story. Furthermore, this tale already was an established piece of American folklore that Twain modified and enhanced; early versions of the tale focused on a jumping grasshopper, not a frog. Twain added to the popularity of his "*Jumping Frog*" by reciting it at lectures and performances he gave across the United States. Because of its popularity, when Twain published his first collection of stories, he made "Jumping Frog" the title piece. The letter-writing structure initially used in this tale was popular at that time and also contributed to the story's success.

In the tale, Twain also made allusions to recent figures in contemporary American history. For example, Jim Smiley's dog, Andrew Jackson, shares his name with a former president of the United States, while Smiley's frog, Dan'l Webster, shares his name with a renowned statesman and politician of the nineteenth century. The letter that frames the original story was addressed to "A. Ward," whom many individuals believed to be Artemus Ward, another popular humor writer of the time. These references and conventions made the tale more accessible and thus popular with Twain's contemporaries.

Although "*The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*" was initially admired for its humor and as an example of a tall tale, it also became known for its satirical portrait of the American East. Although one of Twain's earliest and most successful pieces—a piece that established him as a sketchwriter and humorist—this story also has much in common with his later works, which critics frequently note for their biting comments about American society and human nature. Furthermore, it is noted that by portraying himself as a fool, Twain could get away with more outrageous and possibly offensive comments. For example, he could feature a Westerner (Wheeler) duping an Easterner (Twain)—a situation that reversed the popular stereotypes of the day—without offending Eastern audiences. It must be noted, however, that Twain allowed Jim Smiley, a Westerner, to be duped when he lets his guard down.

More recent interpretations of the story, by critics such as Lawrence R. Smith, have focused on the symbolism attached to the names used in the story. In Mark Twain Journal, Smith asserts that Twain's use of names offers insights into American society. "Smiley," for instance, is considered an optimistic name. The dog Andrew Jackson shares his name with the seventh president of the United States, a brave man of "common stock" known for his strong will. Jackson was also known as a proponent of the idea of democracy—a philosophy Twain highly valued—which is shared by all U.S. citizens regardless of their geographic location. In the case of the two men named Smiley, "Leonidas," the name associated with Twain's Eastern friend, is a more sophisticated and potentially snobbish name. These qualities, sophistication and

snobbery, were sometimes associated with the society of the eastern United States. "Jim," on the other hand, is a more popular and common name, just as frontiersmen were generally considered more "common" and less sophisticated. Critics believe, therefore, that "*The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*" provides a symbolic commentary on the melting pot of American society and the positive and negative qualities of all Americans.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Trudy Ring is a frequent writer, editor, and reporter on literary subjects. In the following essay, she discusses Twain's use of the frame narrative, satiric elements, and the significance of the character names in "*The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*."

' "*The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County* " appears at first glance to be a simple, humorous story, but actually is a complex satire of American literature, social conventions, and politics. Like the land around the mining settlement of Angel's Camp, it has riches under the surface, and the patient and careful reader can tap into this vein.

Inspired by an anecdote Mark Twain heard while traveling in the western United States, the sketch was published in various forms and under various titles, including "Jim Smiley and His Jumping Frog" and "The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County," but the basic story remains the same in all versions. The narrator, apparently from the eastern part of the nation, finds himself in a western mining camp listening to a rustic character tell stories about a habitual gambler named Jim Smiley and the animals that were the subject of Smiley's bets.

Mark Twain's success as a satirist and sketchwriter was further established by his 1869 book *The Innocents Abroad*; or, *The New Pilgrim's Progress*, in which he wrote of his experiences and observations while travelling through the Middle East and Europe with a group of well-to-do Americans.

The story's structure was familiar to American readers in the nineteenth century. Many writers of the era penned "frame stones," commonly set in the southwestern United States, showing supposedly sophisticated and cultured Easterners encountering less polished characters on the frontiers of the expanding nation. The rough Westerners would tell tales that were often preposterous, and the Easterners' account of, and reaction to, these stories provided a "frame" for them. "Writers often capitalized on the juxtaposition of literate traveler and colloquial rustic, exaggerating their differences of manners and speech to suggest cultural absurdities in one or the other or both," critic Paul Baender explained in Modern Philology. "Some writers also contrived little contests between the traveler and the rustic in which the rustic deceived the traveler with a tall tale."

In "*Jumping Frog*," as several scholars have pointed out, Twain has used the conventions of these stories but also has gone beyond them, creating something fresh and unusual. Baender contended that "Jumping Frog" resembles southwestern frame stories but does not actually fit into this category. "Simon Wheeler sees no class or regional pretensions in the narrator and has none of his own ... the tale follows ... not as a regional outgrowth, but as a fabulous history even for the region," Baender asserted. The contrast between the narrator and Wheeler serves primarily to "direct us to the humor that follows," he argued.

Paul Schmidt put forth a somewhat different view of Twain's use of the frame-story device. Schmidt noted in Southwest Review that in earlier southwestern frame stories and their predecessors— "local color" stories focusing on quirky, unsophisticated characters in various parts of the United States—the story's narrator tended to be identified with the author and to be condescending toward the rustics he or she encountered. As the southwestern frame story genre developed, authors found this condescending attitude conflicting with sincere admiration for the people of the frontier. Twain resolved this conflict, according to Schmidt, by separating his own point of view from that of the narrator and by making fun of the narrator's pomposity and pretension. Twain's accomplishment, Schmidt commented, is "much more than the simple addition of another character to his satiric targets"; the author has managed to satirize "the entire point of view of the local colorist" and "the genteel version of the Enlightened traveler and belle esprit, a representative nineteenth-century American rich in official and accepted attitudes."

There is much in the story to support this view. The narrator has an exaggerated and rather ridiculous formality in his manner of speaking. He reports that he went to see Simon Wheeler "in compliance with the request of a friend of mine"; he "hereunto append[s] the result." He assures Wheeler that he "would feel under many obligations to him" for any information Wheeler could provide about Rev. Leonidas W. Smiley. The narrator obviously is annoyed by Wheeler's "interminable narrative," but maintains an attitude of pained tolerance, all the time letting us know he considers himself superior to Wheeler. Wheeler, the narrator says, "had an expression of winning gentleness and simplicity" and told his tale with "impressive earnestness and sincerity ... far from his imagining that there was anything ridiculous or funny about his story, he regarded it as a really important matter."

Wheeler, however, possesses knowledge the narrator does not, and his story, suggested critic Lawrence R. Smith in Mark Twain Journal, contains details "directed precisely at the ignorance of the narrator." For instance, Smith pointed out, Wheeler's portrait of the frog, with references to its chin and the nape of its neck (both hard to find on a frog), "could only be acceptable to a man who had never seen one, or at least had not looked at one very carefully," The narrator, though, is so convinced of his own superiority that he fails to realize Wheeler is playing with him, and he also fails to see anything of value in Wheeler's story. Critics have found a variety of valuable points in Wheeler's narrative. To Schmidt, it is the importance of cooperation in a community over unrestrained competition among individuals; the relaxed and cheerful Wheeler represents community values, while Jim Smiley disturbs the community with his competitiveness and pays the price for it when his frog loses the jumping contest. To Smith, Smiley is a more positive character, to be praised for his optimism and energy, who grows as a person when his frog is defeated; he learns not to be so naive and gullible. Either way, Wheeler's tale can be interpreted as a commentary that ambitious, individualistic types would benefit from taking a hard look at themselves, maintaining the admirable aspects of their personalities, and being willing to change the rest. Both through the story of Jim Smiley and the framing story of Wheeler and the narrator, Twain satirizes certain American ideas of the nature of success and how to achieve it, while he also satirizes authors who have condescended to their "rustic" characters."

Twain aims his barbed wit at some other targets, too. As Smith noted, Twain was known to be skeptical of organized religion, so it is significant that his narrator is looking for information about a minister; the clergy becomes associated with the narrator's smug attitudes. A minister figures in Simon Wheeler's tale, too; he mentions that Jim Smiley would attend Parson Walker's camp meetings for the purpose of making bets. Smiley's apparent lack of respect for religion is a way of deflating the pomposity of some religious people. The names of the bulldog pup and the frog have satirical significance, too, but here the jokes become more complicated. The dog's namesake, President Andrew Jackson, had a public image as the champion of the common people and symbolized the belief that anyone, no matter how humble his origins, could, by talent and hard work, rise to the top of society. Wheeler ascribes just such talent to the dog, saying the animal "would have made a name for hisself if he'd lived, for the stuff was in him and he had genius .. he hadn't no opportunities to speak of, and it don't stand to reason that a dog could make such a fight as he could under them circumstances if he hadn't no talent." Smith thought the symbolism of the name appropriate and called the dog "the embodiment of Jacksonian democracy." But another scholar, S. J. Krause, has argued in American Quarterly that Jackson actually considered himself superior to the so-called common people, that his stubbornness was not altogether admirable, and that he had a penchant for gambling. The story of the dog, therefore, is a means of subtly ridiculing Jackson, according to Krause. The frog is named after Daniel Webster, who distinguished himself as a U.S. congressman, senator, and Secretary of State. Krause has noted, though, that Webster was a political pragmatist, changing his stances when necessary—-in other words, flip-flopping, just like the frog. Also important is the fact that just as the frog cannot jump in the final contest detailed in the story, Webster failed to make the ultimate leap in politics—he never became president. It takes some knowledge of history to appreciate Twain's humor here, but this knowledge allows the reader to understand and enjoy the story on yet another level.

The names of other characters are meaningful, as well, and this is something upon which numerous critics have commented. "Simon Wheeler" suggests both "Simple Simon" of the nursery rhyme and a not-so-simple "wheeler-dealer." This is appropriate because Simon does appear, at least in the narrator's opinion, to be simple, both in the sense of being uncomplicated and in the sense of being not very bright; but, in reality, he is rather complex and crafty. In regard to the two Smileys, the simplicity of the name "Jim" contrasts with the pretense of "Leonidas." And "Smiley" has a connotation of optimism.

These names, along with other aspects of the story, led one scholar, Paul Smith, to make an interpretation in Satire Newsletter that seems a bit farfetched, but is sufficiently interesting to merit the attention of anyone studying the story. Smith saw "*Jumping Frog*" as a retelling of the great legends of pilgrims on a quest for knowledge and spiritual salvation. These pilgrims usually traveled from east to west, from a settled and familiar place to a land where there was much to be discovered. Smith saw the story's nameless narrator as one of these pilgrims. Leonidas W. Smiley, according to Smith, represents the legendary Fisher-King, wounded, impotent, and lost in the Waste Land. Leonidas was the name of the king of ancient Sparta, and a minister is, in a phrase used in the Bible, a fisher of men. The name Smiley, Smith added, "suggests that in him the hopes

of the land are invested and in his rejuvenation rests the chance to turn the waste land into the smiling land it once was." Simon Wheeler is, in Smith's view, an enchanter and a spinner of tales; his tale holds the clue to Leonidas W. Smiley's disappearance. If the letters "o" and "s" are dropped from "Leonidas," the remaining letters can be rearranged into "Daniel," and the "W" stands for "Webster." The king, therefore, has been turned into a frog, just as in the original Fisher-King tale, Smith asserted. And because Daniel Webster, the man, was a politician, the transformation symbolizes how practical politics have replaced religious idealism in American life.

A further sign of the nation's decay is that the minister's last name has been taken over by a compulsive gambler. It may seem a bit much to find religious allegory in the humorous tale of a gambler and his frog, but Smith contended that "however much a humorist Mark Twain was, he was aware of this tale's tragic significance." Smith's interpretation, whether one finds it valid or not, is yet another indication of the riches that readers can mine from "*The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*."

Source: Trudy Ring, for Short Stories for Students, Gale Research, 1997.

Critical Essay #2

Smith is an educator, editor, and poet. In the following essay, he discusses how Simon Wheeler is a "vernacular" hero with many qualities of a "trickster," and how the story is a satiric piece of literature, rather than simply a clever tale.

Mark Twain's "*Jumping Frog*" has been at the center of a critical controversy in recent years. This controversy focuses on one major question. Is the story satiric, with Simon Wheeler as a deadpan trickster making fun of the narrator, or is it simply a wild yarn told by a mindless yokel? Interpretations and claims for the story have varied widely. Some have argued that the "*Jumping Frog*" is the summation of Twain's faith in frontier democracy, while others have held that it is no more than an amusing story, told in an "exquisitely absurd" manner. A close examination of the structure and the component parts of the story itself, rather than argumentation in the abstract realms of cultural history and philosophy, indicates that the "*Jumping Frog*" is a great deal more than a yarn well told. Furthermore, it is more than a simple celebration of "vernacular" heroes and frontier democracy. Twain not only transcends the tradition of the Southwestern humorous frame story, from which the "*Jumping Frog*" is derived, he also passes beyond any narrow ideological statement. He has attempted to create a work that is broad and all-encompassing in its scope. In the encounter between the narrator and Simon Wheeler, Twain sets up a confrontation between the false and the true. As it happens, this is the classic confrontation between the "Whig gentleman" and the "vernacular" character. However, even this factor is not as vital to the meaning of the story as the larger conflict between the false and the true. It is Twain's main purpose to define and explore just what is true and valuable about Simon Wheeler and the qualities he represents. Relatively little time is spent in the deflation of the pretentious narrator; most of the story concerns Jim Smiley, his animals, and the stranger. It is here that Twain, through Simon Wheeler, creates an American heroic ideal. This ideal cannot be defined by such limiting terms as "vernacular," "frontier," "rural," or "western." The names of Smiley's two heroic animals, Andrew Jackson and Daniel Webster, reinforce the broadness and lack of xegionahty in Twain's vision. Yankee shrewdness and the East, conveyed by recalling the legendary Daniel Webster, are as much a part of the ideal Twain is defining as the frontier democracy represented by Andrew Jackson. Moreover, even the idealistic amalgam created by the Webster and Jackson images, and even the ideals represented by the optimistic gambler himself, are tempered by Smiley's deception at the hands of the stranger. What results from the whole tale is a synthesis of the best American traits: shrewdness, a spirit of enterprise and aspiration in Jim Smiley and his animals, and in the stranger the skeptical pragmatism necessary to keep the other characteristics within a useful and realistic framework. Simon Wheeler, as an American Homer, sings the praises of these heroes and the ideals they embody. Even if the narrator could never recognize these men or the traits for which they stand as heroic, Twain certainly does.

The "*Jumping Frog*" could be described as the ultimate example of a genre of Southwestern humor, both in its complexity and in its sophistication. The tradition of a rural character duping and deflating the pretentious, smug city gentleman has been

multiplied into an ingenious system of layers: a trick within a trick within a trick. Simon Wheeler tells the story of Jim Smiley, a trickster himself, being tricked by a stranger, and at the same time Wheeler makes a fool of the frame narrator. Twain is ripening the narrative "I" for his deflation from the moment the story begins. The "gentleman" obviously considers himself well-bred and eloquent, but such elaborate constructions as "In compliance with the request of a friend of mine" and "I hereunto append the result" characterize the man as a prig. His attempts at stylistic flourish are pretentious; he is the stereotyped "genteel traveller" which Twain ridiculed throughout his career. It is noteworthy that the false quality of the narrator's style is immediately connected with the clergy, when we find that he is looking for a Rev. Leonidas W. Smiley. The fact that he has an inflated self-image is further reinforced by the two stilted phrases associated with the mention of the clergyman: "a cherished companion of his boyhood" and "a young minister of the Gospel." Twain could have easily contrasted the genteel and the vernacular simply by stressing the difference between the names, "Leonidas" and "Jim," but he chose to exaggerate the disparity by making the fictitious "Leonidas" a clergyman. Twain's lifelong association of the clergy, Protestant or Catholic, with the most foolish pretense and hypocrisy hardly needs comment. The narrator's attitude is also conveyed by his obvious condescension for Simon Wheeler, whom he describes as "good-natured," "garrulous," full of "winning gentleness and simplicity," "tranquil," "fat and bald-headed." In other words, Wheeler is depicted as the stereotyped yokel as seen through the eyes of polite urban society: homely, lazy, mindless, and most important, harmless good fun. However, even before the tale begins, Twain hints that this superior attitude may not be justified. Old Wheeler's influence soon renders the narrator a helpless captive: "he backed me into a corner and blocked me there with a chair." The old timer is far from tranquil and passive. His irresistible presence is reminiscent of [Samuel Taylor] Coleridge's ancient mariner's hold over the unwary wedding guest.

The narrator further displays his lack of perception and his misapplied condescension in evaluating the yarn and Simon Wheeler's narrative manner. He calls the Jim Smiley story insignificant, "monstrous,' " 'queer," and yet its implications, both for him and for American society as a whole, are monumental. He also finds the unemotional delivery of the old timer amusing, in fact, "exquisitely absurd." However, this only indicates that he has not recognized the traditional deadpan delivery of the rural character, and thus is properly ripe for being taken in. It should also be noticed that the narrator only thinks the manner of the telling "absurd," not the tale itself, and thus is unaware that Simon Wheeler is making fun of his ignorance of country life. The old miner's attribution of impossible characteristics to Daniel Webster the frog, and nevertheless convincing the narrator that they are normal, becomes his masterpiece of satirical oneupmanship.

Twain demonstrates Wheeler's awareness and his satirical nature at the beginning of the yarn. These qualities had to be established before the significance of the Jim Smiley story could be perceived. Simon Wheeler seems to fit the narrator's condescending characterization as he starts his tale with a digression, and continues with a long-winded list of examples of Jim Smiley's willingness to bet. However, he does not wait long before he launches his first barb. When we hear that Jim Smiley went to Parson Walker's "camp meetings" regularly in order to bet, we are puzzled. Does he bet on the length of the sermon, the number of conversions, or the number of furtive defections?

Yet the ambiguity works well, because any interpretation is at the expense of Parson Walker and the clergy in general. It is only as Wheeler continues with the story of the straddlebug that we realize that Parson Walker has been included in a long list of animals, hierarchically arranged by size and importance, with the good parson only slightly above the bugs. Smiley's bet that Mrs. Walker will not recover from her grave illness, after the Parson's pious platitudes "thank the Lord for his inf mt mercy" and "with the blessing of Prov'dence," only reinforces the mockery. At first glance this satiric jab at the clergy may seem gratuitous, but one has only to remember that the pretentious interloper, the narrator, is searching for a. Rev. Leonidas W. Smiley. Furthermore, the narrator has been more than a little vain and pompous about his pious attitude toward the "young minister of the Gospel." The "simple" Simon Wheeler has already tuined the tables on the man who had been so confident about his superiority. The old timer could hardly help being aware that jokes at the expense of the clergy, especially the sardonic joke about the death of the Parson's wife, would be highly unacceptable to the listener, who considers himself polite and well-bred. There should be no question as to whether this is Wheeler's humor or Twain's, because the mouthpiece for the author's satire is clearly aware of what he is doing....

Source: Lawrence R. Smith, "*Mark Twain's 'Jumping Frog': Towards an Amencan Heroic Ideal*," in *Mark Twain Journal*, Volume XX, No. 1, Winter, 1979, pp. 15-17.

Critical Essay #3

In the following excerpted essay, Schmidt asserts that the satire in "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" is pointed at the narrator (Mark Twain) rather than Simon Wheeler, who emerges as the superior character that Twain supposes himself to he.

In the encounter between Mark Twain and Simon Wheeler which frames the story of' "The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" we are, apparently, expected to agree with the narrator, Mark Twain, that the "good natured, garrulous" miner is a comic butt. Wheeler tells his story, according to Mark Twain, like a simpleton:

He never smiled, he never frowned, he never changed his voice from the gentle-flowing key to which he tuned his initial sentence, he never betrayed the slightest suspicion of enthusiasm; but all through the interminable narrative there ran a vein of impressive earnestness and sincerity....

His blank seriousness, his vernacular language, and the seeming naivete with which his story personifies the frog, the asthmatic mare, and the bull pup would appear at first glance to be ample specification of provincial idiocy. Actually, of course, none of us is misled by this characterization, for we sense the play involved. The Westerner, Wheeler, is engaged in his traditional role of taking in the pompous Easterner. We are, indeed, so familiar with the devices of American humor that we are likely to underestimate how much Clemens accomplishes with them—deadpan, tall tale, and all the rest.

To plunge below the innocently smiling surface of the story is to realize that we are engaged in a complex comic business and one which turns upon issues of great scope and vitality.

That business is traditionally described as burlesque, the reduction of the high to the low. The butt of this humor is the narrator himself, "Mark Twain," and what he represents. With his ostentatious formality, his pretentious language, and, above all, his preconceptions as to what this western miner is, he is obviously not to be identified with the author at all. He has been "commissioned," he says, to ask about a friend's "cherished companion," a companion who is a "minister of the Gospel," and if Wheeler will help him out he promises to be "under many obligations." Punctilio jealously guards the distance between this eastern visitor and his Calaveras County host; a jaundiced patronage is apparent in his mention of Wheeler's shabby surroundings—a "dilapidated tavern" in a "decayed mining camp." "Mark Twain" is, in short, the type genteel, ripe with overbearing sophistication. If Wheeler is a seedy dolt, he is so only from the point of view of the genteel "Mark Twain," the point of view which is Clemens' ultimate object of satire in this story.

This deliberate management of point of view is both an outgrowth of the traditions of southwestern humor in which Clemens worked and a sharp and distinctive departure from them. In earlier southwestern sketches and stories the frame and narration in the

first person were standard equipment, but in the frame the author was, in contrast with Clemens here, fully identified with the narrator, and this author-narrator was serenely convinced of his refined superiority to the vernacular-speaking characters who appeared in the story proper. The narrator described the low life of the Crackers, Suckers, and Buckeyes with a condescension ranging from the amused tolerance of A. B. Longstreet's Georgia Scenes to the contempt of Johnson J. Hooper's stories of the rascal Simon Suggs, The function of the frame, with its elegant diction and elevated taste, was to disinfect the author from contamination by the vernacular life he presented.

This narrative attitude derives in large outline from the Enlightenment celebration of the picturesque and its nineteenth-century heir, the local-color story, wherein the author is typically posed as an aristocrat edified by pastoral reflections on the lower classes, indulgent with rural antics, or, if the humble scene is pathetic, Olympian in pity. (Hawthorne's Town Pump sketches are conceived in this manner.) When such condescension is taken over into southwestern humorous sketches it collides head-on with the author's genuine admiration for the low characters in the story within the frame. Thus the sophistication which T. B. Thorpe adopts in the frame of "The Big Bear of Arkansas" is belied by the burlesque of sophistication in the story proper. Where the author moves into closer sympathy with vernacular speech and character, as George Washington Harris does in his SutLovingood sketches, the frame and the lofty narrator tend to disappear.

In "*The Jumping Frog*" Clemens hit upon a brilliant resolution of this confusion. Not only does he sharply dissever the point of view of his narrator, "Mark Twain," from his own; he goes even farther and takes on this sophisticated narrator with his local-colorist assumptions as an object of satire. This technical innovation with its accompanying insight accounts for much of the high distinction of this story and of Clemens' humor generally. It involves much more than the simple addition of another character to his satiric targets; when he takes on the moralizing narrator, what falls within the purview of his burlesque is nothing less than the entire point of view of the local-colorist. Clemens has moved his sights up from the simple dandy, or shyster, or circuit rider, who had figured in American humor from its beginnings, and leveled them on the genteel version of the Enlightened traveler and belle esprit a representative nineteenth-century American rich in official and accepted attitudes.

In Clemens' earliest published sketch, "*The Dandy Frightening the Squatter*," the genteel butt has only the crudest of pretensions—fancy dress and a few mannerisms; he is an oversimplified dude. "*The Jumping Frog"* gives us a more searching view. In the "Mark Twain" of this story a whole culture gone to seed in gentility is brought into the balance. With his unctuous formality of speech, his invidious amusement, and with the whole range of reference into which he proposes to fit Wheeler, he is consciously realized to his very fingertips and riddled with satire. He struts in front of Wheeler with an insufferably patronizing air and, perhaps as a consequence of this egotism, with an almost paranoiac distrust of others. He had, he says, a "lurking suspicion" that he must be on guard against the effronteries of the western vernacular.

He is prepared to find Wheeler's story *"interminable*" and "*ridiculous.*" ("Hostility," as [Rainer Maria] Rilke says, "is our first response.") He sees Wheeler's manner and story as an "infamous" attempt which "blockades" him in the corner and bores him "to death."

This "Mark Twain" is more than a mere snob. The assumptions which govern his reception of Wheeler are those of an eastern traveler in the West, the assumptions which make up the complicated Enlightenment case of Civilization versus Nature, England and the Continent versus America, Boston versus the West. It is the paradoxical view of a refined (or jaded) culture pitted against a boorish (or naively noble) nature. As an inhabitant of the Wild West, Wheeler is viewed by "Mark Twain" as a reversion proper to the American frontier. In response to the pulls of this primitive environment the Westerner is expected to become a rude, uncultivated barbarian. Hence Wheeler is presented as maundering through his idiotic tale, unable to hold his "simple" mind up to the refined level of his genteel visitor. Harriet Martineau had been shocked at the vulgarity of western table manners, Charles Dickens had been disgusted that the residents along the Mississippi River fought like bloodthirsty savages, and now "Mark Twain" is sure that Simon Wheeler is a fool.

Once we see the narrator and this genteel local-colorist view of the Westerner as the target of Clemens' satire, the ostensible values of the story are reversed in characteristic burlesque fashion. Far from being a "good natured, garrulous old" idiot, as "Mark Twain" would lead us to suppose, Wheeler emerges as the initiator of the satire—the teller of the tall tale. He deliberately assumes the role of an unconscious barbarian as a play upon his visitor's preconceptions and with the intention of turning the tables on him. Contrary to "Mark Twain's" picture of him as "far from imagining that there was anything ridiculous or funny about his story," Wheeler is fully aware that his manner is comic and that he is clowning when he treats the frog in his story like a prima donna. He poses as stupid in order to ridicule what his genteel auditor, "Mark Twain," projects on the vernacular Westerner, in order to show how ridiculously inappropriate the stereotype of the western barbarian is and how wrong the genteel values are which led to its imposition. The purpose of Wheeler's "impressive earnestness"—the traditional pokerface—becomes clear: it prevents his giving away his hand, his satire on the genteel "Mark Twain," and the role of outlandish stupidity he is assuming. His pose of "sincerity" and the story he tells are consciously designed, as both Clemens and Wheeler are aware, to take in his presumptuous listener. "Mark Twain" is the unconscious character in the frame, and he is the comic butt....

Source: Paul Schmidt, "*The Deadpan on Simon Wheeler*," in *The Southwest Review*, Vol. XLI, No 3, Summer, 1956, pp 270-77.

Adaptations

Director John Sturges's The Best Man Wins was distributed by Columbia in 1948. This film version of "*The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*" starred Edgar Buchanan and Anna Lee.

Learning Garden Films released an animated version of "*The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*" in 1987.

Topics for Further Study

Twain's story was first written as a letter, a style referred to as epistolary. Other examples of epistolary works are *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1897) and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982). Discuss how the epistolary form impacts the narrative and the reader's interest in a work.

Research what life—particularly life in a mining camp—was like in California at the time Twain wrote this tale.

Tall tales and folk tales traditionally have been used to present nontraditional ideas about society. Examine the social and political messages found in Joel Chandler Harris's "*Br'er Rabbit*" stories, and compare them to this story.

Compare Twain's use of satire with that of Jonathan Swift in his "*A Modest Proposal*" (1729). What and who do these stories satirize?

Compare this tale to Twain's other travel sketches or humorous writings. Discuss their similarities and differences.

Compare and Contrast

1865: People from around the United States and Mexico continue to flock to California in search of prosperity after the Gold Rush of 1849.

Today: The state of California, led by Governor Pete Wilson, passes strict legislation designed to discourage illegal immigration.

1864: Congress passes a bill to protect California's Yosemite Valley, designating it the first public scenic reserve in the United States.

Today: Environmentalists and big business fight over whether to protect dwindling forests in the Pacific Northwest.

1861: A Western Union telegraph line opens between New York and San Francisco, making communication between the eastern and western United States easier.

Today: Internet services provide a cheap and virtually limitless form of long distance communication, bridging disparate peoples and cultures in the process.

What Do I Read Next?

Charles W. Chesnutt's The Conjure Woman (1899) uses the tall tale and frame narrative forms to examine life in the American South of the nineteenth century.

Bret Harte's "*The Outcasts of Poker Flat*" (1869) and "*The Luck of Roaring Camp*" (1868) offer portraits of life in mining camps and on the American frontier.

In the title story of the 1993 collection *One Good Story, That One*, Native American writer Thomas King satirizes the importance of storytelling in anthropological studies and the conflicts that occur between white society and Native Americans. In this tale, the narrator hoodwinks his white audience by telling how, supposedly according to his tribe's beliefs, the world was created.

Further Study

Cuff, Roger P "*Mark Twain's Use of California Folklore in His Jumping Frog Story*," *Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 65, April, 1952, pp. 155-9.

Cuff traces Twain's use of the folklore of the California Gold Rush in "*The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*."

Lewis, Oscar. The Origin of "*The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*," Book Club of California, 1931,27 p.

Lewis outlines the history of this story, "from its origins in the mining-camps of the Sierra foothills during the early days of the Gold Rush to the time Mark Twain gave it world-wide fame."

Mornssey, Frank R. "*The Ancestor of the 'Jumping Frog*,'" *The Bookman*, Vol LIII, no. 2, April, 1921, pp. 143-5.

Morrissey recounts a tale about a man and his trained grasshopper, claiming that it is a prototype for Twain's story about Jim Smiley and Dan'l Webster.

Bibliography

Baender, Paul "*The 'Jumping Frog' as a Comedian's First Virtue," Modern Philology* Vol. LX, no. 3, February, 1963, pp 192-200

Krause, S J. "*The Art and Satire of Twain's 'Jumping Frog' Story*," *American Quarterly*, Vol. XVI, no 4, Winter, 1964, pp 562-76

Smith, Paul "*The Infernal Reminiscence. Mythic Patterns in Mark Twain's 'The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County,*'" *Satire Newsletter*, Vol 1, no. 2, Spring, 1964, pp. 41-44

Copyright Information

This Premium Study Guide is an offprint from *Short Stories for Students*.

Project Editor
David Galens

Editorial
Sara Constantakis, Elizabeth A. Cranston, Kristen A. Dorsch, Anne Marie Hacht, Madeline S. Harris, Arlene Johnson, Michelle Kazensky, Ira Mark Milne, Polly Rapp, Pam Revitzer, Mary Ruby, Kathy Sauer, Jennifer Smith, Daniel Toronto, Carol Ullmann

Research
Michelle Campbell, Nicodemus Ford, Sarah Genik, Tamara C. Nott, Tracie Richardson

Data Capture
Beverly Jendrowski

Permissions
Mary Ann Bahr, Margaret Chamberlain, Kim Davis, Debra Freitas, Lori Hines, Jackie Jones, Jacqueline Key, Shalice Shah-Caldwell

Imaging and Multimedia
Randy Bassett, Dean Dauphinais, Robert Duncan, Leitha Etheridge-Sims, Mary Grimes, Lezlie Light, Jeffrey Matlock, Dan Newell, Dave Oblender, Christine O'Bryan, Kelly A. Quin, Luke Rademacher, Robyn V. Young

Product Design
Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

For more information, contact
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535
Or you can visit our Internet site at
http://www.gale.com

Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Short Stories for Students (SSfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, SSfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of SSfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of SSfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in SSfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by SSfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

SSfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Short Stories for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Short Stories for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Short Stories for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from SSfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from SSfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Short Stories for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Short Stories for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

Editor, Short Stories for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535