

Out tricked: humor in the notorious jumping frog of calaveras county



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A gambler is nothing but a man who makes his living out of hope.”(Bolitho). In “ The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County,” the narrator introduces Simon Wheeler by asking for a man named Leonidas W. Smiley. Instead of indicating the narrator for the information that he asks for, Wheeler starts off with a tall tale about a man named Jim Smiley. Jim Smiley was a man who would bet on anything that eventually, he turned a frog into a pet for which he used to bet on until one day he realized his luck was not long lasting as he thought. Twain’s use of descriptive sentences when relating to Wheeler’s story and as Twain clarifies it through his use of heavy dialect, and bad grammar. The comprehensive humor in the story is layered so that there is not just one, but two tales told, creating various humorous parts throughout the story. Twain illustrates the humorous personal characteristics of both characters, Simon Wheeler and Jim Smiley. The amusing story line that ends with one man out-tricking another. Jim Smiley had outwitted everyone throughout the story, but he was not as intelligent as he thought. In “ The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County,” Mark Twain uses dialect, hyperbole and irony as key aspects of his writing style to create a humorous and intricate personal style.

To begin with, in “ The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County,” Twain’s use of dialect creates an optimistic structure between the two main characters in the beginning of the story. For example, the use of dialect in this particular sentence maintenance a direct structure of how Twain’s style of writing is. “ I have Lurking suspicious-it should be useless to me.” (Twain 680). It illustrates on what to expect on further on reading as he continues to tell the tale. In fact, Twain’s use of unexpected words adds much to the

humor of the story as well. For instance, Simon relates, “ Well, thish-yer Smiley had a yaller one-eyed cow that didn’t have no tail, only just a short stump like a bannanner and-” (Twain 683). Such language creates humorous images in the mind of the reader.

The use of authentic dialogue sums up the story and helps differentiate the characters. When Twain speaks, he uses excellence, grammatical English. When Simon Wheeler speaks, he uses the common dialect of the West. The dialect captures the local color and makes the characters more interesting and seem more amusing. Initially, in describing Simon Wheeler, the narrator uses hyperbole. Simon Wheeler certainly uses exaggerations in his description of his frog’s talents. For instance, as he says, “ You never see a frog so modest and straight-for’ard as he was, for all he was so gifted.” (Twain 682). Meaning, all a frog needed was education, and he could do mostly anything. Another example of hyperbole is, Simon Wheeler demonstrating Jim Smiley and his gambling habit. “-if there was a dog fight, he’d bet on it; if there was a cat fight, he’d bet on it; if there was a chicken fight he’d bet on it; why, if there were two birds setting on a fence, he would bet which one would fly first-so he was too, and a goodman.” (Twain 681). He’s basically saying that Smiley would gamble on pretty much anything. The exaggeration here is that Jim Smiley would find a way to make a bet out of anything. It wouldn’t matter how foolish something was, he would see a way to turn the situation into a way to make money and satisfy his gambling urge. For this reason, the exaggeration here is used to reveal Jim Smiley’s character. That being said, this exaggeration continues to support Simon

Wheeler's character as noted. Hyperbole adds humor and comedic effects in Twain's literary devices.

Incidentally, Mark Twain uses personification when describing the animals in the story. The frog is described as indifferent and Andrew Jackson, Jim Smiley's dog, is described as proud, ornery, and determined. The author uses the same grammatical pattern to hold together long sentences when describing his characters. Mark Twain also uses allegory to personified some of the main characters involved in the story. The narrator implies that Andrew Jackson was a proud dog. Andrew Jackson is described as being determined and strong-willed as well, like the former President of the United States. The Fifteen-Minute Nag is the name given to Jim Smiley's horse which is an old and rather delicate animal.

To resume, Mark Twain's use of irony in "The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County," generates the overall purpose of the tale being told in order for the reader to be maintained with a humorous thought of the narrator's dialect. Mark Twain starts off the story with irony "...if I asked old Wheeler about him, it would remind him of his infamous Jim Smiley, and he would go to work and bore me nearly to death with some infernal reminiscence of him as long and as tedious as it should be useless to me." (Twain 680). The irony forms a calmly humorous tone of the opening sentence there is nothing that leads us to expect being bored to death. The important irony is that Smiley knows he had the best jumping frog in the country. "... you could wink he'd spring straight up and snake a fly off'n the counter there, and flop down on the floor ag'in as solid as a gob of mud.."

(Twain 682). Smiley would bring the frog into town where he would lay bets <https://assignbuster.com/out-tricked-humor-in-the-notorious-jumping-frog-of-calaveras-county/>

with in hope of making a profit out of it.. Which indicates, Smiley is looking for a gullible person who will bet against him. Wheeler then specifies that Smiley's frog is very ordinary looking. Smiley assures himself to win the bet he makes with the stranger, since Smiley goes out and personally catches a frog for the stranger to bet on. The irony in that is that the stranger is not such a Gullible person as he appears to be, the stranger fills Smiley's frog, Daniel Webster, full of quail shot, and when the contest began, Daniel Webster could not get off the ground and Smiley loses the bet. Which makes this is a typical story of a trickster being out-tricked.

In his humorous story, " The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County," Mark Twain makes a knowledgeable use of irony in separating the accurate from the inaccurate. In conclusion, In " The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County," Mark Twain uses dialect, hyperbole and irony as key aspects of his writing style to create a humorous and intricate personal style. The use of descriptive sentences when relating to Wheeler's story and as Twain clarifies it through his use of heavy dialect, and complex grammar. The comprehensive humor Twain uses in the story is layered out so that there is not just one, but two tales told, creating various humorous parts throughout the story.