

Mark twain's use of irony the nortorius jumping frog



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THE NOTORIOUS JUMPING FROG From the first page Mark Twains story, The Notorious Jumping Frog it is clear we are dealing with the work of a master. It is one of the most hilarious and famous works in English literature. The story uses misdirection, irony, and understatement to lay the groundwork for the ridiculous story to follow.

The story is obviously a satire, but it is a particular type of satire. The Roman writer Juvenal gives his name to Juvenalian satire, a satire that is characterized by the liberal use of vituperation or extreme contempt. This is a style that Twain used for much of his writing career. He was a keen observer of human beings and did not like much of what he saw. He believed that people were often very foolish or cruel and the literature he wrote in response to this plainly brings people to task for being this way.

However, to simply state this proposition is not an effective means of communicating it. It becomes a much more powerful idea when Swift uses rhetorical devices like satire and irony. We believe the story until the end. We become invested in the story of the gambling on frogs. Only at the end do we realize it is a joke. This is one of the first indications that we are dealing with a satire or parody. In a satire, a narrator appears to be endorsing something he is actually mocking. This is done by using irony. Irony can be a very effective rhetorical method, pouring contempt on an idea or principle much more harshly than a straightforward attack. Irony sneaks up behind you and ambushes you. It is a good way to rhetorically attack problems and situations that are right in front of you and that many people might want to defend. With irony you can attack but others will not realize you are attacking until it is too late (Horn 76). This is what Twain has done in

The Notorious Frog. For many who picked it up, it would take some time to <https://assignbuster.com/mark-twains-use-of-irony-the-nortorius-jumping-frog/>

realize it was all a joke. When they did realize it was a joke, they would be shocked and begin to really think about what Twain meant. This is an especially militant form of irony—something Twain truly excelled at. People will always take advantage of one another. Gullibility is omnipresent.

A lesser writer might have been tempted at the end of the story to reveal the whole thing to be a joke. But Twain is a rhetorical master. He realizes that consistency is everything in rhetoric: if you shift out of the voice you appear disjunctive and lose the full effect. That is what makes the final paragraph of the story so powerful: even at the end, Twain and his narrator claim he is being sincere.

Rhetoric forms the heart of this story. Without satire and irony, and the calm tone of the narrator, this pamphlet would have been long forgotten. Instead, its rhetoric is remembered and it is considered a powerful and hilarious piece of literature.

Works consulted

Horn, Jason Gary. *Mark Twain: A Descriptive Guide to Biographical Sources*. Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 1999.

Perkins, George, and Barbara Perkins, editors. *The American Tradition in Literature, Volume II*, 12th edition. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2007.

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