

## ABSTRACT

Mark Twain's Art of Grotesque Exaggeration

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This thesis uncovers truths and lies in the works of Mark Twain. It examines the way in which Twain's lies of exaggeration bring about truth. In his early newspaper writings, Twain developed a technique of exaggeration that often burlesques the journalism genre using a mock-serious tone, italics, and framing. These writings not only entertained but sometimes horrified readers by exposing human folly. *Roughing It* adds an element of contrast to the exaggeration. By amplifying both his good and bad experiences in the West, Twain is able to uncover the duality of man mirrored in the duality of nature. Revisiting Twain's most famous works, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, after studying his art of exaggeration, unearths new depths of Twain's social commentary through the contrast of the characters of Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn.

Mark Twain's Art of Grotesque Exaggeration

by

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A Thesis

Approved by the Department of English

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For my nephew, Spencer.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

#### *The “Urgent Necessity” of Lying*

In his 1865 essay, “Advice for Good Little Boys,” Mark Twain insists, “Good little boys must never tell a lie when the truth will answer just as well. In fact, real good little boys will never tell lies at all—not at all—except in cases of the most urgent necessity.” He also instructs the boys, “You ought never to call your aged grandpapa a ‘rum old file’—except when you want to be unusually funny” (163). These laughable quips represent Twain at his finest: funny, to the point, and, above all, painfully honest about the human condition. In Twainian logic gleaned from this passage, one can conclude that if the author ever stretches the truth in his writing, if he ever exaggerates by falsely describing his subject, it is only out of dire necessity or comic intention. Readers know most of Twain’s writing is entertaining at the least and hilarious at best, but urgency lurks behind the humor. Twain’s “jokes” of exaggeration beginning with some of his early newspaper hoaxes and peaking with his masterpiece, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), can be read as lies of urgent necessity as well as lies that are unusually funny.

It is not surprising that Mark Twain, the great American humorist and jokester extraordinaire, advocated the art of a good lie, but his art requires further study than merely labeling works as “good lies,” “tall tales,” “hoaxes,” or “burlesques.” Twain, in some of his shorter works, constructs a very specific and complex definition of lies

hinging on the premise that lying should only be done out of “urgent necessity.” The urgent necessity for lying reveals itself in Twain’s novels and stories through lies told for more than just comic relief. In the quest to discover why Mark Twain so often chose to question truth and almost always chose to use literary lies, readers must examine Mark Twain’s reasons for lying given before and around the time of writing many of his major works such as *Roughing It* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Scholars begin to understand Twain’s most common lie, exaggeration, in light of that established definition and thus begin to understand that Twain’s noble art is more than a comedic technique; it brings about truth and ultimately seeks the good of others.

Lying as urgent necessity appears frequently in Twain’s writings but is defined in some of his shorter essays. Essays from 1865 all the way to 1882 give readers glimpses of Twain’s beliefs on the necessity of lying. “Advice for Good Little Boys” explores the ever-present crisis of truth in the minds of little boys who are trying to be “good.” In seven delightful paragraphs of opposites, Twain begins by stating a normal “rule” one might say to a little boy and then finishes each statement with the more “human” response. For example, the first sentence reads, “You ought never to take anything that don’t belong to you—if you can’t carry it off” (163). Twain takes the truth that upstanding citizens should not steal and embeds an even uglier, but no less true, fact that you *can* steal if you can get away with it or that people will steal whenever they can. In the same way he warns boys not to lie, but then he concedes that there are times in life that one must lie. This is as far as Twain explores lies and truth to “little boys” in 1865; however, later, in 1882, Twain addresses an older audience on the same issue.

“On the Decay of the Art of Lying” (1882) is a longer piece written “for discussion” and to be read at a “meeting of the Historical and Antiquarian Club of Hartford” (824). The satirical essay accuses the Historical Club of being devoted to the art of lying and of preserving this art through its members. Twain turns the tables so this praise of keeping the “noble art” alive attacks the club in reality. If readers delve past the insults, a detailed description of lying emerges from the burlesque, along with Twain’s insistence that lying is a necessary, human behavior. He says, “No fact is more firmly established than that lying is a necessity of our circumstances,—the deduction that it is then a Virtue goes without saying” (824). Again, Twain asserts the necessity of lying, but surely Twain goes too far in the joke: lying, a virtue? He is burlesquing the idea a bit, but “On the Decay of the Art of Lying” is not the only time he uses such language to describe the act of lying. Furthermore, truth surfaces in the statement. It is sometimes in the best interest of others to lie and not hurt their feelings, to protect loved ones from harm. In Twain’s morals these two instances are enough to merit necessity: when the lie somehow brings about truth and when the lie works for another’s advantage.

Before examining the two necessities of lying, readers must decide Twain’s definition of a “lie.” Due to his vocation as a fiction writer, readers must assume Twain viewed his craft as, in a sense, a craft of lying. In fact, in a letter to the New York *Sun*, Twain says:

I never yet told the truth that I was not accused of lying, and every time I lie someone believes it. So I have adopted the plan, when I want people to believe what I say, of putting it in the form of a lie. That is the difference between my fiction and other people’s. Everybody knows mine is true. (qtd. in Wonham 11)

Twain realizes that his works illuminate truth even though they are lies. “Everybody” knows Twain’s works bring truth—even if this truth comes in the form of a ridiculous, hilarious lie.

In *Mark Twain and the Art of the Tall Tale*, Henry Wonham observes that Twain’s previous statement about the truth of his work “is itself a tongue-in-cheek exaggeration, yet the test of credulity that pits character against character, or reader against writer, is essential to Mark Twain’s conception of narrative performance” (11). As Wonham points out, Mark Twain’s narrative performance depends on readers going along with his “tongue-in-cheek exaggeration.” Before readers can fully appreciate the truth behind Twain’s exaggerations, they must realize that these exaggerations are not written strictly for comedic effect, as many would argue, but rather Twain uses literary lies to lead readers to “serious truths” (Wonham 11).

It seems inevitable that lies will come to truth, not because they are the truth but because they are somehow immortal, and the immortality of lies brings about truth. In two pieces from 1882, Twain states that lies are immortal. In his “Advice to Youth,” he warns, “For the history of our race, and each individual’s experience, are sown thick with evidences that a truth is not hard to kill, and that a lie well told is immortal” (802). While he goes on to a less than impressive example of this profound statement, readers today must reread the prophetic words coming from a now-infamous storyteller and “immortal” liar. Even in “On the Decay of the Art of Lying,” he begins by declaring “the Lie” a “Virtue, a Principle” that is both “eternal” and “immortal” (824). Through Twain’s admiration of the immortality of lies versus easy-to-kill truth, readers understand Twain’s goal to make his literary lies immortal as well. Twain remains immortal through his

work; even if the truth readers learn from him comes through fiction, that fiction will stand the test of time. In an entry from his notebook in 1898, Twain quipped, “Truth is mighty and will prevail. There is nothing the matter with this, except that it ain’t so” (345). Despite Twain’s musings on the frailty of truth, time and again truth prevails through the lies of men like Twain. In “Advice to Youth,” Twain quotes this same maxim that “Truth is mighty and will prevail” and says it is “the most majestic compound fracture of fact which any of woman born has yet achieved” (802). Twain insists that this saying is a complete “fracture” of fact; he insists that truth does not prevail and that lies do. Twain believes that lies outlive truth, and he uses this knowledge to create immortal lies that reveal truth.

### *Lies of Exaggeration*

Perhaps it is this belief in the immortality of lies that inspired Twain to use the literary art of exaggeration, a “serious truth” hidden in a stretch of the truth. Wonham agrees with Twain that, although exaggeration is a false representation, exaggeration leads to truth. He uses a writer from Twain’s time, “H.W.” to explain the exaggeration of a tall tale:

Writing in 1838, ‘H.W.’ explained to his countrymen that their former subjects exaggerated compulsively not because the Americans bore a congenital aversion to sincerity, as was often maintained by less sympathetic critics, but because exaggeration generates humorous incongruities [...] Exaggeration itself, as H.W. observes, is neither particularly American nor particularly humorous until the exaggerated image engenders an incongruous picture. (18-19)

According to Wonham and H.W., the purpose of Twain’s exaggeration is to present a false or “incongruous” picture, and it is this literary lie that brings about a truth.

Wonham observes that “The teller’s absurdities serve to reinforce the identity of a

cultural elite by celebrating through fantasy a knowledge that is the product of experience” (24). An example of this knowledge through experience comes in *Roughing It* (1872) when Twain creatively recounts his adventures in the West. The picture Twain paints of the West becomes incongruous and exaggerated but no less real and exciting to those reading the novel. While Twain’s contemporary, George Ripley claims *Roughing It* is “a tissue of vagabond adventures in a mingled yarn of fancy and fact” (par. 1), readers learn that even Twain’s “fancy” is intended to lead his collective audiences to the “facts” of human nature, both good and bad, beautiful and ugly.

If lying is necessary to bring about truth, then, in Twain’s work, exaggeration is the necessary lie to result in truth. Exaggeration is a lie because it misrepresents the subject it describes. By exaggerating the truth, Twain is able to grab his audience’s interest and highlight a human truth through the lie. The necessity of bringing truth through exaggeration is interestingly supported in “On the Decay of the Art of Lying” when Twain quotes noted historian Francis Parkman, saying, “the principle of truth may itself be carried into an absurdity” (825). Twain demonstrates Parkman’s assertion in his writings by transforming truth into absurdity through exaggeration. Time and again Twain presents readers with absurdities that will lead to a truth; he exposes truth through the very lies he warns young boys to avoid. In his notebook, Twain writes, “When we remember that we are all mad, the mysteries disappear and life stands explained” (345). When “lying” to his audience with devices like tall tales or exaggeration, Twain is only portraying humankind how it truly is: mad. Throughout Twain’s work, readers encounter humankind’s madness in many forms, like the silliness of a man saving a broom from a fire, the sadness of a murderer as he faces his own death, and the hypocrisy of

churchgoing citizens who own slaves. This madness reveals the mysteries of life and serves as a challenge to readers to change from within. The realization of humankind's "madness" brings about truth of human nature that no brutal truth could; life stands explained through the absurdity. It is, in fact, brutal truth through burlesque. The brutal truths learned in Twain's work allow readers to grow personally and gain new perspectives on those around them.

Further, in "On the Decay of the Art of Lying," Twain examines the art of what one might call "white lies," lying in order to keep someone from unnecessary harm. In avoidance of harming others it becomes necessary to lie. Not only is it advantageous, but Twain also thinks "this courteous lying is a sweet and loving art, and should be cultivated" (826). In fact, he says, "the highest perfection of politeness is only a beautiful edifice, built [...] of graceful and gilded forms of charitable and unselfish lying" (826). Twain furthermore bemoans the "growing prevalence of the brutal truth" (826) and calls for its eradication. He explains:

An injurious truth has no merit over an injurious lie. Neither should ever be uttered. The man who speaks an injurious truth lest his soul be not saved if he do otherwise, should reflect that that sort of a soul is not strictly worth saving. The man who tells a lie to help a poor devil out of trouble, is one of whom the angels doubtless say, 'Lo, here is an heroic soul who casts his own welfare into jeopardy to succor his neighbor's; let us exalt this magnanimous liar.' (826)

Although Twain slips into an ironic tone with the quotation from the angels at the end, his statement is still worth examining closer. If the reader is not convinced by the previous statement, Twain gives an interesting fact to back up his argument in a small paragraph right after the angels' chorus. It reads, "An injurious lie is an uncommendable thing; and so, also, and in the same degree, is an injurious truth,—a fact which is

recognized by the law of libel” (826). Even the law states that injurious statements are libel, whether truth or lie. Twain’s comparison blurs the line between truth and lies; if each is considered bad when harming someone, each should be considered good if helping another. Twain argues for the lost art of lying; however, he gives us a broader definition of lying, one that proves lying is of urgent necessity when it is to another’s advantage.

*Lying in Practice: The Cases of Huck Finn and Mark Twain*

Perhaps one of the best examples of lying when it is to another’s advantage comes from *Huckleberry Finn*. The use of the art of lying in this work is not surprising since “On the Decay of the Art of Lying” and “Advice to Youth” were written in the same year Twain was continuing work on what would become his masterpiece, *Huckleberry Finn*. In “Advice to Youth,” Twain directs his advice straight to a young boy. Perhaps this boy became Huck Finn, who demonstrates well the urgent necessity and art of lying. At the climax of his story, Huck has a choice to make. If he tells the truth and reveals Jim’s location by sending Miss Watson the letter, he will be doing the “right thing” in society’s eyes. The letter reads: “Miss Watson your runaway nigger Jim is down here two mile below Pikesville and Mr. Phelps has got him and he will give him up for the reward if you send. Huck Finn” (269). Here, Huck chooses to tear up the letter and with it the truth, even if it means going to hell for it. His situation is an excellent example of the urgent necessity of lying. Huck must lie in order to benefit another, Jim, and Twain lies through Huck in order to bring about truth to the readers of the novel. Can’t you hear the chorus ringing: “Lo, here is an heroic soul who casts his own welfare into jeopardy to succor his neighbor’s; let us exalt this magnanimous liar” (“On the Decay” 826)? Huck

has become a “good little boy” who refrains from telling the truth because of the urgent necessity of another’s welfare, and Twain becomes an infamous writer by challenging society’s perspective on lying.

If even his most beloved character follows Twain’s guidelines for lying, did Twain himself adhere to lies of urgent necessity? Let us give Huck one last word as we now look at Twain’s art of exaggerating the truth, or rather lying to bring about truth for the benefit others. Huck begins his story:

You don’t know about me, without you have read a book by the name of ‘The Adventures of Tom Sawyer,’ but that ain’t no matter. That book was made by Mr. Mark Twain, and he told the truth, mainly. There was things which he stretched, but mainly he told the truth. That is nothing. I never seen anybody but lied, one time or another [...] is all told about in that book—which is mostly a true book; with some stretchers, and I said before. (1)

Huck admits Twain told the truth “mainly” except for some “stretchers.” These “stretchers” were identified early in Twain’s career by William Dean Howells who praised Twain’s “grotesque exaggeration” in a review of *Roughing It* in *The Atlantic* (1872). Howells says “the grotesque exaggerations[s]” are “conjecturably the truest colors that could have been used” (par. 2). Howells is quick to point out the relationship between the “lies” Twain has told and the color of truth deepened by this exaggeration.

Because Twain’s truth was deepened through exaggerations, studying the works of Mark Twain often results in the observation of absurd contradictions and quirks of human behavior, the highs and lows of the human emotion roller coaster. When investigating the melancholy side of Twain’s personality in "Those Other Thematic Patterns in Mark Twain's Writings," Alan Gribben finds that “Twain’s writings record what their author perceived for humankind: a diabolically conjoined existence of

antithetical beauty and ugliness, mirth and tears, elation and remorse, security and terror” (198). Twain’s novels, short stories, tales, and sketches capture readers’ attention because of their true depiction of the duality of man’s nature, a nature that is at once good and bad, sincere and deceitful. With the back and forth motions of human nature, Twain became a yarn-spinner, as Henry Wonham argues, weaving artful worlds out of the raw material of human life. Some would even say Twain achieved much of what he credits Shakespeare with in “What Is Man?” Twain became a “Gobelin loom” who “correctly observed” and “marvelously painted” human life. He “exactly portrayed people who *God* had created, but he created none himself [...] The threads and the colors came into him *from the outside* [...] and *it automatically* turned out that pictured and gorgeous fabric which still compels the astonishment of the world” (736). Just as Twain argues Shakespeare was a “machine” spewing human life from his experience, so Twain captures human life in all its woven extremes; however, Twain’s technique reveals truth not through a clear picture but through literary exaggeration. While Shakespeare is known for accurately portraying human life, Twain is known for turning audiences’ perceptions upside-down. Theodore Dreiser negatively notices the difference between Twain’s and Shakespeare’s approach in “Mark the Double Twain” wishing “at times that, like Shakespeare, he [Twain] could have balanced the fantastically ridiculous with the truly tragic, and in some lovely American picture have dealt with what he knew to be the true features and factors of the period in which he lived” (623). Contrary to Dreiser’s belief, Twain reveals the duality of human nature and the picture of America in his time to his readers, much like Shakespeare, but Twain does so by unbalanced exaggerations of beauty and ugliness.

This study illuminates the use of exaggeration by Mark Twain, shedding light on the various ways exaggeration contributed to Twain's writing style and literary technique. The aim is not to argue whether or not Twain's writings are truths or lies, but rather to cultivate examples of exaggeration that are both. At some point, a humorous exaggeration reveals truth greater than reality.

### *From Exaggeration to Grotesque*

A true picture of "serious truth" must be both beautiful and ugly; it must account for both extremes of human emotion. Gribben argues that "Twain's enduring vision[s] of human joy and human woe, mellow mirth and chilling terror" are "all hopelessly interlocked" (186); however, "The world of his fictions impresses most readers as the more truthfully contrived for those disturbing intervals of the repulsive and the horrific" (198). Gribben asserts that Twain's grotesque exaggerations out-weigh and out-shine some of his more realistic or romantic descriptions. Not only did Twain choose to use more grotesque images and exaggerations, these images create a realism his readers appreciate more than romantic descriptions, which explains his standing as an American realist. Readers of Twain's grotesque realism must ask why Twain chose to exaggerate the ugly nature of humans if his aim was to portray for his readers, as he puts it, a "serious truth."

Twain's technique of the grotesque brings about a truth that is readily explained or examined by exaggeration. Perhaps in reading Ruskin's *Modern Painters* (1856), which Twain owned and references in *The Tramp Abroad* (1880), Twain was inspired to create—with words—that which Ruskin says is impossible:

A fine grotesque is the expression, in a moment, by a series of symbols thrown together in bold and fearless connection, of truths which it would have taken a long time to express in any verbal way, and of which the connection is left for the beholder to work out for himself; the gaps, left or overleaped by the haste of the imagination, forming the grotesque character. (99)

Even though Ruskin asserts that a fine grotesque would take a long time to express in any verbal way, readers of Twain should recognize his written exaggerations as *verbal* accounts of the grotesque, taking longer to articulate than a painting or even another story. The gaps in Twain's characters and landscapes, for example the narrative circles in *Roughing It*, give readers a chance to work out for themselves the puzzle of the grotesque. The "leaps" of grotesque and "stretchers" of exaggeration create grotesque exaggeration in much of Twain's work. It is imperative to study and analyze Twain's grotesque exaggeration in order to fill in the gaps and reveal truths about human nature and life. In "Mark Twain's Theological Travel," Joe B. Fulton recognized the merit in studying Twain's comic exaggerations for the same reasons we should also study Twain's grotesque exaggerations. Fulton states:

Twain spends a lot of time making us laugh at others, and not always for the sake of luring us in, putting us off our guard, and then directing our laughter back at ourselves. Sometimes, the fun is just at another's expense. Does that necessarily mean that the humor is not beneficial in ways that do actually broaden us? Quite the contrary. If we accept Twain's assumption that making spectacles of ourselves theologically is bad, laughing at others engaged in such waywardness is preventative medicine. (6)

In the same way Twain makes readers laugh at characters, readers must recognize, laugh at, and mourn the ugliness of human nature exaggerated by the grotesque in Twain's work, as an exercise in caution to avoid becoming grotesque themselves. In *The Reverend Mark Twain*, Fulton defends Twain's use of grotesque realism, explaining:

Like God, the writer of grotesque realism ‘fires no blank cartridges’; the degree to which reality achieves no classical beauty is the very context that demands grotesque realism [...] *Roughing It* and its grotesque aesthetics are the only ore worth mining. With *Roughing It*, Twain achieves a new sort of literature that becomes a ‘classic’ in its own right, all the while without becoming an exponent of the classical school. (64)

By Fulton’s definition, grotesque realism and grotesque exaggeration are art forms defying all classical schools. These techniques aim to better readers by becoming God-like, firing conviction on all who encounter Twain’s work. For example, in *Huckleberry Finn*, Twain spends chapter upon chapter exaggerating both the Shepherdson-Grangerford feud and the King/Duke saga, not just to make his audience laugh, but to warn audiences not to fall prey to the exaggerated faults found in each. With this in mind readers must reexamine many of Twain’s works that have made them laugh and decipher if there is a lesson to be learned from the lies.

If Howells uses “grotesque,” which was a common adjective that Twain used as well, to describe Twain’s exaggeration in *Roughing It*, one must conclude that there are several types of exaggeration. In Twain’s work, however, the most common exaggerations stem from a grotesque description. In fact, the term “exaggeration” is often used to define grotesque. So, perhaps a better wording of Twain’s technique would be that the most common grotesque descriptions actually develop *from* exaggeration. The term “grotesque” originated in the 1500s to describe small statues found in grottoes. *The Oxford English Dictionary* gives these definitions for the term: first, “a kind of decorative painting or sculpture, consisting of representations of portions of human and animal forms, fantastically combined and interwoven with foliage and flowers,” and second, “figures or designs characterized by comic distortion or exaggeration.” Artists create “grotesques” by exaggerating one or more parts of their subjects. In the same way,

contemporary scholars define grotesque as a literary technique which involves exaggeration. Susan Corey combines the ideas of Robert Doty, Geoffrey Harpham, and Mikhail Bakhtin to create this literary definition of the grotesque while studying Toni Morrison's work:

The grotesque is an aesthetic form that works through exaggeration, distortion, contradiction, disorder, and shock to disrupt a sense of normalcy and stimulate the discovery of new meaning and new connections. In its capacity to shock and offend, the grotesque exposes the depths of human vulnerability and the capacity for evil. (32)

Corey's states the purpose of the grotesque is to expose human vulnerability and evil. One could argue this is true for a number of Twain's grotesque exaggerations as well. For example, Twain's terrifying descriptions of Injun Joe in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* serve as a picture of evil. Readers are presented with an ugly picture described in an innocent voice, which causes confusion and contemplation. This incongruous picture reveals the evil capacity of human nature through the wild description of Injun Joe seen through the eyes of Tom and Huck.

As Huck, in the beginning of *Huckleberry Finn*, and Howells, in his review, both attest, Twain employed his own advice by "lying" in many forms of literary hoaxes and even in grotesque exaggerations of characters and scenes. Being a realist, Twain more often employs the realistic, ugly side of human nature to exaggerate rather than a beautiful, romantic exaggeration. However, Twain also gives glimpses of exaggerated beauty and romantic narration in his works which helps to highlight the more grotesque exaggerations. The contrast of good and bad exaggerations is seen most clearly in longer works like *Roughing It*. Jennifer Mckellar notices Twain's complex weaving of the concepts in her article, "The Poetics of Interruption in Mark Twain's *Roughing It*." She

argues that “Twain refuses the simplistic approach of progressing from the romantic to the realistic, from innocence to experience” (341) and instead “he circles about the topic, from one story to the next, but never seems to arrive at it directly” (342). While Mckellar describes Twain’s method correctly, she fails to see that Twain arrives at very poignant conclusions through his circles of exaggeration, both sublime and grotesque. By using the combination of literary opposites and human extremes, Twain demonstrates what Molly Boyd classifies as the most important element of southern grotesque literature in *The Companion to Southern Literature*:

The crucial element in defining the grotesque, however, is the juxtaposition or fusion of contrasting, paradoxical, and incompatible elements such as an impossible or horrific event narrated matter-of-factly and with great detail, often provoking a humorous response [...] This violent and ambivalent clash of opposites in the grotesque evokes a powerfully emotional response in readers. (321)

Boyd classifies Twain among what Ruskin calls the “high” grotesque which “reveals man’s tragic and imperfect nature, causing a reaction of horror, anger, or awe at the human condition” (322). An example of this paradoxical account that causes confusion in the reader is Twain’s hoax, “A Bloody Massacre Near Carson” (1863) when a gruesome murder scene is described in perfect detail but with hardly any emotion. The hoax is meant to accuse perpetrators in a recent water scandal and ends with the comment that “We hope the fearful massacre detailed above may prove the saddest result of their [the corrupt company’s] silence” (58). Twain’s tone while describing the massacre is sardonically even: “About ten o’clock on Monday evening Hopkins dashed into Carson on horseback, with this throat cut from ear to ear, and bearing in his hand a reeking scalp from which the warm, smoking blood was still dripping, and fell in a dying condition in front of the Magnolia saloon” (57). The cool, even tone with which Twain approaches

his subject demonstrates Boyd's definition of one of the most crucial elements of the grotesque by juxtaposing a horrendous event with a casual tone. He also causes horror, anger, and awe at this appalling occurrence. Twain sets this tone often in his works, especially in some of the more "light-hearted" tales of boyhood and adventure, like *Tom Sawyer*, *Huckleberry Finn*, and *Roughing It*. Since the tone is rather light in these and other works, Twain is able to capture the paradoxical element of the grotesque at any moment when he begins to exaggerate on the human condition.

It seems Twain cannot write enough examples of the human race at its ugliest and most absurd. To recognize each and every one of these humorous yet biting depictions is to draw out the richness of Twain's work and to realize new facets of the human race from his complex commentary. In many of his works both before and after "Advice for Good Little Boys," Twain uses ugly exaggerations and untruthful depictions of characters, situations, and landscapes in desperate attempts to lead his readers to an ultimate truth, usually about the human race. Howells noticed the technique of exaggeration used by his contemporary to lead readers to some new perspective on the issue addressed. Through the specific "lie" of grotesque exaggeration, Twain presents the truth that no other words could describe. Twain's tendency, especially in his later works, to paint the ugly side of humanity did not go unnoticed, even in his time. Dreiser says:

However, it is not this particular Rabelaisian extension of Twain's classic gift for paradox and exaggeration and horseplay in the field of humor, quite rampant in his day (Bill Nye, Petroleum V. Nasby, Josh Billings), but rather his much more publicly subdued—and I may add, frustrated—gift as well as mood for dark and devastating, and at the same time quite tender and sorrowing, meditation on the meaning or absence of it in life, plus a force and clarity of realistic presentation and criticism which has arrested me as it has many another. (616)

Twain's predilection for the ugly was, as Dreiser insists, more than just a comic device, Twain was interested in painting a full picture of humanity, one that would help his readers see the darker side of their nature. Twain's gift for "dark and devastating" contemplation that caught Dreiser's attention is what turns Twain's exaggerations from stretches of the truth to grotesque realism. Wonham also notices the difference in Twain's "humor" from his contemporaries in *Roughing It*:

Whereas literary humorists from John Phoenix to Bret Harte had employed parody and exaggeration for the purpose of debunking romantic conventions, Twain recognized a theme, a potential story of the frontier by placing the drama of performance and response at the thematic center of a new kind of *Bildungsroman*, one that figures education as a gradual process of unlearning the illusions that inhibit practical vision. (94)

In many other works besides *Roughing It*, Twain teaches readers to look past "practical vision" and see humankind's madness and mysteries. As Huck tears up the note, audiences are gradually "unlearning" society's illusions of truth. But it is the instances in both *Roughing It* and *Huckleberry Finn*, as well as countless other works, where Twain exaggerates these absurdities that then carry his exaggeration into grotesque realms.

In his article "Caricature, The Fantastic, The Grotesque" in *Eclectic Magazine*, John Addington Symonds outlines the elements of the grotesque as they relate to caricature and the fantastic in all forms of art, including literature. In Symonds' definition, the grotesque is made up of caricature and the fantastic. He first explains caricature as a "distinct species of characterization, in which the salient features of a person or an object have been emphasized with the view of rendering them ridiculous" (796). The word's origin, "*Caricare un ritratto*," means "to exaggerate what is already prominent in the model, and in this way to produce a likeness which misrepresents the

person, while it remains recognizable” (796). Twain’s exaggeration emulates Symonds’ definition of “the most effective kind of caricature” which “renders its victim ludicrous or vile by exaggerating what is defective, mean, ignoble in his person, indicating at the same time that some corresponding flaws in his spiritual nature are revealed by them” (797). While Twain’s exaggerations definitely expose humankind’s flaws, many fall into the broader scope of “grotesque” because they contain a fantastical element. Symonds’ defines the fantastic by first emphasizing it alone does not contain caricature: “The fantastic need have no element of caricature. It invariably implies a certain exaggeration or distortion of nature; but it lacks that deliberate intention to disparage, which lies at the root of caricature” (797). However, the two concepts of caricature and the fantastic combine to create the grotesque which Twain’s exaggeration most often employs: “The grotesque is a branch of the fantastic. Its specific difference lies in the fact that an element of caricature, whether deliberately intended or imported by the craftsman’s spontaneity of humor, forms an ingredient in the thing produced” (798). Twain uses caricature through exaggeration to produce the grotesque.

A study of Mark Twain’s art of exaggeration brings about stunning human truths through convicting and convincing literary lies. Twain is able to vacillate smoothly between one extreme and the next, weaving together a tall narrative which Wonham describes as “neither purely factual nor purely fantastic, but depends for its effect on the ability of cultural insiders to perceive its relation to both fact and fantasy” (35). Twain’s concepts of lies and truth blend together in what Ripley calls “a mingled yarn of fancy and fact” (par. 1), where even Twain’s “fancy” reveals facts to his readers.

## CHAPTER TWO

### “Stirring News” through Exaggeration: Mark Twain’s Early Newspaper Writings

#### *Hannibal: 1851-1861*

Mark Twain’s literary journey began in a blaze; the inspiration rose from the ashes of a fire in the grocery store next to his brother’s printing office in the early morning of January 9, 1851. The folly of his coworker Jim during the commotion of the fire, coupled with Twain’s tendency to exaggerate, resulted in the piece “A Gallant Fireman” (1851). As Edgar Marquess Branch and Robert H. Hirst discuss in their introduction to Twain’s earliest work, Twain actually remembers the event more than half of a century later with vivid details of Jim carrying off the office broom and coming back for the wash-pan. In his haste, Jim had saved some of the most inconsequential items from the building. Branch and Hirst note this is “a surprisingly accurate recollection of the ‘precious burden’ Jim had rescued from the shop” (61). As surprisingly accurate as Twain’s recollection appears, the real surprise resides in Twain’s exaggeration of the event in the published work “A Gallant Fireman” on January 16, 1851 in the *Western Union* which his brother edited at the time.

“A Gallant Fireman” begins with an unexpectedly cool and even tone, considering it describes a fire next door. However, the tone is not too surprising when the audience realizes Twain has created a parody of a real newspaper article. In this case, the tone serves as a marker for the joke and warns the readers of the parody to come. The passage formally states, “At the fire, on Thursday morning, we were apprehensive of our own

safety, (being only one door from the building on fire) and commenced arranging our material in order to remove them in case of necessity” (62). In these first lines of the first published work of one of the best and most celebrated humorists hides Twain’s first joke. The subtle, ironic, and near ridiculous, smooth tone of the first two sentences accomplishes two laughs for the reader. First, is the laugh of the reader who realizes that the serious, even diction mocks the way the printing office’s employees really reacted to the fire. Judging by the panic that follows, no one was only “apprehensive” for his life but instead probably scared out of his wits. No one “commenced” anything but probably launched immediately into action. The even tone, which lends itself to the newspaper genre Twain was using, heightens the contrast between Twain’s description and reality.

A second way to approach the beginning of the scene in “A Gallant Fireman,” however, warrants that Twain and his colleagues were actually calm as they prepared the office to be evacuated. By using the second point of view, readers consent that Twain and his colleagues were “apprehensive” of their safety and “commenced” to arranging things “in order to remove them in case of necessity”; in which sense, the action of the “gallant fireman” that follows becomes even more absurd and laughable. Both ways of reading the first two sentences of “The Gallant Fireman” offer comedy through an extreme contrast of human emotions. The first is a kind of “under-exaggeration” or understatement leading audiences to believe the opposite reaction actually took place; the second is an accurate portrayal of human emotion setting readers up to laugh at the contrast of the extreme reaction to follow by the fireman. Either reading of the first part of “A Gallant Fireman” proves Twain was in the business of creating both serious and comedic material in his works from the very beginning of his career. By contrasting two

opposite tones, behaviors, or characters, Twain allows readers to distinguish more clearly between two opposing views of a situation and thus usually distinguish which one Twain is mocking and which he is praising.

No matter Twain's intention of the tone in the first lines of the work, once "our gallant *devil*" enters the scene, the punch line is delivered:

Our gallant *devil*, seeing us somewhat excited, concluded he would perform a noble deed, and immediately gathered the broom, an old mallet, the wash-pan and a dirty towel, and in a fit of patriotic excitement, rushed out of the office and deposited his precious burden some ten squares off, out of danger. (62)

In the description of Jim's reaction Twain recalls the facts but embellishes the tale with a tone and a diction not fitting the subject matter at hand. In stark contrast to the calmness of his colleagues, the gallant fireman rushes frantically to perform a "noble deed" by saving the broom, mallet, and wash-pan. Not only is the evacuation of the office a noble deed, he bears a "precious burden" while escaping, that precious burden being some unimportant items like a wash-pan and a dirty towel. Readers laugh at the absurdity of the high diction and tone used to describe such a lowly, ineffectual deed. In the same way, even the title's eloquent speech, calling Jim "A Gallant Fireman," creates an ironic tone once the reader has finished the tale. The success of "A Gallant Fireman" comes from the careful exaggeration of tone and character contrasted with "normal" events and people Twain describes.

Twain not only accomplishes the exaggerated tone of the passage through these contrasts but also through the italics used to express a visual change in tone through a variation in font. The italics can signal either a sarcastic or an even tone, depending on the situation. So, when Twain introduces the "gallant *devil*" in such an even-paced piece

of prose, readers can assume that “*devil*” may be a sarcastic description said in an exaggerated tone to contrast the rest of the piece. The word “devil” deepens the joke in a couple of ways. First, “devil” can mean the position of Jim as a printer’s devil, basically an errand boy and helper in the early days of the press. Jim is the lowest of the low in the printer’s office and therefore his heroic deed is easily mocked by his superiors, even Twain who was only just promoted from being a printer’s devil for several years. The “gallant devil” is in fact a “devil,” a printer’s devil; but, the devil also refers to a creature of Satan, especially considering Jim’s exclamation at the end of the piece of “the greatest confirmation of the age!” (62). Since Twain himself had spent most of his boyhood being a printer’s devil one can understand if he viewed this position as one from the devil. In fact Bruce Michelson observes that, in Twain’s final work, the printer’s devil becomes a symbol of evil both in the story and in Twain’s life. Michelson concludes, “practicing the printer’s craft eventually gives way to dangerous outbreaks of sheer imagination; but these at first remain within the world of print, complicating one’s own professional identity, challenging the cultural status and function of the trade” and then Michelson asks, “Does the ‘printer’s devil’ become a devil incarnate, and does the one incarnation lead to the other?” (219). While Michelson probes this idea in *No. 44, the Mysterious Stranger*, there is even evidence from Twain’s first published work of the double meaning of the word “devil” in the title of this position. Therefore, the italicized devil is a three-faced joke emphasizing a serious tone, signaling Jim’s position in the office, and remarking on the devilish work of a printer’s assistant. Devil has tonal, professional, and even theological significance that is bookended by Jim’s last exclamation.

At the end of the short piece, the gallant devil exclaims that the fire would have been the “greatest *confirmation* of the age!” His outburst is exaggerated by the italicized word. In the last half of the work, exaggeration abounds through incongruous expectations. The fireman thinks he will be immortalized for his deed when in reality all he has accomplished is to save some worthless tools from a fire that is already out. The irony of his hopes is charming to the reader, who in turn pities the fireman’s elevated expectations that have been dashed by the reality of the event. If these examples are not enough, the fireman throws his frame in a “tragic attitude,” a bit excessive for the situation, and exclaims with an “eloquent expression” his great phrase to end the work. The expression adds insult to injury through the simple malapropism of “confirmation” instead of what was probably meant as “conflagration,” or fire. “Confirmation” is italicized, highlighting the joke and exaggerating its ridiculousness. Jim was probably surrounded with big words all the time as a printer’s devil, arranging and rearranging blocks, yet even though he knew the words, it is clear he did not understand them. Jim would be setting type with big words and could have easily mistaken one big word that he did not know for another big word he also did not know. The malapropism not only exaggerates the ignorance of a subject, in this case Jim, but it also creates new meaning or new confusion for the readers as they try to understand his great proclamation. Finally, confirmation of the age is also a play on the previous mention of Jim as a “devil.” Readers connect the two concepts at the end and find laughter in the fact that the devil has proclaimed the confirmation of the age.

Before the gallant devil’s proclamation, Twain uses italics in the text to emphasize the man’s character and also to describe his ultimate failure:

Being of a *snailish* disposition, even in his quickest moments, the fire had been extinguished during his absence. He returned in the course of an hour, nearly out of breath, and thinking he had immortalized himself, threw his giant frame in a tragic attitude, and exclaimed, with an eloquent expression: 'If that thar fire hadn't bin put out, thar'd a' bin the greatest *confirmation* of the age!' (62)

The italics of this passage are a study in emphasis and contrast. Twain desires the reader to put more weight to the words which he italicizes, obviously, but the words are more than just "important." The italicized words are exaggerations of tone and markers of double meaning in that word. Readers are automatically drawn to the italics not only because of the type but also because there are so many italics used in such a short piece that these accented fonts contrast with the rest of the text. First, "devil" is italicized when describing the gallant fireman for the first time. This emphasis is Twain's textual wink at the reader, signaling the sarcasm and exaggeration of the name "gallant devil." Next, the italicized word "snailish" informs the reader of how incredibly slow the gallant fireman's save is. Even in his short, first published work, Twain uses the text of the story to exaggerate the meanings of certain words, a method he would continue throughout his literary career.

Readers will also note the surprising amount of space it takes Twain to write what he succinctly described later in Albert Bigelow Paine's *Mark Twain : A Biography* as "Jim in his excitement had carried the office broom half a mile and had then come back after the wash-pan" (92). Twain's extra wording and elaboration in "A Gallant Fireman" trick readers into high anticipation for an ordinary event. Eastman also comments on this facet of Twain's writing in his study entitled *Enjoyment of Laughter*. He insists a good joke can mislead the reader with seemingly unnecessary elaboration. Wit, as defined by Eastman, is:

A word or series of words which seems and pretends to be heading toward a certain meaning, and which 'leads us on' in the direction of that meaning, fails abruptly and with playful intent to get us there at all. It lets us down. It leaves us flat. It April-fools us. And like Ruth Washburn's baby sailing toward its mother's arms, we find in failing of our goal a comic pleasure" (54).

In both the fireman's failure to become a hero and Twain's failure to satisfy the tone of the work with an equally "high" action, readers find great comic pleasure. "A Gallant Fireman" not only exaggerates but also understates the situation. Eastman discusses the understatement in Mark Twain's work: "There is certainly nothing lusty or boisterous in that last sentence. It is not a jovial exaggeration, but a facetious understatement" (153). While Eastman observes this from a different work, his observation translates to earlier works like "A Gallant Fireman" as well. Twain's "facetious understatements" at the beginning of the work contrast the fireman's "jovial exaggeration" at the end.

Twain's "A Gallant Fireman" presents readers of Twain's entire canon with the earliest possible peek at his methods. His use of tone, style, and action in creating exaggerated contrasts can be traced back to Twain's earliest writing experience in journalism. The people of Hannibal and the readers of publications like the *Western Union* and the *Territorial Enterprise* got much more than news from the young Twain. Like the fireman, Twain's good intentions in his early works were sometimes extravagant beyond need; yet, perhaps extravagance is required for the punch line to his literary jokes. Although it is likely that Twain began with no purpose but entertainment, as in "A Gallant Fireman," readers discover truths through his exaggerations as Twain develops in this early period of writing for newspapers. Even in what Dixon Wecter calls his "first known venture [...] into print" (236), Twain manages to stretch the truth into a more interesting and entertaining lie. While this lie seems only for the purpose of

entertainment, it offers readers a first look into Twain's development into a "magnanimous liar" and "Shakespeare" of his age.

Not only "A Gallant Fireman" but also much of Twain's newspaper writings and early works reveal how even from the beginning, with journalistic aspirations, Twain was an artist of exaggeration. Exploring the earliest publications of Mark Twain gives readers groundwork for examining exaggeration throughout the Twain canon. During his early career, Twain refined the technique of exaggeration to an art of lying. From the simplest textual emphases of italics to the longer and more complicated literary hoaxes in his early works, Mark Twain established his place in American literary history as a master of laughter and a creator of truth through lies of exaggeration. His first ventures were in Hannibal under his brother Orion in publications like *Western Union* and *Hannibal Journal*. Twain's earliest publications in Hannibal reveal the budding genius of America's humorist. But how could one of the country's most energetic and eloquent liars begin his literary journey in journalism, a field known for dealing with "the facts"? To begin, readers must remember that Twain wrote in a "subliterary tradition that permitted and even encouraged an indifference to news," according to Edward Branch in his introduction to Twain's *Early Tales and Sketches* (21). Throughout his early days as a journalist and despite his ironic involvement with the press, Mark Twain managed to practice and perfect the art of lying rather than sticking to the truth of situations. Twain boasts in his semi-autobiography of his newspaper days, *Roughing It* (1872), that "I felt that I had found my legitimate occupation at last. I reasoned within myself that news, and stirring news, too, was what a paper needed, and I felt that I was peculiarly endowed with the ability to furnish it" (276-277). Twain's aim was to entertain, yes, but later he

also admits in “A Couple of Sad Experiences” (1870) that he “certainly did not desire to deceive anybody” even in his wildest hoaxes (388). Of course, readers know that the sincerity of this statement must be questioned because it does seem that Twain certainly *did* desire to deceive his audience. However, in “A Couple of Sad Experiences,” he claims that his audience often overlooked the joke that was in plain sight. Twain gives a convincing argument that his jokes were misunderstood as malicious when they were only meant to be funny. Only Twain knew his own motives. It appears from what readers see in his early works that he might have intended jokes but also relished the deception they produced.

Twain’s publication of “A Gallant Fireman” in his brother’s absence from the *Western Union* was his first taste of success and proved Twain’s aptitude for humorous journalism. Twain was granted the opportunity to take over the paper again in his brother’s absence from the *Hannibal Journal*, this time doing a bit more damage by seizing the opportunity to attack a fellow editor in a series of short articles including a dangerously truthful story “‘Local’ Resolves to Commit Suicide” (1852)—discussing the editor’s recent attempted suicide in a flippant, disparaging, yet somehow funny way. Later, in “My First Literary Venture,” Twain describes the feud with Hinton as some of his first “newspaper scribbling” and that it “unexpectedly [...] stirred up a fine sensation in the community” (*Editorial Wild* 3). He concedes that though he thought it “desperately funny,” he was “densely unconscious that there was any moral obliquity about such a publication” (*Editorial Wild* 5). Twain describes the incident as a childish lark of a “progressive and aspiring” printer’s devil, yet grotesque exaggerations like the following “Local” incident did not stop in Hannibal.

In Twain's public feud with J.T. Hinton, the "local" for the Hannibal *Tri-Weekly Messenger*, readers discover how Twain's exaggeration could turn from light humor to grotesque humor in an instant; however grotesque the exaggeration, truth can be learned from the description. While Twain responded to a recent attack on Orion, his joke bordered on cruelty as he mocked Hinton's recent attempted suicide. Not only are the words dripping with satire, Twain included a rough picture to further the image and ridicule of Hinton's fated action. According to Smith in *Mark Twain of the Enterprise*, "Scurrilous abuse was a convention of journalism," in the West during Twain's time, so it is interesting to see that even before he traveled west, though he was on the west bank of the Mississippi, Twain dabbled in the disparaging art. Yet, Twain's defamatory exaggeration is really more like the "harsh truth" of the situation masked in a comic pose, and this venture proves Twain's keen eye for more than a story, for a legend.

In her article "Mark Twain Juvenilia," Minnie Brashear insists that the early publications allowed Twain the confidence and energy to proceed to greater things. She states, "As a matter of fact, those events extended over a period of nine months and were apparently the first expression of the youth's restless energy becoming conscious of itself and impelled inevitably to break out of the narrow limits of its small-town routine" (26). Likewise, in "Mark Twain and the Hannibal Journal," George Brownell reflects on the two instances of Orion's absence as "twin opportunities" that "were grasped by a Samuel burning with a long-repressed creative fire, void of all allegiance to traditions of the editorial craft, indifferent to truth unless dramatic effect be served, yet eager to present to Orion, on his return, a satisfactory record of his stewardship in the form of new subscriptions paid for in vegetables and cord-wood" (176). Brownell notices three

benefits from Twain's venture into journalism: creative fire, economic gain, and his brother's approval. If journalism did spark a young Twain's literary passion, the evidence surfaces in his first few publications in Orion's paper.

Besides the traditions of truth and lies in journalism, Twain's earliest techniques, even in Hannibal, reflect the influence of the Sagebrush literary tradition Lawrence Berkove defines in *The Sagebrush Anthology*. Along with frequently writing about their own profession and peers, the writers of the Sagebrush School were concerned with capturing the truth of the West through their writings. This truth usually came through comic means, such as hoaxes. Berkove states: "Hoaxes always involve deception, but unlike the hoaxes of the real world, the literary hoax, far from harming readers, only entertains and may also instruct and protect" (6). Similar to the author Berkove defines, Twain, even in his earliest works like "A Gallant Fireman" and "The Local," intended to "instruct and protect" his audience. Berkove elaborates on Twain's hoaxes, saying, "Twain is still—and justifiably—regarded as America's greatest humorist, yet only in relatively recent years has it been recognized that moral seriousness underlies much of his humor, and that most of his greatest works incorporate subtle hoaxes at their cores" (7). Like Berkove, readers notice the truthful subtleties in Twain's early newspaper hoaxes. While "The Local" is ironically discussing Hinton's attempt at suicide, its laughter at the situations demands audiences to stop and inspect their own view of the situation and make their own judgments of its hilarity or seriousness. Opposite from "A Gallant Fireman," in the attack on the "Local" Twain uses a light-hearted tone to describe a very serious event. Twain's early writings prove Berkove's belief that "The Sagebrush authors did not invent the literary hoax, but they did nurture it into a high art" (6). Even

as early as “A Gallant Fireman,” scholars have noticed the rich Western humor in Twain’s work but have yet to fully explore his deviation from the tradition. In *Mark Twain*, John Gerber writes that “such an anecdote with its oral tone, juxtaposition of rustic and literary language, puns and silly catalog clearly reflects the Western humor of the time” (5). And Branch agrees, “It is in the light of Clemens’ preoccupation with journalism and with developing his disarming comic technique that the early short works are best appreciated” (56). Yet, the “Local” piece and many of Twain’s early writings reflect more than Western Humor; the early works of Mark Twain reveal his budding talent for exaggeration that, along with its Western roots, permeates much of Twain’s work from the beginning to the end.

“The Dandy Frightening the Squatter” (1852), which appeared more than a year after “A Gallant Fireman,” gives readers a glimpse of Twain’s already-present Western technique in the form of a frame. The sketch describes the scheme of a gentleman trying to impress the ladies onboard the boat he is currently riding. The dandy decides to scare a squatter on the shore and announces the plan to his audience. Then, with the whole party watching, instead of scaring his prey, the dandy is punched by the squatter and ends up falling into the river. Twain’s “first humorous tale of moderate length” (Branch and Hirst 63) uses the same exaggeratedly serious, mock-romantic tone that “A Gallant Fireman” used, again employing the tone to achieve a comedic contrast of tone and action. However, this longer piece also introduces a framing technique Twain used throughout his career. The story begins: “About thirteen years ago, when the now flourishing young city of Hannibal, on the Mississippi River, was but a ‘wood-yard,’ surrounded by a few huts, belonging to some hardy ‘squatters,’ and such a thing as a

steam boat was considered quite a sight the following incident occurred” (1). The first paragraph frames the story, not as an introduction but as a way of distancing narrator and tale. It is as if Twain is telling someone else’s story, not his own. Kenneth Lynn describes this method used by many humorists of the time in *Mark Twain and Southwestern Humor*. Lynn observes, “By containing their stories within a frame, the humorists also assured their conservative readers of something they had to believe in before they could find such humor amusing, namely, that the Gentleman was as completely in control of the situation he described as he was of himself” (64). So by telling the squatter’s tale “through the grapevine” Twain becomes the educated author of an off-hand and somewhat silly joke.

However, framing the story also allows the facts and actions to be flawed because the teller has only heard the tale and is relaying that story back to an audience. He was not part of the action. By retelling the action rather than placing himself in the action, Twain is able to exaggerate with a free conscience. His exaggerated lies are not his own exaggeration but the exaggeration resulting from the story being told and retold. Also, by distancing himself from the story, Twain’s credibility is not in question; instead, readers are more open to the exaggeration because it seems more like the truth when told just as he heard it. In “Editorial Agility” (1852) Twain receives the story from a “youngster” who is quoted by Twain as saying, “I swear I’ll tell it, whether it’s believed or not—he jumped *clean over nine pews*, and I have not the least doubt in the world, sir that he’d have jumped *nine more*, had he not unluckily tripped on the back of a chair” (7). Like Lynn concludes, Twain is in control of the boy’s story and the audience is able to laugh at

the situation, knowing that is an exaggeration but blaming the boy not Twain, the messenger of his tale.

The combination of many or all of Twain's techniques of exaggeration result in a literary hoax played on the reader for both comedic and dramatic effect. Not only do Twain's early pieces make readers laugh, but some make readers marvel at human nature and question the motives and vices of men. The lightest of these works aim only to play a joke on the reader and make the reader laugh. As discussed with "A Gallant Fireman," Eastman's definition of wit fits best when describing the elaborate lengths Twain stretched before the reader to amuse. Eastman says these words "April-fools us," yet in failing us they also achieve a goal of "comic pleasure" (54). Eastman's example of this type of humor comes from *Puddinhead Wilson's Calendar* that reads, "October. This is one of the peculiarly dangerous months to speculate in stocks in. The others are July, January, September, April, November, May, March, June, December, August, and February" (60-61). Eastman remarks, "It is not a very good joke, but useful to show how remote from real fact Freud is—and his teacher, Lipps, before him—in trying to explain the pleasure in wit as due to an 'economy of psychic expenditure.' The amount of labor expended here in apprehending the simple idea contained in the word always would build a boat" (61). As in Eastman's example from *Puddinhead Wilson's Calendar*, in "A Gallant Fireman" and many of his works Twain labors and spins his tales to build a literary "boat," spending all his words to create a priceless structure of truth through exaggeration.

In "The Dandy Frightening the Squatter," as in "A Gallant Fireman," the main character's elevated hopes end in an exaggerated hoax. The dandy, satisfied with his

equipment, strides to shore with an air that says, “The hopes of a nation depend on me” (1). He is so sure that his prank will succeed; thus making his failure that much funnier to the audience watching in the text and the readers as well. When the squatter punches him, the dandy becomes an “astonished antagonist [...] floundering in the turbid waters of the Mississippi” (1). The inflated language is not lost on the ironic turn of events. “The crest-fallen hero” is approached and humiliated by his victor who receives the pistols and knife from the ladies of the ship whom the dandy had attempted to impress. So, the audience is led on by the story teller, and, like the main character, is deceived into expecting the opposite of what really happens. While the dandy provides readers a laugh, readers also see the truth of human expectations within his story. Men allow arrogance to dictate their actions and are often left “floundering” in their false hopes due to that arrogance.

Along with the italicized words and framed story is the sense of confusion between the seriousness of the tone and the dullness of the event, or the opposite: the dullness of the tone crossed with the seriousness of the event. In “Mark Twain’s Use of the Comic Pose” John Gerber states “Twain’s pose of moralism may be distinguished from his sincere expression of moral indignation by the contrived details, the exaggeration or falsification of feeling, the inappropriateness of tone” (299). It is this “inappropriateness of tone” that creates a literary hoax on the reader. The reader does not know whether to take the story seriously or laugh at it; however, Twain intends the reader to do both. Twain’s early burlesques reveal the foibles of human nature in order for audiences to both laugh at them and learn from them. The dandy is not only someone we laugh at but someone we learn never to be like. Twain tricks his readers with words

just like the salesman tricks the little boy in “Historical Exhibition—A No. 1 Ruse” (1852) by charging him money to see “Bonaparte crossing the Rhine” (3) and then only showing him the “bony part” of a hog’s leg crossing over “a piece of hog’s rind” (4). He entertains readers, but also tricks readers into learning about human arrogance and folly.

*Carson City: 1862-1864*

To survey Twain’s early career, readers must not dwell too long in Hannibal for Twain himself decided to escape the local newspaper realm after serving several years for various papers in Hannibal. In 1862 Twain tagged along with his brother Orion as he headed west. Exploring the influence of the West on Twain’s career, Gerber, in *Mark Twain*, observes, “It was in the West that he decided upon writing as his profession, and it was there that he adopted his famous pseudonym. Western publications, too, shaped his early style. Attempting to win the acclaim of readers in Nevada and California, he exaggerated heavily and resorted frequently to burlesque and occasionally even to hoaxes” (10). While burlesque and hoaxes have been studied in much depth, exaggeration permeates both traditions and most of Twain’s methods. For Twain, the initial heavy exaggeration to win acclaim became burlesque and the elaboration for Nevada and California readers became hoax. Whichever form Twain chose, his audience was left with the “stirring news” Twain promised from the beginning of his journey (*Roughing It* 276).

Stirring news certainly came forth from Twain’s stories; yet, these stirring exaggerations evolved in his early works into elaborate signs toward truth as well. Brownell describes exaggerations, like those in “My First Literary Adventure” (1871) which tells of Twain’s days in the newspaper business, as “Twain’s habit of departing,

often widely from the truth that lacked the full measure of dramatic quality” (176). Of course Twain deviates from “boring” stories to “exciting” exaggerations; however, just because the derivations have a “full measure of dramatic quality” does not mean that the audience will not receive some truth from the elaboration. And, to be sure, audiences will never be bored with his reporting. As Branch says, “even when his work is most like conventional journalism, we find his humorous sensibility coloring the report and dominating the interest of these ephemera” (26). Twain strays from the truth not only because it is more interesting to tell a lie, but also because readers will listen to the truth behind the exaggerations and perhaps remember that particular truth more than if it had lacked such dramatic quality.

But Twain complicates readers’ impression of his literary technique on numerous occasions. It is as if he is trying to convince the readers to believe his absurdities as truth, when asking them to believe stories like “The Dandy Frightening the Squatter,” “The Petrified Man,” “Massacre Near Carson City,” and countless others. This is not to say Twain did not think he was lying; Twain knew his art and its outcome on those keen enough to study not only for the punch line but also for the truth behind it. Twain may have explained it the best to readers of “The Stolen White Elephant” in 1882 after practicing the art for awhile. In the textual deviation of a footnote to the title of the work, Twain says, “Left out of ‘A Tramp Abroad,’ because it was feared that some of the particulars had been exaggerated, and that others were not true. Before these suspicions had been proven groundless, the book had gone to press.—M.T.” (804). Readers have to laugh at the irony of a “warning” that some thought the work was exaggerated and untrue paired with the assurance that the claims could be found “groundless.” Just like many of

the pieces of that time, “The Stolen White Elephant” shows Twain’s concern with sounding like he is telling the truth, even when it is only an exaggerated version. This concern maybe because by now he had a reputation of not being the straight toned newspaper man everyone expected him to be from the genre he was writing. He warns his readers yet assures them that he is truthful. Twain does this earlier in “Washoe— ‘Information Wanted’” (1864), a fictitious correspondence with a man who has asked for information about Nevada because he would like to move if conditions are right. Twain tells his correspondent, “Now, William, ponder this epistle well; never mind the sarcasm, here and there, and the nonsense, but reflect upon the plain facts set forth, because they *are* facts, and are meant to be so understood and believed” (82). And for all the sarcasm of this very statement, there is some truth in the warning. “Washoe” does inform readers of the conditions of Nevada. For example, as Twain describes his environment he uses a sarcastic and almost crude example: “It has no character to speak of, William, and alas! In this respect it resembles many, ah, too many chambermaids in this wretched, wretched world. Sometimes we have the seasons in their regular order, and then again we have winter all the summer and summer all winter” (79). Ah, the fickleness of a woman demonstrated in a metaphor of the weather. While not a totally original idea, Twain comically exaggerates the maxim and flips it upside down so that he is using the women to describe the weather instead of the other way around. This example also shows Twain’s elevated style to contrast the mundane topic. He uses “alas” and “ah” to create a mock-dignity to the description. Yet the example is so true the reader cannot deny it and write it off as only a joke. The weather could be and was likened to the “chambermaids.”

So, even though some may be wary of his methods, Twain's truthfulness through exaggeration remains.

When contrasted with the subtlety of tone, a more straightforward approach to exaggerating any aspect of a written story is by changing the format of the text. Twain often emphasizes aspects of his tales. For example, in *America's Humor* Blair and Hill notice this technique when discussing "How to Tell a Story," observing, "By the time Clemens heard this, a soldier displaced the sailor, the scene shifted to a battlefield, a cannon ball beheaded the wounded man, an officer questioned the numbskull, and the pay off line was italicized, capitalized, punctuated, and repeated" (321). As Blair and Hill trace the origin of the story of "A Lying Dog" in Twain's "How to Tell a Story," they discover Twain's many variations to the original, even his "italicized, capitalized, punctuated, and repeated" words. In his first publication and in many subsequent and early works, Twain utilized each detail, even the typeset. By italicizing some words in "A Gallant Fireman" Twain was able to exaggerate the tone of those words. This technique continued throughout those early works in newspapers. In *The Art of Mark Twain*, William Gibson classifies Twain's use of italics as a way to "use [...] type for oral effect" which includes Twain's "frequent calculated italicizing of words in dialogue for accent and emphasis, and his free use of exclamation marks at high dramatic moments [...] And occasionally he uses capitalization for an effect of mock dignity" (20-21). One example of Gibson's definition of the use of italics occurs in Twain's 1864 writing from Carson titled "Miss Clapp's School." In this sketch that underhandedly insults the school, Twain quotes an "infamous, lisping, tow-headed young miscreant" as saying "Yeth, thir, I *thee* him do it!" (64). The italicized "thee" is meant to be the written representation of

the boy's lisp. Instead of saying "seen," Twain has him say "thee." Gibson's analysis rings true here as Twain uses the italics to create an oral quality of a lisp. Another example of this use of italics is in Twain's frequent writings about the fashion in San Francisco. In both "All About Fashions" and "The Lick House Ball" italics are used to highlight foreign or foreign-sounding words. Twain is again signaling the reader to read the word in a different way, a "foreign" way. While Gibson views these stylistic choices as attempts to translate the spoken word to the written word, readers may notice Twain also employs the type of his words to signal an exaggerative mode.

Twain recognized the technique of using italics as more than just an oral technique and mocked its frequent use in a women's writing on one particular occasion in his letter to the *Enterprise* "All About Fashions" (1863) from San Francisco. The letter Twain received, as he quotes it, says, "Mr. Mark Twain:—*Do* tell us something about the fashions. I am dying to know what the ladies of San Francisco are wearing. Do, now, tell us all you know about it, won't you? Pray excuse brevity, for I am in *such* a hurry. Bettie." (29). After repeating the request he received, Twain discusses the form of her letter in mock-disdain: "'*Do* tell us'—and she is in '*such* a hurry.' Well I never knew a girl in my life who could write three consecutive sentences without italicizing a word" (29). The irony of the insult is that Twain was already guilty and would continue to be guilty of the frequent use of italics in his writing. These italics in Mark Twain's writing are a form of exaggeration because of the emphasis italics put on certain words. This format signals an importance of the word to the reader thus exaggerating its message.

For the wary reader who needs more convincing methods than just changing the text of the story, blatant warnings of truthfulness inevitably show up because Twain

knows his audience will not believe the exaggeration. It is not that he wants to convince the reader to accept the lie, but it is almost as if he wants to make sure the audience does not accept it by imposing an obvious marker of “truth” that actually signals the lie. An example of this technique comes when Twain presents “The Killing of Julius Caesar ‘Localized’” (1864). Right after the title is a subtitle in parentheses which assures readers, “Being the only true and reliable account ever published, and taken from the Roman ‘Daily Evening Fasces,’ of the date of that tremendous occurrence” (102). As in the previous examples, Twain uses words like “true” and “reliable” to guarantee the authority of the text to the readers, all the while actually highlighting the improbability of it and warning readers of the lie. In “The Killing of Julius Caesar” Twain displays another of his favorite techniques for lying: framing his story. He is able to get away with the absurdities and blame it on the “source” rather than his imagination. In “Julius Caesar” the source is the Roman “Daily Evening Fasces,” not Mark Twain, but Twain doesn’t mind putting himself in the joke as well like in the earlier piece “The Only True and Reliable Account of The Great Prize Fight” (1863). Twain uses the same reassurance as in “The Killing of Julius Caesar,” but this time the narrator, Twain, is duped by his source just as the readers are duped by Twain. Readers are to believe that a prize fight was held between “His Excellency Gov. Stanford and Hon. F. F. Low, Governor Elect of California” (49) even though it is all a joke played on Twain by his source. Frames like these in Twain’s early works help him stay distanced from the lie and thus allows the audience to accept more of the absurdities.

Scholars see a direct connection between Twain’s genre of Western humor and Twain’s use of devices like framing in early works. In *Mark Twain and Southwestern*

*Humor*, Kenneth Lynn observes, “First and foremost, he embellished the anecdote with a ‘frame,’ in which we are introduced to the narrator, ‘Mark Twain.’” (146). When discussing the Jim Smiley story of “The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calveras County” (1865), Lynn also concludes that “the ‘frame’ is a drama of upset expectations, and so is the story proper” (146). In his examination of Twain’s framing technique, Lynn concludes Twain’s “innocence, in sum, was a mask, and the audience’s awareness of the fact was a part of the joke” (148). In *Mark Twain*, John C. Gerber also looks at the framing of “The Celebrated Jumping Frog” and concludes, “In centering his story on his narrators rather than on the jumping contest, Twain turns the old joke into a comic character study. He focuses, as he later said all humorists should do, on the manner of telling rather than on the matter of what is told” (18). Yet, besides clinging to humor of a Western tradition, Twain gains a distance by framing that makes his exaggerations within the frame more believable, or at least acceptable to the reader.

Some readers find Twain’s exaggerations so believable they accept them as truth without even questioning the tale. These exaggerations usually come in the form of a hoax and almost always reach grotesque proportions. One of the earliest grotesque examples of exaggeration is in the hoax “Petrified Man” (1862). Like Twain’s previous satire of a fellow newspaperman in “‘Local’ Resolves to Commit Suicide,” “Petrified Man” was supposed to expose the hypocrisy and bad character of a public official, Justice Sewell. Twain also admits later in “A Couple of Sad Experiences” (1870) that he was poking fun at the recent fascination with petrified remains because he thought “The mania was becoming a little ridiculous” (389). Readers find in this exaggeration much more than a hoax highlighting the ridiculous fad, it is a grotesque exaggeration stressing

the salient, nasty traits of the Justice and resulting in a grotesque “painting” of the imagined event. The subject of the work is a petrified man whose body was found frozen forever in a rather rude gesture. Twain uses the contrast of an exaggerated and elevated tone with a grave but ridiculous discussion of how to dispose of the petrified man: “The opinion expressed by his Honor that such a course would be little less than sacrilege, was eminently just and proper. Everybody goes to see the stone man, as many as three hundred having visited the hardened creature during the past five or six weeks” (19). Twain mocks the newspaper genre with this seemingly real description of a ludicrous event; he also insults Judge Sewell’s intelligence and competence as a leader by making him the nub of the joke. The body of the petrified man is described as in a “sitting posture, and leaning against a huge mass of croppings; the attitude was pensive, the right thumb resting against the side of the nose; the left thumb partially supported the chin, the forefinger pressing the inner corner of the left eye and drawing it partly open; the right eye was closed, and the fingers of the right hand spread apart” (19). This series of statements separated by semicolons adds description on description of the petrified man. The account is given piece by piece to exaggerate, and with each piece of the puzzle the readers realize how ridiculous a position the man is in. These subtleties were all part of Twain’s hoax which he later confessed did not go as planned. He admits in “A Couple of Sad Experiences,” “From beginning to end the ‘Petrified Man’ squib was a string of roaring absurdities, albeit they were told with an unfair pretence of truth that even imposed upon me to some extent, and I was in some danger of believing in my own fraud. But I really had no desire to deceive anybody, and no expectation of doing it” (391). Twain bemoans many of his failed attempts at hoaxes saying that often the reader

“tranquilly turns up his nose” at the “moral” and does not read the “nub” contained in the last paragraph, the most important paragraph (389). Therefore, in the end, the reader is confused and tricked by the hoax “when the honest intent was to add to either his knowledge or his wisdom” (389). The genre of newspaper article aids in the hoax of this piece since readers would first assume the article in the newspaper was true. This adds to the elevation of tone and the elevation of surprise when and if the reader realizes the ruse.

Twain uses his genre and exaggeration again in “A Bloody Massacre Near Carson” (1863), a mock newspaper article reporting the ghastly murder of a family. By using the combination of literary opposites and human extremes, Twain demonstrates what Molly Boyd classifies as the most important element of southern grotesque literature in *The Companion to Southern Literature*:

The crucial element in defining the grotesque, however, is the juxtaposition or fusion of contrasting, paradoxical, and incompatible elements such as an impossible or horrific event narrated matter-of-factly and with great detail, often provoking a humorous response [...] This violent and ambivalent clash of opposites in the grotesque evokes a powerfully emotional response in readers. (321)

Boyd classifies Twain among what John Ruskin calls the “high” grotesque which “reveals man’s tragic and imperfect nature, causing a reaction of horror, anger, or awe at the human condition” (322). “A Bloody Massacre Near Carson” is an example of this paradoxical account in which a gruesome murder scene is described in perfect detail but hardly any emotion. The hoax is meant to accuse perpetrators in a recent water scandal and ends with the comment that “We hope the fearful massacre detailed above may prove the saddest result of their [the corrupt company’s] silence” (58). When discussing it in “A Couple of Sad Experiences,” Twain called this hoax a “scathing satire” on the dividend-cooking system (392). Twain’s tone while describing the massacre is

sardonically even: “About ten o’clock on Monday evening Hopkins dashed into Carson on horseback, with this throat cut from ear to ear, and bearing in his hand a reeking scalp from which the warm, smoking blood was still dripping, and fell in a dying condition in front of the Magnolia saloon” (57). The cool even tone with which Twain approaches his subject demonstrates Boyd’s definition of one of the most crucial elements of the grotesque, and, also, it may be why so many people were tricked by the hoax.

Twain later unveiled the clues that were supposed to give the hoax away in “A Couple of Sad Experiences” but concedes that, “Ah, it was a deep, deep satire, and most ingeniously contrived. But I made the horrible details so carefully and conscientiously interesting that the public simply devoured them greedily, and wholly overlooked the following distinctly stated facts, to wit” (393). After watching a man read the massacre hoax, Twain keenly analyzes his audience, concluding that these people wanted to read the grotesque realism and refused to get to the nub of the joke: “He never got down to where the satire part of it began. Nobody ever did. They found the thrilling particulars sufficient. To drop in with a poor little moral at the fag-end of such a gorgeous massacre, was to follow the expiring sun with a candle and hope to attract the world’s attention to it” (394). So, Twain gave his audience the blood and gore of the West knowing that this was what they wanted to read, but he was frustrated that they failed to glean the truth from the lies. Twain observes that grotesque nature of humans, stating of the massacre hoax “we would never read the dull explanatory surroundings of marvelously exciting things when we have no occasion to suppose that some irresponsible scribbler is trying to defraud us; we skip all that, and hasten to revel in the blood-curdling particulars and be happy” (394). Readers “revel” in these grotesque descriptions, but discerning readers

will also understand the lesson behind the blood. Twain wrote the “deep satire” as an exaggeration of the emotional harm done to those swindled by the corrupt water company. The audiences’ concern for the man and his family in the story produces concern for real families who have been affected by the scam. Readers also evaluate their own morals and consider the consequences behind their actions toward others like the man in the story.

*San Francisco: 1864-1872*

On May 29, 1864, Twain moved to San Francisco to be a reporter for the San Francisco *Morning Call*. He spent just a few short years here before traveling to the Sandwich Islands and even the Holy Land; however, in the short years in California Twain managed to make quite a stir with several key exaggerative pieces. In “Answers to Correspondents” Twain’s overuse of italics dominates many of his answers to correspondences, but does not demolish these responses’ meanings. In fact, the italics heighten the comedy when at last the reader gets to the end of the tale. For example, in his first entry, an answer to “Discarded Lover,” most sentences have at least one italicized word, and Twain hardly goes three sentences without emphasis through italics. He tells the scorned lover:

The *intention* and not the *act* constitutes crime—in other words, constitutes the *deed* [...] If you discharge a pistol *accidentally*, and kill a man, you can go free, for you have done no murder—but if you try to kill a man, and manifestly *intend* to kill him, but fail utterly to do it, the law still holds that the *intention* constituted the crime and you are guilty of murder. (121)

The emphasis on certain words reminds readers of these words' importance but, in turn, gives the words a mock-emphasis and sets the reader up to be deceived. After continuing in this fashion for several building points, Twain then concludes:

Now according to this view of the case, Jones married a *spinster*, who was a *widow* at the same time and another man's *wife* at the same time, and yet who had no *husband* and *never had one*, and never had any *intention* of getting married, and therefore, of course, *never had* been married; and by the same seasoning you are a *bachelor*, because you have never been any one's *husband*, and a *married man* because you have a wife living, and to all intents and purposed a *widower*, because you have been deprived of that wife, and a consummate *ass* for going off to Benicia in the first place, while things were so mixed. (122)

The rising tension climaxes as the last italicized word hits home. The "Discarded Lover" was an "ass" all along and Twain has strung the reader along his twisted road to get there. He has made it a point to give an elevated tone by italicizing key words and also by using the "high" word "Ergo" as much as needed. Then, when the reader is least expecting it, Twain places the disparaging but no less funny insult of calling the man an "ass" among such serious terms as "husband" and "widower." The elevated language continues as Twain admits he has got himself "so tangled up in the intricacies of this extraordinary case that I shall have to give up any further attempt to advise you" (122). And so the "extraordinary case" is abandoned and the reader is left with the impression that among all the many phrases used to describe him, the inquirer was an "ass." Just as in "A Gallant Fireman" the italics in the passage help to create the incongruous tone that leads to a satisfying laugh.

Twain's construction of tone through textual style does not stop with italics but instead, like Gerber observed, he uses many other antics like capitalization and, even parenthetical expressions. Gary Scharnhorst, in "Notes: Mark Twain's Imbroglio with

the San Francisco Police: Three Lost Texts,” uncovered an excellent example of Twain’s textual exaggerations during the California years. The piece began as a letter from Twain to the Virginia *Enterprise*, and grew into a great burlesque through exaggeration with textual styles. Twain describes the antics of the Chief of Police, Chief Burke, to be like those of a dog chasing his tail. The letter, in its original state, was criticized for its off-handed suggestion that Chief Burke had a mistress.

The letter, scandalous as it was in its original form, transformed under Twain’s pen when he later decided to give “Explanation of A Mysterious Sentence” from the original published article. He asked the editors to “Please publish it again, and put in the parentheses where I have marked them, so that people who read with wretched carelessness may know to a dead moral certainty when I am referring to Chief Burke, and also know to an equally dead moral certainty when I am referring to the dog” (688). And so the letter was published again, this time with parenthetical expressions explaining “(the dog, not the Chief)” and “(the Chief, not the dog)” and so forth. The end product exaggerates each point by letting the reader know with “dead moral certainty” to which the author is referring, but with the “certainty” comes the added insinuation that it is in fact the opposite. Twain assures his editors, “I think that even the pupils of the Asylum at Stockton can understand that paragraph now. But in its original state, and minus the explanatory parentheses, there were people with sufficiently gorgeous imaginations to gather from it that it contained an intimation that Chief Burke kept a mistress!” (689). Despite Twain’s assurance, the exaggerations add to the confusion and highlight the absurdity of the exercise all for the sake of clarification. The completed letter reads:

I want to compliment Chief Burke—I do honestly. But I can’t find anything to compliment him about. He is always rushing furiously

around, like a dog after his own tail—and with the same general result, it seems to me; if he (the dog, not the Chief,) catches it, it don't amount to anything, after all the fuss; and if he (the dog, not the Chief,) don't catch it it don't make any difference, because he (the dog, not the Chief,) didn't want it anyhow; he (the dog, not the Chief,) only wanted the exercise, and the happiness of 'showing off' before his (the dog's, not the Chief's,) mistress and the other young ladies. But it the Chief (not the dog,) would only do something praiseworthy, I would be the first and the most earnest and cordial to give him (the Chief, not the dog,) the credit due. I would sling him (the Chief, not the dog,) a compliment that would knock him down. I mean that it would be such a first-class compliment that it might surprise him (the Chief, not the dog,) to that extent as coming from me. (687-688)

And so in its final form the piece becomes an exaggerated attack on the Chief. Even in the clarification of what Twain called “so dire a misconstruction upon that sentence” (689), readers have to wonder if the exaggeration is only exacerbating the point. If you read it for the emphasis, the parenthetical expression still suggests that the Chief *has* a mistress; Twain is just talking about the dog's mistress instead. When Twain commented on the whole debacle, he joked, “I was genuinely sorry, but the idea was so unspeakably funny that I had to laugh a little, in spite of my tears” (689). Even Twain's comic comment on the exaggeration proves the contrast of feeling between laughter and tears. Twain seems to realize the consequences of such exaggeration, but the reward of the joke and the satisfaction of conveying the silliness of social expectations to his readers makes the risk worth taking. As a journalist, Twain was in a precarious position which demanded he respect his superiors, like Chief Burke, in print. He obviously did not respect Chief Burke and was offended that he had to “correct” the piece in the first place. Twain's frustration led to an overcorrected piece dripping with insincerity and sarcasm and resulting in a study of human hypocrisy. The exaggerated corrections cause readers to evaluate society's expectations of political figures. As they read the sarcastic

explanation of Chief Burke, readers wonder what other lengths are taken in the press to assure that political figures remain respected. Also, as mentioned previously, Twain's correction does not necessarily absolve Burke of the accusation. Readers may never know the truth, but they do learn they may not be able to trust the press.

Throughout the varied examples of textual style Twain employed during his early career as a journalist, although many italicized and emphasized words do allude to the oral language behind them, Twain creates exaggerations that either confirm or confuse the audience. In the more frequent of the two, confusing the audience with tone, Twain elevates the tone through exaggeration to contrast the seriousness with the dullness of an event. In the last example from the *Examiner*, Twain uses an even tone contrasted with "clarification" statements that offset the evenness into an absurd rollercoaster of ridicule.

An example of the lighthearted, comedic hoax is "A Touching Story of George Washington's Boyhood" (1864). Not only does Twain string along readers for a ridiculous introduction to a forgotten story, he also uses wild capitalization to heighten the tone. Near the end of this four-page story, Twain remembers that he had two objects: one was to console and reconcile people who have musical talent and those who think they do "and the other was to introduce an admirable story about Little George Washington, who could Not Lie, and the Cherry Tree—or the Apple Tree, I have forgotten now, which, although it was told me only yesterday. And writing such a long and elaborate introductory has caused me to forget the story itself; but it was very touching" (100-101). And so the boat was built and the joke made. Readers have to laugh at their frustration with not getting a story, only an elaborate introduction. Twain has combined an inappropriate tone with a false pretense of a real story to create a

comedic exaggeration. Although “George Washington’s Boyhood” lacks a biting political or moral aim, readers find few of Twain’s hoaxes that do not reveal some truth through the lie. However, through the simple practice of literary exaggeration and hoax Twain developed a method of grotesque exaggeration far more moving and sometimes even funnier than these light-hearted examples.

In *Mark Twain and Southwestern Humor* Kenneth Lynn states, “Caricatures, puns, burlesques, hoaxes, and editorial badinage were the stock-in-trade of Washoe journalism at the time, and Mark Twain of the *Enterprise* tried them all” (145). Indeed Twain, in his early works, tried many techniques and styles, but he frequently used tone, font, and frames not because of the genre’s restriction but because these techniques allowed Twain to exaggerate to full capacity when needed in order to show his audience some enduring truth through laughter or shock. Compared to his actual newspaper writings, Twain’s book about his experiences while engaged in the journalism of the West, *Roughing It*, demands even more of the readers’ attention and causes even more speculation about the truth of the stories. In fact, while tracking Twain’s artistic endeavors in *The Development of a Writer*, Henry Nash Smith states that the story of *Roughing It* “threatens to get out of hand [...] by turning into wild slapstick” (67). It was through his early journalism days actually in the West, Twain learned to contain his wild exaggerations just enough to “threaten” readers of *Roughing It* without deceiving them. The wild slapstick is in contrast with the stark reality of Twain’s adventures, as Hamlin Hill insists, “no matter how haphazardly Mark Twain put his manuscript together, fortuitously snatching at segments from his own earlier journalism and threading them onto an autobiographical narrative thread, a serious undertone echoes beneath the

rollicking humor of *Roughing It*” (6). As in the earlier works discussed in this chapter, *Roughing It* contains complex layering of “serious” truths and “rollicking” jokes.

Because deadpan journalistic style and Western humor birthed Twain as a writer, he continued to achieve the serious undertone of truth through exaggeration, even when his days as a printer’s devil in Hannibal and traveling journalist in Nevada and California were but memories of his youth.

## CHAPTER THREE

### “A Conundrum Worth Investigating”: Human Nature’s Extremes Exaggerated in *Roughing It*

*Roughing It* (1872) has been praised and criticized for its seemingly haphazard organization and ever-wandering narration, both qualities of which it is safe to assume Twain was fully aware. In fact, Twain’s very definition of the art of American humor is “to string incongruities and absurdities together in a wandering and sometimes purposeless way, and seem innocently unaware that they are absurdities” (“How to Tell a Story” 203). Twain’s method of humor might look something like the natives he encounters in Chapter 67 of *Roughing It*. In this scene, Twain comes upon a missionary family desperate to tame the wild natives who show up to church naked. Therefore, the missionaries give out clothes to the natives who proceed to put together some of the wildest outfits. One girl wears “simply the sleeves of a bright calico dress tied around her waist and the rest of the garment dragging behind like a peacock’s tail off duty,” and a man comes “simply gotten up in a fiery neck-tie and a striped vest” (461). Unlike the natives found on the Sandwich Islands of *Roughing It*, Twain certainly was aware of the absurdities assembled in the novel; yet, Twain’s writing in *Roughing It* mirrors the clothing of the natives because it creates an odd fashion of literature that is “irresistibly grotesque” (461). Like the natives confused about the custom of wearing clothing, *Roughing It* appears absurd at times and obscene at others—certainly not meant for high society. And when the congregation began swapping clothes during the service, it “produced some irresistibly grotesque effects in the course of re-dressing, there was

nothing for it but to cut the thing short with the benediction and dismiss the fantastic assemblage” (461). In the same way the natives’ ridiculous wardrobes produced “irresistibly grotesque effects” so Twain’s composition of varied and absurd stories in *Roughing It* produces an alluring grotesque product that leaves the readers hardly focused on anything but the “fantastic assemblage.” Despite the book’s “grotesque” appearance, readers cannot resist the effects. Twain captivates audiences with each grotesque description or wild adventure, but he (judging by his many writings on the art of storytelling), unlike the natives in this passage, was wholly *conscious* of all absurdity in the book’s appearance and reveled in the art of exaggeration throughout the novel, making up wild wardrobes to impress and intrigue readers.

*Roughing It* recounts Twain’s career as a journalist in the Western territories and Hawaii. Twain’s travels and experiences like the one with missionaries and natives, both before and after a trip to the Sandwich Islands, provide the chronology of *Roughing It*, but Twain’s imagination and exaggeration provide its plotline. These “irresistibly grotesque” happenings were studied by Twain while visiting the Sandwich Islands in 1866 as a correspondent for the *Sacramento Union*. After returning to San Francisco in August, Twain gave his first lecture which told of his trip to the Islands and continued for a lecture tour until the end of the year. Twain’s traveling bug did not stop and before the end of 1866 he was aboard the *America* crossing Central America. In 1867, after a return tour of the states complete with lectures and many published writings and a failed attempt to publish his Sandwich Island letters, Twain traveled on the *Quaker City* to Europe and the Holy Land. It was on this trip that Twain met Charles Jervis Langdon who showed him a picture of his sister, Olivia whom Twain would eventually marry. Upon returning

to the states in November, Twain received book offers and began writing *Innocents Abroad* which would be published in 1869.<sup>1</sup> In 1870, after overcoming some Langdon familial objections, Twain married Livy in Elmira. In the same year, Twain signed a contract with *Galaxy* to supply a monthly humorous column, “Memoranda.” While continuing to write for the *Galaxy*, he finally worked on a Western book, recalling his adventures in Nevada and California seemingly so long ago and so far away from even his Sandwich Island tour.

About four years after leaving the West Twain faced his adventures there once again; after traveling across the Americas, Europe, and the Holy Land, he ended up right back in Washoe. Not only had Twain seen much more of the world by the time he sat down to write *Roughing It*, he had also changed from vagabond bachelor to husband of a wealthy lady from an urbane family. In fact, in his article “Mark Twain’s *Roughing It*: The End of the American Dream,” Hamlin Hill insists that “*Roughing It* is Mark Twain’s renunciation of his footloose bachelorhood, his rejection of that myth of the frontier West that obsessed the American imagination in the nineteenth century, his autopsy of the American Dream, and his acceptance of those Eastern values for which the Langdon family so formidably stood as symbols” (9). Although Hill makes an intriguing point judging from the chronology of events in Twain’s life around the writing of *Roughing It*, many see *Roughing It* as a celebration, not a degradation, of the frontier life. In painting the picture of the West so vividly for readers, Twain leaves the impression that he is not

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<sup>1</sup> Although Twain published *Innocents Abroad* before *Roughing It*, readers find it helpful to study *Roughing It* in succession with his Early newspaper writings since the events of *Roughing It* took place during the Nevada and California years and were mostly written around that time. While there are many exaggerations to examine in the interim works, *Roughing It* presents readers with abundant examples of Twain’s evolving style and represents middle ground between his earliest work and perhaps his most pivotal work, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. In *Mark Twain*, Gerber admits that while *Roughing It* “resembles” *Innocents Abroad* “it differs significantly in the handling of point of view and in its overall coherence and stability. In both of these regards, *Roughing It* is a superior literary achievement” (44).

throwing away the memories but rather indulging in them. Plus, in Harriet Elinor Smith's modern introduction to *Roughing It*, Twain's account rings so true that she argues it has "become part of all serious study of American culture" and "has played a major role in shaping the myth of the "wild West" (xxvii) which Hill suggests Twain was rejecting (9). No matter if he was rejecting or celebrating the West, Twain was teaching readers the culture of the West. Because of the harsh and gruesome contents of *Roughing It*, the book was especially intriguing and most likely disturbing to many of its contemporary readers. Kenneth Lynn, with the support of the testimonies of William Dean Howells and H. H. Boyesen, states, "women in post-Civil War America came to compose an enormous bloc of the reading population to whom book publishers and magazines of national circulation appealed. How was it possible to talk about eyeball-gougers to this audience? And if it was not possible to do so, how could one be honest about the West?" (164-165). Lynn exposes the difficult situation Twain encountered with writing for a specific audience without sacrificing his content, but offers a solution by asserting, "What made Twain's unflinching honesty—one might say compulsive honesty—about the hardness of life on the Western frontier acceptable to a national audience was the fact that his comic spotlight was focused not so much on the violence and the dangers of the West as on his narrator's reactions to these things" (166).

Likewise, John Gerber, in "Mark Twain's Use of the Comic Pose," also attributes

Twain's grotesque exaggerations to the use of the narrator "Mark Twain." Gerber says:

Fundamentally, there are two ways to confront life falsely. Either one can pretend that life is more agreeable to the spirit and more amenable to the will than it really is, or one can pretend that it is less so. One can exaggerate his superiority to human affairs or his inferiority to them. As the narrator 'Mark Twain,' Twain did both. He pretended undue superiority, for example, in posing as the Gentleman, the Sentimentalist,

the Instructor, and the Moralist; he assumed undue inferiority in posing as the Sufferer, the Simpleton, and the Tenderfoot. (297)

While Lynn and Gerber expose the uses of “Twain” the narrator, both imply that Twain needed a buffer between him and his audience. Gerber goes on to state, “With the pose inserted between himself and the human scene, however, Twain could be more equable, for in effect his position became that of a spectator rather than that of a participant” (303). But, as readers see in his earlier works, too, Twain was not afraid to offend and did not sacrifice truth for manners. Whether readers prefer “Mark Twain” the narrator or Mark Twain the “narrator” to tell the tale, the tale is still wrought with excessive emotion and grotesque exaggerations. Twain, however, exaggerates to create a truth worth experiencing, a truth that affects the reader deeply in a way no other could, a truth about a land many would never see or know except in the rambling reminiscences of a writer. Lynn confesses, “Remembering his fascination with Old World symbols of death, one might even say that Twain’s narrator seems eager to talk of these harsh things, that the violence of the frontier has been deliberately sought out by this young man” (165). And so Twain discussed and described the harsh scenery, animals, and people of the West which he had traveled in and loved for almost a decade not as a narrative “pose,” but as the Gentleman and Simpleton that he was.

Contemporary reviewers certainly did not see Twain’s narrator as a contrived medium through which to lie; from anonymous reviewers to the famous William Dean Howells, they agreed that Twain’s *Roughing It* was wildly truthful and of great moral value. While the contemporary readers were somewhat shocked at the contents of *Roughing It*, many caught on to (and perhaps already expected) Twain’s exaggeration. Yet, even these reviews noted the veracity of the book and the enjoyment that comes

from reading it. An Unsigned Review in *Overland Monthly* says, “The writer has managed (as he often does) to convey an accurate and graphic picture, while apparently indulging—or rather rioting—in the drollest and most fantastic exaggeration” (Anderson 50). Even through “fantastic exaggeration” this reader sees the truth in an “accurate and graphic” form. He even goes as far as to compare Twain with others, saying “Artemus Ward, Doesticks, and Orpheus C. Kerr, who have been the favorite purveyors of mirth for the Eastern people, were timid navigators, who hugged the shore of plausibility, and would have trembled at the thought of launching out into the mid-ocean of wild, preposterous invention and sublime exaggeration, as Mark Twain does” (51). Twain dove into the “wild, preposterous” realm that other authors timidly observed. This reviewer felt the utmost respect and awe for Twain’s exaggerations which go beyond his contemporaries’. Neither duped by nor totally convinced of the exaggerations, the reviewer instead noticed the sublime quality of a technique so mastered that one can only marvel at it.

The contemporary reviewers use both extremes of “sublime” and “grotesque” to describe the exaggerations of Twain in *Roughing It*. Above, readers saw the unsigned reviewer dub Twain’s exaggerations “sublime” while Howells’s description of the exaggerations in his review in *The Atlantic* says, “The grotesque exaggeration and broad irony with which the life is described are conjecturably the truest colors that could have been used, for all existence there must have looked like an extravagant joke, the humor of which was only deepened by its nether-side of tragedy” (par. 1). Even though Howells calls the exaggerations “grotesque” and the unsigned reviewer calls them “sublime,” both reviewers agree that the truth of the descriptions through exaggeration is clear. Howells

understands Twain's juxtaposition of humor and tragedy and concludes that this contrast is but the "truest colors" that could have been used to describe the West. Howells goes on to explain "everything far-fetched or near at hand is interwoven and yet the complex is a sort of 'harmony of colors' which is not less than triumphant" (par. 2). Howells's description of the "harmony of colors" suggests a contrast between the light and dark which pervades *Roughing It*. Howells attests these contrasts "appear in kaleidoscopic succession" once more alluding to the mingling of colors and shapes. Perhaps George Ripley's review in the New York *Tribune* says it best by describing *Roughing It* as "a tissue of vagabond adventures in a mingled yarn of fancy and fact" (par. 1). By placing two extremes side by side, Twain provides an exaggeration of each. The "mingled yarn" becomes a unique tapestry that is no less true for its exaggerations because of their combination in the final product.

Howells commends Twain's use of "grotesque exaggeration" to adequately portray the American West: "A thousand anecdotes, relevant and irrelevant, embroider the work; excursions and digressions of all kinds are the very woof of it, as it were; everything far-fetched or near at hand is interwoven, and yet the complex is a sort of 'harmony of colors' which is not less than triumphant" (par. 2). Perhaps the technique of exaggeration was Twain's attempt to be humorous, or, at times, perhaps these exaggerations reveal a truth that could not be portrayed in normal proportions. The lies of exaggeration often show truths of human emotion's extremes. R.G. Collins observes that "the seriousness of concern of a comic writer is the close correlation that he draws between the extravagant emotion that produces joy and that which produces terror" (11). Collins' definition brings back the thought of the sublime: an exaggeration that brings

about both awe and fright. Furthermore, Collins confirms, the writer “uses shock as a special device, the humor of exaggeration as a control, to convey a serious truth” (12). Twain’s *Roughing It* is an exquisite example of controlled exaggerations which produces truth. The truth formed by Twain in *Roughing It* through his grotesque exaggerations is one of human nature’s hypocrisy. By exaggerating both good and bad, Twain’s grotesque realism teaches readers of their own inconsistent identity which vacillates somewhere between the extremes good and evil.

In many of his works both before and after *Roughing It*, Twain uses ugly exaggerations and untruthful depictions of characters, situations, and landscapes in desperate attempts to lead his readers to an ultimate truth, usually about the human race. Howells noticed the technique of exaggeration used by his contemporary to lead readers to some new perspective on the issue addressed. Through the specific “lie” of grotesque exaggeration, Twain presents the truth that no other words could describe. In a way, this exaggeration goes back to the early, aesthetic definition of “grotesque” in which an artist uses distortion to emphasize salient features in his subject. Twain’s tendency, especially in his later works, to paint the ugly side of humanity did not go unnoticed, even in his time. Dreiser says:

However, it is not this particular Rabelaisian extension of Twain’s classic gift for paradox and exaggeration and horseplay in the field of humor, quite rampant in his day (Bill Nye, Petroleum V. Nasby, Josh Billings), but rather his much more publicly subdued—and I may add, frustrated—gift as well as mood for dark and devastating, and at the same time quite tender and sorrowing, meditation on the meaning or absence of it in life, plus a force and clarity of realistic presentation and criticism which has arrested me as it has many another. (616)

Twain’s predilection for the ugly was, as Dreiser insists, more than just a comic device.

Twain was interested in painting a full picture of humanity, one that would help his

readers see the hypocrisy of human nature, a darker but no less real side of humanity that most writers of his genre did not touch. Of Twain's scenes set in silver mining camps Dreiser writes, "True, belly-shaking caricature plays over a cold sense of fact, yet the tragedy of the silver-boom town is as apparent as its comedy and takes permanent and accurate shape for the benefit, I hope, of an inquisitive posterity" (623). What caught Dreiser's attention is what turns Twain's exaggerations from stretches of the truth to grotesque realism for "inquisitive posterity." While he mocks the rough and rowdy crowd of silver mining towns, Twain also depicts a cold reality through the desperate, lonely characters he describes. After laughing at the lonely men in Chapter 57 who pay to kiss children and rally to see a woman, readers are left to contemplate how life really was for these men. Twain exaggerates their condition to enlighten his readers of the lonely life in the West.

The first evidence of Twain's conscious art of exaggeration in *Roughing It* appears in the "Prefatory" to the book. He begins with a sort of warning to the reader that this is "merely a personal narrative, and not a pretentious history or a philosophical dissertation." Immediately after this statement, Twain concedes that there is "information in the volume"; in other words, he is not just stringing us along. He goes on to say, "Yes, take it all around, there is quite a good deal of information in the book. I regret this very much; but really it could not be helped: information appears to stew out of me naturally, like the precious ottar of roses out of the otter." His playful "regret" assures readers that he knew all along the precious jewels of information "stewing" out of him. As if he must explain further, the preface ends with a rationalization of the method: "The more I caulk up the sources, and the tighter I get, the more I leak wisdom.

Therefore, I can only claim indulgence at the hands of the reader, not justification.” Of course readers must take his wisdom with a grain of salt, but Twain has warned them of the “indulgence” of the book. This indulgence is the very essence of *Roughing It*. The indulgence of the author creates stories grossly exaggerated and yet greatly educational. In order for Twain to “leak wisdom” that wisdom must be “caulked up” and “tightened” out of him by exaggeration. This exaggeration causes “the broad exposure of the radical skepticism to which Mark Twain’s humor ultimately brings the reader” which James Cox observes in *Mark Twain: The Fate of Humor* (103). Readers are left wondering what is real in *Roughing It* and what is only roughly the truth.

Twain’s indulgence through *Roughing It* is stated again at the end of the book. In the last paragraph of the long journey Twain says, “Thus, after seven years of vicissitudes, ended a ‘pleasure trip’ to the silver mines of Nevada which had originally been intended to occupy only three months. However, I usually miss my calculations further than that” (542). And thus readers’ “pleasure trips’ through Twain’s world of the West also ends a bit longer than intended. Twain leaves readers a concluding statement with which to analyze the whole book. He tells readers that he usually misses his calculations. So, readers can assume that some of the calculated stories they have just read may not be completely accurate. However, the exaggerated calculations due to indulgence of the author that appear throughout *Roughing It* reveal the salient features of human nature and encourage readers to analyze such absurdities by comparing them to “real” life and discovering a hidden truth through the exaggeration.

Twain assures the reader that if he “thinks he is done, now, and that this book has no moral to it, he is in error” (542) and proceeds to tell the reader the “moral” which is

that if you are “no account” you should travel away from home in order to become “a blessing to your friends by ceasing to be a nuisance to them—if the people you go among suffer by the operation” (542). And so here is the understated moral of the previous five hundred and forty one pages of exaggerated adventures. At the end of such a laborious book, Twain makes yet another understatement that leaves the reader questioning the tone and assuming the tone is incongruous with the sentiment. In fact, Twain is well aware that there are many morals within the bulk of the book that readers will not be able to resist. By telling the reader a very insignificant but true moral of the book, Twain shocks the readers into saying, “Ah, that is not the only moral of this book!” and challenges readers to search for more.

Despite the humor at the beginning and the end of *Roughing It*, the work is full of meticulously crafted lessons. Twain attempts to allow the reader to “see” what he saw and “believe” what he believed while gallivanting in the wild West. In a way, Twain’s art accomplishes the same experience for readers that Twain enjoyed upon seeing the “eternal snow” on the mountaintops of the Rockies. He says, “Truly, ‘seeing is believing’—and many a man lives a long life through, *thinking* he believes certain universally received and well established things, and yet never suspects that if he were confronted by those things once, he would discover that he did not *really* believe them before, but only thought he believed them” (78). Now, obviously the readers of *Roughing It* are not “seeing” the Rocky Mountains, or the silver mines, or volcanoes; however, Twain knew some in his audience might never get to see these wonders, and so he painted an exaggerated picture of the scenery to over-compensate and, hopefully, pull those readers who would never see into belief.

As he begins the novel, Twain lets the audience know just how jealous he is of his brother who landed a job out West as Secretary of Nevada Territory. He bemoans, “I was young and ignorant, and I envied my brother. I coveted his distinction and his financial splendor, but particularly and especially the long, strange journey he was going to make, and the curious new world he was going to explore” (1). Then Twain continues:

Pretty soon he would be hundreds and hundreds of miles away on the great plains and deserts, and among the mountains of the Far West, and would see buffaloes and Indians, and prairie dogs, and antelopes, and have all kinds of adventures, and maybe get hanged or scalped, and have ever such a fine time, and write home and tell us all about it, and be a hero. (2)

The reader is confused at the juxtaposition of having “ever such a fine time” with being “hanged or scalped.” As seen in his early works written in strict newspaper tone, Twain begins *Roughing It* with a ridiculous discussion of the dangers of the West coupled with his complete jealousy of his brother for getting to go. Even in the narrator, readers see evidence of the duality of human nature. Humans can feel jealousy for something completely dangerous, for something they may or may not even want to have part in. Throughout the novel readers are convinced of the narrator’s veracity because of his constant wavering, his love and hate of the same things, and his humanness.

The next thing readers know their fair narrator is on his way to Carson City as his brother’s personal secretary, and, as the brothers pay for an overland coach to Carson City, they learn that each is only allowed twenty-five pounds of baggage. So, like he does in his work as well, Twain tries to stuff as much content as he can into the limited space. He and his brother pack a six pound unabridged dictionary “for we did not know—poor innocents—that such things could be bought in San Francisco on one day and received in Carson City the next” (4-5). Not only does this specific item exaggerate

the brothers' naivety, Hamlin Hill concludes, "Importantly, one of the essential items of baggage which accompanies the narrator on his trip West is a six-pound unabridged dictionary, as if he senses instinctively that the world his is approaching is one in which he cannot communicate" (11). Rather than see the six-pound dictionary as a translator to the West readers could see this excess of words as a translator *of* the West. In other words, Twain must use an excess of elaborate and exaggerated tales in order to communicate the adventures to his audience.

By the Chapter 3 readers have been introduced to the contrasting proportions and vacillating tones of Mark Twain. He gives an interesting picture of his proportions when describing sagebrush: "If the reader can imagine a gnarled and venerable live oak tree reduced to a little shrub two feet high, with its rough bark, its foliage, its twisted boughs, all complete, he can picture the 'sage-brush' exactly" (14). Twain takes a recognizable object and proportions it to an understatement for the reader to grasp. Twain sometimes even lays on the ground "with my face under a sage-brush, and entertained myself with fancying that the gnats among its foliage were Lilliputian birds, and that the ants marching and countermarching about its base were Lilliputian flocks and herds, and myself some vast loafer from Brobdingnag waiting to catch a little citizen and eat him" (14). And so Twain paints a picture of himself in proportion to the content of *Roughing It* in this short, imaginative passage. Not only is Twain exaggerated in contrast with the sagebrush, his allusion to *Gulliver's Travels* adds depth to the description by bringing to mind a book that is likewise founded on exaggeration, but for a more satirical point. In Max Eastman's discussion of understatement, Twain's allusion to *Gulliver's Travels*' Lilliputians is illuminated:

Just as we can be overwhelmed with too much of a thing, so we can be tantalized with too little. As we have seen, the overwhelming when performed in fun creates a jovial and boisterous laughter. The tantalizing gives a mischievous or droll effect. We call it understatement, but only because there is no word to describe a not-enoughness in more general terms. Statements are one kind of thing, but anything whatever that does not measure up to some accepted standard of size, degree, quantity or intensity, can be the cause of laughter. Charlie Chaplin's mustache may be described as an understatement in this sense, just as his shoes are an exaggeration. Gargantuans are an overstatement and Lilliputians an understatement of a man. (179)

Some tales in the book are like Rabelais' Gargantuans, exaggerations that amaze readers with their absurdity and improbability; and some are like Gulliver's Lilliputians intriguing readers with their smaller size. Whether with exaggeration or understatement, many passages revert back to the even-toned newspaper voice of Twain and disturb readers with their cold, deadpan tone about serious events. *Roughing It*, like Twain's description of sagebrush, is a compendium of both understatements and exaggerations.

Also, like this episode and "A Touching Story of George Washington's Boyhood," the narrator often gets lost in his story and forgets the point, yet the point shows up in the tangent anyway. In the middle of his sagebrush description, Twain recalls an incident in Syria when a camel decided to eat his clothes and some of his newspaper clippings. While seemingly irrelevant to the sage brush story at hand, the camel story adds to Twain's imaginative recollections and also makes the reader question Twain's credibility when even the camel who eats clothes, "choked to death on one of the mildest and gentlest statements of fact that I ever laid before a trusting public" (17). The reader begins to wonder if he can trust this statement when obviously some "statements of fact" from Twain are hard to swallow. Finally, the last paragraph of the chapter finishes his discussion of sage brush from which he had presently "diverted" (17), much

like the “moral” gets back to Twain’s point at the end of the book. The reader is left to figure out the truth behind this exaggerated story. Twain uses the environment’s extremes to mirror the extremes of characters later in the book.

From a description of the flora, Twain turns to a description of the fauna of the West from prairie dog to coyote. Twain emphasizes the description with italics as he introduces a profound picture of a desert wolf: “If I remember rightly, this latter was the regular *coyote* (pronounced ky-o-te) of the farther deserts. And if it was, he was not a pretty creature or respectable either” (30). “Not pretty” is quite the understatement as he then goes on to say, “The coyote is a living, breathing allegory of Want. He is always hungry. He is always poor, out of luck and friendless. The meanest creatures despise him, and even the fleas would desert him for a velocipede. He is so spiritless and cowardly that even while his exposed teeth are pretending a threat, the rest of his face is apologizing for it” (31). Like the coyote, most experiences in the West bring about completely opposite effects: both good and bad, exposed teeth and apology. Even apart from the West, readers recognize the humanness of having exposed teeth and apology at the very same time. Most readers will admit to masking emotions with the opposite emotion and consequently “saving face” at some point in their lives. Twain’s poetic description of the coyote inspires reflection on the hypocrisy of humans, not just coyotes.

In Chapter 12 the good, the bad, and the ugly meet in varied proportions along the trail. Twain is astounded with the vacant landscape and terrible animals. The land was “given over to the coyote and the raven—which is but another name for desolation and utter solitude” (83). Part of this desolation stems from the contrast of beauty and ugliness, each in wide proportions through the ride which was “always through splendid

scenery but occasionally through long ranks of white skeletons of mules and oxen—monuments of the huge emigration of other days—and here and there were up-ended boards or small piles of stones which the driver said marked the resting-place of more precious remains. It was the loneliest land for a grave!” (83) Twain marvels at the eerie light within the desert night, another contrast: “On damp, murky nights, these scattered skeletons gave forth a soft, hideous glow, like very faint spots of moonlight staring the vague desert” (83). Even the landscape seems grotesque in its wild proportion of light and dark, life and death. In the same way Twain’s work reveals both the light and dark of Twain’s surroundings, it also reveals the truth of both in human nature. Through his varied and exaggerated descriptions, Twain shows readers *real* life which contains both light and dark times, good and bad experiences.

Not long after the disturbing trek through moonlit skeletons, in Chapter 18, Twain and his comrades become ecstatic at the thought of crossing the desert in daylight. In a very self-consciously dramatic tone, Twain says, “All this was very well and very comfortable and satisfactory—but now we were to cross a desert in *daylight*. This was fine—novel—romantic—dramatically adventurous—*this*, indeed, was worth living for, worth traveling for!” (122-123). The italics remind readers of that first printer’s “*devil*” and “*confirmation*” of the age from “A Gallant Fireman” because of the overly dramatic tone and sparingly placed emphasis in a short passage. Twain insists that this trip is worth living for! Just like the fireman’s disappointment, the traveling company is soon knocked from the high horse of excitement down to stark reality. This frustration mirrors Twain’s disappointment with romantic literature that does not accurately depict life. Twain admits, “This enthusiasm, this stern thirst for adventure, wilted under the sultry

August sun and did not last above one hour.” In fact, “The poetry was all in the anticipation—there is none in the reality” (123). The poetry had indeed left Twain with nothing but failed expectations. He makes an interesting observation about his lack of words for such a description, especially considering he has given the reader plenty of words to describe the meager event. Twain complains, “To try to give the reader an idea of how thirsty they were, would be to ‘gild refined gold or paint the lily’” (124). However, after a brief attempt at better a explanation, Twain decides, “Under these circumstances it seems to me best to leave it in, as above, since this will afford at least a temporary respite from the wear and tear of trying to ‘lead up’ to this really apt and beautiful quotation” (125). Twain gives readers a glimpse of his own frustration with his writing process and the limitations of romantic conventions. With his exaggerations and failed expectations, he has tried to lead up to a great quotation; yet nothing seems to fit and he is left to go back to the old maxim “gild refined gold or paint the lily.” Along with many of his contemporaries, Twain despised romantic literature which did nothing but “gild refined gold” or “paint the lily.” Where Romanticism fails under the pretense of reality, Twain’s grotesque realism does not try to hide its improbability as long as readers will still analyze the work and learn from the exaggerations. Readers could see this as a description of his whole attempt through *Roughing It*, to paint that picture of the West, yet failing through fake exaggerations that give the illusions without the experience. When no amount of words would suffice in describing the event, Twain expects to sufficiently describe his experiences in the West through exaggeration.

However exaggerated the descriptions might be, Twain certainly takes readers deep into the surroundings with pictures of the extraordinary contrasts of light and dark,

life and death. While in the second half of the book Twain begins focusing more on human nature's duality, there are still touching descriptions of the environment in the Sandwich Islands and again back in California. One such moving description comes near Mono Lake as Twain and his companion land on an island and go ashore. Upon arrival Twain perceives an interesting paradox:

Close to one of these jets of steam stood the only tree on the island—a small pine of most graceful shape and most faultless symmetry; its color was a brilliant green, for the steam drifted unceasingly through its branches and kept them always moist. It contrasted strangely enough, did this vigorous and beautiful outcast, with its dead and dismal surroundings. It was a cheerful spirit in a mourning household. (251)

The nature of the desert seems to be constant contrasts through Twain's eyes. Here Twain is able to connect his description with a human condition: "a cheerful spirit in a mourning household." Readers take part in a beautiful description of life among death and are challenged to see its human connection—those brave hearts in times of trouble. Perhaps readers are even inspired to become more like this "beautiful outcast" in a "dead and dismal" world.

Another extreme encounter with nature comes in Chapter 56 when Twain notices that in Sacramento "it is fiery summer always, and you can gather roses, and eat strawberries and ice-cream, and wear white linen clothes, and pant and perspire at eight or nine o'clock in the morning, and then take the cars, and at noon put on your furs and your skates, and go skimming over frozen Donner Lake, seven thousand feet above the valley, among snow banks fifteen feet deep" (390). Within hours travelers experience the sharp contrast of hot and cold, something so unique that Twain must exaggerate to help his audience understand the feeling.

Among descriptions of the Western landscape and animals, Twain moves more and more toward emphasizing and exaggerating the people encountered on the journey. Unlike many of his early, shorter works, *Roughing It* allows Twain to introduce readers to a deeper character study rather than a surface level expounding of the facts. An unsigned review in the Manchester *Guardian* says “the main portion” of *Roughing It* is Twain’s account of his experience among silver miners in Nevada “and very rough both the experiences and the miners seem to have been” (Anderson 46). Among the adventures, this reviewer has a keen eye for the miners who are described in great, grotesque detail along with many of the characters in *Roughing It*. One of the first and most memorable character studies in *Roughing It* begins in Chapter 9 when Twain hears of the infamous Slade.

In Chapter 9 the tables are turned on Twain and he is now the curious hearer of the story and the conductor and driver are the storytellers relaying only the facts in a very matter-of-fact manner not congruent with the seriousness and danger of the issue. The coach has just been attacked in a fury and none of the passengers knows exactly what happened. Twain’s frustration with the mystery is overshadowed by a new and deeper mystery in the character of a man named Slade. When the conductor mentions the name, Twain says, “This remark created an entire revolution in my curiosity. I cared nothing now about the Indians, and even lost interest in the murdered driver. There was such magic in that name, SLADE!” (58). Slade embodies the contrasting exaggeration of Twain: “Slade was at once the most bloody, the most dangerous, and the most valuable citizen that inhabited the savage fastnesses of the mountains” (59). This description not only gives readers insight into Slade’s character, but also teaches them about the society

of the West. It is not normal for a citizen to be both “dangerous” and “valuable,” so Twain combines the two in attempt to break readers of their ingrained social constructs and to give readers a true picture of life in the West.

In Chapter 10, after further research, Twain decides, for the benefit of the reader of course, to “reduce” the “mass of overland gossip” about Slade into “one straightforward narrative” (60). After the fearless Twain gives readers example after example of Slade’s cruelty, he backs up his story with evidence from “a bloodthirstily interesting little Montana book” he calls “The Vigilantes of Montana” by “Prof. Thos. J. Dimsdale” (64). The book verifies the many murders by Slade and then says, “As for minor quarrels and shootings, it is absolutely certain that a minute history of Slade’s life would be one long record of such practices” (64). This excerpt is an excellent example of how Twain goes the extra mile to elaborate on the character of Slade, backing his character study with actual evidence.

Twain’s own narration is as deadpan as if discussing the week’s weather. When Slade captures his “ancient enemy Jules,” Slade “practiced on him with his revolver, nipping the flesh here and there, and occasionally clipping off a finger, while Jules begged him to kill him outright and put him out of his misery. Finally Slade reloaded, and walking up close to his victim, made some characteristic remarks and then dispatched him” (66-67). “Dispatched” is a word that is so wrong for the situation that Twain knows it is right for his story. Twain even assures his readers that “This is the story as I have frequently heard it told and seen it in print in California newspapers. It is doubtless correct in all essential particulars” (67). Twain is sure to cite his “sources” reminding

readers that this story is in print and therefore true. This statement is ironic since Twain himself had participated in so many newspaper hoaxes before and during this trip.

Twain then tells readers of his fated encounter with the legend:

Here was romance, and I sitting face to face with it!—looking upon it—touching it—hobnobbing with it, as it were! Here, right by my side, was the actual ogre who, in fights and brawls and various ways, *had taken the lives of twenty-six human beings*, or all men lied about him! I suppose I was the proudest stripling that ever traveled to see strange lands and wonderful people. (67)

In a situation in which most people would feel fear and anxiety, Twain is proud and views the providential meeting as romance! Not only is Twain's reaction to meeting Slade opposite of the expected, Slade himself turns out to be "so friendly and so gentle-spoken that [Twain] warmed to him in spite of his awful history" (67). Besides the incongruity of Slade's reputation and Slade's actual character, Twain uses this scene to attack the Romantic movement. The exclamation points and italics exaggerate the tone of the passage and mock romantic literature. Readers immediately see the absurdity of such excitement upon meeting a murderer which is exactly what Twain intends. By exaggerating the encounter, Twain shows his audience the false pretense of Romanticism and leaves them longing for a genuine description of Slade. Twain later provides a grotesque description that not only teaches the readers about themselves and Slade, but also outshines this earlier, more contrived romantic musing.

Twain becomes a literary critic as he discusses the previously quoted book *The Vigilantes of Montana* by Thomas J. Dimsdale. Twain says, "Mr. Dimsdale makes two remarks about Slade, both of which are accurately descriptive, and one of which is exceedingly picturesque" (69). The latter of these comments of Dimsdale is: "From Fort Kearny, west, he was feared *a great deal more than the Almighty*" (69). Twain's

description of “exceedingly picturesque” seems exceedingly generous for the rather blasphemous statement. Again, Twain uses an understatement to catch the reader’s attention and seal the exaggeration meant by the statement. For a man to be feared more than God seems impossible; yet, Slade was feared “a great deal more” than God. Although it is an exaggeration because, when it comes down to it, few would sincerely fear a man more than a god, Twain’s exaggeration reveals the human folly of fear. Why should one fear a man? Next to God, Slade seems silly. Twain’s exaggeration of Slade and his reputation remind the reader of something bigger: the truth that God is bigger than man.

Twain even alters the original format of the text to add his personal emphasis to the tale that he is now telling: “Mr. Dimsdale’s narrative is as follows. In all places where italics occur, they are mine” (69). So, while he interestingly decides to use someone else’s words for the story, Twain still exaggerates the text to help steer his readers to certain truths. One example of his exaggeration within Dimsdale’s account is when discussing Slade’s usurping of the Sheriff. Dimsdale says, but Twain emphasizes with italics, that “the Sheriff did not attempt his retention; but being at least as prudent as he was valiant, he succumbed, leaving Slade the *master of the situation and the conqueror and ruler of the courts, law and law-makers*” (71). Twain decides to highlight the last phrase because it is an example of the hypocrisy that sometimes appears in human politics. Readers sense the irony of the statement that a “prudent” and “valiant” man is replaced with the feared and murderous Slade who is now “ruler of the courts” not because of his intellect or political agenda but because of his unrelenting violence.

The story of Slade transforms from gritty to grotesque which may be why Twain did not even feel he needed to rewrite what was already said by Dimsdale. Dimsdale describes Slade's last moments in an even tone but with a romantically inclined spin: "The doomed man had so exhausted himself by tears, prayers and lamentations, that he had scarcely strength left to stand under the fatal beam. He repeatedly exclaimed, 'my God! my God! must I die? Oh, my dear wife!'"(73). The touching scene turns sour as "the box being instantly slipped from beneath his feet, he died almost instantaneously" (74). After Slade's death and his wife's mourning, Twain ends his quotation of Dimsdale and digests the story for his readers. Of Slade he is sympathetic and of those who would condemn Slade he is almost cruel but truthful. Twain says:

Words are cheap, and it is easy to call Slade a coward (all executed men who do not 'die game' are promptly called cowards by unreflecting people), and when we read of Slade that he 'had so exhausted himself by tears, prayers and lamentations, that he had scarcely strength left to stand under the fatal beam,' the disgraceful word suggests itself in a moment—yet in frequently defying and inviting the vengeance of banded Rocky Mountain cut-throats by shooting down their comrades and leaders, and never offering to hide or fly, Slade showed that he was a man of peerless bravery. (75)

In the Slade story Twain actually narrates for his readers his motivation behind exaggerating this vagrant and emphasizes the contrast of Slade's perceived character and his human nature. Twain continues:

Many a notorious coward, many a chicken-livered poltroon, coarse, brutal, degraded, has made his dying speech without a quaver in his voice and been swung into eternity with what looked like the calmest fortitude, and so we are justified in believing, from the low intellect of such a creature, that it was not *moral* courage that enabled him to do it. Then, if moral courage is not the requisite quality, what could it have been that this stout-hearted Slade lacked?—this bloody, desperate, kindly-mannered, urbane gentleman, who never hesitated to warn his most ruffianly enemies that he would kill them whenever or wherever he came across them next! I think it is a conundrum worth investigating. (75)

Here in the Chapter 11 of *Roughing It*, Twain points to the interesting “conundrum” of human nature. Readers have a vivid description of Slade in both positive and negative light and must decide for themselves whether or not Slade deserved his fate and/or if he was a coward at the end. Twain juxtaposes the two contrasts: cowards who have died “without a quaver” but not with moral courage, and Slade who was not a coward, who might have even had moral courage but died a cowardly death in the eyes of society. Twain plays with the contrast of Slade’s character, describing him as a “bloody, desperate, kindly-mannered, urbane gentleman” who at least warned people before he killed them. Twain tickles the reader’s conscience. Slade was a murderer, a husband, and coward in the end, but did he have moral courage?

What started as a mystery is now a scattered mosaic of moral questions in the writer’s and reader’s mind. Twain’s character study of Slade surprises and challenges readers to think differently than society may have trained them. Slade’s character becomes a picture of the law of the West and the dilemma of morality in such a barren environment, but he can even translate into the Eastern reader’s world as well. Twain challenges readers to see human nature raw and pure without social or moral constructs. He accomplishes this goal by presenting a grotesquely exaggerated character with whom the audience still sympathizes.

When Twain arrives in Mormon country he hears of another character who, like Slade, is an oxy-moron of human nature. The Mormon “Destroying Angel” is said to be of a group “who are set apart by the church to conduct permanent disappearances of obnoxious citizens” (85). Of course Twain and his crew are intrigued by such a grotesque character, but they soon discover “alas for all our romances, he was nothing but

a loud, profane, offensive, old blackguard! He was murderous enough, possibly, to fill the bill of a Destroyer, but would you have *any* kind of an Angel devoid of dignity? Could you abide an Angel in an unclean shirt and no suspenders? Could you respect an Angel with a horse-laugh and a swagger like a buccaneer?" (86). Twain inserts these questions to illuminate the irony and truth in the strange combination of angel and killer, good and bad. He even addresses the reader personally, asking if "you" would consider this Destroyer an angel. His laughable exaggeration of a murderer of "obnoxious citizens" becomes a question of morality to ponder. The image could even evoke thoughts of the Angel of Death in Christian faith. Twain touches on the paradox of a "good" being bringing death. Both Slade and the Angel of Death further Twain's intention to create a contrast of human nature. Neither of these characters is pure evil, but neither is pure righteousness either. Even though society may be tempted to write them off as "bad," Twain exposes the good within these men and also creates an incongruous picture for the audience, thus questioning the audience's preconceived perceptions of their own Slades—criminals, thieves, murderers, bitter enemies, etc. With probing character studies as these, Twain fights the Romantic movement; he creates literary characters with openly questionable morals and intends to give readers a new perspective with which to judge those around them.

In Chapter 47, readers encounter another character study enriched by the contrast of "good" and "bad." While the nub of this joke is the play with language and the communication barrier between a minister and a miner, the suggestion of contrast between the two sets up a grotesque exaggeration of Scotty Briggs. Scotty approaches the minister to ask if he will preach Buck Fanshaw's funeral. After a couple of

exchanges, it is painfully obvious that neither man knows exactly what the other is saying. However, Twain's descriptions of the two in between dialogue also inform readers of the two men's differences. For example Briggs, "formed something of a contrast to the pale theological student" (310). One contrast is size as described at a handshake, "Extending a brawny paw, which closed over the minister's small hand and gave it a shake indicative of fraternal sympathy and fervent gratification" (311). This handshake brings together the two opposites in a shake of "fraternal sympathy" and "fervent gratification." Throughout the passage the brawny Briggs is compared with the minute minister, but in the end Briggs becomes a Christian and seems to even the scale between him and the minister. Twain is careful to assure the readers, "The making him [a Christian] did not warp his generosity or diminish his courage; on the contrary it gave intelligent direction to the one and a broader field to the other" (317). And so Briggs becomes a Sunday school teacher, teaching the Bible to others in their own dialect which is obviously more effective because they understand him. He "was listened to by his little learners with a consuming interest that showed that they were as unconscious as he was that any violence was being done to the sacred properties!" (317). As in previous chapters, readers are left with a conundrum at the end that each must wrestle with. In Briggs's case the "violence" being done to the scriptures is questioned. If Briggs teaches the children God's word and they understand it, the result is not "violence" to those scriptures but rather fulfillment of them. Through Briggs, Twain intends his readers to realize God approves of such methods to lead others to His work. The passage may even comfort and convict readers who think they are not worthy of sharing God's word with others. Twain has already made the not-so-subtle stab at Christians by saying that

Scotty's good character was not marred when he became one, suggesting that some Christians are not generous or courageous. The exaggerations of Brigg's inability to communicate with the minister followed by his own conversion and leadership forces readers to reevaluate the requirements of becoming a Christian. Can this burly man so opposite of the minister become a Christian and even teach? Twain shows readers that he can and even challenges readers' ideas of the sacred text.

Directly after Scotty Briggs' story, at the beginning of Chapter 48, Twain continues challenging readers' morals by casually stating the astonishingly grotesque morals of the West. He says, "A person is not respected until he has 'killed his man'" and that, in Nevada "the lawyer, the editor, the banker, the chief desperado, the chief gambler, and the saloon-keeper, occupied the same level in society, and it was the highest" (318). So, like Slade who is a celebrity and a good man, the moral class of the West contains good and bad on the same level, merging the contrasts of character much like the merging contrasts of the landscape. Tom Quirk observes in his book *Mark Twain and Human Nature*, "More than most writers, Twain, early and late, was fond of the dramatic encounter between two characters whose backgrounds, stocks of assumptions, or temperaments are dramatically opposed and who are, presumably, incompatible." In fact, according to Quirk, countless of Twain's works "thrive on social transactions between two antithetical points of view and the comic or satiric consequences that can never quite be anticipated" (8) much like the interaction between Briggs and the minister. Twain was so interested in these opposing views coming together that he instigated their meetings in his works to intrigue and challenge readers.

While many of the characters in *Roughing It* are studied at length, the shortened character sketches Jim Blaine provides in his “Story of the Old Ram” rival all others for grotesqueness and exaggerative qualities. Perhaps one reason Jim Blaine’s character sketches are so grotesque is that the narrator, who is Jim Blaine—not Mark Twain—at this point, delivers each sketch in a dead-pan, even tone although the subjects are extraordinary. Robert Rosen argues that Blaine’s “tendency to explain the obvious, while casually describing the wildest and most improbable event” is what “makes his take convincing as well” (192). As in Twain’s own tone in his previous works, Blaine’s newspaper-like tone distances him from the story and confuses his listeners.

While much is to be said of the joke here (Twain the narrator being duped into listening and Blaine stringing readers along only the never get to the actual story of his grandfather’s ram), the stories Blaine does tell have moral value to the reader because of their grotesque exaggerations revealing truths. Most readers, if they reread the story not rushing through to get to the “ram” part, will find the tale a compendium of grotesque people and happenings rivaled by none in the book thus far. The first rather shockingly grotesque feature of Blaine’s story is Miss Jefferson who “had a glass eye and used to lend it to old Miss Wagner” (363). Now, if the thought of lending a glass eye to another isn’t odd enough, Blaine’s story continues to say, “it warn’t big enough, and when Miss Wagner warn’t noticing, it would get twisted around in the socket, and look up, maybe, or out to one side, and every which way” (363). This bit gets so ridiculous that children are frightened of her. She tries to pack it with raw cotton but the cotton comes loose and scares the children even more. She always puts it in wrong, “But being wrong side before warn’t much difference, anyway, becuz her own eye was sky-blue and the glass

one was yaller on the front side, so whichever way she turned it it didn't match nohow" (364). Miss Wagner is another example of the grotesque juxtaposition of opposites. She is a sweet old lady with an ugly eye that, even when put in correctly, does not match. The parts do not add up. The picture is incongruous and thus grotesquely disproportionate.

The eye is not all that Miss Wagner borrows, either. She also must use Miss Higgins's wooden leg, which is much shorter than her own. Miss Wagner was also "bald as a jug" and thus borrows Miss Jacops's wig. However, the reader is left with only this picture of Miss Wagner before being whisked away on another tangent involving the coffin peddler's wife. The picture of Miss Wagner stays with the reader long after Blaine's story. Such a pathetic compilation of problems and insufficient cures makes the reader marvel at human nature's contrasting qualities. Twain's aim at exaggerating Miss Wagner's physical attributes reminds readers that all humans are broken; all need "parts" from others to fulfill society's expectations of appearance.

Even in the passing glimpses of people in Blaine's story lies the grotesque, such as Maria who "married a missionary and died in grace—et up by the savages. They et him, too, poor feller—biled him" (365). This quick look at the missionary and his wife is soon deepened by the explanation of his death given by the savages who had "tried missionaries every other way and never could get any good out of 'em" and so, the man's life was taken by a whimsical experiment on the savages' part, "a dern'd experiment" says Blaine. The premise is ridiculous, but the truth is biting. Twain, through Blaine, exaggerates one of life's ugliest ironies. Missionaries travel to unfamiliar places in hopes of sharing their God with others, but others do not always accept the missionaries' God

and, sometimes, even harm or kill the missionaries. The exaggeration advances Twain's commentary on the good and evil of human nature. First, missionaries, who strive to do good, sometimes offend their targeted people. Second, if the reader takes the passage figuratively, he or she comes to the conclusion that humans are willing to "eat" each other just out of curiosity. The savage's "dern'd experiment" is like people's attempts to harm one another "just for fun" or even out of boredom.

Finally, Blaine's last story is of William Wheeler who got threaded into some machinery in a carpet factory. "His wider bought the piece of carpet that had his remains wove in" and did not allow them to roll her late husband up, resulting in a fourteen-yard coffin which was then "planted" to have one end stick straight up out of the ground as a monument. As Blaine's voice trails off at the end of this anecdote, readers' minds also trail off into thinking of the horrid encounters of this chapter. While just one of the many grotesque gatherings of the book, as many has argued, this chapter is a microcosm of all of *Roughing It* at its finest including the stark contrast of points of view, from Miss Jacops to Maria all told through the somewhat shaky filter of Blaine.

Mark Twain is suddenly poor and out of luck in Chapter 59. He describes his state with a sincere and somber tone that has been sparingly used throughout the book, recalling that "During all this time I had but one piece of money—a silver ten-cent piece—and I held to it and would not spend it on any account, lest the consciousness coming strong upon me that I was entirely penniless, might suggest suicide" (406). In this somber mood Twain meets Blucher, a "splendid creature" full of "hope, pluck and philosophy" (407) Twain tells Blucher's tale for the readers: "He had an adventure, once, which sticks fast in my memory as the most pleasantly grotesque that ever touched my

sympathies” (407). By now Twain’s readers are intrigued by such an event that could touch the hardened narrator’s sympathies. The contrast of a story both “pleasant” and “grotesque” is also intriguing.

Blucher’s story begins with poverty. Blucher had had a stroke of luck just hours before by finding a silver dime on the street. He was hungry and admiring food from a restaurant window when “he looked up, over his shoulder, and saw an apparition—a very allegory of Hunger!” (409). This allegory of hunger was a man “six feet high, gaunt, unshaven, hung with rags; with a haggard face and sunken cheeks, and eyes that pleaded piteously” (409). Blucher is so affected by the “phantom” that he takes him into the restaurant into which he had just been gazing and has the owner charge the man’s meal to Blucher’s name, all six dollars and fifty cents worth. Then, “Blucher went down to French Pete’s, bought a veal cutlet plain, a slice of bread, and three radishes, with his dime, and set to and feasted like a king!”(411). Twain ends the chapter by saying, “Take the episode all around, it was as odd as any that can be culled from the myriad curiosities of Californian life, perhaps” (411). In this episode readers see a kind deed rather than the hoaxes and practical jokes they have come to expect in this book. Blucher does a kind, generous deed for someone less fortunate than himself. The story really is “pleasantly grotesque.” It is pleasant because one human is kind to another; it is grotesque because the apparition is so hungry and Blucher risks debt to help him. It is pleasant because Blucher “feasts” at the end; it is grotesque because that feast is a ten-cent meal compared to the \$6.50 he now owes.

*Roughing It* borrows from the traditions of Sagebrush Literature and Western Journalism. The novel itself is framed by the narrator “Mark Twain,” but his

exaggerations throughout cause readers to doubt the veracity of some of the claims made. Twain employs the same techniques of textual emphasis, framing, and incongruous proportions that evolve into grotesque exaggerations. Twain discusses a liar in Chapter 77 of *Roughing It*, when he meets an exaggerative fellow in Maui by the name of Markiss. Markiss displays a knack for exaggerations several times in the passage, like when he interrupts the narrator Twain to “one up” him by saying, “*Beg* your pardon, sir, beg your pardon, but it can only be considered remarkable when brought into strong outline by isolation” (527). Readers already see the seriousness of his tone by the italicized first word of the diatribe to follow. He assures Twain,

I am *obliged* to say that you could not, and you *would* not ever again refer to this tree as a *large* one, if you could behold, as I have, the great Yakmatack tree, in the island of Ounaska, sea of Kamtchatka—a tree, sir, not one inch less than four hundred and fifteen feet in solid diameter!  
(527)

Markiss’ credibility is immediately questioned by Capt. Saltmarsh who claims that Markiss took him to see “the stunner” (527) and it “warn’t as big around as a beer cask” (528). Yet even after all the exaggerated stories, the narrator Twain’s conclusion is “Almost from the very beginning, I regarded that man as a liar” (530). However, James Cox brings up an interesting interpretation of an earlier episode of Bemis’ Buffalo that could easily translate to this passage as well. Cox says, “The point is that Bemis is not telling the story to deceive but to entertain his listeners. Moreover, they do not question him in order to catch him in a lie but to encourage him to elaborate more daring departures from probability” (102). The same interaction between narrator and audience seems to be happening in Markiss’ episode. When readers take into consideration Twain’s own style, this statement could go many ways: the “almost” could mean that at

least at the very beginning the narrator did believe Markiss and thus was fooled by his exaggerations, the “almost” could also mean that as close to the beginning as possible Twain had figured out the man and was not fooled by his stories. No matter the interpretation of the statement, the next paragraph confirms that “the opinion hazarded in the last sentence came to be gratifyingly and remarkably endorsed” by a jury in the trial concerning Markiss’ death. The jury decided that, even though Markiss had left a note pinned to his body saying that he was to blame for his death, Markiss was killed “by the hands of some person or persons unknown!” This conclusion was made on the fact that “the perfectly undeviating consistency of Markiss’s character for thirty years towered aloft as colossal and indestructible testimony, that whatever statement he chose to make was entitled to instant and unquestioning acceptance as a *lie*” (531). Readers have to laugh at the lofty and exaggerated sentence to condemn the exaggerator. The jury further believed “that he was not dead, and instanced the strong circumstantial evidence of his own word that he *was* dead” (531).

The absurdity of the jury’s convictions is only exaggerated by the serious tone and carefully placed italics of the passage. The jurors finally come to the conclusion that Markiss committed suicide because of ““mental aberration”” because “he said he was dead, and he *was* dead; and would he have told the truth if he had been in his right mind? *No, sir*” (531). Earlier in Chapter 47, Twain makes a similar attack on the public justice system. After Buck Fanshaw “had taken arsenic, shot himself through the body, but his throat, and jumped out of a four-story window and broken his neck,” the jury, “after due deliberation [...] sad and tearful, but with intelligence unblended by its sorrow, brought in a verdict of death ‘by the visitation of God.’ What could the world do without juries?”

(308). Here, just as in *The Liar's* case, the evidence is plain and even exaggeratedly obvious, yet the jury overlooks the obvious to placate the situation with a lighter verdict or cause.

Again, just as in his spat with "The Local," Twain takes the serious subjects of deceit and suicide and creates an absurd atmosphere in which the audience can laugh at such matters, but through laughing at the absurdity audiences are made aware of the absurdity of life and death, of the fine line between joy and sorrow. Readers must learn from Markiss' story. The chapter could be re-titled "The Boy Who Cried Wolf, Retold" because it teaches readers the cost of deception for one's own pleasure: a cost that Markiss pays in the confusion and suspicion of his death. The cost of lying in the chapter is not so severe as others, however, even in the lighter jokes Twain's writing points readers to human truth. Maybe in this case it even points to the human error of unforgiveness. The jurors are so sure that Markiss is a liar that they cannot even believe he is dead with his cold hard body right in front of them. The hoax seems to be on the jury of his peers rather on the liar himself. His exaggerations are harmless and interesting, his death tragic and captivating. Perhaps Twain wrote this chapter as redemption for his own guilty pleasure of lying to his audience through fiction, more specifically exaggerations. The story of Markiss and his peers is a warning to Twain's peers who dare to take everything he says as a lie, even when they have the cold hard facts in front of them. While showing the ludicrous of lying, Chapter 77 also shows the danger in considering everything a lie just because the liar has "cried wolf" before. Readers take this moral and become careful of considering everything in *Roughing It* as an exaggerated lie; instead, they should view those exaggerations as portions of truth

masked in a lie. Do not be certain that everything in *Roughing It* is a lie. While each specific exaggeration may not be a “truth” in the end, as in Markiss’ story, readers have to believe that Twain is highlighting a human truth.

James Cox noticed this same paradox in the episode of Bemis’ buffalo hunt from which he concludes that *Roughing It*, especially the first volume, “realizes the form of the tall tale by converting it into an act of *art*” (100). Cox observes that the Bemis episode “moves through a series of increasingly absurd improbabilities” (101). These improbabilities are the exaggerations of the teller, just as in Chapter 77, and Mark Twain encourages readers to believe these improbabilities in order grow personally by seeing a different perspective. Cox says, “Bemis’ tall tale and Mark Twain’s tall tale which contains it are lies told not to deceive the listener but to make him see that the only truth which can be told is a lie which reveals rather than conceals the fact that it is a lie” (103). Twain artfully convinces his audience of truth through lying. The fact that *Roughing It* is a lie does not stop Smith, in her introduction to the book, from claiming that “Students of history have come to rely on it for accurate information about the period” (xxvii). Smith even goes on to say that “No examination of American popular culture would be complete without Mark Twain’s imaginative reminiscence of what it was like to be ‘on the ground in person’” (xxvii). Even in Smith’s description of the book there are numerous conundrums: *Roughing It* has “accurate information” yet perpetuates the “myth of the ‘wild West.’” It is at the same time “imaginative” and a “reminiscence.” As are his early writings, *Roughing It* is Mark Twain’s compendium of contrasts. He proportions both good and bad, truth and lie, and sublime and grotesque into each piece from “A Gallant Fireman” down to the last “Moral” of *Roughing It*. Yet, in some early works, and

especially in *Roughing It*, Twain's exaggerations more often turn grotesque. While some might argue this was due to his restricted "dark" personality pent up behind his comic exterior, these grotesque exaggerations reflect human life and human nature in its cruelest form, a form which constantly changes with portions of both good and bad, a form which Romanticism failed to accurately portray. Every landscape has beauty and harshness, every person is born with both good and evil. Twain's exaggeration of the harshness and evil leads readers to examine their own standards for both and results in personal growth through a broadened world view. The harshness of the land takes readers to a new place; the crudeness of the people, while at first taking readers inside their perceived "enemies," actually brings readers to appreciate the nuances of human nature and perhaps sympathize more with every human rather than just those who closely resemble themselves. Twain takes readers to the harshest climate and most beautiful landscapes; he makes readers sympathize with the murderous Slade and learn from the humble Briggs in order to give readers a broader understanding of human life, an understanding that not only can improve their lives but also improve the community to be more tolerant and less quick to judge.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The “Glittering Hero” and the “Romantic Outcast”: The Character Contrast of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn

In the second chapter of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876), Tom cleverly convinces his comrade to whitewash Aunt Polly’s fence, a task he has been assigned against his will. In this famous episode, readers get their first glimpse at the mischievous but endearing character of Tom. After Tom boasts to Ben, “Like it? Well I don’t see why I oughtn’t to like it. Does a boy get a chance to whitewash a fence every day?”, the situation is put “in a new light” for Ben who is then determined to whitewash the fence. Tom uses a bit of reverse psychology by telling Ben that Aunt Polly might not approve of Ben’s whitewashing. Tom says:

No—no—I reckon it wouldn’t hardly do, Ben. You see, aunt Polly’s awful particular about this fence—right here on the street, you now—but if it was the back fence I wouldn’t mind and she wouldn’t. Yes, she’s awful particular about this fence; it’s got to be done very careful; I reckon there ain’t one boy in a thousand, maybe two thousand, that can do it the way it’s got to be done. (14)

The next thing readers know Tom has cajoled Ben to pay Tom to let Ben whitewash Aunt Polly’s fence using an exaggeration of the task’s worth. Tom’s trickery reveals his natural ability to lie through exaggeration. He goes on and on describing the joy and happiness found in whitewashing, and then, right when his audience gains interest, Tom turns the tables and elaborates the opposite case: the case that only one in one thousand boys, maybe even two thousand, could ever live up to Aunt Polly’s expectations. Tom’s technique of exaggeration continues throughout *Tom Sawyer* and is even more developed

in Tom's counterpart, Huck Finn. To look at these two characters and their environment, including people and settings, through the magnifying lens of exaggeration is to look at these characters and the works they represent as catalysts for the truth. *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn* promote Twain's concept of lying out of urgent necessity because of the novels' exaggerated characters, exaggerated settings, and most of all Tom and Huck's ability to lead readers to the truth through exaggeration using much of the same grotesque exaggeration seen in previous Twain works.

Tom's whitewashing scene provides readers with a guide for reading exaggeration in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885). By first examining Twain's grotesque technique of literary hoaxes in journalism and wild Western humor, readers come back to Twain's most beloved books with a fresh eye for the use of exaggeration revealed through narrator and character as never before in his earlier works, a task that can be both daunting and rewarding because of Twain's varied canon. In her introduction to *The Mythologizing of Mark Twain*, Sara deSaussure Davis asserts, "Few serious readers of Twain doubt his genius, but defining and locating the source of his genius continues to challenge scholars, as does the attempt to explain the apparent discrepancy between the enormity of his fame and the unevenness of his literary production" (xiv). Despite Davis' observation of the "unevenness" of Twain's work, readers continue to see the exaggeration reaching grotesque proportions that both delight readers' fancy and challenge readers' morals. Readers begin an exploration of exaggeration in *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn* with the confidence that Twain, like Huck and Tom, is thoroughly romantic, and therefore complex, at heart; resolves to lie

only for a necessary purpose; and gains readers' respect and awe when all is said and done.

Evidence of Twain's intent to exaggerate is unmistakable even in this first classic scene of whitewashing. In her examination of the text in relation to Norman Rockwell's depictions of *Tom Sawyer*, Allison Ensor wonders:

How literally one should take the narrator's statement about 'thirty yards of board fence nine feet high.' Some suppose that this merely represents how high the fence looked to Tom that Saturday morning when Aunt Polly put him to work on it. (It is clear that some statements in the novel are subjective, as when we are told that Huck, in response to Tom's urging that he run for his life, 'was making thirty or forty miles an hour.') The manuscript shows that the original height of the fence was four feet, before Twain altered it to nine. (20)

The fact that Twain changed the height of the fence is a good indication of his intent to elaborate for the sake of the story, even from the very beginning. However, what many critics do not take into account is Twain's grotesque exaggerations throughout this rather "romantic" tale of boyhood. Ensor observes the public's skewed perceptions of both *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn* through analyzing the relationship of the paintings of the novels done by Norman Rockwell to the actual text. She states, "What Rockwell fails to show is in many cases precisely what has disappeared from the collective American memory of these books: those moments when the darker side of human nature manifests itself in a way that is frightening and profoundly disturbing" (35). As Ensor points out, public perceptions of Twain's most famous works have "masked the incisive satire of *Huckleberry Finn* and those darker, more terrifying moments in *Tom Sawyer*" (36). Twain's readership has forgotten the grotesque aspects of his novels, probably because Tom and Huck are such anthems for boyhood; however, after reading Twain's exaggerations from his earliest work to *Roughing It*, readers begin to notice the

characteristic grotesque exaggeration which brings greater truth to Twain's most celebrated works.

As Twain begins the Chapter Two of *Tom Sawyer*, he uses his narrating voice to induce an exaggerated scene of romantic splendor. Readers are used to this tone from Twain's framed narrations in the early works and *Roughing It*, but in *Tom Sawyer* the narrator is unnamed and uninvolved in the action. This high tone can be traced through both *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*; yet, *Tom Sawyer*'s third person narrator draws more attention to this exaggeration than the first person narrator of Huck Finn. The chapter begins:

Saturday morning was come, and all the summer world was bright and fresh, and brimming with life. There was song in every heart; and if the heart was young the music issued at the lips. There was cheer in every face and a spring in every step. The locust trees were in bloom and the fragrance of the blossoms filled the air. Cardiff Hill, beyond the village and above it, was green with vegetation, and it lay just far enough away to seem a Delectable Land, dreamy, reposeful and inviting. (10)

The inflated language of the passage and almost sacrilegious description of a "Delectable Land," cause some readers to look back at the cover of the book to make sure this is Twain's work. One reason he can accomplish this shock is that he is in a narrator's voice, not Tom's, and certainly not Huck's as in *Huckleberry Finn*. While it is surprising to encounter such poetic description in a "boy's book," it is not surprising for Twain to mock the romantic style of writing. However, Twain's purpose in the opening paragraph of the second chapter cannot be easily explained by his penchant for burlesque of Romantic ideals, especially after reading works from "A Gallant Fireman" to *Roughing It*, which utilize a high tone in order to contrast with the absurdity of the plot. If Twain's sole aim was to mock another writing style, why does this passage follow so many of the

same structures of grotesque exaggeration seen in earlier works? For example, the passage repeats the word “heart” for special emphasis and textually sets off “a Delectable Land” by capitalizing it. The passage is an unbelievable exaggeration of an idyllic day which seems somewhat suspended in sublimity of time and space; however, the passage’s “perfectness” results in readers’ suspicion. Obviously this summer day is not as perfect as it sounds. As humans in full knowledge of human nature and her environment, readers know that everything is not how it seems and that behind this exaggerated description is a not-so-perfect boy in his not-so-perfect world. Thus this romantic beginning to the chapter encourages readers to be suspect of the following tale. The inflated language of Chapter Two draws suspicion, but it also introduces a simple and mundane scene of boys whitewashing a fence. The passage stands out as, for lack of a better term, a grotesque exaggeration in romantic form not only because readers know it is not true, but also because it, like Tom, fools innocent readers into false expectations of the content. The fact that it precludes Tom’s trick on the boys and Aunt Polly’s astonishment with the result is no accident.

After a peculiar introduction, readers find Tom with a dilemma: his Aunt Polly wants him to whitewash her fence, and he would rather play. In the same fashion as the narration above, Tom takes something slightly unpleasant and transforms it, through rhetoric, into a commendable, even enjoyable activity. At the end of his long description, Tom tells Ben that he couldn’t possibly allow Ben to whitewash, why only “one out of a thousand, maybe even two thousand” boys could do it. Tom uses the exaggeration of the number of boys and repetition of the words “No,” “fence,” and “thousand” in this passage, and readers are left, like Ben, to believe his elaborate statement. Readers, too,

have decided that whitewashing sounds fun and cannot wait to bargain with Tom for a chance to do it. Tom's refusal at the end is the icing on the cake. Now Ben must prove that he is surely one in two thousand and worthy of such a task. Tom lies for the purpose of passing off work to another, and Tom's lie succeeds in convincing the boys to whitewash, even to pay Tom to whitewash, Aunt Polly's fence. Although not for the noblest of reasons, Tom's purpose remains and is accomplished through the necessary act of exaggeration. Lest we think Tom's purpose too shallow and manipulative, Aunt Polly's reaction is positive and thus Tom's lie has even been for the benefit of another: "When she found the entire fence whitewashed, and not only whitewashed but elaborately coated and recoated, and even a streak added to the ground, her astonishment was almost unspeakable" (17). Aunt Polly's astonishment is so great that she has no words to describe it. Tom's lie, and the boys' work resulting from it, is for the good of Aunt Polly.

The description of the fence proves that the boys' work has been an exaggeration in itself; they have "elaborately coated and recoated" and have even painted the ground! Tom's diligent workers "whitewash" an interesting example of exaggeration: it coats and recoats with words and ideas, and sometimes those ideas spill forth further than the exaggerator first intended and onto the ground. Yet, these exaggerations serve a distinct purpose and cause great joy and astonishment from Twain's audience. A later example of Twain's grotesque exaggeration which leads to truth comes in Chapter 33 at Injun Joe's death. Readers can be sure Norman Rockwell did not paint this scene; yet, it is scenes like this that lead readers to truth through exaggeration. Twain begins this chapter similar to Chapter Two with a brief romantic-sounding description which contains a far

higher tone than the event calls for: “When the cave door was unlocked, a sorrowful sight presented itself in the dim twilight of the place. Injun Joe lay stretched upon the ground dead, with his face close to the crack of the door, as if his longing eyes had been fixed, to the latest moment, upon the light and the cheer of the free world outside” (238). This is much more than a “sorrowful sight.” A dead man lies on the floor of a cave where he was trapped. This pleasant description of Injun Joe gazing “upon the light and cheer” of the world outside gives way to grotesque exaggeration of the scene where the narrator imagines Injun Joe’s last hours and tells in detail the surrounding evidences of his conclusions. The door had been “chipped and hacked through” with Injun Joe’s bowie knife in “useless labor” to “pass the weary time” because, as evident to the narrator, Joe would have known this work was futile because of the structure of the cave door. The prisoner had eaten bits of candle from the walls of the cave and even caught and eaten a few bats “leaving only their claws.” After numerous observations the narrator points out a depressingly grotesque feature of the cave: Injun Joe’s last drink formed from a drip in the cave which made “a dessert spoonful once in four and twenty hours,” a drop that “was falling when the Pyramids were new, when Troy fell; when the foundations of Rome were laid; when Christ was crucified; when the Conqueror created the British empire; when Columbus sailed; when the massacre at Lexington was ‘news.’” The narrator creates an interesting catalogue of past events just to get to Injun Joe’s death. Not only does his grotesque exaggeration of the starvation of Joe make readers wonder, as the narrator does, “Has everything a purpose and a mission?” but also humanizes the “evil” Injun Joe who, in his last hours, “scooped out the stone to catch the priceless drops” to stay alive. The narrator makes sure to tell that “to this day the tourist stares

longest at that pathetic stone and that slow dropping water when he comes to see the wonders of McDougal's cave. Injun Joe's Cup stands first in the list of the cavern's marvels; and 'Aladdin's Palace' cannot rival it" (240). Twain heightens the contrast between evil and good after humanizing Joe by making him the object of a petition for pardon. "Injun Joe was believed to have killed five citizens of the village, but what of that? If he had been Satan himself there would have been plenty of weaklings ready to scribble their names to a pardon-petition and drip a tear on it from their permanently impaired and leaky water-works" (241). Twain, through the narrator, exposes the hypocrisy of the townspeople who had hated Injun Joe and now cry over his pardon. The contrast between Joe's sympathetically described death and his supposedly evil character throughout the book reminds readers of Slade and the Destroying Angel who were "bad" characters by societal standards, but yet they were heroes of the West. In the character of Injun Joe, Twain takes readers on a journey of morals: Should we sympathize and "sign" a pardon for the murderer? After Twain's description of Injun Joe's death, readers certainly want to do just that; and this is Twain's intention. The exaggerations in *Tom Sawyer* cause readers to rethink socially ingrained personal beliefs like the morality of owning slaves or the justice of killing a murderer. Twain accomplishes a conundrum between society's view of "good" and the essential spirit of man despite morals all through an elaborate "fence-painting." Readers cannot help but come from the experience changed, having seen the pitiful death of a murderer and felt sympathy for their fellow man.

Tom's plot to avoid work, Aunt Polly's reaction to the work, and the boys' elaborate painting of the fence, provide a map from which to read the rest of the novel

and its sequel, *Huckleberry Finn*. Tom's whitewashing scene is also a microcosm of Twain's technique of writing and effect on his readers. Here in the second chapter and throughout the rest of the novel, readers first encounter a romantic description of reality that causes them to suspect such a version and seek truth in reality rather than romance. Tom's repetition and exaggeration serve and fulfill a purpose for Tom (Tom's purpose being to please Aunt Polly and Aunt Polly's reaction satisfying that purpose). And, finally, and perhaps most importantly, is the astonishment left from reading such exaggeration. Just as Aunt Polly searches for words, so readers of *Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn* search for words to explain their feeling of absolute confusion and absolute enjoyment of the layered and dripping tale. Twain has become the one in a thousand, maybe even a million, to establish such a rich tradition of lying through literary exaggeration and thus astonish the Aunt Polly in us all.

A study of the romantic language of *Tom Sawyer* can continue with Tom's description of none other than the wild spirit of Huck Finn and thus translate to *Huckleberry Finn* as well. Perhaps the most elaborate and detailed contrast transcending both works in the contrast between the books' main characters: Tom and Huck. As Tom exaggerates Huck's life and the neighborhood boys' fascination with this life, readers question the validity of such exaggerated and romantic prose. Huck, through Tom's eyes but the narrator's voice, is a "juvenile pariah of the village" who is "cordially hated and dreaded by all the mothers of the town, because he was idle, lawless, and vulgar and bad—and because all their children admired him so" (47). Though feared by parents, the boys of the town adore Huck: "In a word, everything that goes to make life precious, that boy had" (48). The elevated language seems too strong to characterize a young boy.

Readers long to see the character of Huck rather than this exaggerated description. Like the introduction of the chapter, something lurks beneath Tom's description, and it is up to the readers to guess Huck's real character.

The narrator continues the description of Huck's character by informing readers that "Tom [...] envied Huckleberry his gaudy outcast condition" (48). Huck is a "gaudy" representation of his young admirers which accounts for his unpopularity with parents. Huck is, therefore, a grotesque exaggeration of the boys of St. Petersburg. His exaggerated features and character attract children and repulse parents much like the grotesque caricature is both funny and disgusting. Huck's exaggerated character makes him interesting and insightful but also insolent and intimidating. Readers immediately feel sympathy for the "romantic outcast," the unfortunate boy in the "Delectable Land." Huck is constantly viewed in double, both good and bad, and Huck's constant contrast to Tom creates a grotesque exaggeration of Huck, perhaps even creating a grotesque exaggeration of Tom through Huck. The duality is a result of Twain's duality as well. As Dreiser asserts, "What interests me, however, is this seeming duality of Twain, for, of course, there were not any two Mark Twains, just one" (620). But in *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn* the "two Mark Twains" are manifested in two different characters who teach readers two different views of humanity, two views needed for the audience to identify with and want to follow the characters. In her study of fiction, Flannery O'Connor says:

I think that every writer, when he speaks of his own approach to fiction, hopes to show that, in some crucial and deep sense, he is a realist; and for some of us, for whom the ordinary aspects of daily life prove to be of no great fictional interest, this is very difficult. I have found that if one's young hero can't be identified with the average American boy, or even

with the average American delinquent, then his perpetrator will have a good deal of explaining to do. (37)

Twain deals with “ordinary aspects of daily life” in a profound way with his boyhood tales, and he accomplishes, as O’Connor insists he must, two characters to fit the bill of “average American boy” and “average American delinquent.” Because readers can identify with one or both of these characters, Tom and Huck teach readers through their own development, in Huck’s case, and their own digression, in Tom’s case. While sympathy for Huck wanes when contrasted with the imaginative hero, Tom, in *Tom Sawyer*, sympathy for Huck waxes into dislike of the society which has banished him, and even uncertainty in Tom’s scheme to free Jim, later in *Huckleberry Finn*. Twain creates an unwanted emotion through the exaggerated character of Huck. Because readers distrust this characterization, they begin to challenge and change their own ideas, especially in the final half of *Huckleberry Finn*. By contrasting Tom and Huck throughout both books, Twain creates a study of the two extremes of human nature with Tom as “good” and Huck as “bad,” Tom a romantic, imaginative boy, and Huck a grotesque, absurdly literal man-child, climaxing with Tom’s ridiculously exaggerated attempt to “free” Jim.

### *The “Glittering Hero”: Tom Sawyer*

As discussed above, *Tom Sawyer* contrasts the character of Tom and Huck through Tom’s perceptions of Huck. Since *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* focuses on the character of Tom, in order to later contrast the two characters readers first get to know Tom. Despite its romantic tone and plot, *Tom Sawyer* is, at its core, as Robinson insists, a “novel of social analysis” (4). Although Robinson thinks Twain followed an

“incompletely acknowledged” impulse, the completeness of the contrast between Tom and Huck, and the known necessity for Twain’s lies through exaggeration, reveal more thought in these two characters than mere impulse.

Twain’s contemporaries both praised and discouraged Twain’s use of grotesque exaggeration in *Tom Sawyer*, perhaps because of the juvenile audience that could be reading it. Moncure D. Conway, in an unsigned review in the London *Examiner*, raves:

We can, indeed, hardly imagine a more felicitous task for a man of genius to have accomplished than to have seized the salient, picturesque, droll, and at the same time most significant features of human life, as he has himself lived it and witnessed it, in a region where it is continually modified in relation to new circumstances. (Anderson 64)

Conway’s review confirms observations of both “picturesque” and “droll” descriptions but descriptions that are all “most significant features of human life” and thus a pointed social analysis. Where Conway sees all the “salient” truths in *Tom Sawyer*, another unsigned review of the time complains by stating, “With less, then of Injun Joe and ‘revenge,’ and ‘slitting women’s ears,’ and the shadow of the gallows, which throws an unnecessarily sinister tinge over the story, (if the book really is intended for boys and girls) we should have liked *Tom Sawyer* better” (Anderson 72). Modern critics have come to appreciate the violence of the novel as grotesque necessities to telling the story and to painting an accurate picture of human life.

Tom Sawyer is a “magnanimous” liar, a surprisingly grotesque boy, and the “glittering” hero of his tale. First, he lies out of necessity to persuade the boys to whitewash for him (and Aunt Polly), but later Tom lies to save Becky from harsh punishment at school. This noble lie is exposed at the end of the book, and Tom is praised by Becky’s father:

When Becky told her father, in strict confidence, how Tom had taken her whipping at school, the Judge was visibly moved, and when she pleaded grace for the mighty lie which Tom had told in order to shift that whipping from her shoulders to his own, the Judge said with a fine outburst that it was a noble, a generous, a magnanimous lie—a lie that was worthy to hold up its head and march down through history breast to breast with George Washington’s lauded Truth about the hatchet! (255)

The Judge uses the same rhetoric Twain uses later when angels proclaim, “Lo, here is an heroic soul who casts his own welfare into jeopardy to succor his neighbor’s; let us exalt this magnanimous liar” (826) in “The Decay of the Art of Lying” (1882). So, Tom has mastered the art of lying out of necessity for his “neighbor” Becky.

If Tom’s lies bring about some truth to the reader, that truth is the hypocrisy of his society with regards to morals, lying, and even Huck Finn. Judith Fetterley asserts, “Tom’s actions in the first half of *Tom Sawyer* are a series of entertainments, but they are also a series of exposures which reveal the absurdity and hypocrisy of his world” (297). Tom’s imaginative games among real tragedy mirror his environment’s ignorance to the tragedies happening under their noses, like the mischief and murders by Injun Joe. Tom’s punishment for lying to protect Becky is but a foreshadow to Huck’s self-damnation for helping Jim. In fact *Tom Sawyer* as a whole is an overly exaggerated romance that precedes the overly grotesque tragedy of *Huckleberry Finn*. In his forward to *Tom Sawyer*, John C. Gerber describes the romantic atmosphere of St. Petersburg much as the narrator does. Gerber says, “In many ways it does seem like heaven for boys and girls. The weather is always summery. The wooded hills, the river, and the cave are ideal for games and adventures. Tom and his friends get into and out of one scrape after another, and Tom’s desires for fame and fortune and for the love of Becky Thatcher are happily realized” (xiii). But to simplify Tom’s story to a mere romantic structure ignores

some of Tom's grotesque features. Gerber elaborates, "*Tom Sawyer* shows the violence of life in the small town as well as its day-to-day activities, the troubles of the children as well as their pleasures," and "unlike most juvenile fiction of the nineteenth century, therefore, *Tom Sawyer* shows how morally complicated real life can be" (xiii). Though Tom is the more romantic of the two main characters, Tom exhibits dark moments and insights not expected from the imaginative seemingly care-free hero. These grotesque thoughts of Tom only solidify the realness of his character and, again, foreshadow the even more grotesque mind of his exaggerated counterpart, Huck Finn. A passage in Chapter 3 describes Tom's darker side:

He wandered far from the accustomed haunts of boys, and sought desolate places that were in harmony with his spirit. A log raft in the river invited him, and he seated himself on its outer edge and contemplated the dreary vastness of the stream, wishing, the while, that he could only be drowned, all at once and unconsciously, without undergoing the uncomfortable routine devised by nature. (23)

Tom wishes to be drowned rather than go through the life he sees before him in St. Petersburg. Tom's thoughts are so distant and profound, yet still different from those of Huck Finn who is unwillingly outcast, Tom seeks solace and loneliness as if for romantic effect. In fact, although the raft invites Tom, he declines the invitation and is instead drenched by the maid's water pail at the end of the scene. Later, in *Huckleberry Finn*, Huck's loneliness will take action by accepting the raft's invitation and sailing through adventures, away from the life Tom wishes to leave.

Despite his mischievous adventures and his friendship with Huck, Tom is the "good little boy" side of Mark Twain. As many critics observe, Twain uses Tom to criticize society. Tom is an exaggeration of the perfect boy, a boy who believes, without question, the social standards set by the society surrounding him and thus, in true

romantic form, becomes the hero of the story. After telling the truth about Injun Joe and saving Muff Potter, “Tom was a glittering hero once more—the pet of the old, the envy of the young” (173). But, Twain learned during his adventures in the West, contrary to the saying “all that glitters is not gold,” that, in reality, “*nothing* that glitters is gold” (*Roughing It* 188). If readers take Twain’s lesson and apply it to Tom, they begin to identify with Huck who is actually disappointed with Tom for going back on his word. Huck’s disappointment highlights the difference in the two boys. While Tom’s conscience leads him to tell the truth and save a man’s life, Huck is sickened by Tom’s “betrayal,” even for a good cause. The narrator explains, “Since Tom’s harassed conscience had managed to drive him to the lawyer’s house by night and wring a dread tale from lips that had been sealed with the dismalest and most formidable of oaths, Huck’s confidence in the human race was well nigh obliterated” (173). Huck is disappointed with Tom for breaking a promise and fails to see the ultimate good that came out of it. In true Twainian style, the deadpan tone of the statement heightens readers’ enjoyment of Huck’s rather misguided conclusions and solidifies the contrast between the flowery language which describes Tom and the rougher, but no less intriguing, language which describes Huck. Twain’s use of tone and style throughout *Tom Sawyer* separates the two boys in every way. Each side of the exaggeration allows for the other to be even clearer in the reader’s mind.

#### *The “Romantic Outcast”: Huck Finn*

The grotesque exaggeration of Huck continues into Twain’s second sketch of boyhood: *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Stallman and Herman observe the contrasts in *Huckleberry Finn* as thus:

Doubleness patterns the book thus: (a) the real thing is presented, as in the death of Boggs, and then (b) the parody of it, as in the mock imitation of his tragic death (Ch. 21). The structure of *Huckleberry Finn*, as I see it, consists of a recurrent counterpointing of the real or true thing or event with the juxtaposed parody of it. Nothing is not parodied. Everything exists thus in doubleness, by contraries [...] With doubleness of selfhood goes masked selfhood in clothes, false fronts and false words, false identities, maudlin sentiments, and lies. While disguise occurs not only on land but also on the river, the river on the contrary is the sole sanctuary for nakedness, literally and spiritually. (425)

Stallman and Herman's doubleness can extend to the doubleness of Tom and Huck in the book's beginning with the stark contrast between Tom's narration and Huck's. Huck Finn tells his story while Tom is only allotted certain monologues, so the reader only knows Tom's thoughts when the narrator chooses to tell them. While Tom demonstrates the urgent necessity of lying, he also exhibits wild exaggerations of the imagination which Huck does not understand. Huck says, "So then I judged that all that stuff was only just one of Tom Sawyer's lies. I reckoned he believed in the A-rabs and the elephants, but as for me I think different. It had all the marks of a Sunday school" (17). Huck notices that he thinks differently than Tom Sawyer; he does not believe Tom's lies which he equates with Sunday school lies. While Tom buys into his society's beliefs and embellishes them, Huck does not understand "Sunday school" ethics because he sees so many discrepancies in what the people around him say and what they do. Even Tom, who strikes up a friendship with Huck, in the end, insists that Huck throw away his "romantic outcast" exterior and become civilized. *Huckleberry Finn* continues the contrast of Huck and Tom; however, in *Huckleberry Finn*, readers begin to sympathize with the "romantic outcast" more than the glittering hero of Tom Sawyer.

Despite Huck's skepticism of Tom's and society's lies, Huck himself lies throughout his story even more grotesquely than Tom's simple romantic flights. The grotesque

thoughts of Tom that are seen in *Tom Sawyer* only solidify his boyish character and, again, foreshadow the even more grotesque mind of his exaggerated counterpart, Huck Finn whose grotesque lies go beyond a boyish charm. If Tom is “melancholy” Huck is a grotesque exaggeration where his loneliness and sadness translate to action not just moods. In *The Development of a Writer*, Smith describes Huck’s lies as follows: “A melancholy if not exactly tragic strain in Huck is revealed also by the fictitious autobiographies with which he so often gets himself out of tight places” (124). Huck consistently avoids trouble by making up wild stories like when he tells the king and duke that his pa and baby brother were drowned when a steamboat ran over their raft (166). This lie is of deep necessity to explain that Jim is not a runaway slave, and it is only one of many grotesque examples of Huck’s imagination. These lies require more than just imagination; they require Huck to continue the lie just as the king and duke continue their lies. Huck is put in pressing situations that require lies while Tom’s lies are mostly imaginative and only occasionally for the better of others.

Readers are more than entertained by Huck; they are disgusted, disturbed, and delighted by his grotesque nature. O’Connor’s description of the grotesque describes readers’ reactions to Huck:

In these grotesque works, we find that the writer has made alive some experience which we are not accustomed to observe every day, or which the ordinary man may never experience in his ordinary life [...] Yet the characters have an inner coherence, if not always a coherence to their social framework. Their fictional qualities lean away from typical social patterns, toward mystery and the unexpected. (40)

Just like O’Connor’s description of grotesque works, Huck’s lies, which would usually be frowned upon, are admired by readers for going against the social framework. His “leaning away” from social patterns and toward the unexpected enthrall readers who

cannot guess what wild story Huck will make up next. Readers are confused by the grotesque nature of the tales told by such a young boy. In fact, Twain's audience was very unsure of the crudeness of the character as Victor Fischer and Lin Salamo discuss in their foreword to *Huckleberry Finn*: "In the nineteenth century, critics were shocked at Huck's 'low' language, his rationalization of lying and stealing, and his undisguised skepticism toward such things as prayer and religious doctrine" (xxiii). Although contemporary critics were hesitant to praise Huck's deviant behavior, many commended the novel because it did not skirt away from those "unmentionable" facts of human life. In his review of *Huckleberry Finn* in *Century Magazine*, Thomas Sergeant Perry says, "Literature is at its best when it is an imitation of life and not an excuse for instruction," and he concedes, "What makes [*Huckleberry Finn*] valuable is the evident truthfulness of the narrative, and where this is lacking and its place is taken by ingenious invention, the book suffers" (Anderson 129). Perry and other critics of the time saw the value of Huck's character because he was an "imitation of life" and not just a fictional example to set up a sermon like in Sunday school books.

#### *Unnecessary Exaggeration: The Evasion Plot*

Perry, however, notices that the book fails when instead of truthfulness the narrative explodes into "ingenious invention." Though he does not cite specific examples, readers might apply Perry's conclusions to the end evasion scene since Huck's grotesque and necessary lies give way to Tom's "ingenious inventions" that are unnecessary and even harmful. Readers must know Hemingway's critique of the novel which attests "All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*" and yet Hemingway goes on to say, "If you read it you must stop where the Nigger

Jim is stolen from the boys. That is the real end. The rest is just cheating” (22). Hemingway’s assessment of the novel and its end has become a standard springboard from which modern critics study the work. Readers cannot ignore the praise for the novel and some are surprised at critiques like Perry’s or Hemingway’s or more recently Smith’s who calls the evasion a “devastating pun” (*Development* 133). However, in recent scholarship there seems to be an acceptance of the evasion scenes as just that: a devastating pun that was fully intended by the master of comedy, Mark Twain. Twain reverses the audiences’ sympathies which results in criticism of society through Tom’s grotesque exaggeration of Jim’s escape. In this pivotal action in the novel, Twain reverts back to all the techniques of exaggeration he used throughout his career culminating in his greatest grotesque exaggeration up to that time. He uses the exaggerated escape plan of Tom to highlight society’s ridiculous antics of “freeing slaves” even though, as humans, they were never supposed to be enslaved to another.

Readers first recognize Twain’s plan through the calm, cool introduction of Chapter 32 which acts as a calm before the storm. Just as he did in pieces like “A Gallant Fireman,” Twain uses a high and romantic tone to describe the day which will turn out anything but calm and cool. The scene is very similar to the romantic description of Tom’s world readers see at the first of *Tom Sawyer*, but here Twain places the contrasting tone in the middle of the action right before the evasion. The tone is not only romantically descriptive, it is also utterly different from Huck’s narration throughout the book. He begins, “When I got there it was all still and Sunday-like, and hot and sunshiny—the hands was gone to the fields; and there was them kind of faint droning of bugs and flies in the air that makes it seem so lonesome and like everybody’s dead and gone”

(276). This description is as close to romantic that the narrator Huck can get. He delicately understates the day as “Sunday-like” and also uses the words “faint droning” which seem out of character even in this short passage. He continues his description with more even toned language and an even more disturbing conclusion. Huck concludes, “If a breeze fans along and quivers the leaves, it makes you feel mournful, because you feel like it’s spirits whispering—spirits that’s been dead ever so many years—and you always think they’re talking about *you*. As a general thing, it makes a body wish *he* was dead, too, and done with it all” (276). Readers are surprised by Huck’s use of words like “quivers the leaves” and “ever so many years” which have not been his normal diction throughout his story. This “too good to be true” scene mirrors the opening scene of Chapter Two in *Tom Sawyer* where the narrator creates skepticism in the description of the day. Yet, this passage goes a step further as only Huck can create a grotesque thought out of a romantic picture. Huck feels like spirits whisper in the wind; and not only do they whisper, they talk about *him* and make him wish that *he* was dead, too. And thus, just like they were in *Tom Sawyer*, readers are skeptical of the outcome of such a description. Huck says these gruesome thoughts as if they were just another thought. Here, in the middle of the action, as Jim is captured and Huck must “strike for the back country” (274) readers encounter a bone-chilling description of the day foreshadowing the bone-chilling events to follow. Just like Twain in his early newspaper writings discussing suicide and fire and all manner of other tragedies as matter-of-factly as if describing the weather, Huck creates a false front at the beginning of the evasion which warns readers of the terrible events about to be described.

It is easy to ignore some of the techniques for exaggeration used in the last chapters of *Huckleberry Finn* because Twain tends to overuse them. One technique worth examining further is the early established use of italics. If the careful reader looks at these emphasized words, he sees the sarcastic tone Twain used in both his early newspaper writings and *Roughing It*. At first when Tom says he will help Huck steal Jim from the Phelps', Huck is taken aback and exclaims, "It was the most astonishing speech I ever heard—and I'm bound to say Tom Sawyer fell, considerable, in my estimation. Only I couldn't believe it. Tom Sawyer a *nigger stealer!*" (284). Huck's incredulous reaction only heightens the humor, and most of all the horror, of the scene since Tom is not, in fact, a "nigger stealer" and instead Tom knows full well that Jim is free and that he and Huck will not be in any danger of punishment for "freeing" Jim. Huck's proclamation reminds readers of the gallant fireman's final, ironic exclamation of joy at of "confirmation" of the age. Here, Huck's misreading of Tom is painfully obvious to the reader and thus painfully ironic. Another use of italics to further Huck's somber tone comes a few pages over when the boys find the king and duke tarred and feathered before they could warn them to leave. Huck says, "I couldn't ever feel any hardness against them any more in the world. It was a dreadful thing to see. Human beings *can* be awful cruel to one another" (290). The italicized "can" and the proper sounding adverb "awful" add a serious tone to the oversimplified statement. Huck has seen such hatred and hypocrisy on his journey down the river and all he has to say is that humans "can" be "awful" cruel to one another. The naïve but powerful statement echoes Mark Twain the narrator of *Roughing It* as he observed human kind at its worst and objectively reported it, even understated it.

Once the boys have put Tom's plan into action, the reader begins to realize the foolishness of Tom's glorified escape plan and the naivety of Huck's consenting to it. Once again Twain employs italics to emphasize his point when Tom begins to justify the plan to dig the foundation out from under the cabin with a couple of caseknives. Huck says, "Confound it, it's foolish, Tom." And Tom replies, "It don't make no difference how foolish it is, it's the *right* way—and it's the regular way. And there ain't no *other* way, that ever *I* heard of" (304). This time Tom's foolishness is highlighted by his emphasis that his way is the "right" way and it doesn't matter if it is foolish or not. Tom could be talking about anything from digging with caseknives to enslaving humans, and he would believe the same principle because he is the glittering hero of society, not the outcast like Huck. Tom cannot see past what he knows, and he even says there is no "other" way. Tom's diction changes to an inflated tone when he says, "that ever I heard of" in an awkward syntax. Tom, like the gallant fireman, tries to sound smarter than he is, thus creating a funny tone with a serious message. Tom's one-track mind reflects the attitudes of even the shiniest heroes of the South who still did not respect slaves and did not see the harm of slavery.

Tom's antics pile on one after another like layers of dripping wet whitewash across the face of the nation. His grotesque exaggeration of Jim's escape mirrors Twain's techniques of exaggeration from his first published piece on. Tom even uses other texts like Twain did throughout his newspaper days and in *Roughing It* to distance himself from the exaggeration. Here, Twain uses these other texts within the text to amplify the ridiculous plan. These exaggerations make readers cringe with shame for

Tom and sigh in pity for Huck who is strung along in the crime. One such cringe-worthy application is Tom's coat of arms for Jim which reads, in italics:

1. *Here a captive heart busted.*
2. *Here a poor prisoner, forsook by the world and friends, fretted out his sorrowful life.*
3. *Here a lonely heart broke, and a worn spirit went to its rest, after thirty seven years of solitary captivity.*
4. *Here, homeless and friendless, after thirty-seven years of bitter captivity, perished a noble stranger, a natural son of Louis XIV. (322)*

Tom's coat of arms' dignified tone does nothing but mock Jim and the situation. Huck even notices that "Tom's voice trembled, whilst he was reading them, and he most broke down" (323). By now readers must be fuming at Tom; he is exploiting Jim for his own fun and even acting sorrowful in the process, knowing full well Jim is free. Texts like Jim's coat of arms in the evasion part of *Huckleberry Finn* are grotesque exaggerations Tom creates that ridicule Jim's actual sorrow as well as the sorrow of all slaves like Jim during this time. Readers' disgust begins as disillusionment of Tom but eventually ends as a critique of Tom's society just as in *Tom Sawyer*. Through his grotesque imaginings like the coat of arms, Jim's messages on plates, and the final letter to the Phelps', Tom acts as an exaggerator just like Twain, warning audiences of the less admirable traits of human nature by magnifying them to ridiculous proportions.

One way Twain deviates from his previous techniques of exaggeration is through the narrator, Huck. There is no longer a distance from the narrator to frame the story; this is Huck's story, and he tells it. Yet, even Huck's voice seems to get lost in Tom's evasion plan. Huck becomes a kind of frame for Tom's action, discussing and discouraging Tom's plan but with no control over the action. Huck's suggestions are always mocked and rejected by Tom and Huck's narration becomes more and more

objective as his ideas are discarded. Twain allows Huck's voice to fade in these chapters for the same reason he uses frames in his previous works—to make sure the narrator is not blamed for the action, for the lie. Even though Huck continues to tell the story, the reader continues to sympathize with him and grows to dislike Tom's actions. Tom becomes the exaggerating fool while Huck recounts Tom's folly. In fact, readers see a reversal of roles; Huck becomes "Tom" on the Phelps farm and, while Tom becomes "Sid," Tom also becomes a caricature of Sid, a grotesque rendering of the "good little boy." In reversing the readers' perceptions of Tom and Huck, Twain shocks audiences into the truth. Readers begin to see the hypocrisy of people like Tom who follow societal rules and do not fight the status quo of slavery. Meanwhile, readers begin to understand Huck's struggle and, despite all prescribed notions, begin to believe Huck is the hero, not because he goes along with Tom's plan, but because he is lost in the exaggeration of Tom and because he has not changed his own "morals." In his analysis of Huck's "playing double" at the end of the novel, Fulton explains, "Huck remains the same 'Huck' at the novel's conclusion, his character seemingly unaffected by what he has gone through. Not so, the reader" (*Ethical Realism* 87). The reader must examine his own morals after reading this exaggerated tale.

Through the contrast of Huck's "deformed" conscience and Tom's devious evasion, readers of *Huckleberry Finn* are left to examine the extremes of human nature and determine what is right and wrong. While there are definitely problems with Huck's character, especially in his acquiescence to Tom's plot, when compared through both works it seems Twain sets up the contrast and invites readers to sympathize and agree with Huck as opposed to Tom. As in earlier writings, Twain achieves a paradox in which

the reader's choice is obvious (Huck) but not the one the reader would have expected (Tom). Twain's mastery of the grotesque aesthetic of exaggeration surfaces in the evasion scene of *Huckleberry Finn*. Readers of his earlier works witness the same technique for exaggeration, employed in works from "A Gallant Fireman" to *Roughing It*, reappearing in the final scenes of *Huckleberry Finn*; yet, the evasion holds infinitely higher stakes with the question of human worth in the balance. What sets this particular sequence above the rest is its disturbing effect on the reader. The reader is challenged to see the morality of Huck's character despite his outcast position in society. Even more transparently, Twain's exaggeration encourages readers to recoil at Tom's evasion plan and thus renounce society's grotesque exaggeration of the morality of slavery.

In his analysis of Mark Twain's influence on the American novel, Richard Chase observes the "doubleness" not only of the author but of his work, *Huckleberry Finn*, which stems from Twain's "imagination of idyl and of melodrama" (148). Agreeing with T.S. Elliot, Chase concludes that Huck's story is one that cannot end happily or tragically, but instead "His life simply continues its pattern of unresolved contradictions; he will go on as the impassive observer and participant in abruptly alternating experiences of contentment and horror" (148). While this alternating experience certainly applies to *Huckleberry Finn*, readers experience the same fluctuation of contentment and horror in *Tom Sawyer* and, more importantly, in life. Twain uses the alternating personalities and actions of Tom and Huck to present a grotesquely real image of humankind. He mixes contentment with horror while exaggerating that horror in order to make it more real to the reader. By lying through exaggeration and portraying the two boys to such extremes, Twain creates a truly grotesque caricature in which the salient

features of both the individual boys and society as a whole are magnified and clarified for readers to come to conclusions about themselves and their own society.

*The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* subtly employ all of Twain's techniques for exaggeration creating a character study where, at first, Huck Finn is the grotesque exaggeration of Tom Sawyer. Huck's grotesque character should repulse readers, but instead readers sympathize and learn from Huck because he becomes an innocent bystander to Tom's grotesque exaggeration of Jim's escape in the final chapters of *Huckleberry Finn*. The sharp contrast of the two iconic characters, when read in light of Twain's technique and execution of exaggeration in previous works, creates new understanding about the paradox of human nature. Readers are confronted yet again with the question of what makes a man "good" or "bad." Should Huck go to hell for deciding to help Jim? Should Tom be praised for taking a bullet in Jim's escape? Twain artfully portrays Tom and Huck so that the audiences' feelings toward each are incongruous with society's within the novels. In his chapter on *Huckleberry Finn* in *Mark Twain's Ethical Realism*, Fulton explores Twain's intention of getting beneath "the crust" of characters like Tom and Huck which, of course, means going beneath what society sees. Fulton expands on the idea from Twain's journal entry which states "Human nature cannot be studied in cities except at a disadvantage—a village is the place. There you can know your man inside & out—in a city you but know his crust; & his crust is usually a lie" (qtd. in *Ethical Realism* 53). While the citizens of St. Petersburg hail Tom the glittering hero and try to civilize Huck, readers feel skepticism toward Tom's bravery and sympathy for Huck's situation. Twain's exaggeration of the two boys and their antics pushes readers beyond the crust of Tom and

Huck and introduces readers to the real boys “inside & out.” With such a clear picture of human nature’s extremes in the form of Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn, Twain challenges readers to contemplate their own “crusts,” or rather to look beyond their outer appearances and inside their motives and values; and, like Aunt Polly surveying the whitewashed fence, readers stand astonished at the end result of Twain’s labor.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Conclusion

A survey of Mark Twain's earliest writings and the novel *Roughing It* (1872) gives readers a new understanding of Twain's techniques and motives behind exaggeration with which to reread the classic boyhood tales of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885). In his early works and novels, Twain constantly uses exaggeration to highlight the contrasts of human nature through contrasts in styles and characters. He "lies" to the reader out of an "urgent necessity" to show truth. Twain's exaggerations start as contrasts in tone, like the high language used to describe a fire in "A Gallant Fireman" (1851). In *Roughing It*, Twain's exaggerations become more of a character study, contrasting the good and evil in each character and showing readers that both good and evil exist in everyone, even killers like Slade, and, later in *Tom Sawyer*, even in good country women like Aunt Polly. The techniques like framing and incongruous tone used in his earlier works are carried into Twain's most famous works, *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*. While the grotesque features in *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn* are not overlooked by scholars, the contrast of the main characters of Tom and Huck must be examined more fully in light of exaggeration. Exaggeration is more than a humorous technique in Twain's work. It is the root of Mark Twain's grotesque style which leads readers to several truths of human nature. In his intriguing exploration of grotesque qualities in the works of Twain and Faulkner, Young-Jong You notices of "quality of nightmare" in *Huckleberry Finn*,

concluding that in the novel “comic romance is fused with the novel of tragic realism” (4). *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn* become truly grotesque in their exaggeration of the ugliness of human nature, like the terrible death of Injun Joe and the ridiculous evasion ending of *Huckleberry Finn*.

As examined in Chapter Four, in *Green Hills of Africa*, Ernest Hemingway says, “All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn* [...] All American writing comes from that. There was nothing before. There has been nothing as good since” (22). Though the legitimacy of this statement is questioned because of Hemingway’s own exaggeration, the heart of the statement is this: Twain’s influence on American literature is immeasurable. The fact that some critics argue *Huckleberry Finn* is “hyper-canonized” proves Twain’s exaggeration, even in the canon. And if readers learn one thing from Twain, it is that if something is genuine it is bound to be exaggerated in order for others to believe it. One of these truths is the paradox of man’s character which is both good and evil. In “Those Other Thematic Patterns,” Gribben observes these contrasts and concludes both must be present for readers to appreciate Twain’s writing. He states:

Twain’s writings record what their author perceived for humankind: a diabolically conjoined existence of antithetical beauty and ugliness, mirth and tears, elation and remorse, security and terror. This current generation would not value Mark Twain’s fiction so much without the turmoil of clouds and fire and agony, and the contrasting sunlight, breaking through benignly, would never seem so bright and cheering. The world of his fictions impresses most readers as the more truthfully contrived for those disturbing intervals of the repulsive and the horrific. (198)

Not only do readers appreciate Twain’s honest look at humankind, readers also learn about humankind because of Twain’s exaggerated contrasts throughout his works. What Gribben notices in Twain’s work is more than just the description of humankind, it is the

exaggeration of humankind so that readers will see the “antithetical beauty and ugliness” as they are contrasted so starkly.

Twain’s art of exaggeration is not to depict human life correctly but rather to correct reader’s perceptions of their own lives. O’Connor discusses the necessity of the grotesque to instruct readers in her essay “Some Aspects of the Grotesque in Southern Fiction.” She says, “For the [grotesque] writer I have been describing, a literature which mirrors society would be not fit guide for it” (46). In another essay about her faith and writing, O’Connor continues this thought by saying that grotesque realism “is the realism which does not hesitate to distort appearances in order to show a hidden truth” (179). O’Connor’s definition of a grotesque writer fits Twain’s art of exaggeration. Twain uses distortions of appearance (mainly through exaggeration) to show a hidden truth of human nature. Twain’s mechanism of exaggeration facilitates grotesque qualities in many of his works. It is because of his exaggerations of the contrasts in human nature that Twain’s works are still studied and admired.

Twain’s intention to capture human nature accurately was not a restraint on his writing but rather a challenge to depict complex feelings and actions that are commonly difficult to put into words. Whether consciously or unconsciously, Twain readily accepted this challenge by pushing the limits between the romantic and the grotesque, between what is real and what is unreal:

If you attempt to (build) create & build a wholly imaginary incident, adventure or situation, you will go astray, & the artificiality of the thing will be detectable. But if you found on a fact in your personal experience, it is an acorn, a root, and every created adornment that grows up out of it and spreads its foliage and blossoms to the sun will seem realities, not inventions. (343)

In this excerpt from his journal, Twain illustrates his writing process through the image of a tree growing from seed to roots, and finally to the finished work. “Every created adornment” represents those grotesque exaggerations stemming from a real-life experience. His articulation above proves Twain had come to understand the different uses and different results of using “wholly imaginary” events and events crafted from experience into imagination through exaggeration. The events crafted from experience into imagination are not “artificial,” but rather they are the expression of truth through exaggeration and imagination. Many times in Twain’s writing, this seedling of inspiration from personal experience “blossoms” into a grotesque experience; it basks in the sunshine of reality but still strangely glimmers in the imaginative.

Joe B. Fulton, in *Mark Twain in the Margins*, notes how this “compass of fact” Twain describes in this journal entry serves as his “aesthetic needle, directing him into believable realms.” According to Fulton, “Twain blends the techniques of romance and realism within his fiction, linking a romantic concept of inspiration with the very realistic concept of how fiction should be made” (13). He suggests Twain did not fully reject Romanticism but combined it with his own art of realism. This mixture of both imaginary and real, which Fulton categorizes as aesthetic realism, can also be seen as Twain’s attempt at capturing the two opposite sides of human nature: the romantic and the grotesque. In many instances, Twain presents a truth to his readers by exaggerating the truth into grotesque realism.

Twain begins with a tangible idea, like the memory of boyhood adventures, but transcends the original with a grotesque description from his imagination. In these grotesque moments, Twain goes beyond taking a picture and instead creates a work of art,

as Brander Matthews observed in 1892 and Rex Burns developed in 1982. His sublime moments are crafted by words on a page but transcend the concrete to touch the spiritual. In his 1892 work *Americanisms and Briticisms*, Brander Matthews, an acquaintance of Twain, writes: “That Mr. Clemens draws from life, and yet lifts his work from the domain of the photograph to the region of art is evident to anyone who will give his writing the honest attention which it deserves” (161). Perhaps closer attention to Twain’s description of environment and characters, real and imagined, will yield evidence of his fine art which transcends even photographs by using words that hit the heart of human nature with truth of its grotesque features, its neither perfectly good nor perfectly evil composition. Through grotesque exaggerations, Twain manages to put into words those ugly but salient characteristics of humans which no photograph can depict.

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