



The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County

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Wheeler's story is slight. Jim Smiley, who would bet on almost anything, once trained a frog to jump so well that Smiley wagered his frog would beat any other. A stranger takes Jim's bet, though he confesses to having no frog of his own and forcing Jim back to the marsh to catch one for him. In Smiley's absence, the stranger takes hold of Smiley's frog, pries open its mouth and pours a bellyful of buckshot down its throat. When Smiley returns and pits his frog against the new one of the stranger's, Smiley's frog is virtually stuck to the ground. Unable to jump, the frog loses the contest, and Smiley loses his wager.

What makes the story so effective is Twain's handling of the obvious tall tale. While telling the story to the narrator in dialect, Wheeler prolongs the events of the tale by bringing in extraneous material, red herrings that circle and swim about but bear little relevance to the main action. Yet the reader is aware that Wheeler knows what he is doing. His straight-faced delivery is part of the hoax, part of the trickery played on the narrator whose style of literary formality contrasts humorously with Wheeler's colloquial freedom.

The successful mixture of dialect, delay, deadpan tone, and absurd detail makes this story a fine example of the tall-tale tradition in American literature.

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