

“seeing the elephant”

**some perspectives  
on mark twain’s  
*roughing it***

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In 1905, when he was almost seventy, Mark Twain was invited to attend a pioneer’s reunion in Reno, Nevada. “If I were a few years younger,” he wrote, “I would accept it, and promptly. I would go. . . . I would renew my youth; and talk — and talk — and talk — and have the time of my life! . . . Those were the days! — those old ones. They were so full to the brim with the wine of life; there have been no others like them.”<sup>1</sup> Our most detailed record of those old times, those good old days, is of course *Roughing It*. In what follows, I will argue that Mark Twain’s memory played tricks with him in 1905, and that his experiences between 1861-1866 were not the hilarious holiday that he remembered forty years later. I will insist that the difference between the seventy year old’s memories of good times on the Pacific Slope and his actual experience of the Far West — as recorded in *Roughing It* — is nearly as extreme as the contrasting portraits of his Hannibal boyhood in *Tom Sawyer* and the dark memories recorded in “Villagers of 1840-1843.” In offering this rather somber reading of *Roughing It*, I will suggest, by recourse to the biographical and cultural contexts out of which the book grew, some of the ways in which it can help us to get “the feel” of life on a mining frontier in middle and late nineteenth century America.

The standard reading of *Roughing It* — Henry Nash Smith’s essay, “Mark Twain as an Interpreter of the Far West: The Structure of *Roughing It*” — proceeds from an analysis of the “voice” of the narrator in the first paragraph of the text. The tone here, Mr. Smith argues, is “extremely complex.”

For although the principal character, the tenderfoot tourist, tells the story in the first person, it is evident that the pronoun "I" links two quite different personae: the tenderfoot setting out across the Plains and the old-timer, the veteran, who has seen the elephant and now looks back upon his own callow days of inexperience. Both these personae are present in the narrative from the start. The contrast between them, which is an implied judgment upon the tenderfoot's innocence and a corresponding claim for the superior maturity and sophistication of the old-timer, is the consequence of precisely that journey which the book will describe. Thus, in a sense, the whole plot is implicit in the management of point of view from the first paragraph.<sup>2</sup>

Franklin Rogers summarizes Smith's argument and elaborates on Smith's suggestion that this view of the book applies only to its first half. According to Rogers, Clemens, who was pressed for time, distracted by domestic troubles, and running out of material, padded out the second half of his book with disconnected filler. In effect, then, esthetically and for the purposes of cultural analysis, the first half of *Roughing It* is coherent and penetrating, the second half flawed and negligible.<sup>3</sup>

Now there can be little disagreement with Smith's characterization of the innocent newcomer. He is gullible, callow, the possessor of inflated expectations and childish illusions. But what does the innocent become? At the end of his journey does he possess "the superior maturity and sophistication of the old-timer," as Smith would have it? Does he embody "the knowledge and wisdom" that Rogers confers upon him?<sup>4</sup>

The acquisition of such virtues would involve entry into a social milieu of values sufficiently secure and rational to permit the realistic—by which I mean wise and mature—acceptance of things as they are. Moreover, such personal growth would bear the strong suggestion that the world of *Roughing It* offered models and rewards for a positive and mature alternative to gullible innocence. In fact, the book does neither. Initially enigmatic, the moral world of *Roughing It* grows progressively more confusing and paradoxical as the innocent moves through it. His reaction is not to put on knowledge and wisdom. In part, no doubt, this is because there is so little to be found in his environment. In greater part, however, the harsh jokes and brutal revelations which constitute the innocent's education fill him with resentment, deep self-contempt, and render him disillusioned, bitter and cynical. Some of that harshness and cynicism is present in the first paragraph of the novel. It grows more insistent as the book progresses.

If my characterization of the pattern of *Roughing It* is even approximately correct, then I believe we can get a glimpse of its evolution by looking briefly at a moment in the history of its composition.

On March 4, 1871, when work on the book was well advanced, Clemens wrote to his brother, Orion: "Right in my first chapter I have got to alter the whole style of one of my characters and rewrite him clear through to where I am now."<sup>5</sup> Smith argues—and I am inclined to agree—that continued work on his narrative had convinced Clemens that a more complex and ironic tone was essential, right from the start.<sup>6</sup> Six days later, on March 10, Clemens wrote to Orion again, this time asking him to jot down his memories of J.A. Slade, a character they had encountered at the Rocky Ridge overland station in 1861.<sup>7</sup> Given the fact that the second letter followed so promptly on the heels of the first, it seems quite probable that there was for Clemens an imaginative connection between the Slade story and the alterations to the tone of Chapter 1. To put it another way, the evolution of his material impressed Clemens with the necessity of introducing ironic complexity (of some sort) into his narrative persona at the very beginning of his book. This decision, in turn, triggered the memory of J.A. Slade, and led to his incorporation into the story. I am suggesting, then, that the Slade material should cast light back on, and help us to precisely define, the quality of the "voice" in Chapter 1.

As he listens to stories and legends on the stagecoach, the tenderfoot learns that J.A. Slade is a man of many parts.

A high and efficient servant of the Overland, an outlaw among outlaws and yet their relentless scourge, Slade was at once the most bloody, the most dangerous and the most valuable citizen that inhabited the savage fastnesses of the mountains. (90)

Warming to his subject, the narrator provides a detailed history of Slade's exploits, a mingled record of savage brutality, ruthlessness, and a rough kind of heroism. Little wonder that he is stunned when Slade turns up in person at an Overland station where they have stopped for breakfast.

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. (96)

Even more astonishing, Slade has none of the personal characteristics that the tenderfoot associates with a man of his bloody reputation.

He was so friendly and gentle-spoken that I warmed to him in spite of his awful history. It was hardly possible to realize that this pleasant person was the pitiless scourge of the outlaws, the

raw-head-and-bloody-bones the nursing mothers of the mountains terrified their children with. (97)

Some time later, the narrator reads an account of Slade's death. Once again he is puzzled, for he learns that Slade, just before his execution by a mob of vigilantes, betrayed an entirely unaccountable personal dimension. "The doomed man," we learn, "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!'" (102-103) Deeply perplexed by this confusing spectacle, the narrator closes the Slade story with a prolonged meditation on the enigma of human behavior.

There is something about the desperado-nature that is wholly unaccountable—at least it looks unaccountable. It is this. The true desperado is gifted with splendid courage, and yet he will take the most infamous advantage of his enemy; armed and free, he will stand up before a host and fight until he is shot all to pieces, and yet when he is under the gallows and helpless he will cry and plead like a child. 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 lamentation, 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. No coward would dare that. Many a notorious coward, many a chicken-livered poltroon, coarse, brutal, degraded, has made his dying speech without a quiver 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. (103-104)

The Slade character, gentle and savage, heroic and degraded, fearless and craven, is a concentrated, paradoxical embodiment of moral confusion. Its significance in the evolution of the narrator's consciousness cannot be overemphasized. In a puzzling and quite unsettling way, the story provokes him to reflect that surfaces cannot be trusted, that ap-

pearances deceive, that human behavior “is a conundrum worth investigating.”

In the wake of the Slade episode, the narrator is systematically and progressively initiated into a world of unreliable illusions. This painful pilgrim’s progress from innocence to experience involves a number of related developments in his world view. At the social and political levels, he is intermittently angry, disillusioned, outraged, and ambivalent to a degree suggesting utter confusion. Government, he decides, is a front for venality and gross self-interest. The legal system, rife with ignorance and corruption, is an obstacle to justice. Politicians and policemen, who brutalize the Chinese, are characterized as “the dust-licking pimps and slaves of the scum.” A crooked assayer is forced out of business not because he is dishonest, but because his success prompts the envy of his equally deceitful competitors. And American missionaries are pious hypocrites, though they are no more subject to the narrator’s ridicule than their victims, the Hawaiians. It is simply a case of moral idiots in the hands of moral idiots.<sup>8</sup>

More crucially, in discovering that the world is throughout deceptive the narrator also learns, to his deep chagrin, that he is himself quite easily taken in. Indeed, there is a neat but devastating symmetry to the situation. The world, and many of the men in it, are deceivers; but the deceivers are also pitifully self-deceived. This is brought home to the narrator most painfully when his determination to strike it rich leads him to gloat over his discovery of what he imagines to be a bonanza. Striding boldly into camp, he assures his companions that he has “enough to make you all rich in twenty-four hours!” (196) When it is demonstrated to him that he is rich in the gold of fools, he is appropriately humiliated and disillusioned.

Moralizing, I observed, then, that “all that glitters is not gold.”

Mr. Ballou said I could go further than that, and lay it up among my treasures of knowledge, that *nothing* that glitters is gold. So I learned then, once for all, that gold in its native state is but dull, unornamental stuff, and that only low-born metals excite the admiration of the ignorant with an ostentatious glitter. However, like the rest of the world, I still go on under-rating men of gold and glorifying men of mica. Commonplace human nature cannot rise above that. (197)

To be sure, the mica is deceptive. More painfully, however, the narrator learns that he is, with the rest of the world, perpetually ready to be deceived. The newcomer sees this, but to no avail, for he also sees that he will continue to be taken in. “Commonplace human nature” makes it inevitable.

This education in the ubiquity of deception could, one imagines, result in a kind of healthy skepticism—something not too far from the

sophistication, maturity, knowledge and wisdom that Smith and Rogers have in mind. In fact, however, within the covers of *Roughing It* this progressive revelation of the world's manifold illusions results in profound cynicism: a deep and simultaneous contempt for both self and others.

This is, I acknowledge, to oversimplify the case somewhat. The texture of the narrative is hardly as consistent as I have made it seem. Most obviously, the book is liberally laced with moments of youthful ebullience and outrageous humor—moments which contrast rather distinctively with the developing pessimism which I have described. The result is a narrative pattern of flow and reflux, of rapidly alternating emotional currents. At the same time, however, these humorous episodes work in comic counterpoint to the crumbling moral fabric that the narrator perceives and reacts to, for the humor, upon close inspection, is seen to arise from a discovery of hollowness, pointlessness, collapsed illusions, willful deception, hapless self-deception, and defeat. In the aggregate, such humorous interludes mirror, but without harsh human consequences, the dominant pattern of shifting surfaces and moral confusion that characterizes *Roughing It*.<sup>9</sup>

As if keeping time with the world around him, the narrator vacillates back and forth between equally strong positive and negative states—between comic elation and despondency, credulity and skepticism, optimism and pessimism. Indeed, as I shall detail more fully below, this radical swing between opposite emotional states was a conspicuous symptom of the mining frontier “boom pathology.” In its essence, the speculator's delirium involved sharp alterations between the optimistic anticipation of striking it rich and periodic but usually temporary feelings of hopelessness and defeat. When the latter condition became permanent, when the miner finally acknowledged that his high hopes had been based on hollow illusions, he had seen the elephant.<sup>10</sup> Attuned as he is to the dominant spirit of speculation, it is hardly surprising to find such a pattern of emotional opposites in the voice of the narrator. Nor is it remarkable that this characteristic pattern forms—especially in the later sections of the book—a kind of epicycle to a progressively more dominant downward curve into complete disillusionment. Taken together, these rhythms or movements, rooted in the perception of shifting surfaces and unreliable appearances, and reflected in the voice of the narrator, bind the parts of *Roughing It*, scattered as they are geographically, into a tentative but discernible unity.

As previously suggested, I am strongly inclined to replace the wise and mature old-timer of Smith and Rogers with the voice of an increasingly bitter cynic. I do not find wisdom or sophistication in the speaker's declaration that he will “go about of an afternoon . . . and pick up two or three pailfuls of shining slugs, and nuggets of gold and

silver on the hillside" (43). The irony that cuts through the superficial innocence is bitter for the simple reason that it is freighted with potent self-contempt. This sentiment is much more dramatically evident in an episode which occurs at the very beginning of the tenderfoot's journey. A coyote is sighted, and the narrator commences what is, admittedly, a marvelously funny description of one of nature's genuine disasters. "The coyote," he says,

is a long, slim, sick and sorry-looking skeleton, with a gray wolf-skin stretched over it, a tolerably bushy tail that forever sags down with a despairing expression of forsakenness and misery, a furtive and evil eye, and a long, sharp face, with slightly lifted lip and exposed teeth. He has a general slinking expression all over. 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. (66-67)

For all of his destitution, however, the despicable coyote has a way of asserting himself. When pursued by an ambitious and overconfident dog, the coyote contrives to prolong the chase until the frustrated pursuer is far from his wagon. Only then does the deceiver exercise his real speed, leaving the "dog solitary and alone in the midst of a vast solitude!" It makes the dog's "head swim."

He stops, and looks all around; climbs the nearest sand-mound, and gazes into the distance; shakes his head reflectively, and then, without a word, he turns and jogs along back to his train, and takes up a humble position under the hindmost wagon, and feels unspeakably mean, and looks ashamed, and hangs his tail at half-mast for a week. And for as much as a year after that, whenever there is a great hue and cry after a coyote, that dog will merely glance in that direction without emotion, and apparently observe to himself, 'I believe I do not wish any of the pie.' (68)

Mr. Smith quite astutely observes that "The basic situation which *Roughing It* develops is presented in a condensed version" in this comic episode. He goes on to elaborate:

This anecdote summarizes Mark Twain's imaginative interpretation of the Far West. It involves a tenderfoot with a higher opinion of himself than he can make good in the frontier environment; a veteran who looks disreputable (and is disreputable, by town-bred standards) but is nevertheless in secure command of the situation; and the process by which the tenderfoot gains knowledge, quite fresh and new knowledge, at the cost of humiliation to himself.<sup>11</sup>

It is quite true that the coyote and the dog embody the elements which combine in the complex voice of the narrative. Furthermore, it seems fair to argue that inflated self-esteem is an ingredient in the tender-foot's innocence. But it is surely a titanic stretch to confer wisdom, knowledge, maturity, and sophistication on the coyote, or to describe him, as Mr. Smith does at another point, as "a triumphant and heroic figure, endowed with supernatural powers."<sup>12</sup> The coyote is disreputable not simply by town standards, but by any standard. He is an odious fraud who evens his score with Fate by seducing innocent fools into the shameful and humiliating exposure of their folly. Furthermore, and much more crucially, the dog does not acquire wisdom and knowledge from his painful experience. He acquires precisely what the coyote wants him to acquire: a powerful insight into the cruel consequences of trusting appearances, and a shattering revelation of his own vanity and capacity for self-deception. The dog is not educated or initiated; he is utterly crushed. His exquisite sense of abandonment and humiliating self-betrayal is gathered up and summarized in his feeling "solitary and alone in the midst of a vast solitude." This image of desolation anticipates Mark Twain's feeling, recorded much later in *Roughing It*, as he looked into the vast crater of a volcano on Maui: "I felt like the Last Man, neglected of the judgment, and left pinnacled in mid-heaven, a forgotten relic of a vanished world" (486). No less than that describing the dog's emotions, this latter image, as William M. Gibson has observed, looks ahead to "the sense of cosmic loneliness" imparted by the "Conclusion" of *The Mysterious Stranger*.<sup>13</sup>

The net psychological result of the dog's experience with the coyote should, by Mr. Smith's calculus, be rather precisely reflected in the narrative "voice" which presides over the incident. Does that voice possess the wisdom and maturity which Mr. Smith confers upon it in the first paragraph, and which he confers, by implication, on the coyote in this episode? Not for a moment. The narrator admires the coyote's gratuitous cruelty only slightly less than he relishes the shattering humiliation of the dog. "If you start a swift-footed dog after the coyote," he says, "you will enjoy it ever so much—especially if it is a dog that has a good opinion of himself, and has been brought up to think he knows something about speed" (67). Quite true, the speaker here is an insider and an old-timer; just as certainly, this is a voice which bespeaks an experience in the Far West not at all unlike the dog's. But it is emphatically not a wise voice, or a mature voice. That the narrator is familiar with devastating humiliation is no less evident than the fact that he takes positive pleasure in seeing it inflicted on others. This is, then, the voice of a cynic whose head once swam when, without warning, he was made to feel as "unspeakably mean" as that innocent fool, the dog. Indeed, we are well justified in believing Mark Twain when he assures us that the coyote "was not a pretty creature or

respectable either, for I got well acquainted with his race afterward, and can speak with confidence”(66). Many chapters later, indigent, solitary and forlorn in San Francisco, he describes himself in terms strikingly reminiscent of the coyote’s unwary victim.

For two months my sole occupation was avoiding acquaintances; for during that time I did not earn a penny, or buy an article of any kind, or pay my board. I became very adept at ‘slinking.’ I slunk from back street to back street, I slunk away from approaching faces that looked familiar, I slunk to my meals, ate them humbly and with mute apology for every mouthful I robbed my generous landlady of, and at midnight, after wanderings that were but slinking away from cheerfulness and light, I slunk to my bed. I felt meaner, and lowlier and more despicable than the worms. (380)

Neither wise nor mature, this is the voice of one who has seen the elephant in his coyote disguise.

To be sure, the tenderfoot’s gullibility and overconfidence are essential elements in his undoing. Indeed, the consciousness that he has himself to thank for his condition intensifies the sting of his painful humiliation. That same consciousness helps to account for the fact that cynicism—and not wisdom, and a host of other virtues—is the tenderfoot’s portion as he emerges from innocence into Far Western varieties of experience. His inadvertent but self-propelled entry into this harsh rite of passage has self-contempt as its issue; and self-contempt, in its turn, fosters in the tenderfoot precisely the kind of ruthlessness which inspires the solitary, iconoclastic coyote. In short, as the result of his initiation the innocent becomes, with the narrator and the coyote, a compulsive and extremely accomplished practical joker.

The evidence concerning Mark Twain’s experiences with, and responses to, practical joking is abundant and remarkably consistent. William R. Gillis’s observation that “Sam did like fun, but not when the fun was at his expense,”<sup>14</sup> is a neat summary of the situation. We know that young Sam Clemens of Hannibal was an avid and accomplished practical joker, and we can be equally certain that he was not pleased with the bloody nose one escapade cost him.<sup>15</sup> By his own account in *Roughing It*, Mark Twain did not easily cease to regret the fact that he once ruined a warm childhood friendship with “a boyish prank” (109). Later, as a young man on the frontier, Clemens was an adept practitioner of the practical joke. C. C. Goodwin recalled that Clemens “would lead his victim up to the shambles he had in waiting for him, and the unconscious creature would never suspect what was going to happen until the ax fell.”<sup>16</sup> True to form, however, Clemens was temperamentally indisposed to find anything even remotely funny in the role—which he unwittingly assumed on dozens of occasions—of

victim. His volatile irascibility at being exposed in his folly comes out most clearly in Gillis's *Goldrush Days with Mark Twain*. For the most part a tribute to the Washoe humorist, the volume recounts episode after episode in which Clemens took the bait and then responded angrily, often "lighting out" in a fit of rage and humiliation.<sup>17</sup> Other commentators have tended to confirm the impression left by Gillis.<sup>18</sup> And Mark Twain's rather extensive commentary on practical joking in *The Autobiography* attests to the fact that the sting of numerous exposures was very much alive in his memory. One passage is especially suggestive:

During three-fourths of my life I have held the practical joker in limitless contempt and detestation; I have despised him as I have despised no other criminal, and when I am delivering my opinion about him the reflection that I have been a practical joker myself seems to increase my bitterness rather than modify it.<sup>19</sup>

Late in his life, Mark Twain also remembered that "there were many practical jokers in the new Territory."<sup>20</sup> Years earlier, in 1870, he wrote a piece for the *Territorial Enterprise*, "'Early Days' in Nevada—Silverland Nabobs," from which a similar picture emerges. In a series of brief portraits he recounts the misadventures of would-be millionaires, concluding, with apparent satisfaction: "I am sincerely glad that my supernatural stupidity lost me my great windfall before I had a chance to make a more inspired ass of me than I was before."<sup>21</sup> Dan DeQuille's account of the early years is equally replete with anecdotes and stories highlighting inflated illusions, collapsed expectations, and their gamesome social expression, the ubiquitous practical joke.<sup>22</sup> The patterned ruse, from bait to the bland, final revelation, was as much a staple of the Washoe experience as it was of the tradition of Southwestern humor so familiar to young Sam Clemens.<sup>23</sup> In view of this personal, social, and cultural background, it is perfectly appropriate that the humor of *Roughing It* should be rooted in the dynamics of practical joking. From the coyote and the dog, through the masterful deflating of that newcomer and windbag, General Buncombe, to Mark Twain's humiliating and bitterly remembered exposure on Gold Hill, *Roughing It* recounts episode after episode in which guileless, sometimes foolish innocence succumbs to ruthless, often cynical experience.<sup>24</sup>

Contrary to one variety of popular opinion, practical jokes are not funny. Nor are they intended to be. They are intended to hurt, to expose, to humiliate. Paradoxically, while we must deplore the malice of the practical joker, we must also pity him, for his joke will succeed only if he is capable of putting himself, at least imaginatively, in the place of his intended victim. Indeed, it is probably fair to assume that

most practical jokers have in fact experienced the hurt and humiliating exposure which they inflict upon others, for the hurt and humiliation explain what is otherwise extraordinary—the malicious impulse which prompts the contriving and the execution of the joke. In short, the joker has been where he puts his victim, just as the coyote and the narrator have been where they put the dog. By extension, it is difficult to conceive of a successful practical joke born, as it were, *ab ovo*. Rather, one practical joke is the child of an earlier practical joke, and that earlier practical joke is in turn the child of an earlier practical joke, and suddenly we see that a practical joke, however trivial in itself, is the manifestation of a sustained, rapidly repeating, and possibly accelerating historical cycle. Being hurt, and hurting. Being humiliated, and humiliating. Being exposed, and exposing. Where the joking started is a conundrum worth investigating. Where it ends is too. In *Roughing It* the joke starts in the first paragraph, and it goes on for hundreds of pages. The victims, numerous and scattered as they are, form an aggregate which points back to an innocence shattering practical joke from which the narrator never recovered, and through myriad repetitions to a kind of ur-practical joke which has deeply penetrated, and which indeed dominates, the culture of the mining frontier. In this light, William Dean Howells' observation, that his friend's exaggerations and ironies were ideal rhetorical devices for describing the Far West, strikes us as particularly astute. "All existence there," he continued, "must have looked like an extravagant joke, the humor of which was only deepened by its nether-side of tragedy."<sup>25</sup> That Mark Twain attempted suicide in 1866, not long before his departure for the East, lends startling confirmation to Howells' insight.<sup>26</sup>

In important ways Mark Twain was ready for the Far West before he got there. One of his earliest notebook entries, set down in 1855, is at once an outline of "The Sanguine Temperament" and an astute moment of self-analysis. Sanguinity, he wrote, confers

readiness, and even fondness for change; suddenness and intensity to the feelings; impulsiveness, and hastiness of character; great warmth of both anger and love. . . . It is always predominant in those active, stirring, noisy characters that are found in every community. It is very sensitive and is first deeply hurt at a slight, the next emotion is violent rage, and in a few moments the cause and the result are both forgotten for the time being. It often forgives, but never entirely forgets an injury. . . . It makes warm friends and fiery enemies, and they may be both friends and enemies in the same day, and be perfectly sincere.<sup>27</sup>

In acknowledging the sanguine surplus in his temperament, Clemens realized that he was heir to the kinds of extreme and rapidly alter-

nating emotional states that I have pointed to as a dominant characteristic of the narrator in *Roughing It*. It was in just such a turbulent mood that Clemens, besieged with one domestic crisis after another, approached the composition of his Western book. Years later he recalled that the “resulting periodical and sudden changes of mood in me, from deep melancholy to half-insane tempests and cyclones of humor, are among the curiosities of my life.”<sup>28</sup> In his astute self-scrutiny Clemens also perceived one bold enough to be vulnerable, vulnerable enough to be exquisitely hurt and humiliated, and both sensitive and volatile enough to be violent in the recoil. Can there be any doubt that this temperament would be as shattered by a practical joke as it would be punishing in playing them?

The same personality, and the same pattern of extreme emotions, appear in high relief in Clemens’ letters during the Washoe period. These documents, as Edgar Branch has observed, “show him to have been wholeheartedly seeking his fortune. Buoyant and optimistic at first, he became increasingly dogged, then doubtful, and finally disillusioned.”<sup>29</sup> The letters are a crystal clear portrait of an easily deceived and self-deceived innocent in a context which combines with his personality to launch him on a ride toward an inevitable fall. And the fall was the more crushing for the fact that Clemens, in one corridor of his consciousness, saw it coming as he careened along. At the outset, the tone is barely restrained optimism; soon he will be rich enough to move the family out in style. At the same time, he cautions his sister, Pamela, not to let “Ma know” that he deals

in such romantic nonsense as “brilliant prospects,” because I always *did* hate for any one to know what my plans or hopes or prospects were — for, if I kept people in ignorance in these matters, no one could be disappointed but myself, if they were never realized.

That the insistence on secrecy is in fact a shield against the humiliation of public failure comes out quite clearly in the closing admonition: “Keep these matters to yourselves, and then if we fail, we’ll keep the laugh in the family.”<sup>30</sup> Four months later, the alterations in tone become more extreme and precarious.

If the ledge should prove to be worthless, we’d *sell the water* for money enough to give us quite a lift. But you see, the ledge *will not* prove to be worthless. We have located, near by, a fine site for a mill; and when we strike the ledge, you know, we’ll have a mill-site, water power and pay-rock, all handy. *Then* we shan’t care whether we have capital or not. . . . So, just keep your shirt on, Pamela, until I come. Don’t you know that undemonstrated human calculations won’t do to bet on? Don’t you know that I have only *talked*, as yet, but proved nothing? Don’t you

know that I have expended money in this country but have made none myself? Don't you know that I have never held in my hands a gold or silver bar that belonged to me? Don't you know that it's all talk and no cider so far? Don't you know that people who always feel jolly, no matter where they are or what happens to them — who have the organ of Hope preposterously developed — who are endowed with an uncongealable sanguine temperament — who never feel concerned about the price of corn — and who cannot, by any possibility, discover any but the *bright* side of a picture — are *very* apt to go to extremes, and exaggerate, with 40-horse microscopic power? Of course I never tried to raise these suspicions in your mind, but then your knowledge of the fact that some people's poor frail human nature is a sort of crazy institution anyhow, ought to have suggested them to you. Now, if I hadn't thoughtlessly got you into the notion of coming out here, and thereby got myself into a scrape, I wouldn't have given you that highly-colored paragraph about the mill, & c., because, you know, if that pretty little picture should fail, and wash out, and go to the Devil generally, it wouldn't cost me the loss of an hour's sleep, but you fellows would be as much distressed on my account as I could possibly be if "circumstances beyond my control" were to prevent my being present at my own funeral. But — but —

"In the bright lexicon of youth,  
There's *no such* word as Fail"

and I'll prove it!<sup>31</sup>

As the letters progress and the Elephant of gross self-deception and inevitable failure becomes increasingly difficult to ignore, the tone shifts to an anger and irascibility as extreme as the levitating optimism of the earlier messages. Clemens grows suspicious, violently critical of his brother, and fearful of being exposed as a fool. Finally, totally frustrated, defeated but unwilling to admit it — asserting rather sharply to Pamela in August, 1862, "I have no fear of failure. . . . This country suits me, and — it *shall* suit me, whether or no. . . ." <sup>32</sup> — he abandoned the diggings for a reporter's job in Virginia City. When the fall came, Clemens picked himself up with bitterness and self-contempt. He had taken the bait; and more fool he, he had all unawares allied himself with circumstance in setting the trap for himself. From here he would commence a career as the Washoe Giant, and ultimately as Mark Twain, hoaxer and practical joker *par excellence*. Having seen the Elephant, he would plant a whole herd.

If Clemens was by nature predisposed to fall lock, stock and barrel for the practical joke that the mining frontier amounted to, so were thousands of others, as the ubiquity of the Elephant attests. Such a fate, according to Rodman W. Paul, was almost inescapable, for "the bulk of the population, being quite inexperienced, was bound to suffer disappointment and hardship."<sup>33</sup> The sight of the Elephant had a

way of souring a man's view of the world. An innocent fool grown cynical is inclined to find only fools and cynics, fools to expose, and cynics to enjoy the laugh with. So goes "Seeing the Elephant," a popular bonanza lyric:

The Mormon girls were fat as hogs,  
The chief production, cats and dogs;  
Some had ten wives, others none,  
Thirty-six had Brigham Young.

The damn fool, like all the rest,  
Supposed the thirty-six the best;  
He soon found out his virgin dears  
Had all been Mormons thirteen years.

.....  
I mined a while, got lean and lank,  
And lastly stole a monte-bank;  
Went to the city, got a gambler's name  
And lost my bank at the thimble game.

.....  
When the elephant I had seen,  
I'm damned if I thought I was green;  
And others say, both night and morn,  
They saw him coming round the Horn.

If I should make another raise,  
In New York sure I'll spend my days;  
I'll be a merchant, buy a saw  
So good-bye, mines and Panama.<sup>34</sup>

A verse from another favorite, "When I Went Off to Prospect," puts the matter quite succinctly:

When I got there, the mining ground  
Was staked and claimed for miles around,  
And not a bed was to be found,  
When I went off to prospect.  
The town was crowded full of folks,  
Which made me think 'twas not a hoax;  
At my expense they cracked their jokes,  
When I went off to prospect.<sup>35</sup>

The message of these lyrics—that life on the Comstock was rough—finds ample confirmation in the historical record. In effect, the miner played at a high risk game in which the penalties for losing were severe. At the root of his problem was the simple fact of uncertainty. Imprecise and fundamentally inadequate legal institutions left the door open to widespread fraud and corruption. Since litigation was interminable, and seemed rarely to serve justice, the duel was an ac-

cepted method for settling disputes. In the words of Eliot Lord, “the most certain way of deceiving was to tell the truth, for the exact opposite would then be commonly believed.”<sup>36</sup> If Lord was exaggerating slightly, Dan DeQuille was not when he allowed that even “the honest miner,” darling of legend and example to youth, was “sometimes a little trickish.”<sup>37</sup>

Set against this background of deception, self-deception and ultimate disillusionment, the narrative “voice” and the pervasive practical joking of *Roughing It* surface as key elements in a rather somber interpretation of the mining frontier. A parallel interpretive impulse is evident in the work of Jay Gurian, who finds complacency and romantic distortion in the writings of Bernard DeVoto, Louis Wright, and others. Gurian argues that most historians have been beguiled by literary conventions which dominate our conceptions of the mining frontier, and which number “heroic absurdity and sanctified ignorance” among their prime ingredients.<sup>38</sup> A long look at *Roughing It* has inclined me to a similar view of some aspects of the accepted critical stance. Meanwhile, the recent historical literature has tended to support Gurian’s very explicit anti-romanticism. W. Turrentine Jackson, generalizing from his exhaustive analysis of the White Pine Mining District, sees a “short season of glory and excitement, followed by sudden decline” as the characteristic “pattern of development in the vast majority of mining districts in the West.”<sup>39</sup> Rodman Paul notes the marked uncertainty that permeated both the public and private spheres in mining communities, and highlights a recurrent cycle of giddy optimism and precipitous collapse.<sup>40</sup> More specific reminders of the perils of headlong speculation emerge from Lewis Atherton’s “The Mining Promoter in the Trans-Mississippi West.”<sup>41</sup>

Perhaps the most prominent feature of the mining frontier experience was the rapid and frequent swing between extreme states and conditions. “All things,” according to Paul, “individual fortunes, prices or the fate of whole towns and camps—were subject to sharp and quick fluctuations between gaudy prosperity and total ruin.”<sup>42</sup> This conspicuous local and regional pattern, as I have already suggested, takes its literary expression in *Roughing It*, where narrative structure, complexities of “voice,” and hectic alternations of mood all derive from a steady procession of practical jokes. Turning to a much broader frame of reference, it is tempting to view this prominent frontier pattern, as mirrored in Mark Twain’s book, in the light of Erik Erikson’s observation that America “subjects its inhabitants to more extreme contrasts and abrupt changes during a lifetime or a generation than is normally the case with other great nations.”<sup>43</sup> Taking his cue from Erikson, Michael Kammen has developed a theory of American Civilization which elaborates on the concept of “biformity” as the leading tendency of the national culture. Kammen is “persuaded that a plethora of dualisms, functional and dysfunctional alike, encourages

very rapid change—social, political, and attitudinal—and that inconsistencies in American thought persistently provide the basis for unanticipated shifts in feeling and perception.”<sup>44</sup> The application of such ideas to Mark Twain’s West would issue in the strong suggestion that the mining frontier was on the cutting edge of the larger national culture. Quite evidently, the pattern of “biformity,” with its rapid fluctuation between extreme poles, was etched deeply into the template from which the miner’s experience was formed. Moreover, Kammen’s catalogue of the causes of cultural tension and paradox overlaps in numerous and striking ways with developments on the mining frontier.<sup>45</sup> And his fear, shared with Erikson, that such tensions and polarities can result in mere contradiction and disintegration, may appear an unwittingly astute commentary on countless abandoned mines, ghost towns, and the spectacle of a ravaged landscape.

Apprehensions notwithstanding, however, Kammen’s sweeping survey of American history and culture results in measured optimism and hope for the future. Others, looking back over the record of the bonanza West, have been much less sanguine in their appraisals. In this relatively narrow expression of cultural trajectories, at least, the drift toward contradiction and disintegration was potent with consequences. Indeed, in straining to find a vocabulary adequate to their subject, commentators on the early days in Nevada invariably settle on the language of sickness, affliction, fever, exhaustion, frenzy and disease. Describing the early 1860s, the period of Clemens’ residence in Nevada, Eliot Lord found that “no metaphor can exaggerate the prevailing delirium.”<sup>46</sup> A more recent historian, Gilman M. Ostrander, has selected similar figures of speech. This lunatic economy of gilded illusions and shattering realities, he declares, was in some part “pathological.”

The Comstock fever was a disease much discussed in the press during those years and long afterwards. The vision of a whole mountain of gold and silver overwhelmed the senses of thousands of investors and brought them to financial ruin. This was true of miners on the Comstock, of day-workers in the city, and also of many otherwise prudent and capable businessmen. Like intelligent alcoholics they might understand their problem and yet succumb all over again the next time.<sup>47</sup>

Diseased, feverish, uncertain, corrupt, violent, a compost of illusion, fraud and dirty tricks, little wonder that in early Nevada, according to Eliot Lord, “the atmosphere of distrust was all-pervading.”<sup>48</sup> Nor is it surprising, given the circumstances, that the image of a bland but covertly malicious old-timer preying on a self-deceived innocent should have been perceived almost universally as the occasion for a good joke.

From the midst of this spectacle of ruthlessness and cynical disre-

gard for fair play the figure of Adolph Sutro emerges as a conspicuous exception. In the view of Gilman M. Ostrander, "all but Sutro played the game according to a generally accepted set of rules. The object was to accumulate as much money as possible, preferably at the expense of rivals. The rules allowed any devious and deceitful means conceivable to attain this goal, including the swindling of one's own partners."<sup>49</sup> Sutro went so far as to attempt, unsuccessfully as it turned out, to reform the rules of the Comstock game. He was joined in this crusade by one Conrad Wiegand, a naive, rather inflated, but genuinely idealistic newspaperman. Together they challenged the exploitative hegemony of William Chapman Ralston and the Bank of California. For his efforts, Wiegand was threatened, harassed, and finally brutally assaulted, all with the apparent consent of the local constabulary. The example of Wiegand is of moment here because Clemens used his pathetic case as the concluding episode in his book. Appendix C, the final chapter in the American edition, is a fitting last hearing of the narrative voice of *Roughing It*.

If ever there was a harmless man, it is Conrad Wiegand, of Gold Hill, Nevada. If ever there was a gentle spirit that thought itself unfired gunpowder and latent ruin, it is Conrad Wiegand. If ever there was an oyster that fancied itself a whale; or a jack-o'lantern, confined to a swamp, that fancied itself a planet with a billion-mile orbit; or a summer zephyr that deemed itself a hurricane, it is Conrad Wiegand. Therefore, what wonder is it that when he says a thing, he thinks the world listens; that when he does a thing the world stands still to look; and that when he suffers, there is a convulsion of nature? . . . Something less than two years ago, Conrad assailed several people mercilessly in his little *People's Tribune*, and got himself into trouble. Straightway he airs the affair in the *Territorial Enterprise*, in a communication over his own signature, and I propose to reproduce it here, in all its native simplicity and more than human candor. (515)

And so it goes. The innocent Wiegand is mocked and abused by the seasoned veteran, the cynical old-timer. The tone exudes relish and positive sidesplitting delight in the spectacle of innocence under heavy assault. What was it, we may wonder, that prompted Mark Twain to this final and extreme display of nearly neurotic cruelty? What was it in the example of poor Wiegand that angered him so?

The trouble began for Conrad Wiegand when he published an article which strongly suggested that local Bank of California officials were engaging in underhanded business dealings. After being twice assaulted and beaten in the streets of Virginia City, Wiegand was lured into the office of his enemy and threatened with violence if he failed to retract his allegations. Conrad refused on two grounds. He argued, first, that he had not made charges, but merely indicated areas in which investigation seemed appropriate. In ef-

fect, there was nothing to retract. Second, he insisted that authorship of the article in question could not be established, and that he was bound by honor and professional policy not to make such information public without the consent of the writer. "Of its *authorship*," he said, "I can say nothing whatever, but for its *publication* I assume full, sole and personal responsibility" (527). After being beaten again, and threatened with even worse punishment, Wiegand was released to tell his tale of woe and mistreatment. Mark Twain's closing remarks on the episode hint with broad irony that as the reward for his cowardice Wiegand had earned the fuller exposure of total, public humiliation.

In its essentials, then, the attack on Conrad Wiegand has three key elements. First, in his zeal for reform, the would-be crusader is inflated in his estimate of his own rectitude and clout, and blind to the realities of the world he would alter. In short, he is an innocent, and for that he earns Mark Twain's scorching contempt. Second, in spite of his own at least plausible protests to the contrary, Wiegand is condemned for slander, and for failing to accept the consequences of his editorial irresponsibility. Finally, his pacificism is ridiculed as a transparent front for whimpering cowardice. "I do not desire," comments Mark Twain, "to strain the reader's fancy, hurtfully, and yet it would be a favor to me if he would try to fancy this lamb in battle, or the duelling ground or at the head of a vigilance committee—M.T." (519-20). The charges clear, it remains to account for the extremity of the response.

Mark Twain knew more than a little about the consequences of journalistic improprieties. His most famous hoax, "The Empire City Massacre," was very successful in gaining the credence of its readers. Once revealed, however, the joke backfired completely. Duped editors and citizens responded by threatening to sever all ties with the *Enterprise*. "The joker," according to Paine, "was in despair."<sup>50</sup> Less embarrassingly perhaps, the threat of reprisals for his attacks on the bigotry and corruption of the police seems to have figured in his abrupt decision to flee San Francisco late in 1864.<sup>51</sup> Is there a hint, then, that in pillorying Wiegand for his reforming zeal and subsequent cowardice Mark Twain was unconsciously ridiculing himself?

We are on much firmer ground if we turn to the conflict which climaxed in Mark Twain's sudden departure from Virginia City in late May, 1864, for here the parallels with the predicament of Conrad Wiegand are quite striking. As the sequel to a war of words and near duel with a local newspaperman, Mark Twain ran away. In after years he was inclined to treat the episode as a mock-heroic joke.<sup>52</sup> But the absence of the story in *Roughing It* is noteworthy, for it suggests that the joke was too painfully at the author's expense for retelling.

In radically compressed form, the sequence of events in the imbroglia, as reconstructed by Henry Nash Smith, are as follows.<sup>53</sup> On May 17, 1864, an *Enterprise* editorial by Mark Twain suggested that the proceeds from a fancy dress ball were being sent to a Miscegenation Society in the East, and not, as announced, to the Sanitary Commission. On May 18, four local women, patronesses of the ball, wrote to the *Enterprise* protesting the falsehood of the suggestion. On the 20th Mark Twain informed his sister-in-law that he was drunk when he wrote the editorial and that its publication was a mistake. Public apology was out of the question. The next day, James L. Laird and J. W. Wilmington of the *Daily Union* attacked the author of the editorial. In the days following, Mark Twain challenged Laird, a novice at gunplay, to a duel; Laird, in turn, responded that Wilmington, a seasoned fighter, was the author of the article and therefore the appropriate target for the challenge. As Laird put the situation: "For all editorials appearing in the *Union*, the proprietors are personally responsible; for communications, they hold themselves ready, when properly called upon, either to give the name and address of the author, or failing that, to be themselves responsible" (193). As a counter to Laird's evasive strategy, Steve Gillis, a ready fighter and Mark Twain's second, tried unsuccessfully to lure Wilmington into a duel. Meanwhile Mark Twain continued to ridicule Laird for refusing to fight. Finally, on May 29, leaving threats and counter threats all unresolved, Mark Twain left with Gillis for San Francisco. Terrified perhaps that Wilmington would succeed in taking Laird's place, he ran for his life. At the very least, in the words of Henry Nash Smith, he ran from "the danger of being ridiculous and ridiculed" (29).

The parallels between the Laird and Wiegand episodes are too numerous and too close to be entirely coincidental. Indeed, the surplus of energy which emerges in the telling of the Wiegand story can be viewed as the residue of powerful emotions which attached themselves, quite appropriately, to the unconscious memory of the humiliating encounter with Laird. The parallels are also rather complex. On one side, they betray Mark Twain's impulse to avenge himself; on the other, they amount to an admission of defeat and a declaration of profound self-contempt.

In its narrative context, Mark Twain's scorn for Wiegand's pacifism seems extreme. The anger, to our eye, should have been diluted with pity for the poor man's helpless predicament. However, if we recall that Laird based his refusal to fight on grounds identical to Wiegand's, then the immoderate wrath begins to make sense. In effect, frustration with Laird's evasive maneuver resurfaces as angry ridicule for an equivalent strategy by Wiegand. Mark Twain abused Laird as "a fool," insisting that "a publisher is bound to stand responsible for any and all articles printed by him, whether

he wants to do it or not" (196). But he got no satisfaction. In observing Wiegand, however, Mark Twain has the pleasure of seeing the hated strategy fail. And the punishment that he once wished on James L. Laird is finally administered, unconsciously, and at a considerable remove in time, on hapless Conrad Wiegand. Once fooled, the fool becomes a predator of folly, impatient for the opportunity to play the old joke on some new fool.

The practical joker's malice seems extreme, even gratuitous, until we reflect that he cannot forget the suffering and humiliation that he once experienced as the result of his own innocence. The cruelty of his jokes is a measure of his frustration with the failure to erase that painful memory. Or, to put it another way, the joker attempts to ease the pressure of buried self-contempt by venting it on the head of his victim. In this frame of reference, the excess of Mark Twain's scorn finds its appropriate object in the image of a former self, an image unconsciously glimpsed in the figure of poor Wiegand.

What of himself did Mark Twain see in Conrad Wiegand? He saw a man who had incurred the mockery of citizens and the wrath of enemies as the result of ill-advised editorial decisions. Wiegand's rather lame justification for refusing to retract his statements may have reminded him, at some level, of his own refusal to apologize for an admitted blunder and his rather implausible insistence that "the affair was a silly joke, and that I and all concerned were drunk" (190). Most damningly, in Wiegand he saw a man who resorted to subterfuge rather than face the consequences of his own actions. He saw a coward. True, Wiegand did not run away. But Mark Twain wished that he had. In the final paragraph of *Roughing It* he imagines for his victim that final, shattering and unforgettable humiliation which, in effect, completes his own unconscious self-portrait.

The merited castigation of this weak, half-witted child was a thing that ought to have been done in the street, where the poor thing could have a chance to run. When a journalist maligns a citizen, or attacks his good name on hearsay evidence, he deserves to be thrashed for it, even if he *is* a "non-combatant" weakling; but a generous adversary would at least allow such a lamb the use of his legs at such a time. — M. T. (530)

Ishmael, you will recall, "takes this whole universe for a vast practical joke" and as the result, views his experience with a "free and easy sort of genial, desperado philosophy."<sup>54</sup> Mark Twain had the same insight, but he did not take the joke nearly as well. His habit, in the years to come, was to revive that old, innocent self, to pick him up, steady him, and then, with that strange delight peculiar to those who have seen the Elephant, to knock him down again. He does it, for ex-

ample, in a letter of 1876 in which he looks back upon the image of a former self:

As you describe me I can picture myself as I was, 22 years ago. . . . You think I have grown some; upon my word there was room for it. You have described a callow fool, a self-sufficient ass, a mere human tumble-bug, stern in air, heaving at his bit of dung and imagining he is re-modeling the world and is entirely capable of doing it right. Ignorance, intolerance, egotism, self-assertion, opaque perception, dense and pitiful chuckle-headedness—and an almost pathetic unconsciousness of it all.<sup>55</sup>

Is this young Sam Clemens? or Conrad Wiegand? or one of thousands of young innocents who set out to make their fortunes on the mining frontiers of the Far West?

## notes

1. Albert Bigelow Paine, ed. *Mark Twain's Letters*, 2 vols. (New York, 1917), II, 773.
2. Walker D. Wyman and Clifton B. Kroeber, eds. *In The Frontier in Prospective*, (Madison, 1965), p. 212.
3. "The Pattern for Mark Twain's *Roughing It*," *University of California English Studies*, 23 (Berkeley, 1961), 15.
4. *Ibid.*, 16.
5. *Mark Twain's Letters*, I, 186.
6. Smith, "Mark Twain as an Interpreter," 210-12.
7. Orion's response appears as Supplement C in *Roughing It*, ed. Franklin R. Rogers and Paul Baender (Berkeley, 1972), 742-45. Hereafter the pagination of quotations from this volume is indicated in the text.
8. *Roughing It*, 182-83, 307-09, 355, 236-37, 411-13.
9. Others have commented on the darkness of the humor in *Roughing It*, but no treatment of the humor gives it the emphasis that I do. See especially Warwick Wadlington, *The Confidence Game in American Literature* (Princeton, 1975), 208-09, and Richard Boyd Hauck, *A Cheerful Nihilism* (Bloomington, 1971), 143.
10. The phrase "seeing the Elephant" appears as early as 1835, in Longstreet's *Georgia Scenes*. For more detail, see *The Songs of the Gold Rush*, ed. Richard A. Dwyer and Richard E. Lingenfelter (Berkeley, 1964), 52.
11. Smith, "Mark Twain as an Interpreter," 214.
12. *Ibid.*, 213.
13. From the "Introduction" to *Mark Twain's Mysterious Stranger Manuscripts*, ed. William M. Gibson (Berkeley, 1969), 31. *Roughing It is punctuated by a series of similar images of lonely desolation. See, for example, 110, 141, 154, 243, 248, and 369.*
14. William R. Gillis, *Gold Rush Days with Mark Twain* (New York, 1930), 75.
15. Dixon Wecter, *Sam Clemens of Hannibal* (Boston, 1952), 235-36.
16. *As I Remember Them* (Salt Lake City, 1913), 214, as quoted in Edgar Marquess Branch, *The Literary Apprenticeship of Mark Twain* (Urbana, 1950), 108.
17. *Goldrush Days*, 72-75, 98-101, 103-07, 109-16, 153-56, 173-74.
18. See Albert Bigelow Paine, *Mark Twain, a Biography*, 3 Vols., (New York, 1912), I, 224-27, 297-302, and Ivan Benson, *Mark Twain's Western Years* (Stanford, 1938), 151.
19. Charles Neider, ed., *The Autobiography of Mark Twain*, (New York, 1959), 48. See also 103 and 311-13.
20. *Ibid.*, 103.
21. As reprinted in *The Mining Frontier*, Marvin Lewis, ed. (Norman, 1967), 186.
22. *The Big Bonanza* (New York, 1967). See especially 54-61, 212-14, 270-71, 309-15, 331-39, 347-51, 415-27.
23. On the place of practical joking in Southwestern humor, see Constance Rourke, *American Humor* (Garden City, 1953), 49 and 56-57. Her comments on Mark Twain's humor (173) are especially acute and suggestive. Edgar Branch makes the useful point that one of Mark Twain's favorite forms, the hoax, "is little more than the practical joke raised to

literary status" (*Literary Apprenticeship*, 83). Susan Kuhlmann has quite aptly pointed to the importance of the practical joke in Mark Twain's humor (*Knave, Fool, and Genius* [Chapel Hill, 1973], 50-54).

24. General Buncombe's story appears on 224-29; the Gold Hill episode, which lends a particularly angry flavor to the end of *Roughing It*, is related on 497-502. For other versions of this mock holdup, see Gillis, *Goldrush Days*, 109-16, and Paine, *Mark Twain*, I, 297-303.

25. The remarks appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly*, June, 1872, as quoted by Justin Kaplan, *Mr. Clemens and Mark Twain* (New York, 1966), 148.

26. For accounts of the attempt, see Kaplan, *Mr. Clemens and Mark Twain*, 15, and Hamlin Hill, *Mark Twain: God's Fool* (New York, 1973), 223-24.

27. Frederick Anderson, Michael B. Frank, and Kenneth M. Sanderson, eds. *Mark Twain's Notebooks and Journals* (Berkeley, 1975), I, 22-23.

28. Bernard DeVoto, ed. *Mark Twain in Eruption*, (New York, 1940), 252.

29. Branch, *Literary Apprenticeship*, 63.

30. From *Mark Twain's Collected Letters*, I (1853-1869), ed. Lin Salamo, forthcoming from the University of California Press; reprinted by permission.

31. *Ibid.*

32. *Ibid.*

33. *Mining Frontiers of the Far West* (New York, 1963), 10.

34. *The Songs of the Gold Rush*, 53-55.

35. *Ibid.*, 71.

36. *Comstock Mining and Miners* (Berkeley, 1959), 318.

37. *The Big Bonanza*, 331.

38. "Literary Convention and The Mining Romance," *Journal of the West*, V (January, 1966), 113.

39. *Treasure Hill: Portrait of a Silver Mining Camp* (Tucson, 1963), 1.

40. *Mining Frontiers*, 9-10, 25.

41. *The Western Historical Quarterly*, I (January, 1970), 35-50.

42. *Mining Frontiers*, 22.

43. *Childhood and Society*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1963), 285.

44. *People of Paradox* (New York, 1972), 91-92.

45. *Ibid.*, 113-15.

46. *Comstock Mining and Miners*, 125.

47. *Nevada: The Great Rotten Borough, 1859-1964* (New York, 1966), 13.

48. *Comstock Mining and Miners*, 136.

49. *Nevada*, 58-59.

50. *Mark Twain*, I, 230.

51. See Paine, *Mark Twain*, I, 264-65, and Branch, *Literary Apprenticeship*, 114.

52. See the account in *The Autobiography*, 115-18.

53. For a full elaboration, see *Mark Twain of the Enterprise*, Henry Nash Smith, ed. (Berkeley, 1957), 25-27. Subsequent page references are cited parenthetically in the text.

54. Harrison Hayford and Herschel Parker, eds. Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*, (New York, 1967), 195-96.

55. As quoted in *Mark Twain's Notebooks and Journals*, I, 15.