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Commentary on "Twain’s Mythic West"

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and by become very rich…” (Twain 49). And though he completed his physical travels to the West, and saw all the marvels, perhaps he did not have “all kinds of adventures,” and he certainly did not “become very rich.” Author and scholar of Western literature Lee Clark Mitchell has suggested that the premise of *Roughing It* is the West’s existence “as a direction of thought in far more remarkable ways than… as a geographical place or historical episode” (69). This is thoroughly supported by Twain’s satirical destruction of the Western legends, as fictionalization and exaggeration of the reality.

In *Roughing It*, Twain bares the truth of the West for his readers through the melancholy tale of his own disenchantment. He shows the more sobering capabilities of travel narratives, using his own story to prevent others from suffering his disappointment. This gently moralizing tone and brutally honest perspective are not common in travel writing, which often seeks to replace negative stereotypes with positive truth. Twain shallowly buries his personal hopelessness and realism throughout the narrative, but it is more easily discovered than a pocket of gold in a Humboldt mine.

Carole Burkett’s *Twain’s Mythic West* exemplifies how much can be accomplished in a short 4-5 paper. These are typical assignments at Denison and as such, Burkett’s paper correctly handles the succinctness and concision that these demand. *Twain’s Mythic West* begins with a clear-cut and reasonable thesis which isn’t overbearing for a paper of this length and the thesis both structures and guides the rest of the essay. Once this is done, Burkett is able to appropriately execute her arguments through insightful quotations and connecting various segments of Mark Twain’s work. The complexity of Burkett’s essay lies in the risk she takes in suggesting not only is Twain’s book satirical but it may in fact be a direct result of his own failures and the failures of so many others in the days of Manifest Destiny. In our workshop together, Carole and I worked on building a conclusion which puts Twain and her thesis in a larger context and asks the question what the relevance and significance of her thesis is to big picture ideas.

-Joshua Rager, Writing Center Consultant

**Works Cited**
