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BREPOLS

Medieval Narrative Conventions and the Putative Antimedievalism of Twain's *Connecticut Yankee*

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Nineteenth-century England and America witnessed a revival in interest in medieval art, architecture, and literature, but the most prominent interest was in the Arthurian legend. For the most part, the works of literati like Sir Walter Scott (*Marmion*, *Ivanhoe*),¹ Lord Tennyson (*Lays of the King*, *The Princess*), Sidney Lanier (*The Boy Arthur*), and James Russell Lowell (*The Vision of Sir Launfal*) employed the Arthurian myth to elevate the Middle Ages as a period of superior social order and decorum. These literary works as well as "the paintings of Burne-Jones had canonized feudal knighthood as one of the major symbols of genteel values."² This

¹ Marinella Salari, "Ivanhoe's Middle Ages," in *Medieval and Pseudo-Medieval Literature*, ed. Piero Botani and Anna Torri (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1984), pp. 149-60, expounds on Scott's role in the revival of medieval literature: "Scott's relation to this Mediaeval Revival is rather complex: it is commonly said that the Mediaeval Revival began with Scott and that he was chiefly responsible for it, but this is only true in part. In reality, the study of the Middle Ages had never been abandoned, not even in the centuries immediately preceding" (p. 157).

² Clara Bartocci, "A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court," in *ibid.*, p. 164. For discussions of the nineteenth-century sentiment toward the Arthurian legend, see Richard Barber, *King Arthur: Hero and Legend* (Cambridge: Boydell, 1986); Alice Chantler, *A Dream of Order: The Medieval Ideal in Nineteenth-Century English Literature* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970); Mark Girouard, *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981); Jennifer Goodman, *The Legend of Arthur in British and American Literature* (Boston: Twayne, 1988); and Beverly Taylor and Elizabeth

climate of the idealized Middle Ages, then, surrounded Mark Twain during the creation of his novel *A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court*.³ Although some critics have written on the medieval elements in the novel, most scholars emphasize Twain's negative view and consider his book an all-out satirical attack on the "primitive" Middle Ages and the romantic mode.⁴ Some of the critics emphasizing Twain's supposed antimedieval stance base their arguments on the artificially constructed dichotomy between the oral and illiterate Middle Ages and the writing-based and literate nineteenth century.⁵

Brewer, *The Return of King Arthur: British and American Arthurian Literature since 1900* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1983).

³ For a discussion of the Yankee's genesis, see Howard G. Baetzhold, "The Course of Composition of *A Connecticut Yankee*," *American Literature* 33 (1961): 195-214; and Ensor R. Allison, "Mark Twain's 'Dream of a Knight-Errent': The Origin and Development of *A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court*," *Tennessee Philological Bulletin* 15 (1964): 5-16.

⁴ Alice P. Kenney, "Yankees in Camelot: The Democratization of Chivalry in James Russell Lowell, Mark Twain, and Edwin Arlington Robinson," *Studies in Medievalism* 1.2 (1982): 73-79, for instance, claims that "Twain's own knowledge of the Middle Ages, which in footnotes he states to have been derived from such sources as Malory and the historian Lecky, is perhaps of less interest than the background required by his audience to appreciate his humor" (p. 75). For discussions of Malory's and Lecky's influence on the Yankee, see Harold Aspiz, "Lecky's Influence on Mark Twain," *Science and Society* 26 (1962): 15-25; Alan Gribben's "'The Master Hand of Old Malory': Mark Twain's Acquaintance with *Le Morte D'Arthur*," *English Language Notes* 16 (1970): 32-40; Robert H. Wilson, "Malory in the *Connecticut Yankee*," *Texas Studies in English* 27 (1949): 185-206; Lesley C. Kondecki, "Twain's Critique of Malory's Romance: *Forna tractandi* and *A Connecticut Yankee*," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 41 (1986): 329-48; and Paul L. Kegel, "Henry Adams and Mark Twain: Two Views of Medievalism," *The Mark Twain Journal* 15 (1970-71): 11-21. Furthermore, Bruce Mitchellson, *Mark Twain on the Loose: A Comic Writer and the American Self* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995) points out that Twain had been grappling with his attraction to the Middle Ages: "Before *Yankee* there had been several all-out uprisings against the romantic mode, campaigns that seem meant to drive its bad habits clean out of the American sensibility—and out of Mark Twain himself—and supplant them with plain-language representations of experience as ordinary people knew it. The adversary, in such fiction, often proves to be the personality seduced by romance, by sentimentality, by literary culture heavily and mindlessly ingested" (p. 152). For a general article on Twain and the Middle Ages, see James C. Duram, "Mark Twain and the Middle Ages," *Wichita State University Bulletin* 47 (1971): 3-16. See also Leslie J. Workman's erudite discussion on "Medievalism and Romanticism," *Poetica* 39/40 (1993): 1-44.

⁵ See Heinrich Breinig, "Macht und Gegenmacht: Mündliches Wissen und Schriftlichkeit in Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court*," *Mündliches Wissen in neuzeitlicher Literatur*, ed. Paul Goetsch (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1990), pp. 121-35; and Thomas D. Zlatich, "Language Technologies in a *Connecticut Yankee*," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 45

This monolithic view of the Middle Ages is common to scholars outside the realm of medieval scholarship and invites a reassessment of the medieval elements in Twain's novel. While I agree that Twain attempts to construct his pseudo-mythological, pseudo-historical Arthurian world of the sixth century as an oral and illiterate time, I interpret that his main intent is to furnish a satire of the nineteenth-century medieval revival. I would therefore like to argue that even in satirizing the medieval revival, Twain constructs his satire from written medieval sources, especially literary narrative conventions that, paradoxically, emphasize actual medieval text production and deconstruct some of the inferiority implicit in his representation of oral culture. In my discussion of the Yankee—clearly one of Twain's most discourse-conscious novels⁶—I am therefore concerned with the remnants of medieval literature, how they provide narrative depth to the novel, how they demonstrate the paradox of Twainian satire that must utilize what it supposedly detests to construct itself: narrative conventions of the Middle Ages.

The obvious question that arises here pertains to Twain's level of medieval knowledge. A study of Mark Twain's library has revealed an astounding number of books dealing with medieval subjects and affirms that he had more knowledge of both medieval history and literature⁷ than commonly recognized, a knowledge revealed in the Yankee in a rich tapestry of references to medieval narrative conventions and text

(1991): 453-77.

⁶ The following examples from *A Connecticut Yankee* illustrate that, even on a very mundane and humorous level, writing as a scheme is central to Twain's novel. Upon meeting Clarence, Hank Morgan comments on him: he "said he had come for me, and informed me that he was a page. 'Go along,' I said; 'you ain't more than a paragraph'" (p. 47). When Hank contemplates using the eclipse: "I could play it myself, now; and it wouldn't be any plagiarism, either, because I should get it nearly a thousand years ahead of those parties" (pp. 66-67). Hank is also perplexed about autographs: "But there was something I couldn't understand, nobody has asked for an autograph. I spoke to Clarence about it. By George, I had to explain to him what it was! Then he said nobody in the country could read or write but a few dozen priests. Land! think of that" (p. 82). When Sandy recounts her "damsel in distress" story, the nineteenth-century narrator, for whom the true value of words has long been eroded by inflation, assaults medieval credibility: "Have you brought any letters—any documents—any proofs that you are trustworthy and truthful?" (p. 110). Finally, a metatextual comment by the narrator calls attention to writing again: "It seems like a little thing, on paper, but it was not a little thing at all" (p. 119). All quotations are taken from *A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court*, introd. Justin Kaplan (New York: Penguin, 1986). All subsequent references are to this edition, abbreviated *CY*.

⁷ With the publication of Alan Gribben's *Mark Twain's Library: A Reconstruction*, 2 vols. (Boston: Hall, 1980), it is possible to ascertain the medieval works Twain owned and possibly had read. See Appendices I and II.

production.⁸ Altogether, Twain employs eight medieval narrative conventions: the apology topos, the framing tale, the dream vision, and the romance in the preface and framing chapter; and in the novel proper, additional romance conventions, medieval chronicle style, magical charms, as well as intertextual and interaurorial⁹ references to the *Canterbury Tales*. The novel even charts its own genesis and completion by a second party, demonstrating yet another medieval literary convention. Both the perceived medieval conventions and the "new" text production at Camelot—instigated by the Yankee—have narratological import. However, whereas the medieval conventions have "propelled" the action up to chapter twenty five, the new "texts" produced greatly contribute to the apocalyptic end of the novel.

The first medieval convention in the *Yankee* occurs in the preface. The preface is a standard medieval authenticating device, in which usually a first-person narrator vouches for the authenticity and accuracy of the content. Twain parodies that function of authenticity and accuracy when he talks about the historical accuracy of his novel:

The ungentle laws and customs touched upon in this tale are historical, and the episodes which are used to illustrate them are also historical. It is not pretended that these laws and customs existed in England in the sixth century; no, it is only pretended that inasmuch as they existed in the English and other civilizations of far later times, it is safe to consider that it is no libel upon the sixth century to suppose them to have been in practice in that day also. One is quite justified in inferring that wherever one of these laws and customs was lacking in that remote time, its place was competently filled by a worse one. (CY, p. 29)

Additionally, medieval prefaces were the usual places for authorial apologies and justifications, which were often not entirely sincere but mere disclaimers to avoid punishment.¹⁰ Twain, too, puts a disclaimer-like apology in his preface, an apology that packs a typically unapologetic punch by making clear that even worse customs held sway in the Middle Ages than what Twain described.

The second convention belongs to the framing chapter, "A Word of Explanation," which Twain uses to solve the problem of the time travel from the present to the past and back again. In that chapter, the frame narrator meets the main narrator, Hank Morgan, and the initial contact between the two fulfills much the same narratological

⁸ For a general discussion of Twain's usage of source material, see Alan Gribben, "Stolen from Books, Tho' Credit Given: Mark Twain's Use of Literary Sources," *Mosaic* 12 (1979): 150-55.

⁹ I derive the terms "interaurorial" and "interauroriality" from Ina Schabert's article "Interaurorialität," *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 57 (1983): 679-701. These terms describe an author referring to another author in his work.

¹⁰ For a study of the medieval apology tradition, see Anita Obermeier, *Aurorial Self-Criticism in the European Middle Ages* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms, 1992).

function as the framing tale of the *Canterbury Tales*. Both of Twain's narrators are on a trip touring Warwick Castle in England and meet again in an inn, a meeting reminiscent of Chaucer the Pilgrim's first encounter with his fellow pilgrims at the Tabard Inn. The mysterious stranger gives the frame narrator a manuscript, whose genesis he describes thus: "First, I kept a journal; then by-and-by, after years, I took the journal and turned it into a book. How long ago that was!" (CY, p. 38). The frame narrator assumes the same posture as Chaucer the Pilgrim, a mere reporter of what is being relayed by the other pilgrims. In this case, the frame narrator simply reads what was given to him, and thus becomes an even more passive and disavowing narrator, actually only an eye:

The first part of it—the great bulk of it—was parchment, and yellow with age. I scanned a leaf particularly and saw that it was a palimpsest. Under the old dim writing of the Yankee historian appeared traces of a penmanship which was older and dimmer still—Latin words and sentences; fragments from old monkish legends, evidently. I turned to the place indicated by my stranger and began to read—as follows. (CY, p. 38)

Again the references to writing are important. The Yankee's designation as a historian and his use of the palimpsest imply the rewriting of history, as we see happen in the novel. The palimpsest passage also draws attention to the frame narrator's (later identified as the hardly incognito M. T.) knowledge of medieval text production. He obviously presents himself as an expert in language and writing, as he recognizes not just the paper and parchment preparation but also the penmanship and effortlessly reads the meaning of the Latin.

The third genre in the framework is the dream vision, actually a double dream vision. The frame narrator states that he "was steeped in a dream of olden time" and that he, dipping "into old Sir Thomas Malory's enchanting book . . . dreamed again" (CY, p. 34). His surroundings both parallel and parody medieval dream vision constructs. For instance, he reads Malory's book of romances much like the dreamer in Chaucer's *The Book of the Duchess* reads a book of "romance" full of "fables."¹¹ Chaucer's dreamer wakes up in a room with scenes from *The Romance of the Rose* painted all over the walls. Twain's Yankee will wake up in Malory's Arthurian myth. Thus, for both, bedtime reading material obviously influences the dream world. Twain's account twists another commonplace of the dream vision: the babbling brook in a serene May setting full of life and love; instead, his narrator sits in an inn "while the rain beat upon the windows, and the wind roared about the eaves and corners" (CY, p. 34). This allows the reader to interpret the frame narrator's world already as a dream, which distances the novel even further from reality.

¹¹ *Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry Benson, 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), pp. 330-46, lines 48, 51.

While Hank Morgan's dream state is also ambiguous, there are additional linguistic—if ironic—clues pertaining to the medieval dream vision genre. Hank's dream state is both less voluntary and less peaceful than a medieval dream vision description as he is catapulted into his temporal and spatial loop with the unkind whack of a crowbar. Despite the brutal beating, he initially arrives in the idyllic landscape of a medieval dream vision "under an oak tree" "in a soft, reposeful, summer landscape, as lovely as a dream" (*CY*, pp. 37, 41). References to dreams by the narrator abound in the rest of the novel, especially in the first six to ten chapters and at the end of the frame. Twain closes the framework of the novel by showing us Hank Morgan's death scene, during which he mutters repeated references to dreams, leaving open the question of the experienced versus the imagined narrative.

Both the dream vision genre and the fourth genre of the frame, the romance, tie the main narrative to the unrealistic and the fantastic, providing a richness of association lost without the knowledge of medieval genres. *The Romance of the Rose*, for instance, starts by introducing the contemporary medieval critics' perception of dream visions: "Many a man holds dreams to be but lies, / All fabulous."¹² Dream visions, however, usually admit from the beginning that they are unbelievable and open to interpretation. Romances, too, are considered exotic and untrue, with many ecclesiastical authorities having denounced their moral value. Even Chaucer's dreamer refers to the book of romances he is reading as full of fables, evoking the medieval connection between truth and the *logos*, the foundation of all medieval writing approved of by the Church. The "untrue" component of medieval romances implies that Twain's own novel is also "untrue."

Concerning the romance genre in the novel's frame, the frame narrator establishes an announced intertextual and interauricular connection to Malory and Arthurian myth when he reads a chapter in Malory ("How Sir Launcelot Slew Two Giants, and Made a Castle Free") before going to bed, thus fitting himself into a rich tapestry of intertextuality. First, the reading of the chapter foreshadows the world into which the reader, along with Hank Morgan, will soon be catapulted. Second, the chapter provides a benchmark for reliable narrating, when the same story is retold in the world of the novel. Third, the reading introduces the medieval genre of romance, a genre one can as well apply to the *Yankee* itself. I am, of course, aware that the nineteenth-century notion of romance differed from the medieval, but it is the medieval notion that Twain seems to apply in this novel. Medieval romance is a much discussed but elusively defined concept that developed from a mere language designation to a genre. Initially, *romanz* meant "a language derived from popular Latin and also designated a translation from Latin into the vulgar tongue," and then, specifically in England, the term was applied to "distinguish Anglo-Norman or French from the native language and literature."¹³

¹² Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *The Romance of the Rose*, trans. Harry W. Robbins (New York: Meridian, 1962), lines 1–2.

¹³ John Finlayson, "Definitions of Middle English Romance," *Middle English Romances*:

From the thirteenth century on, romance assumed the character of a literary genre associated with chivalry and fantastic adventures, a sort of medieval tall tale. Maybe it was the tall-tale character of medieval romances along with their geographic and chronological remoteness that intrigued Twain in the first place. And fourth, the Malory chapter in the frame proffers a clear case of interauricularity, where one author mentions another author by name. Here, the frame narrator's reading of Malory could also be interpreted as a tacit source attribution. While Malory has been regarded as the primary quarry from which Twain built his satire, works by Tennyson, Cervantes, Lanier, and Scott have also been named as possible candidates for his inspiration.¹⁴

Furthermore, medieval narrative conventions are integral parts of the second narrative level, the novel itself. In the third chapter of the novel, the same story about Lancelot from the framing tale is not only retold by Sir Kay but is grossly exaggerated, thus creating a double intertextuality by referring both to Malory and to the framework of the novel. The exaggeration is laid at the feet of the drunken Sir Kay and has been interpreted by Robert H. Wilson and Lesley C. Korddeck as a device to satirize the medieval romance genre.¹⁵ But the Yankee narrator is not a reliable narrator himself, and Twain often sets him up for falls, this being a case where Twain satirizes his narrator by questioning his veracity. At any rate, the Lancelot story in the framing tale establishes the narratological intertextuality here between two fictional worlds of the past.

Critics are torn, nevertheless, concerning the exact nature of Twain's relationship to this fictional world of Malory's. Wilson postulates that "the *Yankee* is not primarily concerned with Malory and the romances at all. The central attack is first upon the actual Middle Ages for their social injustice and lack of 'modern civilization' and second upon apologists like Scott who would falsely glorify the medieval."¹⁶ But for Twain to satirize the Middle Ages without referring to his own time would be pointless and further from the purpose of satire. The Middle Ages are a fact of the past that cannot be altered; therefore, Twain's primary interest must have been in the still changeable present (or future), a present that had been permeated by reconstructions of

Authoritative Texts, Sources and Backgrounds Criticism, ed. Stephen H. A. Shepherd (New York: Norton, 1995), p. 430.

¹⁴ According to Twain's *Notebooks & Journals*, ed. Frederick Anderson, vol. 3. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), Twain contemplated a "plan to enhance the effect of A Connecticut Yankee by including with each copy a volume of Malory's *Morte D'Arthur*." Clemens later also considered George Sandring's *People's History of the English Aristocracy* as a possible companion work to his own book" (3:307). See also the list of works in Appendix II, which confirms that Twain had access to additional medieval literary sources that might have influenced him as well.

¹⁵ Wilson, "Malory in the Connecticut Yankee," p. 188; Korddecky, "Twain's Critique of Malory's Romance," p. 377.

¹⁶ Wilson, "Malory in the Connecticut Yankee," pp. 199–200.

the Middle Ages for a nationalistic purpose, especially in England.¹⁷ Twain's attacks on contemporary renditions of the Middle Ages—such as Tennyson's, Lanier's, Lowell's, and Scott's—are more direct and effective because he created his own rendition of both the Middle Ages and the nineteenth century. Instead of Twain finding the Middle Ages wholly objectionable, it seems that he is quite taken by Malory, as evident from his pronouncement that he "shall leave unsmirched & unbelittled the great and beautiful characters drawn by the master hand of old Malory," and 'should grieve indeed' if the climactic incidents 'should lose their pathos & their tears through my handling.'¹⁸ Indeed, in 1906, Twain praised Malory's *Morte D'Arthur* to Albert Bigelow Paine as "one of the most beautiful things ever written in English, and written when we had no vocabulary."¹⁹ This is not to say that Twain did not satirize the Malory of the Middle Ages but is to point to the particular nature of satire as time-specific. Satire without a historical context is often ineffective for a later reader. The nineteenth-century medieval revival provided that literary-historical context for Twain; as a satirist he was not so much trying to improve humanity as to correct his contemporaries, and he used Malory and the romance as vehicles. Critics Alan Gribben, Kordecki, and Bruce Michelson all conclude that the romance genre was not a bane but a boon for Twain.²⁰

Since Malory and the romance have received the most critical attention relating to the Middle Ages, three examples of romance intertextuality shall suffice here. The first example focuses on narrative. Michelson postulates that Twain's novel is "a story about storytellers,"²¹ which is not merely attributable to Twain, but is also an integral part of the medieval romance form itself. In many medieval romances, the new characters whom the protagonist meets on his quest invariably become storytellers, for they relate their particular problem to the questing knight who might provide a solution.

The second example shows Twain's criticism of Tennyson. In chapter three of the novel, Merlin relates the story of the lady of the lake and Arthur's ascent. Immediately, the entire court falls asleep, and Merlin is called a liar and his story a lie (CY, pp. 56–60). Michelson posits that "[n]early everything that Mark Twain found wrong with romance can be found in Merlin" and that Merlin becomes the "embodiment of pernicious romance."²² The complex connections between lying, the medieval romance, and Merlin become even more intricate when we consider the fact that Twain's

¹⁷ Workman, "Medievalism," argues that "medievalism is widespread in England at the end of the eighteenth century, that it cannot easily be confined in critical categories, that it cannot in fact be confined to literature, art, architecture, but reflects the most fundamental pattern of English life" (p. 9).

¹⁸ Quoted in Taylor and Brewer, *The Return of King Arthur*, p. 170.

¹⁹ Quoted in Gribben, "The Master Hand of Old Malory," p. 40.

²⁰ Gribben, "The Master Hand of Old Malory" p. 39; Kordecki, "Twain's Critique of Old Malory," pp. 338–39; Michelson, *Mark Twain on the Loose*, p. 157.

²¹ Michelson, *Mark Twain on the Loose*, p. 158.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 158, 160.

illustrator Dan Beard painted Merlin with Tennyson's face, effectively calling the British poet laureate a literary liar.²³

The third example takes place in the context of Hank Morgan's establishing a newspaper and also satirizes Malory's narrative style,²⁴ which in this passage is reminiscent of medieval chronicle style, the fifth genre in the "tapestry" of medieval literary conventions. Twain's library demonstrates that he was no stranger to chronicle style, having possessed several medieval chronicles: *A Chronicle of the Kings of England*; *Chronicles of the Crusades*; *Chronicles of England, France, Spain, and The Chronicle of Henry Huntington*.²⁵ One of the first writers for this newspaper was a "pious hermit . . . [whose] report lacked whoop and crash and lurid description, and therefore wanted the true ring" (CY, p. 94). However, Hank seems to be even semi-forgiving when he concedes that "its antique wording was quaint and sweet and simple, and full of the fragrances and flavours of the time, and these little merits made up in a measure for its more important lacks" (CY, p. 94). This intertextual connection seems to be threefold: a satire on Malory's and the medieval chronicles' paratactic, lackluster, and plain historical style; a satire on the yellow press of the nineteenth century for which the designation "true ring" is hardly apropos; and a faint connection to the writing of saints' lives, since hagiography contained the miraculous deeds of the saint candidate. Here is a sample of the *Yankee's* chronicle satire:

Then Sir Brian de les Isles and Gummorre Gummorsum, knights of the castle, encountered with Sir Aglovale and Sir Tor, and Sir Tor smote down Sir Gummorre Gummorsum to the earth. Then came in Sir Carados of the dolorous tower, and Sir Turquine, knights of the castle, and there encountered with them Sir Percivale de Galis and Sir Lamorak de Galis, that were two brethren, and there encountered Sir Percivale with Sir Carados, and either break their spears unto their hands, and then Sir Turquine with Sir Lamorak, and either of them smote down other, horse and all, to the earth, and either parties rescued other and horsed them again. (CY, p. 94)

²³ Howard Baetzhold, *Mark Twain and John Bull: The British Connection* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970), p. 348, note 27, elaborates on the connection between Twain and Tennyson: "Planning notes for CY indicate that part of the satire was aimed indirectly at the genteel picture of Arthurian England in *Idylls of the King*. Possibly Tennyson's acceptance of a peerage in 1884 had irked Clemens, as it had some of the English Liberals (even though it was Gladstone who had urged Tennyson to accept the title). . . . Originally, too, passages from Tennyson's poems were to appear in the novel, for one note outlines an episode in which Hank was to impress the court with renditions of 'Break, Break, Break!' and 'The Fair Maid of Astolat,' and to seek Guinevere's favor by recounting 'some exploit of Launcelot' from the *Idylls*. To expose a rival bard's change that his [Hank's] performance was 'prepared' rather than impromptu, he would expose the bard's faulty memory and then 'whirl in some more Tennyson,' add a touch of Shakespeare and Browning, and 'take the cake.'"

²⁴ This passage is from the *Morte D'Arthur*, Book 7, chapter 28.

²⁵ For complete citations, see Appendix I.

The paragon of virtue and truth, Hank, who sits on his moral high horse and criticizes the medieval church and monarchy for controlling their subjects, himself practices censorship immediately: "There was an unpleasant little episode that day, which for reasons of state I struck out of my priest's report" (CY, p. 95).

The sixth example of medieval narrative conventions relates to the use of magical charms. At the Fountain of Holiness, Hank Morgan competes with Merlin to restore the flow of water. While Merlin is uttering fruitless spells to restore the water, Hank secretly has the underground masonry of the well repaired. Since that, however, would make for a rather prosaic solution to the problem and since the Yankee possesses an uncanny flair for one-upmanship, he stages the restoration of the fountain with thundering incantations accompanied by fireworks. The scenario and incantations are reminiscent of Merlin's situation with King Vorliger from Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini*. King Vorliger superstitiously believed that he could not build a tower on a certain spot and had to sacrifice a fatherless child to succeed. Merlin actually pointed out that the real reason for the collapse was a pool of water below the foundations. Digging confirmed this and dragons emerged, causing Merlin to utter a series of prophecies. Strangely enough, Merlin exposed the superstition by producing a geological reason, whereas the Yankee, wanting to indict the credulity of the Christian monks and hermits, stoops to a smoke-and-mirrors spectacle to foster the same superstitious beliefs he deplors. An example of Hank's incantations is "Transvaal-truppentransportmittelherbeibringungstränkenräucheröde" (CY, p. 212). These incantations, although clearly associated with the Merlin myth, also evoke connections to the first documented examples of charms in England, the Anglo-Saxon charms. Old English charms were often found in medical texts and clearly belong to the rituals of a pre-Christian people. Although it cannot be proven that Twain read any Anglo-Saxon charms, he did know about Old English language and literature (see Taine and Craik in Appendix II) and might have emphasized this pagan connection. Furthermore, by selecting German for his "awful" incantations, Twain obviously wanted to take advantage of the supposed "guttural" sounds of the language to intimidate the audience. Some modern German sounds are close to Old English sounds and might have been used to give the incantation an ancient flavor.

The seventh example in Twain's tapestry, really a compendium of genres, deals with the storytelling contest of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, eliciting Twain's intertextual and interauratorial remarks. Hank compares a group of pilgrims he encounters to Chaucer's pilgrims:

This company of pilgrims resembled Chaucer's in this: that it had in it a sample of about all the upper occupations the country could show, and a corresponding variety of costume. There were young men and old men, young women and old women, lively folk and grave folk. They rode upon mules and horses. . . . It was a pleasant, friendly, sociable herd; pious, happy, merry, and full of unconscious coarseness and innocent indecencies. What they regarded as the merry tale went the continual round and caused no more embarrassment than it would have caused in the best English society twelve centuries later. (CY, pp. 185-86)

Again, a fiction of the past finds a place in another fiction of the past. The speaker also benefits from having a fictional account after which to pattern his own group.

Furthermore, Twain's description of the pilgrims echoes the "General Prologue." According to Gribben's cataloguing of Twain's library, Twain owned two copies of the *Canterbury Tales*, a children's edition and the Tyrwhitt edition, which shows annotations in Twain's handwriting in "The Knight's Tale," "The Wife of Bath's Prologue," "The Friar's Tale," and "The Squire's Tale."²⁶ Twain's word choices and literary allusions in the passage above illustrate that he also must have read the "General Prologue." The words "company" and "folk" conjure up Chaucer's "Wel nyne and twenty in a compaignye / Of sondry folk."²⁷ "Horses" and "costume" refer to Chaucer's method of characterization in the "General Prologue":

Me thynketh it acordaunt to reson
To telle yow al the condicoun
Of ech of hem, so as it semed me,
And whiche they weren, and of what degree,
And eek in what array that they were inne.²⁸

Like Chaucer, Hank Morgan displays an almost Chaucer-the-Pilgrim-like impressionability with the more affluent and important pilgrims, as he describes them as belonging to the "upper occupations" and seems to admire the "variety of costume" (CY, p. 185). But among Chaucer's pilgrims were also lower occupations, such as the Plowman and the Yeoman. In tone, Twain's passage is one of the more balanced and sympathetic accounts Hank Morgan delivers about medieval people, albeit literary ones. Perpetually wary of institutionalized religion, Hank actually seems to go against character here by conceding that the pilgrims were "pious, happy, [and] merry" (CY, p. 186).

Nevertheless, this passage raises intriguing questions about authorial persona and writing. We probably would find it just as unlikely that Hank, a late nineteenth-century arms-factory superintendent with a self-professed barrenness "of poetry" (CY, p. 36), reads Chaucer as we do that Chaucer the Pilgrim really tells the "Tale of Sir Thopas." Twain's author persona breaks through here just as it does in most of the socio-political excursions in the novel. From an intertextual standpoint, Twain succeeds in transporting two of the narratological cruxes of the literary debate in the *Canterbury Tales* to his novel. The first crux hinges on the term "merry tale," which is interpreted broadly by the various pilgrims. In his quest for the perfect tale, the Host keeps asking the pilgrims for a "mure tale" because, on the Horatian scale of literature, he is more interested in *delectatio* (entertainment) than *utilitas* (moral profit). All the occurrences of "mure

²⁶ Gribben, *Mark Twain's Library*, pp. 139-40.

²⁷ Geoffrey Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, *Riverside Chaucer*, gen. ed. Larry Benson, 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), pp. 23-328; *General Prologue*, lines 24-25.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, *General Prologue*, lines 37-41.

'tale' can be ascribed to him, except for one. He invites the Clerk, the Pardoner, Chaucer the Pilgrim, and the Canon Yeoman to tell such tales—with dismal results—while he also lauds the Nun's Priest in having succeeded in telling a merry tale. Usually there is a discrepancy between the Host's request and the teller's delivery. This discrepancy functions to provide the typical ironic literary criticism Chaucer levels against most of his storytellers as well as the Host, all of whom seem to have a rather rudimentary notion of literary genres at best. The slipperiness of "murie tale" also afflicts the other user of this phrase, the Parson. On one hand, most critics would not associate the Parson's exhortatory tract on penance with a merry tale. On the other hand, if one takes it from the standpoint of Christian *utilitas*, penance is a step higher on the ladder to salvation, and so the "myrie tale in prose" could indeed be a merry tale, a part of the Christian good news.²⁹ Thus, the literary discourse of the *Canterbury Tales* moves roughly from a lighthearted beginning to the serious conclusion of the Parson's tract on penance. The narratological movement of the *Yankee* actually parallels this Chaucerian movement and foreshadows a fact in Twain's own tale: his eventual failure of sustained lighthearted satire—a merry tale—and the resultant apocalyptic end of the novel.

Twain's second authorial crux rests on the "unconscious coarseness and innocent indecencies" (CY, p. 186) told by the pilgrims. On one hand, by applying the adjectives "innocent" and "unconscious" to the pilgrims' storytelling, Twain invalidates both the pilgrims' level of maturity and conscious artistic creation. Perhaps Twain tries to apologize for some of the *Canterbury Tales*' sexually explicit content. It would surely fit into Hank's character, since he is highly squeamish when it comes to sexual innuendo. On the other hand, Twain brings to the forefront the question of literary seemliness, a question that, at least superficially, plagued Chaucer enough that he sprinkled his *Canterbury Tales* with numerous apologies for and disavowals of his literary guilt, much the same as Twain has achieved through the framework of his novel and by his function as a mere lens:

But first I pray yow, of youre curteisye,
That ye n'arete it nat my vileyny,
Though that I pleynly speke in this mateere,
To telle yow hir wordes and hir cheere,
Ne thogh I speke hir wordes proprely,
For this ye knowen al so wel as I:
Whoso shal telle a tale after a man,
He moot reherce as ny at evere he kan
Everich a word, if it be in his charge,
Al speke he never so rudeliche and large,
Or ellis he moot telle his tale untrewe,
Or feyne thyng, or fynde wordes newe.

²⁹ Ibid., *Parson's Tale Prologue*, line 46.

He may nat spare, although he were his brother;
He moot as wel seye o word as another.³⁰

Chaucer's posing as a reporter parallels Twain's posturing as a mere reader and handler of the manuscript. Chaucer puts the blame on the teller of the tale and emphasizes the importance of remaining true to the original and not skewing the text to indulge the audience's sense of decorum. His asserted refusal to make any euphemistic changes is analogous to both Boccaccio's and Jean de Meun's defense for using sexually explicit terms ostensibly in the imitation of everyday vernacular speech. This leaves room for interpretation and linguistic license but still exonerates the author, who is, after all, only a compiler of stories. Since Twain also risks offending the Victorian sensibilities surrounding the Arthurian myth, he constructs the time-travel fiction of the *Yankee* as a distancing device. This, however, was not successful with his English audience, which detested his novel.

From chapter 25 on, Twain relied less on medieval narrative conventions to propel the action; now text production in the novel is instigated by Hank Morgan, and more and more of the narrative thrust depends on written communication, much of which actually contributes to the breakdown of the narrative world, especially in the last five chapters. It seems that during that creative phase Twain was both running out of steam in mining the medieval sources for comic value and sinking deeper into the quagmire of his personal problems. It is true that to keep with the Arthurian storyline, Twain would eventually have to encounter the Malorian showdown between Arthur and Mordred. But it is questionable whether he would have had to stage it quite that viciously, signaling that what he started as a spoof now would end in fatalistic annihilation. The sword that killed the adder and unintentionally set off the domino effect of destruction in the *Morte D'Arthur* has now been replaced by the pen and writing. For instance, in chapter 39, Camelot's fledgling newspaper, *The Weekly Hosannah and Literary Volcano*, becomes the means with which to summon Hank to the postponed duel with Sir Sagamour and his first outright fight with the British knighthood in general:

DE PAR LE ROI
Know that the great lord and
illustrious knight, SIR SAGRA-
MOUR LE DESIROUS having
condescended to meet the King's
Minister, Hank Morgan, the
which is surnamed The Boss, for
satisfaction of offence anciently

³⁰ Ibid., *General Prologue*, lines 725-38.

given, these will engage in the lists by Camelot about the fourth hour of the morning of the sixteenth day of this next succeeding month. The battle will be a 'outrance, sith the said offence was of a deadly sort, admitting of no composition. (CY, p. 353)³¹

The ensuing duel is the first instance where Hank Morgan destroys many knights but is still a pale foreshadowing of the end.

Additional references to writing examples help orchestrate the breakdown both of communication and the Arthurian society. For instance, during Hank Morgan's absence in France, Clarence institutes war correspondence and fills in Hank about the battle between Arthur and Mordred: "I will finish that battle by reading you what one of the boys says" (CY, p. 383). The ensuing report, however, still hails from the *Morte D'Arthur*. The trickery of the Church comes to light when Clarence explains to Hank that he heard Hank had sent a verbal message that everything was wonderful in France. Hank answers: "Of course not. I would have written, wouldn't I?" (CY, p. 385). Hank proclaims the Republic in writing and communicates with both his and the enemy troops with written statements (see CY, pp. 389-90, 396-97, 398). However, despite all the "modern" written declarations touting the republic, the novel ends in the horrific Battle of the Sand-Belt—the electrocution of 25,000 English knights.

But even then, the Yankee is still writing; as a matter of fact, Hank's own literary writing—his rewriting of history as hinted in the palimpsest of the framing chapter—is in high gear: "I was writing all the time. During the first three days, I finished turning my old diary into this narrative form; it only required a chapter or so to bring it down to date. The rest of the week I took up in writing letters to my wife" (CY, p. 391). In the postscript to the novel, a third narrator springs into action, supplying the last medieval literary convention. In order for Twain to complete the frame and transport the manuscript that "M. T." reads back to his time, Clarence needs to finish it and hide it on the Boss's body. It was also not unusual in the Middle Ages for a second or third person to finish an unfinished work; take, for instance, the famous medieval example of the authors of *The Romance of the Rose*, Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun. Forty years after Guillaume, Jean "finished" the poem by adding 18,000 lines to Guillaume's original 4,000.

Considering all of these intertextual references to medieval literature and the extent of Twain's medieval library, one cannot but reject Howard G. Baetzhold's claim that

Twain's knowledge of medieval literature was "slight."³² Twain possessed considerable knowledge of medieval literature, which manifested itself in his historical romances, including *The Prince and the Pauper* and *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc*. Claiming that Twain's use of the medieval world was exclusively oral, as some critics suggest,³³ seems to disregard all the infiltration of medieval literary genres and conventions into the *Yankee*. A reevaluation of the rigid and monolithic dichotomy between the oral Middle Ages and the literate nineteenth century is thus in order. After all, the novel is propelled by the help of medieval narrative conventions for the first twenty-five chapters, while it collapses in the second half when supported by "modern" literate methods. The question that surfaces here is what was Twain's intent in the *Yankee*. As a medievalist examining the writings of a nineteenth-century author who pens three historical romances with medieval subject matter, I would like to observe that either Twain was not enough in control of his material to sustain a successful satire or that the boundaries between the medieval literary material used for the satire and the resultant modern fiction became too blurred. I propose that Twain's intent was not entirely clear-cut: on one hand, he mocked the nineteenth-century medieval revival because he considered it a sappy and an outdated concept for the realism of the industrial age, and, on the other hand, he appreciated artistically the medieval literature in its own setting. In light of this love-hate dichotomy, Twain's *Yankee* appears like a building whose thoroughly medieval foundation carries a modern superstructure that cannot exist without that foundation. Twain's dependence on the underlying medieval literary genres and conventions to buttress his novel actually highlights the literary and literate Middle Ages and undermines the antimedievalism in the superstructure.³⁴

³¹ This passage contains purposeful errors, strange spellings, and upside-down characters. I have copied accurately what I could but could not recreate the upside-down characters.

³² Quoted in Ziatic, "Language Technologies," p. 467.

³³ See Ziatic, "Language Technologies," and Breinig, "Macht und Gegenmacht."

³⁴ For reading several drafts of this essay and suggesting many improvements, I am grateful to Robert E. Bjork.

APPENDIX I: HISTORICAL WORKS

I do not include medieval historical works that were published after the Connecticut Yankee. The titles are quoted as found in Gribben. Twain owned the following historical works relevant to this topic: (Sir) Richard Baker, *A Chronicle of the Kings of England, from the time of the Romans Government, to the Death of King James the First . . . with Continuation to the Year 1660*, (1733); James Branch Cabell, *Chivalry* (1909); *Chronicles of the Crusades; Contemporary Narratives of the Crusade of Richard, Coeur de Lion, by Richard of Devizes, and Geoffrey de Vinsauf, and of the Crusade of Saint Louis, by Lord John de Joinville* (1876); Jean Froissart, *Chronicles of England, France, Spain, and the Adjoining Countries* (1853); John Richard Green, *History of the English People*, 4 vols. (1878-1880); *Short History of the English People* (1875); Mary Anne Everett Green, *Lives of the Princesses of England from the Norman Conquest*, 6 vols. (1850-1855); Henry of Huntingdon, *The Chronicle of Henry of Huntingdon, Comprising the History of England, from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Accession of Henry II*. Also, *The Acts of Stephen, King of England and Duke of Normandy* (1853); Paul Lacombe, *Arms and Armour in Antiquity and the Middle Ages; Also a Descriptive Note of Modern Weapons* (1870); Paul Lacroix, *The Arts in the Middle Ages, and at the Period of the Renaissance* (1875); *Manners, Customs, and Dress During the Middle Ages, and During the Renaissance Period* (1874); William Edward Hartpole Lecky, *History of European Morals from Augustus to Charlemagne*, 2 vols (1874); (Sir) Edwin Pears, *The Fall of Constantinople, Being the Story of the Fourth Crusade* (1896); George Standing, *The People's History of the English Aristocracy* (1887; second edition, 1891).

APPENDIX II: LITERARY WORKS

I do not include medieval literary works that were published after the Connecticut Yankee, nor the sources for *Jean of Arc*. Those can be found indexed in *Mark Twain's Library*, 2:846-47. The titles are quoted as found in Gribben. Twain owned the following literary works relevant to this topic: Samuel Austin Allibone, *A Critical Dictionary of English Literature and British and American Authors*, 3 vols. (1858-1871; reprinted 1874 and numerous times); Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron or Ten Days' Entertainment of Boccaccio* (1869); *Stories of Boccaccio (The Decameron)* (1881); Elbridge Streeter Brooks, *Chivalric Days, and the Boys and Girls Who Helped to Make Them* (1886); Benvenuto Cellini, *The Life of Benvenuto Cellini, Newly Translated into English*, 2 vols. (1888); Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *Don Quixote*, illus.; *The Exemplary Novels of Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra: To Which Are Added El Bascapé, or, The Serpent; and La Tia Finginda, or, The Pretended Aunt* (1855); *Galatea, A Pastoral Romance by Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra* (1867); Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales by Geoffrey Chaucer from the Text and with Notes and Glossary of Thomas Tyrwhitt* (1874); *Chaucer for Children; a Golden Key* (1877); *The Chronicle of the Cid* (1883); George Lillie Craik, *A Manual of English Literature and of the History of the English Language*, tenth edition (1883); Joseph

Cundall, *Robin Hood and His Merry Foresters* (1842); Bulfinch, *Age of Chivalry; Dante Alighieri, The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, trans. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1867); Margaret Vere Farrington, *Tales of King Arthur and His Knights of the Round Table* (1888); Alphonse Marie Louis de Lamartine, "Heloise," *Memoirs of Celebrated Characters*, 3 vols. (1854); William Langland; Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *The Golden Legend* (1862); *Poets and Poetry of Europe* (1863); James Russell Lowell, *The Vision of Sir Launfal* (1861); Mabington, *The Boy's Mabington; Being the Earliest Welsh Tales of King Arthur in the Famous Red Book of Hergest* (1881); *The Lovers of Provence, Aucassin and Nicolette: A MS. Song-Story of the Twelfth Century Rendered into Modern French by Alexander Bida; Translated into English Verse and Prose by A. Rodney Macdonough* (1880); (Sir) Thomas Malory, *The Boy's King Arthur; Being Sir Thomas Malory's History of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table* (1880); *Le Morre D'Arthur* (1868; reprinted 1870, 1876, 1879, 1883, 1884); (Sir) John Mandeville, *Early Travels in Palestine, Comprising the Narratives of Arculf, Willibald, Bernard, Sewulf, Sigurd, Benjamin of Tudela, Sir John Mandeville, De La Brocquiere, and Maundrell*, ed. Thomas Wright (1848); Marguerite d'Angoulême, *Queen of Navarre, The Heptameron of Margaret, Queen of Navarre* (1864); William Morris, *The Story of Sigurd the Volsung and the Fall of the Niblungs* (1877); John O'Kane Murray, *Little Lives of the Great Saints* (1889); (Mrs.) Margaret Oliphant (Wilson), *The Makers of Florence: Dante, Giotto, Savonarola, and Their City* (1888); Alexander Pope, "Eloisa to Abelard" (poem); Howard Pyle, *The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood of Great Renown, in Nottinghamshire* (1883); Dante Gabriel Rossetti, ed. and trans., *Dante and His Circle, with the Italian Poets Preceding Him* (1100-1200-1300): *A Collection of Lyrics* (1874); Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene and Epithalamion; Hippolyte Adolphe Taine, History of English Literature, A New Edition*, 2 vols. (translator's preface dated 1871); Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *Idylls of the King*, in vols. 2-6 of *The Works of Alfred Tennyson* (1871); Tennyson, *The Princess, A Medley*, in vol. 8 of *Works*; Henry Van Dyke, ed., *Little Masterpieces of English Poetry, by British and American Authors*, 6 vols. (1905); Orlando Williams Wight, *Lives and Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, second ed. (1861).