Did Mark Twain bring down the temple on Scott's shoulders?

Susan Manning

In Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1820), the Grand Master of the Order of the Templars, determined to purify their Preceptory of Templestowe, figures the besotted knight Brian de Bois Guilbert as a Samson entrapped by the sorceries of the Jewess Rebecca-Delilah:

with [the] aid [of the saints and angels] will we counteract the spells and charms with which our brother is entwined as in a net. He shall burst the bands of this Dalilah, as Samson burst the two new cords with which the Philistines had bound him, and shall slaughter the infidels, even heaps upon heaps. But concerning this foul witch, who hath flung her enchantments over a brother of the Holy Temple, assuredly she shall die the death.¹

Samson does indeed burst his bonds, but it's an odd image of victory for the Templar to choose: as everyone knows, this is not the end of the story. In one of the Old Testament's most powerful accounts of revenge and of vindication, the man of miraculous powers is out-tricked by Delilah and blinded by the Philistines, and takes his revenge by bringing down the temple on his own shoulders:

And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with all his might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life.²

This final desperate gesture of strength is also an admission of helplessness. As Mieke Bal has recently put it, Samson's most dramatic act of power is his own *coup de grâce*: his death 'is his greatest performance'.³ The biblical story had already served Scott as a powerful image for the seductions of literature: in the 'Autobiographical Fragment', which he composed in 1808 and revised in 1826, he described his continuing delight in

the ballads of chivalry, the ‘Delilahs of [his] imagination’ guiltily enjoyed in secret beyond boyhood.⁴

In *Life on the Mississippi*, published a little over sixty years after *Ivanhoe* in 1883, Mark Twain delivered an indictment of sorcery on Scott himself, via the literary seduction his novels had wrought on the imagination of the American South:

Then comes Sir Walter Scott with his enchantments, and by his single might checks this wave of progress, and even turns it back; sets the world in love with dreams and phantoms; with decayed and swinish forms of religion; with decayed and degraded systems of government; with the sillinesses and emptinesses, sham grandeurs, sham gauds, and sham chivalries of a brainless and worthless long-vanished society.⁵

Scott has entwined the South with ‘spells and charms’; Twain sets himself up as the champion who shall challenge and expose the sorcery. Unable to get round or past Scott’s enchantments (so I’ll argue), Twain attempted a Samsonite annihilation of everything his writing stood for.

This essay considers a catastrophic act of revenge which is also one of self-immolation. It is an attempt to complicate our current, perhaps too sanguine, view of Scottish–American literary relations: instead of emphasising (as those of us who work in the field normally do) influences, affinities, and mutually enriching aspects of the transatlantic exchange, I want to ask about some of the problems Scottish literature may have cast in the way of nineteenth-century American writing, some of the anxieties of influence, the blocks in transmission, the failures to read, assimilate and move on. And what better exemplary comparison than Scott – arguably the single most influential writer in the shaping of nineteenth-century American literature – and Mark Twain, who notoriously acknowledged the power of that influence to the extent of blaming ‘the Great Enchanter’ for the American Civil War? More precisely, because the novel stands square at the heart of Twain’s antipathy and his indictment, I want to look at the relationship between *Ivanhoe* (arguably the single most influential *novel* in nineteenth-century America) and Twain’s belated, bloated satiric fantasy of chivalry, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* (1889). Two questions present themselves insistently: why did Twain’s antipathy to Scott last well beyond the point in his own career where his literary reputation stood clear of the shadow of ‘The Author of *Waverley*’? And why was it so virulent? Both aspects of the issue register an element of excess which itself chimes with the characteristics of the biblical story through which my analysis will be focused.

Twain was not of course the first to profess that Scott was not merely a burden but a peril to American writers and readers. For James Fenimore Cooper,

These very works of Sir Walter Scott are replete with one species of danger to American readers; and the greater the talents of the writer, as a matter of course, the greater is the evil. . . . Th[e] idea [of deference to hereditary rank] pervades his writings, not in professions, but in the deep insinuating current of feeling, and in a way, silently and stealthily, to carry with it the sympathies of the reader. . . . Now what would be the situation of a writer who should attempt, before the American public, to compete with even a diminished Scott, on American principles? He would be almost certain to fail, supposing a perfect equality of talent, from the very circumstance that he would find the minds of his readers already possessed by the hostile notions, and he would be compelled to expel them, in the first place, before he could even commence the contest on equal terms.⁶

I want to note two things here: firstly, Cooper's sense of the heroic act of purification demanded of American writers, who, like Christ casting the money-changers out of the temple, must expel false notions instilled in the minds of American readers by Scott's enchantments before pure American principles may be sown.⁷ Secondly, that final image: the very existence of Scott's writing is figured as a challenge; the rivalry has, that is, a representative as well as a personal aspect, couched in the language of chivalry. In 1820, the year of *Ivanhoe's* appearance, *The Port Folio* described Scott as 'the first genius of our age'; a few years later *The Southern Review* declared that 'he stands upon an eminence, to which approaches have been made, but no one has placed himself by his side'.⁸ Whatever else is at stake, this clearly expresses the enormous cultural anxiety of nineteenth-century American writers: if Scott, the colossus, cannot be got round, he must be encountered on his own territory – taken on, we might say, 'at *outrance*' in single combat.⁹

The assignment of responsibility for the Civil War is by no means an isolated attack in Twain's work: running skirmishes with Scott persist in his writing through markedly changing cultural conditions for the production and sale of *American* literature. We can only conclude that, at some level, Twain himself remained in thrall to the enchanter, as he alternately reviled and adopted the romance mode.¹⁰ In 1876, Tom Sawyer nearly comes to grief through destructive romantic adventures unmistakably the result of a too-great fondness for the works of Scott; nearly twenty years later, in *Tom Sawyer Abroad* (1894), the protagonist seeks fame in a 'crusade', like the one in which

Richard Cur de Loon, and . . . lots more of the most noble-hearted and pious people in the world, hacked and hammered at the paynims for more than two hundred years trying to take their land away from them, and swum neck-deep in blood the whole time.¹¹

In *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), the antipathy is rehearsed in the symbolic episode of the wrecked steamboat *Walter Scott* on the Mississippi, with the books of romance salvaged from the hulk from which Huck

read considerable to Jim about kings, and dukes, and earls, and such, and how gaudy they dressed, and how much style they put on, and called each other your majesty, and your grace, and your lordship, and so on, 'stead of mister; and Jim's eyes bugged out, and he was interested.¹²

All leading, of course, to the impersonated aristocracy of the Dauphin and the Duke of Bridgewater, and the murderous, meaningless feud of the Grangerfords and the Sheppersons, which critics have read as an image of the Civil War.

Huckleberry Finn came as close as anything in Twain's writing to making terms with Scott's legacy; but the confidence of its apparent assimilation of outmoded heroics into a new comic vision and voice of America did not signal a resolution of the anxiety of influence in Twain's writing. The 'wreck' surfaces as outright indictment in *Life on the Mississippi* (1883):

He did measureless harm; more real and lasting harm, perhaps, than any other individual that ever wrote. Most of the world has now outlived good part of these harms, though by no means all of them; but in our South they flourish pretty forcefully still. . . .

Sir Walter had so large a hand in making Southern character, as it existed before the war, that he is in great measure responsible for the war. It seems a little harsh toward a dead man to say that we never should have had any war but for Sir Walter; and yet something of a plausible argument might, perhaps, be made in support of that wild proposition.¹³

It's a celebrated passage, but I don't believe anyone has ever inquired about its degree of virulence. Twenty years previously, the relatively unknown Henry James had securely consigned Scott to the pantheon of the Great (safely) Dead: 'He has submitted to the somewhat attenuating ordeal of classification; he has become a standard author. He has been provided with a seat in our literature; and . . . his visible stature has been by just so much curtailed'.¹⁴ No publisher, he went on,

would venture to offer *Ivanhoe* in the year 1864 as a novelty. The secrets of the novelist's craft have been laid bare; new contrivances have been invented; and as fast as the old machinery wears out, it is repaired by the clever artisans of the day. Our modern ingenuity works prodigies of which the great Wizard never dreamed.¹⁵

The Scott who survives in James's version of American literary culture is benign, 'a strong and kindly elder brother'.¹⁶ His Scott is a comfortable teller of fireside tales, absolutely without power to intervene in the *real-politik* of contemporary life. A possible clue to Twain's excess may lie in the explosive momentum of his prose. The 'stretcher' was, after all, the hallmark of his comic style and this may have fuelled Twain's flying beyond rational decorum: self-sustaining invective employs language as a symbolic murder-implement. It's worth noting, too, that James had very little investment in 'Southern' culture, in comparison with Twain.

Something more still seems required to account for it, however. Lacking James's (at least apparent) assurance, Twain's letters to literary correspondents continued to seek confirmation that Scott's magic was no longer potent. To Brander Mathews as late as 1903, he exclaimed melodramatically,

Brander, I lie here dying, slowly dying, under the blight of Sir Walter. I have read the first volume of *Rob Roy*; and as far as Chapter XIX of *Guy Mannering*, and I can no longer hold my head up nor take my nourishment. Lord, it's all so juvenile! So artificial, so shoddy. And such wax figures and skeletons and spectres. Interest? Why, it's impossible to feel an interest in these bloodless shams, these milk-and-water humbugs!¹⁷

The weight of the parricidal displacement is greater than the ensuing freedom.¹⁸ What is interesting here is the question why, given the apparently unvarying antipathy, he was still reading – or failing to read – Scott at all, in 1903. There is in fact no obvious cultural reason why Twain should still have been beating his fists against the 'Great Enchanter' at the very end of the century, after Emerson, Hawthorne, Melville, Whitman, Dickinson, James – and himself, as it were – just to mention the most obvious names.¹⁹ The uncritical craze for Scott's work in America – if it had ever existed – had long since subsided into the containable respectability of leatherbound 'Magnum editions' on library shelves.²⁰ Why, then, did Twain continue to tussle with his influence at such length and with such rancour? What writerly purpose might it have served him to go on reiterating it?

The Civil War accusation does seem to have stuck in some form of

communal imagination: it is probably the single thing that everybody knows about Scott and Mark Twain.²¹ Scholars of Scott have, however, energetically refuted the idea that the novels were in any sense precipitating factors in the Civil War. The Southern aristocracy have been demonstrated to have had a progressive not reactionary image of themselves; we know that 'medieval' jousting matches as a popular form of entertainment predated *Ivanhoe* in both North and South (in Philadelphia in 1778, British troops neglected their opportunity to finish off Washington's famished army at Valley Forge, in favour of giving General Howe a grand send-off with a lavish tournament).²² Scott's romances have been shown to be far from uniquely influential on Southern taste; and of course it is easy to demonstrate that he did not advocate chivalry anyway.²³

Against this (in its own terms entirely convincing) accumulation of evidence of the factitiousness of Twain's accusation, I'm going to argue that there *is* a real connection for an American writer between Scott and the Civil War, though the manner of its expression in Mark Twain's writing has misled scholars of both writers since, as to its nature. It will be important, too, in rescuing the real issue from the obscuring veil cast over it by Twain's rhetoric, to address the question of how *literally* to read the denunciations of a humorist whose comic effects are so largely based on exaggeration. I'll return to this issue, which is central to the literary relationship between Twain and Scott, but it will be helpful to look first at Twain's use of a strategy of subversion that is reliant on burlesque and parody.

This is a characteristic defensive strategy of early nineteenth-century American writing in its relation to British literature. There is an issue of Twain's belatedness here, which needs further attention, but one of the most powerful characteristics of the burlesque voice, as we find it in American literature from Washington Irving's *Salmagundi* papers (1808) and *A History of New York* (1809), through Poe's 'Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall' (1835), and *Moby-Dick* (1851), to *A Connecticut Yankee*, is its instability. As a mode, burlesque tends to veer towards satire and parody without resting in either, and yet to lie uncomfortably close to imitation and the more respectful forms of emulation. Mixed messages give burlesque a kind of skittering elusiveness that is deeply subversive of the claim of the classical and exemplary. It is one of the main 'weapons' deployed by nineteenth-century American writing against the overweening importance of British 'models': but while we might wish to read a work such as *Moby-Dick* as triumphantly launching out from imitation into uncertainty, there is I think an inherent tendency for burlesque to get

caught up in a running argument with its original, to keep coming back to strike a final blow.

A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court notoriously plays across the whole gamut of burlesque from satire to submission. A Jamesian *donnée* apparently came to Twain in a dream after several days reading Malory:

Dream of being a knight errant in armor in the middle ages. Have the notions & habits of thought of the present day mixed with the necessities of that. No pockets in the armor. No way to manage certain requirements of nature. Can't scratch. Cold in the head – can't blow – can't get at handkerchief, can't use iron sleeve. Iron gets red hot in the sun – leaks in the rain, gets white with frost & freezes me solid in winter. Suffer from lice & fleas. Make disagreeable clatter when I enter church. Can't dress or undress myself. Always getting struck by lightning. Fall down, can't get up. See Morte Darthur.²⁴

The novel begins, that is, with armour, which exemplifies (as Bruce Michelson has usefully put it) 'all the other hobbling habits, the habits of thought, the moral systems, the social institutions, the popular literature that Mark Twain had to live with'.²⁵ It is the *embodiment* of chivalry. And real bodies find it deeply uncomfortable to live in. The comedy is circumstantial, disengaged, and quite without animosity. It's a classically Bergsonian example of laughter deriving from the clash of rigidity and the humanly flexible.²⁶ Twain as humorist is able here, quite literally, to get inside a clichéd image and explode it.

The story that evolves from this image tells how Hank Morgan, employee of the Colt firearms factory in Hartford, Connecticut, wakes up after a blow to the head in the 'lost land' of sixth-century Camelot. Determined to bring order and progress to this hopelessly beknighted world, he manoeuvres himself into a position of power at King Arthur's right hand, introduces nineteenth-century inventions to chivalry and incites the peasants to rebel.²⁷ The comedy derives from the juxtaposition of ways of life thirteen centuries apart: at a crucial moment, for example, Sir Lancelot comes riding fully armed to Hank's rescue on a bicycle. This aspect of the book is also freewheeling burlesque; if the whole has a satirical *purpose*, it's probably best described by Twain's own retrospective account:

I think I was purposing to contrast that English life, not just the English life of Arthur's day but the English life of the whole of the Middle Ages, with the life of modern Christendom and modern civilization – to the advantage of the latter, of course.²⁸

But the great final books of Malory's epic are structured by revenge, whose primitive impulses rapidly come to dominate any ideas of normativity. From very early on, the wreck of the 'Walter Scott' muddies the waters of the Arthurian fantasy with traces of animus foreign to the burlesque mood. The narrative is framed by 'A Word of Explanation': during a guided tour of Warwick Castle (familiar to Scott's readers of course as Kenilworth), the 'editor' encounters a 'curious stranger', who, with his knowledge of heraldry, his easy tale-spinning and romantic weaving of spells from the past, seems set up as a figure of the 'Great Enchanter' of the nineteenth century. Here already are intimations of the self-immolating preoccupation that later brings Twain's story toppling down upon itself. The vituperative attack on Scott which will sabotage Hank's success is beginning to distract the narrative in some oddly serendipitous allusions to Sir Kay 'fir[ing] up on his history-mill', and how 'talk from Rebecca and Ivanhoe and the soft lady Rowena' would 'embarrass a tramp in our day'.²⁹

The novel's burlesque freedom in tilting indiscriminately at satiric objects derived from sixth-, twelfth-, fifteenth- and nineteenth-century sources soon starts to rigidify as the competition between Hank and Merlin for supremacy as magicians takes over. The 'mighty liar and magician, perdition singe him for the weariness he worketh with his one tale!', whose prestige at Arthur's court stands in the way of Hank's advancement, focuses the pervasive oppositional presence of Scott in the narrative.³⁰ (We remember that the denunciation in *Life on the Mississippi* occurs in a chapter entitled 'Enchanters and Enchantments'.) The confrontation of the rival 'magicians' accounts for the increasingly unstable positioning of the character of Hank, who becomes dangerously, though intermittently, identified with the narrative voice of the novel. His first act of pyrotechnic destruction in the Court of Camelot is to blow up Merlin's tower; but the wily sorcerer is not so easily defeated. Mutual outmanoeuvrings structure the action, Hank playing Samson to Merlin-Scott's Delilah. After his trick of the eclipse appears to have outdone his rival, Hank is jubilant.³¹ Their final conflict is cast into the terms of chivalry: a mighty 'duel not of muscle but of mind, not of human skill but of super-human art and craft; a final struggle for supremacy between the two master enchanters of the age'.³² Like Samson, power goes to his head as he over-reaches himself in omnipotent boasting:

And Samson said, With the jawbone of an ass, heaps upon heaps, with the jaw of an ass have I slain a thousand men.³³

And so, like Samson, he does. But the exultation, in both cases, is premature and misplaced. Noting its excessiveness over any *cultural* 'need' for an American writer to topple Scott from the American literary pantheon by 1889, we must, I think, look to a more personal explanation in Twain's own response to this omnipresent literary forebear. A psychoanalytic reading is strongly suggested by the very extremity of response over occasion: the chivalric quest that Hank takes is unavoidably an image of omnipotence, a form of magical thinking.³⁴ He becomes increasingly the hero of his own aggrandising story; the exaggerating idiom which previously anchored the reader to common sense takes on a sinister edge. As Bruce Michelson writes, 'A *Connecticut Yankee* never stops being a wish-dream of glory, no matter what other themes offer themselves, or undercut that dream in the novel.'³⁵ With an indeterminate degree of ironic objectivity on Twain's part, Hank falls for what Hanna Segal (speaking of twentieth-century moments of apocalyptic devastation) has called 'the lure of destructive and self-destructive omnipotence, and the terror they induce'.³⁶ Revenge, as John Kerrigan points out, brings down rigidity of purpose on the avenger; it is a kind of armour that constricts his mental freedom to see that every story has more than one side.³⁷ Triumphantly vanquishing the entire chivalry of England, Hank finds that total victory empties experience of meaning; taken to its literal conclusion, it wipes out the other in relation to whom identity is always negotiated.

Twain's working notes for the novel had suggested peaceful resolution; in fact, it ends, as Henry Nash Smith puts it, in 'one of the most distressing passages in American literature', when Hank Morgan 'literalises the carnage of romance victories', in a scene that alludes directly to the general tourney at Ashby in *Ivanhoe*.³⁸

Down swept that vast horseshoe wave – it approached the sand-belt – my breath stood still; nearer, nearer – the strip of green turf beyond the yellow belt grew narrow – narrower still – became a mere ribbon in front of the horses – then disappeared under their hoofs. Great Scott! Why, the whole front of that host shot into the sky with a thunder-crash, and became a whirling tempest of rags and fragments; and along the ground lay a thick wall of smoke that hid what was left of the multitude from our sight. . . . Of course we could not count the dead, because they did not exist as individuals, but merely as homogeneous protoplasm, with alloys of iron and buttons.³⁹

There is something drastically overdetermined about the extent of destructiveness revealed in these final chapters. If Hank Morgan, for most of the novel, is the enchanter-as-showman, a kind of cross between

Prospero and P.T. Barnum, he becomes at this climax an equivocal figure of authorial vengeance. Outlining an 'antagonistic model of Anglo-American literary relations', Robert Weisbuch intimates that 'something better than blockage and subterfuge might be brought forth by an acceptance of enmity. Insult could catalyze the imagination'.⁴⁰ One way to read *A Connecticut Yankee* would be as the product of an imaginative enmity which had in some sense been excessively catalysed beyond its own metaphoric capacities into a revelation of very primitive destructive instincts. The 'insult' may (indeed must, given Scott's priority) have been an imagined one, but the extraordinary, unstable, comic energies released in response suggest that the Anglo-American exchange – at least in this particular case – cannot be understood on any simple model either of 'influence' or 'antagonism'.

If, as Jacqueline Rose has suggested, 'metaphor is the recognition and suspension of aggression', that horrific literalising of the destructive potential of human imagination to which Henry Nash Smith points may represent the unleashing of uncontrolled revenge against a hated rival who cannot be subdued in direct confrontation.⁴¹ However, Rose also notes that:

loss of metaphor is in itself a form of defence which threatens memory and identification alike . . . [those who] los[e] metaphor, have lost that function without which the origins of language are unthinkable. Take metaphor out of language and there is no memory, no history, left.⁴²

To literalise, that is, is to cut language loose from its *representative* function in relation to the past, to deprive it of elucidatory power which might hold revenge in suspension. This chivalric Armageddon manifests what – given its excess over the cultural demands of American conditions of literary production by the late 1880s – one can only call Twain's traumatic relation to Scott, displaced into catastrophic re-enactment of a civil war embodied in terms of the South's seduction into sham ideals. It's an act of revenge-through-repetition, an exercise of the *lex talionis* so complete that it brings down the house divided upon itself.⁴³ Hank's energy, sated with destruction, ebbs to the point that he cannot resist the final spell of Merlin, the prodromal enchanter, who makes him sleep for thirteen centuries, to awaken, alienated from both memory and history, in the nineteenth:

I seemed to be a creature out of a remote unborn age, centuries hence, and even that was as real as the rest! . . . Ah . . . stay by me every moment – *don't* let me go out of my mind again⁴⁴

This temporal dislocation in which the past floods and overwhelms the present characterises all experience so dominant that it must be repeated because (in Rose's terms) it cannot be metaphorised. This is the point, I suggest, at which the power of Scott and the horror of recent American history coalesced in Twain's literary representation.

The connection between the end of *A Connecticut Yankee* and the American Civil War has been noted before and is explicit in the text, where Arthurian 'freemen' are compared with poor Whites of the South, and the knights clearly resemble the planter aristocracy.⁴⁵ What to my knowledge has not been observed, is that *A Connecticut Yankee* in several respects other than those already mentioned repeats Scott's example when it intends to dispel it: because this juxtaposition of an antiquated, doomed but gallant way of life with the irresistible (but not altogether lovable) progressive forces which come to supplant it is, structurally speaking, precisely that of the *Waverley* model. Scott's narratives of civil war (*Old Mortality* (1816), *Quentin Durward* (1823), *Peveril of the Peak* (1823), *Woodstock* (1826) all explicitly take this form) make it clear, too, that civil war must annihilate the chivalric spirit, that 'secret Delilah' of its author's imagination. In his 'Essay on Chivalry' for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Scott had located its final decay in Britain in the internecine Wars of the Roses, whose slaughter so depleted the English nobility that the system could not survive:

And, thus, Providence, whose ways bring good out of evil, laid the foundation of the future freedom of England in the destruction of what had long been its most constitutional ground of defence, and, in the subjugation of that system of Chivalry, which, having softened the ferocity of a barbarous age, was now to fall into disuse, as too extravagant for an enlightened one.⁴⁶

Scott's providential historiography structurally allowed for the co-existence of comic and tragic implications; Twain's apocalyptic vision offers no compensating redemption through its displaced 'fratricidal carnage'.⁴⁷ And it may help to explain why *Ivanhoe* – for all the 'ingredients' which made its *matter* eminently appropriable by the developing nation: nation-building, race, the conflict of old and new cultures – proved such a difficult novel for American writers to incorporate imaginatively. Because it is as much about civil war as it is about chivalry. Civil war is the ultimate destruction of enchantment, as the metaphor of the 'house divided' takes on horrifyingly literal embodiment; it is, classically, the narrative that American literature has not found itself able to tell directly.

A Connecticut Yankee is the great American Civil War novel that didn't

quite happen, because its capacity to represent metaphorically the full memory-range of this nationally and personally devastating conflict was suborned into a confrontation with Scott which caused it to self-destruct in a curiously hopeless repetition. Characteristically, Twain's writing seeks to purify itself of the 'sham' of Scott's sorcery by revealing the literal absurdity of the romance mode. This, of course, is to deny the self-knowingness of metaphor – in itself an absurd position. Encountering the phenomenon of shell-shock in soldiers during the First World War, Freud's associate Janet began to formulate a distinction between 'traumatic memory', which repeats the past, and 'narrative memory', which narrates the past as past.⁴⁸ *A Connecticut Yankee* seems to be an attempt to convert trauma into narrative, a kind of 'working through' of both Scott's influence and the trauma of the Civil War into a comic fiction which is, however, overtaken and destroyed, at the end, by a reprise of the original injury. Dominick LaCapra's observation that 'trauma limits history and historical understanding, notably in its disruption of contextualization and dialogic exchange', gives us, I think, a useful formulation for Twain's misprision of Scott.⁴⁹ The American's forceful entry into Scott's 'field' itself enacts a violent aggression, taking revenge by repeating his own outraged sense that the life of the South had been suborned by Scott's enchantments. As Melville dramatises in *Moby-Dick* the traumatic relationship of American writers to Shakespeare, so, I suggest, *A Connecticut Yankee* embodies as a failed dialogue the traumatic literary relationship between Scott and Mark Twain.

I want now to speculate about some reasons for this, and to ask why Twain's misprision of Scott was not in the Bloomian sense productive, but finally self-defeating. Firstly, the Civil War was territory of 'unclaimed experience' for Twain himself, and his tone never stabilises in relation to it. 'The Secret History of a Campaign that Failed' and other evasive redactions of his two weeks' inglorious sojourn as a Southern soldier (followed by a leave-taking that in military terms would be described as desertion), reveal a kind of survivor-guilt. This may begin to explain why, in 1888–89, Twain was still re-writing and fighting his own war with Scott, in a symptomatically excessive burlesque that explodes beyond comedy when it cannot find ground which is not pre-occupied by its antagonist. Repeatedly, revenge is thwarted by being anticipated.

For one thing, Scott had already pointed out that excess was somehow constitutive of chivalry, whose manifestations from the beginning always verged on self-parody. His analysis of how it came to be that the exploits recounted by the mediaeval *romanciers* were taken seriously as historical

accounts of the chivalric age, in fact maps exactly onto Twain's indictment of the enchantments cast by the *Waverley* novels onto Southern society: 'All those extravagant feelings, which really existed in the society of the middle ages, were magnified and exaggerated by the writers and reciters of Romance; and these, given as resemblances of actual manners, became, in their turn, the glass by which the youth of the age dressed themselves.'⁵⁰ The paired essays on 'Chivalry' and on 'Romance' for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* linked their subjects, as James Chandler has recently brilliantly summarised them, by a mutually enhancing and self-perpetuating 'principle of extravagance', itself analogous to the self-knowing excessiveness of metaphor:⁵¹ there can be no doubt that Scott's reading of chivalry, like his understanding of 'romance', was every bit as disillusioned as Twain's. The grimmer moments of humour in *Ivanhoe* anticipate *A Connecticut Yankee* with indicative exactness; the reader is never allowed to turn aside from the reality that chivalric violence, though harnessed, is real, and costs. Here is the assessment of loss at the Ashby tournament:

Thus ended the memorable field of Ashby-de-la-Zouche, one of the most gallantly contested tournaments of that age; for although only four knights, including one who was smothered by the heat of his armour, had died upon the field, yet upwards of thirty were desperately wounded, four or five of whom never recovered. Several more were disabled for life; and those who escaped best carried the marks of the conflict to the grave with them. Hence it is always mentioned in the old records, as the Gentle and Free Passage of Arms of Ashby.⁵²

A modern reader has no difficulty in detecting the irony in this description; we are forced back to the question of why it should have escaped Twain, master of annihilation-by-understatement. It is a passage that – including the detail of the knight smothered by the heat of his armour – he might well have written himself. 'These are not,' asserts the scheming statesman Waldemar Fitzurse, 'the days of King Arthur, when a champion could encounter an army.'⁵³ In its own way, *Ivanhoe* deconstructs the chivalric pattern quite as thoroughly as *A Connecticut Yankee*: for much of the novel, its ostensible hero is bedridden, an enfeebled, infantilised knight borne around on a litter and tended by an outcast. At the end of *Ivanhoe*, the Templar de Bois Guilbert dies, as Hank does, not a victor or even the glorious loser in the field of chivalry, but 'victim to his own contending passions'.⁵⁴ The climactic contest between hero and anti-hero for the virtue of Rebecca in the lists of Templestowe in fact dissolves into grisly comedy as a debilitated *Ivanhoe* and an apoplectic de Bois Guilbert fall simultaneously from their horses at the first knock.

The problem for Twain, as for all Scott's parodists, is that Scott's writing did not take itself seriously enough to be susceptible to the kind of burlesquing demolition which is so devastating in the case, for example, of Twain's 'Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses'. This is to say that the novel already contains not only the arguments that would undermine any of its apparent 'positions' or messages, but also the comic space in which they quite simply do not matter all that much. It's not a question of the 'seriousness' of chivalry, or vengeance, as subjects. Like pastoral, what Nassau Senior called the 'splendid masque' of *Ivanhoe* subsumes the materials of its own undoing in the Saxon slaves Wamba and Gurth, tricksters whose antics form a kind of anti-masque or 'internal commentary', as the narrator puts it.⁵⁵ Both thematically and formally, then, *Ivanhoe* is proleptic of its own parodies, from *Crotchet Castle* and *Rebecca and Rowena* to *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*: Coeur de Lion fights under the banner of 'The Black Sluggard'; Athelstane the Saxon Pretender is a lazy, good-natured glutton. This inconvenient strain of levity was noted by the novel's earliest reviewers: 'Instead of the grave and somewhat dignified style in which it behooved the celebrator of ancient deeds of chivalry to describe such high achievements', admonished the *Eclectic Review* in June 1820,

a vein of facetiousness runs through the composition, which is not always in unison with good taste; and the Author throughout the narrative, takes especial care to keep himself distinct from the subjects of the fiction.⁵⁶

Bad taste or not, this quality was well represented by Don Quixote's appearance at the Fauquier Springs tournament, but disappeared from the necessarily simpler formulae of both idolators and iconoclasts once the novel had been tamed to exemplariness.

Enchantment remains, however, at the heart of both Scott's and Mark Twain's imaginative universes. The question, finally, is about how to deal with the *end* of enchantment, and of what kind of space it can still occupy in a dis-illusioned world. Scott is a wilier, murkier, and more ambivalent writer than Twain could afford to allow him to be. The literary dialogue that could not happen was replaced by a series of revenges that are constrained to repeat. In the end, Twain's apocalyptic indictment both literalises the purity of 'the temple' and brings it down. Though it travesties readers' experience of the novels, his version of chivalric romance embodies a very real relationship between Scott and the Civil War as elements unassimilable in the redaction of an American post-Romantic ideology of nationhood – an embodiment that itself exemplifies a wider problem of the failure of idealism, the loss of 'purity', for nineteenth-century American writers.⁵⁷

Notes

- 1 Walter Scott, *Ivanhoe* [1820], ed. Graham Tulloch, The Edinburgh Edition of the *Waverley* novels, Vol. 8, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1998, p. 314.
- 2 Judges 16:30.
- 3 Mieke Bal, *Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1987, p. 63.
- 4 Walter Scott, *Scott on Himself*, ed. David Hewitt, Edinburgh, Scottish Academic Press, 1981, p. 28.
- 5 Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi*, ed. James M. Cox, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1986, p. 327.
- 6 James Fenimore Cooper, *Gleanings in Europe* [1838]; New York, Oxford University Press, 1928, Vol. 1: *France*, p. 348; Vol. 2: *England*, pp. 153–4.
- 7 Mark 11:15.
- 8 Quoted by Andrew Hook, *Scotland and America: A Study of Cultural Relations, 1750–1835*, Glasgow and London, Blackie, 1975, p. 147. On the contemporary reception of Scott in America, see Andrew Hook, 'Scott and America', *From Goosecreek to Gandercleugh*, East Linton, Tuckwell Press, 1999, pp. 94–115; G. Harrison Orians, 'The Romance Ferment after *Waverley*', *American Literature*, 3:4 (January 1932), 408–31; Rollin C. Osterweis, *Romanticism and Nationalism in the Old South*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1949, etc.
- 9 Scott, *Ivanhoe*, p. 77.
- 10 Amidst all the self-righteous indignation, Clemens was not above a bit of chivalric display himself: 'To celebrate the visit of [Ulysses S. Grant, the Civil War hero] and his family to Hartford in October 1880, the Clemens house, like others in the city, was decorated from top to bottom with flags of all nations, shields and coats of arms, glittering arches, mottoes and heraldic devices on gold and silver paper. Near the gate stood two figures in complete armor'. Justin Kaplan, *Mr Clemens & Mark Twain*, [1967], Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1970, p. 281.
- 11 Mark Twain, *Tom Sawyer Abroad*, in *The Writings of Mark Twain*, 37 vols, New York, Gabriel Wells, 1922–25, Vol. 19, p. 10. Peter Messent has recently analysed the cultural anxieties displayed in *Tom Sawyer*, in *Mark Twain*, London, Macmillan, 1997, pp. 65ff.
- 12 Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, ed. Emory Elliott, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 71.
- 13 Twain, *Life on the Mississippi*, pp. 327–8.
- 14 Unsigned Review of Nassau Senior's *Essays on Fiction*, *North American Review*, 1864, reprinted in John O. Hayden (ed.), *Walter Scott: The Critical Heritage*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970, p. 427.
- 15 Unsigned review of Nassau Senior's *Essays on Fiction*, p. 428.

- 16 Unsigned review of Nassau Senior's *Essays on Fiction*, p. 431.
- 17 Mark Twain, *The Selected Letters of Mark Twain*, ed. Charles Neider, New York, Harper and Row, 1982, p. 276. See also to his letter to William Dean Howells, 22 August 1887 (p. 180).
- 18 See Cathy Caruth, 'Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History', *Yale French Studies* 79 (1991), 181–92, for a reading of Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* that links the possibility of history for the Jews to the displaced trauma of parricide.
- 19 Robert Weisbuch notes that 'Twain seems almost anachronistic in his struggle with the British. His attacks on Scott in *Huckleberry Finn* and elsewhere broaden into an Emersonian worry with an America that refuses its fresh self for Old World pretensions', *Atlantic Double-Cross: American Literature and British Influence in the Age of Emerson*, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1986, p. 32.
- 20 James T. Hillhouse makes it clear that right from the outset strongly dissenting voices were heard in the chorus of praise for the *Waverley* novels, notably in the radical and liberal press; see *The Waverley Novels and Their Critics*, Minneapolis, The University of Minnesota Press, 1936, Chapter 5.
- 21 James Fenton, for example, reviewing a recent scholarly study of armoury in *The New York Review of Books*, cites it without qualifying comment: 'An Ardor for Armor', *The New York Review of Books*, 46:7 (22 April 1999), p. 60. I am grateful to Ian Duncan for drawing this review to my attention.
- 22 See Fenton, *Ibid.*
- 23 See, for example, Grace Warren Landrum, 'Sir Walter Scott and His Literary Rivals in the Old South', *American Literature*, 2:3 (1930), 256–76; G. Harrison Orians, 'Walter Scott, Mark Twain and the Civil War', *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 40:4 (1941), 342–59; Michael O'Brien, *Rethinking the South: Essays in Intellectual History*, Baltimore and London, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988; and the works already cited by Hook, Fenton and Osterweis.
- 24 Mark Twain, *Mark Twain's Notebooks & Journals*, Vol. 3 (1883–91), eds Robert Pack Browning, Michael B. Frank, and Lin Salamo, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979, pp. 78–9. Revenge structures the final books of Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*; Mark Girouard notes that 'most of the popular editions of Malory in circulation in late Victorian and Edwardian England were written by Americans' (*The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1981, Preface). He describes how as early as 1792 Scott was making notes on the *Morte d'Arthur*; both *Marmion* and *The Bridal of Triermain* show Arthurian influences (*Return to Camelot*, p. 178). Scott quotes from Robert Southey's 1817 edition of Malory in his 'Essay on Romance', 1818.
- 25 Bruce Michelson, *Mark Twain on the Loose: A Comic Writer and the American Self*, Amherst, The University of Massachusetts Press, 1995, p. 155.

- 26 See Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, trans. Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell, London, Macmillan, 1935, pp. 3–22.
- 27 See Paul J. de Gategno, *Ivanhoe: The Mask of Chivalry*, New York, Twayne Publishers, 1994, p. 68; In *Return to Camelot*, Girouard notes how enthusiasm for chivalry was kept alive in the nineteenth century as it became the vehicle of opposition to utilitarianism. Hank Morgan, of course, is a veritable embodiment of utilitarianism.
- 28 Mark Twain, *The Autobiography of Mark Twain*, ed. Charles Neider, New York, Harper & Brothers, 1959, p. 271.
- 29 Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court*, ed. M. Thomas Inge, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 30–1.
- 30 Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee*, p. 25.
- 31 Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee*, p. 47.
- 32 Twain *A Connecticut Yankee*, p. 306 and Chapter 39.
- 33 Judges 15:16.
- 34 See Adam Phillips, *The Beast in the Nursery*, London, Faber & Faber, 1998, pp. 2ff.
- 35 Michelson, *Mark Twain on the Loose*, p. 155.
- 36 'From Hiroshima to the Gulf War and after: socio-political expressions of ambivalence', in *Psychoanalysis, Literature and War: Papers 1972–1995*, London and New York, Routledge, 1997, p. 163. The lecture from which this comes makes, appropriately enough, a plea for tolerance of ambivalence in the face of difference.
- 37 John Kerrigan, *Revenge Tragedy: Aeschylus to Armageddon*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1996, p. 3.
- 38 Henry Nash Smith, *Mark Twain's Fable of Progress: Political and Economic Ideas in 'A Connecticut Yankee'*, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1964, p. 65, and Scott, *Ivanhoe*, pp. 111–12. See Twain, *Notebooks & Journals*, Vol. 3, p. 415.
- 39 Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee*, Chapter 43.
- 40 Weisbuch, *Atlantic Double-Cross*, p. 12.
- 41 Jacqueline Rose, *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath*, London, Virago Press, 1991, p. 213.
- 42 Rose, *Haunting*, p. 213.
- 43 Repetition has always, as Kerrigan puts it, 'the potential to register, in crypto-Freudian terms, the rhythm of psychic trauma'. *Revenge Tragedy*, p. 269; see also James M. Cox, 'A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court: The Machinery of Self-Preservation', *Yale Review*, 50:1 (1960), 89–102.
- 44 Twain, 'Final Postscript', *A Connecticut Yankee*, p. 356.
- 45 Daniel Aaron, *The Unwritten War: American Writers and the Civil War*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1971, pp. 140–5.
- 46 Walter Scott, *The Prose Works of Sir Walter Scott*, 28 vols, Edinburgh, Robert Cadell, 1834–36, Vol. 6, p. 113.

- 47 The phrase is Henry James's, in *Hawthorne*, London, Macmillan, [1879] 1967, p. 135.
- 48 Ruth Leys, 'Traumatic Cures: Shell Shock, Janet, and the Question of Memory', *Critical Inquiry*, 20:4 (Summer 1994), 623–62; quoted passage from p. 647.
- 49 Dominick LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1994, p. 14.
- 50 Walter Scott, 'Essay on Romance', in *Prose Works*, Vol. 6, p. 171.
- 51 James Chandler, *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism*, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1998, p. 145. See also Scott, 'Essay on Chivalry', in *Prose Works*, Vol. 9, pp. 10–11; 39–40.
- 52 Scott, *Ivanhoe*, p. 115.
- 53 Scott, *Ivanhoe*, p. 134.
- 54 Scott, *Ivanhoe*, p. 392.
- 55 Nassau Senior, *The Quarterly Review*, 1821, in Hayden, *Critical Heritage*, p. 235, and Scott, *Ivanhoe*, p. 27. See also Kenneth Sroka's description of Wamba and Gurth as 'eiron figures' according to Northrop Frye's model of romance, 'The Function of Form: *Ivanhoe* as Romance', in *Studies in English Literature 1500–1900*, 19:4, (Autumn 1979), p. 650.
- 56 Hayden, *Critical Heritage*, p. 193.
- 57 Scott's model for the clash of cultures in the making of modern nations continued actively to shape Southern writers' analyses of their historical divisions and dilemmas well beyond the Civil War and Reconstruction. Outside the scope of this essay is Twain's later adaptation of *Waverley* structures and motifs in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, which transposed the North/South conflict into an encounter with the issues of race. Other writers – like Charles Chesnutt whose *House Behind the Cedars* (1900) mimics *Ivanhoe*'s chivalric scenes, substituting an African-American woman who passes as white for Scott's Rebecca – and film-makers, notably D.W. Griffiths's celebrated epic *Birth of a Nation* (1914), developed the *Waverley* model to portray – and suggest structures of resolution for – racial tensions in the American South well into the twentieth century.

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