



Historical Romances: The Prince and the Pauper / A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court / Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc

Mark Twain , Susan K. Harris (Editor)

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In the three novels collected in this *Library of America* volume, Mark Twain turned his comic genius to a period that fascinated and repelled him in equal measure: medieval and Renaissance Europe. This lost world of stately pomp and unspeakable cruelty, artistic splendor and abysmal ignorance—the seeming opposite of brashly optimistic, commercial, democratic 19th-century America—engaged Twain's imagination, inspiring a children's classic, and astonishing fantasy of comedy and violence, and an unusual fictional biography.

Twain drew on his fascination with impersonation and the theme of the double in *The Prince and the Pauper* (1882), which brilliantly uses the device of identical boys from opposite ends of the social hierarchy to evoke the tumultuous contrasts of Henry VIII's England. As the pauper Tom Canty is raised to the throne, while the rightful heir is cast out among thieves and beggars, Twain sustains one of his most compelling narratives. A perennial children's favorite, the novel brings an impassioned American point of view to the injustices of traditional European society.

A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court (1889) finds Twain in high satiric form. When hard-headed Yankee mechanic Hank Morgan is knocked out in a fight, he wakes up in Camelot in A.D. 528—and finds himself pitted against the medieval rituals and superstitions of King Arthur and his knights. In a hilarious burlesque of the age of chivalry and of its cult in the 19th-century American South, Twain demolishes knighthood's romantic aura to reveal a brutish, violent society beset by ignorance. But the comic mood gives way to a darker questioning of both ancient and modern society, culminating in an astonishing apocalyptic conclusion that questions both American progress and Yankee "ingenuity" as Camelot is undone by the introduction of advanced technology.

"Taking into account . . . her origin, youth, sex, illiteracy, early environment, and the obstructing conditions under which she exploited her high gifts and made her conquest in the field and before the courts that tried her for her life, she is easily and by far the most extraordinary person the human race has ever known." So Twain wrote of the heroine of *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc* (1896), his most elaborate work of historical reconstruction. A respectful and richly detailed chronicle, by turns admiring and indignant, Joan of Arc opens a fascinating window onto the moral imagination of America's greatest comic writer.

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Date : Published August 1st 1994 by Library of America

ISBN : 9780940450820

Author : Mark Twain , Susan K. Harris (Editor)

Format : Hardcover 1050 pages

Genre : Literature, Classics, Fiction, American

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From Reader Review Historical Romances: The Prince and the Pauper / A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court / Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc for online ebook

Lee says

I only read the Joan of Arc story. It was excellent and I am not a Twain fan.

Sherman says

Skip Joan of Arc.

Rebecca says

My 15 year old daughter and I read this book. We BOTH loved it. She enjoyed it so much she bought a copy of it for herself.

Mark Twain has such an entertaining writing style yet at the same time the story is very thought provoking and educational. I love how he writes fiction within a historical background. He can then put to verse his distaste for certain politics through his characters. It is more thought provoking to the reader rather than reading a list of grievances from someone.

Maurice Williams says

I recently got interested in Mark Twain when his new biography came out. I heard a lot about Mark Twain, especially in grade school when two of his novels and several short stories were required reading. I googled "Mark Twain" to get a better insight on him: his life, his ambitions, his failures. I didn't know that he owned a publishing house that prospered when he published the notes of Ulysses S. Grant and went into bankruptcy when it embarked on an ambitious and expensive marketing plan to publish the biography of Pope Leo XIII.

I could see into Twain's character and noticed that he wanted things done correctly and was a bitter critic of things he perceived not to be done correctly. He criticized trends in society he thought were not right, like slavery throughout the world, religious systems that appeared to accept, even benefit, from slavery, and governments that advocate democracy, but actually seem to be as imperialistic as autocratic governments. He criticized Louis XIV for his excessive pomp and King Leopold of Belgium for what he allowed to be done to blacks in The Congo. He harshly criticized the United States for its handling of the Philippines after the ouster of Spain. He criticized Mary Baker Eddy and her Christian Scientist Church because of her autocratic method of controlling every aspect of the church. He even criticized famous writers like James Fennimore Cooper for sloppy use of English and poor craftsmanship in developing story lines.

I noticed that Twain was not a pious Christian believer, although the religion of his family was Presbyterian.

He wrote many criticisms of Christianity, even going as far as to state: "If Christ were here now, there is one thing he would not be--a Christian." But in spite of all this criticism, Twain appears to be a man with a sense of moral uprightness. He helped Frederick Douglas, an escaped slave, to acquire a college education at Twain's expense. He thought it correct, after filing for bankruptcy, to pay back all his creditors even though, under the laws of bankruptcy, he was not obligated to do so.

In surfing The Internet, I was surprised to see that Twain wrote a novel about Joan of Arc. I found his novel in a collection of three of his novels in the above book I'm reviewing. I read his novel with great interest. I had already seen two movies about Joan of Arc and saw that Twain's novel contained much more detail than the movies did. Intrigued, I read two historical books about Joan of Arc written by Regine Pernoud and two biographies of Joan: one by Ronald Sutherland Gower, the other by Margaret Oliphant, and I watched all four of the movies available on Amazon. I quickly realized that Joan fought many battle. The movies condensed all the battles into basically two battle scenes. Also the movies show Joan having a different character than she really had. Three of the movies show her as somewhat arrogant and disrespectful. Only one movie, Joan of Arc directed by Victor Fleming, shows her character pretty much as it really was. Mark Twain states that every aspect of Joan's life is verified by sworn testimony in a court of law by witnesses who knew her. Twain claims, and I believe it, that this is not true for the biography of any other historical person.

This book review is not about the career of Joan of Arc; it is about Twain's perception of her. Since most people's perception of her has been garnered from the movies, I think a short synopsis of the real facts is warranted here. After the Dauphin believed Joan and commissioned her as General-in-Chief of the armies of France, she dictated a letter of warning to the English holding Orleans on April 21, 1429. She moved with the army to attack Orleans on April 29, but discovered that her generals had countermanded her orders and had the army on the wrong side of the river. A few days later, she approached Orleans from the correct side of the river. Joan attacked the bastilles St. Loup on May 6. Then she attacked the bastilles Augustine. Then she attacked the Tourelles, where she was wounded. By May 8, the siege of Orleans was lifted. An incredible success: seeing that France had been steadily engulfed by England for almost 100 years.

For inexplicable reasons, the Dauphin then disbanded the army. Then on June 9, the Dauphin regrouped a new army. Joan liberates Jargeau, where Joan is wounded a second time. On June 18, Joan defeats the English at Patay. This broke the back of England's one-hundred year ambitions in France, and the road was now open to have the Dauphin crowned in Rheims. There was a more or less bloodless march to Rheims. Some English-held cities let Joan and the Dauphin pass without battle, some tried to stop them and were defeated. One city, Troyes, was strongly garrisoned by English and their Burgundian allies and offered resistance. Joan defeated them on July 9. The Dauphin was crowned king on July 17, 1429.

While in Rheims, Joan sent a message to the Duke of Burgundy urging him to seek reconciliation with the Dauphin, now that he is anointed King and do not fight against him, for, "if you do, you will surely be defeated." The Duke sent emissaries to Rheims, and Joan thought the King would argue for a good firm peace. Instead, the King settled for a two week cease fire, which only weakened the King's position. Joan and the generals felt this was foolish. Since lifting the siege of Orleans and having the Dauphin crowned was the objectives of her commission to assist France, after the coronation, Joan resigned from the army and prepared to return home. Her generals convinced her to encourage the King to continue to Paris and liberate all of France, which probably could have been done in a few months, given the terror Joan's presence did to the English and Burgundian soldiers. The King was willing at first, but later had second thoughts. He was not fully convinced that conquest was desirable at this point. He felt negotiation would be more effective. He vacillated back and forth trying to make up his mind.

Joan's voices no longer had anything to say about attacking Paris, but her generals and she, herself, wanted to liberate Paris. But the King still vacillated between conquest and negotiated peace. Nevertheless, Joan and her generals did begin an attack to liberate Paris, but, as the attack was in progress, the King withdrew his

support and ordered a retreat. Joan was wounded a third time during this attack.

Joan then spent several months in the King's service fighting many minor battles against rebellious cities and bands of partisans. Then, the Burgundians laid siege to Compiègne, a recently liberated city near Paris, so Joan, with about 400 fighting men went to raise the siege. She charged against the defending troops who retreated, apparently a ploy to lead her and her men into an ambush. When her men realized the risk of ambush they had to force her to retreat toward the city. The captain of the city, seeing a great many English and Burgundians close on the heels of Joan and her men, quickly closed the gates of Compiègne to insure that the pursuing army could not enter the city, leaving Joan and her soldiers trapped. Joan was taken prisoner by the Burgundians, who later sold her to the English, who later staged a rigged trial to have her executed as a witch. I saw that all these details cited by Twain are, indeed, verified by historians.

Mark Twain always had a great admiration for Joan of Arc, stemming from a chance encounter with a page from a book. On his way home one afternoon, he saw a sheet of paper on the pavement. He picked it up and read it. It was a page from a history book about Joan of Arc. The "maid" was described imprisoned within a cage in a fortress at Rouen. Two English soldiers had stolen her clothes. There arose within Twain a deep compassion for Joan, a burning resentment toward her captors, and a powerful and indestructible interest in what had happened to Joan. It was an interest that would grow steadily for more than half a lifetime and culminate at last in "Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc," the most ardently-felt biography of her life. I think Twain was genuinely impressed by Joan and, since she was put to death for political reasons rather than any proven crime, she is a victim of injustice. I think this is Twain's take on her life. He said this book about Joan of Arc is the best of his works and one that he rests his career on. He took a lot of criticism and ridicule from his peers (perhaps that is why some persisted in calling his book "pure" fiction). Twain had long said that this was the work of which he was most proud. I think he felt disappointed that the work he thought his best was received so poorly by critics.

I was surprised by Twain's take on the life of Joan of Arc. He describes her as being "gutsy." This is quite a compliment from someone as critical and satirical as Mark Twain. He is known to make such bold statements as: "The Bible is full of interest. It has noble poetry in it; and some clever fables; and some blood-drenched history; and some good morals; and a wealth of obscenity; and upwards of a thousand lies." "Our Bible reveals to us the character of our god with minute and remorseless exactness. It is perhaps the most damnatory biography that exists in print anywhere." "If Christ were here now there is one thing he would not be--a Christian." "I do not believe He has ever sent a message to man by anybody, or delivered one to him by word of mouth, or made Himself visible to mortal eyes at any time in any place." "I believe that the Old and New Testaments were imagined and written by man, and that no line in them was authorized by God, much less inspired by Him." "I think the goodness, the justice, and the mercy of God are manifested in His works: I perceive that they are manifested toward me in this life; the logical conclusion is that they will be manifested toward me in the life to come, if there should be one."

Very few people, probably because of his views on religion, know that Mark Twain wrote a major work on Joan of Arc. Still fewer know that he considered it not only his most important but also his best work. He spent twelve years researching her life, including many months in France doing archival work and then made several starts until he felt he finally had the story he wanted to tell. Because of his aversion to established churches, one might expect an anti-Catholic bias toward Joan's beliefs or at least toward the bishops and theologians who condemned her. Instead, one finds a remarkably accurate biography of the life and mission of Joan of Arc. The very fact that Mark Twain wrote this book and wrote it the way he did is a powerful testimony to his open-mindedness toward the religion Joan placed her faith in.

In his book, here's what Twain had to say about the church Joan remained faithful to: "Joan was deeply religious. Her religion made her inwardly content and joyous. Her face had a sweetness and serenity that justly influenced her spiritual nature. If sometimes she seemed troubled, it came from distress for her country, no part of the distress can be charged to her religion." Twain recounts that the first person Joan

approached about her mission, Robert de Baudricourt, had decided that Joan was either a witch or a saint. To resolve this question, he brought a priest with him to exorcise the devil within her if there was one. "The priest performed his office and found no devil in her. The priest had offended Joan's piety for he had already heard her confession and he should have known that devils cannot abide the confessional." Twain relates how he understands Joan's genius coming into play when she has the Dauphin crowned by the Church. "Now, then consider this fact, and observe its importance. Whatever the parish priest believes, his flock believes; they love him, they revere him; he is their unfailing friend, their dauntless protector, their comforter in sorrow, their helper in their day of need; he has their whole confidence; what he tells them to do they will do; with a blind and affectionate obedience, come what may. Add these facts thoughtfully together, and what is the sum? This: The parish priest governs the nation. What is the King, then, if the parish priest withdraw his support and deny his authority? Merely a shadow and no king; let him resign." For someone distrustful of ecclesial influence, Mark Twain is certainly open to the influence of the Church in this case.

It seems strange to me to see that Twain's "Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc" is described as fiction; some even say "a work of pure fiction." Twain's book does have some fictional characters and episodes in it, but almost everything he writes about Joan is, in fact, backed up by sworn testimony in a court of law, as can easily be verified by the two historical books written by Regine Pernoud. Twain, in the pseudonym of Sieur Louis de Conte – the fictional narrator of the book, says: "I have finished my story of Joan of Arc, that wonderful child, that sublime personality, that spirit which in one regard has had no peer and will have none—this: its purity from all alloy of self-seeking, self-interest, personal ambition. In it no trace of these motives can be found, search as you may, and this cannot be said of any other person whose name appears in profane history."

I wonder, sometimes, why God intervened into human affairs in such a spectacular way when the man God wanted confirmed as king of France turned out to be such a problem for those who went out of their way to make this happen. I think the reason goes beyond the careers of Joan's contemporaries. It has something to do with God putting enmity between the woman and her seed (Jesus Christ) and Satan and his seed (those humans who follow Satan) when God punished Adam and Eve and Satan when God first created the human race. I think this ongoing struggle has influenced human history ever since Satan dared to tempt the human race.

On December 30, 1905, Mark Twain was the guest of honor at a dinner given at the Aldine Association by the Society of Illustrators. Many well-known magazine and newspaper artists were present. It had been arranged that when Twain was speaking, a young model wearing armor like Joan of Arc would appear followed by a young boy carrying Joan's banner. While Twain was in the middle of his talk, he was astonished to see this young woman approaching. Twain's face suddenly changed. He looked like he had seen a ghost. Joan presented him with a wreath of flowers. He merely bowed and watched her as she turned and left the room. Then, his voice broken, he stunned the audience by saying: "There's an illustration, gentlemen, a real illustration. I studied that girl, Joan of Arc, for twelve years, and it never seemed to me that the artists and the writers gave us a true picture of her. They drew a picture of a peasant. Her dress was that of a peasant. But they always missed the face—the divine soul, the pure character, the supreme woman, the wonderful girl. She was only eighteen years old, but put into a breast like hers a heart like hers and I think, gentlemen, you would have a girl—like that." Even at this time, he still felt admiration for Joan and still felt the sting of the poor reception of his biography of Joan.

Four and an-half years later, Mark Twain left this life. His wife had died in 1904, and Twain became dependent on his personal secretary, Isabel van Leek Lyon, who apparently was very devoted to him. Something went wrong in their relationship, something that disrupted his relationship with his daughters and soured his relationship with Isabel. It was a very embarrassing scandal during the last years of his life, but Twain, Isabel, and his daughters managed to keep most of this difficulty private. Today, several of the new 2010 biographies focuses almost entirely on an unpublished manuscript by Twain and a secret diary by Isabel, bringing public scrutiny of Twain's friends and foes alike to this unhappy affair in the most in the

most minute and uncomfortable detail.

I can visualize Mark Twain when he stood before the judgment seat of God and feeling as uncomfortable as you and I would feel when we finally are there. And while he is feeling so uncomfortable and regretting at least some of the things in this life, I can imagine Joan arriving. I sincerely think it proper that he who defended Joan so ardently in this life should have someone like her to plead his case in the next life.

Bap says

Twain's Historical romances range from pure comedy of the prince and the pauper which always contains barbs against class and royalty to a Connecticut Yankee in King arthur's court whcih begins in the comedic vein but turns dark with a massacre at the end of the book to Joan of Arc which is really a tragedy and is close to straight narrative as told by a contemporary and close friend of Joan's who write his recollections 60 years after her death.

Comedy and tragedy, indignation, and expose are all close cousins.

Sandy says

I only read the Prince and the Pauper. I intend to read the other stories. It is wonderful to see how truly coming to see another's perspective is so very important. I wanted to keep reading, the language was so comfortable and story compelling.

Karis Sculley says

I loved it!! it was a beautifully told story. Only it was hard to read because it was in old English.

Laura says

I'm shocked: it IS possible to get too much of the good thing that is Mark Twain. Any of these three books would be enjoyable on its own; together, their style and subject matter get yawn-inducingly repetitive. Twain employs his usual wit while taking on royalty and religion in various eras of England's past - I'd recommend any of these works individually, but don't read this whole volume cover-to-cover.

Ashley says

I just read Joan of Arc, but I would be interested in The Prince and the Pauper as well. I did not know much of the details of Joan of Arc's life, and it is fascinating! I really enjoyed reading this book from the point of view of her friend and personal secretary. Joan was truly inspired and an amazing individual to stand up for what she believed in despite her gender and peasant status. As a book, it was a little slow at times and the ending dragged out, but I'm glad I finished it!

Greg Brozeit says

These novels are somewhat out of character for those who think of Twain as a writer of American and travel stories. The best part for me was the third and final part of *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc, Trial and Martyrdom*. It is an insightful account about the nature of faith, miracles and mysticism, devotion, patriotism, and fidelity that is countered by descriptions of corruption, venality, false devotion, hypocrisy, craven ambition, and, most of all, the self-serving bureaucracy of Church administration. Although not an academic standard, the story of Joan of Arc is recounted passionately through Twain's retelling. (4 stars)

A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court is surprising for its wide variety of unsympathetic characters and general dark tone. (1.5 stars) *The Prince and the Pauper* is the best known and doesn't hold up as well as I would have hoped since the time I read it for the first time almost 40 years ago. (2.5 stars)

Jacqueline Hankinson says

Prince and the pauper, a good read, surprisingly easy to read in the cockney style. Mark Twain is an intelligent writer. A Connecticut Yankee includes a solar eclipse, so timely given the August 21, 2017 Great American Eclipse. Having begun Joan of Arc, Mark Twain seems even more a master storyteller. This is his "most elaborate work of historical reconstruction".
