

## Uncorrected Proofs

# Mfs Print Culture, Queer Form, and Mark Twain's *No. 44*, *The Mysterious Stranger*

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August Feldner, the narrator of Mark Twain's posthumously published manuscript *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger*, uses modern American dialect when recounting his adolescence in late medieval Austria.<sup>1</sup> August says, for instance, that he intends to "[get] in on the ground floor" (43) of a special mass by paying a sizable sum for special access to the Sacred Host. The modern language of stocks and investments frames the procedures of pre-Reformation penance and the Catholic system of monastic orders. Anachronisms of this sort occur frequently throughout the narrative and thus suspend determinate chronological differences, much in the way that Jonathan Goldberg and Madhavi Menon describe the queering of history. In Goldberg and Menon's view, anachronisms work against the grain of historicist models of analysis that situate the past and the present according to the terms of "alterity" (1609). They argue that modern historical accounts overwhelmingly pattern history after the prefix "hetero," and they advise historians to think instead about the historical pleasures of sameness. The anachronisms of Twain's manuscript similarly configure August's narrative according to crafted temporal displacement, as if the narrative were as out of sync with the normal order of things but strategically aware of this discrepancy. As a result, August's verbal

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performances allow readers to take note of the playful union and indiscriminate mingling of past with present. *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger* thus invites its readers to pattern their literary pleasures in terms of historical sameness.

In addition to crafting a queer sense of time and history, the anachronisms in the last *Mysterious Stranger* manuscript also link up with the narrative's many reflexive techniques.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the narration calls attention to itself as artifice from the outset: the handwritten title page describes the manuscript as "an Ancient Tale found in a Jug, + freely translated from the Jug by Mark Twain" (iv) (see Figure 1).

The trope of the manuscript-found-in-a-jug recalls the eighteenth-century technique of authenticating narrative for the sake of establishing some tenuous relation between truth and fiction. Michael McKeon associates this trope with "debates on questions of truth" (182) during the Renaissance, in which "the discovered manuscript topos" was replaced by "the empirical authentications of the claim to historicity." Through a merger of late nineteenth-century American dialect, on the one hand, and a "topos" developed during the Renaissance for authenticating narrative, on the other, Twain's manuscript plays with the norms of a very long and heterogeneous realist tradition through two of that tradition's most recognizable conventions.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, much like the process of typesetting in early printing technology, Twain's manuscript combines a variety of literary elements to construct narrative meaning. Yet Twain's narrative is an assembly of disparate literary types, for it pieces together such seemingly unrelated elements as Southern dialect and Renaissance plot devices. Although *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger* takes type from recognizable literary norms, Twain assembles that type into a literary form that plays with its own conventionality.

This essay argues that the reflexivity of such transgressive and playful elements implies an innovative reckoning with literary form.<sup>4</sup> The manuscript's reflexivity presents a view of narrative as a system that developed out of the literary norms and conventions of modern print culture but that have since come to take those norms as defining features of the system itself. Realist narrative, in particular, becomes merely the accumulation of "the cultural rules of representation" (Barthes 145) and the institutionalized procedures for reading those rules. However, rather than offering a bounded theory of narrative as a self-enclosed system—what I describe as a proceduralist view of narrative form—Twain's manuscript takes pleasure in flaunting and exploiting the norms that comprise the narrative's rich allusive texture. It's as if the narrative orients itself around exhibitions of the

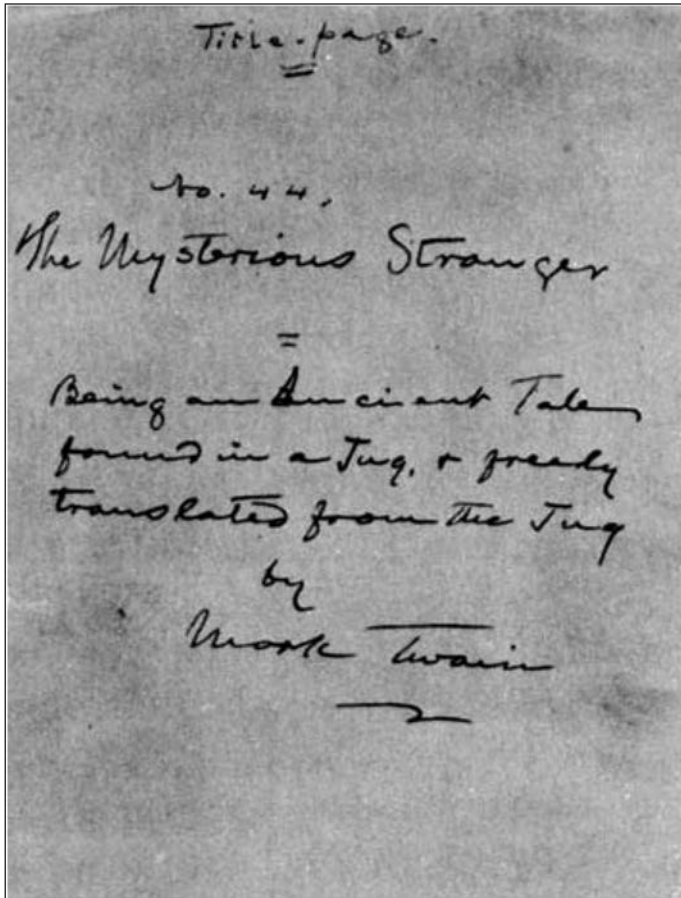


Figure 1. Title page of the *Mysterious Stanger* manuscript. Courtesy of the Mark Twain Project, The Bancroft Library; University of California, Berkeley.

artificiality of the normal. These exhibitions, I argue, are evident in the manuscript's depiction of several varieties of queer form—from the nonconforming bodies of certain characters to the narrative's playful adaptation of realist tropes and its final experimental form in the concluding chapters. Twain's manuscript takes as its structuring preoccupation the pleasures of queering the conventions of gender, sexuality, and the modes of literary production made possible through the technologies of modern print culture. Literary play with notions of form thus becomes the means for a symbolic reckoning with the

norms of a long literary inheritance. However, this symbolic reckoning is also tangled up with the development of notions about sexual identity and certain economic fantasies of print capitalism. These intellectual and material histories help us see how Twain's queer forms are part of his ambiguous conceptualization of the creative disruption made possible by both modern sexual identity and the turn-of-the-century technological revolutions in the print industry.

### **Bodily Form, Print Culture, and the Gender Identity Paradigm**

The possibility of queered form most often surfaces in the manuscript during moments when conventions about gender identity appear to be in trouble. In addition to the peculiar discrepancy between August's medieval context and the "freely translated" (iv) style of the narration, August recounts being called by the quasi-technical slur "B.-A." (45) or bottle-assed, a term he finds too offensive to include explicitly in the narrative. The slur is technical because it compares the shape of August's body to the shape of an undesirable type. August says the following about this allusion to type in the print shop:

All types taper slightly, and are narrower at the letter than at the base of the shank; but in some fonts this spread is so pronounced that you can almost detect it with the eye, loose and exaggerative talkers asserting that it was exactly the taper of a leather bottle. Hence the odious name: and now they had fastened it upon me. . . . It may seem a small thing; but I can tell you that not all seemingly small things are small to a boy. That one shamed me as few things have done since.

This slur presents August's body type as effeminate, and he feels ashamed that he fails to conform to normative ideas about a masculine body. August's form instead recalls the leather bottles common during this era. As Oliver Baker explains in a 1921 study of medieval and early modern leather bottles, such a vessel was "not a bottle, according to our modern ideas of that word, but was more like a miniature Gladstone bag" (34). The bottle was a container, or a receptacle, with a rounded bottom (see Figure 2).

Through a meeting of imagery taken from the tavern and the print shop, August is assigned a body type associated with effeminacy and, more suggestively, one that presents him as a use-object.

The slur "B.-A." (45) draws on the early technologies of print culture but, as August explains, the "odious name" also alludes to gender deviancy, a type who transgresses the norms of masculine identity. Here is August's elaboration of this nonnormative slur

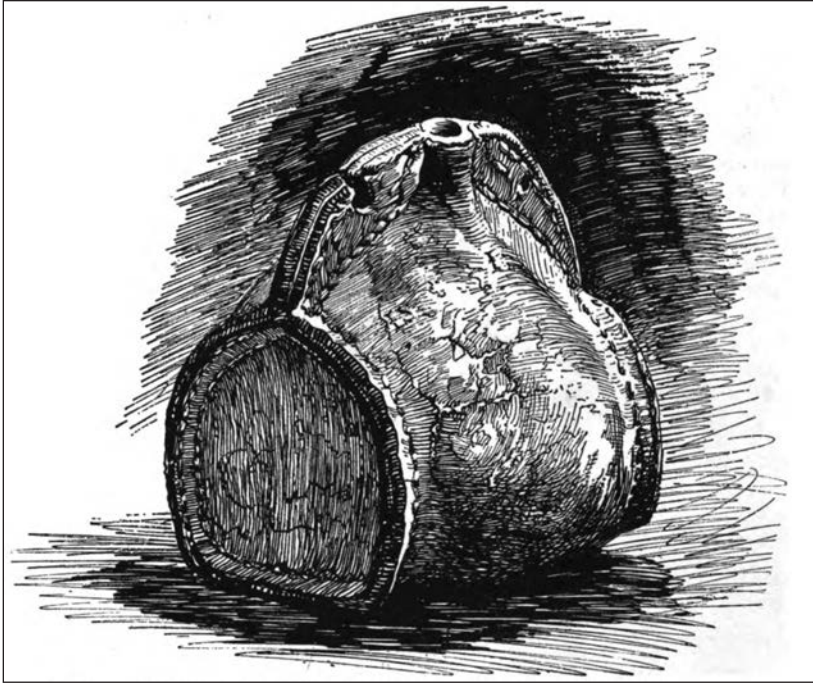


Figure 2. Leather bottle. From page 9 of *Black Jacks and Leather Bottles* by Oliver Baker. Reproduced from HathiTrust Digital Library.

about his form: “As for that name the foreman gave me, it stung me and embittered me more than any of the other hurts and humiliations that were put upon me; and I was girl-boy enough to cry about it.” The insult of being a “leather bottle” leads August to depict his gender as a “girl-boy,” implying a failure to meet the norms in either of the slur’s connotative registers (that is, the ideals of masculinity circulating in taverns and among the laborers of the print shop). He also becomes emotional in a supposedly effeminate way (he cries). August has been labelled with a certain sexual and gendered type drawn from an imaginary “case” (196), namely, “a shallow wooden tray divided into compartments of different sizes in which printers keep type.” August’s body and behavior fail to fit in the separate compartments for gendered type. Indeed, his queerness here also initiates a running theme of August’s body becoming increasingly characterized by leaky and ejaculatory fluids. His body and behavior are fluid, not fixed.

If this play with ideas of form and type allows August to become both genders at once, he fails to become either in any conventional sense. What is “unprintable” (45) about being bottle-assed is not so much a problem with “my shape,” as August puts it, but the slur’s allusion to “a certain kind of type”—that is, to an effeminate figure, a man legible through qualities associated with women. The storehouse of metaphor in this insult also presents those preferences or distinctions to be fungible, a problem of moveable type. It is significant that this queering of August’s bodily form is expressed through adaptations of print technology, for it is the first indication in the narrative that gender and sexuality may be imaginable as techniques of cultural signification. This gendered metaphor from print technology facilitates the expression and publication of August’s gender troubles, but the metaphor also suggests that those troubles are pieced together and arranged, not preset or eternally established.

The manuscript therefore takes the terms and conventions of one mode of representation (print culture) to violate the norms of other modes of representation—namely, the symbolic techniques for reading bodies through the type of gender identity. Notably, this account of the simultaneous normativity and fungibility of gender anticipates the “gender identity paradigm” (Hausman 8) that began to cohere decades later in the twentieth century. In this paradigm, as Berenice Hausman argues, the term “gender” refers to a “separate experience of identity in sex” (73). This paradigm imagines a scientific or biological category (sex) that may be distinguished from the fluid and subjective realm of a cultural identity (gender). Yet Hausman notes that this paradigm also follows a structuralist distinction between nature and culture, which in turn preserves the normativity and seeming neutrality of the idea of biological sex. While the gender identity paradigm acknowledges the fluidity of the “psychosocial category” (74) of gender, it nevertheless “accepts the nature/culture distinction” (75) in its theory of sex by removing this category to a biological or scientific realm, when in fact no such distinction obtains.

August’s shame about his bodily shape illustrates how the queerness of both embodied and print form in Twain’s manuscript relies on distinctions closely related to the gender identity paradigm. This scene does not call into question the naturalness of biology and human anatomy, even if August and many of Twain’s other characters are mobile across a relatively broad spectrum of gender expressions. For example, just before August becomes a “girl-boy” (45), he insists that he is also “a natural boy, and I longed to be conspicuous, and wondered at and talked about” (28). August suggests that it is “natu-

ral" to want to be admired, a claim he makes in order to explain his growing attraction to Forty-Four after the latter's arrival. Rather than querying the natural, the expression of queerness in the text offers instead an expansive and versatile view of nature. Indeed, August later declares that the scorn of others "made me lean toward [Forty-Four] more than ever. That was natural" (41). It's as though naturalness, or some conception of human nature, comes into play at the very moment that non-normative gender and same-sex attraction also become available.

The naturalness of August's interest in a man is akin to the cross-dressing in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc*. These earlier novels also depict unconventional gender performances as paradoxically natural varieties of queerness. Huck's and Joan's identities are betrayed by the mainstream artifice of the categories male and female, but the manuscript does not present their identities as in any way unnatural.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, Laura Skandera-Trombley shows that Twain took cross-dressing as a matter of intellectual curiosity as early as the uncompleted short story "A Medieval Romance" and his articles for the *Buffalo Express* in the 1870s. He often even links gender-queer figures with notions of racial identity. In these instances, Twain's writings query one set of suppositions—implying that gender, race, and sexuality are as moveable as type—while leaving unexamined a prior or more fundamental set of assumptions about the naturalness of identity itself.

*Pudd'nhead Wilson* is another telling example of this vexed relation between queer bodily forms and the naturalization of identity categories. In this novel, a slave named Roxy switches her son with her master's child. Roxy's son, Valet de Chambre, is raised as a white boy named Tom Driscoll. While Roxy's action changes the racial identity of Valet de Chambre, he regularly chooses to move between gender identities by cross-dressing. For example, as an adult Roxy's son later cross-dresses to deceive the lawyer Wilson, wearing what he calls "girl-clothes" (203). Roxy has not disclosed that she switched her child and her master's son, so Valet de Chambre identifies as Tom Driscoll. As Roxy's Tom says to himself about the deception of cross-dressing, Wilson would now be searching for a "woman who doesn't exist any longer, and the clothes that gave her her sex burnt up, and the ashes thrown away" (217). While "sex" is given, it can also be taken away. Yet in this scene, the secret of the fungibility of "sex" is underwritten by the stability of—through a return to—what the narrative presents as Tom's true identity. The dramatic irony, of course, is that Tom doesn't know this true identity. As a result of these

multiple layers of identity confusion, the novel shows how gender and race may be reshuffled as mere markers of appearance.

However, *Pudd'nhead Wilson* also presents at least some aspects of the body as stable referents for determining identity, regardless of the surface appearance of socially constructed norms and behaviors. Race and gender are constructed through social norms, as the narrative suggests when describing the “embarrassing situation” (241) of the real Tom Driscoll, who is displaced between white and black social worlds. Yet the plot device that enables the novel’s final inversion of Tom and Chambers adapts the much older idea of the Book of Nature, or the notion that the natural world may be read for signs of divine truths. By reading the body as a kind of book, Wilson finds in the biological marker of fingerprints the supposed truth about Tom’s identity. “Valet de Chambre,” Wilson says to him, “negro and slave—falsely called Thomas à Becket Driscoll—make upon the window the finger-prints that will hang you!” (241). The body may be a canvas bearing the arbitrary markers of racial and gendered manners, but *Pudd'nhead Wilson* also takes the body as a natural and fundamental cage that characters cannot escape.

This dynamic between the contingency of values and the seemingly inescapable fact of the body positions Twain within ground marked out in some respects by Foucault’s history of sexuality. According to Foucault’s account, the human body becomes a repository for something that would come to be called sexuality but first needed to be understood as subjectivity—that is, the identity of the self. As Foucault writes, “Sex was a means of access both to the life of the body and the life of the species” (146). In this view, it was entirely consistent with an emerging discourse about sexuality to acknowledge the fluidity of erotic desire and gender while also taking the body as the most basic and unchanging house for those variable experiences.

This association with the body as a register of sexuality that points more fundamentally to a category of identity suggests how the queer forms assumed by many of Twain’s characters have a recognizable place within the history of sexuality. Even if many of Twain’s works call attention to the fluidity and contingency of the cultural norms surrounding gender—and even as he associates this perspective with narrative form in *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger*—Twain’s ideas about form are also entangled with paradoxically normative and historically legible ideas about the body and subjectivity. Bodies appear to be bearers of moveable type, but Twain takes as self-evident the idea that there is something underneath the machinery of culture.<sup>6</sup> As a result of this indeterminacy, Twain’s writing may be understood as an



intriguing facet of what Christopher Looby describes as the literary invention of sexuality in the nineteenth century. According to Looby, sexual categorization was in such flux in this period that it is often difficult to know “under what description [characters] act” (852). Modern sexual conventions were taking form under recognizable criteria, including a type of psychologized or internal deviancy, but they were by no means sedimented.<sup>7</sup> The paradox of Twain's queer forms contribute to this literary imagination of modern identity.

### Creative Destruction and Narrative Form

While the queer forms in Twain's work bear out the ambiguities of his moment in the history of sexuality, *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger* also engages with the economic anxieties and technological changes that pervaded Anglo American print culture at the start of the twentieth century. While we might view the print shop as a source of metaphor for expressing the fungibility of behavioral conventions related to gender, we might also invert this reading to see how gender and sexuality index the manuscript's anxieties and fantasies about disruptions within the structure of print capitalism. Twain's metaphors regarding identity throughout much of his career drew on the iconography of the closet—clothing, cross-dressing, and undressing. Yet *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger* is distinctive in that it recasts the imagery of identity through the iconography of the print shop. In this section, I explore the significance of this new iconography—namely, I will show that the exchanges between gender identity and print culture are not only linked techniques for reflecting on narrative form but are also suggestive of Twain's fantasies about economic and cultural innovation.

At first blush, gender, sexual attraction, and the printing press seem linked as representative expressions of a proceduralist view of literary narrative in *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger*. Each of these phenomena follow established procedures for producing their respective form of value. Indeed, the link between print culture and the forms of narrative makes historical sense given the importance of print technologies to the readerly expectations and collective identities of modern readers.<sup>8</sup> Yet Twain's manuscript develops this somewhat obvious link by noting how literary pleasure comes not only by following the proper procedures for constructing narrative but also by violating those rules and conventions.

As I've been suggesting, the manuscript examines the conventions of gender and print culture through the ideas of form and type.

Of course, these terms have meaning in both the print shop and theories of literary narrative. In terms of print technology, the form is the “collection of type pages and of wooden and metal furniture (or filler blocks) when they are locked up in the chase by means of quoins” (197), as the Glossary of Printer’s Terms puts it in the appendix to the Mark Twain Project edition of the manuscript. To make the form, lines of letters or type are assembled and then inked before being locked in with “quoins” or small wooden wedges.

There was much anxiety about the state of the printing trade at the turn of the twentieth century, and the proper way of “[lock-ing] up” forms, in particular, was symptomatic of concerns about the integrity of the modes of print production. For example, writing 11 years after Twain completed his manuscript, Frank Souder Henry authored a treatise on the preparation of forms for “job presses” (3), which were printing presses that could be operated by a single user (in contrast to industrial-scale printing). Henry published this manual with the United Typothetae of America, an organization that invited Twain to give lectures during his lifetime, including a lecture titled “The Old-Fashioned Printer.” The following is an example of the sort of principled advice Henry offers to apprentices: “the form must be square, it must be tightly locked up, the furniture must not bind, and the type must be on its feet” (7). Henry provides several examples of “improper” (9) methods of locking up the form (see Figure 3) as well as the “proper way” (10) for executing this task (see Figure 4).

Failing to lock up the form could lead to significant mistakes, which in turn could cause “expensive pull-out or accident” (7). (One can see why Twain thought print culture was a rich storehouse for sexual innuendo.) Due to the potential hazards and disruptions to productivity, Henry maintained that the labor practices associated with print technology had to be tightly regulated: “Every form locked up for press should be made as firm and as unyielding as possible” (8). As a result, form represented a problem of artistry and craft, but it also expressed labor norms that derived from anxieties about economic efficiency.<sup>9</sup>

This technical sense of form in the history of print culture is certainly related to, but is distinct from, the idea of literary form. The notion of literary form “descended from the Latin ‘forma,’ which was equivalent to the Greek ‘idea’—the term for a central critical concept. In this application, the form of a work is the principle that determines how a work is ordered and organized” (Abrams and Harpham 140). Form in its manifold literary uses may be synonymous with the equally amorphous concept of genre (for example, the sonnet form),

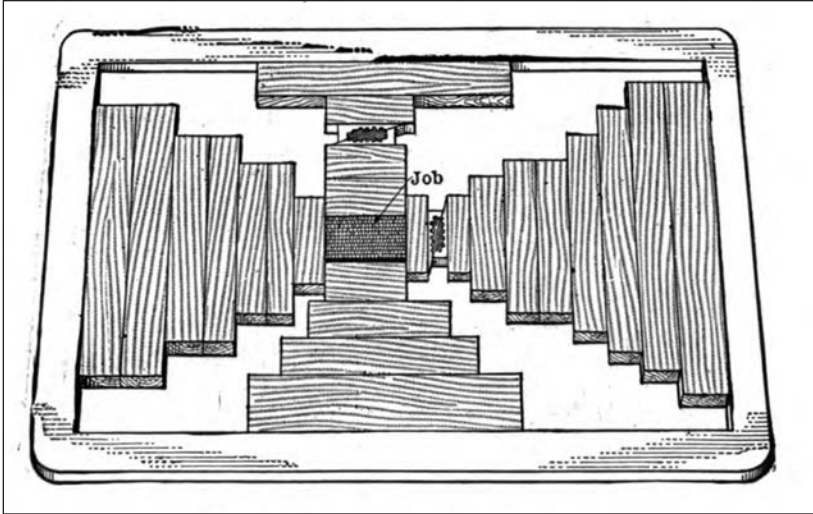


Figure 3. The improper method. From page 9 of *Locking Forms for the Job Press* by Frank S. Henry. Reproduced from HathiTrust Digital Library.

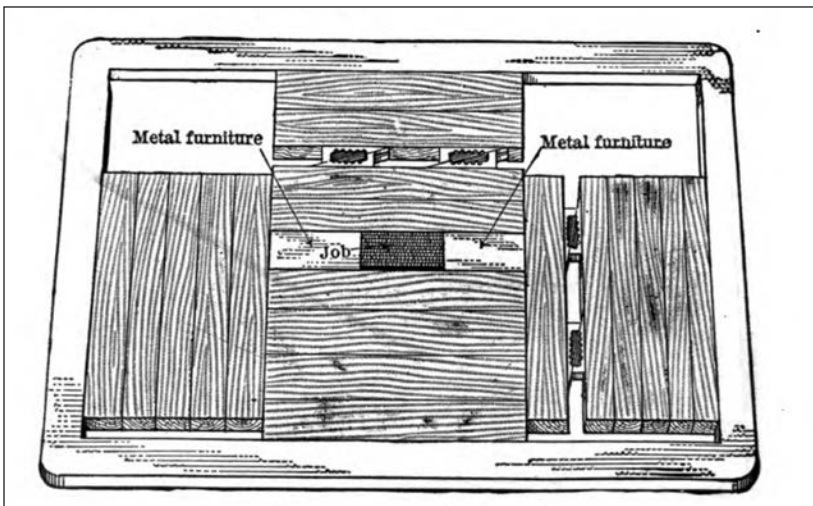


Figure 4. The proper method. From page 10 of *Locking Forms for the Job Press* by Frank S. Henry. Reproduced from HathiTrust Digital Library.

which often relies on relatively codified conventions; or, form may refer to literary type (such as, the lyric form), which is more akin to a general tradition or literary sensibility. In short, literary form has no single or consistent referent in our discipline. Still, it is no longer controversial in each of its varieties to say that form is pieced together through conventions. According to this proceduralist view, form refers to representational norms yielded by the attempt to address readerly expectations, the established procedures of a literary inheritance, and the epistemological criteria of widely shared social imaginaries. Whatever else it may be, the idea of form is an abridgment, a shorthand for dealing with assembled givenness in particular verbal and textual interactions.<sup>10</sup>

But this proceduralist account does not exhaust the varieties of form or the implicit account of narrative in *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger*. Twain's manuscript suggests how the procedures involved in form include not only the representation of givenness but also the transgression of the given; it is, in other words, a reflexive and transgressive gloss on the proceduralism underwriting the formal construction of narrative. This is evident in the manuscript's twinned engagement with the procedures of narrative form and certain characters' bodily forms. Rather than pathologizing failures to fulfill masculine norms, the manuscript presents nonnormative behavior as a source of literary pleasure.<sup>11</sup> August's nearly fetishistic affection for the character Doangivadam is a telling example. After Doangivadam arrives in the castle, August explains, "I was all girl-boy again, I couldn't keep the tears back" (59). Again, August's gender identity becomes queer ("girl-boy") in close connection to leaky metaphors—the fluids that come out of his body in response to men. More important, though, August responds this way because Doangivadam enters as a counterforce or relief to the "herd" (29) behavior of the other men.<sup>12</sup> That is to say, Doangivadam enters the narrative as a transgression of the print shop's conformity: "At his leisure he had strolled over from the village inn, and he marched in among us gay and jovial, plumed and gorgeous, and took everybody by surprise" (59). His nonconformist entry leads August's body into a kind of dissolution: the young apprentice can no longer keep his form locked up and held in its proper place.

Doangivadam appears to be heterosexual (he kisses Katrina, for example), yet he also goes against the consensus of the herd for the very pleasure of standing up for what August describes as the "underdog" (59). What's more, this "plumed and gorgeous" figure recalls characters from other works—including Tom Driscoll's "suit

of clothes of such exquisite style and cut and fashion" (*Pudd'nhead* 45)—whose clothing marks them out as queer figures in an otherwise repressive social world. He is the object of August's affection because of his willingness to defy consensus, but Doangivadam also attaches himself to the marginalized and outcast. Indeed, he later feels Forty-Four's hands, proclaiming, "Why, they are soft and plump—just a girl's" (61). His defiance is not separable from either gender or attraction. Thus, perhaps not unlike Huck, who "do[es] a girl tolerable poor," although he "might fool men, maybe" (*Adventures* 72), Forty-Four convinces a man to read him as a woman. In contrast to the fundamental stability and naturalness of the body in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, Forty-Four's body is legible as "just a girl's" (61), and Doangivadam is nonconforming enough to read him as such.

Doangivadam's arrival also enables a multifaceted view of queer gender and sexuality in the narrative. In particular, the sort of queerness attached to his person follows a set of narratival tropes, which appear at first glance to be transgressive but are in fact quite conventional. For example, Doangivadam's appearance is anticipated or heralded twice before his arrival. This heralding of a virtuous outsider, courtesan, or hero presages the resolution of an insulated community's crisis. This heralding device is a familiar literary trope, deriving from medieval figures of chivalry and knight-errantry but extending into modern narrative forms—consider, for example, the Veiled Lady in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance* (1852).<sup>13</sup> Doangivadam is thus transgressive but also conventional; he is an outsider who fits squarely inside the procedural toolbox for constructing narrative.

What's more, the conventionally anticonventional character of Doangivadam anticipates the strange don't-give-a-damn turn in the manuscript's final chapter. After the historical procession in chapters 32 and 33, Forty-Four waves his hand and dismisses not only the progression of historical figures but also the scene of the narrative. The castle outside Eseldorf has disappeared and so has the context for narrative coherence. Recursively, this gesture of dismissing the narrative world underscores its artificiality. As August says, the two characters "stood in an empty and soundless world" (185). The procession and scenes from a bucolic print shop preceding this dismissal were, by implication, type that can be taken from the narrative chase and returned to the case, or even tossed into the hell-box, "a box into which battered or broken type metal is thrown" (197). Having thus cleared away this particular composition of type, Forty-Four reveals to August that "*there is no other [life]*" (185). This revelation creates

a “gush of thankfulness” (186) in August’s “breast,” turning August into a leaky body yet again, as though his emotions had come to a certain climax. This revelation also turns out to be revolutionary for the form of the manuscript’s narrative. August’s bodily form, initially nonnormative, in the end becomes the unbounded source of all norms: “Nothing exists but You. And You are but a *Thought*—a vagrant Thought, a useless Thought, a homeless Thought, wandering forlorn among the empty eternities!” (187). The narrative adopts a representational mode in which the fictional world dissolves and everything appears to be a “vagrant Thought.” The vagrancy of this don’t-give-a-damn turn in the narrative displaces August from history and time. In the end, he finds himself outside norms and authoritative structures that can make claims upon him, for the nature of his timeless wandering is characterized only by “empty” space.

There are conspicuously religious or metaphysical dimensions to Forty-Four’s final proclamation, and it is quite reasonable to conclude the he advances either some brand of nihilism or a version of Emerson’s transparent eyeball.<sup>14</sup> Given the heavily reflexive elements of the surrounding material, though, this dissolution of the procession of history and the narrative world has decidedly metafictional connotations. The idea of difference (fact from fiction, the self from the other) becomes an illusion, a figment of the imagination. Indeed, when Forty-Four says to August, “I myself have no existence, I am but a dream—your dream, creature of your imagination” (186), he orients existence around sameness. As a further permutation of the connection between August and Forty-Four as girl-boys, the two characters are finally conflated. The truth of this fiction appears to be rooted in the pleasures of sameness.

The verbal performances and conventions piecing together the narrative world become impermanent and easily exchangeable at the end of *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger*. “In a moment you will have realized this,” Forty-Four says, “then you will banish me from your visions” (186). The narration’s queering of realist representation (initially signaled in its use of anachronistic dialect) is unveiled at the end as an even more transgressive fictional mode. The final chapter concludes with Forty-Four’s illocutionary speech-act: his declaration of August’s authority and the consequent dismissal of the material independence of reality. He proclaims the end of the narrative world, and the manuscript in turn concludes. What’s most notable about this speech-act is that Forty-Four glosses the power of verbal performativity in decisively self-reflexive terms: “But I your poor servant have revealed you to yourself and set you free” (186).

Forty-Four's revelation is that he and August are one, and life oriented around the pleasures of difference becomes nothing but an illusion. If the constructions of the world are revealed to be so easily pieced together, August discovers that his "universe and its contents were only dreams, visions, fictions!" (186). The forms of the world and the forms of fiction become one and the same.

### Print Capitalism and Queer Desire

Yet does Twain's manuscript, as Forty-Four announces, enclose the world within narrativized reflexivity, such that life and fiction become one? Even if we were to evaluate the manuscript on the terms given by Forty-Four, do these terms present the narrative world to be solely the product of the imagination?

The magical turn in the print shop and Forty-Four's universalizing proclamations have both been read perceptively as expressions of anxious wish-fulfillment—namely, as Samuel Clemens's dream of triumph within the market of print capitalism and a victory over organized labor in particular.<sup>15</sup> In this line of interpretation, Bruce Michelson reads *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger* as a vexed meditation produced by the pressures of Clemens's long relationship to the American publishing revolution. For instance, when Forty-Four invites spirits to replace the human workers who strike in the print shop, the manuscript seems to imagine a resolution in which inhuman automation resolves the inefficiencies of print capitalism. This automation, in turn, becomes a new form of enchantment to replace the disillusionment of a divisive world: "The invisibles were making up forms, locking up forms, unlocking forms, carrying new signatures to the press and removing the old: abundance of movement, you see, plenty of tramping to and fro, yet you couldn't hear a footfall" (64). In this dream (as we discover it to be at the novel's end), the production of form is no longer dependent on the procedures and routines of the print shop. It's as if form now marks the transcending of bodies, the passing away of bounded productivity. As Forty-Four later tells August, "you have no body, no blood, no bones, you are but a *thought*" (186).

This invisible automated labor recalls Clemens's unsuccessful investments in the Paige compositor, as Corban Goble has documented. The strike in the printshop also recalls the wildcat strikes that regularly disrupted Clemens's other financial interests. In Michelson's view, "the final version of the 'Mysterious Stranger' can be understood as about the threatened disintegration of personality

and belief under one specific pressure of modernity, the accelerating production and alienation of printed words” (220). August’s account seems to invite this economic connection: “invisible hands removed the form and washed it” (65), he says, and Adam Smith’s familiar economic metaphor thus becomes manifest in the procedures of the print shop. The Master’s shop overcomes the wildcat strike through the invisible hand guiding the development of print capitalism. The “invisible hands” of print capitalism also help explain the manuscript’s critical approach to religious authorities, who oppose “the cheapening of books and the indiscriminate dissemination of knowledge” (12). These conservative authorities are opposed to the potential social disruption created by widely reproduced print objects. As the narrative progresses, the magic animating print technology becomes (to use Joseph Schumpeter’s well-known phrase) a “gale of creative destruction” (84), wreaking havoc not only on the dictates of conservative religious authorities but also on the form of the narrative.

Michelson calls attention to the technological and economic pressures that shaped the production of the manuscript, but we might also refer to another set of pressures when trying to account for the dissolution of the narrative’s physical world in the final chapters—namely, Clemens’s personal history with nonconforming gender and sexuality. Building on Linda Morris’s argument about other works in Twain’s oeuvre, the manuscript’s interest in nonconformity might bear some relationship to Clemens’s eldest daughter, Susy, and her romantic relationship with Louise Brownell from 1891–1894. Morris notes that Twain’s “intense study of the transvestite figure Joan of Arc occurred precisely during the years when Susy was most deeply emotionally involved with Louise Brownell” (20). Admittedly, the narrative style of Louis de Conte, the translated narrator of *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc*, differs in many ways from the “freely translated” (iv) narration of August’s encounters with Forty-Four. However, both modes of narration take transgressive figures as centers of gravity. According to Morris, Twain’s “fascination with Joan of Arc . . . was that she was an archetypal liminal figure. She moved between earthliness and saintliness, between the centuries, between childhood and adulthood, between masculine and feminine—and she partook of all” (99–100). Forty-Four, too, traverses the centuries: “For the moment, I am not living in the present century, but in one which interests me more, for the time being” (81).

What’s more, the supernatural appears often to index socially transgressive attraction in both texts. For instance, during the trial in *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc*, Joan refuses to remove her clothes



even if she were offered communion. "When one receives the sacrament," she declares, "the manner of his dress is a small thing and of no value in the eyes of Our Lord" (378). Social transgression and the supernatural are linked in *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger* when the Duplicate selves created by Forty-Four lead to a potentially compromising marriage between a Duplicate named Emil Schwarz and August's beloved Marget. Forty-Four's solution is to transform the Duplicate and create still others, such that Marget "would not be able to tell t'other from which, and couldn't choose the right one, and it wouldn't be lawful for her to marry the whole harem. That would postpone the wedding, he thought" (140). The solution to Marget's romantic confusion is to multiply her lovers, thereby allowing the supernatural figures to disrupt the supposedly proper form of romance.<sup>16</sup> The supernatural being, Schwarz, later confesses to August that his body is a kind of prison because it fails to signify the truth about his identity: "these bonds of flesh—this decaying vile matter, this foul weight, and clog, and burden this loathsome sack of corruption in which my spirit is imprisoned, her white wings bruised and soiled—oh, be merciful and set her free!" (151). In Schwarz's confession, the sex of his soul is mismatched with the flesh of his body. The soul of Schwarz is a female trapped within the "vile matter" of a male bodily form.

Such episodes suggest how the supernatural makes imaginable the transcendence of institutionalized norms for romance (polyamory) and the possibility of transvestitism. The supernatural also becomes the vehicle for expressing transgressive sexual desire in. For instance, a religious revelation early in the manuscript presents a scene of thinly veiled queer desire when Father Peter recounts a "learned priest" (57) discovering "that the Sacred Heart had, so to say, separated into two parts, in order to make room in the middle for the form of a young man of wondrous beauty. The breast of Jesus projected beyond the circle of the monstrance, and He graciously moved His head whilst with His right hand He blessed the assembly." The miracle of the Eucharist dividing makes space for a queer figure to emerge. It's also possible to view the separating Sacred Heart as recalling an anus, in which case the entrance of the form of the "young man of wondrous beauty" is particularly homoerotic. Regardless, this story about the "form of a young man" presents a desirable male body, which is taken as the object of reverence by another man—that is, the more sympathetically depicted Father Peter.

The point is that *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger* and *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc* both establish a close relationship between

disruptive supernatural beings and nonconforming gender identity and sexuality.<sup>17</sup> To invoke the spectral and the surreal may be a route for addressing the shortcomings of the physical and the real. Yet the supernatural elements in these texts are also coded attempts to depict same-sex attraction, sexual deviancy, and gender self-fashioning. In this latter view, the composition of *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger* continues Twain's literary inquiry into the possibilities of gender and sexual nonconformity in the years following Susy Clemens's death.

On the one hand, then, the image of printed forms being assembled through invisible labor surely looks forward to a mode of print production that undercuts the interests of laborers. On the other hand, that magical view of the construction of form—both print and narrative—also transgresses the norms and virtues of what August regularly calls the “herd” (29). *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger* thus complicates a proceduralist view of the production of narrative by calling attention to the pleasures associated with transgressing norms. Yet the manuscript's treatment of nonconforming identity is also linked to fantasies of an emerging model of technological disruption. In this account, sexual nonconformity and gender self-fashioning are coupled with an economic logic of creative transgression and technological productivity. The further consolidation of propertied interests, in this arrangement, is linked to a print culture that facilitates opposition to social norms encoded within ideas about sexuality and gender.<sup>18</sup> The manuscript's queer forms therefore call attention to the pleasures of reworking one set of conventions to frustrate another set of norms. Yet this opposition toward normativity shares its template with wider economic forces and social disruptions: the “gale of creative destruction” sweeps away both gender norms and a labor-intensive mode of print production.

I've been arguing that the suggested power of narrative world-making at the end of *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger* brings into view the ambiguities of Twain's queer forms. One of the implicit aspirations of this queering of form is to envision a type of imaginative labor that very often displaces prior modes of production. The manuscript's reflexivity about narrative form is therefore as much a new vision of labor within print capitalism as it is a statement about the artificiality of narrative forms and the instability of cultural norms regarding gender. In fact, the manuscript's resistance to the procedures of realist narrative is evoked from the beginning by the portrait of a boyhood idyll in the fictional village of Eseldorf, which translates into English as “Assville” (Tuckey, “Foreword” x). If the village resides “in the middle of [Austria's] sleep” (3) and is therefore backward and

asinine, this provinciality is replaced at the end of the manuscript with a timeless and global procession. The opening combination of body (Ass-) and place (-ville) dissolves in the final chapters, such that the particular bodies necessary for print culture are deleted, effaced. Creative disruption becomes the manuscript's final horizon. Assville passes away and, behold, all things are made ever-present.

But this enlightenment—the movement from dogma and ignorance to spontaneous thought, boundless productivity, and free-thinking—is not without its troubles. The narrative presages the character and source of these troubles in an earlier moment when Forty-Four, as he is just learning the trade of being a printer's devil, is charged with nearly committing a major foul-up in the print shop, called "piing the form" (38). To "pi" the form is "dropping the form and spilling out the lines of type" (198). The form no longer holds, the type falls out of place, and the text escapes the chase. Even as Twain uses the print shop throughout as a repository of metaphor for everything from gender to the use of "fact" (13), the problem of "piing the form" (38) likewise captures what happens in the last chapter of the manuscript, when Forty-Four dissolves after proclaiming, "It is all a Dream, a grotesque and foolish dream" (187). The conventions of realism—the organizing principles for representing reality—fall apart. The construction of sense spills outside the lines of type. Vagrancy, rather than coherence, comes to be the character of representation. It's as if, at the end of the manuscript, Twain has pined the novel form.

To entertain the queerness of form, in this view, is also to hazard form's dissolution. At the moment of encountering this possibility, in the manuscript's final sentence, August says that Forty-Four "vanished, and left me appalled; for I knew, and realized, that all he said was true" (187). August's realization seems to bear out Forty-Four's claim that certain conventional truths ("hell," "angels," "Golden Rules") are "the silly creations of an imagination that is not conscious of its freaks." Following this recognition, the narrative ends, the dream concludes, and the reader returns to reality.<sup>19</sup>

Yet August's state of being "appalled" implies that piing the form, while revelatory and even pleasurable, is also fundamentally disruptive. The novel's conclusion puts forward an account of form resembling Schumpeter's influential view of the effects of capitalism upon corporate firms and the forms of economic production. In Schumpeter's view, capitalism "creates and destroys" (84) existing structures; it is a "perennial gale of creative destruction" (87). Writing 40 years before Schumpeter, Twain's manuscript similarly

situates narrative form within the forces of innovation and creative displacement. On the one hand, the penetration of Eseldorf by Forty-Four's revelation signals that the constricting norms of the medieval village can be overcome. Self-fashioning is the horizon that resolves the tyranny of striated difference governing August's late medieval setting. On the other hand, and more disturbingly, the queerness of Forty-Four and the final dissolution of realist representation may invoke the specter of infection.<sup>20</sup> Queer form, in this more anxious view, threatens to make vagrants of us all, to undermine the coherence we bring to the world and thus leave us "wandering forlorn among the empty eternities" (187). What's so appalling about Forty-Four's conclusion, August implies, is the possibility of being displaced within a vacant and otherwise formless expanse. The cost of August's revelation about the contingency of form appears to be the loss of a shared world. Sameness, in the manuscript's ambiguously anxious ending, is a structuring principle that dispatches all structures. While Twain depicts the distinct pleasures made available through the queering of form, his manuscript is also troubled by the specter of displacement that has been conjured by unsettling the narrative frame.

## Notes

1. There is an established body of scholarship on the three "Mysterious Stranger" manuscripts. Tuckey uncovered the troubling editorial history of the manuscripts in 1963, and Gibson published the unfinished manuscripts in 1969. The 1916 version published by Paine and Duneka as *The Mysterious Stranger: A Romance* was essentially a mashup of three versions of the narrative, including some characters Paine added. This essay does not discuss the peculiarities of this editorial history, but Simmons has persuasively argued that critics may regard the 1916 version "as an opportunity to test several theoretical positions, including those on authorship" (127).
2. Edelman takes the notions of time as an object of queer critique in another sense—that is, in the "reproductive futurism" (19) that structures modern political culture. A version of this reproductive ethos appears in Twain's manuscript through the spirits of the printshop, although the final chapter also provides a counter-figure in the image of the "vagrant Thought" (187). I turn to the dynamics of this figure at the end of the essay.
3. This variegated realism in Twain's manuscript is not unlike Sedgwick's proposal to set unlikely objects and ideas "beside" (8) one another.

"Ideally," Sedgwick says of this proposal, "life, loves, and ideas might then sit freely, for a while, on the palm of the open hand" (3). This essay takes the willingness to reach across both time and the established conventions of narrative structure to be one of the constitutive gestures of queer form. In this view, the queering of form is a literary speech-act, the performative of narrative form rather than a fully codified and encoded aesthetic design.

4. In one of its most influential definitions, reflexivity refers to "*the movement whereby that which has been used to generate a system is made, through a changed perspective, to become part of the system it generates*" (Hayles 8). See also Waugh's closely related definition of metafiction as writing that "draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text" (2). In Twain's case, I'm arguing that self-reflexivity poses questions about the relationship between the conventions of print culture and gender identity.
5. Harris finds an even more radical version of this idea in the deliberate pronoun confusion in "1002nd Arabian Night," a story written during the 1880s but unpublished in Twain's lifetime. According to Harris, this story questions "an entrenched cultural assumption that to be male or female meant to have a predetermined set of behaviors as well as a particular genital organization" ("Mark Twain and Gender" 166).
6. As Morris puts this point, Twain's later work shows how his "larger investigation into gender transgression" was "unfinished" (126).
7. As one example, see the remarkable story "The Man Who Thought Himself a Woman" (1857), which is among the many texts discussed by Looby from the nineteenth century. See also LaFleur's analysis of early nineteenth-century perceptions about the effects of social and physical environment upon sexual vice and virtue (164–88).
8. In his now classic account, Ong argues that print has not only had social effects but has also altered the structures of human consciousness. Ong shows that the development of "alphabetic letterpress print" (118) entailed a corresponding change in the nature of written discourse: "Words are made out of units (types) which pre-exist as units before the words which they will constitute. Print suggests that words are things far more than writing ever did." In another influential argument, Anderson shows that print capitalism "gave a new fixity to language, which in the long run helped to build that image of antiquity so central to the subjective idea of the nation" (44). In both accounts, print technology and the construction of modern identity are inextricably connected. Still other

scholars have emphasized the mutual determination of print culture and the various forms adopted in modern discourse. See Warner's *Letters*, 151–76.

9. Miller shows how anxieties about the pace of print capitalism were pervasive in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Many radical writers hoped to counter this trend in Great Britain, in particular, as a way of resisting norms about economic productivity and liberal ideals of independent rational subjectivity.
10. Notably, there are many competing accounts of the term “form” in the varieties of new formalism that have been theorized over the last two decades. In Levinson's view, this trend in criticism is more of a movement than a methodology, and may therefore be understood as structured along the lines of closely related schools: “activist formalism” and “normative formalism” (559). As others have noted, this debate about the right sort of formalism becomes a proxy for disagreements over the distinctiveness of the discipline (see Clune 1194–99) and the nature of aesthetic abstraction more generally (see Gaskill 505–24). Levinson shows that many varieties of formalism react against a (no longer current, if ever actually available) critique by new historicists of form as only a mystification—a term we use when we fail or refuse to see the ideological machinery of the aesthetic.
11. One may reasonably ask whether this pleasure takes gender-queer characters and homoerotic desire to be the butt of a joke or the nub of a more authentic sexuality. Versions of this question have been a persistent feature of scholarship on Twain's work since Fiedler's landmark essay in 1948. For example, Hoffman even mounts a speculative argument that Clemens had romantic relationships with other men. As this essay argues, though, Twain depicts an especially permeable border between the risible and the sexual.
12. Keane identifies Nietzsche as a source for this strain of nonconformity in the *Mysterious Stranger* manuscripts. Nietzsche's disdain for the “herd” (Ratner-Rosenhagen 42) was part of an elite cultural milieu in the US during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, while his writings may have come “into Vogue” (67), they were hardly widespread until much later in the twentieth century. Indeed, Clemens claims never to have read the German philosopher, although he remarks, “Nietzsche published his book, and was at once pronounced crazy by the world—by a world which included tens of thousands of bright, sane men who believed exactly as Nietzsche believed, but concealed the fact, and scoffed at Nietzsche” (*Autobiography* 130).
13. Frye adapts Aristotle's account in his *Poetics* to explain various tropes regarding the hero. For Frye, the “hero's power of action” (33) in fiction follows decidedly conventional patterns, including the heirs of the

“secular form” (34) of romance. Regarding this pattern, Frye says, “If superior [to us] in *degre* to other men and to his environment, the hero is the typical hero of *romance*, whose actions are marvelous but who is himself identified as a human being. The hero of romance moves in a world in which the ordinary laws of nature are slightly suspended” (33).

14. An exclusively nihilistic reading of this conclusion supports Keane’s thesis that Nietzsche’s writings influenced Twain’s later thinking. On the other hand, Eutsey argues that Forty-Four become a liberal theological figure: namely, he is the representation of an “‘all-round view’ of God” (55). In Eutsey’s view, the seemingly nihilistic conclusion affirms “the existence of a transcendent realm in which ‘no thing’ exists. This experiential level of consciousness is devoid of concepts, and August is absorbed into it like a drop of water into the ‘shoreless expanses’ of a divine sea” (59). The famous passage from Emerson is clearly also a source: “Standing on the bare ground—my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God” (4).
15. My description of this line of interpretation is of course only schematic. Clemens’s views on the accumulation of capital fluctuated widely; his attitude toward organized labor likewise varied, for he supported the riverboat pilots’ union in the 1870s but then supported what Camfield calls a “labor-supplanting machine” (99) the Paige compositor in the 1880s. According to Camfield, the context of this seeming contradiction is nineteenth-century democratic republicanism, which holds “labor as the source of value” (101), at least insofar as it’s skilled or artisan labor.
16. This link between the supernatural and the violation of social norms takes on sexual connotations in *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger* when Dream-Selves and Waking-Selves sneak into dark corners for romantic liaisons. For example, Lisbet mistakes August for Martin—an incident that Csicsila views as an indication of August’s “evolution over the course of the love triangle incident from dull Workaday mortal to enlightened spirit to signify August’s gradual understanding of the disparate states of human existence” (97). Csicsila’s view thus connects sexual development with an acknowledgement of fluid identities.
17. For more on the narrative form of *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc*, see Harris’s “Narrative Structure” 53–54. *Joan of Arc* is decidedly more conventional than *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger*, but its narrator’s seemingly cynical convictions at the end of the novel are no less attuned to the more radical conclusions of expressivist configurations of the self in *No. 44*.
18. To be clear, print culture has only rarely been oppositional to heteronormativity. See Warner’s discussion of these dynamics in *Publics and Counterpublics* 61–64.

19. As Dixon notes, this movement of “Egress” from the pleasures of fiction is a common one in Twain’s writing: Twain’s texts “deposit the audience onto the street in the middle of their visit; any wisdom or effect produced within the text has to be reevaluated in the light of day” (50). According to Dixon, this movement also has a conventional aim: “His goal, after all, is to reaffirm sanity, orderliness, and logic, not destroy it. If there is no proper truth, no standard of fair dealing, there can be no humbug” (56).
20. In this latter view, the invocation of queered forms anticipates twentieth-century anxieties about queerness as a threat to conventional marriage and other mainstream norms. Based on the textual evidence, this view seems as viable as the Schumpeterian gloss.

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