

“Mark Twain’s *A Horse’s Tale*: The Papers of William F. Cody”

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Professor Frank Christianson

English

Project Purpose

The purpose of this project is to recover a little-known and out-of-print novel written by Mark Twain titled *A Horse’s Tale* (1907). The recovery process will be threefold: First, I will edit and annotate the novel in order to bring a new edition of it into contemporary scholarship in partnership with Professor Frank Christianson and the University of Nebraska Press *The Papers of William F. Cody* series. Second, I will use my annotation and appendix research to inform a critical study on the novel, which I will write as a conference paper to present at next year’s ORCA conference. Third, I will produce a work of original digital scholarship which will be published on the Cody Papers project digital archive codystudies.org.

Project Importance

Mark Twain is one of America’s most recognized authors of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, yet his novel *A Horse’s Tale* has all but disappeared. Though it was released into the public domain in 1997, the novel remains out of print and exists primarily in digital reprint formats. There is very little scholarship surrounding *A Horse’s Tale*, which provides a strong motivation for shining light on this novel and reprinting it as a scholarly edition. This edition, planned for publication in the University of Nebraska Press *The Papers of William F. Cody* series, will include an editor’s introduction, annotation of the text, and appendices consisting of contextual materials.

The University of Nebraska Press and the Cody Papers project are interested in including this novel in the series because Buffalo Bill Cody plays a central role in it—Twain interestingly and uncharacteristically wrote the novel from the perspective of Cody’s horse. Exploring the reason behind this narrative choice will shed light on the little-known relationship between Mark Twain and another iconic American figure of the time. This novel continues Twain’s preoccupation with addressing questions of American national self-definition in a transnational context as the plot extends from the American frontier to the bullfighting arenas of Spain. My editorial work will help to place the novel within a cultural history of the American West and its relationship with Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Project Profile Body

I plan to investigate the origin, history, purpose, and eventual reception of Mark Twain’s *A Horse’s Tale* after it was published in 1907. From this preliminary investigation I will draw materials and research necessary for understanding the novel within a scholarly framework. Twain draws upon Cody’s mythic persona in *A Horse’s Tale* to dramatize transatlantic themes, such as American Exceptionalism and frontier mythology, that were popularized by Buffalo Bill’s Wild West exhibition. The Wild West show was one of the most popular forms of traveling entertainment on both sides of the Atlantic at the turn of the century. Because of these connections, I can develop a relationship with the Cody Papers project that will be beneficial to both parties—I will draw upon the extensive resources and expertise of the Cody Papers project as I conduct annotation research and work to contextualize Twain’s novel. My research will appear in the form of annotation work—footnotes explaining references and colloquialisms—for the body of the novel and appendices of pertinent contextual material including photographs of historic figures and locations, as well as Twain’s correspondence and journal entries about writing the novel.

I will then use my experience researching and editing to address larger questions surrounding the novel in a conference paper. This paper will explore themes of American Exceptionalism, the American frontier myth, and transatlanticism as they involve Twain’s relationship with Cody, America’s relationship with Europe, and the novel’s relationship to Occasional writing common in the nineteenth century. This last point stems from the fact that Twain wrote the novel as part of a campaign against the evils of bullfighting.

With Professor Christianson as my mentor, I will be able incorporate my critical writing into the aims of the Cody Papers project, which provides me with a specific opportunity to develop and publish my own research. Ultimately I will revise and adapt my conference paper for a digital format, including a visual component with links to other resources from the Cody Papers project. The publication of my writing on codystudies.org (a scholarly publishing site for digital scholarship in partnership with the Cody Papers project) will further ensure that my research remains permanent and accessible long after I have graduated.

Anticipated Academic Outcome

As a contributing editor for the scholarly edition of *A Horse's Tale*, I will conduct annotation and appendix research which will be a valuable extension of my training as an editing minor. My research will then become a contextual basis for critical writing, where I will address and analyze larger themes pertinent to a full understanding of the novel, such as Mark Twain's transatlantic vision and the role of the mythic frontier. Currently very little criticism exists on *A Horse's Tale*, so my critical writing will be unique in placing the novel within the larger body of Twain's fiction while considering its relation to the Buffalo Bill Cody frontier myth. This critical writing will first take the form of a conference paper that I will present at the ORCA research conference in 2014, and finally take the form of digital scholarship so that my writing can permanently reside on the website codystudies.org.

Qualifications

Professor Christianson teaches courses on transatlanticism and nineteenth-century American studies and would be an invaluable resource to me as I seek to have my research published. He is Senior Editor for the *Papers of William F. Cody* project and co-series editor for the *The Papers of William F. Cody* series with University of Nebraska Press, which works to preserve and publish the literature, print media, and scholarship relating to Cody's life and enterprises. Professor Christianson and I both have a unique perspective and solid experience in exploring the themes of transnational literature, the American frontier, and American Exceptionalism that are necessary in order to understand Twain's *A Horse's Tale*.

This project represents an ideal fusion of my undergraduate training and interests. As an English major and editing minor, I look forward to incorporating these various skill sets to produce something meaningful. Along with my editing coursework and work on student journals, I took my senior course, English 495, from Professor Christianson where I studied the American frontier and how it is mythologized in literature. My final research paper for the course was in the form of a scholarly introduction to a novel—experience that will inform my research and strengthen my understanding of this project's expected outcome.

I am currently enrolled in Professor Christianson's English 390R course focusing on transnational writers such as Mark Twain and William F. Cody. Approaching this project already familiar with these writers will enable me to make substantive progress on research and analysis during the ORCA grant period: I understand the critical and theoretical framework in which to explore these texts and can start right away in the editing, research, and writing process.

Project Timetable

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| February-April 2014: | Establish authoritative version of the text. Research annotations and context material for novel's appendices. Submit research and editorial work for scholarly edition of <i>A Horse's Tale</i> |
| April-May 2014: | Write an analysis based on frontier myth and transnationalism in Twain's novel that draws upon my research findings |
| April 2014: | Submit material for review to the Cody Papers editors for possible publication on codystudies.org |
| June 2014: | Final review and revisions for publication on codystudies.org |
| October 2014: | Present my research in the form of a conference paper at the ORCA conference |

Scholarly Sources

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