

A Connecticut Yankee in Saddam's Court: Mark Twain on Benevolent Imperialism

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Is it acceptable (or perhaps even imperative) that the United States works to spread democratic liberty, even when nation building requires warfare on behalf of the oppressed? I argue that Mark Twain's novel *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* is a useful aid for reflection regarding this question. What Twain accomplishes, thanks in great part to his humor, is an honest exposure of the partial truths and considerable falsehoods contained in each common opinion regarding benevolent intervention. To highlight the complexity of Twain's thoughts on nation building, I discuss three possible interpretations of *Connecticut Yankee*. The first conceives of Hank Morgan as a well-intentioned democratic reformer, laying the proper foundation for a peaceful democratic transition after King Arthur dies. The second reads the book as ironically criticizing Hank for his overzealous promotion of democracy amidst a traditional culture. The third portrays Hank as an all-out revolutionary, justified in using any means to rid Camelot of slavery and oppression. Each of these interpretations represents, I believe, one aspect of Twain's outlook on the world. Brought together in the minds of thoughtful readers, these three themes prompt deeper reflection on the moral status of benevolent imperialism.

Americans tend to debate the war in Iraq as if nothing in their history is relevant to the current crisis. Opponents of the war often invoke the memory of Vietnam in their critiques, usually with the word “quagmire” included strategically, while supporters predictably link Saddam Hussein to Adolph Hitler and Joseph Stalin. In neither case are the comparisons more sophisticated than what is necessary for an effective barb on a cable talk show. Indeed, it is rare to find anyone in the public debates discussing the Iraq war in the context of America's long history of foreign interventionism—both of the benevolent kind and the nakedly imperialist kind. Unfortunately, this ahistoricism causes Americans to squander the hard-won wisdom of past generations, which grappled with the same fundamental questions of morality, justice, and expediency that appear in the current controversy, albeit with a few different particulars.

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With regard to Iraq, two of the publicly stated rationales for war (Iraq having weapons of mass destruction and having links to Al Qaeda) no longer find widespread acceptance among Americans. That leaves a third publicly stated argument—that civilized democracies have a duty to spread the blessings of liberty to the oppressed—bearing much (perhaps most) of the load in justifying America's continuing involvement. Setting aside, for the moment, the *realpolitik* reasons for war, which focus on advancing the national interest, we are left with the question of whether the third argument is sufficient to justify America's involvement in Iraq. In other words, is it acceptable (or perhaps even imperative) that the United States work to spread democratic liberty, even when nation building requires warfare on behalf of the oppressed?

This is a difficult question, requiring the development of some sort of principle (either involvement in such circumstances is generally a duty, or it is not), in addition to calculating a whole host of variables regarding costs, benefits, and chances of success. Until now, the moral debate over Iraq involvement has proven rather shallow on this point. My purpose in this article is to recapture some important insights from an earlier era of American nation building overseas by discussing possible interpretations of Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889),¹ a novel that engages themes directly relevant to the current debate on Iraq.

Twain occupies a place in American culture similar to Abraham Lincoln, in that few have matched his combination of homespun humor, commitment to democratic

ideals, and bracing intellectual honesty. As with Lincoln and God, everyone wants Twain on their side, and it is common practice to pull his quotes completely out of context, merely to support a point. What is surprising is that few people have mined his writings on imperialism, including *Connecticut Yankee*—a most complex and insightful work on nation building—for wisdom applicable to today.

I contend that Twain's ambivalence regarding Hank Morgan's incursion into the world of Camelot is analogous to contemporary ambivalence about the United States' role in the world after the terrorist attacks of September 11. While Twain provides no neat resolution to the conundrum of American intervention in undemocratic countries, he nonetheless helps us understand the nature of our conflicting thoughts and emotions regarding that problem. In fact, it is his preservation of ambiguity on this point, made possible by his marvelous sense of humor, that makes his work so valuable to modern readers. With this in mind, I shall highlight three possible interpretations of *Connecticut Yankee*.² The first conceives of Hank as a well-intentioned democratic reformer, laying the proper foundation for a peaceful democratic transition after King Arthur dies. The second reads the book as ironically criticizing Hank for his overzealous promotion of democracy amidst a traditional culture. The third portrays Hank as an all-out revolutionary, justified in using any means to rid Camelot of slavery and oppression. Each of these interpretations represents, I believe, one aspect of Twain's outlook on the world. Brought together in the minds of thoughtful readers, these three themes prompt fuller reflection on the question of benevolent imperialism.

A note on terminology: the word *imperialism* often connotes the extension of political influence over other realms, for example as the Roman Republic became an empire by conquering the Mediterranean world. What Hank Morgan attempts in *Connecticut Yankee* is not imperial conquest of Camelot, strictly speaking. However, the term *nation building* does not entirely comprehend Hank's actions, either. To be sure, he is building a nation, but he is building it from outside. He is in no way a product of the community he tries to reform, and he extends his power over the Camelotians ostensibly for their own benefit. The word *revolution* is too general to describe Hank's reforms. Revolution (or nation building) *imposed from outside* might work, but would be exceedingly cumbersome. In lieu of a more elegant alternative, I have defined Hank's actions as *benevolent imperialism*: the use of one's power (military or otherwise) to transform a nation other than one's own, for the benefit of that other nation's citizenry. (Apologists for the current U.S.-led reconstruction of Iraq would be quick to point out that, like Hank in Camelot, America has the best of intentions in reforming the Middle East. On paper, at least, the Iraq struggle exhibits all the features of benevolent imperialism.)

Interpretation I: Hank as Benevolent Reformer

On the surface, *Connecticut Yankee* might be taken for an amusing children's story. It tells of the new triumphing over the old, of grand ideals becoming reality—the sort of tale Gilded Age Americans could relish, rapidly streaming, as they were, away from Old World stagnancy. What entrepreneurial capitalist, what progressive reformer, what evangelical missionary of the time could not find something to like in Hank Morgan?

The book also appeals to casual readers who, deep down, worry that modern democratic times lack the nobility and splendor of ages past. *Connecticut Yankee* is, then, a fantasy that destroys the object of another fantasy: the gleaming image of the Middle Ages hammered out by Scott, Malory, and innumerable imitators. It assuages the fears and insecurities of those who might otherwise seek fulfillment through escapism. It reassures them that their society is the best of all possible worlds, and if they were to return to medieval Camelot, they would find it a remarkably disappointing place. The work gives a healthy dose of confidence to an increasingly powerful—and increasingly criticized—America. In the wake of Matthew Arnold's 1888 comment that “many countries, much less free and prosperous than the United States, are yet more truly civilized; have more which is interesting, have more to say to the soul; are countries, therefore, in which one would rather live,” Twain's satire would have been refreshingly patriotic.³

The evidence for this first interpretation—in which Hank Morgan figures as a benevolent, democratic hero—is easy to find, especially at the beginning of the book. The narrator, we discover, is fascinated by things medieval, touring Warwick Castle by day and poring over *Le Morte D'Arthur* at night. In fact, it is as he dreams of Sir Lancelot's gallant exploits that Hank Morgan appears at his door, having met him at the castle earlier. After plying him with whisky, the narrator gets his curious acquaintance to tell his story—which he might reasonably have expected to be a tale of shining knights, distressed damsels, and the other glorious trappings of Camelot.

Instead, Hank relates how he, a practical factory boss from Hartford, was transported to sixth century England after a good clobbering on the head. Hank's description of his new surroundings bears some resemblance to romantic depictions of Camelot (there are plenty of ornate castles, ironclad knights, and well-dressed ladies), but it soon becomes clear that this kingdom is not the stuff of legend. Hank's first thought, in fact, is that his captor, Sir Kay, is an asylum escapee. As they enter Camelot, Hank notices the tremendous contrast between peasant and noble life. Outside the castle walls, pigs wallow in the streets and filthy children play in front of ramshackle huts; while inside, a great banquet hall hosts the Knights of the Round Table as they feast and make merry with drink and stories.

Yet even the privileged classes depart dramatically from the model of Malory and Tennyson. Hank notes that there are twice as many dogs as men in the hall, grease and wine are everywhere, and the noblewomen's coarse speech "would have made a Comanche blush" (20). The fabled knights are chronic liars, Merlin is a fraud, and the resident humorist, Sir Dinadin, tells and retells the sorriest lot of jokes. Although there is a "fine manliness" in many faces, Hank concludes that "there did not seem to be brains enough in the entire nursery, so to speak, to bait a fishhook with" (14).

Slavery exists throughout the realm, and even "free-men" act slavishly in the presence of superiors. Everyone is superstitious, and the foremost superstition, Hank soon discovers, involves the doctrine of the Church. The religious power trumps even the secular power of King Arthur, through the doctrine of divine right, and generations of Camelotians have been bred to respect hierarchy. Consequently, no one thinks for himself.

Hank, a devout democrat and fervent believer in moral and technological progress, decides to disclose the wonders of the nineteenth century to the sixth century. After freeing himself and defeating Merlin in a showdown, he sets out to "boss" the country into shape for a republican revolution, scheduled for the moment after Arthur's demise.

Hank's plan reads like a primer for democratizing nations; it seemingly includes everything necessary for transitioning from authoritarian to republican rule. His first official act as "Boss" is to set up a patent office. As Hank explains, "a country without a patent office and good patent laws was just a crab, and couldn't travel any way but sideways or backwards" (41). His other reforms include a newspaper, a cleanliness crusade, the telegraph, a modernized military, and freedom of religion. As a twist on the old notion of crafting citizens, Hank establishes "man factories," where carefully selected Camelotians are sent to study the three "R"s in secrecy.

Hank neutralizes the aristocrats by providing a stock market and the game of baseball (to absorb their competitive energies); and by sending them out to sell soap, toothbrushes, and plug hats (thereby making them ridiculous). The Church is a harder nut to crack, and its ever-present authority forces Hank to conduct many of his improvements in secrecy. However, he is confident that by the time Arthur passes away, Camelot will be ready for self-rule and modern capitalism. Little more will be left to do but declare the republic.

Early readers of the book—at least those inclined to give it a favorable review—tended to see Hank's reforms as not only deriving from laudable motives, but as being the necessary and proper course of action for someone in his circumstance. For example Sylvester Baxter, writing in the Boston *Sunday Herald*, argued that "there is a certain aspect of sober truth in this most fanciful tale," which makes it immediately relevant to the experiences of civilized nations in the modern world:

Just as the Connecticut Yankee went back into the days of King Arthur's court, so might he go out into the world today, into Central Asia or Africa, or even into certain spots in this United States of ours, find himself amidst social conditions very similar to those of 1300 years ago, and even work his astonishing 19th century miracles with like result. For it is a fact that, when Frank Hamilton Cushing astounded the Zuni Indians with an acoustic telephone constructed of two tomato cans and a string, they deemed him a magician, and tried him for witchcraft. And, for parallels of the inhumanities which, as we here read of them, seem to have been left far behind us in the track of the centuries, we have but to look with George Kennan into the dungeons of Siberia; and, in our own country, read the records of the investigations into the horrors of the almshouses, jails and lunatic hospitals here in this enlightened commonwealth of Massachusetts so late as the time of Horace Mann, or look to the record of the nameless barbarities of negro slavery alive in the memories of men still young.⁴

Even those reviewers, like William Dean Howells, who sensed the ambiguous nature of Hank's character, were quick to see that this book was an "object-lesson in democracy." Although certain aspects of Twain's Camelot, such as Arthur's native courage, inspire respect, Howells argued, *Connecticut Yankee* "makes us glad of our republic and our epoch." Specifically, Twain sets a man with no pedigree or social standing against all the supposed advantages of aristocratic society—and emerges victorious. In addition, Hank's tireless efforts on behalf of social justice serve as an inspiration to modern readers:

There are incidents in this wonder-book which wring the heart for what has been of cruelty and wrong in the past, and leave it burning with shame and hate for the conditions which are of like effect in the present. It is one of its magical properties that the fantastic fable of Arthur's far-off time is also too often the sad truth of ours; and the magician who makes us feel in it that we have just begun to know his power, teaches equality and fraternity in every phase of his phantasmagory.⁵

Twain's early critics basically agreed with his early supporters that *Connecticut Yankee* was primarily a critique of monarchy and aristocracy. A reviewer in the *Scots Observer*, for example, wrote that Twain "treats you to a 'lecture' in dispraise of monarchical institutions and religious establishments as the roots of all evil, and in praise of Yankee 'cuteness and Wall Street chicanery as compared to the simple fidelity and devotion of the knightly ideal."⁶ In the *Review of Reviews*, William T. Stead opined that Hank

is a fierce and furious propagandist of anti-monarchical and aristocratic ideas. Under the veil of sarcasms levelled at King Arthur we see a genial mockery of the British monarchy of to-day, with its Royal grants and all its semi-feudal paraphernalia. Nor is it only at British abuses Mark Twain levels his burly jests. He thwacks the protectionist American as readily as the aristocratic Briton.⁷

If there was any doubt that Twain was tweaking royalty, Dan Beard's illustrations, which featured caricatures of Queen Victoria (as a sow) and the Prince of Wales and Kaiser Wilhelm II (as "chuckleheads"), removed it.

Although the reviewers disagreed about the effectiveness and literary quality of Twain's work, they seemed united in their assessment of his purpose. All saw Hank as the intended protagonist, the representative of American democracy and progress in a fight with Old World privilege. To the extent that they saw any critique of America in the book, it was of those elements of American society that bore resemblance to the injustices of old (slavery in the Old South, working conditions under robber barons like Jay Gould, etc.).⁸

In fact, Twain's activities at the time seem to support the notion that Hank is the unqualified hero of the work. Twain had invested heavily in a number of new inventions, including the Paige Typesetting Machine, convinced that the machine age would redound to the benefit of mankind (and reap him a handsome profit in the process). He was also watchful of world affairs, and considered Hank's efforts in Camelot analogous to those of freedom fighters around the world. As his book was about to appear, he remarked to a reporter that

I began to think several months ago that it was about ripe, and that the times were about ripe for it. And sure enough it was, for there is Brazil gets rid of her Emperor in twenty-four hours, and there is talk of a republic in Portugal and in Australia. And curiously enough, the proclamation of the Brazilian republicans is very similar—I mean in the idea, not the words—to that which my hero issues abolishing the monarchy.⁹

Twain's concern for democratization appears most strikingly in chapter thirty of *Connecticut Yankee*, where Hank stridently asserts that

a man *is* a man, at bottom. Whole ages of abuse and oppression cannot crush the manhood clear out of him. Whoever thinks it a mistake is himself mistaken. Yes, there is plenty good enough material for a republic in the most degraded people that ever existed—even the Russians; plenty of manhood in them—even in the Germans—if one could but force it out of its timid and suspicious privacy, to overthrow and trample in the mud any throne that ever was set up and any nobility that ever supported it (182).

It is difficult to read this passage as containing irony—on either Hank's or Twain's part.

In sum, on this first interpretation, *Connecticut Yankee* is a humorous diatribe against the shams of political and social hierarchy. Hank Morgan systematically undermines the authority of the nobles and begins the difficult process of preparing the lower classes for rule—just as any upright nineteenth-century American would feel duty-bound to do. Advantages confer responsibilities toward the ignorant and oppressed, and Hank (though lacking in lineage and aristocratic title) does his level best to bring about change. Although he ultimately fails to reform Camelot, his failure results more from the literary necessity of bringing Hank back to an unchanged nineteenth century, rather than from a judgment about the worthiness of Hank's endeavor.

Hank's motives here closely resemble those of modern nation builders: work diligently on behalf of oppressed peoples to give them the freedoms they deserve as human beings. Selfless benevolence should be the guiding principle of civilized democracies as they interact with their less civilized neighbors, and everything possible should be done to bring about peaceful reform through education and improved living standards. Eventually, the inherent attraction of democratic liberty will pull people out of their timid submissiveness and into the republican manliness necessary for self-rule. In the case of Iraq, the results have been mixed, with less fervent shows of gratitude among liberated Iraqis than American leaders expected. Defenders of the war, however, would chalk this up to the insecurity that has resulted from the insurgency. In time, they argue, the Iraqi people will stand up and rise to their full height.

Interpretation II: A Lesson in Anti-Imperialism

While the first interpretation has much textual evidence, later critics have generally emphasized the anti-imperialist overtones in *Connecticut Yankee*. This trend has been based partly on textual evidence, and partly on Twain's subsequent opposition to imperialist efforts in Africa, Asia, and the Philippines. On this second interpretation, Hank's good intentions blind him to the intrinsic value and nobility of the society he so crudely tries to reshape. Far from being a book about the virtues of American democracy and capitalism, *Connecticut Yankee* is a veiled attack on Americans for their uncritical faith in their own system, and their exuberance in spreading their values overseas.

Twain was widely known for his castigation of American rule over the Philippines following the war with Spain and of the race to divide Africa and Asia among the European powers. Joining the Anti-Imperialist League in 1900, he soon issued "A Salutation Speech from the Nineteenth Century to the Twentieth":

I bring you the stately matron called CHRISTENDOM—returning bedraggled, besmirched and dishonored from pirate raids in Kiochow, Manchuria, South Africa and the Philippines; with her soul full of meanness, her pocket full of boodle and her mouth full of pious hypocrisies. Give her soap and a towel, but hide the looking-glass.¹⁰

Twain argued that America's actions with regard to the Philippines made her part of the "Society of Sceptred Thieves." The "stupendous joke of the century" came when the United States paid twenty million dollars to Spain for islands it had just conquered, and to which Spain had no right in the first place—all for the sake of being recognized by Europe as a *bona fide* imperial power.¹¹ What made things worse was the method in which American troops attempted to "pacify" the islands, in the face of Emilio Aguinaldo's insurrection. Twain continually

hammered General Frederick Funston, outraged at his treacherous method for capturing Aguinaldo, and at significant evidence that American soldiers were executing wounded prisoners.¹² Twain aimed plenty of shots at European imperialists, as well. “The Czar’s Soliloquy” takes Nicolas II to task for his oppression of the Russian peasantry,¹³ and Leopold II receives especial scorn in “King Leopold’s Soliloquy” for his depredations in the Congo. Even Christian missionaries found themselves targeted by Twain for supposedly extorting punitive damages from the Chinese people.¹⁴ Wherever Twain scented imperial designs, he quickly exposed them.

It is no surprise, then, that Twain has been invoked in recent months to decry American involvement in Afghanistan and particularly Iraq. Mark Engler and Norman Solomon, for example, have both drawn close analogies between Iraq and Twain’s Philippines. Engler notes that

President Theodore Roosevelt declared an official end to war in the Philippines on July 4, 1902, but we maintained a controlling military presence for decades, facing frequent skirmishes. As Twain had warned, “We have got into a mess, a quagmire from which each fresh step renders the difficulty of extrication immensely greater.”¹⁵

He argues that “if Mark Twain were alive today, he would not be surprised to see that George W. Bush professes his admiration for ‘Theodore Rex,’ nor that the president recently pointed to the Philippines as a model for Iraqi ‘liberation.’” Solomon sees the same similarities, noting that while “what Mark Twain had to say is all too relevant to what’s happening these days . . . policymakers in Washington can rest easy. Twain’s most inflammatory writings are smoldering in his grave—while few opportunities exist for the general public to hear similar views expounded today.”¹⁶

To my knowledge, no one has explicitly linked *Connecticut Yankee* to the current war in Iraq, but the work is certainly relevant to a discussion of Twain’s thoughts regarding benevolent intervention or imperialism—call it what one will. In fact, *Connecticut Yankee* seems to provide powerful ammunition to opponents of American involvement in Iraq.

Wilson Carey McWilliams once noted that Twain was as difficult to quote as Plato, given the ambiguous relationship both writers have with their main characters.¹⁷ Is the narrator of *Connecticut Yankee* (“M.T.”) speaking with Twain’s voice? Is Hank? Early critics believed Hank was genuinely expressing Twain’s views, but that reading has become passé. Once one entertains the possibility that *Connecticut Yankee* is not merely an encomium upon American ideals, it becomes easy to spot passages that lend themselves to an anti-imperialist reading of the book. For starters, the overarching problem with the first interpretation is that Hank *fails*. Not only does he fail, but he slaughters nearly the entire aristocratic class in the pro-

cess, using Gatling Guns and electric fences. The Battle of the Sandbelt, in which Hank and a few dozen boys exterminate the massed chivalry of England, might be more than a thrilling end to a book about the foibles of aristocratic regimes. Rather, it could be Twain’s way of showing the consequences of an excessive faith in reason and technology, and of callousness toward the virtues of traditional society. By the time Hank is cast back into the nineteenth century, he has accomplished nothing durably positive, and he has left the ruling class of Camelot decimated.

The title of the work is, of course, significant. It is not *An American in King Arthur’s Court*, nor even *A Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*. Hank Morgan is, by his own admission, a “Yankee of the Yankees”—meaning that to the extent New England represents the moral and technological core of America, Hank possesses his country’s values in their most intense or extreme form. As such, Twain seems to be setting up the book as a comparison of two ages in their fully developed phases, rather than a one-sided satire. A careful reader, then, should be attentive to secondary lines of critique, perhaps subtly buried to prevent casual American readers from becoming offended.

James M. Cox, writing in 1960, described Hank Morgan as follows:

Constantly advertising his ideas, his mechanical aptitude, and his stagey jokes, Morgan becomes a grotesque caricature of the enlightenment he advocates. He prances and struts through every conceivable burlesque, flaunting himself before the stunned Arthurian world into which he bursts until he becomes the real buffoon of his own performance.¹⁸

Modern critics have not always considered Hank a buffoon, but few—if any—assert that Twain intended Hank as an unqualified hero. In his classic biography, Justin Kaplan argues that Hank’s character grew out of Twain’s increasing frustration with the machine age, catalyzed by his heavy investment in the dysfunctional Paige typesetting machine:

The very names the Yankee gives to his institutions—“civilization factories,” and, a dehumanizing pun, “man factories”—suggest not the fervent brotherhood of Whitman’s utopian democracy but instead a bleak, industrial collectivism, the nightmare society of a monolithic state ruled by the Boss.¹⁹

The book, which on the surface is a satire of the Old World, is perhaps more deeply a satire on the New World.

The text does bear out this second interpretation.²⁰ Hank admits that although he is an eminently practical man, he is “nearly barren of sentiment . . . or poetry, in other words” (4). His attitude towards the people of Camelot—especially the nobles—is one of pure condescension. As soon as he arrives at the palace, Hank sets out his plan for mastering the nation:

I made up my mind to two things: if it was still the nineteenth century and I was among lunatics and couldn’t get away, I would

presently boss that asylum or know the reason why; and if on the other hand it was really the sixth century, all right, I didn't want any softer thing: I would boss the whole country inside of three months (11).

Hank revels in being called "The Boss," a term that, while not conferring nobility, nevertheless implies great superiority over others (and thus satisfies the human desire to excel others, which under democracy is constantly simmering):²¹

I was . . . a giant among pygmies, a man among children, a master intelligence among intellectual moles: by all rational measurement the one and only actually great man in that whole British world . . . (40).

Even when disguised as a peasant, Hank cannot resist one-upping others. Irked by the self-satisfaction of a blacksmith named Dowley, Hank spends a ridiculous amount of money on a feast to humiliate him. Hank is seemingly incapable of deference—except where it might suit his interests (e.g., being loyal to Arthur).

Although Hank generally sympathizes with the plight of the suffering, he is sometimes erratic in applying his nineteenth-century values. For example, he is horrified when the tyrannical Morgan Le Fay stabs a page and imprisons her subjects for no good reason, but Hank himself condones the execution of her house band for playing poor music. He justifies himself on the grounds of political expediency: "A little concession, now and then, where it can do no harm, is the wiser policy" (85).

Hank's apparent callousness permeates his scheme to undermine the Church and the nobility. He makes the knights into pathetic creatures as they hawk toiletries with placards hanging from their armor. He mows down his challengers in the tournament lists with revolvers and a lasso, in place of lance and sword. He blows up Merlin's tower to prove his superiority as a wizard, and harnesses the most pious man in the realm, an ascetic bowing continuously on the top of a tall pillar, to a sewing machine—"It seemed a pity to have all this power going to waste. It was one of the most useful motions in mechanics, the pedal movement" (124).

Hank's confidence in himself and his values makes him blind to certain virtues of traditional society. For example, the knights of Camelot are heroic to a fault. Hank realizes this when touring the country in disguise with Arthur. The two men enter a peasant hut, and instantly discover its inhabitants are dying of smallpox. Hank's first impulse is to flee, and he tries to drag Arthur out with him. However, Arthur does not coldly calculate his self-interest, and stays to help. For a brief moment Hank sees Arthur as something more than a sham or imposter:

Here was heroism at its last and loftiest possibility, its utmost summit; this was challenging death in the open field unarmed, with all the odds against the challenger, no reward set upon the contest, and no admiring world in silks and cloth of gold to gaze

and applaud; and yet the king's bearing was as serenely brave as it had always been in those cheaper contests where knight meets knight in equal fight and clothed in protecting steel. He was great, now; sublimely great (172).

Struck by this passage, Howells notes that

The mainly ridiculous Arthur of Mr. Clemens has his moments of being as fine and high as the Arthur of Lord Tennyson; and the keener light which shows his knights and ladies in their childlike simplicity and their innocent coarseness throws all their best qualities into relief.²²

Hank comes off as almost cowardly, absent manliness when facing a danger that his modern tools cannot combat.²³ It becomes increasingly clear, as the book progresses, that Hank is far from an ideal man—despite his rousing calls for dragging Camelot into republican manliness.

An additional problem with Hank is that he seems not to comprehend all that is necessary to make a people capable of self-rule. Certainly, his overall plan appears sound, but his list of particular reforms is somehow incomplete. In his quest for straighter roads, better communications, greater cleanliness, modern education, and political equality, Hank provides all the trappings of a "civilized" nation, without truly understanding how the depths of Camelot's soul must change.²⁴ He is shocked to find that, despite his educational and religious reforms, all of his supporters—except for a few dozen boys—desert him when the Church declares an Interdict. He never really grasps how the Church—along with all the other customs of deference—functions in the lives of ordinary Camelotians. Hank's faith in the nineteenth century makes him believe that if he could only open people's minds to greater possibilities, they would flock to his side and never waver. Unfortunately for him, however, his disciples have followed him merely because of his power. He is a great wizard, the vanquisher of Merlin, but nothing more. The people's attachment to him is far weaker than their bond to the Church. This is not to say that the Church exercises its influence simply by spreading hope and good cheer, since fear of punishment (including excommunication) is certainly on the minds of those who desert Hank. However, Hank, a man "barren of sentiment" and hardly religious, is stunned by the power of the Church's pull. In his frustration he blows up all of his technological marvels, and sets out to exterminate that which he cannot restrain.

More could be said about the dark side of Hank Morgan, but it suffices to say that Hank, while having generally good intentions, is blinded by his confidence in his own values. He sees Camelot as lacking all civilization, an assessment that brings out the tyrant in himself (for in his mind, such an extreme case of barbarity justifies the use of absolute power). In addition, once his reforms are underway, Hank is sure his plan will work—demonstrating again a dangerous hubris.

Adherents to this second interpretation would likely see a close parallel between sixth-century Britain and contemporary Iraq. The confidence of the American administration at the beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom—as expressed in the small size of the invasion army, the expectation that toppling Saddam Hussein’s regime would lead to mass jubilation in the streets, and the notion that rebuilding Iraq’s infrastructure and providing democratic institutions would be sufficient to ensure lasting positive change—is quite similar to Hank’s confidence throughout his time in Camelot. The initial air strike, a “decapitation” attempt in which Saddam and his chief advisors were targeted, betrays the same simplistic view of reform that Hank advances in *Connecticut Yankee* (knock off the leaders and the people will throw off their chains). And what could be worthier of one of Hank’s grand “effects” than the much-heralded “shock and awe” campaign? The motives behind bombing Baghdad and blowing up Merlin’s tower are remarkably similar: inspire loyalty among a submissive people by a spectacular display of force.

Anti-imperialist critics would note that the deadly insurgency in Iraq makes President Bush’s infamous “Mission Accomplished” proclamation seem as empty as Hank’s declaration of a republic in Camelot. Even in “friendly” areas of occupied Iraq, the power of religious clerics presents considerable obstacles to the establishment of a tolerant, secular state. Furthermore, America’s willingness to go it alone in its mission to spread liberty and democracy has earned it an international reputation not unlike Hank’s: namely, a powerful force that “bosses” until it gets its way. According to this comparison, America’s leaders, particularly neoconservatives, might be seen as devoid of cultural sensitivity; their confidence in the appeal of liberal democracy makes them fall into the old trap of believing the American Way to be the only way, rather than one of many legitimate (and often non-secular) conceptions of civilization. Like Hank at the end of *Connecticut Yankee*, America is stuck fighting a bloody war, aided by only a handful of allies, against the very people it thought it was helping.

According to the second interpretation, America, like Hank Morgan, has waded into a war understanding the religion and culture of neither its enemies nor those it professes to help. The result is a modern Battle of the Sand Belt, pitting a technological superpower against an opponent that no amount of firepower seems to shake. And this, of course, is only if we presume that America entered the war to bring democratic liberty to an oppressed people. That is the best case scenario, since it relies on mostly good intentions. However, as Twain seems to warn, the best of intentions can actually lead to wanton destruction, magnified by technology. *Connecticut Yankee* is, then, a monition to democratic nations engaged in reforming “less civilized” countries: such efforts can easily turn into episodes of tyrannical bossing, under cover of democratic rhetoric.²⁵

Interpretation III: Hank as Justified Revolutionary

Like the early critics’ interpretation, the anti-imperialist reading of *Connecticut Yankee* explains a great deal. Nearly everything in the text can be seen as fitting a subtle anti-imperialist position, or at least some synthesis of interpretations one and two. However, the book still refuses to sit quietly; there is energy in it that the first two interpretations fail to capture fully.

The main danger with reading *Connecticut Yankee* as an anti-imperialist tract is that one’s interpretation of the book (published in 1889) becomes colored by Twain’s later writings against imperialism. In fact, there is significant evidence that, earlier in his career, Twain heartily approved of what we now call nation building. In an 1898 letter to Joseph Twichell, for example, Twain praises American action in Cuba:

I have never enjoyed a war—even in written history—as I am enjoying this one. For this is the worthiest one that was ever fought, so far as my knowledge goes. It is a worthy thing to fight for one’s freedom; it is another sight finer to fight for another man’s. And I think this is the first time it has been done.²⁶

Of course, it was this same war that ultimately pushed Twain to declare his anti-imperialism. However, given his enthusiasm at the outset, it becomes no easy matter to draw analogies between *Connecticut Yankee* and Twain’s post-1900 diatribes.

In fact, a closer look at Twain’s work regarding the occupation of the Philippines reveals significant complexity of thought. In his critique of General Funston, for example, Twain focuses not on the treachery used to capture Aguinaldo (such means, he notes, history has long approved), but on how Funston’s men, disguised as insurgents and starving to death in the wilderness, begged Aguinaldo for food, and then, having received aid, proceeded to attack his camp. It was this outrage—worse, to Twain, than violating a flag of truce—that animated his hatred of Funston.²⁷

Similarly, in his famous essay “To the Person Sitting in Darkness,” Twain distinguishes carefully between types of involvement in other nations’ affairs. One possibility is ordinary conquest for imperial gain. Although usually a matter of great distress for the conquered, ordinary imperialism pales in comparison with imperial activity cloaked under the rhetoric of benevolence—such as when an outside party claims to be helping a nation rise to its feet, while in reality is exploiting that nation for its own gain. There is then an important third form of meddling activity—which may look like imperialism for its use of military force and pressure—but is truly benevolent. Twain describes this possibility in the context of operations in the Philippines:

In Cuba, [McKinley] was playing the usual and regular American game, and it was winning, for there is no way to beat it. The Master, contemplating Cuba, said: “Here is an oppressed and

friendless little nation which is willing to fight to be free; we go partners, and put up the strength of seventy million sympathizers and the resources of the United States: play!" Nothing but Europe combined could call that hand; and Europe cannot combine on anything. There, in Cuba, he was following our great traditions in a way which made us very proud of him, and proud of the deep dissatisfaction which his play was provoking in Continental Europe. Moved by a high inspiration, he threw out those stirring words which proclaimed that forcible annexation would be "criminal aggression;" and in that utterance fired another "shot heard round the world." The memory of that fine saying will be outlived by the remembrance of no act of his but one—that he forgot it within the twelvemonth, and its honorable gospel along with it.²⁸

Assuming that one's actions are truly done on behalf of the oppressed nation, all means are at one's disposal. Twain grew increasingly skeptical that benevolent motives would be dominant in any given engagement (McKinley forgot his principles within a year, according to Twain), but the possibility remains theoretically open.²⁹

Given Twain's willingness to condone imperialist actions, if done primarily for the long-term benefit of the oppressed, and given his enthusiastic initial response to the Spanish-American War, it seems reasonable to read *Connecticut Yankee* as an example of revolutionary action on behalf of an oppressed people.

While Twain was composing *Connecticut Yankee*, he avidly read news reports on Czar Alexander III's Russia, and became increasingly angered by reports of cruelty and oppression at the hands of the country's ruling class. Less than a year after his book was published, Twain expressed his views on the Russian situation in a fiery (but unpublished) editorial:

I now perceive why all men are the deadly and uncompromising enemies of the rattlesnake: it is merely because the rattlesnake has not speech. Monarchy has speech, and by it has been able to persuade men that it differs somehow from the rattlesnake, has something valuable about it somewhere, something worth preserving, something even good and high and fine, when properly "modified," something entitling it to protection from the club of the first comer who catches it out of its hole.

As if this critique of monarchy in general is not harsh enough, Twain proceeds to pick apart Alexander, the "granite-hearted, bloody-jawed maniac of Russia." He scorns the attempts of Russian liberals to restrain the Czar: "Apparently none of them can bear to think of losing the present hell entirely, they merely want the temperature cooled down a little." Russia is like a house on fire in the midst of a vast city, and one

reason[s] confidently that it is the first comer's plain duty to put the fire out in any way he can—drown it with water, blow it up with dynamite, use any and all means to stop the spread of the fire and save the rest of the city.

Revolution is one way to rid Russia of its scourge. However, since "it is not possible to get up a revolution there . . . the only thing left to do, apparently, is to keep the

throne vacant by dynamite until a day when candidates shall decline with thanks. Then organize the Republic." For those who dislike the use of force, Twain points out that

My privilege to write these sanguinary sentences in soft security was bought for me by rivers of blood poured upon many fields, in many lands, but I possess not one single little paltry right or privilege that come to me as a result of petition, persuasion, agitation for reform, or any kindred method of procedure. When we consider that not even the most responsible English monarch ever yielded back a stolen public right until it was wrenched from them by bloody violence, is it rational to suppose that gentler methods can win privileges in Russia?

Whether this assertion of Twain's is *true* is questionable, but it is undeniable that he believed progress to be dependent at times on violence—and sometimes on a great deal of it, as the Russian case demonstrated.³⁰

Reading *Connecticut Yankee* in conjunction with this fierce, nearly cotemporaneous letter causes one to reevaluate the two earlier interpretations, especially the anti-imperialist one. Hank is like the first comer to the Russian house fire; he may not own the house, or even live nearby, but his duty is clear nonetheless: extinguish the flames by whatever means necessary. What appear to be excesses in Hank's behavior, or a lack of cultural sensitivity, are actually the hallmarks of an effective republican revolutionary. In other words, the aspects of Hank's character that offend the delicate modern palate are actually fully justifiable traits. Blowing up Merlin's tower and exterminating the knightly class are essential to the success in Camelot of republican government—the only adequate regime. This interpretation of Hank as a justified revolutionary, while partially rebutting the anti-imperialist interpretation, extends and radicalizes the first interpretation—that of Hank Morgan as benevolent, peace-loving reformer.³¹

Hank's revolutionary side appears first in chapter 13, in which he encounters a band of "freemen." He observes that these farmers and artisans, though the substance of the British nation, were free only "by a sarcasm of law and phrase" (62). The Church had bred into them the idea that the worst parts of society, "in the shape of a king, nobility and gentry, idle, unproductive, acquainted mainly with the arts of wasting and destroying," deserve the majority's complete deference. What had resulted was institutionalized pillaging and rape by barons and priests, cloaked in religious dogma and humbly acceded to by the peasantry.

This is the first of a series of horrors Hank witnesses as he tours the kingdom. Later, he watches a slave driver flog a young mother nearly to death, while a band of holy pilgrims "looked on and commented—on the expert way in which the whip was handled" (114). Despite endless harsh treatment at the hands of their superiors, the vast majority of the populace would enthusiastically rise to their masters' defense. In one tragic episode, three

commoners escape from a dungeon, kill their baron, and torch his manor house. Rather than seizing their newfound liberty, the baron's subjects hunt down the offenders, sacrifice their lives in the burning house in searching for their lord, and keep watch over his dungeons until all his prisoners (their own friends and neighbors) have satisfactorily burned to death. Hank's immediate thought is of the antebellum South,

when the "poor whites" . . . who were always despised and frequently insulted, by the slave-lords around them, and who owed their base condition simply to the presence of slavery in their midst, were yet pusillanimously ready to side with slave-lords in all political moves for the upholding and perpetuating of slavery, and did also finally shoulder their muskets and pour out their lives in an effort to prevent the destruction of that very institution which degraded them (181).

Morgan Le Fay's dungeon reveals other horrors of feudalism. Many of the inmates received their life sentences for petty offenses, like calling Le Fay's hair *red* instead of *auburn*; or for acting courageously, like the man who resisted his lord's advances on his new bride. The cruelty of this regime, Hank finds, extends far beyond physical imprisonment: through various ingenious tricks, Le Fay and her fellow nobles sap the vital force from their prisoners, causing Hank to remark that "chains cease to be needed after the spirit has gone out of a prisoner" (94).

Horrified by what he sees, Hank invokes the spirit of the French Revolution, which he defends against the most common charge brought against it:

There were two "Reigns of Terror," if we would but remember it and consider it; the one wrought murder in hot passion, the other in heartless cold blood; the one lasted mere months, the other had lasted a thousand years; the one inflicted death upon ten thousand persons, the other upon a hundred millions; but our shudders are all for the "horrors" of the minor Terror, the momentary Terror, so to speak; whereas, what is the horror of swift death by the axe, compared with lifelong death from hunger, cold, insult, cruelty, and heart-break? What is swift death by lightning compared with death by slow fire at the stake? A city cemetery could contain the coffins filled by that brief Terror which we have all been so diligently taught to shiver at and mourn over; but all France could hardly contain the coffins filled by that older and real Terror—that unspeakably bitter and awful Terror which none of us has been taught to see in its vastness or pity as it deserves (63–64).

Foreshadowing Twain's bold letter on Russia, Hank asserts that "no people in the world ever did achieve their freedom by goody-goody talk and moral suasion: it being immutable law that all revolutions that will succeed, must *begin* in blood, whatever may answer afterward." What the people of Camelot really need, Hank notes, was "a Reign of Terror and a guillotine" (103). How wonderful it would be, he muses, if the mass of the peasantry would suddenly rise up and throw off its shackles, just as the band of slaves does in chapter 37.

At one point Hank claims to be the "wrong man" to bring a French-style revolution to Camelot (103), but this is not entirely true. Earlier Hank had said "the thing that would have best suited the circus side of my nature would have been to resign the Boss-ship and get up an insurrection and turn it into a revolution." He decided against such a scheme not out of principle, but out of prudence: "I knew that the Jack Cade or the Wat Tyler who tries such a thing without first educating his materials up to revolution grade is almost absolutely certain to get left" (65). Thus the primary focus would be education, with hopes for a bloodless change of power at some distant point. Yet such a hope did not change Hank's ultimate willingness to become a sixth-century Jack Cade. In fact, the more Hank learns about the English aristocracy, the more he becomes convinced that that class cannot be educated out of its barbarity. "Arguments have no chance against petrified training," he remarks of Morgan Le Fay (86). As long as the nobility reign, the people will scurry back to them during times of crisis, regardless of how much "retraining" they have undergone (255). To ameliorate the situation, the nobles must be neutralized; but as Hank notes, "English knights can be killed, but they cannot be conquered" (265). The only way to save Britain from its oppressive ruling class is to wage outright war against that body, the source of its fatal superstitions. Hank frames his battle with Sir Sagramor as a death struggle between "hard unsentimental common sense and reason" and "frivolous black arts." He enters the tournament "to either destroy knight-errantry or be its victim" (234). The Battle of the Sand Belt is simply a magnified version of this earlier duel. Both were massacres of a sort, yet both were, in Hank's mind, the necessary actions for saving the people of Camelot. The Church and nobility were the twin cancers that needed excising before the body politic could flourish, and Hank was the only person with the technical expertise to perform the surgery. Only with the oppressors removed could this "nation of worms" become a nation of men (39).

Many have commented on the tremendous number of casualties Hank inflicts during the final battle, and his self-satisfaction in carrying out such a gigantic slaughter (30,000 knights dead). What, if anything, separates Hank from Robespierre and his guillotine, or even Hitler and his gas chambers?³² Such comparisons are not groundless. In fact, Hank's cadets become squeamish at the notion that they will be waging war against all of England. Even to these fully assembled products of man factories, Hank's scheme borders on murderous insanity. Hank quickly assuages their fears, however, by noting that their quarrel is not with all of England, but with the vanguard of the approaching host. Once the knights are eliminated, Hank argues, "the civilian multitude in the rear will retire, to meet business engagements elsewhere" (262). On the anti-imperialist interpretation, this is just another example of

Hank's hubris, but Hank does seem to have been correct. While after the climactic battle there is still talk of the enemy regrouping, no mass attack follows the destruction of the knights.

It is curious how Twain describes Hank's wounding at the end of the book. In his later critique of General Funston, Twain had focused on how Funston had appealed for aid from his enemy just before striking him down, and what a grievous wrong that had been. Something quite similar happens to Hank. After the smoke clears from the battlefield, Hank convinces Clarence to go out and see if they can help the enemy's wounded. One knight appeals for help, and Hank leans over to assist him. The knight seizes the opportunity and promptly stabs him. Had the knight merely been playing dead, this incident would be far less noteworthy, from a moral point of view. After all, history has always been witness to treachery. However, this special form of treachery says much about the person (and culture) who commits it, and underscores the notion that Hank is justifiably crusading against English chivalry.

Twain, if this interpretation is correct, is hardly one to shy away from warfare, if the benefits to humanity are great enough. In an 1887 letter to Howells discussing the French Revolution, Twain flatly declares "I am a Sansculotte!—And not a pale, characterless Sansculotte, but a Marat."³³ In a later note to Howells regarding *Connecticut Yankee*, he writes:

I am glad you approve of what I say about the French Revolution. Few people will. It is odd that even to this day Americans still observe that immortal benefaction through English and other monarchical eyes, and have no shred of an opinion about it that they didn't get at second-hand.

Twain would be disappointed to find that popular opinion regarding the French Revolution has not changed much in the intervening time. It would be still be just as surprising to see the following statement in print now, as it would have been in 1889:

Next to the 4th of July and its results, [the French Revolution] was the noblest and the holiest thing and the most precious that ever happened in this earth. And its gracious work is not done yet—not anywhere in the remote neighborhood of it.³⁴

This is bracing stuff, assuming Twain is being genuine (and there seems to be no reason to read him otherwise). It is entirely possible that, given the above evidence, Twain might consider the current U.S. involvement in the Middle East as a half-hearted effort that is unlikely to change anything fundamentally. To satisfy this Yankee Sansculotte, a more radically revolutionary fervor would have to animate American foreign policy, so that the world could finally be free of aristocracy, theocracy, and plutocracy. Only then could the simple ideal of democratic liberty truly flourish.

Conclusion

Throughout this essay, I have concerned myself with the meaning of *Connecticut Yankee*: that is, with Twain's intended message (or messages). As we have seen, it is no small matter to determine his purpose exactly and comprehensively. It is likely that Twain, a master of irony, intended the work to be read on multiple levels. It is also likely that he neither understood all the possible ways of reading his text; nor the number and extent of severe tensions within the book. He was himself a conflicted man, vacillating at times between almost Panglossian optimism regarding people's capacity for self-rule on the one hand, and the darkest sort of despair about human nature on the other hand; his ambivalence creeps into *Connecticut Yankee*, whether he fully intended it to or not.

Regardless of Twain's conscious or unconscious intentions, there is the broader question of the book's significance which, unlike authorial intention, changes with the passage of time. In other words, of what use is this work to thoughtful people of the twenty-first century, as they grapple with the challenging theoretical issues surrounding benevolent imperialism?

One way of approaching the book—the most unfortunate one—is as a strict partisan, hunting through the text for passages that support one's own uncritical position regarding Iraq. As we have seen, *Connecticut Yankee* admits of multiple interpretations, and selective quoting can buttress just about any position on nation building—whether an argument in favor of peaceful aid, in favor of (violent) revolutionary assistance, or against all such involvement.

The central significance of *Connecticut Yankee* for our times, I would argue, is as an aid for reflection regarding the partiality of such narrow views. What Twain accomplishes, thanks in great part to his humor, is an honest exposure of the partial truths and considerable falsehoods contained in each common opinion regarding benevolent intervention. America's greatest humorist is also its greatest Aristotelian, sorting out claims to rule and effectively—if sometimes savagely—putting everyone in his or her proper place. For someone whose most notable fictional characters are chronic liars (think Tom Sawyer, Huckleberry Finn, and Hank Morgan), Twain is a remarkably honest writer. He is, in his own way, a philosopher. And, like the greatest of teachers, he preaches without *preaching*: by placing the incongruous in front of his readers' eyes, he allows them to recognize their foolishness for themselves.³⁵

Assuming that each of the three interpretations is plausible to a significant degree (just as the claims to rule among the various classes within the Aristotelian polity are partially justified), what specific lessons can we take away from *Connecticut Yankee*? To proponents of benevolent intervention, Twain's book warns of the impulse to Boss. This is, to some extent, a matter of human nature, for all people relish power. However, democracy exacerbates the problem by removing the formal hierarchies that

lock people into static social roles. The desire for distinction is now joined with the institution of political equality; the combination makes for endless, anxious competition among individuals in the social and economic realms. The snobbery of wealth and education, which replaces the snobbery of noble pedigree, can easily carry over into international relations, as technologically advanced nations scorn the traditional societies that lag behind. Just as Hank repeatedly compares the people of Camelot to children, citizens in developed democracies are prone to view those living under authoritarian regimes as either (1) ignorant or (2) lovers of democracy and technology whom fear of punishment holds in silent obedience. In either case, the conclusion is that they are incapable of improving their lot without the intervention of a more “civilized” people—a conclusion Americans appear to endorse, as they attempt to restructure much of Asia and the Middle East. It is too easy for the benevolent nation to conclude that because it is the helper, it is morally superior to the helped. Needless to say, kind intentions are rarely sufficient, in Twain’s mind, to establish moral superiority.

Furthermore, Hank’s experiment in reform reminds us of the complicated nature of democratization. Straighter roads, cleaner water, better technology, and newspapers may all contribute to democratic progress, but unless the new regime can speak to the soul in the same way the old regime did, the revolution is doomed to fail. Hank knew the Church was powerful, but he could never fully understand the depth of attachment people had for it. Citizens living in rational political systems tend to discuss issues in terms of interests, but the language of self-interest makes little sense in Camelot. Both Arthur’s heroism in the small-pox hut and the flight of Hank’s fledgling democrats after the Interdict illustrate how other concerns (chivalric honor, fear of spiritual punishment, loyalty to one’s feudal lord) trump the sort of utilitarian calculation Hank is used to. It is an open question whether the ongoing infrastructure improvements in Iraq, which overlap significantly with Hank’s reforms in Camelot, will have a noticeably positive impact on the chances for democracy, absent a wellspring of democratic faith among the Iraqi people. The old regime is toppled, but will a democratic nation arise once the liberators have left?

On the other hand, Twain has little patience for those opponents of intervention who rely upon the notion of cultural relativism. He is confident that one can identify severe injustices when one sees them—as Hank does in Camelot—and he is committed to the idea that people have a moral duty to help the oppressed. There *are* better and worse regimes, and as long as one operates with the proper intentions, and with an adequate understanding of the people one is trying to help, then giving assistance can be a glorious thing. There was no doubt in Twain’s mind that Russia was badly in need of a revolution, and he was

not terribly skittish about it being prompted or guided from outside, so long as the revolution were true to the fundamental interests of the Russian people. Insofar as the war in Iraq is one of liberation, it must meet the same basic test. If America is in Iraq merely to provide for its own security, or to ensure a reliable energy source, then Twain would be highly suspicious. Only if the United States is truly committed to the democratic reform of Iraq, being willing to bear substantial casualties and economic strain in the process, could Twain possibly be satisfied. Only then might the Iraq war qualify as the next step in the “gracious work” of the French revolutionaries.³⁶

In this age of partisan rancour, when it is often difficult to tell whether the Bush Administration and its critics are talking about the same war, so different are their descriptions, it would behoove everyone to read *Connecticut Yankee* carefully. Because this is a fictional account of a place and time far removed from our own, the stakes are lowered, and an honest discussion of the fundamental issues is likelier to occur. While it is still possible that partisan readers will make partisan readings of the work, Twain has a uncanny knack for unsettling—and perhaps even humiliating—the confident ones among us. Surviving the process yields greater maturity of thought and a better-developed sense of humor—which, at the end of the day, may be the same thing.

“Well, my book is written—let it go.”³⁷

Notes

- 1 In-text page citations refer to Twain 1981. Readers interested in the history of *Connecticut Yankee* criticism should consult Twain 1982, which helpfully collates many of the original sources I cite.
- 2 Little has been written about *Connecticut Yankee*’s relevance to modern nation building. Consequently I will provide the fullest and best argument for each possible interpretation, making reference to scholarly work where possible, and elaborating the argument myself, where necessary.
- 3 Arnold 1972, 181.
- 4 Baxter 1889.
- 5 Howells 1890.
- 6 *Scots Observer* 1890.
- 7 Stead 1890.
- 8 For similar accounts of Hank Morgan, see Van Doren 1945, 152–53; Hoben 1946; McKeithan 1948; Lorch 1958; Williams 1964; and Budd 2001, ch. 6.
- 9 “Mark Twain and His Book: The Humorist on the Copyright Question,” 1889. Twain joked that he would have to charge Brazil with plagiarism, before Brazil could charge him with the same. See Twain 1917, 2: 520.

- 10 Twain 1900.
 11 Twain 1907.
 12 Twain 1902.
 13 Twain 1905.
 14 Twain 1901.
 15 Engler 2003.
 16 Solomon 2003.
 17 McWilliams 1973.
 18 Cox 1963.
 19 Kaplan 1966.
 20 Writers who focus on Hank's flaws and Twain's critique of America include Smith 1962, ch. 7; Allen 1966; Robinson 1986; Zuckert and Zuckert 1972; Hoffman 1988, ch. 4–5; McWilliams 1973, ch. 16; McWilliams 1995; Rowe 1995; Rowe 2000; and Zwick 2002.
 21 See, for example, Tocqueville 1969, vol. 2, sect. 2, ch. 13.
 22 Howells 1890.
 23 Indeed, as Catherine and Michael Zuckert (1972, 84) observe, Hank seems to lack the very virtue—courage—that he is trying to inspire among the people of Camelot.
 24 Recall that Twain had already dealt satirically with civilization in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, where Huck refers to the bourgeois predilections of Miss Watson and Aunt Sally as “sivilization.”
 25 For a discussion of America's changing involvement in the Philippines, and Britain's struggle with the Boers, see Mark Twain to Joseph Twichell, January 27, 1900 (Twain 1917, 2: 694–95).
 26 Mark Twain to Joseph Twichell, June 17, 1898 (Twain 1917, 2: 663).
 27 It should be noted that Twain did not condone the idea of treachery in war, just because violating trust is as old as warfare is. What sets Funston's actions apart is that this was the first time a commanding officer had been saved by the enemy, and then immediately turned on his helpers (Twain 1902).
 28 Twain 1926.
 29 Disappointed by the outcome in the Philippines, Twain remarked “I thought it would be a great thing to give a whole lot of freedom to the Filipinos, but I guess now that it's better to let them give it to themselves” ([Anonymous] 1900). Again, this is not, strictly speaking, a *principled* position against involvement overseas.
 30 “To the Editor of Free Russia” (Twain 1917, 2: 535–538).
 31 Critics who most closely approach this interpretation of Hank include Foner 1958; Griffith 1975; Carter 1978; and Warren 1986.
 32 See Zuckert and Zuckert 1972, 87 n. 83.
 33 Mark Twain to William Dean Howells, August 22, 1887 (Twain 1917, 2: 490).
 34 Mark Twain to William Dean Howells, September 22, 1889 (Twain 1917, 2: 514).
 35 Twain once remarked: “Humor must not professedly teach and it must not professedly preach, but it must do both if it would live forever. And by forever, I mean thirty years” (Quoted in White and White, eds., 1941, xxii). Like Jesus and Zarathustra, Twain realized that subtle persuasion (in the form of parables or satire) often works better than explicit dictation.
 36 It is far from obvious that this is the case. However, if true, then the House of Representatives' cafeteria could replace its “freedom fries” and “freedom toast” with french fries and french toast. This would not be a gesture of good will, but rather a snub, for the House would be signaling that America has out-Frenched the French in spreading democracy throughout the world.
 37 Mark Twain to William Dean Howells, September 22, 1889 (Twain 1917, 2: 492).

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