Shock and Awe

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CHAPTER TWO

A Connecticut Yankee as American Jeremiad

The Historical Context

Have a battle between a modern army, with gatling guns—(automatic) 600 shots a minute . . . torpedoes, balloons, 100-ton cannon, iron-clad fleet &c & Prince de Joinville's Middle Age Crusaders.

—Mark Twain's Notebooks 18 (1883–1891)

He took a contract from King Arthur to kill off, at one of the great tournaments, fifteen kings and many acres of hostile armored knights. When, lance in rest they charge by squadrons upon, he behind the protection of a barbed wire fence charged with electricity mowed them down with Gatling guns that he had made for the occasion.

—Mark Twain, Reading at Governors Island (1886)
The archive of commentary and criticism on Mark Twain’s *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* that has accumulated since its publication in 1889 is massive. Moreover, virtually every Americanist literary critic who has been identified with the founding of American literary studies as a discipline has written about it. Both these facts testify to the novel’s canonical status, despite its patent flaws, in the American literary tradition. By this, I want to emphasize, I not only mean that it symbolically reflects in some fundamental way the (dominant) American national identity but, more specifically, the Divine or History-ordained exceptionalism—the radical difference and superiority of its progressive democratic “New World” ethos from that of the tyrannical and decadent “Old World.” And yet, as I noted in the previous chapter, overt reference to the term “American exceptionalism” is remarkably minimal in the huge archive that has cumulatively endowed canonical status to Twain’s novel. It is entirely absent not only in the early criticism that wholeheartedly celebrates Hank Morgan’s effort to “proclaim” a nineteenth-century American-style republic in sixth-century feudal England but also in the later criticism (following the professionalization of American literary studies and the ideological appropriation of the “American Renaissance” to the Cold War) that, troubled by Morgan’s resort to spectacular technological firepower to establish the new republic, either concluded that this turn was a contradiction manifesting Twain’s loss of control over his initial purpose or, in a more questionable gesture, disassociated Morgan from Twain to render him an unreliable narrator and his political errand the object of Twain’s satire. Only since the emergence of what has come to be called the New Americanist studies in the wake of the Vietnam War, when the logic of the American “errand in [the world’s] wilderness” began to self-destruct—to disclose the depredations its benign rhetoric disavows—has the term “American exceptionalism” been brought to bear on Twain in general and *A Connecticut Yankee* in particular. But even at this late date, as we shall see, there has been an insistent reluctance to pursue the implications of this disclosure for Twain, the novel, and the United States.

I will undertake a synecdochical reading of the history of the commentary and criticism of *A Connecticut Yankee* from the critical perspective enabled by the New Americanist genealogy of American exceptionalism developed in chapter 1 in the next chapter. Before inaugurating such a project, it will be necessary, for obvious reasons, to establish the historical American occasion that Twain is addressing in the novel. I use the quite appropriate term “the Gilded Age,” coined by Twain and his coauthor Charles Dudley Warner in
their 1873 novel of the same name. To summarize, it will be my purpose in this chapter to show that the post–Civil War and postindustrial Mark Twain, like his ancestral Puritan Jeremiahs and his more immediate predecessor Francis Parkman (whose Oregon Trail he imitates in Roughing It), was highly conscious of the waning of the American frontier (the “Virgin Land”) and the threat its demise posed to the “American Adam”—the always youthful, self-reliant, and adventurous pioneering American spirit—and to the organic unity of the (chosen) covenantal people. He was compelled, therefore, to write A Connecticut Yankee, a novel whose decidedly American protagonist (the descendant of Huck Finn) epitomizes the American exceptionalist ethos in all its aspects, as an American jeremiad, not simply to forestall the debilitating overcivilization endemic to the rejuvenating errand but to proffer symbolically the possibility of a new frontier/enemy that would renew and reunite the recidivistic covenantal American people, retrieve the golden [Adamic] age in the nineteenth–century present from the threat of becoming its simulacrum (a “Gilded Age,” an age of “robber barons”), or, to retrieve the biblical origins of this democratic American obsession, despotic “fleshpots.”

I cannot in this limited space provide an adequate account of this highly complex and decisively crucial occasion in the history of exceptionalist America. For such accounts, I refer readers to John F. Kasson’s and Alan Trachtenberg’s magisterial cultural histories, Civilizing the Machine: Technology and Republican Values in America, 1776–1900 (1976) and The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age (1982), respectively, with the proviso that they bring to bear the discriminating directives suggested by the American exceptionalist ethos, which Kasson and Trachtenberg, like their contemporary Americanists, inexplicably do not invoke. It will suffice for the purpose of establishing a context for my critical reading of the history of Americanist commentary and criticism of A Connecticut Yankee to underscore those fundamental and indissolubly related aspects of Twain’s contemporary historical occasion to which he is alluding and commenting on in choosing a “New World”—Adamic—American as his protagonist in the “Old World” and American exceptionalism as that ethos that drives his “revolutionary” project (“errand”) in the novel. The most important of these, reflected in Twain’s setting the novel beyond the late nineteenth–century borders of the United States, is, of course, the waning of the frontier. From the exceptionalist perspective, this meant, as I have shown, the loss of an internal enemy (the crisis that rejuvenates) and thus the threat of backsliding—the paradoxical return to the Old World conditions from
which it was the purpose of the original covenantal people to free themselves by way of a divinely sponsored exodus to the Promised Land. Not incidentally, to Mark Twain, an American author hailing from and celebrating the primal values of the West, this debilitating effect of “improvement” had already become markedly manifest in the eastern seaboard states by the time he wrote *The Gilded Age* with Charles Dudley Warner.

The westward expansionist momentum—which is to say the penetration, “settlement,” and “improvement” of the “virgin land,” the *terra nullius* of the American Puritan exegetes, or, in the triumphal language that Twain and the later American Myth and Symbol critics who came to dominate the first wave of American literary studies indulged, “the westward march of civilization”—was accompanied by the rapid, and spectacular, rise of a railroad system that bound the diffuse regions and cultures of the nation together and produced the conditions for the replacement of settlements by cities, an inefficient agrarian society by an efficient metropolitan urban one. Simultaneously, it prompted a revolutionary, magic-like explosion of scientific and technological advances—the Taylorized factory system, the commodification of exchange, the transformation of social life into a consumer society, and, not least, the globalization of the market and the imperialization of the (nation) state. These produced a dominant (“aristocratic”) political and cultural class of enormously wealthy managers/entrepreneurs—the Rockefellers, the Vanderbilts, the Stanfords, the Astors, the Goulds, the Carnegies, the Huntingtons, the Hills (the “robber barons”)—which resulted, in Trachtenberg’s terms, in both the economic and cultural “incorporation of America”: an inordinately imbalanced class society in which a remarkably small number of aggressive and often corrupt capitalist entrepreneurs determined the economic and social course by buying political policy. At the same time that the Census Bureau announced the official closing of the American frontier (1890), thus prompting Frederick Jackson Turner’s jeremiad bemoaning the loss of its rejuvenating dynamics vis à vis the self-reliant spirit of the westering pioneer, it also offered statistics on income distribution in the United States that put the negative terms of the waning of the frontier in terms that spoke directly of the culminating economic and sociopolitical consequences of the westward expansionist momentum. The Census Bureau’s 1890 figures, Trachtenberg observes, provided stark evidence of “a range of income distribution which provided one measure of the shape and depth of the gulf” between the rich and the poor at that critical moment of American development: “Out of 12 million families, 11 million lived on
incomes below $1,200 a year. The average income of this group was $380, far below the accepted poverty line. In the population as a whole, the richest one percent earned more than the total income of the poorest 50 percent, and commanded more wealth than the remaining 99 percent. About half of all American families lived without property” (Trachtenberg, *Incorporation of America*, 99; emphasis original).

But this small number of capitalist entrepreneurs did not simply determine the economic and political agenda of the United States of the late nineteenth century, thus reducing the laboring class to the status of virtual slavery. It also determined its cultural agenda: the “genteeel” tradition. It transformed high culture into a simulacrum, and it enabled the representation of the new working class, made up almost entirely of poor southern European immigrants, contemporary versions of the nomadic native Americans, who, devoid of a calling and lacking the Protestant work ethic and its sense of errand, “roamed” rather than “worked” and “settled” the land and thus were seen as savage and dangerous denizens:

In a memorable collocation assembled from *The New York Times* of July 1877 by historian Philip Foner, the reader can easily discern the newspaper’s point of view of the railroad strikers [of 1877]:

Disaffected elements, roughs, hoodlums, rioters, mobs, suspicious-looking individuals, bad characters, thieves, blacklegs, looters, communists, rabble, labor-reform agitators, dangerous class of people, gangs, tramps, drunken section-men, lawbreakers, threatening crowd,bummers, ruffians, loafers, bullies, vagabond, cowardly mob, bands of worthless fellows, incendiaries, enemies of society, reckless crowd, malcontents, witched people, loud-mouthed orators, rascallions, brigands, robbers, ruffraff, terrible felons, idiots.

In short, all but “savage Indians.” The dean of the Yale Law School supplied the missing term, however, in “A Paper on Tramps” at an 1877 meeting of the American Social Science Association: “As we utter the word *Tramp*, there arise[s] straightaway before us the spectacle of a lazy, incorrigible, cowardly, utterly depraved savage.” In such images of unruly passions and suspicious motives did respectable folk find their fears confirmed: the troubles marked a degeneration of virtue, a loss of those character traits of industry, regularity, and respect for order essential to the public. (Trachtenberg, *Incorporation of America*, 71)
The ultimate consequence of this divide was, in Michel Foucault’s counter-
mnemonic language, the establishment of the disciplinary society, a polity, as John Kasson proleptically observed in his neglected analysis of the ori-
gins and development of the Lowell, Massachusetts, factory system,\(^3\) that was organized to transform the potentially insurrectional bodies of the de-
prived masses into “useful and docile bodies” (Trachtenberg, *Incorporation of America*, 71).

It needs to be underscored that at the time he was writing *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*, Mark Twain (unlike Herman Melville, not in-
cidentally) was not critical of American scientific and technological progress as such, nor of the analogous disciplinary machinery that, by the time of the official closing of the frontier in 1890, had transformed agrarian America into a remarkably productive industrial/disciplinary—and imperial—soci-
ety. Unlike Herman Melville, Twain, like the vast majority of the dominant Anglo-Protestant core culture, was not only enthusiastic about the amaz-
ing technological innovation and progress in postbellum America\(^4\)—and the morally uplifting disciplining potential for the depraved and volatile poor they commanded\(^5\)—but also sympathetic with the United States’ extension of its colonial errand into the world’s wilderness. We must not, as all too many Americanist scholars (including New Americanists) have done, read the spectacularly developing America of Twain’s post–Civil War time from the perspective of a later, more jaded or “realistic” age. The unpleasant fact is that, despite the visible victimization of the immigrant minorities who worked the new machines (and their recurrent uprisings, which the dominant culture represented as “mob riots”), the majority of Americans, inscribed by the ex-
ceptionalist New World/Old World binary, were enthusiastic supporters of the sudden and rapid post–Civil War scientific/technological project and the consequent imperial initiative of the United States to achieve global hege-
mony. Indeed, as I have been insinuating, it would be no exaggeration to say that the dominant public, like Twain, responded to the spectacular scientific/technological/industrial takeoff in the late decades of the century that had enabled the United States to assume the global center that hitherto had been claimed by Europe as if it was the work of magic.

Twain’s enthusiasm for technological progress—and the global status it endowed to the United States—was abiding. It is borne witness to not only by his early writing, not least *The Innocents Abroad*, or *The New Pilgrims’ Progress* (1869), his travel book narrating his journey to the “Old World” and Palestine
(“the Holy Land”), but also by the globally inflected writing that immediately follows *A Connecticut Yankee* (1889)—which, as we shall see, Americanists old and new have read as reflecting Twain’s disillusionment in his former faith in America’s techno-industrial-imperialist global vision—particularly *Following the Equator* (1897). Despite Twain’s impatience with his fellow “pilgrims” provincialism—their mindless reliance on the Bible or on prior American “guides” to the Old World and Palestine—the former text is saturated by his New World exceptionalist (and “Orientalist”) ethos, which never lets an opportunity go by to point out and underscore the material and moral superiority of a democratic and technologically developed United States over the sharp contrast between the luxury of the few that govern and the squalor of the groveling masses that are governed in the Old World he, as an “innocent” American Adam, is visiting. And the latter text, in classic American Orientalist fashion, represents America’s Others—most tellingly, the Indians under British imperial rule—from the perspective of the “civilized” British colonist victors; not, however, without implying that American colonialism is superior because it is more humane. This is especially evident in Twain’s extended narration of the Great Mutiny of 1858, which he draws entirely from official British histories of that epochal global event. It was, as many critics have noted, Twain’s intention to see the lands and peoples he visited with his own unencumbered (innocent/objective) “American” eyes. Despite his avowed intent, however, Twain’s representations of what he saw were invariably, unlike Herman Melville’s, not incidentally, mediated by what Edward Said, in exposing the “Orientalism” of Western representations of the Orient, has called “the textual attitude”:

It may appear strange to speak about something or someone as holding a *textual attitude*, but a student of literature will understand the phrase more easily if he will recall the kind of view attacked by Voltaire in *Candide*, or even the attitude to reality satirized by Cervantes in *Don Quixote*. What seems unexceptionable good sense to these writers is that it is a fallacy to assume that the swarming, unpredictable, and problematic mess in which human beings live can be understood on the basis of what books—texts—say; to apply what one learns out of a book literally to reality is to risk folly or ruin. One would no more think of using *Amadis of Gaul* to understand sixteenth century (or present-day) Spain than one would use the Bible to understand, say, the House of Commons. But clearly people have tried and do try to use texts in so
simple-minded a way, for otherwise Candide and Don Quixote would not still have the appeal for readers that they do today.\textsuperscript{9}

What is of crucial importance to keep in mind, however, is that, for Twain, the “textual attitude” that largely determined what he saw in the “Old Worlds” he visited, whether the American West, Hawaii, Europe, the Middle East, Palestine, Australia, or India, was not only the consequence of the Western books about them he had read but also, and above all, of the discourse of American exceptionalism. By the time of the post–Civil War period and by way of the astonishing takeoff of American scientific knowledge and material production to which I have been referring, this discourse had become hegemonic or, in Louis Althusser’s language, an “ideological apparatus” or a “problematic.”\textsuperscript{10}

Twain’s enthusiasm for the spectacular advances in science and technology being achieved in the United States (as opposed to Europe and the rest of the world) at the precise time he was writing A Connecticut Yankee is also, and more specifically, testified by his famous personal, moral, and financial investment in and undeviating loyalty to the ill-fated Paige typesetting machine. As Kenneth S. Lynn has observed:

In the year 1880, Twain purchased two thousand dollars’ worth of stock in the Colt arms factory in Hartford [the site of Hank Morgan’s employment prior to his sudden transplantation to sixth-century England]. Soon he put his name down for another three thousand dollars’ worth. Five years later, the machine was still not workable, but by this time Twain’s faith in it had grown into an obsession. James W. Paige, the inventor of the typesetter, he believed to be “a poet; a most great and genuine poet, whose sublime creations are written in steel.” When Paige offered him a half-interest in the machine in exchange for thirty thousand dollars, Twain eagerly accepted. In 1886, the year in which Twain began work on A Connecticut Yankee, Paige came to him for another four thousand dollars. Twain supplied it; and at the rate of three to four thousand dollars every month thereafter, poured his fortune into the “most wonderful typesetting machine ever invented.” Offered a half interest in the Mergenthaler linotype in exchange for his interest in the Paige patent, Twain loftily refused. Once the Paige machine was on the market it would bring in annual rentals, Twain calculated, of fifty-five million dollars.\textsuperscript{11}

In Twain’s mind, these technologically sublime capitalist and globalizing American achievements were the modern manifestations of the adventurous,
self-reliant pioneering spirit that distinguished the forwarding Adamic New World from the decadent, hopelessly class-structured, backward-looking Old World. What he did criticize, because it evoked his jeremiadic anxiety, was not the exceptionalist ethos that drove the Paiges’ and the Edisons’ technological experiments but rather the self-serving attitude toward the worldly—material and social—benefits that were the consequence of the scientific and technological vocation: the capitalization, in Max Weber’s terms, of the benign Protestant work ethic and the reproduction of the Old World class system (in simulacral form). Twain’s understanding of the modern American errand—its commitment to the machine as the late nineteenth century’s means of rationalizing the earth—prized faith in its service to a “higher cause” as opposed to the worldly benefits that accrued to this service. As such, his vocation was a secularized version of the Puritan calling as decisively exemplified by the Puritan John Cotton: “There is another combination of virtues strangely mixed in every lively, holy Christian: and that is, diligence in worldly business, and yet deadness to the world. Such a mystery as none can read but they that know it.” Commenting on this fundamental paradox of the exceptionalist Puritan work ethic, Perry Miller writes (in a way, not incidentally, that recalls the exceptionalist distinction between natural Adamic man and civilizationally cluttered Old World man fundamental to the Connecticut Yankee’s project):

Actually it is a logical consequence of Puritan theology: man is put into this world, not to spend his life in profitless singing of hymns or in unfruitful monastic contemplation, but to do what the world requires, according to its terms. He must raise children, he must work at his calling. No activity is outside the holy purpose of the overarching covenant. Yet the Christian works not for the gain that may (or may not) result from his labor, but for the glory of God. He remains an ascetic in the world, as much as any hermit outside it. He displays unprecedented energy in wresting the land from the Indians, trading in the seven seas, speculating in lands: “Yet,” says Cotton, “his heart is not set upon these things, he can tell what to do with his estate when he hath got it.” In New England the phrase to describe this attitude soon became “loving the world with weaned affections.”

In other words, in calling America at the end of the nineteenth-century the “Gilded Age,” Twain, the “plain,” unencumbered westerner who had come to the overcoded, degenerating (recidivist) East Coast, was criticizing what he took to be a national forgetting of America’s ever forward-looking (westering)
political and cultural exceptional origins. This progress, as the jeremiad warned, was in fact a reversion to overcivilization or decadence, or, more accurately, as the title “robber barons” testifies, a recuperation of the Old World class structure, though now as farce. In politics, this amnesiac tendency took the form not only of the corruption of what John Kasson has called the republican virtue of the founding fathers—the buying and selling of votes that Twain and Warner excoriate in *The Gilded Age* by way of the history of the pioneer Hawkins family—but also of the forgetting of America’s Jacksonian-style democracy, which had opposed the corrupt, courtly, and tyrannical aristocracies of the Old World that, as Twain reiterates endlessly in *The Innocents Abroad*, reduced the vast majority of their people to subhuman slavery. After attributing the cultural conditions that prompted Frederick Jackson Turner to focus “on the victory of the New World plenitude of the national landscape over the entropy of Old World English tradition” to “what Mark Twain had named ‘The Gilded Age,’” the Americanist historian David Noble, echoing the transformation of the Protestant work ethic into the predatory spirit of capitalism, writes:

Twain had seen the years from 1865 to 1890 as the victory of the self-interest of capitalism *over virtuous private property committed to the public interest of the nation*. In the rhetoric of Jacksonian politics, Thomas Jefferson represented the virtuous property identified with the national landscape. His opponent, Alexander Hamilton, represented the chaos of the international market place because he wanted to expand the power of English capitalism in the United States. Twain’s *Gilded Age* could be interpreted as the defeat of the classless democracy of Jefferson and Jackson by English capitalism and its apologist Hamilton. That capitalism was introducing class hierarchy as it shattered the homogeneity of the people and dissolved the sacred boundaries of the nation.¹³

In culture, this late nineteenth-century amnesiac tendency manifested itself in the form of the “genteel tradition.” For Twain, this triumph of Hamiltonian over Jeffersonian democracy meant a backsliding from the earlier American exceptionalist project, particularly of writers such as Emerson and Thoreau (later, during the World War II and Cold War periods, called the founders of the “American Renaissance”), who were dedicated to the task of looking at home to an Adamic—unadorned, forward-oriented, democratic—America (and beyond) rather than abroad to backward and effete, tradition-bound aristocratic England for forms of life commensurate with their unique New World
status. It meant, more specifically, a regression to a servile yearning for the kind of “high culture” epitomized by the novels of manners of Jane Austen, the romances of Sir Walter Scott, and, above all, the highly influential work of the renowned British cultural critic Matthew Arnold, which struck a resounding chord in liberal American intellectuals rendered anxious by the labor upheaval of 1886 (the so-called Haymarket Riots). I am referring particularly to Culture and Anarchy (1867), in which Arnold, against the rapidly declining authority of the Christian religion and in the name of a secular “disinterested inquiry” of the “best self,” espouses the “sweetness and light” of “civilization” —“the best which has been thought and said in the [Western] world”—as the means of resisting the “anarchy,” the centerlessness, that would ensue from allowing the “barbarous” uncultured order to “do . . . what it likes.”

In substituting (Western) culture for Christ, the Anthropologos for the Theologos, however, Arnold was in fact espousing a recuperative conservative Eurocentric politics that, in the liberal name of the “disinterested inquiry” of the centered and unswerving “best self,” was intended to bring about the state’s unsparing repression of the “anarchy”—epitomized for him by the workers’ protest demonstration of July 1866, which he represents as “the Hyde Park Riots”—he thinks would ensue from the passage of the electoral Reform Bill. I quote Arnold at some length not only to underscore the violence endemic to the logic of the “best self” but to point to the (unintended) parallel with Twain’s liberal American exceptionalism:

For we have seen how much of our disorders and perplexities [are] due to the disbelief, among the classes and combination of men, Barbarian or Philistine, which have hitherto governed our society, in right reason, in a paramount best self; to the invisible decay and break-up of organizations by which, asserting and expressing in these organizations their ordinary self only, they have so long ruled us; and to their irresolution, when the society, which their conscience tells them they have made and still manage not with right reason but with their ordinary self, is rudely shaken, in offering resistance to its subverters. But for us,—who believe in right reason, in the duty and possibility of extricating and elevating our best self, in the progress of humanity towards perfection,—for us the framework of society, that the theatre on which this august drama has to unroll itself, is sacred; and whoever administers it, and however we may seek to remove them from their tenure of administration, yet, while they administer, we steadily and with undivided heart support them in
repressing anarchy and disorder; because without order there can be no society, and without society there can be no human perfection.

With me, indeed, this rule of conduct is hereditary. I remember my father, in one of his unpublished letters written more than forty years ago, when the political and social state of the country was gloomy and troubled, and there were riots in many places, goes on, after strongly insisting on the badness and foolishness of the government, and on the harm and dangerousness of our feudal and aristocratic constitution of society, and ends thus: “As for rioting, the old Roman way of dealing with that is always the right one; flog the rank and file, and fling the ringleaders from the Tarpeian Rock!” (Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, 222–223).16

In opposition to this “genteel” high culture being imported into America from Victorian England at the end of the nineteenth century, Twain aggressively reasserted his anti–Old World American exceptionalist ethos. Against the tyranny of monarchy, he privileged the democracy of “the common man”; against cultural gentility, he opposed straightforward simplicity; against the “florid elaborateness” of the British romance novel and highly decorous novel of manners, which, for him, were epitomized in the United States by James Fenimore Cooper’s fiction,17 he privileged a lowly, often deliberately course, and unadorned American “realism”; against the “effeteness” of British high style (and its eastern American imitators), he privileged the vernacular, the “plain style,” of western Americans. In short, oriented by the optimistic, practical (“can-do”) logic of his American exceptionalist ethos, Twain ostensibly opposed New World “fact” to Old World “fable,” “history” to “myth.” It was this decisively affirmative exceptionalist gesture that, in the (Cold War) period bearing witness to the professionalization of American literary studies, led contemporary American writers (Ernest Hemingway and T. S. Eliot), critics (Lionel Trilling), and scholars (Henry Nash Smith) to identify *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* as the first quintessentially American novel or, as Jonathan Arac puts it, to its “hypercanonization.”18 But insofar as Twain represented this relay of worldly sites according to the dictates of the panoptic logic of his exceptionalist ethos—that is, from a secularized or naturalized supernatural perspective or, to put it alternatively, from an ontological “center elsewhere . . . which is beyond the reach of the [free]play [of criticism]”19—he was, as I will show, compelled to perceive their singularity as errant and thus to employ his will to power over them in the name of order.
In *Billy Budd, Sailor*, Herman Melville, a contemporary of the Twain of *A Connecticut Yankee*, had asserted “fact” (history), the “Truth uncompromisingly told” that “will always have its ragged edges” (128), over “fable” (myth or romance), the “measured forms” endemic to the myth of Orpheus’s lyre to which Captain Vere was unerringly committed in the name of the “King” (the sovereignty of the state of exception): “With mankind,’ he [Vere] would say, ‘forms, measured forms, are everything; and that is the import couched in the story of Orpheus with his lyre spellbinding the wild denizens of the wood.’ *And this be once applied to the disruptions of forms going on across the Channel [the French Revolution] as the consequence thereof.*”20 Despite Twain’s alleged commitment to “history” over “romance” at the time he was writing *A Connecticut Yankee*, the logocentric logic of his American exceptionalist ethos compelled him in the end, like Matthew Arnold’s “best self,” to privilege the “genteel tradition” he was ostensibly opposing. Unlike Melville, Twain in fact chose “fable” over “fact”—the “measured forms” of the Orphic imagination over the “ragged edges” of historical time. The deus ex machina ending of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* bears symptomatic witness to this decision. It is, as I will show, this truth about Twain’s artistic vocation, the consequence of his unquestioned commitment to the American calling, to which the massive body of criticism and scholarly commentary on *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* has been blinded by its surprisingly unthought adherence to the American exceptionalist ethos.