CHAPTER FOUR

Staging the Spectacle

_A Contrapuntal Reading of A Connecticut Yankee_

In the most general sense of progressive thought, the Enlightenment has always aimed at liberating men from fear and establishing their sovereignty. Yet the fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant.

—Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, “The Concept of Enlightenment”

Philosophy, the power of separate thought and the thought of separate power, could never by itself supersede theology. The spectacle is the material reconstruction of the religious illusion. Spectacular technology has not dispelled the religious clouds where men had placed their own powers detached from themselves; it has only tied them to an earthly base. The most earthly life thus becomes opaque and unbreathable. It no longer projects into the sky but shelters within itself its absolute denial, its fallacious paradise. The spectacle is the technical realization of the exile of human powers into a beyond; it is separation perfected within the interior of man.

—Guy Debord, _The Society of the Spectacle_

Today a law that seeks to transform itself wholly into life is more and more confronted with a life that has been deadened and mortified into juridical rule. Every attempt to rethink the political space of the West must begin with the clear awareness that we no longer know anything of the classical distinction between _zōē_ and _bios_, between private life and political existence, between man as a simple living being at home in the house and man’s political existence in the city.

—Giorgio Agamben, _Homo Sacer_
The reading of *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* that I undertake in this chapter will be, following Edward Said’s directives, contrapuntal: it will avow what this eminently American text disavows. Ultimately, however, it will be genealogical in Michel Foucault’s sense of the word. Assuming, with Said and Foucault, that Mark Twain’s novel is a “worldly text,” my ultimate intention, is to offer, by way of a contrapuntal reading, a history of the present American occasion. By this I mean, to put it starkly, the volatile post–September 11, 2001, occasion bearing witness to the United States’ assumption of planetary hegemony, its unilateral declaration of a global “War on [Islamic] Terror,” and its consequent systematic policies of “regime change,” “preemptive war,” “shock and awe” techno-military tactics, “enhanced methods of interrogation” (a euphemism for torturing the human body), and the establishment of “Homeland Security” (i.e., the tacit normalization of the state of exception that, as Giorgio Agamben has observed, reduces life to “bare life,” life that can be killed with impunity), all in the tacit name of its History-ordained exceptionalist errand in the world’s wilderness. From a literary point of view, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* is not a particularly distinguished novel. As so much of the criticism and commentary testifies, its narrative structure is often heavy-handed in conception, its narrative voice ambivalent, its portrayal of character obvious, its language often pedestrian, its structure forced, and, not least, its “frontier” humor disturbingly tasteless. And yet it has remained from the time of its publication in 1889 to the present post-9/11 occasion one of the most popular—read and written about—works of American fiction. Despite its patent flaws, Twain’s novel is, in short, an “American classic,” indeed a privileged text in the American canon. And this is because, as the previous chapter has attempted to suggest, more than any other work in the American literary tradition, *A Connecticut Yankee* resonantly mirrors all the facets of the exceptionalist ideology that has come increasingly to inform the American national identity and endowed it with its sense of chosenness, unerring optimism, and mission in the world’s wilderness since the dissident English Puritans undertook their exodus from the overcivilized and tyrannical Old World to the Adamic New World at the beginning of the seventeenth century. In the close reading that follows, I will show that it is precisely because the narrative of *A Connecticut Yankee*, despite its flaws, unerringly follows the forwarding logic of the American exceptionalist calling that it is capable of disclosing more about the contemporary national vocation that determines the present domestic, and especially foreign, policies of the United States (whether
under the aegis of the Republican Party or the Democratic Party) than any other literary text in the American canon.

“Yankee of the Yankees”

As I have noted, the fourth (i.e., contemporary) phase of the criticism and commentary on *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* has, despite the quite different assumptions of the first three phases suggesting otherwise, unquestioningly assumes that Mark Twain and his Yankee protagonist, Hank Morgan, are distinct characters; the latter, in fact, the object of the former’s satire. When, however, it is acknowledged that the radical difference between Hank Morgan and the medieval age, the world he has been catapulted into, is in fact the difference between the New World and the Old World—particularly the political and economic tyranny and the overcoded and disabling forms of culture of its elite—that is at the heart of the American exceptionalist ethos, this determining assumption becomes problematic. And this is because such an acknowledgment of the pervasiveness of the exceptionalist ethos in the novel reminds us that Mark Twain, the celebrated American author who deliberately changed his birth name, Samuel Langhorne Clemens, in order to identify himself with the river that more than any other site in the United States symbolizes the very idea of a natural, undomesticated America, and who wrote *The Innocents Abroad, Roughing It, The Gilded Age, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and other classics of American literature that pit the youthful American Adamic perspective against the decadent, tradition-bound perspective of the Old World, was, like his protagonist in *A Connecticut Yankee*, profoundly and undeviatingly committed to the American exceptionalist ethos.

This general identity of the perspectives of Mark Twain and Hank Morgan is intimated, if not made manifest, in the (rather clumsy) framing mechanism Twain devises to inaugurate his time-travel tale. “M. T.,” who proffers the narrative written by Hank Morgan to the public, is an American tourist, not unlike the author of *The Innocents Abroad*, visiting Warwick Castle in England. In the process of sightseeing, he comes across and is deeply attracted to a “curious stranger,” whose soft, pleasant, flowing talk about “Sir Bedivere, Sir Bors de Ganis, Sir Lancelot of the Lake, Sir Galahad, and all the other great names of the Round Table” “wove such a spell about me that I seemed to move among the spectres and shadows and dust and mold of a gray antiquity, holding speech with a relic of it!” Following this admission of deep attraction and
nostalgia for a long-vanished, now legendary world, M. T. informs the reader that his strange new acquaintance is somehow a modern man. This disclosure is inaugurated when, as the tour guide is attempting to explain to his audience the mystery of a bullet hole in an ancient hauberk, the stranger, in a medieval ancient English, announces that “Wit ye well, I saw it done. . . . I did it myself.” M. T. is shocked by this startling information, which brings modern technology into clashing play with a pretechnological world, and when he recovers from “the electric surprise of this remark” (Twain, Connecticut Yankee, 6) realizes that the enigmatic stranger has disappeared. That evening, however, M. T. reverts to the nostalgia for Malory’s Camelot that he was feeling prior to the interruption of the stranger: “I sat by the fire . . . steeped in a dream of the olden time, while the rain beat upon the windows, and the wind roared about the eaves and corners. From time to time I dipped into old Sir Thomas Malory’s enchanting book, and fed at its rich feast of prodigies and adventures, breathed-in the fragrance of its obsolete names, and dreamed again” (6).

Given Twain’s undeviating commitment to an American modernism that mocked the yearnings for an “olden time” in previous works such as The Innocents Abroad and Roughing It, and, in a different vein, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, this patently inflated nostalgic language of romance can only be read as a dramatic device intended to suggest the possibility of Twain’s recidivism—a straying from his forwarding errand or calling into “medievalism,” a dream world, and thus preparation for the emergence of the stranger as a voice of conscience who will save M. T. from backsliding into sentiment (i.e., “poetry”). In other words, what M. T.’s sudden and spectacular juxtaposition of touristic nostalgia for an obsolete legendary world, on the one hand, and an ancient suit of armor pierced by a modern bullet, on the other, as a framing device is clearly intended to establish is not simply the theme of the New World/Old World opposition but this theme in its stark modern manifestation (the “medievalist” nostalgia that, like a virus, was infecting contemporary American culture), and, more precisely, an orientation toward this opposition grounded on the vocational logic (I use this term to evoke its Puritan meaning) of the American exceptionalist ethos.

This interpretation of the sudden intrusion of the stranger into M. T.’s dream world is corroborated later on in the evening when the stranger comes unexpectedly to M. T.’s room, interrupting the latter’s enchanted reverie about Malory’s world, to narrate his bizarre history and to leave him the manuscript he had written about it. The stranger’s very first resonant words are:
I am an American. I was born and reared in Hartford, in the State of Connecticut—anyway, just over the river, in the country. So I am a Yankee of the Yankees—and practical, yes, and nearly barren of sentiment, I suppose—or poetry, in other words. My father was a blacksmith, my uncle was a horse doctor, and I was both, along at first. Then I went over to the great arms factory and learned my real trade; cannon, boilers, engines, all sorts of labor-saving machinery. Why, I could make anything a body wanted—anything in the world, it didn't make a difference what; and if there wasn't any quick new-fangled way to make a thing, I could invent one—and do it as easy as rolling off a log. I became head superintendent; had a couple of thousand men under me. (Twain, *Connecticut Yankee*, 8)

Contrasting sharply with M. T.'s inflated nostalgic prose (and the circular prose of “Sir Thomas Malory’s enchanting book” he is reading), the stark, plain style of the Yankee stranger’s speech, its identification of Americanness with self-reliance, practicality, and, not least, the manly ability, enhanced by modern technological inventiveness, to get things done (I will return to the Yankee’s failure to discriminate between productive and life-destroying technology), clearly suggests the entire history of the American exceptionalist ethos from its origins in the Puritan’s divinely ordained errand, through its secularization in the period of the “American Renaissance,” to its “fulfillment” in the postbellum technological/industrial age (synecdochically, from John Winthrop, through Ralph Waldo Emerson, to Thomas Edison). It thus announces the opposition between the benignly productive American exceptionalism and the decadent and effeminate medieval world as the supreme theme of the novel.

The many critics of the third and fourth phases of *A Connecticut Yankee* criticism who have distinguished Twain from his protagonist will no doubt object to this reading of the novel's frame on the basis of the Yankee's “admission” that he is “barren of sentiment . . . or poetry, I suppose.” Indeed, it is primarily to this inaugural passage that those few critics of this group who have considered the problem of authorial point of view have appealed in asserting that Twain was being critical of Hank Morgan and his American exceptionalist ethos. The problem with this argument, however, is that it flies radically in the face of the evidence of Twain's writing at large. For Twain, as for Hank Morgan, it should be remembered, it was the American vernacular—the plain style and its unadorned, secular, virile, and directed simplicity (*sermo humilis*, to evoke the larger Western context Twain is likely to have had in mind)²—that he not
only cultivated but even insistently flaunted publicly from the beginning of his
career as an American writer, in opposition to the effete “genteeel” style (sermo
gravis) of the overcoded European tradition (and its American imitators like
James Fenimore Cooper). “Poetry,” in the “Yankee of Yankees” view, insofar as
it obscures rather than clarifies the center that activates its ruminations, blocks
action: getting things done, producing, progress. In other words, its circularity
impedes the (forwarding “march” of the) exceptionalist errand. It is, in short, a
cultural manifestation of the unworldly worldly decadence—the betrayal—of
the transcendentally ordained elect’s vocation and its inexorably forwarding,
end-oriented logic. To be an American, “a Yankee of Yankees,” in Twain’s, as
in Morgan’s, always ironic/comic vein, is then to be practical or, more precisely,
to be an obedient servant in this (profane) world of a “higher cause.”

This, I suggest, is what Hank Morgan means when, in identifying himself
decisively as an American, he underscores his announcement by adding the
appositive “a Yankee of Yankees.” What he is implying in this locution is that
he is the essence of a diluted essential—the real thing. And, in so doing, he is,
in opposition to the impulse to backslide (into poetry), pointing to—and
celebrating—the unerring logic that is the imperative of his “benign” excep-
tionalist American vocation. Read in this light, Twain’s overdetermined use
of the epithet “a Yankee of Yankees” to characterize the Americaness of his
protagonist and his vocation cannot help but recall two remarkably similar,
but utterly negative, exemplars of this pervasive American cultural imaginary
identified by an earlier American writer equally obsessed with the American
exceptionalist calling. I am referring to Captain Ahab in Herman Melville’s
Moby-Dick (his monomaniac exceptionalist “fiery pursuit” of the white whale)
and, even more relevantly, as the epithet suggests, “the Indian-hater par excel-
"lence” in the chapters of Melville’s The Confidence-Man usually referred to as
“The Metaphysics of Indian-hating.” Like their Puritan forebears, both these
archetypal American figures are “chosen” (called) to the “benign” errand of
rationalizing the world (ridding it at all costs, in the language Ishmael uses
to represent “crazy” Ahab’s vocation, of “all that most maddens and torments;
that stirs up the lees of things; all truth with malice in it; all that cracks the
sinews and cakes the brain; all the subtle demonizations of life and thought;
alL evil . . .” and, in thus unerringly fulfilling the imperatives of their excep-
tionalist vocations, paradoxically avow, in the end, the violence their benign
exceptionalism disavows. I will return to this resonant paradox later in this
chapter, where I confront the “troubling” Battle of the Sand Belt. Here it will
suffice, for the purpose of underscoring the hitherto unremarked antithetical parallel with the “Yankee of Yankees”—and of orientation—to quote the passage from “The Metaphysics of Indian-hating,” where Melville (through the voice of the “Westerner” who is quoting Judge James Hall [Sketches of History, Life, and Manners in the West, 1835]) proffers his definition of “the Indian-hater par excellence” by distinguishing him from the “backwoodsman” in general or, as this figure is characterized later, the “diluted Indian-hater,” one who is “too often draw[n] from the ascetic life” by the “soft enticements of domestic life”:

The Indian-hater par excellence the judge defined to be one “who having with his mother’s milk drank in small love for red men, in youth or early manhood, ere the sensibilities become osseous, receives at their hand some signal outrage, or, which in effect is much the same, some of his kin have, or some friend. Now, nature all around him by her solitudes wooing or bidding him muse upon the matter, he accordingly does so, till the thought develops such attraction, that much as straggling vapors troop from all sides to a storm-cloud, so straggling thoughts of other outrages troop to the nucleus thought, assimilate with it, and swell it. At last, taking counsel with the elements, he comes to his resolution. An intenser Hannibal, he makes a vow, the hate of which is a vortex from whose suction scarce the remotest chip of the guilty race may reasonably feel secure. Next, he declares himself and settles his temporal affairs. With the solemnity of a Spaniard turned monk, he takes leave of his kin; or rather, these leave-takings have something of the still more impressive finality of death-bed adieus. Last, he commits himself to the forest primeval; there, so long as life shall be his, to act upon a calm, cloistered scheme of strategical, implacable, and lonesome vengeance. Ever on the noiseless trail; cool, collected, patient; less seen than felt; snuffing, smelling—a Leatherstocking Nemesis. In the settlements he will not be seen again; in eyes of old companions tears may start at some chance thing that speaks of him; but they never look for him, nor call; they know he will not come. Suns and seasons fleet; the tiger-lily blows and falls; babes are born and leap in their Mothers’ arms; but, the Indian-hater is good as gone to his long home, and ‘Terror’ is his epitaph.”

From the point of the Missourian narrator (and Judge Hall), the Indian-hater’s systematic killing of Indians is not morally culpable. On the contrary, it is the imperative of the benign vocation of pioneering, implying that in their eyes, as in the eyes of the Indian-hater, Indians are what, to anticipate, Giorgio
Agamben has called “bare life,” life that can therefore be killed with impunity. This, I am suggesting, is, despite the comedic tone that distinguishes Hank Morgan’s story from that of the “Indian-hater par excellence,” also true of the inexorable exceptionalist logic of Mark Twain and his “Yankee of Yankees.”

The evidence suggesting the continuity I am adducing to Mark Twain’s and Hank Morgan’s American sensibility is not restricted to *A Connecticut Yankee*. This exceptionalist filiation can in fact be easily inferred by a random examination of Twain’s writing at large. I will, however, restrict citation to an example from *The Innocents Abroad* that, because the narrative it is drawn from is analogous to that of *A Connecticut Yankee* (an American’s visit to the Old World—here, the metropolis of the Ottoman Empire) and is articulated in Twain’s own (practical “American”) voice, is an especially self-evident telling one:

I do not think much of the Mosque of St. Sophia. I suppose I lack appreciation. We will let it go at that. It is the rustiest old barn in heathendom. I believe all the interest that attaches to it comes from the fact that it was built for a Christian church and then turned into a mosque, without much alteration, by the Mohammedan conquerors of the land. They made me take off my boots and walk into the place in my stocking-feet. I caught cold, and got myself so stuck up with a complication of gums, slime and general corruption, that I wore out more than two thousand pair of boot-jack getting my boots off that night, and even then some Christian hide peeled off with them. I abate not a single boot-jack.

St. Sophia is a colossal church, thirteen or fourteen hundred years old, and unsightly enough to be very, very much older. Its immense dome is said to be more wonderful than St. Peter’s, but its dirt is much more wonderful than its dome, though they never mention it. . . . The inside of the dome is figured all over with a monstrous inscription in Turkish characters, wrought in gold mosaic, that looks as glaring as a circus bill; the pavements and the marble balustrades are all battered and dirty; the perspective is marred everywhere by a web of ropes that depend from the dizzy height of the dome, and suspend countless dingy, coarse oil lamps, and ostrich-eggs, six or seven feet above the floor. Squatting and sitting in groups, here and there and far and near, were ragged Turks reading books, hearing sermons, or receiving lessons like children, and in fifty places were more of the same sort bowing and straightening up, bowing again and getting down to kiss the earth, muttering
prayers the while, and keeping up their gymnastics till they ought to have been tired, if they were not. Every where was dirt, and dust, and dinginess, and gloom; every where were signs of a hoary antiquity, but with nothing touching or beautiful about it; every where were those groups of fantastic pagans; overhead the gaudy mosaics and the web of lamp-ropes—nowhere was there any thing to win one’s love or challenge his admiration.⁶

In short, to distinguish Twain from Hank Morgan, as so many critics of the third phase have done, on the basis of the inaugural passage that introduces the Connecticut Yankee as an “American,” a “Yankee of Yankees,” which is to say, to read Morgan’s affirmation to M. T. that he is a practical man, nearly barren of poetry, as an unintended admission of a radical flaw that is intended by Twain to orient the reader’s sympathies against his American exceptionalist protagonist, is to undermine the very exceptionalist logic that has rendered Mark Twain himself the quintessential American writer. Following his decisive identification of himself to M. T. as an American, the stranger goes on to recount the fight in the Colt arms factory he had with “a fellow we used to call Hercules,” in the process of which a blow to the head from his antagonist’s crowbar knocks him unconscious. When the American wakes up, he finds himself in an utterly unfamiliar land. On the basis of an encounter with a “fellow on a horse” “in old time armor” (Twain, Connecticut Yankee, 9) who speaks an English language he doesn’t understand and who requests from him a response that is beyond his practical and present-bound geographical and chronological frame of reference, the American first takes the strangely attired rider to be a member of a nearby circus and then, when that explanation proves inadequate, an escaped inmate of an insane asylum. The dialogue between the two that Morgan recounts to M. T. immediately before he offers him the manuscript ends by revealing the true identity of this foreign world:

I asked him how far we were from Hartford. He said he had never heard of the place; which I took to be a lie, but allowed it to go at that. At the end of an hour we saw a far-away town sleeping in a valley by a winding river; and beyond it on a hill, a vast fortress, and turrets, the first I had ever seen out of a picture.

“Bridgeport?” said I, pointing.

“Camelot,” said he. (Twain, Connecticut Yankee, 9)
What is significant about this ending of the introductory frame is that its stark incommensurabilities repeat in different words, but with the same dramatic force, the decisive (and orienting) opposition between the New World and the Old World of the beginning of the stranger’s visitation to M. T., thus underscoring the determining centrality of American exceptionalism in the narrative that follows.

**Shock and Awe**

The stranger’s manuscript begins at the immediate point where his history leaves off on the night he, like a specter, visits M. T., immersed in the enchanting world of *Le Morte d’Arthur*, in his room at the Warwick Arms. Taken captive by Sir Kay, Hank Morgan is eventually brought before King Arthur and the knights of the Round Table in Camelot. Before their arrival, however, he emphasizes the tremendous contrast between the rational New World he has left and the irrational Old World in which he suddenly finds himself, thus underscoring the exceptionalist orientation established in the frame. From the perspective of the natives of the English sixth century he encounters on the way to the court, the modern Yankee, like Gulliver in Brobdingnag and Lilliput, is a startling curiosity. From his highly advanced nineteenth-century American perspective, on the other hand, they are subhuman:

> As we approached the town, signs of life began to appear. At intervals we passed a wretched cabin, with a thatched roof, and about it small fields and garden patches in an indifferent state of cultivation. There were people too; brawny men, with long, coarse, uncombed hair over their faces and made them look like animals. They and the women as a rule wore a coarse tow-linen robe that came well below the knee, and a rude sort of sandals, and many wore an iron collar. The small boys and girls were always naked but nobody seemed to know it. All of these people stared at me, talked about me, ran into the huts and fetched out their families to gape at me; but nobody ever noticed that other fellow [Sir Kay] except to make him humble salutation and get no response for their pain. (Twain, *Connecticut Yankee*, 13)

And their mode of life is that of dehumanized slaves rendered unaware of their abject slavery by their aristocratic masters:
In the town were some substantial windowless houses of stone scattered among a wilderness of thatched cabins; the streets were mere crooked alleys, and unpaved troops of dogs and nude children played in the sun and made life and noise; hogs roamed and rooted contentedly about, and one of them lay in a reeking wallow in the middle of the main thoroughfare and suckled her family. Presently there was a distant blare of military music; it came nearer, still nearer, and soon a noble cavalcade wound into view, glorious with plumed helmets and flashing mail and flaunting banners and rich doublets and horse cloths and gilded spear heads; and through the muck and swine, and naked brats, and joyous dogs, and shabby huts it took its gallant way. (Twain, Connecticut Yankee, 14)

These inaugural impressions of the lopsided world the Connecticut Yankee has awakened into, it is important to register, are based on the superiority of his scientific knowledge over the superstition (the lack of scientific knowledge) to which he bears witness and will not only become the essential means of achieving authority (which he would invoke instead of “power”) over his captors but will also determine his self-righteous hostility toward the theo-politics of the nobility of Camelot and his ameliorative American exceptionalist political vocation. Given the genealogy of his “Americanness,” it is no accident that Hank Morgan will represent the subhuman existence of the denizens of sixth-century England later in his text not only as that of mindless “children” and “animals” but also, indeed insistently, as “white Indians” (Twain, Connecticut Yankee, 19).

The Connecticut Yankee envisions his vocation—his obligation to rise from captive to “Boss” of the benighted Arthurian world—even before he is certain that he is in a real world rather than the lunatic asylum it appears to be. And this, not incidentally, is the result of an exceptional empirical knowledge he possesses that is unavailable to his sixth-century Old World captors: his “sudden” recollection (I put this word in quotation marks because the information is imposed by Twain), when he is told that he is in King Arthur’s court and the date is “528—nineteenth of June,” of the hard fact that the only total eclipse of the sun in the first half of the sixth century occurred on the “21st of June 528 O.S. and began at 3 minutes after 12 noon. (Twain, Connecticut Yankee, 17). This exceptional empirical knowledge appeases anxiety (that which has no thing as its object) and enables practicality to dominate in the face of uncertainty. In other words, by objectifying the mysterious, the “practical Connecticut man” is enabled, in a way that is denied to his superstitious captors, to see the whole
picture and thus to undertake his end-oriented vocation (work) calculatedly, efficiently, and, to anticipate, spectacularly, without wasting time. The allusion to the motif of the work ethic, which binds Hank Morgan to the tradition that begins with the Puritan calling and culminates in its secularization by Benjamin Franklin in the following passage, should not be overlooked:

Wherefore, being a practical Connecticut man, I now shoved the whole problem clear out of my mind _till its appointed day and hour should come_, in order that I might turn all my attention to the circumstances of the present moment, and be alert and ready to make the most out of them that could be made. One thing at a time, is my motto—and just play that thing for all its worth, even if it’s only two pair and a jack. 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 that whole country inside of three months; for I judged I would have the start of the best-educated man in the kingdom by a matter of thirteen hundred years and upwards. _I'm not a man to waste time after my mind's made up and there's work on hand_. . . . (Twain, *Connecticut Yankee*, 17; my emphasis)

The event that catapults the captive who has been condemned to be burned at the stake into power and inaugurates his “progressive” reign as “the Boss” of Arthurian England is the eclipse of the sun he is enabled by his nineteenth-century scientific knowledge to predict. This empowering turn in the Connecticut Yankee’s itinerary in Arthurian England has, of course, been central to virtually all the criticism and commentary on the novel. But, as I have observed in chapter 3, the systemic failure to identify Hank Morgan’s victory over Merlin as a victory of American exceptionalism in its spectacular nineteenth-century scientific/technological avatar over Old World magic (superstition) has obscured not only the decisive role this episode actually plays in the unfolding narrative (particularly, the genocidal Battle of the Sand Belt) but also the complicity of Mark Twain with his “Yankee of Yankees” protagonist. Despite the apparent self-evidence of the episode of the eclipse, it will therefore be necessary to attend more closely to its tenor than heretofore.

What is crucial to this alternative reading of the decisive conflict between Morgan and Merlin, which against the third- and fourth-phase criticisms points to the _continuity_ between the early Morgan and the Morgan of the
Battle of the Sand Belt, is not simply the Yankee’s (alleged) superior knowledge of the operations of nature over the theo-magical knowledge of Merlin, the feared representative of Old World knowledge production. It is also the fearful spectacular (“magical”) effects this American exceptionalist knowledge of nature is intrinsically capable of unleashing in an audience of superstitious primitives devoid of such knowledge. Shortly after registering the coincidence of the date of his arrival in King Arthur’s court and the date of the sixth-century eclipse of the sun, Morgan, for whom no detail is superfluous, announces to Clarence, the young page (“paragraph” is what the Yankee, ventriloquizing Twain’s type of humor, calls him) who will become his loyal follower and witness to the Boss’s accomplishments, that he, too, is a magician and has conceived a plan to use his knowledge of the coming eclipse of the sun as his weapon against Merlin’s pedestrian “tricks.” It is no accident that, in doing so, the Yankee invokes a tactic that had its origins in the first colonial encounters with the “savages” of America and became from then—and especially in the period of the American westward errand in the New World wilderness—to the present one of the standard technologies of conquest and colonization. I am referring to the staged unleashing, by means of scientific knowledge, of a spectacular phenomenon of nature—here, the eclipse that threatens to obliterate the sixth-century English world—by an “advanced” civilization before a body of superstitious primitive spectators for the purpose of awing them into fearful and abject obedience. For the sake of orientation, I will call these the spectacular tactics of “shock and awe”: “You see [Morgan writes after the last obstacle to his preconceived scenario has been annulled] it was the eclipse. It came into my mind, in the nick of time, how Columbus, or Cortez, or one of those people, played an eclipse as a saving trump once, on savages, and I saw my chance. I could play it myself, now; and it wouldn’t be any plagiarism, either, because I should get it in nearly a thousand years ahead of those parties” (Twain, Connecticut Yankee, 29–30).

Hank Morgan’s “Columbian/Cortezian” strategy for achieving authority in Arthurian England in the face of Merlin’s power has often been noted by critics. But this notice of its operations in the novel is universalized and thus emptied of its topicality and thus its intrinsic relationship to the American exceptionalist ethos. As a result, this criticism has failed to observe that Morgan’s shock-and-awe strategy of persuasion is everywhere aided and abetted by Twain’s authorial interventions; indeed, that it ventriloquizes one of Twain’s most fundamental formal techniques as an American writer: that staging for effect
so prominent—indeed, defining—in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, The Prince and the Pauper, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,* and, not least, *The Tragedy of Pudd’nhead Wilson,* that is enabled by his American exceptionalist perspective on the Old World.

The entire episode of the eclipse, both linguistic and structural, is meticulously and systematically orchestrated by Hank Morgan to achieve the awe-inspiring effect—and the end (not only his freedom but also the authority over the nobility and the Church)—his calculative, panoptic mind’s eye perceives from the beginning. This staging of “the show,” which relies on “timing” (the manipulation of expectation), is inaugurated when Clarence, having returned from the court, where he has learned that Merlin has persuaded King Arthur that the Yankee’s earlier announcement of his intention to visit a calamity on the land is a fraud, begs his prisoner friend to “name the calamity” he had prophesied:

I allowed silence to accumulate while I got my impressiveness together, and then said:

“How long have I been shut up in this hole?”

“Ye were shut up when yesterday was well spent. It is 9 of the morning now.”

“No! Then I have slept well, sure enough. Nine in the morning now! And yet it is the very complexion of midnight, to a shade. This is the 20th, then?”

“The 20th—yes.”

“And I am to be burned alive to-morrow.” The boy shuddered.

“At what hour?”

“At high noon.”

“Now then, I will tell you what to say.” I paused, and stood over the cowering lad a whole minute in awful silence; then in a voice deep, measured, charged with doom, I began and rose by dramatically graded stages to my colossal climax. I delivered in as sublime and noble a way as ever I did such a thing in my life: “Go back and tell the king that at that hour I will smother the whole world in the dead blackness of midnight: I will blot out the sun, and he shall never shine again; the fruits of the earth shall rot for lack of light and warmth, and the peoples of the earth shall famish and die, to the last man!”

(Twain, *Connecticut Yankee,* 30)

This calculated incremental process by which Hank, using his terrified ephebe as mediator, intends to rouse the anxiety of the superstitious King Arthur and
his benighted court to an excruciatingly intolerable pitch, can of course be interpreted (and has frequently been so by third- and fourth-phase critics) as evidence of a character defect that signals Morgan's later turn to totalitarianism and thus of Twain's initial and continuing satirical attitude toward his protagonist. What is overlooked by such panoptic (and spatializing) readings—and this is surprising, given its prominence in Twain's work—is that Twain's authorial hand, in fact, intervenes on behalf of rendering the staged spectacular effect that Morgan is incrementally producing even more "effective." This is especially evident in chapter 6, entitled "The Eclipse," which artificially postpones the impending climax announced in Morgan's speech at the end of chapter 5. As Morgan, "impatient for tomorrow [the day of the eclipse] to come," envisions in his cell the impending "great triumph" and his becoming "the centre of all the nation's wonder and reverence" (Twain, *Connecticut Yankee*, 31), he is suddenly interrupted by "some men-at-arms," who inform him that the time of his execution at the stake has come. And when, in shock, he responds that "this is a mistake—the execution is to-morrow," he is informed that the order has been "set forward a day" and then, disoriented by this information that ostensibly shatters his calculated timetable, is led out to the enclosed court of the castle. There, in a panoptic vision that repeats and underscores the spectacular metaphor of the theatrical center and periphery he used earlier but now in absolute reverse, Morgan sees "the stake, standing in the center, and near it the piled fagots and a monk" and "on all four sides of the court the seated multitudes [rising] rank above rank, forming sloping terraces that were rich with color," with "the king and queen sitting on their thrones" (32).

At this precise moment, following but ironizing the pattern of the theatrical nick-of-time rescue, Clarence appears out of nowhere to inform Morgan that, in order to save the world from his magic, he has "lied" to the king, telling him "that your power against the sun could not reach its full until the morrow; and so if any would save the sun and the world, you would have to be slain to-day" [that is, the day before the actual eclipse was to occur]. He then exultantly annunciates the triumphant denouement of his dramatic lie: "Ah, how happy has the matter sped! You will not need to do the sun a real hurt—ah, forget not that, on your soul forget it not. Only make a little darkness—only the littlest little darkness, mind, and cease with that. It will be sufficient. They will see that I spoke falsely . . . and with the falling of the first shadow of the darkness you shall see them go mad with fear; and they will set you free and make you great! Go to the triumph now!" (Twain, *Connecticut Yankee*, 32) Robbed of the
dramatic value of his scientific knowledge by his young admiring ephebe’s good
deed, the self-reliant Yankee is again rendered temporarily helpless.

What follows this bereavement of Morgan’s speech, which is accompa-
nied by the hushed silence of the expectant multitude, is sheer melodramatic
spectacle, but, as I have noted by way of the parallel between Morgan’s and
Twain’s own narrative techniques in general, it is now a staging for effect,
not by Morgan but by Twain himself. I quote this ultraspectacular scene at
length not only to verify this filiation but also to underscore the American
exceptionalism that is *intrinsic* to the common strategy of persuasion they use
to shock their benighted opponent into awed—bereft of speech—submission:

This hush continued while I was being chained to the stake; it still continued
while the fagots were carefully and tediously piled about my ankles, my knees,
my body. Then there was a pause, and a deeper hush, if possible, and a man
knelt down at my feet with a blazing torch; the multitude strained forward,
gazing, and parting slightly from their seats without knowing it; the monk
raised his hands above my head, and his eyes toward the blue sky, and began
some words in Latin; in this attitude he droned on and on, a little while, and
then stopped. I waited two or three moments: then looked up; he was standing
there petrified. With a common impulse the multitude rose slowly up and
stared at the sky. I followed their eyes; as sure as guns, there was my eclipse
beginning! The life went boiling through my veins; I was a new man! The rim
of black spread slowly into the sun’s disk, my heart beat higher and higher,
and still the assemblage and the priest stared into the sky, motionless. I knew
that this gaze would be turned upon me, next. When it was, I was ready. I was
in one of the most grand attitudes I ever struck, with my arms stretched up
pointing to the sun. It was a noble effect. You could *see* the shudder sweep the
mass like a wave.

“Apply the torch!”

“I forbid it!”

The one was from Merlin, the other from the king. (Twain, *Connecticut
Yankee*, 32–33)

But even this spectacular effect is not enough for Twain. As in the cases of
the extended scenarios orchestrated by Tom Sawyer to free (the already free)
Jim at the end of *Huckleberry Finn* and of the scientifically minded lawyer to
prove Chambers’s guilt in *Pudd’nhead Wilson*, Twain squeezes the possibility
for spectacle latent in his knowledge of the eclipse to its limit. Assured at
last of the coincidence of the actual date of the sixth-century eclipse and the
date and exact time of day of his execution, the Yankee uses this exceptional
knowledge to further exacerbate the anxiety of the king and his terrorized
subjects and to demand that he be made “the king’s right hand”—given the
status of authority that would enable him to fulfill his exceptionalist vocation.
As the darkness begins to increase, the king accedes to the “prodigious roar of
applause” of the multitude. This gratuitous second climax ends in a ritualized
tableau of triumph that, not incidentally, recalling the type and antitype of
figural biblical interpretation, combines the Old Testament God of Creation
and the New World settler of the American Adamic myth, who subdues the
benighted “savages” not by force of arms but by the wondrous light of empirical
knowledge:

It grew darker and darker and blacker and blacker, while I struggled with
those awkward sixth-century clothes [the “raiment” befitting his now elevated
status]. It got to be pitch dark, at last, and the multitude groaned with horror
to feel the cold uncanny night breezes fan through the place and see the stars
come out and twinkle in the sky. At last the eclipse was total, and I was glad
of it, but everybody else was in misery, which was quite natural. I said, “The
king, by his silence, still stands to the terms.” Then, I lifted up my hand—
stood just so a moment—then I said, with the most awful solemnity “Let the
enchantment dissolve and pass harmless away!”

There was no response, for a moment, in that deep darkness and that
grateyard hush. But when the silver rim of the sun pushed itself out, a
moment or two later, the assemblage broke loose with a vast shout and came
pouring down like a deluge to smother me with blessings and gratitude: and
Clarence was not the last of the wash, be sure. (Twain, Connecticut Yankee, 35)

Earlier, I observed that the sudden spectacular takeoff of scientific knowl-
edge production and technological innovation in the post–Civil War United
States was, in keeping with the American exceptionalist sense of superiority
over the Old World, greeted enthusiastically as if it were a kind of magic, and
that Twain conceived the Connecticut Yankee as a figure who symbolized this
spectacular and awe-inspiring utilitarian momentum. Despite its hegemonic
status, however, not everyone in the United States was as sanguine about the
scientific/technological revolution as Twain was. Once again, Herman Melville
in particular comes to mind as a means of demystifying this late nineteenth-
century manifestation of American exceptionalism—and precursor of what
Guy Debord has called “the society of the spectacle”—as it is enacted by Twain in the form of the Connecticut Yankee’s errand in feudal England, not least in his spectacular display of his superior New World techno-scientific “magic” over Merlin’s pedestrian Old World magic. I am referring particularly to Melville’s extended representation of Benjamin Franklin in his novel *Israel Potter* (1854–1855), which uncannily resembles Twain’s symbolic portrait of Hank Morgan, except that it heretically and proleptically satirizes this American exceptionalist everyman as a spectacle-mongering con man rather than celebrating him as the ideal American. The similarity and radical difference is manifest not only in Melville’s emphasis on Franklin’s excessively exemplary self-reliant practicality, which anticipates Twain’s Connecticut Yankee, but also in underscoring the absence in him of the poetic:

> Having carefully weighed the world, Franklin could act any part in it. By nature turned to knowledge, his mind was often grave, but never serious. At times he had seriousness—extreme seriousness—for others, but never for himself. Tranquility was to him instead of it. This philosophical levity of tranquility, so to speak, is shown in his easy variety of pursuits. Printer, postmaster, almanac maker, essayist, chemist, orator, tinker, statesman, humorist, philosopher, parlor-man, political economist, professor of housewifery, ambassador, projector, maxim-monger, herb-doctor, wit:—Jack of all trades, master of each and mastered by none—the type and genius of his land, Franklin was everything but a poet.

Equally, if not more so, the similarity and difference between Twain’s “Yankee of Yankees” and Melville’s portrayal of Franklin is evident in Melville’s characterization of the exceptional scientific knowledge of this American “sage”—the “type and genius of his land”—not simply as that of a “magician” capable of performing “effective miracles” (Melville, *Israel Potter*, 39) but a magician with a very worldly (imperial) agenda:

> Wrapped in a rich dressing-gown—a fanciful present from an admiring Marchesa—curiously embroidered with algebraic figures like a conjuror’s robe and with a skull-cap of black satin on his hive of a head, the man of gravity was seated at a huge claw-footed old table, round as the zodiac. It was covered with printed papers; files of documents; rolls of MSS; stray bits of strange models in wood and metal; odd-looking pamphlets in various languages; and all sorts of books; including many presentation-copies; embracing
history, mechanics, diplomacy, agriculture, political economy, metaphysics, meteorology, and geometry. The walls had a necromantic look; hung round with barometers of different kinds; drawings of surprising inventions; wide maps of far countries in the New World; crowded topographical and trigonometrical charts of various parts of Europe; with geometrical diagrams, and endless other surprising hangings and upholstery of science. (Melville, *Israel Potter*, 38–39)\textsuperscript{30}

Hank Morgan’s Biopolitics

Following his stunning victory over Merlin—and, not incidentally, the Church, on which Merlin’s power is based—the Connecticut Yankee, now the awe-inspiring center of attention of the British multitude, is enabled to assume his American vocation, to begin his transcendentally ordained “errand in [the English] wilderness”: the rationalization of its unproductive earth according to the directives of nineteenth-century American capital and its political allotrope, the democratization of its feudal aristocracy. Morgan’s inaugural gesture in fulfillment of the first task involves, admittedly, an appeal to a British archetype: “I saw that I was just another Robinson Crusoe cast away on an uninhabited island, with no society but some more or less tame animals, and if I wanted to make life bearable, I must do as he did—invert, contrive, create, reorganize things; set brain and hand to work, and keep them busy. Well, these were in my line” (Twain, *Connecticut Yankee*, 36; my emphasis). But as his invocation of the Protestant work ethic in this passage, coupled with his insistent references to his Americanness, testifies, the Crusoe he invokes is clearly the Protestant Crusoe who, in the process of the fulfillment of the Puritan errand, became massively identified with the Franklinian version of the American exceptionalist ethos: the self-made American man.

This elision is in fact enacted in Hank Morgan’s deliberate choice of the patently American title “the Boss” over the possible titles of authority available to him from the Old World aristocratic system after he has staged another shock-and-awe episode that destroys Merlin’s tower and once again humiliates his Old World antagonist. Appealing to Dan Beard’s illustrative allusion to Boss (William M.) Tweed, the notorious Tammany Hall political boss, Americanists of the second and, especially, third phases of *A Connecticut Yankee* criticism have invoked the decidedly negative connotation of the term “Boss” that accrued to it in the Gilded Age to distinguish Twain from Hank Morgan.
But a close examination of the text suggests no such identification is intended. On the contrary, as I am suggesting, the term, in keeping with Twain’s (and Morgan’s) deliberate and insistent practice, is an “Americanism” that serves to underscore its exceptionalist difference from the titles of authority (duke, baron, earl, etc.) endemic to the aristocratic class structure of British feudal society. This is clearly, if indirectly, affirmed by the historical future Morgan panoptically envisions after he has destroyed Merlin’s tower by the “magic” of blasting-powder, in which he pointedly contrasts European historymakers with his American exceptionalism:

I stood here, at the spring and source of the second great period of the world’s history; and could see the trickling stream of that history gather, and deepen and broaden, and roll its mighty tides down the far centuries; and I could note the upswinging adventurers like myself in the shelter of its long array of thrones. De Montforts, Gavestons, Mortimers, Villierses; the war-making campaign-directing wantons of France, and Charles the Second’s scepter-wielding drabs, but nowhere in the procession was my full-sized fellow visible. I was as Unique; and glad to know that that fact could not be dislodged or challenged for thirteen centuries and a half, for sure. (Twain, Connecticut Yankee, 40–41; my emphasis)

Indeed, this positive identification of the term with American democracy is explicitly underscored by Morgan when, immediately after invoking his exceptionalist status—and continuing the New World/Old World contrast—he recalls its origin:

I could have got a title easily enough, and that would have raised me a large step in everybody’s mind; even in the king’s, the giver of it. But I didn’t ask of it; and I declined it when it was offered. . . . I couldn’t have felt really and satisfactorily fine and proud and set-up over any title except one that should come from the nation itself, the only legitimate source, and such a one I hoped to win; and in the course of years of honest and honorable endeavor, I did win it and did wear it with a high and clean pride. This title fell casually from the lips of a blacksmith, one day, in a village, was caught up as a happy thought and tossed from mouth to mouth with a laugh and an affirmative vote; in ten days it had swept the kingdom, and was become as familiar as the king’s name. I was never known by any other designation afterwards, whether in the nation’s talk or in grave debates upon matters of state at the council-board of the sovereign. This
Hank Morgan’s purpose in Arthurian England is, in short, to undertake an “errand” in the wilderness of the feudal Old World. Or, to put it alternatively, his “vocation,” ordained by a transcendental call, is to rationalize and render its economic, cultural, and political “lunacy” rational and productive: “improvement,” in both Morgan’s discourse and that of the American exceptionalist tradition. Once it is acknowledged that the Connecticut Yankee’s mission is a vocation informed by this “benign” American exceptionalist ethos, it can also be seen that his calculative and aggressive practice in what follows his assumption of the title “the Boss” does not manifest itself in contradictions that betray confusion (or conflict) in Twain’s imagination, as the second-phase critics such as Henry Nash Smith and James Cox claim, nor slippages that are intended to reveal “despotic” or “fascist” (antidemocratic) or “imperialist” tendencies that distance Twain from his protagonist, as third-phase critics virtually unanimously assert. Rather, Morgan’s calculative and aggressive practice, like that of the colonial American pioneers in the process of westward expansion, constitutes the unerring fulfillment of the “benign” logic of his American exceptionalism. This is clearly affirmed by Morgan in the process of summarizing the preliminary results of his errand at the end of his first four years as “Boss,” during which he has secretly established a patent office to instigate technological innovation, a Presbyterian Sunday school to counter the powerful authority of the Roman Catholic Church, a newspaper to disseminate and inculcate republican virtues and American-style English, a “teacher-factory” to produce what he insistently calls “men” out of the animalistic multitude of England, military and naval academies ostensibly to defend the land efficiently against external enemies, and a telephone and telegraph system that would establish communication between hitherto isolated and uncultivated communities. Referring to these pioneering efforts of cultivation (“improvement”), all of them clearly being affiliated manifestations of the American exceptionalist ethos, Morgan writes in an all too familiar resonant language (to which I will return): “Unlimited power is the ideal thing when it is in safe hands” (Twain, Connecticut Yankee, 51; my emphasis).

Once Hank Morgan has achieved the status of Boss, the next stage in the process of fulfilling the demanding logic of his American exceptionalist vocation is to transform the groveling and resistant multitude he encounters
in feudal England into (disciplined) “men,” as he insistently calls them to distinguish their positive future from their actual abject and quiescent animal-like present existence under the aegis of the Church and the feudal aristocracy it justifies. Or, to invoke an illuminating current term, from Antonio Gramsci, that estranges the normal connotations of this dynamics of “improvement,” this stage of the Yankee’s project is to render the republican ideal of the free individual “hegemonic” in the face of a reluctant commons that has been dehumanized by the class structure endemic to the monarchic state and its sanctioning Church. I (re)quote Raymond Williams’s version of this central Gramscian insight into capitalist modernity not only for convenience and because it is a brilliant summary of its still misunderstood meaning but also to underscore its pertinence to the Connecticut Yankee’s exceptionalist vocation:

The concept of hegemony often, in practice, resembles [the usual definitions of ideology], but *it is distinct in its refusal to equate consciousness with the articulate formal system which can be and ordinarily is abstracted as “ideology.”* It of course does not exclude the articulate and formal meanings, values and beliefs which a dominant class develops and propagates. But it does not equate these with consciousness, or rather it does not reduce consciousness to them. *Instead it sees the relations of domination and subordination in their forms as practical consciousness, as in effect a saturation of the whole process of living—not only of political and economic activity, nor only of manifest social activity, but of the whole substance of lived identities and relationships, to such a depth that the pressures and limits of what can ultimately be seen as a specific economic, political, and cultural system *seem to most of us pressures and limits of simple experience and common sense.* Hegemony is then not only the articulate upper level of “ideology,” nor are its forms of control only those ordinarily seen as “manipulation” or “indoctrination.” It is a whole body of practices and expectations, over the whole of living: our senses and assignments of energy, our shaping perceptions of ourselves and our world. It is a lived system of meanings and values—constitutive and constituting—which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming. *It thus constitutes a sense of reality for most people in the society, a sense of absolute because experienced reality beyond which it is very difficult for most members of the society to move, in most areas of their lives. It is, that is to say, in the strongest sense a “culture,” but a culture which has also to be seen as the lived dominance and subordination of particular classes.*
This hegemonizing phase of Hank Morgan's errand (which is ultimately unsuccessful) is enabled by the two opportunities to take extended journeys, picaresque style, into the English wilderness, which allow him to observe the benighted life of the multitude and thus, by way of the knowledge accrued in the process, to facilitate the “improving” republican reformations he would eventually enact. In the first, initiated by the king’s wish that the Boss undertake “adventures” in order to become “worthy of the honor of breaking a lance with Sir Sagramour” (Twain, *Connecticut Yankee*, 53), who has challenged him to a duel, he is accompanied by the loquacious maiden Alisande la Cartelloise (whom the American characteristically calls “Sandy”). In the second, he is accompanied by the king himself. What is central in both these “fact-finding” journeys is not only Hank Morgan’s persistent utilization of the shock-and-awe tactics that won him his victory over Merlin and earned him his “Boss-ship,” but also (and this has gone unremarked) that his observations of the degraded lives of the multitude and the remedies he envisions on the way are, from beginning to end, undeviatingly processed through his benign American exceptionalist lens—and duplicate Mark Twain’s avowed sentiments.

This exceptionalism is inaugurated by and exemplified in Morgan and Sandy’s first encounter during their knight errantry, with a “group of ragged poor creatures” who had been assembled to repair their lord the bishop’s road (Twain, *Connecticut Yankee*, 64). When the Yankee, to his genteel medieval lady’s horror, offered to breakfast with these lowly commoners, “they were so flattered, so overwhelmed by this extraordinary condescension of mine that at first they were not able to believe that I was in earnest” (64). To this manifestation of a collective broken spirit caused by the usurpation of “the nation” by the few, which will recur over and over again in both journeys, the practical, work-ethic–driven Yankee observes—in a scornful rhetoric reminiscent of, say, *The Innocents Abroad* or *The Gilded Age*:

And yet they were not slaves, not chattels. By a sarcasm of law and phrase they were freemen. Seven-tenths of the free population of the country were of just their class and degree: small “independent” farmers, artisans, etc.; which is to say, they were the nation, the actual Nation; they were about all of it that was useful, or worth saving, or really respectworthy; and to subtract them would have been to subtract the Nation and leave behind some dregs, some refuse, in the shape of a king, nobility, and gentry, idle, unproductive, acquainted mainly with the arts of wasting and destroying, and of no sort of use or value in any
rationally constructed world. And yet, by ingenious contrivance, this gilded minority, instead of being in the tail of the procession where it belonged, was marching head up and banners flying, at the other end of it; bad elected itself to be the Nation, and these innumerable clams had permitted it so long that they had come at last to accept it as a truth; and not only that, but to believe it right and as it should be. The priests had told their fathers and themselves that this ironical state of things was ordained of God; and so, not reflecting upon how unlike God it would be to amuse himself with sarcasms, and especially such poor transparent ones as this, they had dropped the matter there and become respectfully quiet.

*The talk of these meek people had a strange enough sound in a formerly American ear.* (Twain, *Connecticut Yankee*, 64–65; my emphasis)

Indeed, the outrage provoked by this absolute divide between nobility and the multitude is so great that the Yankee is compelled to invoke the “excess” of the French Revolution—the “Reign of Terror”—to express his republican feelings. I quote at length not only to underscore the force and depth of Morgan’s New World contempt for the theologically justified monarchical system of the Old World but also, given Morgan’s later pointed retrieval of the Reign of Terror, for the sake of orientation. Referring to the unfree “freeman” he encounters on the road, he writes:

Why, it was like reading about France and the French, before the ever-blessed Revolution, which swept thousands of years of such villainy away in one swift tidal wave of blood—one: a settlement of that hoary debt in the proportion of half a drop of blood for each hogshead of it that had been pressed by slow tortures out of that people in the weary stretch of ten centuries of wrong and shame and misery the like of which was not to be mated but in hell. There were two “Reigns of Terror,” if we were but to 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 the life-long death from hunger, cold, insult, cruelty, and heart-break? What is the swift death by lightning compared with a 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 Terror—that unspeakable bitter and awful Terror which none of us has been taught to see in its vastness or pity as it deserves. (Twain, *Connecticut Yankee*, 66)\(^{14}\)

Put this way, one could, of course, as most critics have done, interpret Morgan’s outrage in universalist terms, as an obvious general republican condemnation of despotism. But what follows immediately from the Yankee’s encounter with this cultural and political abjection makes it manifestly clear that he is perceiving and responding to the degraded condition of these “freemen” from the particular perspective of American exceptionalism. When, analogous to his shock-and-awe New World strategy vis-à-vis the phenomena of nature, he asks his abject British listeners, in the deliberately heretical language of common sense, if “a nation of people” who, with “a free vote in every man’s hand, would elect that a single family and its descendants should reign over it forever, whether gifted or boobies, to the exclusion of all other families—including the voter’s,” they are at first taken aback, never having “thought about it before.” But after more subversive prodding at this deep culturally inscribed ideology, one of these “freemen” breaks out and vehemently asserts that “he didn’t believe a nation where every man had a vote would voluntarily get down in the mud and dirt in any such way, and that to steal from a nation its will and preference must be a crime and the first of all crimes” (Twain, *Connecticut Yankee*, 67). This triumphant breakthrough not only calls forth the Yankee’s highest praise: his identification of freedom with *manliness*—and manliness with the logic of belonging of the nation-state. In so doing, it also reinspires his American exceptionalist errand: the creation of a national polity modeled on that of the State of Connecticut:

I said to myself:

“This one’s a man. If I were backed by enough of his sort, I would make a strike for the welfare of this country, and try to prove myself its loyalest citizen by making a wholesome change in its system of government.”

You see my kind of loyalty was loyalty to one’s country, not to its institutions or its office-holders. The country is the real thing, the substantial thing, the eternal thing. It is the thing to watch over, and care for, and be loyal to; institutions are extraneous, they are mere clothing, and clothing can wear
out. . . . To be loyal to rags, to shout for rags, to worship rags, to die for rags—that is loyalty of unreason, it is pure animal; it belongs to monarchy, was invented by monarchy; let monarchy keep it. I was from Connecticut, whose Constitution declares “that all political power is inherent in the people, and all free governments are founded on their authority and instituted for their benefit; and that they have at all times an undeniable and indefeasible right to alter their form of government in such a manner as they may think expedient. (Twain, Connecticut Yankee, 67; emphasis original)

And, in a decisive gesture symbolizing his choice to accomplish his nation-building errand (“his new deal,” 68) by means of hegemonizing it rather than through revolution—and in keeping with his nineteenth-century version of the American exceptionalist ethos—Morgan sends the still puzzled neophyte to his “Man-Factory” in Camelot. It is a gesture, not incidentally, that, as he encounters increasing resistance, he will insistently and exactly repeat in both his sojourns through the benighted British countryside with Sandy and, later, with King Arthur.

Like their reading of “the Boss,” the third-phase critics have interpreted the key term “Man-Factory” as a manifestation of Twain’s satire of the Connecticut Yankee’s (un-American) mechanistic view of humanity. This, I submit, is a misreading that has its point of departure in a desire emanating from the recently accrued negative connotations of the term. The “Man-Factory” is in fact an integral aspect of both Morgan’s and Twain’s American exceptionalism. It is no accident that Morgan’s first use of this resonant term (as well as his two other similar ones—in Morgan Le Fay’s dungeons in chapter 17 and in his encounter with the enslaved pilgrims in chapter 21)—to refer to the “education” of the multitude occurs during his journey into the Arthurian wilderness accompanied by his exasperatingly loquacious, “poetic,” and always erring female companion, Sandy. Throughout this journey of ameliorative exploration, that is, Morgan, following Twain’s narratological example, establishes an indissoluble relay of hierarchical oppositions that, in a deliberate reversal of Don Quixote’s knight’s errant project, is intended to distinguish the “enchanted” Old World from the “disenchanted” New World:

1. He privileges the straightforward American vernacular—a practical (deliberately unpoetic) language oriented toward objectification (the spatialization of temporality) and getting things done—over the archaic, convoluted
imaginative (“lying”) English of Arthurian England, most decisively embodied in Sandy’s (the “wandering wench’s”; Twain, Connecticut Yankee, 56) circumlocutory, endless, and undiscriminating discourse:

“So these two knights [Sir Uwaine and Sir Marhaus in Sandy’s tale] came together with great random.” I saw that I had been asleep and missed a chapter [of her unending story], but I didn’t say anything. I judged that the Irish knight was in trouble with the visitors by this time, and this turned out to be the case.—“that Sir Uwaine smote Sir Marhaus that his spear brast in pieces on the shield, and Sir Marhaus smote him so sore that horse and man he bare to the earth, and hurt Sir Uwaine on the left side—.”

“The truth is, Alisande, these archaics are a little too simple; the vocabulary is limited, and so, by consequence, descriptions suffice in the matter of variety; they run too much to level Saharas of fact, and not enough to picturesque detail; this throws about them a certain air of the monotonous; in fact the fights are all alike: a couple of people come together with great random. . . . A body ought to discriminate—they come together with great random, and a spear is brast, and one party brake his shield and the other one goes down, horse and man, over his horse tail and brake his neck, and then the next candidate comes randoming in, and brast his spear, and the other man brast his shield, and down be goes horse and man, over his horse tail, and brake his neck and then there’s another elected, and another and another and still another, till the material is all used up; and when you come to figure up results, you can’t tell one fight from another nor who whipped; and as a picture, of living, raging, roaring battle, sho! Why, it’s pale and noiseless—just ghosts scuffling in a fog. Dear me, what would this barren vocabulary get out of the mightiest spectacle?—the burning of Rome in Nero’s time, for instance, boy brast a window, fireman brake his neck! Why, that ain’t a picture.” (Twain, Connecticut Yankee, 74–77; emphasis original)

2. He privileges the practical activeness of masculinity over the passive and vague errancy of the feminine:

“The castle, you understand, where is the castle [where Sandy’s kin are held captive by a cruel ogre]?

“Oh, as to that, it is great, and strong, and well be seen, and lieth in a far country. Yes, it is many leagues.”

“How many?” “Ah, fair sir, it were woundishly hard to tell, they are so many,
and do so lap at the one upon the other, and being made all in the same image
and tincted with the same color, one may not know the one league from its
fellow, nor how to count them except they be taken apart, and ye wit well
it were God’s work to do that, being not within man’s capacity; for ye will
note—”

“Hold on, hold on, never mind about the distance, whereabouts does the
castle lie? What’s the direction from here?”

“Ah, please you sir, it hath no direction from here; by reason that the road
lieth not straight, but turneth evermore; wherefore the direction of its place
abideth not, but is sometime under the one sky and anon under another,
whereso if ye be minded that it is in the east, and wend thitherward, ye shall
observe that the way of the road doth yet again turn upon itself by the space of
half a circle, and this marvel happing again and yet again and still again, it will
grieve you that you had thought by vanities of the mind to thwart and bring to
naught the will of Him that giveth not a castle a direction from a place except
it pleaseth Him, and if it please Him not, will the rather that even all castles
and all directions thereunto vanish out of the earth, leaving the place wherein
they tarried desolate and vacant, so warning His creatures that where He will
He will, and where He will not He—” (55; emphasis original)

3. And he privileges the idea of a disciplined and productive nation (a cov-
enant of manly freemen committed to the [Protestant/capitalist] work ethic)
over the resistant feudal world characterized, as we have seen, by “some dregs,
some refuse, in the shape of a king, nobility and gentry, idle, unproductive,
acquainted mainly with the arts of wasting and destroying, and of no sort of
use or value in any rationally constructed world.” The American language as
opposed to archaic English; the male sensibility as opposed to the effeminate;
the covenantal nation as opposed to feudal tyranny and waste (barbarous lux-
ury, as it were); and manhood understood as disciplined and productive (the
pioneering spirit): all constitute an indissoluble relay that, in opposition to the
despotic/overcivilized Old World, are intrinsic to the American exceptionalist
errand, especially as it manifested itself in Twain’s late technologically oriented
American nineteenth century.

Understood in this historical context, then, the Connecticut Yankee’s
“Man-Factory” undergoes a sea change. It comes to be seen not as an object
of Twain’s satire but as the essential Enlightenment means of fulfilling his
earth-rationalizing American errand, of disenchanting the enchanted Arthu-
rian world. Morgan, it will be recalled, repeatedly asserts that the barbarous civilization of feudal England is the benighted result of “petrified training” (Twain, Connecticut Yankee, 87). During his visit to Morgan Le Fay’s castle, for example, he encounters a courageous young man (and his self-sacrificing wife), whom she is torturing on the rack to gain a confession (of killing one of her deer), which would enable her to confiscate his property. Assuming his authority as “the Boss,” Morgan responds to their anomalous humanity by ordering their release and telling them that he will “book [them] both for my colony; you’ll like it there; it’s a Factory where I’m going to turn groping and grubbing automatons into men” (89). Immediately after this telling reiteration of his educational project, the Yankee, referring to Morgan Le Fay’s inscribed inability to understand his obvious argument on the right of the accused to confront his accuser, observes:

Oh, it was no use to waste sense on her. Training—training is everything; training is all there is to a person. We speak of nature; it is folly; there is no such thing as nature; what we call by that misleading name is hereditary and training. We have no thoughts of our own, no opinions of our own; they are transmitted to us, trained into us. . . .

No, confound her, her intellect was good, she had brains enough, but her training made her an ass—that is, from a many-centuries-later [American nineteenth century] point of view. To kill the page was no crime—it was her right; and upon her right she stood, serenely unconscious of offense. She was a result of generations of training in the unexamined and unassailable belief that the law which permitted her to kill a subject when she chose was a perfectly right and righteous one. (Twain, Connecticut Yankee, 90–91)

In other words, in keeping with the logical imperatives of his (and Twain’s) nineteenth-century version of the American exceptionalist ethos, the Connecticut Yankee sees his “Man-Factory” as the most efficient educational means of fulfilling his New World vocation/errand in the medieval wilderness. It would break the hold of a training that had inscribed the benighted Arthurian world with a divinely sanctioned culture that, in privileging the few over the many in the name of a supernatural (magical) dispensation, reduced the many (the multitude) to animal (unmanly) status. And it would accomplish this benign cultural revolution by a rigorous training that not only privileged the many over the few (including the language of the many over that of the few) but also the humanity of the many understood as the manliness that the
Old World culture disabled. In the analogous rhetoric of the novel, Morgan’s American “Man-Factory”—this practical (and unpoetic) educational institution—would, by training its students in an American exceptionalist mode of pioneering manliness, disenchant the enchanted sixth-century world, demystify the divinely ordained system of “truths” of Arthurian feudalism.

What the Connecticut Yankee’s (and Twain’s) revolutionary avowal disavows in his commitment to overthrow the life-damaging tyranny of monarchy, however, is, as I have been suggesting (and will show more fully later), that Morgan’s practical “Man-Factory,” precisely because it is informed by the logic of belonging of American exceptionalism, is an educational institution that, in the name of civilizational progress (“improvement”), produces, in Michel Foucault’s uncannily apt poststructuralist terms, “useful and docile bodies”:

The historical moment of the disciplines [the age of the Enlightenment] was the moment when an art of the human body was born, which was directed not only at the growth of its skills, nor at the intensification of its subjection, but at the formation of a relation that in the mechanism itself makes it more obedient as it becomes more useful, and conversely. What was then being formed was a policy of coercions that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behaviour. The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it. A “political anatomy,” which was also a “mechanics of power,” was being born; it defined how one may have a hold over others’ bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques the speed and the efficiency that one determines. This discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, “docile” bodies. Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience). In short, it dissociates power from the body; on the one hand, it turns it into an “aptitude,” a “capacity,” which it seeks to increase; on the other hand, it reverses the course of the energy, the power that might result from it, and turns it into a relation of strict subjection. If economic exploitation separated the force and the product of labour, let us say that disciplinary coercion establishes in the body the constricting link between an increased aptitude and an increased domination.18

Under the aegis of the duplicitous logic of American exceptionalism, Hank Morgan’s “Man-Factory” produces a hegemonic “biopolitics” and the “disci-
plinary” society, in which the members of the multitude, unlike their groveling collectivized counterparts in the feudal world, indeed become individuals, but individuals who are nonetheless “subjected subjects.” Indeed, it will be no imposition, as we shall see, to say, in the starker language of Giorgio Agamben, that in the end Morgan’s antifeudal American Man-Factory produces “bare life.” 19

The Apotheosis of the Spectacle

One could go on to provide further evidence of the point I have been making about Mark Twain and his protagonist’s affiliation: that the Connecticut Yankee is basically Twain’s spokesperson, not an imaginative accident or the object of his satire; that what they have in common is their commitment to and celebration of the American exceptionalist ethos in all its polyvalent aspects; that nothing substantial happens in the text, from the beginning to the climactic occasion of the allegedly problematic Battle of the Sand Belt, that undermines the “benign” logic of the Connecticut Yankee’s errand in the feudal British wilderness; and that in fact it becomes increasingly aggressive to the degree that it is resisted by the nobility and the Church, on the one hand, and the abject multitude, on the other. This filiative relation between Twain and the Connecticut Yankee is, for example, patently manifest in all its aspects in the episode of Hank Morgan’s second sojourn into the British hinterlands, now accompanied by the king himself, which involves his “drilling” of Arthur (as the title of chapter 28 puts Morgan’s disenchanting educational project) into adopting the demeanor and manners of the lowly multitude, and in the episodes of the small–pox hut and the Manor House of Abblasoure (chapters 29 and 30), in which Morgan bears further witness not only to the abjectness of the commoners under the aegis of the Church and the feudal system but also to the republican “truth” that “a man is at bottom a man”:

There it was, you see [when Marco, the charcoal burner who had been hunting one of his cousins on behalf of the nobility, suddenly responds positively to Morgan’s calling him a scoundrel for his servility]. 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 . . . 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. We should see certain things yet, let us hope and believe. First, a modified monarchy, till Arthur’s days were done, then the destruction of the throne, nobility abolished, every member of it bound out to some useful trade, universal suffrage instituted, and the whole government placed in the hands of the men and women of the nation there to remain. Yes, there was no occasion to give up on my dream yet a while. (Twain, *Connecticut Yankee*, 173)

This relation between Morgan and Twain is also manifest in the episode in which the Connecticut Yankee, having deflated the medieval system-sanctioned economic pretensions of Dowley, the “prosperous blacksmith,” stages another event, this time by means of the “magic” of his nineteenth-century American-style laissez-faire (“free-trade”) economic science, which shocks and awes his animal-like listeners into some degree of “manly” consciousness, and in the episode that is the turning point of their journey in the English wilderness, where, after they are sold into slavery, Morgan works the king into announcing at last that he would abolish this dehumanizing institution.

But enough has been said about this affiliation to render its point viable. What remains to be added to this incrementally accumulating relationship for the purpose of understanding the troubling climactic violence of the Battle of the Sand Belt has to do with the often noted but unexamined nature of Hank Morgan’s style of narration: his peculiarly “American” humor. To be specific, it is my purpose in this section not simply to show that the Connecticut Yankee’s brand of humor exactly mirrors the (hyperbolic) “tall tale” style of “western humor” that is a trademark of Twain’s prose. Nor is it simply to show that, as “western” humor, it has its origins in the westward errand into the New World wilderness, in the imperatives of Manifest Destiny (that is, like the “American vernacular,” to which it is related, it is an indissoluble dimension of the American exceptionalist ethos). More tellingly, it is also my intention to show that this exceptionalist western humor Twain and Morgan inherit from the American past and employ in fulfilling their vocation and errand contributes, by rendering violence and the human suffering it inflicts routinely humorous—a consumable simulacrum of the thing itself—to the very dehumanizing process (the reduction of *bios* to *zoe*, political life to bare life) it not only disavows but always attributes to and deplores in despotic Old World regimes.
One obvious example, of the many possible ones, of the type of (simulacral) western humor from Twain’s other prose writing that is patently reminiscent of the Connecticut Yankee’s is the often referred to extended ending of *Huckleberry Finn*, in which Tom Sawyer, with Huck’s unquestioning assent to and admiration of his friend’s “style,” stages the spectacular “freeing” of the black runaway slave Jim, who, unknown to him, has already been set free, in such a way as to greatly exaggerate the imagined threat to the well-being of the helpless black man—to render it comic—and to prolong (through eight chapters, 34–42) his “rescue” for the sake of pure “comic/dramatic” *effect*. Twain represents this extended episode of staging for spectacular effect entirely from the perspective of the white planners of the scene. Jim (in both the narrative and the telling illustrations of Edward Windsor Kemble) is reduced to the prevailing caricature of the “Southern nigger.” The feelings of a real runaway slave in Jim’s precarious predicament are totally effaced in the name of the climactic humorous/spectacular effect intended *in advance* (calculatedly) by the staged representation. And, when the black man is taken into account, he is ventriloquized by his white “friends”:

“Now old Jim, you’re a free man again, and I bet you won’t ever be a slave no more.”

“En a mighty good job it wuz, too, Huck. It ’uz planned beautiful, en it ’uz done beautiful; en dey ain’t nobody kin git a plan dat’s mo’ mixed-up en splendid den what dat one wuz.” (Twain, *Huckleberry Finn*, 279)21

Read, however, from the perspective of the effaced historical black person (contrapuntally, in Edward Said’s apt term), this famous scene of American literature, celebrated as a symbolic archetype of one of the basic characteristics of the American national identity, undergoes an estranging—and discomposing—sea change. It comes to be seen not simply as an extended act of callous and degrading cruelty justified by the American exceptionalist ethos but also as an act of cruelty that is rendered ethically innocuous by the reduction of the black man’s life to bare life. Ultimately it comes to be seen as an act of staging that turns human pain into a simulacrum: a product for consumption.

Seen in the context of this quite typical and celebrated Twainian narrative strategy in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Hank Morgan’s fundamental penchant for staging events for spectacular comic effect in *A Connecticut Yankee* does not, as the critics of phases two and three either affirm or imply, constitute a departure from Twain’s practice that justifies reading the novel as a disas-
trous failure of imaginative consistency or as satire of his Yankee protagonist’s (Fascist) republican project. On the contrary, this overdetermination of the artistic tactics of western frontier humor, understood as an indissolubly related extension of the overdetermination of the American vernacular (against the “maddeningly” unproductive circumlocutions of Maloryan English) goes far to establish their basic identity as American exceptionalist.23

The relationship between the frontier humor, the unerring logic of the American exceptionalist ethos, and the callously reductive violence (to America’s Other) that informs the exemplary ending of *Huckleberry Finn* is in fact, repeatedly and in a cumulative determinative way, enacted by Hank Morgan throughout the process of fulfilling his vocation, which culminates in the Battle of the Sand Belt. What is different about the relay Morgan relies on to bring his errand in the feudal English wilderness to fruition is that its force is enhanced by the late nineteenth-century technological knowledge at his disposal. But this difference, as I have shown, is not disruptively radical; it is rather an extension—an “improvement,” as it were—of his American exceptionalist technological “magic”: the advanced shock-and-awing firepower that his nineteenth-century scientific knowledge has enabled. Preliminary to my discussion of this catastrophic climactic battle between the progressive New World and the recalcitrant Old World, I will, for brevity, cite only one of many possible examples: the jousting engagement, following Morgan and King Arthur’s return to London as slaves and their “nick-of-time” rescue by Launcelot and his “five hundred mailed and belted knights on bicycles” (Twain, *Connecticut Yankee*, 21),24 between Sir Sagramour le Desirous and the Yankee, which, it will be recalled, explains the mystery of the bullet hole in the armor that inaugurates Morgan’s time-travel tale. Read in the light of this logical relay (American humor/exceptionalism/technological firepower), it will be seen that it is no accident that Morgan prefaces this penultimate episode of *A Connecticut Yankee* by deliberately staging the event to suggest that his duel with Sir Sagramour is not personal but a matter of historical forces—more specifically, about the struggle for the future between the New World and the Old World, understood as an epochal conflict between the “Yankee of Yankees” and the medieval necromancer, Merlin; between modern American (technological) “magic” and feudal British (superstitious) “magic”:

Up to the day set, there was no talk in all Britain of anything but this combat. All other topics sank into insignificance and passed out of men’s thoughts.
and interest. It was not because a tournament was a great matter. . . . Yet there was abundant reason for the extraordinary interest which this coming fight was creating. It was born of the fact that all the nation knew that this was not to be a duel between mere men, so to speak, but a duel between two mighty magicians; a duel not of muscle but of mind; not of human skill but of superhuman art and craft; a final struggle for supremacy between the two master enchanters of the age. It was realized that the most prodigious achievements of the most renowned knights could not be worthy of comparison with a spectacle like this; they could be but child’s play, contrasted with this mysterious and awful battle of the gods. Yes, all the world knew it was going to be in reality a duel between Merlin and me, measuring his magic powers against mine. It was known that Merlin had been busy whole days and nights together, imbuing Sir Sagramour’s arms and armor with supernal powers of offence and defence; and that he had procured for him from the spirits of the air a fleecy veil which would render the wearer invisible to his antagonist while still visible to other men. Against Sir Sagramour, so weaponed and protected, a thousand knights could accomplish nothing; against him no known enchantments could prevail. These facts were sure; regarding them there was no doubt, no reason for doubt. There was but one question: might there be still other enchantments unknown to Merlin, which could render Sir Sagramour’s veil transparent to me, and make his enchanted mail vulnerable to my weapons? This was the one thing to be decided in the lists. Until then the world must remain in suspense.

So the world thought there was a vast matter at stake here, and the world was right, but it was not the one they had in their minds. No, a far vaster one was upon the cast of this die: the life of knight-errantry. I was a champion, it was true, but not the champion of the frivolous black arts. I was the champion of hard unsentimental common-sense and reason. I was entering the lists to either destroy knight-errantry or be its victim. (Twain, Connecticut Yankee, 221)

Like all the preceding shock-and-awe episodes, Morgan/Twain stages this “epochal” duel with the representative of knight errantry for its spectacular effect. All of England, high and low, is assembled at the tournament. Now, however, since the errand itself is at stake, they stage the event in such a way as to underscore the “Americanness” of this errand and, at the same time, to demonstrate the “magic” of American New World (pioneering) knowledge (science) in its most advanced and extreme form. Whereas Sir Sagramour
enters the lists elaborately accoutered in the flamboyant ceremonial garb of knighthood and concealed by a veil Merlin has woven for him, the practical Yankee, typical of his “lowly” but effective plainness, appears (accompanied by “a great wave of laughter”) “in the simplest and comfortablest of gymnastic costumes—flesh-colored from neck to heel . . . and bare-headed” (Twain, Connecticut Yankee, 222), and, cowboy-style, armed with reason (“noting the knight’s position and progress by hearing, not sight,” 223) and a lasso—and, we learn after Sir Sagramour and several of the other knights have been unceremoniously unsaddled by Morgan’s lariat, a pair of Colt six-shooters.

What follows is an epitome of the hyperbolic American western tall tale and its unique kind of dehumanized violence. Morgan first demonstrates his demystifying and deflating American ingenuity by lassoing Sir Sagramour, then a number of unfriendly knights of the Round Table, and finally, having become “the focal point of forty thousand adoring eyes,” “the Invincible,” Sir Launcelot: “with the rush of a whirlwind—the courtly world rose to its feet and bent forward—the fateful coil went circling through the air, and before you could wink I was towing Sir Launcelot across the field on his back, and kissing my hand to the storm of waving kerchiefs and the thunder-crash of applause that greeted me!” (Twain, Connecticut Yankee, 224) This victory, however, is thwarted—and the spectacular climax of the show predictably postponed—by Merlin’s surreptitious theft of Morgan’s lasso. Sir Sagramour, seeking revenge for his humiliating degradation, confronts the Yankee with a sword from which he knows he cannot escape. It is at this point, when the entire Arthurian world is bearing witness, with bated breath, to an unarmed man about to die a bloody death and to Merlin’s triumphant gloating—“this man is a pretender, and ignorant” (225)—that the Connecticut Yankee, always aware of the last trump card, resorts to his technological American “magic”: the awesome firepower of the Colt revolvers he had hidden in his holster. I quote at length to convey in detail the exaggerated western-style humor (including the cosmic boasting) that Morgan/Twain employs to articulate the mythical scope of the event, the technological “shock and awe” that is their medium of conquest and conversion, and the callous indifference to the dreadful character of the violence of this kind of sudden bloodless death of which the logic of the exceptional American technological spectacle is capable:

“Fly, fly! Save thyself! This is murther!” [people shout to Morgan]

I never budged so much as an inch, till that thundering apparition [Sir
Sagramour] had got within fifteen paces of me; then I snatched a dragoon revolver out of my holster, there was a flash and a roar, and the revolver was back in my holster before anybody could tell what had happened.

Here was a riderless horse plunging by, and yonder lay Sir Sagramour, stone dead.

The people that ran to him were stricken dumb to find that the life was actually gone out of the man and no reason for it visible, no hurt upon his body, nothing like a wound. There was a hole through the breast of his chain-mail, but they attached no importance to a little thing like that; and as a bullet-wound there produces but little blood, none came in sight because of the clothing and swaddling under the armor. The body was dragged over to let the king and the swells look down upon it. They were stupefied with astonishment, naturally. I was requested to come and explain the miracle. But I remained in my tracks, like a statue, and said:

“If it is a command, I will come, but my lord the king knows that I am where the laws of combat require me to remain while any desire to come against me.”

I waited. Nobody challenged. Then I said:

“If there are any who doubt that this field is well and fairly won, I do not wait for them to challenge me, I challenge them.” (Twain, Connecticut Yankee, 226)

But it is not simply the dehumanized indifference to gratuitous death as such that the “western humor”—the exceptionalist American technological spectacle—of this triumphant climactic moment discloses. *It is also the even more awful undiscriminating quantity of death it is capable of achieving in the name of amelioration.* Responding to the king’s chiding at their hesitation to accept Morgan’s boasting challenge to take on the “chivalry of England,” “not by individuals, but in mass,” the knights mount an attack on the apparently unarmed man. Of this scene of terrific persuasion, the Connecticut Yankee reminiscent of the Davy Crockett figure of American myth (and anticipating the Hollywood western) writes:

I snatched both revolvers from the holsters and began to measure distances and calculate chances.

Bang! One saddle empty. Bang! Another one. Bang—bang! And I bagged two. Well it was nip and tuck with us, and I knew it. If I spent the eleventh shot without convincing these people, the twelfth man would kill me, sure.
And so I never did feel so happy as I did when my ninth downed its man and I detected the wavering in the crowd which is premonitory of panic. An instant lost now could knock out my last chance. But I didn’t lose it. I raised both revolvers and pointed them—the halted host stood their ground just about one good square moment, then broke and fled.

The day was mine. Knight-errantry was a doomed institution. The march of civilization was begun. How did I feel? Ah you never could imagine it.

And Brer Merlin? His stock was flat again. Somehow, every time the magic of fol-de-rol tried conclusions with the magic of science, the magic of fol-de-rol got left. (Twain, Connecticut Yankee, 227)

The Battle of the Sand Belt: The Fulfillment of the Logic of American Exceptionalism

To summarize, I have shown that Hank Morgan’s mission in sixth-century Arthurian England is unerringly driven by the logic of American exceptionalism; in other words, that it is a relentlessly forwarding vocation, a manifestly destined “march” undertaken in subservient response to a naturalized supernatural call (American “civilization”) to fulfill its errand in the feudal wilderness even, as in the case of the Exodus Jews in the “wilderness” of Canaan, at the expense of any obstacle that stands in the righteous way. I have also shown that Morgan’s medium for fulfilling his errand is, like Twain’s, consistently his (unquestioning) knowledge of nineteenth-century science/technology harnessed to western humor understood as the hyperbolic “tall tale,” in which violence is routinized to simulacrum. Given this context, I can now address the difficult question of the Battle of the Sand Belt, the allegedly shocking contradiction of which, it will be recalled, compelled the second phase of Americanists, epitomized by Henry Nash Smith, to read A Connecticut Yankee as “a crisis in Mark Twain’s thought and feeling about progress, a crisis so severe that it led to an almost complete loss of control over his materials,” and the third-phase Americanists, epitomized by John Carlos Rowe, to read the novel as Twain’s satire of Morgan’s imperialist penchant.

After his epochal defeat of knight errantry and his triumph over Merlin’s “black arts” at the tournament, Morgan, no longer “obliged to work in secret,” exposes his “hidden schools, mines, and vast system of clandestine factories and workshops to an astonished world” (Twain, Connecticut Yankee, 227). And, during the peace of the next three years, he is enabled to enact much of the
groundwork for the fulfillment of his two-fold project—the overthrow of the Catholic Church and establishment of “the Protestant faith on its ruins” and “to get a decree issued . . . commanding that upon Arthur’s death unlimited suffrage should be introduced” (229); that is, to introduce a term that has become endemic to the American exceptionalist errand in the world’s wilderness in the wake of 9/11, to enable a “regime change.” At the end of this period, “Slavery was dead and gone; all men were equal before the law; taxation had been equalized. The telegraph, the telephone, the phonograph, the typewriter, the sewing machine, and all the thousand willing and handy servants of steam and electricity were working their way into favor” (228). England, that is, had become a nascent capitalist consumer society committed to the free market. And, in keeping with the nineteenth-century American will to globalize its benign economic reach (I am referring to the example of the United States’ deliberate expansion into the Pacific following the closing of the frontier),27 the Yankee has established a fleet of modern warships and merchant ships in preparation for the discovery of America: “We had a steamboat or two on the Thames, we had steam war-ships, and the beginning of a steam commercial marine; I was getting ready to send out an expedition to discover America” (228).

The Yankee’s momentous worldly initiative, however, is halted when his baby daughter, Hello-Central (we are told parenthetically but tellingly that he has married Sandy to avoid compromising her), becomes ill and he must, given his (bourgeois) domestic impulses, take her to France for a cure. This gesture of errancy (and convenient structuring)—this digression from the (teleo)logic of his vocation—is fatal to Morgan’s errand. When he returns clandestinely to England, he finds it in darkness—the enlightenment he had brought to a benighted land, symbolized by the electric light system he had instituted in Camelot (“the most like a recumbent sun of anything you ever saw”; Twain, Connecticut Yankee, 235), has been blotted out. He learns from Clarence not only that “it was the Church that sent you cruising—through her servants the doctors” (242) but also that civil war had broken out among the nobility over Sir Launcelot’s manipulation of the stock market, that it had ended in the death of King Arthur, and that these recidivist conditions had enabled his archenemy the Church (the theological justification of the feudal system) to place the nation under its Interdict and to initiate a unified strike against his “secular” revolution. It is at this point that the latent and forwarding logic of the Yankees’ American exceptionalist ethos is pushed to the point of its “ful-
fillment." What follows, it must be admitted, is clumsily articulated. One gets the distinct impression that Twain, too impatient to work out the narrative's tensions systematically, rushed the denouement. (This is especially true of the "Postscript by Clarence" and the "Final P. S. by M. T.") But this failure, as I have been arguing, is a failure of aesthetic strucutation, not of the determining (ideo)logic of the narrative. The concluding act of Morgan's progress—of his errand—is a necessary consequence of the unerring and spectacular logic of his American exceptionalism.

This conclusion, it will be recalled, begins after Clarence has informed the Yankee, newly returned from France, of the Church's Interdict and its impending counterstrike against his "revolution." Curiously, it is initiated not by the Yankee but by Clarence, a member of the people it is his purpose to "free" from the degrading bondage of feudalism. After presenting Morgan with an apparently hopeless situation, he reveals his plan, worked out with fifty-two of the remaining faithful while his master is away in France, to defeat the Church and its army of nobility by using the awesome technological killing power the Yankee's exceptionalist scientific knowledge has made available to the progressive forces of feudal England. But Clarence's apparent alacrity to use these nineteenth-century weapons of mass destruction against his own people is not an anomaly. It is in fact the exceptionalist society's essential ideological means of justifying the validity of the violence—or rather of disavowing its horror—enacted in the name of its benign exceptionalism. This becomes clear if we see Clarence in the light of Twain's representation of the black man Jim's response to Tom Sawyer's elaborate staging of his "rescue" from slavery (quoted earlier) and read the plan of attack he outlines to Morgan in the light of Edward Said's enabling contrapuntal reading of Rudyard Kipling's representation of the "Great Mutiny" of 1857 in India in *Kim*:

In such a situation of nationalist and self-justifying inflammation, to be an Indian would have meant to feel natural solidarity with the victims of British reprisals. . . . For an Indian, not to have those feelings would have been to belong to a very small minority. It is therefore highly significant that Kipling's choice of an Indian to speak about the Mutiny is a loyalist soldier who views his countrymen's revolt as an act of madness . . .

*A madness ate into the Army, and they turned against their officers. That was the first evil, but not past remedy if they had then held their hands. But they chose to kill*
Clarence, in short, as the long exchange between him and his boss amply verifies in rendering his plan of attack superior to the initial doubts of his boss, is Twain's late avatar of Robinson Crusoe's “man Friday” or, even more to the point, of James Fenimore Cooper’s exemplary “good Indian,” Chingachgook, and his plan a ventriloquization of the Yankee’s exceptionalist logic that enables the effacement of its horrific negative practical consequences or, rather, their acceptance as a positively benign dispensation.

But Clarence’s puppetry is not restricted to his mimicking of his master’s practical Yankee intelligence; more tellingly, it also includes his (and Twain’s) hyperbolic western humor, as in the following dialogue that brings the information session between master and ephebe to its chillingly violent conclusion:

“Well, go on. The gatlings.”

“Yes—that’s arranged. In the centre of the inner circle, on a spacious platform six feet high. I’ve grouped a battery of thirteen gatling guns, and provided plenty of ammunition.”

“That’s it. They command every approach, and when the Church’s knights arrive, there’s going to be music. The brow of the precipice over the cave—”

“I’ve got a wire fence there, and a gatling. They won’t drop any rocks down on us.”

“Well, and the glass-cylinder dynamite torpedoes?”

“That’s attended to. It’s the prettiest garden that was ever planted. It’s a belt forty feet wide, and goes around the outer fence—distance between it and the fence one hundred yards—kind of neutral ground, that space. There isn’t a single square yard of that whole belt but is equipped with a torpedo. We laid them on the surface of the ground, and sprinkled a layer of sand over them. It’s an innocent looking garden, but you let a man start in to hoe it once, and you’ll see.”

“You tested the torpedoes?”

“Well, I was going to, but—”

“But what? Why, it’s an immense oversight not to apply a—”

“Test? Yes, I know; but they’re all right; I laid a few in a the pubic road beyond our lines and they’ve been tested.”

“Oh, that alters the case. Who did it?”
“A Church committee.”
“How kind!”
“Yes. They came to command us to make submission. You see they didn’t really come to test the torpedoes; that was merely an incident.”
“Did the committee make a report?”
“Yes, they made one. You could have heard it a mile.”
“Unanimous?”
“That was the nature of it.” (Twain, *Connecticut Yankee*, 244–245)

It is in the immediate wake of this exceptionalist sanctioned “unanimous report” that the Connecticut Yankee, rejecting Clarence’s strategic recommendation to “sit down and wait” (Twain, *Connecticut Yankee*, 245), decides to take the offensive against the Church and its superstitions and the domineering English nobility. Following the inexorable imperatives of his benign American exceptionalist logic, the “Yankee of Yankees” not only repeats the central forwarding gesture of the American exceptionalist past (from the Puritan errand to Manifest Destiny); he also, more importantly, projects it proleptically into the American future. He commits his advanced New World technological knowledge (his “expertise”) to what can only be called a “preemptive war” against a primitive regime—a regime that is impeding the “march” of History—to compel a “regime change” justified by his transcendentally ordained and therefore unshakable belief in the absolute benignity of the cause and the absolute necessity of its fulfillment, and accomplished by installing a puppet government and the unleashing of the “shock and awe” tactics of his superior “magic,” the scientific knowledge and the massive, spectacular killing power that is its signature:

“No, sir! Rise up and strike!”
“Do you mean it?”
“Yes, indeed! The defensive isn’t in my line, and the offensive is. That is, when I hold a fair hand—two-thirds as good a hand as the enemy. Oh, yes, we’ll rise up and strike; that’s our game.”
“A hundred to one, you are right. When does the performance begin?”
“Now! We’ll proclaim the Republic.”
“Well, that will precipitate things, sure enough!”
“It will make them buzz, I tell you! England will be a hornet’s nest before noon to-morrow, if the Church’s hand hasn’t lost its cunning—and we know it hasn’t. Now you write and I’ll dictate—thus:
PROCLAMATION

BE IT KNOWN UNTO ALL. Whereas the king having died and left no heir, it becomes my duty to continue the executive authority vested in me, until a government shall have been created and set in motion. The monarchy has lapsed, it no longer exists. By consequence, all political power has reverted to its original source, the people of the nation. With the monarchy, its several adjuncts died also; wherefore there is no longer a nobility, no longer a privileged class, no longer an established Church; all men are become exactly equal, they are upon one common level, and religion is free. A Republic is hereby proclaimed, as being the natural estate of a nation when other authority has ceased. It is the duty of the British people to meet together immediately, and by their vote select representatives and deliver into their hands the government.

I signed it “The Boss,” and dated it from Merlin’s Cave. (Twain, Connecticut Yankee, 245)

Understood in the light of its American exceptionalist origins, the “republic” that the Yankee envisions cannot be seen otherwise, despite the appeal to the sovereignty of “the people of the nation,” than as a state that, in its exceptionalist logic of belonging, must inevitably become a national security state, a state, as Twain’s contemporary Herman Melville anticipated in Billy Budd, Sailor,30 in which the state of exception (and the spectacle) becomes the rule, meaning a state in which politics becomes biopolitics and humanity becomes, in Foucault’s terms, “docile and useful bodies.”31 Indeed, what is uncanny about Twain’s novel is that “the Yankee of Yankee’s” errand in the feudal wilderness on behalf of turning “animals” into a nation of “Men” not only repeats Giorgio Agamben’s genealogy of the Western political understanding of humanity embodied in the ironic concept of homo sacer, under the aegis of which bios (political life) becomes zoe (bare life), life that can be killed without killing being called murder:

What defines the status of homo sacer is not the originary ambivalence of the sacredness that is assumed to belong to him, but rather both the particular character of the double exclusion into which he is taken and the violence to which he finds himself exposed. This violence—the unsanctified killing that, in his case, anyone may commit—is classifiable neither as sacrifice nor as homicide, neither as the execution of a condemnation to death nor as sacrilege.
Subtracting itself from the sanctioned forms of both human and divine law, this violence opens a sphere of human action that is neither the sphere of *sacrum facere* nor that of profane action. This sphere is precisely what we are trying to understand.

We have already encountered a limit sphere of human action that is only ever maintained in a relation of exception. This sphere is that of the sovereign decision, which suspends law in the state of exception and thus implicates bare life within it. We must therefore ask ourselves if the structure of sovereignty and the structure of *sacratio* might be connected, and if they might from this perspective, be shown to illuminate each other. We may even then advance a hypothesis: once brought back to his proper place beyond both penal law and sacrifice, *homo sacer* presents the originary figure of life taken into the sovereign ban and preserves the memory of the originary exclusion through which the political dimension was first constituted. The political sphere of sovereignty was thus constituted through a double exclusion, as an excrescence of the profane in the religious and of the religious in the profane, which takes the form of a zone of indistinction between sacrifice and homicide. The *sovereign sphere is the sphere in which it is permitted to kill without committing homicide and without celebrating a sacrifice, and sacred life—that is, life that may be killed but not sacrificed—is the life that has been captured in this spheres.*

Even more telling, as I will show more fully in the final chapter, Morgan’s sovereign errand also prefigures the fulfillment of the logic of this genealogy of bare life as Agamben, following Hannah Arendt and Michel Foucault, articulates it in his chilling diagnosis of post–World War II thanatopolitics, in which American-style democracy (under the aegis of the exceptionalist *Pax Americana*) and totalitarianism lose their distinction and converge in the image of the “concentration camp”:

Hannah Arendt once observed that in the camps, the principle that supports totalitarian rule and that common sense obstinately refuses to admit comes fully to light: this is the principle according to which “everything is possible.” Only because the camps constitute a space of exception . . . —in which not only is law completely suspended but fact and law are completely confused—is everything in the camps truly possible. If this particular juridico-political structure of the camps—the task of which is precisely to create a stable exception—is not understood, the incredible things that happened there remain completely unintelligible. *Whoever entered the camp moved in a zone*
of indistinction between outside and inside, exception and rule, licit and illicit, in which the very concept of subjective right and juridical protection no longer made any sense. . . . Insofar as its inhabitants were stripped of every political status and wholly reduced to bare life, the camp was also the most absolute biopolitical space ever to have been realized, in which power confronts nothing but pure life, without mediation. This is why the camp is the very paradigm of political space at the point at which politics becomes biopolitics and homo sacer is virtually confused with the citizen. The correct question to pose concerning the horrors committed in the camps is, therefore, not the hypocritical one of how crimes of such atrocity could be committed against human beings [This is addressed to the self-righteous liberal proponents of Western-style “democracies.”] It would be more honest and, above all, more useful to investigate carefully the juridical procedures and deployments of power by which human beings could be so completely deprived of their rights and prerogatives that no act committed against them could appear any longer as a crime. (Agamben, Homo Sacer, 171–172; my emphasis)

This metamorphosis of the exceptionalist state into a state in which the exception necessarily becomes the rule is enacted explicitly and systematically—and in the same spectacular style as the Yankee’s encounter with Sir Sagramour and the British nobility at the tournament—in the process of the genocidal Battle of the Sand Belt, which follows Morgan’s declaration to pursue his “offensive game,” though, of course, Morgan (and his author) is blinded by his benign American exceptionalist oversight to the horrific consequences of his technological magic.

Prior to the battle, Morgan learns, all too suddenly and in rapid succession, that the “people” on whom he has counted for support in establishing the republic have been cowed by “the Church, the nobles, and the gentry” (Twain, Connecticut Yankee, 247) back into the fold in the name of “the righteous cause” and, to make matters worse, that his fifty-two young English followers, conscious now that “All England is marching against us” (247), are wavering in their loyalty to him: “These people are our people, they are bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, we love them—do not ask us to destroy our nation!” (248) Certain of the absolute validity of his vocation (like his Puritan ancestors), the Yankee, however, is not swayed from his epochal ameliorative purpose. In response to these unforeseen obstacles that have gotten in the way of the fulfillment of his errand, he explains to the boys that it is not “the people”
that they will be killing but the tyrannical priests and the nobility: “They are 30,000 strong. Acres deep, they will march. Now, observe: none but they will ever strike the [mined and electrified] sand belt! There will be an episode! Immediately after, the civilian multitude in the rear will retire, to meet business engagements elsewhere. None but nobles and gentry are knights, and none but these will remain to dance to our music after that episode.”” (248) And the boys, of course, are “convinced.”

Following this additional example of patent authorial ventriloquy, Morgan, utilizing the exceptionalist “shock and awe” tactics that had won him his victories over Merlin's Old World magic and his bosshood of England (and the analogous narrative strategy of staging for epic effect), unleashes the killing power of his technological weapons of mass destruction against the (unsuspecting and inadequately equipped) resistant English nobility. This mass high-tech slaughter of the unknowing helpless in the Battle of the Sand Belt that ensues is perpetrated in two increasingly cruel shocking and awing stages. In the first, the Yankee ignites the dynamite that had been planted in front of the cave by the fifty-two defenders as the attacking British host is advancing en masse. I quote at length to underscore the continuity between Hank Morgan’s American exceptionalism at the beginning of his narrative and his exceptionalism at the end of it, and to show that this undeviating continuity also manifests itself in a melodramatic rhetoric (reminiscent of the hyperbole of western humor) that is indifferent to the horrific violence he perpetrates in the name of its self-righteous logic:

At last we could make out the details. All the front ranks, no telling how many acres deep, were horsemen—plumed knights in armor. Suddenly we heard the blare of trumpets, the slow walk burst into a gallop, and then—well, it was wonderful to see! Down swept that vast horseshoe wave—it approached the sand-belt—my breath stood still; nearer, nearer—the strip of green turf beyond the yellow belt grew narrow—narrower still—became a mere ribbon in front of the horses—then disappeared under their hoofs. Great Scott!! Why, the whole front of that host shot into the sky with a thunder-crash, and became a whirling tempest of rage and fragments; and along the ground lay a thick wall of smoke that hid what was left of the multitude from our sight!

Time for the second step in the plan of campaign! I touched a button, and shook the bones of England loose from their spine!

In that explosion all our noble civilization-factories went up in the air and
disappeared from the earth. It was a pity, but it was necessary. We could not afford to let the enemy turn our own weapons against us.

Now ensued one of the dullest quarter-hours I had ever endured. We waited in a silent solitude enclosed by our circles of wire, and by a circle of heavy smoke outside of these. We couldn’t see over the wall of smoke, and we couldn’t see through it. But at last it began to shred away lazily, and by the end of another quarter-hour the land was clear and our curiosity was enabled to satisfy itself. No living creature was in sight! We now perceived that additions had been made to our defences. The dynamite had dug up an embankment some twenty-five feet high on both borders of it. As to destruction of life, it was amazing. Moreover, it was beyond estimate. Of course we could not count the dead, because they did not exist as individuals, but merely as homogeneous protoplasm, with alloys of iron and buttons. (Twain, *Connecticut Yankee*, 249)

Morgan unleashes the second, even more spectacular—and horrific—stage of the Battle of the Sand Belt when, after the British nobility has refused his ultimatum to “surrender unconditionally to the Republic,” his man Clarence has “persuaded” him, against his “mistimed sentimentalities” (Twain, *Connecticut Yankee*, 251), that the British nobility would call for the dismemberment of the “animal” who brought the proposal and have him sent back in a basket to the “base-born knave who sent him” (251). Justified by the enemy’s arrogant obtuseness, he repeatedly and systematically sends electric charges through row after row of the wired fences fronting the cave, instantly executing all those coming into contact with them. Then, believing “the time was come, now, for the climax” (254), he springs his preconceived shock-and-awe denouement, which, however he understands it, can only be characterized as cold-blooded genocide:

So I touched a button and set fifty electric suns aflame on the top of our precipice. Land, what a sight! We were enclosed in three walls of dead men! All the fences were pretty nearly filled with the living, who were stealthily working their way forward through the wires. The sudden glare paralyzed this host, petrified them, you may say, with astonishment; there was just one instance for me to utilize their immobility in, and I didn’t lose the chance . . . while even that slight fragment of time was still unspent, I shot the current through all the fences and struck the whole host dead in their tracks! There was a groan you could hear! It voiced the death-pang of eleven thousand men. It swelled out on the night with awful pathos.
A glance showed that the rest of the enemy—perhaps ten thousand strong—were between us and the encircling ditch, and pressing forward to the assault. Consequently we had them all! and had them past help. Time for the last act of the tragedy. I fired the three appointed revolvers—which meant:

“Turn on the water!”

There was a sudden rush and roar, and in a minute the mountain brook was raging through the big ditch and creating a river a hundred feet wide and twenty-five deep.

“Stand to your guns, men! Open fire!”

The thirteen Gatling guns began to vomit death into the fated ten thousand. They halted, they stood their ground a moment against that withering deluge of fire, then they broke, faced about and swept toward the ditch like chaff before a gale. A full fourth part of their force never reached the top of the lofty embankment; the three-fourths reached it and plunged over—to death by drowning.

Within ten short minutes after we had opened fire, armed resistance was totally annihilated, the campaign was ended, we fifty-two were masters of England! Twenty-five thousand men lay dead around us. (Twain, Connecticut Yankee, 225; first emphasis is mine)

A hasty reading of Mark Twain’s unusual sympathy, both in his letters to William Dean Howells and in A Connecticut Yankee, with the “infamous” French “Reign of Terror” (referred to earlier) might tempt a reader of these exclamations to the surprising conclusion that, far from being antirevolutionary, as I am claiming, he is anticipating Walter Benjamin’s radical defense of “divine” or “pure” violence in “The Critique of Violence”: that “law-annihilating” violence against the state that will not tolerate a violence outside the law, and, in thus enacting this “pure violence”—a violence that is a means without end (i.e., nonvocational)—inaugurates a new revolutionary era. For convenience, I quote Giorgio Agamben’s succinct analysis of Benjamin’s term:

The aim of the essay is to ensure the possibility of a violence . . . that lies absolutely “outside” . . . and “beyond” . . . the law and that, as such, could shatter the dialectic between lawmaking violence and law-preserving violence. Benjamin calls this other figure of violence “pure” . . . or “divine,” and in the human sphere, “revolutionary.” What the law can never tolerate—what it feels as a threat with which it is impossible to come to terms—is the existence of a violence outside the law, and this is not because the ends of such violence are
incompatible with the law, but because of “its mere existence outside the law.”

. . . The task of Benjamin’s critique is to prove the reality of such a violence: “If

violence is also assured a reality outside the law, as pure immediate violence,

this furnished proof that revolutionary violence—which is the name for the

highest manifestation of pure violence by man—is also possible.” The proper

characteristic of this violence is that it neither makes nor preserves law, but

deposes it . . . and thus inaugurates a new historical epoch. 35

Despite the apparent resemblance, Morgan's/Twain's arresting sympathy with

the French “Reign of Terror” should not, however, be interpreted as an an-

ticipation of Benjamin's truly revolutionary “pure” or “divine” violence. There

are at least two reasons for this. The first is textual. Earlier during his journey

with Sandy, when Morgan encounters another instance of abjectness in the

“down-trodden people of Arthurian England, he rejects the way of a “Reign of

Terror” in the very process of invoking it as the only means of accomplishing

a revolution:

I rather wished I had gone some other road. This [the spectacle of “resignation,

dumb uncomplaining acceptance of whatever might befall them in this

life”] was not the sort of experience for a statesman to encounter who was

planning out a peaceful revolution in his mind. For it could not help bringing

up the un-get-aroundable fact that, all gentle cant and philosophizing to

the contrary notwithstanding, 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. If history teaches anything, it teaches that. What this folk needed,

then, was a Reign of Terror and a guillotine, and I was the wrong man for them.

(Twain, Connecticut Yankee, 101; my emphasis)

The second reason is theoretical. Morgan understands his “Reign of Terror” as

a means toward an end, not as a matter of “pure” violence. It thus would replace

the violence of the law it opposes with the violence of its own law, leaving

the violence of the law intact. Put alternatively—in a way not incidentally

that Herman Melville anticipates in his novella about the state of exception,

Billy Budd, the Connecticut Yankee's commitment to the exceptionalist state

reproduces the state of exception. 36

If, to return to the Connecticut Yankee’s response to this last climactic use

of shock-and-awe violence, one reads his hyperbolic triumphantist exclamations
in the light of the imperatives of his American exceptionalist logic, one cannot help hearing in them not only a nineteenth-century millenarian echo of the exalted response of the American Puritans to their Old Testament God’s ferocious exhortation to His chosen (covenantal) people in the New World wilderness—“But thou shalt utterly destroy them; the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, as the Lord thy God hath commanded thee: that they teach you not to do after all their abominations” (Deuteronomy 20:17–18)—but also a modern secularized (indeed, biopoliticized) version of this American exceptionalist vocational imperative. This latter is exemplified by a military officer during the Vietnam War, who, in response to a reporter’s astonishment at the inordinate degree of carnage the high-tech firepower of the American military machine had achieved in the area—and speaking the Word of the “[American] Mission” in the Vietnam wilderness—replied: “We had to destroy Ben Tre in order to save it.”

Indeed, if one is attuned to the indissoluble relation in Twain’s mind between American exceptionalism and the hyperbolic western humor with which, as we have seen, he expresses its imperatives, it would not be an exaggeration to conclude that the itinerary of Hank Morgan’s errand in the Arthurian wilderness is mirrored by the historical itinerary of American exceptionalism itself: the history, that is, that, in the process of its fulfillment, self-destructs. To put it synecdochically, I mean the increasingly ironic counterhistory of America inaugurated by Herman Melville, which begins with the “tragedy” of Captain Ahab’s exceptionalist “fiery pursuit” of the white whale; has its developed middle in Melville’s satirical portrait of the larger-than-life “Indian-hater par excellence,” whose excess in the pursuit of his vocation borders on the comical; and its end in Stanley Kubrick’s chillingly farcical portrait, in Dr. Strangelove, of the Morgan-like American Air Force officer (played by Slim Pickens), who, attired in his cowboy outfit and riding astride the atomic bomb as if it were a galloping horse, is at the end of the film triumphantly closing in on the Soviet Union to stage the ultimate shock-and-awe effect—and with this spectacular scientific magic, to announce the apocalypse.

Hank Morgan’s “Tragic” Flaw: “As Mistimed Sentimentality”

Despite the triumphal tone of his account of the climactic Battle of the Sand Belt, however, the Connecticut Yankee’s narrative does not, of course, end in
triumph, but in sudden unexpected and mysterious defeat. In the concluding paragraph of his manuscript, which follows immediately after his exclamation that “we fifty-four were masters of England!” he writes: “But how treacherous is fortune! In a little while—say in an hour—happened a thing by my own fault, which—but I have no heart to write that. Let the record end here” (Twain, Connecticut Yankee, 255). What follows is “A Postscript by Clarence” recording what the Boss in his final despair could not bring himself to write. This appended “conclusion” of the narrative has been interpreted by the second phase of Connecticut Yankee Americanist critics as further evidence of Mark Twain’s loss of imaginative control of his protagonist (or as symptomatic of his need to kill his scientific/businessman alter ego) and by the third-phase critics, when they have deigned to address the “Postscript” at all, as evidence that Twain was satirizing the United States’ obsession with technological progress and/or its imperialist pretensions. If, however, one attends, as I have, to the undeviating rigor with which Morgan has applied the logic of his American exceptionalist ethos against his remaining “misguided sentimentalities” (251) from the beginning of his sojourn in England to the aftermath of the Battle of the Sand Belt, it will be seen that his “defeat” is not illogical but inevitable. More precisely, it will be seen that it is neither the abortive result of a growing recognition on Twain’s part that his protagonist’s American republicanism is in fact a contradictory totalitarianism, as the second-phase Americanists conclude, nor Twain’s consistently satirical judgment against his protagonist’s “imperial” or “neo-imperialist” project. It will be realized, rather, that the defeat is the consequence of the Connecticut Yankee’s “tragic” failure in the last instance to live up to the demandingly rigorous logic of his American exceptionalism—the unwanted, because they are impractical and unproductive, promptings of his vestigial “humanity.” This disturbing conclusion is signaled not only by the Yankee’s casual but, from a contrapuntal perspective, highly significant reference to his ultimatum to the British nobility offering them amnesty as an instance of the “misguided sentimentalities” to which he has granted “a permanent rest” (251) but also, and even more resonantly, in the last paragraph of his manuscript (quoted earlier), where he attributes the sudden misfortune he cannot write about to “my own fault.” Immediately after the spectacular slaughter of the Battle of the Sand Belt, Clarence tells the reader that Morgan, against his “strenuous” advice, “proposed that we go out and see if any help could be afforded the wounded.” This gesture of humanity—or rather, this sentimental betrayal of the inexorable logic of the exceptionalist
errand—instigates a rapid succession of disastrous events. The first wounded knight Morgan would succor “perfidiously” stabs him; then, when Clarence brings him back to the cave to be nursed back to health, he takes into the household an “old peasant goodwife” claiming to be in desperate need, who turns out to be Merlin in disguise. This last “misguided” humane gesture, which is again to say this recidivist departure from the inexorable imperatives of the exceptionalist vocation, or, to recall his own analogous original language, from his American practicality—“I am an American. I was born and reared in Hartford, in the State of Connecticut. . . . So I am a Yankee of the Yankees—and practical; yes, and nearly barren of sentiments, I suppose—or poetry, in other words”—ends in catastrophe, as Morgan’s man Clarence, stressing this fatal deviating sentimentality, dolefully recounts:

We were glad to have this woman, for we were short handed. We were in a trap, you see—a trap of our own making. If we stayed where we were our dead would kill us; if we moved out of our defenses, we should no longer be invincible. We had conquered; in turn we were conquered. The Boss recognized this; we all recognized it. If we could go to one of those camps and patch up some kind of terms with the enemy—yes, but the Boss could not go, and neither could I, for I was among the first that were made sick by the poisonous air bred by those dead thousands. Others were taken down, and still others. To-morrow—(Twain, Connecticut Yankee, 256)

On the arrival of this tomorrow, Clarence wakes to see the old hag “making curious passes in the air about the Boss’s head.” When he calls on her to desist, she responds, echoing Clarence in reverse, with a triumphant “accent of malicious satisfaction”: “Ye were conquerors; ye are conquered! These others are perishing—you also. Ye shall all die in this place—every one—except him. He sleepeith, now—and shall sleep thirteen centuries. I am Merlin” (Twain, Connecticut Yankee, 256). And then, in high melodramatic fashion, as Merlin “reeled about like a drunken man” in a “delirium of silly laughter,” he electrocuted himself against a live wire, but paradoxically, with the laugh preserved in death: “His mouth is spread open yet; apparently he is still laughing. I suppose the face will retain the petrified laugh until the corpse turns to dust” (256).

Clarence’s concluding words have been taken by at least one critic of the second phase of Connecticut Yankee criticism to imply that in the end Merlin’s magic, understood now as a symbol of the “poesis” that the “Yankee of the
Yankees” admittedly lacks, triumphs paradoxically over the practical/scientific perspective he brings to his vocation:

The book [A Connecticut Yankee] could not prevent the disasters [“toward which the machine obsession was tending”] it could only prepare for them, but in its way it represented a victory of the writer over the businessman. In viewing that victory one is almost led to believe that Merlin, who has been crossed, belittled and ridiculed by the Yankee throughout the book, is—as he was for so many writers during the nineteenth century—the prototype of the artist who emerged from humiliation and shame to exercise his magic power at the last.38

But, as I have shown, such a comforting Old Americanist reading is the contradictory result of a desire: a deeply inscribed wishful (exceptionalist) thinking that, in the face of contrary (and discomposing) external and internal evidence, would protect an innocent “Mark Twain” from the “absurd” charge that his wild-western-style comedy about an American’s—“a Yankee of the Yankees”—effort to “Americanize” the Old World is informed by a “benign” promise/fulfillment logic that eventually self-destructs. I mean, in the post-poststructuralist language that has enabled my contrapuntal voice, a narrative that, in the name of the self-reliant practical man (homo faber, in Hannah Arendt’s apt term), ends (comes to its structural fulfillment) in the atrophy of sentiment/poetry/humanity/politics (bios)—the reduction of human life to (ungrievable) bare life (zoé)—and thus in genocide: mass killing without being named homicide. This is the starkly horrific reality that the discourse of American exceptionalism has perennially disavowed from the Puritans’ murderous errand in the New World “wilderness” in the name of rationalizing God’s creation to the George W. Bush administration’s murderous post-9/11 errand in the global “wilderness” in the name of the political theology of the Pax Americana. It is also the starkly horrific reality that the Old Americanist criticism and commentary on Twain’s A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court has almost paranoidically repressed in the name of its celebration of Mark Twain as the quintessential American writer.

Following his first defeat of Merlin by using his shock-and-awing scientific knowledge about the eclipse of the sun, the Connecticut Yankee not only boasts the spectacular New World achievements he has accomplished in the Old World during his first four years as “the Boss” but also anticipates the promise—the glorious future—of his democratizing/modernizing errand
in feudal England. In doing so, it will be recalled, he justifies his aggressive, practice-oriented methods of ameliorative enlightenment by asserting all too casually—as if it were an obvious truth—that “unlimited power is the ideal thing when it is in safe hands” (Twain, Connecticut Yankee, 51; second emphasis mine). What one learns from reading Mark Twain’s novel as a narrative about American exceptionalism is that this apparent “truth” is in fact the hegemonic (or “common sense,” in Gramsci’s sense of the phrase) meaning of the Yankee’s mythic American exceptionalist ethos. In other words, one learns that Morgan’s glib truth is a self-deceptive national fiction that enables the covenantal people to disavow the violence of the practices that its assumed exceptionalism demands and justifies. In the end, “the unlimited power” in the Connecticut Yankee’s “safe hands” not only destroys “knight errantry” in the name of American-style enlightenment but destroys the humanity that practices its “superstitions.” In this, Morgan’s benign errand not only repeats the history of exceptionalist America prior to Twain’s occasion but is also, despite increasingly incremental disclosures of the mythic character of the American exceptionalist ethos since the end of the nineteenth century, remarkably proleptic of America’s future in the age of globalization. That this paradox of “the safe hands” continues to be the case is repeatedly borne witness to by the massively annihilating firebombing of Dresden and the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in World War II, the destruction of Vietnam during the Vietnam War, and the devastation of Iraq and Afghanistan following September 11, 2001—all undertaken in the name of America’s benign errand in the world’s wilderness and justified by the assumption that “unlimited power is the ideal when it is in safe hands.” In the end, American-style enlightenment, understood as Morgan and Twain do, becomes an agency of the magical enchantment it would dis-enchant. Or, in Horkheimer and Adorno’s appropriate terms, American-style enlightenment becomes a spectacle-oriented totalitarianism.

Coda

The second addendum of A Connecticut Yankee, “Final P. S. by M. T.,” has also been interpreted by many of the second-phase critics as exemplary of Twain’s loss of imaginative control over his protagonist or, by the third-phase critics, as evidence of Twain’s inaugural satirical intent concerning Morgan’s technoscientific republican/neo-imperial project. Representing the second-phase critics, Henry Nash Smith, for example, writes:
Yet if Hank Morgan’s story can be read as a parable dealing with the same historical subject as *The Education of Henry Adams* [the incompatibility of the frontier thesis (the American Adam) and the later scientific/technological/republican American world] his defeat is also due to a conflict within Mark Twain’s mind between a conscious endorsement of progress and a latent revulsion against the non-human imperatives of the machine and all it stood for in the way of discipline and organization. . . . But his latent hostility to machines and technological progress was unusually strong. Even though he disclaimed exact fidelity to history, his choice of medieval Britain as the setting for his fable meant that he could not hope to represent the Yankee’s undertaking as permanently successful. Mark Twain may not have realized fully at the outset what the implications of this decision were, but they must have been present in his mind in some fashion. Let me mention again evidences in the story itself that he felt a nostalgia for a half-remembered, half-imagined preindustrial world: the images associated with his uncle’s farm near Hannibal that crop up so vividly in his descriptions of landscapes in Arthurian Britain; the hints that the Yankee’s industrial system is a potential menace; the consistently destructive effects of technology in the story; and above all the strange ending of the framework narrative, in which the dying Yankee proclaims himself to be “a stranger and forlorn” in the modern world, “with an abyss of thirteen centuries yawning . . . between and all that was dear to me, all that could make life worth the living!”

Read in the light shed by attending (as Smith strangely does not) to the un-deviating exceptionalist logic informing Hank Morgan’s New World vocation in the Old World, however, this “Post Script,” in which “M. T.” records the Connecticut Yankee’s dying words, does not present a contradiction that betrays Twain’s “latent hostility to machines and technological progress,” nor, as the third-phase critics put it in resolving the “contradiction,” does its alleged contradictoriness enable a reading of Morgan’s manuscript that sees in it, from beginning to end, all the signs of Twain’s consistently critical voice. On the contrary, the words Morgan speaks to M. T., believing, in his delirium, that he is saying them to his beloved Arthurian wife, are in keeping with his original American exceptionalist project. On the one hand, they imply the rejuvenating function of the jeremiad, thus explaining the “latent hostility” not as a hostility directed against technology as such but as the debilitating overdetermination of its material benefits (the forgetting of the pioneering spirit). More imme-
diately, they refer to Morgan’s exceptionalist vocation—the disenchantment of an enchanted world, meaning the remaking of a superstitious and tyrannical Arthurian England into a vibrant modern scientific/technological/capitalist American-style republic:

O Sandy you are come at last!—how I have longed for you! Sit by me—do not leave me—never leave me again, Sandy, never again. . . . You are so dim, so vague, you are but a mist, a cloud, but you are here and that is blessedness sufficient, and I have your hand; don’t take it away—it is for only a little while, I shall not require it long. . . . Was that the child? . . . Hello—Central! . . . She doesn’t answer, asleep, perhaps? Bring her when she wakes. . . . Sandy! . . . Yes, you are there. I lost myself a moment, and I thought you were gone. . . . Have I been sick long? It must be so; it seems months to me. And such dreams! Such strange and awful dreams, Sandy! Dreams that were as real as reality—delirium, of course, but so real! Why I thought the king was dead, I thought you were in Gaul and couldn’t get home, I thought there was a revolution in the fantastic frenzy of these dreams, I thought that Clarence and I and a handful of my cadets fought and exterminated the whole chivalry of England! But even that was not the strangest. I seemed to be a creature out of a remote unborn age, centuries hence, and even that was as real as the rest! Yes, I seemed to have flown back out of that age into this of ours, and then forward to it again, and was set down, a stranger and forlorn in that strange England, with an abyss of thirteen centuries yawning between me and you! Between me and my home and my friends! Between me and all that is dear to me, all that could make life worth the living! It was awful—awfuler than you can ever imagine, Sandy. Ah, watch by me, Sandy—stay by me every moment—don’t let me go out of my mind again; death is nothing, let it come, but not with those dreams, not with the torture of those hideous dreams—I cannot endure that again. (Twain, *Connecticut Yankee*, 257; my emphasis)

Whatever their sense of confusion, these last words of the Connecticut Yankee do not suggest a nostalgia for a pristine American Adamic garden world that betrays his (and Twain’s) “latent hostility” against the intruding machine and technological/capitalist progress. They are indeed manifestly fraught with regret and yearning, but this regret and yearning, as the climactic words I have underscored emphatically make clear, are for that three-year period—the Pax Americana, as it were—immediately following the Yankee’s decisive second victory over Merlin, when he had established the inaugural educational, cultural, and political
conditions in Arthurian England to remake it into a land of Promise. I mean, to be more specific, the three-year period of political peace and tranquility—and the idyllic domesticity with Sandy and Hello-Central it enabled—between his victory over Merlin in the episode of the duel with Sir Sagramour and the knights of the Round Table and the Yankee’s fatal decision to leave England for France to care for his sick daughter: the “mistimed sentimentality” that triggered a domino effect beginning with the Church’s Interdict, followed by the counter-revolution, the collapse of the republic and the Pax, and, finally, the Yankee’s death. “M. T.’s” final comment to the reader does not dispute this reading. He responds to the Connecticut Yankee’s last delirious words, “A bugle? . . . It is the king! The drawbridge, there! Man the battlements!—turn out the—,” not by registering anything remotely resembling dismay at the catastrophic consequence of Morgan’s project but by underscoring his essential Yankee perspective; that is, as I have shown, the very perspective of the spectacle that Mark Twain had fundamentally in common with his exceptionalist Yankee protagonist: “He was getting up his last ‘effect,’ but he never finished it” (Twain, Connecticut Yankee, 258). A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court does indeed disclose the dehumanizing violence that is endemic to the disciplinary biopolitical scientific/technological/capitalist consciousness, but this should not be seen as an artistic or psychological contradiction that exonerates Mark Twain, the “quintessential American writer,” from complicity with it. It should be seen, rather, as the foregoing contrapuntal reading of the novel has argued, as the paradoxical fulfillment of the benign logic of American exceptionalism: as the arrival at the historical end of exceptionalism’s ameliorative “promise,” an arrival that discloses the dark side endemic to it but in the process of its fulfillment is always subordinated and closed off (concealed) by its celebratory surface. To put it alternatively, the vocation the Connecticut Yankee is called to fulfill in the name of America ends in the establishment of a regime of truth as dehumanizing as the one he would replace. Or, in the terms of the novel, his disenchantment of the enchanted medieval world turns out to be a reenchantment.

As I have noted in chapter 3, it is no accident that the phrase “American exceptionalism” was not applied by Americanist critics, despite the determinative centrality of the ethos to which it refers, to Twain and A Connecticut Yankee until that late period of modern American history when the United States began overtly to establish its neo-imperial hegemony over the planet in the name of the Pax Americana and by means of its spectacular mass-
killing technological firepower. I mean, more specifically, that disclosive time beginning with the United States’ Cold War against the Soviet Union, the firebombing of Dresden, the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and, not least, the devastation of Vietnam, and culminating in its unending “War on Terror,” which has borne decisive witness to the dehumanizing violence that the American exceptional ethos has always disavowed. Prior to this time, as I have observed—during the time, for example, that Mark Twain was writing *A Connecticut Yankee*—the vast majority of Americans, including many critics of its political economy, such as Twain, identified the techno-military industrialization of the United States with its New World pioneering spirit. Only after the self-destruction of the American narrative at the end of the twentieth century, when the American exceptionalist ethos lost its status as “the (obvious) truth,” was dehegemonized, and became a patent ideology, could it be said that *A Connecticut Yankee*, whatever Mark Twain’s conscious intention, was a proleptic critique of modern America’s obsession with the machine and its spectacular techno-military-industrial errand in the global wilderness.