

Labor and Revolt in Mark Twain and William Morris

Joshua T. Boyd

*I*n his *Autobiography*, Mark Twain records a “curious story” that he hears from Rev. Mr. Goodwin (279). Goodwin has been constructing his father’s mansion, and Twain, walking by, decides to stop in to see how far along the project is. Upon entering the house, Twain learns from Goodwin that the room in which Twain now stands has been unfinished for quite some time because Goodwin had run out of wallpaper and could not find another roll to finish the job. He tells Twain, “This is Morris paper, and it didn’t hold out.... I sent to New York and ordered some more of the paper – it couldn’t be furnished. I applied in Philadelphia and in Boston, with the same result. There was not a bolt of that paper left in America, so far as any of these people knew” (279). So, Goodwin sought the paper in London only to find out it is an out-of-print design. There was nothing to be done but to strip the walls and start over with a new pattern. Goodwin then tells Twain that just before he was going to begin stripping the paper, “a farmer-looking man” had approached and asked Goodwin if he could take a look around. “[T]his being the first room on the route,” Goodwin explains, “he naturally glanced in. He saw the paper on the wall and remarked casually ‘I am acquainted with that pattern. I’ve got a bolt of it at home down on my farm in Glastonbury’” (279). The two men quickly negotiated a trade for the bolt of paper, and Goodwin hired a paperhanger. They happened to be finishing that room as Twain walked in. In concluding this story, Twain writes, “It was only a coincidence, but I think it was a very curious and interesting one” (279).

In Twain's "curious story" we have one of only a few instances in which Twain and Morris are mentioned together, and this instance, like most others, is brief and seemingly inconsequential. Twain is simply curious about a man's progress in constructing his father's house, and Morris happens to have produced the wallpaper Goodwin hangs in that house. From other sources that connect these two men, we learn that George Bernard Shaw called Morris "an incurable Huckfinomaniac"¹ (qtd. in Hearn 36) and, according to William Dean Howells, that Twain favored Morris's "Sir Guy of the Dolorous Blast" and "especially exulted in the lines which tell of the supposed speaker's joy in slaying the murderer of his brother" (16). Beyond these references, we know little about what else of Twain's Morris read or what else of Morris's Twain read. We do not know, for example, if Twain ever read Morris's *A Dream of John Ball* or if Morris ever read Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* even though both novels were published in the late-1880s (*A Dream* in 1888² and *Connecticut Yankee* in 1889) and narrated by men who experience a dream that takes them back to an earlier time in England.

Critics who suggest that Morris may have read Twain's *Connecticut Yankee* contend that Morris and his English contemporaries who pined for the days of Arthur were the objects of Twain's satire. Consider, for example, this excerpt from Carl Van Doren's *The American Novel: 1798-1939*:

With the brash irresponsibility of frontier vaudeville [*Connecticut Yankee*] catches up a hard, dry, obstreperous Yankee, hurries him back through thirteen centuries, and dumps him, with all his wits about him, into Camelot. Speaking in terms of literary history, the *Yankee* is an anti-romance; it indicates a reaction from the sentimentalism about the Middle Ages which had recently been feeding on Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, William Morris's *Earthly Paradise*, the Pre-Raphaelites, and Pater, and now was languishing in the sunflower cult of Oscar Wilde. (152)

While Van Doren does not address Morris's literary tastes, we can understand that Twain's novel, if it were indeed intended to satirize those who long for Camelot, would be distasteful to William Morris's readership and perhaps Morris himself. Like Van Doren, Michael Patrick Hearn sets Twain and Morris in opposition. Hearn writes in the introduction of his *Annotated Huckleberry Finn* that William Morris, his admiration for *Huckleberry Finn* notwithstanding, "should have been offended by *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*" (36). The claim that Morris "should have been offended" suggests Morris had indeed read *Connecticut Yankee* but took no offense, a thought surprising to Hearn who betrays some incredulity that Morris would like any of Twain's work at all – "Even William Morris" likes Twain's work, Hearn writes (36, emphasis added), implying that that these men had more to disagree about than to agree upon.

In defense of Van Doren and Hearn we should note that there is truth to the claim that Twain did disdain pining for sixth-century England. In *Life on the Mississippi*, for example, he blames the Civil War on Sir Walter Scott (*LM* 469). It is also likely true that Twain did aim his criticism at contemporary England. Critics often mention that Matthew Arnold was the incendiary of Twain's wrath.³ That Twain would pass on an opportunity to respond to Arnold's criticisms of America in the early 1880s is highly implausible. Henry Nash Smith goes as far to say that American readers thought of Hank Morgan "as avenger of British insults to the United States" (76). While Twain does poke fun at Arthurian England, he satirizes nineteenth-century England and America even more than he does the past. Thus, we might question Hearn's presumption that Morris would have disliked Twain's novel, for Morris himself was highly critical of his era. In what follows, I argue that *Connecticut Yankee* is as critical of the labor system under capitalism as Morris's *A Dream of John Ball*. To make this argument, I read the thirteenth chapter of *Connecticut Yankee*, "Freemen," alongside Twain's pro-labor speech "The New Dynasty," which he delivered in Hartford, Connecticut, a year before he drafted the chapter "Freemen." The ideas

Twain expressed in “The New Dynasty” surface in Chapter 13 of *Connecticut Yankee*, a fact missed by Philip S. Foner, a critic who, according to Hugo Johnson, “provides the fullest discussion of Twain’s defense of labor” (435) and who also points out correspondences between other chapters of *Connecticut Yankee* and Twain’s ideas about labor. Reading “The New Dynasty” alongside “Freemen” also offers a slight corrective to interpretations that focus exclusively on the Anglophobia of *Connecticut Yankee*, for the British aristocracy is not the sole recipient of Twain’s satire. The hierarchical structure of English society mirrors that of industrial capitalism in England and the United States. Thus, *Connecticut Yankee* severely critiques the exploitation of the many by the few that Twain found so egregious in the United States and Morris found so detestable in England.

Using “The New Dynasty” as a subtext for Chapter 13 of *Connecticut Yankee* resembles Morris’s own putting into his fiction the ideas expressed in his non-fiction essays regarding labor under capitalism published in *Commonweal*. Morris and Twain, then, engage a similar issue in a similar way. In their fiction they expose the exploitive tendency of capitalists, thus complementing ideas expressed in their non-fiction speeches and essays. The two novels diverge sharply in the end, however. Morris’s dreamer is renewed and cautiously optimistic about the future. Twain’s Hank Morgan dies after annihilating 25,000 knights. These conclusions, however, are not necessarily contradictory. Instead, Twain depicts through Hank, a humanitarian and champion of equality for much of the novel, the ease with which a laborer himself becomes the oppressor. In this light, *Connecticut Yankee* is a novel far more sympathetic than antagonistic to Morris’s ideas. I am challenging the assumption that Morris and Twain stood on opposite sides of the fence in regard to labor.

To pit Twain against Morris as Van Doren and Hearn do is to ignore the fact that both found intriguing and critiqued a third novel of similar structure and content also published in the late-1880s: Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward*. Looking at how these men thought of *Looking*

Backward serves to demonstrate that Morris and Twain had more in common than we might suppose. In the 21 June 1889 issue of *Commonweal* William Morris reflects on the "spread of Socialism among English-speaking people" ("Bellamy's"). That the readership in England and America had accepted so warmly Edward Bellamy's new novel *Looking Backward* was indicative of the deepening sympathy for Socialism in both countries, for "to anyone not deeply interested in the social question," writes Morris, "[*Looking Backward*] could not be at all an attractive book" ("Bellamy's"). The book, however, and the author himself *did* hold a particular attraction to Mark Twain. In *My Mark Twain*, William Dean Howells notes that Twain never adopted socialism as he had, "but he was fascinated with *Looking Backward* and had Bellamy to visit him" (38). Exactly what fascinated Twain about *Looking Backward* remains uncertain. Foner suggests that Twain relished Bellamy's "brilliant analysis" of "the 'dog-eat-dog' system of competitive capitalism," his critique of a state church, and his recognition of the pernicious influence of business over schools and news agencies (179). Nevertheless, Twain ultimately rejected the optimism of Bellamy (Gabler-Hover 69) because he could not comprehend the destruction and reconstruction of the class system apart from conflict and a shared vision between employees and their employers (Foner 179).

While William Morris acknowledged the good of *Looking Backward*, he, like Twain, ultimately distances himself from Bellamy. The primary point of disagreement is the organization of society under Socialism. E.P. Thompson summarizes this difference succinctly: "the ever-present intention in Morris's mind [was] to contrast the variety and simplicity of the life of 'Nowhere' with the bureaucratic State Socialism [...] of Bellamy's *Looking Backward*" (692). It is Bellamy's confidence that technology and industrialism will ensure reform that Morris cannot accept. As he writes in "Bellamy's *Looking Backward*,"

It may be indeed the logical outcome of the most modern side of commercialism – i.e., the outcome that *ought* to

be; but then there is its historical outcome to be dealt with – i.e., what *will* be; which I cannot help thinking may be after all, as far as this kind of monopoly, under the influence of competition for privilege, or war for the division of plunder, till the tide comes and destroys them all. (“Bellamy’s”)

Morris concludes rather tartly, “In short, a machine-life is the best which Mr. Bellamy can imagine for us on all sides; it is not to be wondered at then this [*sic*] his only idea of making labour tolerable is to decrease the amount of it by means of fresh and ever fresh developments of machinery” (“Bellamy’s”). Quoting Morris’s critique of Bellamy’s conception of Socialism serves two purposes. First, these passages help readers make a distinction between Morris’s Socialism and the State Socialism that arises in the century after Morris’s lifetime. John McGowan prefers to think of Morris under the rubric Tory Radical because he rejected the “new order” in hopes of reclaiming “an earlier pre-capitalist social reality” (478). This certainly sets Morris in contrast to Bellamy. Second, and this point will require further development later in this paper, these passages offer a profoundly accurate description of Twain’s Hank Morgan, “a Yankee of the Yankees” who learned how to design “all sorts of labor-saving machinery” (CY 50). The conclusion of the novel, “The Battle of the Sand-Belt,” is the fictional coming to fruition of what Morris expected if Bellamy’s ideas were carried out. The end may likewise be Twain’s artistic rejection of Bellamy’s faith in progress. Before examining the conclusion of the novel, however, I first need to demonstrate the ways Morris’s *A Dream* and Twain’s *Connecticut Yankee* function similarly and present similar ideas. I will also demonstrate that Twain’s pro-labor speech “The New Dynasty” anticipates Bellamy’s ideas and that chapter thirteen of *Connecticut Yankee* reflects some of the content of “The New Dynasty” but without Bellamy’s optimism.

Not surprisingly, Morris critiques industrialism and capitalism explicitly in *A Dream of John Ball*, which was published serially in the

Socialist League's newspaper *Commonweal* between 13 November 1886 and 22 January 1887 (Holzman 100). The historical context of *A Dream of John Ball* is the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 (MacCarthy 547). This revolt William Morris and E. Belfort Bax briefly mention in their work "Socialism from the Root Up," which appeared serially in *Commonweal* from 15 May 1886 to 30 October 1886 and resumed publication on 5 February 1887, after the conclusion of *A Dream of John Ball* in January (Holzman 99-100). The two texts were thus quite closely connected in publication dates and content. The second chapter of "Socialism from the Root Up" even mentions the historical John Ball, accompanied by Wat Tyler and John Lister, as one leader in the revolt that contributed to the "break-up of serfdom" (Morris and Bax). As Michael Holzman convincingly argues, the serialization of *A Dream of John Ball*, appearing in *Commonweal* at roughly the same time as Bax and Morris's "Socialism from the Root Up," offered readers an "imaginative expansion" of "the historical and technical work on socialism by Bax and Morris" (100). In other words, Morris's fictional account in *A Dream of John Ball* serves "to complement the drier historical account given in 'Socialism from the Root Up'" (Holzman 102). Part of their intention in both these historical and fictional works was to demonstrate that social classes are not inevitable or determined but, rather, constructed, and thus vulnerable to deconstruction and capable of reconstruction. As noted already, one of Morris's primary concerns was that industrialism would maintain its oppressive grip on the working class even if they should rise to power, thus negating both the destruction and reconstruction of the labor system. The most important part of *A Dream* is dedicated to discussing this negation.

The third part of *A Dream*, the most important section, depicts a lengthy conversation between John Ball and the Dreamer in which John Ball asks the Dreamer what will come of the peasants' revolt. The Dreamer and John Ball converse throughout the night, the various stages of the night functioning metaphorically as the stages of the revolt against economic oppression. As Holzman describes this

progression, “the Dreamer compares John Ball’s revolt to the light of the moon, the oppression of industrial capitalism to the dark before the dawn, and the cold light of early morning to the realization of the truth of class oppression and the moment when, at its worst, that oppression can at last be remedied” (112). As the novel concludes, the dreamer finds himself figuratively in the dark oppression of industrial capitalism but literally at the brink of a new day. He wakes from his dream and peers out his window only to be disheartened by dirty London, yet “the frightful noise of the ‘hooters,’ one after the other, that call the workmen to the factories” (*DJB* 128) inspires him to continue to advocate for exploited workers. The whistle, however, reminds the reader of the dreamer’s revelation to John Ball that the prevalence of machines in factories will not, as Ball supposes, free men and women to pursue leisure. Rather, these machines continue to oppress employees, for the employees still sell their labor power to one who does no labor. Those who do not work but watch others work, the dreamer tells John Ball, “shall see to the making of all laws, and in their hands shall be all power, and the labourers shall think that they cannot do without these men that live by robbing them, and shall praise them and wellnigh pray to them as ye pray to the saints” (*DJB* 120).

While *A Dream* was appearing in *Commonweal*, Mark Twain was working on his *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*. In the 1960s Harold G. Baetzhold clarified a tentative understanding of Twain’s composition of *Connecticut Yankee* and offered a new perspective on works that influenced Twain as he wrote this novel. Baetzhold “rechart[s] the course of that composition,” arguing that Twain worked on the first three chapters from December 1885 to March 1886. Then, “during the summer of 1887 when *A Yankee* supposedly lay untouched,” Baetzhold argues that Twain completed sixteen more chapters, and he then finished the novel by May 1889 (195-96). Of note is that Twain wrote Chapter 13, “Freemen,” in the summer of 1887, a year after he had delivered his pro-labor speech in Hartford.

In the thirteenth chapter of *Connecticut Yankee*, "Freemen," Hank muses on the social construction of classes and the lower classes' ignorance of this construction. Thus, the tenor of this chapter is quite similar to that in Morris's *A Dream*. Hank mentions that the power of the "gilded minority" in England is ensured "by ingenious contrivance" (CY 156). The "actual Nation," the "farmers, artisans" (CY 155) had cowed before the aristocracy for "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" (CY 156). What is particularly interesting about this chapter is that it functions similarly to the way Morris hoped *A Dream* would function. That is, as *A Dream* was the fictional, imaginative version of Morris's (and Bax's) ideology expressed in the historical "Socialism from the Root Up," *Connecticut Yankee*, particularly "Freemen," is likewise a more imaginative reworking of a speech Twain gave before the Monday Evening Club in Hartford, Connecticut on 22 March 1886 (Foner 169). While Twain's speech "The New Dynasty" and "Freemen" were not composed and published as closely together as Morris's "Socialism from the Root Up" and *A Dream*, nonetheless the similarity in content between "The New Dynasty" and "Freemen" and the critical consensus that Baetzhold is correct that Twain wrote "Freemen" during the summer of 1887 indicate that the speech and the chapter served to call into question the hitherto accepted distinctions in class, the speech being the analog to Morris's "Socialism from the Root Up" and "Freemen" being the analog to Morris's *A Dream*. Even more interesting, however, is the fact that in Chapter 13 Hank directly refers to Wat Tyler (CY 160), one of John Ball's fellow revolutionaries from the Peasants' Revolt. While this reference does not mean Twain read *A Dream*, it nonetheless indicates that he was thinking about the very topic Morris had on his mind and at a very similar time.

Although his close friend William Dean Howells eventually became a socialist, Twain never did (Johnson 435). Not surprisingly, however, Twain's attitude toward capitalism was less than enthusiastic even if quite complicated. Philip Foner notes that "Twain's attitude toward the

rampaging development of American capitalism following the Civil War is a complex one. More than on any other subject, his thinking on this issue displays a dichotomy, an ambivalence which must be analyzed with care” (154). Nonetheless, Foner finds no ambiguity in “The New Dynasty,” a speech he calls “the most eloquent defense of organized labor during the 1880’s” (174).

This eloquent defense of labor begins by establishing the causal relationship between power and oppression. Speaking before middle- to upper-middle-class businessmen, Twain says candidly, “Power, when lodged in the hands of man, means oppression – *insures* oppression: it means oppression *always*” (883, emphasis original). If this beginning were not indictment enough to his audience, Twain becomes even more explicit moments later: “Who are the oppressors? The few: the king, the capitalist, and a handful of other overseers and superintendents. Who are the oppressed? The many: The nations of the earth; the valuable personages; the workers; they that MAKE the bread that the soft-handed and the idle eat” (884, emphasis original). That the many should suffer under the hand of the few Twain cannot understand nor can Hank in *Connecticut Yankee*.

In the chapter “Freemen,” Hank asks some “poor ostensible freemen” (CY 158) if “they supposed a nation of people ever existed, 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” (CY 158). Not surprisingly to Hank, these men, except one, cannot conceive of such a nation, for, as Hank notes earlier in the novel, “if you are born and brought up under that sort of arrangement [i.e., a hierarchical society] you probably never find it out for yourself, and don’t believe it when somebody else tells you” (CY 110). While here Twain certainly intends to belittle English society, he also intends to critique the American (and English) labor systems. (Note that he does the same thing in “The New Dynasty.” The oppressors are kings and capitalists.) As an American from the nineteenth century, Hank readily finds an analog for the aristocracy,

namely wealthy business owners. Later in the chapter, in fact, Hank recasts the disparity between kings and subjects in terms of business owners and their employees: "I was become a stockholder in a corporation where nine hundred and ninety-four of the members furnished all the money and did all the work, and the other six elected themselves a permanent board of direction and took all the dividends" (CY 160). Like Morris, Twain attempts to account historically for the subservience of the many to the few. In sixth-century England, Hank sees the seeds of the oppression he has experienced as a factory worker. Just as men born under a monarchical system of government rarely question the monarchy's rule and their own subjugation, so too men born under the industrial-consumer culture of the nineteenth century rarely question or even recognize their own oppression. In chapter nine of "Socialism from the Root Up," Morris and Bax make this very connection. They write that in England "aristocratic privilege [...] was of itself melting into money-privilege," which led to "the completest and securest system of the plunder of labour which the world had yet seen" (Morris and Bax). Both Morris and Twain attribute this susceptibility to the working class's inability to recognize an alternative class system. Thus, in both the works under consideration in this paper, they offer such a vision.

While delivering his rousing speech to the men gathered at the cross, for example, John Ball bolsters the courage of the men before him by saying that "it is for him that is lonely or in prison to dream of fellowship, but for him that is of a fellowship to do and not to dream" (DJB 35). The alienation and inaction of some people in stark contrast to those who endeavor to change their conditions is quite obviously an allusion to Karl Marx's famous line from his "Theses on Feuerbach": "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it" (Marx 145, emphasis original). Naturally, this philosophy informs the mission of the Socialist League as well – to "Educate, Agitate, Organise" (qtd. in Holzman 98), and it also informs Twain's "The New Dynasty" and *Connecticut Yankee*. As Twain

said before the Monday Evening Club, whenever he had observed a man beating his horse, Twain wished he could communicate with the horse its superiority in strength so as to encourage it to overthrow its abusive master. The horse is representative of “The working millions” in need of “a capable leader to organize their strength and tell them how to use it, and they would in that moment be master” (888). In *Connecticut Yankee*, as well, Hank muses that the people of Arthurian England need something like “the ever-memorable and blessed [French] Revolution, which swept a thousand years of such villainy away in one swift tidal-wave of blood – one” (CY 157). The question then follows, however, what happens when the oppressed majority does find itself in power? It is the answer to this question that seemingly so distinctly separates William Morris and Mark Twain.

In one of his notebooks, Twain wrote, “Began ‘Looking Backward’ Nov. 5, 1889 on the train. A fascinating book” (qtd. in Foner 178). By this time Twain had already delivered “The New Dynasty” speech and his *Connecticut Yankee* was completed, so *Looking Backward* could not have had any influence on Twain’s speech or the novel. That is not to say, however, that Twain does not express ideas similar to Bellamy’s in these works. Indeed, part of the reason Twain found *Looking Backward* so intriguing may have been that he saw within its pages a viewpoint he had held when he delivered “The New Dynasty” but no longer held at the conclusion of *Connecticut Yankee*. Perhaps his fascination stemmed from seeing another man hold views so enthusiastically that, for Twain, were no longer tenable. In “The New Dynasty,” Twain anticipates the counterargument to his belief that the laboring class will rise to power. “How will he [the laborer/new king] use his power?” Twain asks, assuming the perspective of his audience of businessmen. “To oppress – at first. For he is not better than the masters that went before” (888). This oppression, however, lasts only until the new order is established. The new king “will imprison nobody, he will massacre, burn, flay, torture, exile nobody, nor work any subject eighteen hours a day, nor starve his family” (888). Additionally, this king “will see to it that there is fair play,

fair working hours, fair wages" (888). While Morris could certainly agree with these sentiments (see, for example, his "How We Live & How We Might Live."), one wonders if Twain at this point is still too invested in the system to suit Morris, for Twain's verbiage, like Bellamy, still betrays confidence in a strongly centralized authority other than the individual man or woman. The laborer in power is a new king with "craftsmen," a "citadel," and a "throne" (888-89). Further, the very language Twain relies upon to describe this new man is dependent upon the vocabulary of industrial consumer culture. This man "is the most stupendous *product* of the highest civilization the world has ever seen" (889, emphasis added). He is a product that ensures one's place in a competitive market of competing countries. These ideas ultimately sound more like Bellamy than Morris would have liked. In *Connecticut Yankee*, however, Twain puts the product he so enthusiastically describes in "The New Dynasty" on display through his protagonist, Hank Morgan, also called "The Boss," in an effort to critique this product of nineteenth-century America.

As critics of *Connecticut Yankee* often note, the gruesome annihilation of 25,000 English knights at the conclusion of the novel is difficult to reconcile with Hank's concerns regarding labor equality included in earlier chapters such as "Freemen" or "Sixth Century Political Economy." Henry Nash Smith, for example, notes that the inconsistency in Hank Morgan – at once a plucky "entrepreneur in search of profit" and "a humanitarian emancipator of the downtrodden peasants" (54) – indicates a "failure" on Twain's part "to undertake the revisions that would have been necessary to confer a consistent motivation on the Yankee" (54). Smith finds this artistic flaw problematic for readers. Surprisingly, while Smith can describe Hank as Twain's mouthpiece, he cannot conceive of Hank as representing Twain's own conflicted and complex attitude toward social maladies exacerbated and, potentially (Twain once thought), mitigated by technology. The ambiguity present in Hank, however, is precisely what warrants our attention, for through Hank, Twain addresses the

complicated questions regarding the rise of laborers prevalent in his era. On the one hand, Hank exudes quintessential American virtues. A “Yankee of the Yankees” (CY 50), as he describes himself, he manifests industry, punctuality, practicality – the qualities of an American self-made man. Further, he disbelieves class systems are inveterate, choosing instead to see discipline, diligence, education, and technology as means to social mobility and a better life. This is the Hank who cannot fathom why the working classes, by far the majority of the population, remain subservient to the ruling few. On the other hand, Hank gladly takes advantage of King Arthur’s subjects, quickly rising to second in command and gloatingly taking on the title “The Boss.” This is the Hank that abuses his power, becoming something akin to a monopolist and tyrant or Twain’s “New Dynasty” king gone horribly wrong.

In stark contrast to John Ball’s crystalline denunciation of the lords stands the complex protagonist of *Connecticut Yankee*, a character Louis J. Budd plausibly states “comes the closest of [Twain’s] major characters to being Twain himself” (112). As anyone who has spent even a negligible number of hours scouring Twain scholarship knows, we are hard-pressed to pin Twain down to any specific line of social or political thought. Twain himself is to blame (or credit) for this difficulty. Continually using satire, burlesque, and hoaxes, Twain seemingly defies readers to take him seriously,⁴ and, after our first reading of *Connecticut Yankee*, perhaps we do feel we have had the wool slipped over our eyes. Upon our initial introduction to Hank, we meet an honest, hard-working, rather typical American.

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; learned all there was to it; learned
to make everything; guns, revolvers, cannon, boilers,
engines, all sorts of labor-saving machinery. (CY 50)

Just as the Apostle Paul, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, lists the requisite traits and practices for being Jewish, Hank gives us a list of supposedly quintessential American qualities. He gets things done in a no-nonsense kind of way. His father was a tradesman, and his uncle acquired some education. Hank has learned the trade and received an education. As a factory worker, Hank has learned to design new technologies that make life easier. Hank embodies the American dream. He's a self-made man, and we initially find much that resonates with our American ethos.

As Jeffrey Bilbro notes, Twain's readers "expect Hank to bring American-style democracy and technological progress to Camelot" (218). Yet Bilbro goes on to point out that "Hank's actions consistently undermine his language of equality" (218) and, I would add, the promise of technological progress that benefits the general populace. To support his claim, Bilbro draws our attention to those moments early in the novel when Hank is still questioning whether he is really in the sixth century. Hank resolves to take control regardless of his situation: "I made up my mind to two things; if it was still the nineteenth century and I was among lunatics and couldn't get away, I would presently boss that asylum or know the reason why; and if on the other hand it was really the sixth century, all right, I didn't want any softer thing: I would boss the whole country inside of three months" (CY 63). These lines anticipate Hank's later taking on the self-appointed title "The Boss" (the title by which he is known for the majority of the novel) as well as Hank's penchant for power. To ensure that he can "boss the whole country" in a few months, Hank uses his technological acumen to attain and maintain his position of authority. He initially saves his own life by recalling the exact date and time of a solar eclipse. He uses his knowledge of this natural phenomenon to convince Arthur and his subjects that he possesses the power to black out the sun. Later, he further instantiates his power by

dynamiting Merlin's tower, an act that Hank reveals, "solidified my power, and made it impregnable.... There was not any one in the kingdom who would have considered it good judgment to meddle with my matters" (CY 108). The reason for his confidence is, he says, his education (CY 63). Thus appears the refrain of progress. Hank, with 1,300 years of knowledge unknown to those around him, considers himself in a far better position to guide Arthur's kingdom than anyone else. As it turns out, however, Hank, in imposing his technological savvy on Arthurian England, does not ultimately help that civilization progress. Instead, he introduces modern warfare in England thirteen hundred years early.

Twain has given his readers hints about Hank's character that, if noted, make the conclusion of the novel less shocking. In particular, the eighth chapter, "The Boss," is most relevant to the questions Twain and Morris raise regarding the rise of the labor class. This chapter, then, most explicitly serves to disillusion readers who find admirable the ends to which Hank uses his ingenuity and pluck. In "The Boss," Hank reveals that he now feels reasonably at home in the sixth century. His reasons for feeling at home, however, are highly suspect even though also understandable. He says that he now prefers the sixth to the twentieth century, for in the sixth century, he is unmatched:

Look at the opportunities here for a man of knowledge, brains, pluck and enterprise to sail in and grow up with the country. The grandest field that ever was; and all my own; not a competitor; not a man who wasn't a baby to me in acquirements and capacities; whereas, what would I amount to in the twentieth century? I should be foreman of a factory, that was about all.... I was no shadow of a king; I was the substance, the king himself was the shadow. My power was colossal, and it was not a mere name, as such things have generally been, it was the genuine article.... I was Unique; and glad to know that that fact could not be dislodged or

challenged for thirteen centuries and a half, for sure.

(CY 109)

Hank's anticipation of waking from a "dream" and hearing the factory whistle reminds us of the conclusion of *A Dream of John Ball*, when the dreamer does awake and the factory whistle summons him to his work of educating the proletariat so that they might rise against their oppressors. As a factory worker himself, though, Hank offers an intriguing counterargument to Twain's confidence in the factory workers that he expressed in "The New Dynasty." Hank's description of the king as a shadow alludes to "the sham nobilities" and the "age-worn sham and substanceless spectre" (885) of power that Twain contrasts with the rising workers in "The New Dynasty." While Hank has not revolted against his boss, he finds himself in the position of a boss (or monarch) in the sixth century. We do not note in the above passage, however, a smidgeon of the fellowship that Morris envisions will characterize the new, post-revolution era. Hank has little need for anyone else. In fact, he relishes that he has no "competitor" and that his position will not be "dislodged or challenged for thirteen centuries and a half, for sure." This is the ironic inversion of the death of market competition Morris describes and hopes for in "How We Live & How We Might Live." Morris asks, "But what should they be, what will they be, when they, once for all, come to know their real power, and cease competing with one another for livelihood? I will tell you: they will be society, they will be community" (13). Hank, however, does not lead us to anticipate the peace that Twain himself predicted would follow the victories of the labor unions, nor do Hank's words resonate with the assurances that the dreamer gives John Ball about future peace.

Those who know Mark Twain's work, particularly his work in his later literary career, will surmise that Morris's hope that soaks the conclusion of *A Dream* makes a fine juxtaposition with the blood that soaks the final pages of *Connecticut Yankee*. Indeed, *Connecticut Yankee* is in many ways a far different story than *A Dream*, which presents a tempered idealism Twain does not present in *Connecticut Yankee*. John

Ball and the dreamer focus on the results of the peasants' revolt and envision future fellowship. Hank illustrates an extreme example of revolt – total annihilation. To have things his way, Hank ultimately must do away with knight errantry entirely. Hank fails to do this and, consequently, perishes. Twain and Morris could certainly agree on and offer their critiques of the ills of capitalism that pervaded their societies. What is perhaps more surprising, given Morris's reputation as Romantic and idealist and Twain's reputation as a Realist and pessimist, is that both men hold out hope that the inequalities and exploitive tendencies in the class system may eventually end. Certainly, they differ in their faith in mankind to bring about positive change. One ought to recall, for example, that in "The Character of Man," Twain described man as lovable enough to his family but, on the whole, "the buzzing, busy, trivial, enemy of his race – who tarries his little day, does his little dirt, commends himself to God, and then goes out into the darkness, to return no more, and send no messages back – selfish even in death" ("Character" 858). This humorous and biting summary notwithstanding, we recognize that Twain did take the time to write *Connecticut Yankee* and spent several years completing the task. If he really believed what he wrote in "The Character of Man," why would he write at all? What Twain can see is the temptation that factory workers who rise to power face. Will they become oppressors, or will they be capable of ushering in the more egalitarian society Twain and Morris both want? Unfortunately, in *Connecticut Yankee*, Hank does at last cast off the hegemony of knight errantry, yet in the process of doing so, he becomes what Raymond Williams calls the "counter-hegemony" (113). That is, he becomes the oppressor he sought to overthrow. In Twain's mind, this is a *possible* conclusion of the kind of revolution that Morris sought to foment. It does not, however, negate Morris's ideas or put Twain in opposition to him. Rather than thinking of *Connecticut Yankee* solely as a caustic attack on Morris and all things English, we ought to see it as a cautionary tale that complements in many ways *A Dream of John Ball*.

Baylor University

Notes

¹ Professor James Mavor, a good friend of Morris's, shares a story in volume one of *My Windows on the Street of the World* that supports Shaw's description of Morris as a "Huckfinomaniac." At a dinner party with Morris and other friends, Mavor recalls that Morris, who had begun reading *Huckleberry Finn* earlier that day on the train, desired to read aloud from the novel for their evening's entertainment. Mavor notes that Morris "read to us for six or seven hours, that is, till between two and three in the morning" (196). The following morning, Mavor asked Morris how he had rested to which Morris responded, "I rested well enough when I did get to sleep; but I had to finish *Huckleberry Finn*" (qtd. in Mavor 196). Morris did not put the book down until five o'clock in the morning.

² The year 1888 refers to the publication date of the first edition of *A Dream*. This work was available earlier than 1888, however, as it was published serially in *Commonweal* between November 1886 and January 1887.

³ Arnold traveled and lectured in the United States in 1883-1884 and had occasion to offer his criticisms of American culture in hopes Americans would refine themselves. Nash notes two particular offenses to Arnold's sense of decorum: American newspapers and "addiction to 'the funny man,' who is a national misfortune there" (qtd. in Nash 71).

⁴ As Louis J. Budd has said, "Even when [Twain] was not using burlesque or irony as a cautious mask he could exploit their disguises almost too well. I have tried to remember that his hoax about the Empire City 'massacre' was not the last pitfall he built for literal-minded readers" (Budd vii). The massacre to which Budd refers is Twain's "A Bloody Massacre Near Carson," which he later refers to as a "burlesque" and "my fine satire upon the financial expedient of 'cooking dividends,' a thing which became shamefully frequent on the Pacific coast" ("Couple" 392). Apparently this "reformatory satire" ("Couple" 392) failed because Twain's readers took it literally. Christopher D. Morris

reveals a similar problem in critics of Twain today. With a cautionary tone Morris reminds us that in reading Twain, we risk being “suckered” as was the narrator in Twain’s “Jumping Frog” story (160). Jeffrey Bilbro, too, refers to this confusion and uses it as means of interpreting *Connecticut Yankee*. Bilbro, like Budd, notes Twain’s adeptness as a hoaxer and uses Twain’s own description of the hoax as a genre to argue that “*Connecticut Yankee* appears as a sophisticated hoax, one whose satire is directed not at any generalized society [...] but rather at its individual readers’ complicity in silent-assertion regarding American democracy and technological progress” (205-6).

Works Cited

- Baetzhold, Howard G. “The Course of Composition of *A Connecticut Yankee*: A Reinterpretation.” *American Literature* 38 (November 1946): 197-218. Print.
- Bilbro, Jeffrey. “‘That Petrified Laugh’: Mark Twain’s Hoaxes in the West and Camelot.” *Journal of Narrative Theory*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (Summer 2011): 204-34. Print.
- Budd, Louis J. *Mark Twain: Social Philosopher*. Indiana University Press, 1962. Print.
- Foner, Philip S. *Mark Twain: Social Critic*. New York: International Publishers, 1958. Print.
- Gabler-Hover, Janet. “Bellamy, Edward.” *The Mark Twain Encyclopedia*. Ed. J.R. LeMaster and James D. Wilson. New York: Garland, 1993. 69. Print.
- Hearn, Michael Patrick. “Introduction.” Mark Twain. *The Annotated Huckleberry Finn*. New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1981. Print.
- Holzman, Michael. “The Encouragement and Warning of History: William Morris’s *A Dream of John Ball*.” *Socialism and the Literary Artistry of William Morris*. Ed. Florence S. Boos and Carole G. Silver. University of Missouri Press, 1990: 98-116. Print.
- Howells, W.D. *My Mark Twain: Reminiscences and Criticisms* (1910). Louisiana State University Press, 1967. Print.

- Johnson, Hugo D. "Labor." *The Mark Twain Encyclopedia*. Ed. J.R. LeMaster and James D. Wilson. New York: Garland, 1993. 435-36. Print.
- Marx, Karl. *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Ed. Robert C. Tucker. 2nd ed. New York: Norton, 1978. Print.
- Mavor, James. *My Windows on the Street of the World*. Vol. 1. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1923. Print.
- MacCarthy, Fiona. *William Morris: A Life for Our Time*. London: Faber and Faber, 1995. Print.
- McGowan, John. "The New Tory Radicals." *Soundings*, Vol. 72, No. 2/3 (Summer/Fall 1989): 477-500. Print.
- Morris, Christopher D. "The Deconstruction of the Enlightenment in Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889)." *Journal of Narrative Theory*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (Summer 2009): 159-85. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 28 March 2012.
- Morris, William. "Bellamy's *Looking Backward*." *Commonweal* (21 June 1889). *Marxists.org*. Web. 23 April 2012.
- . *A Dream of John Ball and A King's Lesson*. London: Reeves & Turner, 1888. *GoogleBooks*. Web. 28 March 2012.
- . "How We Live & How We Might Live." *The Collected Works of William Morris*. Vol. XXIII. New York: Longmans Green and Co., 1915. 3-26. Print.
- Morris, William and E. Belfort Bax. "Socialism from the Root Up, Chapter II: Medieval Society." *Commonweal*, Vol. 2, No. 19 (22 May 1886). *Marxists.org*. Web. 30 March 2012.
- . "Socialism from the Root Up, Chapter IX: The Industrial Revolution in England." *Commonweal*, Vol. 2, No. 31 (14 August 1886). *Marxists.org*. Web. 23 April 2012.
- Smith, Henry Nash. *Mark Twain's Fable of Progress: Political and Economic Ideas in A Connecticut Yankee*. Rutgers University Press, 1964. Print.
- Thompson, E.P. *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1955. Print.

- Twain, Mark. *The Autobiography of Mark Twain*. Vol. 1. Ed. Harriet Elinor Smith. University of California Press, 2010. Print.
- . “The Character of Man.” *Mark Twain: Collected Tales*. Vol. 1. New York: Library of America, 1992. 854-58. Print
- . *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. Ed. Bernard L. Stein. University of California Press, 1979. Print.
- . “A Couple of Sad Experiences.” *Mark Twain: Collected Tales*. Vol. 1. New York: Library of America, 1992. 388-95. Print.
- . *Life on the Mississippi*. Oxford University Press, 1996. Print. The Oxford Mark Twain.
- . “The New Dynasty.” *Mark Twain: Collected Tales*. Vol. 1. New York: Library of America, 1992. 883-890. Print
- Van Doren, Carl. *The American Novel: 1789-1939*. Revised Edition. New York: MacMillan, 1940. Print.
- Williams, Raymond. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford University Press, 1977. Print.

