



SHOCK  
& AWE

American Exceptionalism and the Imperatives  
of the Spectacle in Mark Twain's  
*A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*

WILLIAM V. SPANOS

# SHOCK AND AWE

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FOR ADAM AND SHORHEH,

who

dwell

now

(*ho nyn kairos*)

in the coming *polis*



You see, 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 some savages, and I saw my chance. I could play it myself, now; and it would not be plagiarism, either, because I should get it in nearly a thousand years ahead of those parties.

—Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*

The spectacle presents itself as something enormously positive, indisputable and inaccessible. It says nothing more than “that which appears is good, that which is good appears.” The attitude which it demands in principle is passive acceptance which in fact it already obtained by its manner of appearing without reply, by its monopoly of appearance.

—Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*

How can thought collect Debord's inheritance today, in the age of the complete triumph of the spectacle? It is evident, after all, that the spectacle is language, the very communicativity and linguistic being of humans. This means that an integrated Marxian analysis should take into consideration the fact that capitalism . . . not only aimed at the expropriation of productive activity, but also, and above all, at the alienation of language itself, of the linguistic and communicative nature of human beings, of that *logos* in which Heraclitus identifies the Common. The extreme form of expropriation of the Common is the spectacle, in other words, the politics in which we live. But this also means that what we encounter in the spectacle is our very linguistic nature inverted. For this reason (precisely because what is being expropriated is the possibility itself of a common good), the spectacle's violence is so destructive; but, for the same reason, the spectacle still contains something like a positive possibility—and it is our task to use this possibility against it.

—Giorgio Agamben, *Means without End*



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## PREFACE

It is soothing to the heart to abuse England and France for interposing to save the Ottoman empire from the destruction it has so richly deserved for a thousand years. It hurts my vanity to see these pagans refuse to eat of food that has been cooked for us, or to eat from a dish we have eaten from, or to drink from a goatskin which we have polluted with our Christian lips except by filtering the water through a sponge! I never disliked a Chinaman as I do these degraded Turks and Arabs, and when Russia is ready to war with them again, I hope England and France will not find it good breeding or good judgment to interfere.

—Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad*

In spring 2010, I taught a graduate seminar on Herman Melville's fiction in which we focused on his lifelong engagement with and interrogation of the myth of American exceptionalism. In the process of our study, we realized that Melville's insistent and polyvalent critique of "the American calling" uncannily anticipated the George W. Bush administration's declaration of its "war against [Islamic] terror" and the "shock and awe" tactics of its military practice in the wake of the attacks of September 11, 2001. In the fall of that year, I decided to pursue this, to me, increasingly urgent theme by way of a broader and more encompassing graduate course on "American Literature and the Frontier," using the discourse of the American jeremiad as our directing forestructure. The readings included the American Puritans' literature on the errand in the wilderness; Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography*; James Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking novels (particularly *The Pioneers*); Robert Montgomery Bird's *Nick of the Woods*; William Gilmore Simms's *The Yemassee*; Francis Parkman's *The Conspiracy of Pontiac*; Melville's *Israel Potter*, *Pierre*, "Benito Cereno," "Bartleby," and *The Confidence-Man*; Frederick Jackson Turner's *The American Frontier in American History*; and Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. Not having taught Twain's novel before, I decided to prepare for it by reading the Norton edition edited by Allison R. Ensor and published in 1982, not only because it was an "authoritative text" but also because it was, as all the Norton editions are alleged to be, accompanied by substantial "background" and "source materials," and the most compelling "early" and "recent" literary criticism of the text. As one living in the era bearing witness to the United States' will to achieve global hegemony, what I found astonishing was that the

“authoritative” commentary and criticism accompanying this quintessential “American” text, which virtually every student in the United States who takes a course in American literature will be assigned, contains not a single reference to the phrase “American exceptionalism.” This was despite the fact that the exceptionalist ethos, whatever Twain’s attitude toward it, saturates every aspect of the novel, both aesthetic and thematic, and the contemporary American historical context that it addresses.

This glaring absence speaks volumes not only about the blindness of the “New World” insight of those American critics who, in Jonathan Arac’s words, “hypercanonized” Mark Twain,<sup>1</sup> but also, and more broadly, of the founders of American literary studies—F. O. Matthiessen, Bernard De Voto, Henry Nash Smith, Leo Marx, R. W. B. Lewis, Richard Chase, Lionel Trilling, and Quentin Anderson, among others—who, in the period between World War II and the Cold War, produced the “American literary canon” and harnessed its exceptionalist myth first to America’s war against Nazi totalitarianism and then to its ideological struggle against Soviet communism. As Arac has decisively shown, it was, to be sure, the “nationalization” of Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn*—particularly its (exceptionalist) apotheosis of the American vernacular (in opposition to the Old World language of the “genteel tradition”) as the essence of the American democratic ethos—that rendered Twain a powerful weapon in the American Cold War arsenal.<sup>2</sup> But, I submit, it is *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*, whose protagonist, not incidentally, has often been represented as Huckleberry Finn grown up, that is more revealing of the unseen or unsaid—or, more accurately, disavowed—of the American exceptionalism that has (hyper)canonized Twain. In repeating the national itinerary of *Huckleberry Finn* at a more “mature” stage and on a wider, global register, *A Connecticut Yankee* not only discloses the dark underside of the American exceptionalist ethos that rendered Twain a powerful weapon in the Cold War against Stalinist communism. As a later, more mature avatar of Huck Finn, its protagonist proleptically discloses more tellingly than *Huckleberry Finn* its self-destruction. I mean by this the inexorable logical continuity between the “defensive” exceptionalism that determined American Cold War policy and the later “offensive” exceptionalism that, in the aftermath of the Cold War—what was called euphorically at the time “the End of History”<sup>3</sup>—and particularly the 9/11 bombings of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, would justify the concept of “preemptive war” and “regime change” by “shock and awe” violence against “rogue states” that “harbored terrorists.”

The canonical stature in American literature of Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee*, in short, has been the consequence of an American critical perspective that, despite its claims to objectivity, has been in fact deeply informed by the very American exceptionalist ethos that informs the novel. Attuned to the imperatives of globalization demanded by the United States' assumption of the status of an imperial power in the aftermath of World War II—and the belated New Americanist initiative to think of American literature from a transnational perspective<sup>4</sup>—this book asks “What would *A Connecticut Yankee* look like to those colonial peoples who, like the British of the sixth century, have been the chosen objects of American ‘benign’ exceptionalist practice?” Following Edward Said's directives, it will undertake a contrapuntal reading of both the criticism that has canonized the novel—rendering it a national monument—and the novel itself. More specifically, it will undertake the task of articulating the disclosures referred to herein in four chapters. Chapter 1 establishes the ideological context for reading the history of the literary criticism on *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* by undertaking a genealogy of the American exceptionalism that is at the thematic heart of the novel. Chapter 2 provides the historical context—the particular techno-scientific avatar of the American exceptionalist ethos—at the time of the closing of the American frontier at the end of the nineteenth century, when Twain was writing the novel. Chapter 3 constitutes a critical analysis of the dominant representations of *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*: the early ones, contemporary with Twain, which interpret the novel as a celebration of the exceptionalism of the American nation at the end of the nineteenth century (phase 1); the later, Cold War ones, which, troubled by the contradictory excessive violence of the climactic Battle of the Sand Belt, read the novel as a noble failure (phase 2); and the latest ones, encompassing the period between the Vietnam War and the “War on Terror” in the wake of September 11, 2001, which categorically—without commenting on the anxieties expressed in phase 2—distinguish an anti-imperialist Twain from his protagonist's techno-capitalist-republican-imperial project in feudal England (phases 3 and 4). Following this critical history, chapter 4 constitutes a close contrapuntal reading of Twain's novel. By this I mean, with Edward Said, a reading that, in attending to the unerring exceptionalist logic, particularly its affiliation with the staging of the spectacle, informs *but goes unnamed* in Hank Morgan's “benign” and “ameliorative” New World project in the Old (feudal) World and discloses the violence that the benign logic of American exceptionalism has always necessarily disavowed—and Twain's complicity with

this unacknowledged but inexorably necessary horrific consequence. Finally, chapter 5 reconstellates Twain's novel into the contemporary global context to show how uncannily proleptic the Connecticut Yankee's American spectacle-oriented exceptionalist errand in Arthurian Britain was to America's errand in the post-Cold War, particularly post-9/11, era. More specifically, it will show that, in mounting a campaign in the name and according to the imperatives of the forwarding logic of American exceptionalism that, in hindsight, we are enabled to call synecdochically a "preemptive war" that utilizes "shock and awe" tactics to facilitate "regime change" in feudal England, the Connecticut Yankee uncannily anticipates the George W. Bush administration's unerringly America-centered imperial foreign policy in the Middle East: the extremist, spectacle-oriented policy that, as history has shown, has brought the logic of American exceptionalism, founded on the Puritans' alleged "election" by God to undertake His "errand in the [New World] wilderness," to its fulfillment in the normalization of the state of exception, the universalization of biopolitics, and the reduction of life to "bare life"—and, hopefully, given its catastrophic consequences, its demise.

In other words, it is my contention that, despite its often affirmed imperfections as a work of novelistic art, indeed perhaps ironically because of them, Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, whatever Twain's avowed intention, speaks in a remarkably revealing way not only to the genealogy of the American national identity but also to the contemporary imperial American occasion. Only Herman Melville's late fiction from *Moby-Dick* to *Billy Budd* is comparable to Twain's novel in this respect, though strangely, but tellingly, little criticism has been written on this relationship. Indeed, as I intend to show, Melville's insistently conscious interrogation of the myth of American exceptionalism, particularly his critical underscoring of its devastating "unerring" forwarding and end-oriented logic, acts as a kind of counterpoint to Twain's protagonist's exceptionalist project, from its ontological grounds, through its discursive articulation, to its political practice, and thus contributes to an understanding of Twain's accomplishment, if not his intention, that has thus far more or less escaped the legion of critics who have addressed *A Connecticut Yankee*.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, and not least, this book is intended to interrogate a certain tendency of the recent New Americanist initiative to globalize the study of American literature. In 2002, I published an essay entitled "American Studies in the 'Age of the World Picture': Thinking the Question of Language," in which I

complained that the globalism of the “New American Studies,” which is to say its emergent antinationalist initiative, was not, with few exceptions, global enough.<sup>6</sup> Since then, this deficiency, as the recent publication of numerous books promoting postnational or transnationalist Americanist studies testifies, has been remedied. In the process, however, this positive initiative, it seems to me, has gone too far. The present volume, needless to say, is in solidarity with the New Americanist transnationalizing project. However, in overdetermining the global aspect of the local/global relation, this “global re-mapping of American literature,” as one of these critics calls it,<sup>7</sup> has tended to minimize the historical exceptionalism of American culture. That is, in attempting to demonstrate that American culture is not historically exceptional or, to put it alternatively, is multicultural and geographically diverse, unstable, and fraught with tensions, this revisionary critical initiative has tended to efface the *reality* that the fiction of American exceptionalism became in the process of American history by way of the power of what I will call, with Antonio Gramsci and Louis Althusser in mind, interpellation. It is therefore imperative, at least for the foreseeable future (that is, as long as the waning concept of the nation-state survives), that American studies address the local (national)/global (transnational) opposition not as an ontological binary, as it now tends to be, but as an indissoluble dialectical relation. It is indeed true that America was plural in its origins, that the exceptionalist national identity it has claimed for itself is a myth, and these origins should not be minimized. But it is equally true that *this myth has become reality in the sense that it has contributed fundamentally and enormously to the making of (an unjust) historical reality on an increasingly global scale*. It is this paradox, this “truth” of the fiction of American exceptionalism, I suggest, that the juxtaposition of the synecdochical history of American studies, enacted in the history of Americanist criticism of *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*, with my reading of Twain’s novel will bring to resonant light by considering the implications of the American calling/vocation.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The immediate origin of this book's argument was my reading of my former *boundary 2* colleague Jonathan Arac's *Huckleberry Finn as Idol and Target* in summer 2011, particularly at the place late in his book where he brilliantly invokes Edward Said's notion of contrapuntal reading to challenge the hyper-canonization of Twain's novel: "By recognizing the necessary limits and imperfections of all human activities," he writes about the contrapuntal perspective, "Said takes a strong position against what he calls the 'rhetoric of blame.' This is a critical position that has hurt feelings and provoked debate among some readers who have previously used Said's work and felt themselves allied with him." Jonathan goes on to say that it is this version of contrapuntal reading that he has adopted in addressing the question of the canonicity of *Huckleberry Finn*. But then he adds, almost as a contradiction, "Yet there remains a question that [Said] has not yet worked out, I think. Granted that *Culture and Imperialism* magnanimously refuses the 'rhetoric of blame' that has marked so much recent socially and politically concerned criticism ... nonetheless, the book's practice of 'connections' rejoins at the realm of pain (empire, slavery, war, etc.) to the realm of pleasure (the separated aesthetic sphere). Once the connection is reestablished, what can assure the pain does not overwhelm the pleasure?" In putting Said's contrapuntal reading this way, it was as if Jonathan was speaking directly to me, since I was one of those oppositional critics who had appropriated Said's contrapuntal perspective as a means of exposing not only the blindness and deafness of canonical Western writers to "other echoes [that] inhabit the garden" but also to the pain that blindness and deafness produced. That night, I wrote Jonathan a note saying, in part, that "that, too, is the question I have asked in addressing Said's contrapuntal reading. But I have chosen to respond to the pain despite the enticements of the pleasure. In some sense I think you have too, despite the weight you give to the 'pleasure' of *Huckleberry Finn*." It is this version of Said's contrapuntal reading—one, I think, Said employed more than is admitted—that has guided me in the writing of this book on Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. I offer it in the spirit of critical dialogue to all those who, like Jonathan Arac, opt for the pleasure.

Besides my debt to Jonathan Arac, I have incurred many others in the process of writing this book. First, there are the scholars, particularly in American studies, whose work I have both plundered and criticized, above all Sacvan Bercovitch and Donald Pease. I hope that after reading this book both will continue to think of me as a comrade in the struggle to think “America” anew. Then there are my graduate students in the yearlong course on “American Literature and the Frontier” I taught in 2011, particularly Guy Risko, Bob Wilson, Sean Jasinski, Ubaraj Katawal, Mary Dinapoli, Molly Goldblatt, and Jennifer Sweeney, who were an ideal audience for my late—sometimes surreal—style errant monologues. I also wish to thank the students in the spring 2012 course “Masterpieces’ of the Novel I was teaching at the time of writing: Sayma Bayram, Lauren Brown, Ann Marie Genzale, Molly Goldblatt, Chelsea Horne, Sara Lee, Karen-Elizabeth Moroski, and Mahmoud Zidan. Together we broke ground to create an empty space for a coming community. I also want to express my gratitude to my colleague David Bartine, graduate director of the Binghamton English Department, for the unfailing support he has given my work over the years, and to Donald Nieman, dean of the humanities, for providing me with funds for a research assistant while the work was in progress. I also want to thank my research assistant, Guy Risko, who went way beyond the call of duty to facilitate my work. I hope that the conversations we had during the process were as rewarding to him as they were to me.

On a more personal register, I once more want to thank Susan Strehle with all my heart—not only for patiently listening but also for the many insights she contributed along the long way and, not least, for her unfaltering encouragement to pursue my controversial project. Finally, I dedicate this book with deep and abiding love to my son Adam Spanos, who has read and commented brilliantly on the whole manuscript, and to his fiancée, Shorheh Farzah. They represent hope in a time of dearth.

## CHAPTER ONE



# American Exceptionalism

## *A Genealogy*

First: faith draws the heart of a Christian to live in some warrantable calling. As soon as ever a man begins to look towards God and the ways of His grace, he will not rest till he find out some warrantable calling and employment. An instance you have in the prodigal son, that after he had received and spent his portion in vanity, and when being pinched, he came home to himself, and coming home to his father, the very next thing after confession and repentance of his sin, the very next petition he makes is: "Make me one of thy servants." Next after desire of pardon of sin, then "put me into some calling," though it be but of an hired servant, wherein he may bring in God any service. A Christian would no sooner have his sin pardoned than his estate to be settled in some good calling: though not as a mercenary slave, but he would offer it up to God as a free-will offering; he would have his condition and heart settled in God's peace, but his life settled in a good calling, though it be but of a day laborer.

—John Cotton, "Christian Calling"

All this is clearly written in what is rightly called the Scriptures. "And it came to pass at that time that God the Lord (Yahweh) spoke to Moses in the cloud. And the Lord cried to Moses, 'Moses!' And Moses replied 'It is (really) I! I am Moses thy servant, speak and I shall listen!' And the Lord spoke to Moses and said to him, 'I am that I am.'"

God thus defines himself as the Subject, *par excellence* he who is through himself and for himself . . . and he who interpellates his subject, the individual subjected to him by his very interpellation, i.e. the individual named Moses. And Moses, interpellated—called by his Name, having recognized that it "really" was he who was called by God, recognizes that he is a subject, a subject of God, a subject subjected to God, *a subject through the Subject and subjected to the Subject*. The proof: he obeys him, and makes his people obey God's Commandments.

—Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses"

The fact that must constitute the point of departure for any discourse on ethics is that there is no essence, no historical or spiritual vocation, no biological destiny that humans must enact or realize. This is the only reason why something like an ethics can exist, because it is clear that if humans were or had to be this or that substance, this or that destiny, no ethical experience would be possible—there would be only tasks to be done.

—Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*



## The Puritan Jeremiad versus the Frontier Thesis

A superficial explanation for the absence, until quite recently, of the use of the term “American exceptionalism” in readings of *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* is that it did not come into being until the period of the Cold War. As Donald Pease has observed of the genealogy of this term in his magisterial critical analysis of its use in that era:

The primal event to which it was connected was the global catastrophe that was imagined as the inevitable result if the cold war between the United States and the Soviet Empire ever went nuclear. That event did not become imaginable until the 1950s, but the term’s relation to that antagonist originated at its coinage.

American exceptionalism has been retroactively assigned to the distant origins of America. But the term did not in fact emerge into common usage until the late 1920s when Joseph Stalin invented it to accuse the Lovestoneite faction of the American Communist Party of a heretical deviation from party orthodoxies. Stalin’s usage of the term as a “heresy” is helpful in explaining why exceptionalism was reappropriated as the core belief within cold war orthodoxy.

Since Stalin had excommunicated the Lovestoneite sect for having described the United States as exempt from the laws of historical motion to which Europe was subject, cold war ideologues transposed American exceptionalism into the revelation of the truth about its nature that explained *why* the United States was exempt not merely from Marxian incursions but from the historical laws that Marx had codified. As the placeholder of a communist heresy, American exceptionalism named the limit to the political provenance of the Soviet Empire. As the manifestation of economic and political processes that negated communism at its core, the “heresy” constituted the primary means whereby U.S. citizens could imagine the nullification of communism.<sup>1</sup>

But this technical origin, however revelatory about American Cold War policy, is inadequate as an explanation of its absence in discussions of Twain’s *Connecticut Yankee*, since it refers to only one specific historical manifestation of a classificatory schema whose origin was simultaneous with the founding of “America” but since then has undergone multiple historical transformations (though, I submit, never a mutation).<sup>2</sup> To explain its absence in Twain criticism,

it will therefore be necessary, however briefly, not only to retrieve the genealogy of the myth and ethos of American exceptionalism. Since the meaning of the term has become too generalized to mean very much, as the contemporary popular version disseminated by the American political class and the media testifies, especially during the Barack Obama administration, it will also be necessary to articulate its telling, historically accrued specific components.

What, I think, is crucial to an understanding of American exceptionalism that would be adequate to explain its absence until very recently in the scholarship about Mark Twain in general and in particular *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, a text that is saturated by the ethos of, if not explicit reference to, American exceptionalism, is that American exceptionalism *is not simply a political but also an ontological category*. In other words, it refers to an indissolubly related representational continuum from the ontological, through the epistemological, to the political. Twain's novel was published in 1889, the remarkable year that bore witness to the Spanish–American War, the United States' extension by violence of its westward expansion, inaugurated by the Puritans' removal of the Pequots from the Massachusetts Bay Colony in the seventeenth century, into the Pacific—Hawaii and the Philippines—in the wake of the closing of the American frontier, so fundamental to Frederick Jackson Turner's inordinately influential thesis about the formation of the American national identity and the progress of American history. When this history is remembered, we are also compelled to remember that the American exceptionalist ethos had its origins in the American Puritan's version of the patristic typological exegesis of the historical relationship between the Old and the New Testaments, which posited the historical events of the Old Testament as prefigurations of the historical events of the New. As Sacvan Bercovitch (following Erich Auerbach) puts this Puritan providential concept of time—or, to emphasize its spatializing imperative implicit in the etymology of “providence,” this promise/fulfillment structure:

For the seventeenth-century Puritan, *exemplum fidei* denoted a type of Christ; and what [Cotton Mather, who represents Nehemiah as a prefiguration of John Winthrop in *Magnalia Christi Americana*] meant by type pertained equally to biography and to history. In its original form, typology was a hermeneutical mode connecting the Old Testament to the New in terms of the life of Jesus. It interpreted the Israelite saints, individually, and the progress of Israel, collectively, as a foreshadowing of the gospel revelation.

Thus Nehemiah was a personal type of Jesus, and the Israelites' exodus from Babylon a "national type" of His triumphant *agon*. With the development of heremeneutics, the Church Fathers extended typology to postscriptural persons and events. Sacred history did not end, after all, with the Bible; it became the task of typology to define the course of the church ("spiritual Israel") and of the exemplary Christian life. In this view Christ, the "antitype," stood at the center of history, casting His shadow forward to the end of time as well as backward across the Old Testament. Every believer was a *typus* or *figura Christi*, and the church's peregrination, like that of old Israel, was at once recapitulative and adumbrative. In temporal terms, the perspective changed from anticipation to hindsight. But in the eye of eternity, the Incarnation enclosed everything that preceded and followed it in an everlasting present. Hence Mather's parallel between Winthrop and Nehemiah: biographically, the New Englander and the Israelites were correlative types of Christ; historically, the struggles of the New England saints at that time, in this place—the deeds Christ was now performing through them in America—were "chronicled before they happened, in the figures and types of the ancient story."<sup>3</sup>

Interpreting themselves literally as the historical heirs of the Jews of the Old Testament, particularly of the story of the Exodus, these Calvinist Christians viewed their existence in England as a form of captivity. Indeed, they saw it as slavery to a tyrannical and decadent regime of "fleshpots" prefigured by the Israelites' captivity in Egypt; their status as God's elect; their sense of community and communal purpose as a mutually binding covenant contracted with a demanding, indeed a ruthlessly judgmental, God, who, as the Exodus story bears witness, will allow nothing (the Canaanites /Indians who roam but do not inhabit the *terra nullius* that is the Promised Land) to be an obstacle in the way of His inexorably preordained *Telos*;<sup>4</sup> their emigration as an exodus from a corrupted Old World; their earthly collective mission in the "New World" as an "errand in the wilderness" ("to build a city on the hill" that would fulfill the promise God announced in the Old Testament); their individual "calling" or "vocation" as laboring not in the profane time of the now but as workers or "servants" to His higher futural cause; and their use of spectacle—"shock and awe" tactics—to fulfill their divinely ordained "errand." Not least, like the Israelites of the Old Testament, fortified by their faith in the Covenant and the truth of their God's Promise, they were, despite the resistance they encountered on the way, certain about the promised end and "unswerving"—one could say,

as Ishmael says of Captain Ahab in *Moby-Dick* — monomaniacally “unerring” in their “fiery pursuit” of its accomplishment. This is the way John Winthrop put this exceptionalist Puritan calling on board the flagship *Arabella* in the famous lay sermon he gave during their passage from “the island of England” to “[the threatening wilderness of] New England in North America”:

Now the only way to avoid shipwreck and to provide for our posterity is to follow the counsel of Micah: to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk with our God. For this end, we must be knit together in this work as one man. We must entertain each other in brotherly affection; we must be willing to abridge ourselves of our superfluities, for the supply of others’ necessities; we must uphold a familiar commerce together in all meekness, gentleness, patience and liberality. We must delight in each other, make others’ condition our own, rejoice together, mourn together, labor and suffer together: always having before our eyes our commission and community in the work, our community as members of the same body. So shall we keep the security of the spirit in the bond of peace, the Lord will be our God and delight will dwell among us, as His own people, and will command a blessing upon us in all our ways, so that we shall see much more of His wisdom, power, goodness, and truth than formerly we have been acquainted with. We shall find that the God of Israel is among us, when ten of us shall be able to resist a thousand of our enemies, when He shall make us a praise and glory, that men shall say of succeeding plantations: “The Lord make it that of New England.” For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill, the eyes of all people are upon us. So that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and a by-word through the world: we shall open the mouths of enemies to speak evil of the ways of God and all professors for God’s sake; we shall shame the faces of many of God’s worthy servants, and cause their prayers to be turned into curses upon us, till we be consumed out of the good land whither we are going.<sup>5</sup>

As the spectacle-oriented tone of warning that saturates Winthrop’s synecdochical sermon resonantly suggests, however, to restrict the meaning of the Puritans’ exceptionalist ethos inscribed in their self-identification as God’s “chosen people” (and their responsibility to His providential [Promise /Fulfillment]) historical design) to the alleged radical difference between them and their English persecutors—their benignly youthful, democratic, and progressive

New World perspective and the decadence, despotism, and backwardness of the Old World practice—as has all too frequently been done by American literary critics and historians, is inadequate. What needs to be added to this definition, as Sacvan Bercovitch decisively observed in his inaugural book *The American Jeremiad* (1978), is the original Puritans' anxious awareness, in the analogy of the “murmurings” of the Israelites during their “march” under Moses' leadership to the “Promised Land,”<sup>6</sup> of the fundamental threat to their divinely ordained “calling”: backsliding. In other words, the succeeding generations would, with temporal distance from and familiarization with what I will call the energizing and unifying inaugural event, lose not only their sense of covenantal community but also their initial collective intensity of commitment—their fidelity—to their errand. In opposition to Perry Miller's interpretation of the Puritan jeremiad as “castigation”—the betrayal of the Covenant—Bercovitch identifies it with a paradoxical optimism that understands the very threat to the energy and unity of the community as promise: “But the Puritan clergy were not simply castigating. For all their catalogues of iniquities, the jeremiads attest to an unswerving faith in the errand; and if anything they grow more fervent, more absolute in their commitment from one generation to the next” (my emphasis). For Bercovitch, “the most severe limitation of Miller's view is that it excluded (or denigrated) this pervasive theme of affirmation and exaltation.” According to his reading, “the essence of the sermon [the jeremiad] that the first native-born American Puritans inherited from their fathers, and then ‘developed, amplified, and standardized,’ is its *unshakable optimism*. In explicit opposition to the traditional mode, it inverts the doctrine of vengeance into a promise of ultimate success, affirming to the world, and despite the world, the inviolability of the colonial cause.”<sup>7</sup>

In thus retrieving this paradoxical optimism inherent in the Puritan figural version of providential history, Bercovitch was enabled to read the jeremiad not simply as a means of transfiguring any threat, whether external or internal, to the covenantal community's oneness into a positively productive force, but also of rejuvenating its vital energy. To put Bercovitch's insight into the paradoxical nature of the jeremiad in a way that illuminates its long and determinant future in America, not least its role in Mark Twain's *Connecticut Yankee*, Bercovitch demonstrated that its emphasis on spectacular threat became the means of always evading the intrinsic ironic fate of the civilizing process (the fulfillment of the errand in the wilderness): *overcivilization*, the very condition it would escape. In the ubiquitous metaphors used by the Puritan Jeremiahs, it would

prevent the choice grain they believed they were in the eyes of God from reverting to the “chaff of England” (Bercovitch, *American Jeremiad*, 2–4)—old and decadent—an Old World of fleshpots:

The American Puritan jeremiad was a ritual of a culture on an errand—which is to say, a culture based on a faith in process. Substituting teleology for hierarchy, it discarded the Old World ideal of stasis for a New World vision of the future. Its function was to create a climate of anxiety that helped release the restless “progressivist” energies required for the success of the venture. The European jeremiad also thrived on anxiety, of course. Like all “traditionalist” forms of ritual, it used fear and trembling to teach acceptance of fixed social norms. But the American Puritan jeremiad went much further. *It made anxiety its end as well as its means. Crisis was the social norm it sought to inculcate.* The very concept of errand, after all, implied a state of *unfulfillment*. The future, though divinely assured, was never quite there, and New England’s Jeremiahs set out to provide the sense of insecurity that would ensure the outcome. Denouncing or affirming, their vision fed on the distance between promise and fact. (Bercovitch, *American Jeremiad*, 23; my emphasis)

In attending to Bercovitch’s version of the Puritan jeremiad, we realize that the meaning of American exceptionalism cannot be adequately understood as simply America’s radical difference from and superiority over the rest of the world.<sup>8</sup> Rather, Bercovitch enables us to see it as an exceptionalism grounded in a providential (ontological) vision of history but one, like that of the Israelites of the Exodus story, always threatened by crisis: the very errand in the wilderness that renders its participants exceptional. To reinvolve the biblical term from the Old Testament that the Puritans insistently appropriated to characterize this threat of recidivism, I am referring to the “murmuring” or the “backsliding”<sup>9</sup> that eventually manifested itself in the worship of idols (the “Golden Calf”)<sup>10</sup> or, to anticipate my reading of the American historical occasion of Twain’s *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*, the metamorphosis of the original dynamic and creative energy enabled by faith into its simulacrum: a golden age into a “gilded age.” I am referring ultimately to the comfort, the well-being, the sense of repose, of satisfaction, of delight, of ease—leisure, the respite from work—that is the reward of the chosen people’s labor expended in the process of transforming the wilderness into the Lord’s fruitful vineyard, the paradoxical luxury and decadence that is endemic to the Puritan calling and the vocation it entails.

As I have observed, Sacvan Bercovitch's analysis of American exceptionalism was inaugural, indeed the harbinger, in many ways, of the New Americanist studies that are revolutionizing the received history of the United States. But it remains, nevertheless, inadequate for understanding the American future: the transformation of the Puritan jeremiad into the "American jeremiad." And this, I think, is because, in characterizing the jeremiad, in opposition to Perry Miller, Bercovitch emphasized the threat to the unity of the covenantal community over the threat to its youthful productive energy posed by the very errand itself. To put it alternatively, he emphasized the Puritan thesis over the frontier thesis concerning the essence of America's historical itinerary. Bercovitch overdetermined the abstract *ontological* anxiety instigated by the apparent contingencies of finite existence over the concrete *worldly* wilderness or frontier. "Methodologically," he writes, Miller's reading of the jeremiad "implies the dichotomy of fact and rhetoric. Historically, it posits an end to Puritanism with the collapse of the church-state. From either perspective, in what is surely a remarkable irony in its own right, Miller's analysis lends support to the dominant anti-Puritan view of national development—that the 'American character' was shaped by what he called 'the fact of the frontier.'"<sup>11</sup> Bercovitch then goes on to affirm his interpretation of the jeremiad as the more authentic historical origin of the American national identity: "We need not discount the validity of this frontier thesis to see what it does *not* explain: the persistence of the Puritan jeremiad throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in all forms of literature, including the literature of westward expansion" (Bercovitch, *American Jeremiad*, 10–11). In minimizing the "fact of the frontier" by forgetting the role that the wilderness plays in rejuvenating the Israelites of the Exodus story,<sup>12</sup> Bercovitch also fails to see that the Puritan jeremiad, above all, called for the staging of a *moving* frontier between civilization (white Protestants) and barbarism (red Indians)—that is, for a *perpetual*, crisis-provoking enemy—the encounter with which would always rejuvenate (by violence) the always flagging energy endemic to the civilizing errand of the covenantal community. As I have written elsewhere about Bercovitch's argument:

In pointing to [his] overdetermination of the unifying potentialities of the American jeremiad at the expense of the rejuvenating effects—the solidarity of community in behalf of the errand at the expense of the renewal that would render its civil life immune to decay—I am not opting for the "frontier"

thesis about the development of the American national identity. Rather, I am suggesting that Bercovitch's thesis about the role played by the American jeremiad needs to incorporate and emphasize the "fact of the frontier" instead of minimizing it. Bercovitch is right in singling out the jeremiad as that cultural ritual that more than any other explains the development of the American national character and the elect's domestic and foreign policies. But this cultural ritual—this communal agency for the renewal of the commonweal's covenant with God—must, I suggest, be understood not simply in domestic terms (the solidarity of civil society), but also and simultaneously in terms of its "foreign" relations (the threatening Other beyond the frontier). In the wake of the demise of the Puritan theocracy and the constitutional separation of church and state, "the fact of the frontier" came to dominate the [exceptionalist] discourse of an ever-westward expanding America, but it is the jeremiad—and the concept of providential optimistic history on which it is founded—not in a purely secular form, as liberals have erroneously assumed, but in a religio-secular—a "natural supernaturalist"—form, that has determined the meaning of its various and fluid historical manifestations. And, as in the case of the Puritans, although increasingly as America rationalized and banalized the "wilderness," its purpose has been not to close the frontier and terminate the errand, but to keep it perpetually open, even after the farthest western reaches of the continent had been settled and colonized. Its purpose has been to *always already produce crisis and the communal anxiety crisis instigates* not simply to mobilize the national consensus and a flagging patriotism, but also to inject by violence the American body politic with antibiotics against decay.<sup>13</sup>

## The Relationality of the Puritan and the Frontier Thesis

Once the symbiotic relationship between the Puritan jeremiad and "the fact of the frontier"—civilization and wilderness—is seen, we are also enabled to perceive the indissoluble relationship between (rather than opposition of) the Puritan and the frontier theses about the American national identity sponsored by Frederick Jackson Turner at the end of the nineteenth century (1893) in the wake of the official closing of the American frontier (1890). This was the historical conjuncture that Mark Twain (and Charles Dudley Warner) called "the Gilded Age" and at which, not incidentally, he was writing *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (ca. 1879–1889). I will return to this resonant

affiliation between Twain and Turner. In opposition to the prevailing view (epitomized, as we shall see, by Henry Nash Smith and Leo Marx, among others) that they are antithetical, here I want to briefly trace the development of the relationship between the Puritan jeremiad and the frontier—westward expansionism, meaning “settlement” and “improvement” (or “betterment”) of a *terra nullius*, Indian removal, and imperial conquest (and, later, the anxiety over the “waning of the frontier”)—from its origins to the present global occasion both to differentiate the various transformations that the myth of American exceptionalism has undergone and to suggest the essential and inexorable continuity of its always forwarding or “westering” (onto)logic.<sup>14</sup> As I have observed, the first and most dramatic transformation occurred when the Puritan theocracy collapsed, or, to put it alternatively, when, with the waning of New England’s cultural power in the wake of westward migration, the original thirteen colonies adopted the Constitution, which separated church and state. With this official “secularization” of the American nation, the promise/fulfillment structure of the divinely sanctioned Puritan figural or providential concept of history lost its juridical authority. Henceforth, historical events, rather than the biblical exegesis, ostensibly determined official law and, to a lesser degree, American public thought and action. This dramatic turn—this separation of church and state—at the time of the founding of the United States as a nation-state has been perennially represented by the official custodians of the American cultural memory, including Mark Twain, as a decisive revolution. In reality, however, it was not—nor has this fiction been challenged since then. By the time of the American Revolution, the Puritan providential concept of history—and the exceptionalism it implied, including the jeremiadic ritual that sustained the covenantal community and rejuvenated its youthful energies—had become secularized, a “naturalized supernaturalism.”<sup>15</sup> Under the aegis of the Enlightenment and the romantic pressures of the opening frontier, the *Theologos* had become (more or less) the *Anthropologos*, providential or figural history had become History, promise had become progress, and, as so much American art of the nineteenth century attests, the divinely ordained errand had become the “march of civilization.”<sup>16</sup> That is, the Puritan errand in the wilderness to build a city on the hill had become Manifest Destiny. Warning his early nineteenth-century readers of a national tendency “to imitateness [of European values], prevailing amongst our professional and literary men, subversive of originality of thought, and wholly unfavorable to progress” because “they are far behind the mind and movement of the age

in which they live: so much so, that the spirit of improvement, as well as of enfranchisement, exists in the great masses,”<sup>17</sup> John L. O’Sullivan, who coined the phrase “Manifest Destiny,” can nevertheless conclude:

Yes, we are the nation of progress, of individual freedom, of universal enfranchisement. Equality of rights is the cynosure of our union of States, the grand exemplar of the correlative equality of individuals; and while truth sheds its effulgence, we cannot retrograde, without dissolving the one and subverting the other. We must onward to the fulfillment of our mission—to the entire development of the principle of our organization—freedom of conscience, freedom and equality. This is our destiny, and in nature’s eternal, inevitable decree of cause and effect we must accomplish it. All this will be our future history, to establish on earth the moral dignity and salvation of man—the immutable truth and beneficence of God. For this blessed mission to the nations of the world, which are shut out from the life-giving light of truth, has America been chosen; and her high example shall smite unto death the tyranny of kings, hierarchs, and oligarchs, and carry the glad tidings of peace and good will where myriads now endure an existence scarcely more enviable than the beast of the field. Who, then, can doubt that our country is destined to be *the great nation* of futurity? (O’Sullivan, “Great Nation of Futurity,” 429–430)

But it needs emphasizing that the exceptionalism informing the concept of Manifest Destiny that O’Sullivan attributes to mid-nineteenth-century America should not be restricted, as it generally has been, simply to the principle of chosenness, for this optimistic anxiety endemic to the Puritan jeremiad, now “secularized” as the “American jeremiad”—this paradoxical anxiety that, to appropriate Richard Slotkin’s resonant phrase, justifies “rejuvenation through violence”<sup>18</sup>—saturates not only the official but also the cultural (literary and popular) discourses throughout the period of westward expansion and beyond. In the felicitous phrase Edward Said uses to characterize Orientalists’ representation of the Orient, it has become a “textual attitude.”<sup>19</sup> Telling official post-Puritan instances of this anxious exceptionalism, which span the period between the secularization of the Puritan providential concept of history and the official closing of the frontier—and, not incidentally, more or less contemporary with Mark Twain—are Francis Parkman’s *The Conspiracy of Pontiac* (originally published in 1851 but constantly revised until the sixth edition of 1870) and Frederick Jackson Turner’s “The Significance of the Frontier in

American History" (1893). As I have argued elsewhere,<sup>20</sup> both these synecdochical "official" histories are essentially American jeremiads or, rather, deeply inscribed by the jeremiad, not only by the sense of America's exceptionalist status as such—its vigorous superiority over the decadent Old World (France in Parkman's case, Europe in Turner's)—but also, like their Puritan predecessors, by a disturbing awareness that the inexorable westward movement is a civilizing process that threatens the very conditions that justify that superiority and thus by an urgent sense of the need for a perpetual rejuvenating frontier or enemy.

Both the exceptionalism and its jeremiadic import are implicit in Parkman's "Preface" to the first edition of *The Conspiracy of Pontiac*, which, it should be underscored, summarizes the ideological intent of his later histories of the colonial conquest of the "New World":

The Conquest of Canada was an event of momentous consequence in American history. It changed the political aspect of the continent, prepared a way for the independence of the British colonies, rescued the vast tracts of the interior from the rule of military despotism [the French, but implicitly the Mexican and also the English armies], and gave them, eventually, to the keeping of an ordered democracy. Yet to the red natives of the soil its results were wholly disastrous. Could the French have maintained their ground, the ruin of the Indian tribes might long have been postponed; but the victory of Quebec was the signal of their swift decline. *Thenceforth they were destined to melt and vanish before the advancing waves of Anglo-American power, which now rolled westward unchecked and unopposed.* They saw the danger, and, led by a great and daring champion, struggled fiercely to avert it. The history of the epoch, crowded as it is with scenes of tragic interest, with marvels of suffering and vicissitude, of heroism and endurance, has been, as yet unwritten, buried in the archives of governments, or among the obscurer records of private adventure. *To rescue it from oblivion is the object of the following work. It aims to portray the American forests and the American Indian at the period when both received their final doom.*<sup>21</sup>

The American exceptionalism of this representative passage—its assumption that American history is informed by a preordained (Manifest) destiny; that the Old World (France) is effete and despotic; that democracy will triumph; that the savage native denizens of the wilderness are destined by History to extinction; and that its errand in the wilderness is a civilizing one—is self-evident. What needs to be remarked as well, however, given the general

tendency of critics to identify these ideas with the frontier thesis despite Parkman's New England roots,<sup>22</sup> is, as the last underscored sentence suggests, that Parkman's histories of the French and Indian War, particularly *The Conspiracy of Pontiac*, are classic American jeremiads. Written in the middle of the nineteenth century, when the now industrializing East was, by way of the westward expansionist momentum, beginning to crowd the agrarian West, they not only prophesy the "doom" of the native Americans and the "forests"; that is, the demise of the very conditions that perennially rejuvenated the American people. In envisioning this destined double doom, they also, as the past tense of the following passage suggests, instigate an anxious awareness of the possible enervation and disintegration of the original and inaugurating—pioneering—exceptionalist/Protestant/Anglo-Saxon core culture and, implicitly, the need for a new frontier:

When the European and the savage are brought in contact, both are gainers, and both are losers. The former loses the refinements of civilization, but he gains, in the rough schooling of the wilderness, a rugged independence, a self-sustaining energy, and powers of action and perception before unthought of. . . . Those rude and hardy men, hunters and traders, scouts and guides, who ranged the woods beyond the English borders, and formed a connecting link between barbarism and civilization, have been touched upon already. They were a distinct, peculiar class, marked with striking contrasts of good and evil. Many, though by no means all, were coarse, audacious, and unscrupulous; yet, even in the worst, one might often have found a vigorous growth of warlike virtues, an iron endurance, an undespairing courage, a wondrous sagacity, and singular fertility or resource. In them was renewed, with all its ancient energy, that wild and daring spirit, that force and hardihood of mind, which marked our barbarous ancestors of Germany and Norway. (Parkman, *Conspiracy of Pontiac*, 465–466)

Despite Frederick Jackson Turner's deliberate intent to displace the origins of the American national character from New England to the West, his enormously influential American exceptionalist frontier thesis is, as much of his metaphorized biblical rhetoric makes clear, deeply inscribed by the exceptionalist ethos of the Puritan jeremiad. Thus, as David Noble has observed:

Turner's language was consistently of a civil religion when he described the birth of the national people from the national landscape. Jefferson, he [Turner]

wrote, “was the first prophet of American democracy, and when we analyze the essential features of his gospel, it is clear that the Western influence was the dominant element.” But Jefferson, he continued, was but “the John the Baptist of democracy, not its Moses. Only with the slow settling of the tide of settlement farther and farther toward the interior did the democratic influence grow strong enough to take actual possession of the government.” Andrew Jackson, then, was that Moses figure who led the people into the promised land of the West.<sup>23</sup>

And, like the Puritan jeremiad, Turner’s frontier thesis has as its fundamental purpose to instigate collective anxiety over the threat to the unity of the American community and its pioneering spirit posed by the closing of the American frontier—the conquest, colonization, “settlement,” and “improvement” of the “wilderness,” the fulfillment of the errand—at the end of the expansionist nineteenth century. This, including his exceptionalist indifference to the horrific fate of the natives under the heels of “the march of American civilization,” is made manifestly clear in the opening paragraph of Turner’s inaugural essay, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” delivered significantly at the meeting of the American Historical Association in Chicago on July 12, 1893, during the Columbian Exposition—a mere five years before the publication of *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*. Symbolized by the technologically perfected “White City” as the model of the American future, this celebration of the four hundredth year since the discovery of the “New World” was intended to proclaim to the (Old) world the fulfillment of the American errand in the planting of the “city upon the hill”:<sup>24</sup>

In a recent bulletin of the Superintendent of the Census for 1890 appear the significant words: “Up to and including 1880 the country had a frontier of settlement, but at present the unsettled area has been so broken into by isolated bodies of settlement that there can hardly be said to be a frontier line. In the discussion of its extent, its westward movement, etc., it can not, therefore, any longer have a place in the census reports.” This brief official statement marks the closing of a great historic movement. Up to our own day American history has been in large degree the history of colonization of the Great West. The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development.<sup>25</sup>

What distinguished the American nation from the nations of the Old World up to this climactic historical moment, Turner goes on to say, is that, whereas in the latter (civilizational) “development” occurred in a limited geographical space, “American development has exhibited not merely advance along a single line, but a return to primitive development for that area. American social development had been continually *beginning over and over again on the frontier. This perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life*, this expansion westward with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society, furnish the forces dominating the American character” (Turner, *Frontier in American History*, 2; my emphasis). With the closing of the frontier and the annulment of the possibility of “perennial rebirth” (through violence) it entails, Turner, not unlike Parkman and his Puritan predecessors, envisages the specter of a “development” in America that would in fact be a regression that threatened to reproduce the static conditions of overcivilization characteristic of the “soft” Old World and thus an American people who were no longer exceptional in their *self*-reliance or, in Parkman’s significantly similar terms, who were endowed by their frontier conditions with “warlike virtues, an iron endurance, an undespairing courage, a wondrous sagacity, and singular facility of resource.”

Despite the closing of the American frontier, however, Turner’s secularized concept of providential history precludes pessimism. Like that of the Puritan predecessors he would disavow, its teleological structure is capable of accommodating all worldly crises; that is, of sustaining optimism about the American future. By the close of the nineteenth century, the literal frontier, he implies, had become a metaphor or, to invoke a term I will develop later, the ethos it produced had become hegemonic. Its character of “incessant expansion,” and the imperative of rejuvenation by violence, had been internalized as a fundamental attribute of the American national identity. Underscoring the “closed frontier” by way of juxtaposing the celebration of the fourth centennial of Columbus’s discovery of the New World with the spectacle of the triumphant “White City,” Turner brings “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” to its resounding close by way of an anxiety-provoking optimistic opening:

Since the days when the fleet of Columbus sailed into the waters of the New World, America has been another name for opportunity, and the people of the United States have taken their tone from the incessant expansion which had not only been open but has even been forced upon them. *He would be a rash prophet who would assert that the expansive character of American life has now*

*entirely ceased. Movement has been its dominant fact, and, unless this training has no effect upon a people, the American energy will continually demand a wider field for its exercise.* But never again will such gifts of free land offer themselves. For a moment, at the frontier, the bonds of custom are broken and unrestraint is triumphant. There is not *tabula rasa*. The stubborn American environment is there with its imperious summons to accept its conditions; the inherited way of doing things are also there; and yet, in spite of environment, and in spite of custom, each frontier did indeed furnish a new field of opportunity, a gate of escape from the bondage of the past; and freshness, and a confidence, and scorn of older society, impatience of its restraints and its ideas, and indifference to its lessons, have accompanied the frontier. What the Mediterranean Sea was to the Greeks, breaking the bond of custom, and offering new experiences, calling out new institutions and activities, that, and more, the ever retreating frontier has been to the United States directly, and to the nations of Europe more remotely. *And now, four centuries from the discovery of America, at the end of a hundred years of life under the Constitution, the frontier is gone, and with its going has closed the first period of American history.* (Turner, *Frontier in American History*, 37–38; my emphasis)

This, clearly, is no pessimistic lament over the close and demise of a vibrant and expansive era. Fortified by an undeviating belief in America's chosenness by History, it is, rather, like the Puritan jeremiads of an earlier theological age, a paradoxical optimistic prophecy of a rebirth, now, under the aegis of the secularized *Logos* enabled by the metaphorization of the new frontier or enemy; that is, by stripping the frontier of its limiting geography and rendering it a naturalized mental (global) attribute—and permanent. At the end of the nineteenth century, Turner's American exceptionalist gaze does not come to rest at the California coast; rather, it looks, inevitably, further westward to the Pacific Ocean and beyond, thus justifying and encouraging the contemporary American exceptionalist imperial project in Hawaii and the Philippines—and anticipating the announcement, over a half century later, of "the New Frontier" in Vietnam.

### American Exceptionalism: From Myth to "Reality"

It is, however, not enough to rely on "official" texts like Parkman's and Turner's synecdochical histories to justify the claim that the myth of American exceptionalism lies at the heart of the American national character and that

its accompanying corollary, the American jeremiad, constitutes the paradoxical driving force of American history. Though they go a long way toward supporting this thesis, especially by way of the remarkable rhetorical and structural parallels that encompass the entire span of American history from its founding to the end of the nineteenth century that I have pointed to between these widely separated secular texts and the Puritan theological ones (these cultural productions are, after all, “official” narratives), they remain, despite their secular status, instances of *conscious ideology* and thus, in themselves, are not entirely reliable as expressions of the character of the “American people.” What is needed to confirm the claim, therefore, is evidence that this exceptionalist/jeremiadic ethos had come to saturate the discourse of the everyday life of the American people (the dominant “Protestant core culture”) from its origins to the end of the nineteenth century (and beyond). Such a project cannot be undertaken in this limited space. But some sense of the pervasiveness of the exceptionalist ethos in the popular discourse of the United States can be suggested by representative examples ranging historically from the beginnings of westward expansion in the immediate aftermath of the decline of the Puritan concept of providential history and the emergence of its secular version to the *fin de siècle*, when Mark Twain was writing *A Connecticut Yankee*.

The most obvious of the earliest instances of this cultural discourse that inscribes the popular American mind with the exceptionalist ethos, both the rejuvenating frontier and the threat of overcivilization, as a truth, is, of course, the legendary Daniel Boone. Echoing the double imperative of the American jeremiad, and demonstrating the indissoluble relationship between the Puritan and frontier theses, he not only remains always one step ahead of the settlers of the wilderness because of his consciousness of the entropic—softening and corrupting—dynamics inherent in the process of civilizational settlement and improvement, but also, as the famous George Caleb Bingham painting (1851) testifies, blazes the trail across the Alleghany Mountains, opening up the West for the imperial march of American civilization.<sup>26</sup> This same exceptionalism informing the Daniel Boone myth, which indissolubly relates the jeremiadic element with the forwarding dynamics of westward expansion—the Puritan thesis with the frontier thesis—and dooms (blames) its native victim, also informs the concluding turn of James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Pioneers*, published half a century later, and the “Leatherstocking” novels that followed, which track the career of the Boone figure, Natty Bumppo, from his youth

to his death. As Templeton, the post-Revolutionary village at the edge of the frontier, which is the novel's ostensible protagonist, becomes increasingly domesticated and "civilized" under the aegis of Judge Templeton's and, especially, his cousin Richard Jones's relentless commitment to "clearing," "settling," and "improving" the wilderness (and removing the nomadic natives). Cooper, conscious of the recidivism of the eastern seaboard states to the ways of the Old World, suddenly realizes that not only the "noble savage" of the American forests (Chingachgook) is doomed to extinction by the progressive ways of an encroaching civilization but also the nature-oriented, manly, self-reliant, naturally sagacious, trail-blazing, and rejuvenating backwoodsman (Natty, now in old age). To forestall that enervating end, as Cooper makes retrospectively clear in setting his following novel, *The Deerslayer*, in an early primal time (the pre-Revolutionary period of the French and Indian War, 1756–1763), when the question of the New World and the Old World was a revolutionary issue in the colonies, and in presenting Natty (and the frontier) in his youthful prime, Cooper resorts to the American exceptionalist narrative, both its westward imperial and its jeremiadic aspects:

Elizabeth raised her face, and saw the old hunter standing, looking back for a moment, on the verge of the wood. As he caught their glances, he drew his hard hand hastily across his eyes again, waved it high for an adieu, and, uttering a forced cry to his dogs, who were crouching at his feet, he entered the forest. This was the last that they ever saw of the Leather-stocking, whose rapid movements preceded the pursuit which Judge Temple both ordered and conducted. He had gone far towards the setting sun,—the foremost in the band of Pioneers, who are opening the way for the march of the nation across the continent.<sup>27</sup>

A generation later, one finds the American exceptionalist/jeremiadic narrative centrally informing not only Francis Parkman's official histories of the United States, as I have shown, but equally, if not more tellingly, his personal life as a mid-nineteenth-century New Englander of Puritan descent who, conscious of the enervating consequences of civilizational improvement—the transformation of the New World into an Old World—idealized the rawness of the West. Following Turner's frontier thesis, Henry Nash Smith reads Parkman's enthusiasm for the "Wild West" as the indulgence of a "young [New England] gentleman of leisure" in a "slightly decadent" Byronic "cult of wildness and savagery":

Parkman's love of the West implied a paradoxical rejection of organized society. He himself was the product of a complex social order formed by two centuries of history. . . . But a young gentleman of leisure could afford better than anyone else to indulge himself in the slightly decadent cult of wildness and savagery which the early nineteenth century took over from Byron. Historians call the mood "primitivism." Parkman had a severe case. In later life he said that from his early youth "His thoughts were always in the forest, whose features possessed his waking and sleeping dreams, filling him with vague cravings impossible to satisfy." And in the preface to *The Oregon Trail* written more than twenty years after the first publication of the book he bewailed the advance of humdrum civilization over the wide empty plains of Colorado since the stirring days of 1846. (Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land*, 52)

But this interpretation of Parkman's psyche as bordering on decadent is the blindness inherent in the frontier thesis, which represents the Puritan tradition as having run its course by the time of the American Revolution. Retrieving this tradition, which Smith and his Myth and Symbol followers obliterate, one is enabled to see that the threat of decadence for Parkman is in fact as it was for his Puritan forebears, that which the western frontier always keeps at bay. Indeed, this American exceptionalist/jeremiadic ethos was so deeply inscribed in Parkman's psyche that it not only compelled him to simulate the rejuvenating journey westward after he came to realize that that western world was doomed—the experience he recounted in his memoir, *The Oregon Trail*<sup>28</sup>—but also determined his very practice of historiography.

As a historian of the frontier era of American history, Parkman perceives his task in the analogy of the conditions of the wilderness and thus models his scholarly self, without irony, after the by this time long-textualized American frontiersman. Despite his claim to the objectivity that is enabled by "being there," his "new" (world) kind of historiography will be carried out according to the imperatives of what Edward Said has called "the textual attitude"<sup>29</sup> of the regulative *discourse* of the frontier: "clearing," "reclaiming," "bettering," "settling," and, if we see his project in terms of the belongingness of the New World and the Old World, always "renewing": "The crude and promiscuous mass of [primary] materials presented an aspect by no means inviting. The field of the history was uncultured and unreclaimed, and the labor that awaited me was like that of the border settler, who, before he builds his rugged dwelling,

must fell the forest-trees, burn the undergrowth, clear the ground, and hew the fallen trunks to due proportion" (Parkman, *Oregon Trail*, 348–349).<sup>30</sup>

More instances of this popular manifestation of the American exceptionalist/jeremiadic ethos could be adduced, but I will bring this phase of the synecdochical history to which I am alluding to a close by invoking as a last telling example, appropriately from Mark Twain, the last sentences of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, which, though still to be entirely understood by readers, becomes self-evident in the jeremiadic context I have provided: "But I reckon I got to light out for the Territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and sivilize me and I can't stand it. I been there before."<sup>31</sup>

### The Self-Destruction of the American Exceptionalist Truth

In undertaking this all too brief genealogy of American exceptionalism from the Puritans to the time of Twain's publication of *A Connecticut Yankee*, my point has been not simply to demonstrate the unerring continuity of its rejuvenating vocational logic but also to suggest that, in the long process, the exceptionalist myth/ethos, which, in the beginning, was a conscious ideological structure (a heuristic fiction, as it were), had become, as my example from *Huckleberry Finn* suggests, a deeply inscribed "truth" of the American national psyche: a symbolic expression, felt in the capillaries of the American body politic, of "the way things are." In Antonio Gramsci's resonant term, it had become "hegemonic." I quote Raymond Williams's definition—which includes the crucial distinction between "conscious ideology" and hegemony—at length to indicate how precisely it reflects the historical itinerary of American exceptionalism I have traced, particularly its jeremiadic aspect, and to suggest the difficulty of combatting its insidious effects:

This sense of "an ideology" is applied in abstract ways to the actual consciousness of both dominant and subordinate classes. A dominant class "has" this ideology in relatively pure and simple forms. A subordinate class has, in one version, nothing but this ideology as its consciousness (since the production of all ideas is, by axiomatic definition, in the hands of those who control the primary means of production) or, in another version, has this ideology imposed on its otherwise different consciousness, which it must struggle to sustain or develop against "ruling-class ideology." The concept of

hegemony often, in practice, resembles these 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 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 the 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.<sup>32</sup>

The end of the nineteenth century bore witness to westward expansion accompanied by extraordinarily rapid development of the occupied land, which was represented as the manifestation of the miraculous or, to emphasize one of the less resonant aspects of the exceptionalist ethos, the spectacular success of America’s errand in the wilderness. By this time, the myth of American exceptionalism as a conscious ideology had become a hegemonic discourse. And in the following century the United States, under the aegis of this hegemonic truth, became incrementally but inexorably a global imperial power. From World War I, through World War II, to the Cold War era, when, not incidentally, American literature was harnessed both by the American academy and by the U.S. government, to the cultural struggle against Soviet communism, its latest rejuvenating enemy,<sup>33</sup> it extended its History-ordained errand in the American “wilderness” into the world’s “wilderness.” But its undeviating pursuit

of its vocation beyond its frontiers “ended” in its theoretical self-destruction. In pushing the reifying logic of exceptionalism to its limit, it disclosed to those who were attentive (I am referring to the initiative that has come to be called “New Americanist studies”) the disavowed dark side of the American exceptionalist ethos. This liminal moment, which, as we shall see, is both terminal and inaugural and which I will call an “event” (*événement*) after Alain Badiou,<sup>34</sup> was the Vietnam War, which bore witness to the spectacle of the American juggernaut destroying a nation—its people, its culture, its land—in the name of bringing it the benefits of American-style democracy. But the Vietnam War’s devastating witness was muted by the massive campaign of the dominant culture to reduce that knowledge to the “Vietnam syndrome” and by the implosion of the Soviet Union in the 1990s. In the wake of the al Qaeda bombing of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, however, the George W. Bush administration, finding the necessary new rejuvenating enemy to replace the old Communist one, unleashed the United States’ spectacular “War on [Islamic] Terror” in the overt name of the American exceptionalist calling. In the process, the Bush administration pushed its exceptionalist logic to its liminal extreme by staging its justification for invading Afghanistan and Iraq (that Saddam Hussein was manufacturing atomic weapons), adopting the concepts of “preemptive war” and “regime change,” employing “shock and awe” military tactics, and establishing the state of exception as the norm. In so doing, the Bush administration disclosed the violence that the discourse of American exceptionalism has always disavowed, and its hegemonic status reverted to a conscious ideology that henceforth could be challenged.

Later in this book, I will extend the genealogy of the myth of American exceptionalism, which culminates with the time when Twain was writing *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*, to include its cultural and political manifestations from that decisive moment of American history to the present post-9/11 occasion particularly to the period of the Cold War (Vietnam) and the “War on [militant Islamic] Terror” mounted by the George W. Bush administration. Here, I want to return, after a long but necessary genealogical detour, to the point of departure of this introductory chapter. Such a genealogy enables us to understand the real reason for the absence of explicit references to the American exceptionalist myth/ethos, not only in Twain’s writing but also in the long and voluminous history of commentary on and criticism of *A Connecticut Yankee*, a canonical novel in the American literary tradition that,

as I have observed, perhaps more than any other, is saturated right down to its capillaries by the exceptionalist ethos. The end of the nineteenth century, as we have seen, bore witness not only to the closing of the frontier and the emergence of “the Gilded Age” but also to the reopening of the frontier into the “wilderness” of the Pacific Ocean (Twain insistently refers to the Pacific as erroneously named). By that time of global opening, the “relations of domination and subordination” informing the exceptionalist myth had come, to put it in Williams’s resonant language, to be experienced 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 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 the pressures and limits of simple experience and common sense.” In short, the myth of American exceptionalism for Twain and the critics and commentators of *A Connecticut Yankee* was by that time so deeply inscribed in their being as *the truth* of the American national identity that it was virtually impossible for them to project it as a conscious concept to be thought about critically. In Louis Althusser’s apt terms, Twain and the early Americanists who read him as the quintessential American writer were “interpellated”—rendered “subjected subjects”—by the call of the American exceptionalist *Logos*:

The duplicate mirror-structure of ideology ensures simultaneously:

1. The interpellation of the individuals as subjects;
2. Their subjection to the Subject;
3. The mutual recognition of subjects and Subject, the subjects’ recognition of each other, and finally the subject’s recognition of himself;
4. The absolute guarantee that everything really is so, and that on condition that the subjects recognize what they are and behave accordingly, everything will be all right: Amen—“*So be it.*”

Result: caught in this quadruple system of interpellation as subjects, of subjection to the Subject, of universal recognition and of absolute guarantee, the subjects “work,” they “work by themselves” in the vast majority of cases, with the exception of the “bad subjects” who on occasion provoke the intervention of one of the detachments of the (repressive) State apparatuses. But the vast majority of (good) subjects work all right “all by themselves,” i.e. by ideology (whose concrete forms are realized in the Ideological State

Apparatuses. . . . Their concrete, material behavior is simply the inscription in life of the admirable words of the prayer: *Amen*—“*So be it.*”

This was the case not only of the early critics, like William Dean Howells and Sylvester Baxter, who celebrated the novel as an American masterpiece, but, as we shall see, even much later ones such as Henry Nash Smith and James Cox, who were troubled by the “contradictory” violent ending of the novel, or John Carlos Rowe, who, unable to believe that a true American like Twain could advocate violence, read it from beginning to end as his critique of Hank Morgan’s unrelentingly crass Yankee commitment to technological “progress.” It is for this reason, I submit, that, despite the vast existing archive of criticism and commentary on it, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* still remains to be adequately read.

Seen in the estranging light shed by the thematization of the hegemonic status of the American exceptionalist ethos at the end of the nineteenth century, furthermore, *A Connecticut Yankee*, I suggest, assumes enormous importance as proleptic of the United States’ global future. I am not only referring to the Cold War era, which bore witness to the United States’ destruction of Vietnam in the name of “saving it” for the “free world,” but also, and even more tellingly, to the permanent “War on Terror” inaugurated in the wake of the end of the Cold War—which, from the exceptionalist perspective, meant the loss of a rejuvenating enemy—by the George W. Bush administration (the neoconservative exponents of “the American Century”). Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*, despite its patent flaws as a novel, sheds more light on the United States’ contemporary global occasion than any other novel in the American canon, with the exception of Herman Melville’s fiction.

Interpellated by the American calling, the vast majority of American critics and commentators on *A Connecticut Yankee* have been blinded by their American exceptionalist insight to or, more precisely, by their oversight of<sup>35</sup> the dark side of its “benign” progressive surface, a darkness that has in fact in some degree haunted the consciousness of all those American writers, like Mark Twain, who have committed their labor to the accomplishment of the “errand” from the beginning.<sup>36</sup> What, then, is this spectral dark side of the exceptionalist ethos? To put it generally, it is the spectacular violence endemic to an unerring optimistic logic, which, having its origins, as I have shown, in the myth of transcendental election and calling (by and from God or History) and

its vocational end in the fulfillment of this panoptic “higher cause,” justifies the destruction, indeed the annihilation if necessary, of any obstacle in its “march” toward its transcendently ordained *Telos*—and, in the process, enables the victimizer to blame the victim. Put in a more recent theoretical language, in relying on an ontologically founded perpetual frontier or enemy—to recall the Puritan jeremiad, the paradoxically rejuvenating anxiety precipitated by crisis (the state of emergency)—the unswerving logic of the American exceptionalist ethos renders the state of exception the norm. In Giorgio Agamben’s resonant terms, to which I will return, it transforms politics into a biopolitics that reduces human life (*bios*) to “bare life” (*zoē*), *homo sacer*, the included excluded, or, in Jacques Rancière’s phrase, the part [of a polity] of no-part, which can then be killed with impunity:

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 sphere.*<sup>37</sup>

To provide an orientating contrast to Twain’s exceptionalism and that of the Americanist criticism and commentary that has dominated Twain studies, I invoke here a passage from Herman Melville’s novel *Moby-Dick* that I take to be at the heart of this subversive American work: Ishmael’s recollection of the origins of Captain Ahab’s monomaniacal desire for vengeance against the white whale. The passage follows Ishmael’s account of Ahab’s charismatic galvanizing of the crew of isolatoes that man the ship of state he commands on

behalf of his “fiery pursuit” of Moby Dick and immediately precedes Ishmael’s antithetical representation of the white whale:

No turbaned Turk, no hired Venetian or Malay, could have smote him with more seeming malice. Small reason was there to doubt, then, that ever since the almost fatal encounter, Ahab had cherished a wild vindictiveness against the whale, all the more fell for that in his frantic morbidity he at last came to identify with him, not only all his bodily woes, but all his intellectual and spiritual exasperations. The white whale swam before him as the monomaniac incarnation of all those malicious agencies which some deep men feel eating in them, till they are left living on with half a heart and half a lung. That intangible malignity which has been from the beginning; to whose dominion even the modern Christians ascribe one-half of the worlds; which the ancient Ophites of the East revered in their statue devil;—Ahab did not fall down and worship like them; but deliriously transferring its idea to the abhorred white whale, he pitted himself, all mutilated, against it. All that most maddens and torments; all that stirs up the lee of things; all truth with malice in it; all that cracks the sinews and cakes the brain; all the subtle demonisms of life and thought; all evil, to crazy Ahab, were visibly personified, and made practically assailable in Moby Dick. He piled upon the whale’s white hump the sum of all the general rage and hate felt by his whole race from Adam down; and then, as if his chest had been a mortar, he burst his hot heart’s shell upon it. (Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 184)



## CHAPTER TWO



# *A Connecticut Yankee as American Jeremiad*

## *The Historical Context*

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

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

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

—Mark Twain, Reading at Governors Island (1886)



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

I will undertake a synecdochical reading of the history of the commentary and criticism of *A Connecticut Yankee* from the critical perspective enabled by the New Americanist genealogy of American exceptionalism developed in chapter 1 in the next chapter. Before inaugurating such a project, it will be necessary, for obvious reasons, to establish the historical American occasion that Twain is addressing in the novel. I use the quite appropriate term “the Gilded Age,” coined by Twain and his coauthor Charles Dudley Warner in

their 1873 novel of the same name. To summarize, it will be my purpose in this chapter to show that the post-Civil War and postindustrial Mark Twain, like his ancestral Puritan Jeremiahs and his more immediate predecessor Francis Parkman (whose *Oregon Trail* he imitates in *Roughing It*), was highly conscious of the waning of the American frontier (the “Virgin Land”) and the threat its demise posed to the “American Adam”—the always youthful, self-reliant, and adventurous pioneering American spirit—and to the organic unity of the (chosen) covenantal people. He was compelled, therefore, to write *A Connecticut Yankee*, a novel whose decidedly American protagonist (the descendant of Huck Finn) epitomizes the American exceptionalist ethos in all its aspects, as an American jeremiad, not simply to forestall the debilitating overcivilization endemic to the rejuvenating errand but to proffer symbolically the possibility of a new frontier/enemy that would renew and reunite the recidivistic covenantal American people, retrieve the golden [Adamic] age in the nineteenth-century present from the threat of becoming its simulacrum (a “Gilded Age,” an age of “robber barons”), or, to retrieve the biblical origins of this democratic American obsession, despotic “fleshpots.”

I cannot in this limited space provide an adequate account of this highly complex and decisively crucial occasion in the history of exceptionalist America. For such accounts, I refer readers to John F. Kasson’s and Alan Trachtenberg’s magisterial cultural histories, *Civilizing the Machine: Technology and Republican Values in America, 1776–1900* (1976) and *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (1982), respectively, with the proviso that they bring to bear the discriminating directives suggested by the American exceptionalist ethos, which Kasson and Trachtenberg, like their contemporary Americanists, inexplicably do not invoke.<sup>1</sup> It will suffice for the purpose of establishing a context for my critical reading of the history of Americanist commentary and criticism of *A Connecticut Yankee* to underscore those fundamental and indissolubly related aspects of Twain’s contemporary historical occasion to which he is alluding and commenting on in choosing a “New World”—Adamic—American as his protagonist in the “Old World” and American exceptionalism as that ethos that drives his “revolutionary” project (“errand”) in the novel. The most important of these, reflected in Twain’s setting the novel beyond the late nineteenth-century borders of the United States, is, of course, the waning of the frontier. From the exceptionalist perspective, this meant, as I have shown, the loss of an internal enemy (the crisis that rejuvenates) and thus the threat of backsliding—the paradoxical return to the Old World conditions from

which it was the purpose of the original covenantal people to free themselves by way of a divinely sponsored exodus to the Promised Land. Not incidentally, to Mark Twain, an American author hailing from and celebrating the primal values of the West, this debilitating effect of “improvement” had already become markedly manifest in the eastern seaboard states by the time he wrote *The Gilded Age* with Charles Dudley Warner.

The westward expansionist momentum—which is to say the penetration, “settlement,” and “improvement” of the “virgin land,” the *terra nullius* of the American Puritan exegetes, or, in the triumphalist language that Twain and the later American Myth and Symbol critics who came to dominate the first wave of American literary studies indulged, “the westward march of civilization”<sup>2</sup>—was accompanied by the rapid, and spectacular, rise of a railroad system that bound the diffuse regions and cultures of the nation together and produced the conditions for the replacement of settlements by cities, an inefficient agrarian society by an efficient metropolitan urban one. Simultaneously, it prompted a revolutionary, magic-like explosion of scientific and technological advances—the Taylorized factory system, the commodification of exchange, the transformation of social life into a consumer society, and, not least, the globalization of the market and the imperialization of the (nation) state. These produced a dominant (“aristocratic”) political and cultural class of enormously wealthy managers/entrepreneurs—the Rockefellers, the Vanderbilts, the Stanfords, the Astors, the Goulds, the Carnegies, the Huntingtons, the Hills (the “robber barons”)—which resulted, in Trachtenberg’s terms, in both the economic and cultural “incorporation of America”: an inordinately imbalanced class society in which a remarkably small number of aggressive and often corrupt capitalist entrepreneurs determined the economic and social course by buying political policy. At the same time that the Census Bureau announced the official closing of the American frontier (1890), thus prompting Frederick Jackson Turner’s jeremiad bemoaning the loss of its rejuvenating dynamics vis à vis the self-reliant spirit of the westering pioneer, it also offered statistics on income distribution in the United States that put the negative terms of the waning of the frontier in terms that spoke directly of the culminating economic and sociopolitical consequences of the westward expansionist momentum. The Census Bureau’s 1890 figures, Trachtenberg observes, provided stark evidence of “a range of income distribution which provided one measure of the shape and depth of the gulf” between the rich and the poor at that critical moment of American development: “Out of 12 million families, 11 million lived on

incomes below \$1,200 a year. The average income of this group was \$380, far below the accepted poverty line. In the population as a whole, the richest one percent earned more than the total income of the poorest 50 percent, and commanded more wealth than the remaining 99 percent. About half of all American families lived without property” (Trachtenberg, *Incorporation of America*, 99; emphasis original).

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

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

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

In short, all but “savage Indians.” The dean of the Yale Law School supplied the missing term, however, in “A Paper on Tramps” at an 1877 meeting of the American Social Science Association: “As we utter the word *Tramp*, there arise[s] straightaway before us the spectacle of a lazy, incorrigible, cowardly, utterly depraved savage.” In such images of unruly passions and suspicious motives did respectable folk find their fears confirmed: the troubles marked a degeneration of virtue, a loss of those character traits of industry, regularity, and respect for order essential to the public. (Trachtenberg, *Incorporation of America*, 71)

The ultimate consequence of this divide was, in Michel Foucault's counter-mnemonic language, the establishment of the disciplinary society, a polity, as John Kasson proleptically observed in his neglected analysis of the origins and development of the Lowell, Massachusetts, factory system,<sup>3</sup> that was organized to transform the potentially insurrectional bodies of the deprived masses into "useful and docile bodies" (Trachtenberg, *Incorporation of America*, 71).

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

Twain's enthusiasm for technological progress—and the global status it endowed to the United States—was abiding. It is borne witness to not only by his early writing, not least *The Innocents Abroad, or The New Pilgrims' Progress* (1869), his travel book narrating his journey to the "Old World" and Palestine

(“the Holy Land”), but also by the globally inflected writing that immediately follows *A Connecticut Yankee* (1889)—which, as we shall see, Americanists old and new have read as reflecting Twain’s disillusionment in his former faith in America’s techno-industrial-imperialist global vision—particularly *Following the Equator* (1897). Despite Twain’s impatience with his fellow “pilgrims” provincialism—their mindless reliance on the Bible or on prior American “guides” to the Old World and Palestine—the former text is saturated by his New World exceptionalist (and “Orientalist”) ethos, which never lets an opportunity go by to point out and underscore the material and moral superiority of a democratic and technologically developed United States over the sharp contrast between the luxury of the few that govern and the squalor of the groveling masses that are governed in the Old World he, as an “innocent” American Adam, is visiting.<sup>6</sup> And the latter text, in classic American Orientalist fashion, represents America’s Others—most tellingly, the Indians under British imperial rule—from the perspective of the “civilized” British colonist victors<sup>7</sup>; not, however, without implying that American colonialism is superior because it is more humane. This is especially evident in Twain’s extended narration of the Great Mutiny of 1858, which he draws entirely from official British histories of that epochal global event. It was, as many critics have noted, Twain’s intention to see the lands and peoples he visited with his own unencumbered (innocent/objective) “American” eyes.<sup>8</sup> Despite his avowed intent, however, Twain’s representations of what he saw were invariably, unlike Herman Melville’s, not incidentally, mediated by what Edward Said, in exposing the “Orientalism” of Western representations of the Orient, has called “the textual attitude”:

It may appear strange to speak about something or someone as holding a *textual* attitude, but a student of literature will understand the phrase more easily if he will recall the kind of view attacked by Voltaire in *Candide*, or even the attitude to reality satirized by Cervantes in *Don Quixote*. What seems unexceptionable good sense to these writers is that it is a fallacy to assume that the swarming, unpredictable, and problematic mess in which human beings live can be understood on the basis of what books—texts—say; to apply what one learns out of a book literally to reality is to risk folly or ruin. One would no more think of using *Amadis of Gaul* to understand sixteenth century (or present-day) Spain than one would use the Bible to understand, say, the House of Commons. But clearly people have tried and do try to use texts in so

simple-minded a way, for otherwise *Candide* and *Don Quixote* would not still have the appeal for readers that they do today.<sup>9</sup>

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

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

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

In Twain’s mind, these technologically sublime capitalist and globalizing American achievements were the modern manifestations of the adventurous,

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

Actually it is a logical consequence of Puritan theology: man is put into this world, *not to spend his life in profitless singing of hymns or in unfruitful monastic contemplation, but to do what the world requires, according to its terms.* He must raise children, he must work at his calling. No activity is outside the holy purpose of the overarching covenant. Yet the Christian works not for the gain that may (or may not) result from his labor, but for the glory of God. He remains an ascetic in the world, as much as any hermit outside it. He displays unprecedented energy in wresting the land from the Indians, trading in the seven seas, speculating in lands: "Yet," says Cotton, "his heart is not set upon these things, he can tell what to do with his estate when he hath got it." In New England the phrase to describe this attitude soon became "loving the world with weaned affections."<sup>12</sup>

In other words, in calling America at the end of the nineteenth-century the "Gilded Age," Twain, the "plain," unencumbered westerner who had come to the overcoded, degenerating (recidivist) East Coast, was criticizing what he took to be a national forgetting of America's ever forward-looking (westering)

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

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

In culture, this late nineteenth-century amnesiac tendency manifested itself in the form of the “genteel tradition.” For Twain, this triumph of Hamiltonian over Jeffersonian democracy meant a backsliding from the earlier American exceptionalist project, particularly of writers such as Emerson and Thoreau (later, during the World War II and Cold War periods, called the founders of the “American Renaissance”), who were dedicated to the task of looking at home to an Adamic—unadorned, forward-oriented, democratic—America (and beyond) rather than abroad to backward and effete, tradition-bound aristocratic England for forms of life commensurate with their unique New World

status. It meant, more specifically, a regression to a servile yearning for the kind of “high culture” epitomized by the novels of manners of Jane Austen, the romances of Sir Walter Scott,<sup>14</sup> and, above all, the highly influential work of the renowned British cultural critic Matthew Arnold, which struck a resounding chord in liberal American intellectuals rendered anxious by the labor upheaval of 1886 (the so-called Haymarket Riots). I am referring particularly to *Culture and Anarchy* (1867), in which Arnold, against the rapidly declining authority of the Christian religion and in the name of a secular “disinterested inquiry” of the “best self,” espouses the “sweetness and light” of “civilization”—“the best which has been thought and said in the [Western] world”—as the means of resisting the “anarchy,” the centerlessness, that would ensue from allowing the “barbarous” uncultured order to “do . . . what it likes.”<sup>15</sup>

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

For we have seen how much of our disorders and perplexities [are] due to the disbelief, among the classes and combination of men, Barbarian or Philistine, which have hitherto governed our society, in right reason, in a paramount best self; to the invisible decay and break-up of organizations by which, asserting and expressing in these organizations their ordinary self only, they have so long ruled us; and to their irresolution, when the society, which their conscience tells them they have made and still manage not with right reason but with their ordinary self, is rudely shaken, in offering resistance to its subverters. But for us,—who believe in right reason, in the duty and possibility of extricating and elevating our best self, in the progress of humanity towards perfection,—for us the framework of society, that the theatre on which this august drama has to unroll itself, is sacred; and whoever administers it, and however we may seek to remove them from their tenure of administration, yet, while they administer, we steadily and with undivided heart support them in

repressing anarchy and disorder; because without order there can be no society, and without society there can be no human perfection.

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

In opposition to this "genteel" high culture being imported into America from Victorian England at the end of the nineteenth century, Twain aggressively reasserted his anti-Old World American exceptionalist ethos. Against the tyranny of monarchy, he privileged the democracy of "the common man"; against cultural gentility, he opposed straightforward simplicity; against the "florid elaborateness" of the British romance novel and highly decorous novel of manners, which, for him, were epitomized in the United States by James Fenimore Cooper's fiction,<sup>17</sup> he privileged a lowly, often deliberately coarse, and unadorned American "realism"; against the "effeteness" of British high style (and its eastern American imitators), he privileged the vernacular, the "plain style," of western Americans. In short, oriented by the optimistic, practical ("can-do") logic of his American exceptionalist ethos, Twain ostensibly opposed New World "fact" to Old World "fable," "history" to "myth." It was this decisively affirmative exceptionalist gesture that, in the (Cold War) period bearing witness to the professionalization of American literary studies, led contemporary American writers (Ernest Hemingway and T. S. Eliot), critics (Lionel Trilling), and scholars (Henry Nash Smith) to identify *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* as the first quintessentially American novel or, as Jonathan Arac puts it, to its "hypercanonization."<sup>18</sup> But insofar as Twain represented this relay of worldly sites according to the dictates of the panoptic logic of his exceptionalist ethos—that is, from a secularized or naturalized supernatural perspective or, to put it alternatively, from an ontological "center elsewhere . . . which is beyond the reach of the [free]play [of criticism]<sup>19</sup>—he was, as I will show, compelled to perceive their singularity as errant and thus to employ his will to power over them in the name of order.

In *Billy Budd, Sailor*, Herman Melville, a contemporary of the Twain of *A Connecticut Yankee*, had asserted “fact” (history), the “Truth uncompromisingly told” that “will always have its ragged edges” (128), over “fable” (myth or romance), the “measured forms” endemic to the myth of Orpheus’s lyre to which Captain Vere was unerringly committed in the name of the “King” (the sovereignty of the state of exception): “‘With mankind,’ he [Vere] would say, ‘forms, measured forms, are everything; and that is the import couched in the story of Orpheus with his lyre spellbinding the wild denizens of the wood.’ *And this he once applied to the disruptions of forms going on across the Channel [the French Revolution] as the consequence thereof.*”<sup>20</sup> Despite Twain’s alleged commitment to “history” over “romance” at the time he was writing *A Connecticut Yankee*, the logocentric logic of his American exceptionalist ethos compelled him in the end, like Matthew Arnold’s “best self,” to privilege the “genteel tradition” he was ostensibly opposing. Unlike Melville, Twain in fact chose “fable” over “fact”—the “measured forms” of the Orphic imagination over the “ragged edges” of historical time. The *deus ex machina* ending of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* bears symptomatic witness to this decision. It is, as I will show, this truth about Twain’s artistic vocation, the consequence of his unquestioned commitment to the American calling, to which the massive body of criticism and scholarly commentary on *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* has been blinded by its surprisingly unthought adherence to the American exceptionalist ethos.

## CHAPTER THREE



# Americanist Criticism of *A Connecticut Yankee*

## *A Critical History*

It is no exaggeration to say that liberation as an intellectual mission, born in the resistance and opposition to the confinements and ravages of imperialism, has now shifted from the settled, established and domesticated dynamics of culture to its unhoused, decentered, and exilic energies, energies whose incarnation today is the migrant and whose consciousness is that of the intellectual and artist in exile, the political figure between domains, between forms, between homes, and between languages.

—Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*

We must suppose, then, that whatever convokes someone to the composition of a subject is something extra, something that happens in situations as something that they and the usual way of behaving in them cannot account for. Let us say that a *subject* which goes beyond the animal (although the animal remains its sole foundation [*support*]) needs something to have happened, something that cannot be reduced to its ordinary inscription in “what there is.”

Let us call this *supplement* an *event*.

—Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* (my emphasis)



## The Four Phases of Criticism of *A Connecticut Yankee* and the Self-Destruction of the American Exceptionalist Ethos

The body of criticism and commentary on *A Connecticut Yankee* is, of course, too vast to be adequately treated in this limited space. Nevertheless, an extensive chronological reading of this inordinately popular American work from the contrapuntal perspective afforded by the New Americanist studies, particularly its thematization of the American exceptionalist ethos as a problematic matter, suggests a rather simple and predictable interpretive pattern that articulates itself in four overlapping temporal phases: (1) the period between the novel's composition and publication and its reception as a national classic (1886—ca. 1945: the Gilded Age); (2) the period bearing witness to the professionalization of American literary studies and the canonization of Mark Twain (1940—ca. 1990: the Cold War era);<sup>1</sup> (3) the period in which the American exceptionalist ethos becomes visible as an ideology (1970 [the Vietnam War decade]—2000); and the period when the New Americanist studies begin to expose the violent disavowed underside of American exceptionalism (the post-9/11 era).<sup>2</sup> In all four phases, what is hermeneutically at stake in the novel (even if ostensibly it is not) is the meaning of the culminating Battle of the Sand Belt, when, in the face of apparently irrational resistance to his benign Adamic errand to establish a modern American-style republic in the wilderness of feudal Britain, Hank Morgan unleashes his spectacular technological weapons of instant mass destruction—Gatling guns and a murderous field of electrically charged wire—to achieve his “benign” end. In other words, this history repeats at the interpretive register the self-destructive historical itinerary of the American exceptionalist ethos. This entails the process, analyzed in chapter 1, bearing witness to its divinely ordained origin; the secularization and hegemonization of the (teleo)logic of its theology (the replacement of the *Theo-logos*, God, by the *Anthropo-logos*, History); the fulfillment of its unerring westering logic (the “march of [American] civilization”); its reduction of the world to a “world picture” seen panoptically with American eyes; and its simultaneous demise: the disclosure at this liminal point (“the logical end”), by way of its self-righteous violence against its recalcitrant Other, of the spectral reality its exceptionalist logic cannot contain (and disavows) within its totality.

## Phase One

Significantly, the focus of virtually all the commentary in the first phase of this interpretive history of *A Connecticut Yankee*, not only that of the reviewers and critics but also of Mark Twain himself, is—almost too insistently—on the first chapters of the novel, which introduce and underscore Hank Morgan’s Yankee sanity (his perception of the Arthurian chivalric/feudal world into which he awakens as a lunatic asylum), his Yankee realism, his self-reliance, his practicality, his technological know-how, and his commitment to transforming feudal Britain into a nineteenth-century-style American capitalist democracy. What is remarkable about this commentary, given the inordinate violence Hank Morgan unleashes at the end in the name of his benign project, is the absence of significant reference to the culminating Battle of the Sand Belt. That is to say, this first phase of criticism and commentary on the novel assumes the identity of Mark Twain and the Connecticut Yankee. In his comments on the novel before, during, and immediately after its publication, it is usually to the first part, which recounts Hank Morgan’s revolutionary transformation of feudal England into a republic, that Twain refers. And what he says about it invariably indicates total solidarity with the Connecticut Yankee’s “ameliorative” American project. This unnamed American exceptionalist solidarity is epitomized, for example, in a letter, precipitated by the fall of the Brazilian monarchy (1889), Twain wrote to Sylvester Baxter (who would favorably review the novel in the *Boston Herald* soon after its publication). I quote at length not only to underscore the depth of Twain’s oneness with Hank Morgan’s anti-Old World New World values but also to suggest by way of its allusion to the Gilded Age the novel’s ultimate American jeremiadic intent—and, not incidentally, the violence (concealed by his brash “western”-style humor) endemic to his American logic:

Another throne has gone down, and I swim in oceans of satisfaction. I wish I might live fifty years longer; I believe I should really see the thrones of Europe selling at auction for old iron. I believe I should really see the end of what is surely the grotesqueness of all the swindles ever invented by man—monarchy. It is enough to make a graven image laugh, to see apparently rational people, away down here in this wholesome and merciless slaughter-day for shams, scoundrelisms, hereditary kingship and so-called “nobility.” It is enough to make the monarchs and nobles themselves laugh—and in private they do;

there can be no question about that. I think there is only one funnier thing, and that is the spectacle of these bastard Americans—the Hamersleys and Huntingtons and such—offering cash, encumbered by themselves, for rotten carcasses and stolen titles. When our great brethren the disenslaved Brazilians frame their Declaration of Independence, I hope they will insert the missing link; “We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all monarchs are usurpers, and descendants of usurpers; for the reason that no throne was ever set up in this world by the will, freely exercised, of the only body possessing the legitimate right to set it up—the numerical mass of the nation. You already have the advance sheets of my forthcoming book in your hands. If you will turn to about the five hundredth page, you will find a state paper of my Connecticut Yankee in which he announces the dissolution of King Arthur’s monarchy and proclaims the English Republic. Compare it with the state paper which announces the downfall of the Brazilian monarchy and proclaims the Republic of the United States of Brazil, and stand by to defend the Yankee from plagiarism.”<sup>3</sup>

This overdetermination of the first part of the novel, which tacitly suggests the identity of the author and his Yankee protagonist, recurs frequently in Twain’s comments about the novel, even long after its publication, as in the following remarks in his *Autobiography* castigating the brutal rapacity of Belgium’s monarch, King Leopold, in the Congo:

*A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* was an attempt to imagine, and after a fashion set forth, the hard conditions of life for the laboring and defenseless poor in bygone times in England, and incidentally contrast these conditions with those under which the civil and ecclesiastical pets of privilege and high fortune lived in those times. I think I was purposing to contrast that English life, not just the English life of Arthur’s day but the English life of the whole of the Middle Ages, with the life of modern Christendom and modern civilization—to the advantage of the latter, of course. That advantage is still claimable and does creditably and handsomely exist everywhere in Christendom—if we leave out Russia and the royal palace of Belgium. The royal palace of Belgium is still what has been for fourteen years the den of a wild beast, King Leopold, who for money’s sake mutilates murders and starves half a million of friendless and helpless poor natives in the Congo State every year and does it by the silent consent of all the Christian powers

except England, none of them lifting a hand or a voice to stop these atrocities, although thirteen of them are by solemn treaty pledged to the protecting and uplifting of these wretched natives.<sup>4</sup>

Even when on occasion during that period immediately before and after the publication of *A Connecticut Yankee* Twain does anticipate or refer to the “disturbing” end of the novel—the violent events that bring his benign project of regime change to its culmination—it is to express his unequivocal solidarity with his protagonist. Thus, in a notebook entry (1885) shortly following the dream that apparently inaugurated his project, Twain writes: “Have a battle between modern army with gatling guns—(automatic) 600 shots a minute with one pulling of the trigger, torpedoes, balloons, 100-ton cannon, iron-clad fleet &c & Prince de Joinville’s Middle Age Crusaders.”<sup>5</sup> This solidarity is decisively underscored in a speech he gave to the Monday Evening Club of Hartford, Connecticut, on May 22, 1886 (three years before the publication of *A Connecticut Yankee*), ironically entitled “The New Dynasty.” The speech celebrated the newly formed American labor organization the Knights of Labor, which, significantly, was anti-Socialist and anti-Communist. In striking against the corrupt economic policies of the robber barons and the aristocratization of wealth, this nascent labor movement was, in Twain’s mind, not only resisting the Gilded Age’s establishment of a decadent Old World aristocracy in the New World, including, not incidentally, the production of an uprooted—and threatening—class of vagrants reminiscent of the nomadic (savage) natives, but also, as the recurrent allusion to the resonant refrain “the westward march of American civilization” suggests, recuperating and enhancing the original, frontier-oriented, American vocation. I quote Twain at length not only to point to the similarity between the author and protagonist of *A Connecticut Yankee* but also to underscore the remarkable identity of their New World ethos and worldly project: the Protestant work ethic, its principle of self-reliance, its pioneering spirit, its republicanism, and, not least, the undeviating optimism inherent in its logic of chosenness:

Many a time, when I have seen a man abusing a horse, I have wished I knew that horse’s language, so that I could whisper in his ear, “Fool, you are master here, if you but knew it. Launch out with your heel!” The working millions, in all the ages, have been horses—were horses; all they needed was a capable leader to organize their strength and tell them how to use it, and they would

in that moment be master. They have FOUND that leader somewhere, to-day, and they ARE master—the only time in the world that ever the true king wore the purple; the only time in this world that “By the grace of God, King” was ever uttered when it was not a lie.

And we need not fear this king. All the kings that have ruled the world heretofore were born the protectors and sympathizing friends and supporters of cliques and clans of gilded idlers, selfish pap-hunters, restless schemers, troublers of the State in the interest of their private advantage. But this king is born the enemy of them that scheme and talk and do no work. He will be our permanent shield and defence against the Socialist, the Communist, the Anarchist, the tramp, and the selfish agitator for “reforms” that will beget bread and notoriety for him at cleaner men’s expense; he will be our refuge and defence against these, and against all like forms of political disease, pollution, and death.

How will he use his power? *To oppress*—at first. For he is not better than the masters that went before; nor pretends to be. The only difference is, he will oppress the few; they oppressed the many; he will oppress the thousands, they oppressed the millions; but he will imprison nobody, he will massacre, burn, flay, torture, exile nobody, nor work any subject eighteen hours a day, nor starve his family. He will see to it that there is fair play, fair working hours, fair wages: and further than that, when his might has become securely massed and his authority recognized, he will not go, let us hope, and determine also to believe. He will be strenuous, firm, sometimes hard—he *must* be—for a while, till all his craftsmen be gathered into his citadel and his throne established. Until then let us be patient.

It is not long to wait; his day is close at hand: his clans are gathering, they are on their way; his bugles are sounding the call, they are answering; every week that comes and goes sees ten thousand new crusaders swing into line and add their pulsing footfall to the thunder-tread of his mighty battalions.<sup>6</sup>

This evidence of the identity between the author and the protagonist of *A Connecticut Yankee*, which I am claiming is crucial to an understanding of the meaning of the novel, especially for the present post-9/11 occasion is not singular. Other similar anticipatory gestures, such as the reading Twain gave from his work in progress to the Military Service Institute on November 11, 1886, at Governors Island, New York, bear witness to its consistency. On that occasion, which consisted of reading selected fragments from the work in

progress and “outlining the rest of it in bulk” to an audience of military brass, Twain betrays no ambiguities about his relationship to his Yankee protagonist (then named Robert Smith) and his benign democratizing goal, when following the establishment of the Yankee’s New World (common American man’s or Benjamin Franklin-like) credentials against a lunatic feudal chivalric society of “white Indians.” (“I am a Yankee of the Yankees, a practical man, nearly barren of sentiment or poetry.”) He summarizes (in his typical western-style humor, to which I will return) his protagonist’s participation in “a tournament” that was to become the “horrific” climax of the novel:

He took a contract from King Arthur to kill off, at one of the great tournaments, fifteen kings and many acres of hostile armored knights. When, lance in rest they charge by squadrons upon him, he behind the protection of a barbed wire fence charged with electricity mowed them down with Gatling guns that he had made for the occasion. He found that the “education of the nineteenth century is plenty good enough capital to go into business in the sixth century with.” And the next year he was running the kingdom all himself on a moderate royalty of forty per cent.<sup>7</sup>

This solidarity between the author and his protagonist implicit in Twain’s comments about the novel during and after its composition is, surprisingly, more or less unquestioningly assumed by most of the commentary and criticism immediately following the publication of *A Connecticut Yankee*. Setting the basic interpretive parameters for the discussion of the novel, William Dean Howells, the liberal novelist and influential arbiter of cultural taste of that American fin de siècle, not only reaffirms, in his own genteel style, his friend’s sympathetic attitude toward the brash Connecticut Yankee. He also generalizes, more than Twain does, the *Americanness*, which is to say, *without naming it*, the anti-Old World exceptionalism of the Connecticut Yankee’s ameliorative progressive techno-capitalist democratic project:

Mr. Clemens, we call him, rather than Mark Twain, because we feel that in this book our arch-humorist imparts more of his personal quality than in anything else he has done. Here he is to the full the humorist, as we know him; but he is very much more, and his strong, indignant, often infuriate hate of injustice, and his love of equality, burn hot through the manifold adventures and experiences of the tale. What he thought about prescriptive right and wrong we had partly learned in *The Prince and the Pauper*, and in *Huckleberry*

*Finn, but it is this last book which gives his whole mind.* The elastic scheme of the romance allows it to play freely back and forward between the sixth century and the nineteenth century, and often while it is working the reader up to a blasting contempt of monarchy and aristocracy in King Arthur's time, the dates are magically shifted under him, and he is confronted with exactly the same principles in Queen Victoria's time. The delicious satire, the marvelous wit, the wild, free, fantastic humor are the colors of the tapestry, while the texture is a humanity that lives in every fiber. At every moment the scene amuses, but it is all the time an object-lesson in democracy. *It makes us glad of our republic and our epoch; but it does not flatter us into a fond content with them; there are passages in which we see the noble of Arthur's day, who batted on the blood and sweat of his bondmen, is one in essence with the capitalist of Mr. Harrison's day who grows rich on the labor of his underpaid wagemen.*<sup>8</sup>

What should be noted in this decisive summary of the novel is not simply that Howells wholly subscribes to Twain's identification with Hank Morgan and that he pointedly Americanizes his project to willfully coerce a backward feudal monarchy into a progressive nineteenth-century-style American republic. As the qualification he pointedly asserts about present-day (i.e., Gilded Age) America strongly suggests, he is also, however unconsciously, alluding to a nationalizing American rhetorical tradition whose origins lay in the Puritan era. I mean, of course, the American jeremiad—the ultimate form, I am suggesting, that *A Connecticut Yankee* takes—whose fundamental purpose was and continues to be to rejuvenate (by violence) the backsliding covenantal people. In other words, its purpose was and is to instigate, by way of imagining an always threatening frontier or an enemy, the anxiety that would forestall overcivilization—the luxury and decadence endemic to the dynamics of improvement.

What is equally remarkable, given its patently problematic and apparently contradictory resonance—and later importance—is the utter casualness of Howells's single passing reference to the end of Hank Morgan's exceptionalist efforts at, to anticipate, regime change. Coming at the end of a loosely random series of itemized generalizations that, in summarizing the Connecticut Yankee's narrative itinerary, emphasizes his spectacularly productive technological/democratic accomplishments from the time he becomes foreman of Colt's pistol factory in Hartford to the time he assumes the status of "Boss" of Arthurian England—this cataclysmic event, like so many others in Twain's

work, is drained of its ethical significance. It is, in Hannah Arendt's apt term, reduced to banality:

The Boss cannot rest from introducing the apparatus of our time, and he tries to impart its spirit, with a thousand most astonishing effects. He starts a daily paper in Camelot; he torpedoes a holy well; he blows up a party of insolent knights with a dynamite bomb; when he and the king disguise themselves as peasants, in order to learn the real life of the people, and are taken and sold for slaves, Launcelot arrives to their rescue with five hundred knights on bicycles. It all ends with the Boss's proclamation of the Republic after Arthur's death, and his destruction of the whole chivalry of England by electricity. (William Dean Howells, "Review of *A Connecticut Yankee*," 327)

Howells's next celebratory sentence, which begins a new paragraph, in fact, underscores this banalization: "We can give no proper notion of the measureless play of an imagination which has a gigantic jollity in its feat, together with *the tenderest sympathy*" (my emphasis). Like Twain and, as we shall see, all too many of the critics and scholars his writing has attracted, Howells's ethical consciousness, here and elsewhere in his text, succumbs to that deeply inscribed—and questionable—tradition of American western humor, popularized by and identified with Twain, that in burlesquing the violence endemic to the exceptionalist logic of westward expansions to escape its dislocating effects routinized the horrific pain its "civilizing march" inflicted on its other.

One could invoke a number of other readings of *A Connecticut Yankee* published during this first phase of the history of criticism and commentary on the novel that in the unnamed name of American exceptionalism either bypass the catastrophic ending of the novel or, like Howells, give its dramatic violence only a fleeting reference. For the sake of economy, however, I will restrict myself to two further significant examples written by influential Americanist scholars—those of the Twainian critic Louis Budd in *Mark Twain: Social Philosopher* (1962) and the historian of ideas Ernest Lee Tuveson in *Redeemer Nation* (1968)—during the period that the official culture under the aegis of the John F. Kennedy administration called the era of "the New Frontier" and since then has come to be known as the "Vietnam decade." I mean that critical time of the Cold War, following the professionalization and harnessing of American literary studies to its ideological purposes,<sup>9</sup> that, in its political and military excesses, activated, in some degree, a *consciousness* of the mythic

status of the benign American historical errand, if not (yet) of the contradictory violent underside of the American exceptionalist ethos.

Like Howells and other earlier scholars, Budd everywhere in his reading of *The Connecticut Yankee* assumes the identity of Mark Twain and Hank Morgan. Though he acknowledges, with contemporaries such as Henry Nash Smith and James Cox, that *A Connecticut Yankee* is a flawed novel, he nevertheless insists, on the basis of his impeccable scholarship, that author and protagonist are basically one and the meaning of the narrative, despite the confusions, is sustained from beginning to end by their New World sense of superiority over the Old World:

From the day it reached print, there has always been some rigid dislike of its ideas or brash tone; and after praising many passages the typical critic decides that it fails as a unified work of literature. In part Twain is clearly to blame for this last verdict. Though the transfer is not complete to the last feature, Hank Morgan comes the closest of his major characters to being Twain himself. This means that Hank's attitudes cut in many directions, sometimes confusedly or erratically. However, *A Connecticut Yankee* had a basic coherence of plan as well as a simple foundation: Twain was more hopeful about the American system than he had ever been or would be again. (Budd, *Mark Twain*, 112)

Budd's purpose in this substantial book is to articulate, against a prior tendency to read Twain's writings from a "belle lettrist" (New Critical) perspective, the development of his "liberal" democratic sociopolitical philosophy by way of attending primarily to his obsessive topical concerns. Given this purpose—and his Cold War historical occasion—it is surprising that, like most of his predecessors, Budd makes no explicit reference to American exceptionalism, despite the fact that the exceptionalist idea, as in the case of his sympathetic reference to Twain's ferocious response to Matthew Arnold's "genteel" criticism of the philistinism of American culture, saturates the rhetoric of his entire study, particularly that of his climactic chapter on *A Connecticut Yankee*, pointedly entitled "Uncle Sam":

But the hot humanity, the economic criticism, the bursts of leveling democracy, and the religious satire were mainly for export [to Britain]: Twain was jumping into the family quarrels of John Bull and Brother Jonathan. His attitude strained fraternal limits, however; he acted more like an impatient uncle. Besides sketching a free-thinker's version of what the Old World past

had really been like, the narrowest focus of *A Connecticut Yankee* projected a rich, bustling, inventive United States as the living example of what our British relatives had failed to accomplish. Twain had been surprisingly slow to feel this way. All in all he had resisted the waves of anti-British talk since the Civil War, and when he finally started sniping at John Bull's island nothing at first promised an all-out barrage [like the one he was to unleash in this novel].

As the filial rhetoric he uses to characterize Twain's attitude toward the Old World—and his explicit uncertainty as to the cause of Twain's "sudden animus toward England" (Budd, *Mark Twain*, 118)—manifestly suggest, Budd seems blinded, like his subject, by his "sociopolitical" insight to the foundational role that the American exceptionalist ethos plays in Twain's "variable" (i.e., antitotalitarian, liberal) politics in general and in *The Connecticut Yankee* in particular. Despite the pervasive presence of the American exceptionalist ethos in his discourse, Budd seems to feel the need to disavow it in favor of a more fluid sociopolitical perspective: "Obviously," Budd tellingly writes in underscoring Twain's (American) difference between right and left extremism, "both conservatives and radicals can claim him if they merely look for what they want to find" (Budd, *Mark Twain*, 212). Like a specter that will not be laid to rest, there is something about Twain's and his Yankee's American exceptionalism that seems to haunt Budd.

Equally if not more surprising, given his Cold War occasion, is the fact that Budd, like Howells, makes only a brief and passing reference to the horrific Battle of the Sand Belt in his long and decisive chapter on *A Connecticut Yankee*:

Twain was obviously hunting with the fiercest critics of the House of Lords. The only hereditary chamber left in European parliaments, it was being widely deplored as an anchor of reaction, particularly after its drag on the latest Reform Bill. In a trial preface he explicitly needled the Lords for "once in a while in a century taking care of Number One to the neglect of the rest of the numerals." More often their stubborn holding on to a lopsided and antiquated margin of power drove their critics far beyond such understatement, and Hank Morgan, who gleefully massacred most of Arthur's knights, called for the return of a "Reign of Terror and a guillotine." This was not really meant to set off a bloodbath but only to challenge squarely the favorite example of people who opposed swift or even loud debate. (Budd, *Mark Twain*, 124)<sup>10</sup>

The omission of reference to or the parenthesizing of this climactic episode of the novel by Twain and the earliest critics, though unjustified, could be explained by the cultural circumstances that prevailed in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century. Under the aegis of the aggressively forwarding optimistic frontier spirit (particularly with the energizing anxiety-provoking announcement of the closing of the American frontier) and its spectacularly “progressive” scientific, technological, and economic accomplishments, that time, despite the political and cultural corruption this civilizational momentum precipitated, was bearing euphoric witness to the United States’ becoming, almost magically, a global power—and a redeemer nation. The omission of or the passing reference to the Battle of the Sand Belt in the 1960s, however, is more difficult to understand, since by that time the dark underside of the United States’ exceptionalist “errand in [the world’s] wilderness” was (foreshadowed by the essentially gratuitous—staged—firebombing of Dresden and the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki that brought World War II to its cataclysmic close) beginning to manifest itself, particularly in Vietnam, in the United States’ massive Cold War effort, undertaken in the name of its exceptionalist ethos against the Soviet Union, to achieve hegemony over the entire planet.

An insight into the blindness of Budd’s “political” insight is, however, clearly suggested in the “Conclusion” of his study:

When we review Twain’s career and add up the many specific cases when he was involved with political and social questions, it may seem strange that the substantial total has for so long been largely overlooked. The fault lies primarily in our own time. The twentieth-century writer has typically become an alienated intellectual, more and more engrossed in problems of deepest self-hood and unrelentingly suspicious or else cynical about the public world manipulated by press agents, lobbyists, and—lately—cold-war maneuvers. Today the writer who displays a political label is taken as an oddity; yet his nineteenth-century counterpart naturally lined himself up as a Democrat or Whig or Republican, or at least a mugwump. (Budd, *Mark Twain*, 209)

In other words, Twain’s writing was misunderstood by Budd’s generation of critics because American Modernism (the New Criticism) had shifted critical attention away from the political, which dominated in Twain’s time, to the (universal) aesthetic: the autonomy of *poesis*. The recuperation of Twain as an

American political writer, according to Budd, thus enabled him to be harnessed to America's exceptionalist struggle against the Soviet Union. Clearly, this—and the blindness to the violence it entails—is the gist of what follows:

While the label of "politician" had already acquired much of the derogatory connotation that it still has, Twain's circle did not despair of America's ability to produce statesmen of the caliber of the founding fathers, if the majority could be taught to think and vote right. Faulkner or Hemingway or O'Neill or Wallace Stevens have been nowhere near so hopeful. But Twain was, and he acted on that hope. That he acted so heavily on it has been overlooked also because his political preferences and the reasons for them were different from what his later admirers would expect. Only with a regretful wrench can most of these admirers come to think of him as cleaving to the middle class, the upper middle class, in fact. Thinking of Twain in this way has sounder bases, however, than a crude Marxist determinism. As the temper of his social mind is studied from his Hannibal days onward, it becomes clear that he would have sided with the claims of property even if his own bank account had not been sizable after 1870. Seldom in his long life did he doubt that almost everybody makes as much money in the end as he deserves, that property rights are the foundations of the happiest society, that the amount of property a man has largely determines the extent of his right to help guide society, and that political rights are secondary to the need to safeguard the health of private property. (Budd, *Mark Twain*, 210)

Budd criticizes the American "Modernists" for aesthetically distancing Twain's literary art from the politics his writing practiced. But as his reductive reference to "a crude Marxist determinism" suggests, the political he attributes to Twain is, despite his alleged "objectivity," manifestly the American exceptionalist (capitalist-style) liberal politics of the Cold War occasion. Just as many of the American academics who founded American studies harnessed American canonical writers to the war against communism, Budd turns Mark Twain into a Cold War warrior in the name of the redeemer nation.<sup>11</sup> As in the case of the founders of American studies, it is the hegemonic status of the exceptionalist ethos—"So be it."—that explains the absence of references to American exceptionalism in Budd's reading of *A Connecticut Yankee*.

Like Louis Budd, Ernest Lee Tuveson also identifies Twain with his protagonist, Hank Morgan, in his "Appendix" to *Redeemer Nation* (1968), "A Connecticut Yankee in the Mystical Babylon." But, whereas Budd overdetermines

the liberal politics of Twain's novel, Tuveson reads it as a representative instance of nineteenth-century American Protestant millennialism, the massively popular belief that America was the "redeemer nation," whose vocation was to fulfill God's providential design *in history* by "Americanizing" the world into a religiosecular (holy) utopia. This was particularly true of the "Campbellites," the version of millennialism, inaugurated by Alexander Campbell, that, according to Tuveson (and in opposition to Henry Nash Smith, as we shall see), in indissolubly relating the divinely ordained American errand and scientific progress, influenced Twain's conception of Hank Morgan's vocation:

The Reformation [of feudal England] is to be introduced, carried out, and completed with a rush. . . . Sir Boss's combination of advance in knowledge, democracy, and standard of living with advance of knowledge of the spiritual truths is entirely in consonance with the millennialists' frequent panegyrics of the telegraph, the printing press, improvements in agriculture, and the like as both means and results of spiritual improvements.<sup>12</sup>

Even more important, Tuveson, following the directives of the American Protestant millennialist interpretation of history, goes on, despite some uneasiness, to tacitly justify the technological violence the Yankee unleashes against "mystical Babylon" in the Battle of the Sand Belt:

The problem of the new weapons Sir Boss introduces is more complex than the problem of the relation between religion and scientific progress. They are undoubtedly products of the mastery of nature; are they instruments for attaining the millennium? There is curiously little interest in this question among religious writers. Julia Ward Howe [the author of the ferocious "Battle Hymn of the Republic"] has no difficulty in identifying the burnished rows of steel with the apocalyptic symbols; they are predestined, and necessarily right. I do not see much evidence that moral ambiguity is recognized consciously in Mark Twain's description of Sir Boss's electrical inventions. A millennial war is not only a just but, in Whitman's phrase, a "divine war." Means and ends are in predetermined harmony. (Tuveson, "Appendix," 274)

Indeed, Tuveson suggests, one of the motives compelling Twain to write this novel at the time of the "Gilded Age," and its nostalgia for the Middle Ages, was "his fear" that the "seeming healthy state" he felt "had been achieved in America for the first time" was being threatened by "relapse" (Tuveson, "Appendix," 226). That is, though Tuveson doesn't use the phrase, Twain conceived

*A Connecticut Yankee*, as I suggested in chapter 2, as an “American jeremiad” intended not only to warn against backsliding but also to dramatize a new rejuvenating frontier (or enemy). Relying heavily on Dan Beard’s illustrations (and their millennial resonance), Tuveson writes:

And, in fact, we may suspect that *A Connecticut Yankee* is a kind of counter-propaganda to reversionary tendencies [Twain] feared were currently visible in the romanticization of the Middle Ages. Dan Beard’s illustrations for the first edition point to such a suspicion. There is, for example, the curious fact that Merlin is represented with the features of the seemingly innocuous Lord Tennyson. . . . [I]t must have seemed to Twain as well as to Beard that this poet was indeed a kind of magician, who, in *The Idylls of the King* and other works, had worked a kind of spell, inducing people to regard the Dark Ages and chivalry as noble and admirable. The fashion for medievalism would certainly seem like a device of the Old One. And the adulation of royalty, so marked in the later nineteenth century, could well seem another peril. (Tuveson, “Appendix,” 226)

But it is not only the jeremiadic instigation of national anxiety that Tuveson finds to be Twain’s purpose in *A Connecticut Yankee*; it is also its corollary, the holy apocalyptic war against the universal principle of evil (the Beast). Indeed, like so many Americanists of his (Cold War) occasion, Tuveson in the end appropriates the millenarian narrative on behalf of exceptionalist America’s “epochal struggle” against Communist totalitarianism.<sup>13</sup> Like the Americanists of the second phase (as we shall see), he acknowledges the “frightening ambiguities” of the end, but, unlike them, adds that they are “more evident, probably, to us [in the 1960s] than to the nineteenth-century audience” (Tuveson, “Appendix,” 130). Then, in a liberal democratic rhetoric that suggests how fundamental the United States’ exceptionalist global war against modern totalitarianism has been in his reading of Twain’s “millennialist” novel, he concludes:

The display of the terrible destructiveness of electricity, the slaughter of the knights, reminds us that we have created, with our sciences and technology, a world that resembles the one John saw in his prophetic vision. The supernatural, cosmic battles and plagues would be matched, in terror and frightfulness, by our weapons in an all-out war. Conversely, using this same technology, we can construct a world that matches the millennium. *Certainly, part of the message of Revelation in our time would seem to be that we must make*

*our choice between them.* The old intermediate world of some good, much evil, but nothing totally catastrophic is gone. And, as we have learned from totalitarian states, the Augustinian refuge of the City of God is becoming impossible. Too, the “leverage” of good and evil is increasing, in an incredible rate. Modern man is, it seems, faced by the final challenge of history: create the millennium, or go down into the lake of fire. (Tuveson, “Appendix,” 230–231; my emphasis)

Why, we are compelled to ask by the rhetorical overdetermination of its essential characteristics to which I have pointed, didn’t Twain and the first critics of and commentators on *A Connecticut Yankee* directly invoke the term “American exceptionalism”? As I observed in chapter 1, the answer to this resonant question is suggested by the contrapuntal perspective enabled by the United States’ annunciation of its global “War on Terror” in the wake of 9/11, in the aftermath of which the frontier, so crucial to the exceptionalist ethos, has become everywhere and for all time. In other words, by the time of the first phase of the history of criticism and commentary on Twain’s novel (ca. 1880–1940), what had been at the outset of the Puritan experiment an *ideology* had become, through the process of increasing secularization, *hegemonic* by the time Twain was writing *A Connecticut Yankee*: “a lived system of meanings and values—constitutive and constituting,” to recall Raymond Williams’s language, “which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming. [Hegemony] 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 society to move, in most areas of their lives.”<sup>14</sup> In this first phase, that is, for Twain and his commentators American exceptionalism is no longer a conscious covenantal (national) program but a lived reality: the way things are. Having been interpellated by the American calling, having become, in Althusser’s terms, “subjected subjects,” Twain and his critics henceforth take what they are given to see as the truth: “the individual *is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the Subject, i.e. in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection, i.e. in order that he shall make the gestures and actions of his subjection ‘all by himself.’ There are no subjects except by and for their subjection.* That is why they work all by themselves. ‘So be it!’”<sup>15</sup> For Twain and the early critics of *A Connecticut Yankee*, the advanced and spectacular technological violence perpetrated by Hank Morgan against his Old World enemy was simply not a moral problem because their

American exceptionalism—their election and calling—enabled them to believe that, in exterminating obstacles in the path of their benign *Telos*, they were pursuing the imperatives of their ordained vocation, that they were fulfilling the mandates of the Truth.

## Phase Two

The second phase of the history of the criticism and commentary on Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* occurred between 1945, the beginning of the Cold War, and 1990, the implosion of the Soviet Union. And it is broadly identifiable with the emergence and hegemony of the American Myth and Symbol school of criticism, which, by and large, infused the frontier paradigm with national cultural significance. This is the period that not only bore witness to the official establishment of American literary studies in academia and, as Donald Pease has decisively shown, the appropriation by the state, with the active support of many of the founders (Henry Nash Smith, Leo Marx, R. W. B. Lewis, Charles Feidelson, Lionel Trilling, Richard Chase), of its "Americanness" to the "struggle" against communism.<sup>16</sup> It is the period that eventually, and by way of this patently ideological appropriation, gave birth to the term "American exceptionalism," which is to say it rendered its ethos susceptible to conscious thematization if not (yet) to critique. Unlike in the first phase, critical attention in *A Connecticut Yankee* at this second stage focuses almost invariably on that moment in the novel to which the early Americanists seemed to be utterly indifferent—Hank Morgan's spectacular, technologically facilitated wholesale slaughter of his feudal antagonists in the Battle of the Sand Belt immediately following his proclamation of the republic in King Arthur's kingdom. And this sudden and remarkable shift of hermeneutic focus, I suggest, was compelled by the marked displacement of Europe (the monarchical Old World) by the totalitarian Soviet Union as America's new—and far more "threatening"—enemy and thus the (re)emergence in some significant degree to *conscious national prominence* of the exceptionalist ethos: the American people's acute sense not only of the technological but also moral superiority of America's (self-reliant) individualism over its coglike collectively determined adversary. It was a sense of superiority—and threat—that, it needs to be underscored, "justified" the dominant culture's transformation of the United States into a national security state: a "threatened" exceptionalism that, in abrogating the law (human rights), rendered the state of exception the rule.<sup>17</sup>

In other words, largely—increasingly—determined by these national Cold War circumstances, the Americanist critics of this second phase of the history of *A Connecticut Yankee* criticism, unlike their self-assured predecessors, are compelled (despite their patent reluctance) to confront the disturbing contradiction between Hank Morgan's New World project to democratize (and capitalize) a primitive feudal monarchy—which to his advanced modern Yankee mind means turning the “insane asylum” he initially encounters into a rational, free, and progressive community—and the mass technological slaughter that he unleashes at the end to accomplish his benign purpose. Like their predecessors, these second-phase critics uneasily identify Mark Twain with his Yankee protagonist (without overtly labeling them exceptionalist). But what is remarkable is that almost invariably they conclude, *mutatis mutandis*, that Twain loses control of his narrative precisely at the point of the technological massacre he stages. To put it provisionally, it appears inconceivable to these critics (despite the massive historical evidence) that this canonical American writer, who established the American vernacular as the language of American literature against the tradition from James Fenimore Cooper to Henry James, which hitherto had been slavishly dependent on the “genteel” English of the Sir Walter Scotts, Jane Austens, and Alfred Lord Tennysons, could also be capable of envisioning such a horrific conclusion of the benign logic of the American exceptionalist ethos. Despite its alleged objectivity—and the absence of the term in its rhetoric—the discourse of these Americanists remains deeply inscribed by the exceptionalist ethos.

As in the case of the first phase, the criticism and commentaries written from this perspective of the second phase are too numerous to be dealt with adequately in this limited space. I will, for convenience, confine my discussion to three exemplary and influential texts published by prestigious early Americanists who were also Twain scholars: Howard G. Baetzhold's essay “The Course of Composition of *A Connecticut Yankee*: A Reinterpretation” (1961); Henry Nash Smith's book-length study of the novel, *Mark Twain's Fable of Progress* (1964); and James M. Cox's “*A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*: The Machinery of Self-Preservation” (1960; republished without substantial changes in 2002).<sup>18</sup> Spanning the period of the second phase as they do, the more or less similar conclusions they draw about the novel suggest the continuity of the entire body of *Connecticut Yankee* criticism. Baetzhold demarcates five distinct stages in the lengthy process of Twain's composition of the novel (1884; 1885; December 1885–February 1886; summer 1887; and July

1888–1889). Taking his directives, like Louis Budd, from Twain’s immediate topical social and political concerns (in ostensible opposition to a formal reading of the text), these stages, he claims, enact an erratic narrative itinerary that not only mars its unity but drastically transforms its original intent. More specifically, according to Baetzhold’s rather feeble argument, what at the outset was intended simply as a “*contrast*’ [emphasis original] between ‘the daily life of the time & that of today’” [as Twain put it in a letter to Mrs. Fairbanks, p. 344]—burlesque at most—becomes a crude, savage satire in stage 4 in the wake of Twain’s “sudden” turn against modern (Victorian British) culture instigated by his new admiration for the liberal economic policies of Grover Cleveland, his enthusiasm for the project of the emergent Knights of Labor, his reading of “a radical [British] propagandist,” George Standing’s, *People’s History of the British Aristocracy* and the British historian W. E. H. Lecky’s *History of England in the Eighteenth Century*, and, perhaps above all, by his renewed contempt for Matthew Arnold’s “genteel” criticism (following a visit to the United States) of American philistinism:

But sometime between the Governors Island reading and the summer of 1887, Clemens’ concept of the story of the Yankee’s role seems to have changed drastically. Instead of merely profit for himself and for the king’s treasury [which, according to Baetzhold, was his motive in the early phase of composition], the Yankee’s primary goal became no less than the total reform of political and social evils in Arthur’s kingdom. Instead of dodging the encounter with the ogre, he would carry the quest through to its vivid conclusion that the princesses (and by implication, all royalty and nobility) were hogs. And instead of using his Gatling gun and electrified fence *simply* against Arthur’s enemies, he would ultimately add the devastating power of dynamite and turn his weapons against the whole chivalry of England and the “superstitions” for which it stood. (Baetzhold, “Course of Composition,” 346–347)

Like his predecessor Louis Budd, Baetzhold’s critical purpose is to interpret Mark Twain’s fable about the Connecticut Yankee in terms of Twain’s topical concerns—his particular political affiliations, his immediate reading, and journalistic projects—at the time he was writing the novel.<sup>19</sup> And though he does not explain his reason for doing so, it is likely that, like Budd’s, it was, in opposition to the New Critics’ formalism, to harness Twain’s fiction to the liberal Cold War agenda. This inference is suggested by what follows

immediately after the passage I have quoted in which Baetzhald identifies the occasion when “Clemens’ concept of the story of the Yankee’s role seems to have changed drastically.” Invoking Twain’s speech to the Monday Evening Club (March 22, 1886) to distinguish between the liberalism of Twain’s “new sympathy for equalitarian democracy” and the totalitarianism of communism and socialism, he writes: “Admitting that power inevitably resulted in oppression, [Clemens] argued that because this [New Dynasty] would be concerned with the nation’s good rather than with the selfish interests of a small clique, it need not be feared. Rather, it would form a permanent defense ‘against the Socialist, the Communist, the anarchist, the tramp, and the selfish agitators for reform,’ and ‘against all like forms of political disease, pollution and death” (Baetzhald, “Course of Composition,” 347).<sup>20</sup>

Tellingly, the language Baetzhald uses to refer to Twain’s alleged newly acquired animosity toward aristocratic England is in fact saturated by unconscious allusions to America’s perennial New World/Old World opposition, yet nowhere in his influential essay is there an overt reference to this American exceptionalist tradition. Given the actual fulfillment of the logic of Hank Morgan’s civilizing errand in the medieval England wilderness, it is as if, in interpreting the horrific Battle of the Sand Belt as a drastic imaginative aberration, Baetzhald were compulsively repressing a spectral dark side of the very exceptional ethos that informs his effort to save Twain’s liberal democratic—anti-Communist—politics from censure. To identify Twain with Hank Morgan at the scene of holocaustal violence would be a tacit admission of the violent underside of the American exceptionalist ethos and thus of the illegitimacy of the United States’ Cold War against Soviet communism.

Henry Nash Smith’s influential “Myth and Symbol” reading of *A Connecticut Yankee* takes its point of departure from Howard Baetzhald’s five-stage chronology of the composition of the novel. Like his predecessor, he affirms that Twain “did not systematically revise earlier chapters in the five year process of composition . . . to bring them into accord with his changing conceptions of plot and character.”

In Smith’s words, the published result “resembles a geologist’s stratigraphic series.” Thus, he concludes with Baetzhald that “a knowledge of the chronological order of the strata enables the reader to observe the first appearance and the subsequent evolution of ideas and themes which undergo drastic changes in meaning.” Like Baetzhald, too, Smith believes the most drastic of these changes occurred at stage 4, the chapters on the Battle of the Sand Belt.

The difference between the two is that for Smith, the author of *The Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (1950), the imaginative “crisis” signaled by the Battle of the Sand Belt (stage 4; summer 1887: composition of chapters 4–20 except chapter 10) is far more ideologically decisive than it is for Baetzhold.

Smith inaugurates his structural study of *A Connecticut Yankee* by contrasting Twain’s story with Charles Dudley Warner’s novel *A Little Journey in the World* and William Dean Howells’s *A Hazard of New Fortune*, which constitute critiques, from a “genteel” perspective, of the entrepreneurial dynamics of the capitalist system of Gilded Age America. Stressing Twain’s initial oneness with his protagonist, Smith observes that “Mark Twain, on the other hand, chooses to identify himself with the businessman.” He “is an engineer and executive who undertakes the task of bringing about an industrial revolution in Arthur’s kingdom. *Ostensibly* this program had Mark Twain’s complete approval: the Yankee is the standard-bearer of progress, determined to overthrow feudal tyranny and to bring such basic decencies as food, clothing, shelter, and education to the impoverished and exploited common people of Britain” (Smith, *Fable of Progress*, 37; my emphasis). As his qualification (“ostensibly”) of his identification of Twain and Hank Morgan, and his restriction of Morgan’s status to that of American businessman, suggest, however, Smith points to a reservation about this identity that manifests itself as a problem—the apparent incompatibility between the agrarian American past and the industrial present—at the close of this inaugural discussion and will be compounded as his reading progresses. On the one hand, Hank Morgan is a Philistine businessman:

The novelty of Mark Twain’s approach to his materials lies in his deliberate abandonment of the genteel perspective. Hank Morgan belongs to the working class; he has risen from the ranks of worker to the position of superintendent in the Colt arms factory in Hartford. The controlling item in the account he gives of himself at the outset of his narrative is that he is “practical” and “nearly barren of sentiment . . . —or poetry, in other words.” Lacking any pretensions to refinement, he can avow his unabashed loyalty to the profit motive. At the same time the Yankee is practical in the sense that he can get things done. For the purposes of the fable, he is given the power to make any machine known to modern industry; he is a personification of technological skill and inventiveness. The nearest thing to poetry in him is

what Mark Twain called his “circus side.” He delights in gaudy and vulgar display; he is constantly calling attention to himself and advertising his own accomplishments. (Smith, *Fable of Progress*, 38)

On the other hand, according to Smith, the Yankee is a larger than life, mythic figure:

Despite the Yankee’s antics and the side-splitting predicaments he falls into, his command of technology makes him at least potentially a hero of epic dimensions, a man with a world-historical mission. His plan of industrializing Arthur’s Britain resembles Prometheus’ defiance of the tyrannical gods for the sake of bringing to man the priceless gift of intellectual light and technological power. *A Connecticut Yankee* is thus not a mere tall tale but a philosophical fable which sets forth a theory of capitalism and an interpretation of the historical process that has brought it into being. (Smith, *Fable of Progress*, 39)

As the apparent incommensurability between these two sides of Hank Morgan suggests, this “problem” is related in Smith’s mind with what his (exceptionalist) interpretation of America as “virgin land” compels him to read as the alleged contradiction between the original “American Adam” and the later Philistine capitalist who in the process of the civilizing errand in the American wilderness transformed the Adamic forwarding (westering) mythic pioneer spirit into something like its opposite. This becomes manifest when Smith locates Twain’s Connecticut Yankee in the context of his (American exceptionalist) thesis about the virgin land:

The diverse strains of thought and feeling that converge in the character of Mark Twain’s Yankee are all aspects of American self-consciousness in the later nineteenth century, but we can distinguish two clusters of images embodied in this protagonist *that derive from radically different sources and are never fully synthesized*. In some of his roles the Yankee is a figure out of the past. He is an avatar of the American Adam dwelling in the Garden of the World, whose vague but resplendent features can be discerned in Cooper’s Natty Bumppo, the yeoman farmer dear to agrarian tradition, Frederick Jackson Turner’s frontiersman, and the idealized “self” of Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*. Because the Yankee is a transatlantic innocent confronting an ancient and corrupt Europe, he also resembles the narrator of *The Innocents Abroad*. In fact, he belongs to the long line of vernacular protagonists in Mark Twain’s books which includes the tenderfoot in *Roughing It*, the cub pilot in *Life on*

*the Mississippi*, and, of course, Huck Finn. The Yankee's colloquial language, his lowly rural origins, his uncultivated practical common sense, and his magnificent indifference toward the pretensions of titled aristocrats all attest to this side of his ancestry. *Yet he also embodies significant traits that are foreign to Mark Twain's earlier vernacular characters.* One of these novelties is his command of industrial technology. Another is his highly developed political awareness. He is a constitutional and legal theorist and is well versed in the outstanding events of modern history. He knows what he is trying to do in a way that sets him apart from his predecessors. (Smith, *Fable of Progress*, 68; my emphasis)

In short, the "problem" with which Smith is confronted by Mark Twain's "ostensibly" "complete approval" of the Connecticut Yankee's project to industrialize feudal England is the problem that haunts the Myth and Symbol (Virgin Land) school of the early Americanists. This problem, epitomized by Leo Marx's "decisive" opposition between the Garden and the Machine, allegedly bore witness to the rupture of the "Adamic" (read chosen and exceptionalist) American national identity precipitated by the post-Civil War industrial revolution.<sup>21</sup>

Smith summarizes the problem by claiming that "Mark Twain was asking himself whether the American Adam, who began as representative of the preindustrial order, could make the transition to urban industrialism and enter upon a new phase of his existence by becoming a capitalist hero" (Smith, *Fable of Progress*, 69), concluding with a decisive negative. Invoking the fourth phase of Baetzhold's analysis of the composition of *A Connecticut Yankee*, he writes:

*What follows* [Clarence's announcement of the people's backsliding into superstition in the wake of the Church's Interdict] *is one of the most distressing passages in American literature.* The Yankee takes refuge with Clarence and a small band of loyal boy-technicians in a cave that Clarence has fortified with Gatling guns, land mines, and a fence charged with a lethal electric current. Thirty thousand knights march against them, and when the anachronistic modern weapons have done their work, twenty-five thousand corpses lie before the entrance to the cave. The Yankee, placed under a spell by Merlin in the disguise of an old servant woman, sleeps thirteen centuries to waken in Mark Twain's day and, dying, hands to him the manuscript of his "Tale of the Lost Land." (Smith, *Fable of Progress*, 65; my emphasis)

Following Baetzhold's directives, Smith interprets this "distressing" turn in the plot to Twain's loss of imaginative control over his material. But what he actually means by this, as I have been suggesting by stressing his unnamed exceptionalist assumption about America as the virgin land, is that the canonical American writer, Mark Twain, went astray in identifying what Smith takes to be the radical incommensurability between the agrarian and industrial, the Adamic and the capitalist, motifs. This inference is underscored by Smith's attribution of the composition of this devastating "contradiction" to the period of the failure of the Paige typesetter, in which Twain had invested his fortune.<sup>22</sup>

Smith is not precise about what he means by calling the Battle of the Sand Belt "one of the most distressing passages in American literature." But his interpretation of Morgan's appropriation of the term "Boss" (to counter the symbolic word "King") as his title is suggestive. "By virtue of the Yankee's position as The Boss," he writes, "he merges in himself the functions of ownership, management, and government. The title to the new factories is vested in the state, and he may be imagined as issuing his directives in the name of the King. But in effect he is an economic dictator, or in his own terms a 'despot.'" Then, in what seems to be a passing observation but is in fact at the heart of his reading of *A Connecticut Yankee*, he observes, "From the standpoint of economics, the society he brings into being resembles Soviet Russia rather than nineteenth-century America" (Smith, *Fable of Progress*, 104). In other words, what distresses Smith about the narrative logic of *A Connecticut Yankee*—and compels him to read the Battle of the Sand Belt as Twain's loss of imaginative control of his narrative—is the "impossible" transformation of an American democracy that represents itself as the totalitarianism it is not into a totalitarian regime, a system of government that absolutely belies the benign image the exceptionalist American state was going all out to represent to the world in the Cold War era. More fundamentally, what is distressing to Smith about the event of the Battle of the Sand Belt is the spectacle of Twain's and the Connecticut Yankee's American exceptionalism *becoming* the very political and cultural tyranny it came into being to defeat, which is to say the very horrific reality it would disavow. Given his (exceptionalist) commitment to the idea of virgin land,<sup>23</sup> it seems inconceivable to Smith that Mark Twain could posit an American exceptionalism the logic of which could in fact accommodate the Machine to the Garden and thus end in the justification of violence against all obstacles in the path of America's *Telos*: its benign errand in the world's wilderness.

One could invoke a number of other Americanist readings of *A Connecticut Yankee* undertaken during this second phase of the novel's critical history that, however tentatively, identify Twain (the author) and his protagonist, and in the process betray a reluctance similar to Howard Baetzhold's and Henry Nash Smith's to maintain that identity at the point in the narrative where, in a banalized rhetoric, the Yankee recounts his staging of his spectacular, massively life-destroying technological firepower in the name of establishing the republic he has recently proclaimed—and thus to acknowledge the violence, the disavowed dark side, endemic to the benign logic of Twain's American exceptionalist ethos.<sup>24</sup> I will restrict myself, however, to one further instance: that of James M. Cox in his "*A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court: The Machinery of Self-Preservation*" (1960),<sup>25</sup> an influential essay (the gist of which is restated in another reading of the novel in 1966<sup>26</sup>) that, like Smith's, addresses the disturbing "contradiction" of the Battle of the Sand Belt, in psychoanalytical rather than cultural/political terms but in such a way as to entirely evade the question of American exceptionalism that Morgan's story patently evokes. Like all the other critics of this second phase, Cox begins his reading by tentatively assuming the identity of the author and narrator-protagonist. Invoking the narrative framework, he claims that Hank Morgan, the "Yankee of Yankees," the "practical" entrepreneur, "nearly barren of sentiment, I suppose—or poetry, in other words," is Twain's alter ego or, in the term he borrows from W. B. Yeats's psycho-mythical system, "anti-mask," who, in the beginning, exists to prick the bubble of his equally inscribed (Southern) nostalgic romanticism:

The Yankee's role, as it is defined in the frame, is one of burlesquing "Mark Twain's" tourist vision of the past. The one emotion which is anathema to Morgan is reverence, and wherever he encounters the posture—whether in sentimental nostalgia or in a feudal aristocracy—his reaction is one of aggressive ridicule. This unqualified irreverence was by no means new in Twain's work. It was a necessary adjunct to a writer whose own creative impulse was essentially nostalgic. When we look upon Twain's work we realize that the past—his personal past—was his own armor. His great work is staged within his and America's remembered Southern geography of boyhood which the indignation and mechanization of the Civil War had reduced to the status of an island in the remote past. (Cox, "Machinery of Self-Preservation," 121–122)

In the process of the narrative, however, Twain's alter ego—this realistic psychic impulse, whose ironic bent saves Twain's vernacular ("American") writing from the fate of the inflated genteelness of Sir Walter Scott's and James Fenimore Cooper's—becomes increasingly encompassing and aggressive: "But Hank Morgan is more than merely an agent of ridicule; he goes beyond burlesque [Twain's alleged initial purpose] to threaten the whole existence of the past—any past" (Cox, "Machinery of Self-Preservation," 122). That is, when he comes systematically to harness his entrepreneurial talents and his technological know-how to his deflating realistic project, this expanding aggressiveness assumes visibility, and this realistic (unpoetic) "Yankee" self takes on a demonic force that, in threatening Twain's creative imagination, demands exorcising. (This, it should be noted, is Cox's equivalent to Smith's assumption of the incommensurability of the Garden and the Machine.) If Twain is to survive as a literary artist, Cox claims, he must kill his worldly alter ego.

As in the cases of Howard Baetzhold and Henry Nash Smith, this latent demonic aspect of Twain's self, according to Cox, emerges inexorably, and in all its devastating spectral force, into his consciousness at precisely the time of the composition of the *Battle of the Sand Belt* (stage four), when, he alleges, Twain begins to identify the book he is writing with the "demonic" Paige typesetting machine, in which he has invested not only his money but his soul as well. Compelled, like Baetzhold and Smith, by his certainty that imagination and instrumental reason (*Garden and Machine*) are incommensurate, to disregard the patent fact that Twain's faith in the "magic" of technology survived the failure of the Paige typesetter, Cox asserts:

That Twain could bring the book to an end at all and break the vicious identification between it and the machine signifies a victory for the writer. For Hank Morgan is to a large extent the concrete embodiment of Twain's obsession with Paige's invention. . . . Intruding into Twain's reverie, he assumes the power in the book that he held in the Hartford world outside the novel. In the cosmos of the novel, however, Twain is the Yankee's master; although the Yankee is Boss of the machine world he imposes upon the [beautifully romantic] face of the Arthurian landscape, Twain operates the machinery of the novel and compels the Yankee to jump through act after act with ever increasing velocity until all his improvisations are exhausted. In bringing Morgan to death Twain was symbolically killing the machine madness which possessed him. If the devices Twain employs in the narrative do not always

succeed as art—even if they are mere parts of the machine of this mechanical novel—the novel nevertheless remains an act of personal salvation, its machinery the machinery of self-preservation.<sup>27</sup> (Cox, “Machinery of Self-Preservation,” 125–126)

Indeed, according to Cox (though he qualifies this suggestion), in representing “a victory of the writer over the businessman”—and the “demonic Paige typesetter”—the novel also seems to vindicate, if it does not apotheosize, Merlin, the (exceptionalist) Yankee’s arch enemy: “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 emerges from humiliation and shame to exercise his magic power at the last” (Cox, “Machinery of Self-Preservation,” 127). In short, Cox’s psychoanalytic perspective “unworlds” *A Connecticut Yankee*. In universalizing Twain’s psyche, it overlooks, in the very act of revealing it, the practical republican Yankee’s manifest exceptionalist (New World) errand in Merlin’s feudal (Old World) wilderness. Like Baetzhold and Smith, Cox, it seems, is incapable of entertaining the possibility that, despite the evidence, Twain’s capitalist republicanism—that is, his American exceptionalism—is capable of such a horrific consequence.

This disabling limitation of the second phase of *A Connecticut Yankee* criticism also applies to John F. Kasson’s reading of the novel over a decade later in the wake of the humiliating defeat of the United States in the Vietnam War. I mean, more specifically, after the inordinate—and finally futile—violence of the United States’ conduct of its war on the “new frontier” of South East Asia (“Indian country,” as the soldiers called the Vietnam wilderness), undertaken in the name of “saving Vietnam for the free world,” disclosed the dark underside of the benign rationale of America’s Cold War foreign policy. That is to say, it revealed the “truth” of American exceptionalism to be a mass murderous fiction. Like his second-phase predecessors, though with a deeper historical knowledge of the techno-industrialization of America, Kasson asserts the identity of Mark Twain and his self-reliant, technologically oriented republican protagonist at the beginning of the novel. Pointing to the simultaneity of Twain’s active engagement in the development of the Paige typesetter (December 1884 to May 1889) and his writing of the novel, Kasson writes:

In a sense the book may be regarded as an attempted justification (*though ultimately a judgment*) of Mark Twain’s passionate involvement with

technology. By sending a nineteenth-century Yankee (in the early notebook entries the character was Mark Twain himself) to Arthurian England and depicting his adventures, he intended a comic contrast between two cultures: modern, republican technological America and primitive, aristocratic, superstitious England. *In conception, at least*, the novel defended contemporary American society against both millennialist critics and nostalgic dreamers. History was a record of ethical, political, and technological progress from medieval barbarism to the glories and comforts of the present. America would advance toward perfection by developing along existing lines. Thus Twain *ostensibly* offered his readers an assuring message. He confirmed the achievements of the present by journeying back into time to burlesque the romantic attraction of the Middle Ages. He made this point explicit in an unpublished preface: "If any are inclined to rail at our present civilization, why—there is no hindering him, but he ought to sometimes contrast it with what went before and take comfort and hope, too."<sup>28</sup>

Clearly an exemplary representation of American exceptionalism, Kasson's characterization of Twain's/ Morgan's errand in the medieval wilderness surprisingly does not invoke the term, which, by the time he was writing, had become current in American cultural discourse, particularly in historiography. Instead, as the insistent qualifiers in the preceding quotation testify, he is anticipating the Battle of the Sand Belt, the violence of which seems absolutely to contradict the benignity of Twain's/ Morgan's ameliorative project. In other words, Kasson is intent on damage control: how to exonerate the canonized Mark Twain—the epitome of the American exceptionalist, democratic national identity—from the accusation of cruel and indifferent totalitarianism that transforms the state of exception into the rule and thus reduces life (*bios*) to disposable reserve (*zoē*).

Reading what follows Hank Morgan's decision to democratize and modernize King Arthur's feudal England retrospectively from the horrific Battle of the Sand Belt (which is to say from his, unstated, American exceptionalist perspective), Kasson, like the other critics of this second phase, is enabled to find (read "impose") contradictory psychological "clues" that cumulatively prefigure the radical transformation Morgan undergoes at the end of the novel. Gradually and imperceptibly, but in an inexorable way, Kasson, like the other critics of phase two, separates Twain from his protagonist's missionary project. Having pointed to Morgan's "strategic dilemma" (Kasson, *Civilizing*

*the Machine*, 208)—his vacillating realization of the incommensurability of “the mere progressive rhetoric” he initially advocates and his realization in the face of resistance that only revolutionary violence is capable of achieving his goal—Kasson reduces the Yankee, who initially symbolizes republican America, to a private self-serving self. “Ultimately,” he writes, “the Yankee is a person more attracted to the idea of achieving what he calls his ‘new deal’ than to republicanism itself. This ‘deal,’ the plan to industrialize and democratize Arthurian England, arises more out of his own need and assumptions than those of the English themselves. His deepest ambition is personal: to be ‘the greatest man in the kingdom,’ to exert ‘enormous authority,’ to remake Arthurian England in his own image. He revels in his title spontaneously awarded to him by the people, which, translated into modern speech, would be ‘THE BOSS’” (Kasson, *Civilizing the Machine*, 208–209)

And this willful reduction of Morgan from national symbol to a private aggrandizing self enables Kasson to identify Morgan’s errand in feudal England as totalitarian. “This is not the title of a republican leader but that of a dictator,” he asserts, “a phrase linking him to the political and industrial bosses of the nineteenth-century and, still more ominously, translated into modern Italian and German, to *Il Duce* and *der Führer* of the twentieth. Despite his professions of republicanism, the Yankee displays alarming fondness for despotic power, as when he exults over the swift development of his factories: ‘Unlimited power is the ideal thing when it is in safe hands.’”<sup>29</sup>

Thus the Yankee whom Twain represents in the beginning as “a Saviour bringing technological and political enlightenment in order to lead the people to a new heaven on earth” becomes contradictorily “an Exterminating Angel, prefiguring the character of Satan in Mark Twain’s *The Mysterious Stranger*, destined to destroy them” (Kasson, *Civilizing the Machine*, 210). Read retrospectively into *A Connecticut Yankee* from the pessimistic perspective of Twain’s last works, which universalize his earlier American focus, this “contradictory” transformation of the benign errand into careless violent slaughter—killing at long distance, to invoke Graham Greene’s devastating criticism of American exceptionalist ethos in *The Quiet American*<sup>30</sup>—is horrifically enacted at the Battle of the Sand Belt, after Morgan has “ironically” “reproduced nineteenth century American civilization [the Gilded Age] all too faithfully” ( 211). I quote Kasson at length not only to point to the slippage that transforms the logic of Hank Morgan’s American exceptionalist vocation into a disquieting contradiction (and decisively separates the author from his protagonist) but

also to bring out against the grain—contrapuntally, as it were—and to underscore the spectacular, polyvalent violence that belongs to but has always been disavowed by the American exceptionalist calling. By this I mean the specter that haunts Kasson's and the old Americanist critics' failure to address the issue of American exceptionalism in addressing the American canon in general and *A Connecticut Yankee* in particular:

As the Yankee's vision is at last rejected, it turns to destructive megalomania. Throughout, Morgan has reflected his experiences at the arms works in a strong affinity for military technology and a fascination with battle; he has even established his own West Point. As he turns to gain by force what he has failed to achieve by peaceful means, *his actions reveal the technological violence of which Americans (among others) are capable when their republican values are opposed by an alien and technologically less advanced people, such as the American Indians in Mark Twain's own time or the Vietnamese in recent years.* Failing to win "the hearts and minds" of the medieval English by his program of industrial development or by his limited duels, the Yankee escalates the conflict to a war against all comers. Against all forces of cultural resistance, the war of liberation thus becomes a war of extermination. Morgan installs his crew in a fortress and lovingly and meticulously assembles his era's most modern technology of death: Gatling guns, landmines, and his *pièce de résistance* a row of electrified fences. These weapons consummate the interest Morgan expressed in such "labor-saving machinery" at the very outset of the story. For they were all regarded in the late nineteenth century as more efficient and hence, proponents reasoned, more "humanitarian" weapons because they would lead to smaller armies and shorter wars. (Kasson, *Civilizing the Machine*, 211–212; my emphasis)<sup>31</sup>

Having thus arbitrarily distanced the author of *A Connecticut Yankee* from his protagonist, Kasson is enabled to exculpate Twain of the mass murder perpetrated by the "Yankee of Yankees" with his technologically advanced firepower, which can only be called his weapons of mass destruction. That is to say, this distancing enables him, as it does the other "liberal" critics of this second phase, to blame the horrific crime on a misunderstanding or a willful distortion of the benign essence of "the American way."

Kasson enacts this exculpating summary in his troubled conclusion. Admitting, with other "recent critics" who had been distressed by Twain's "ambivalent attitude toward the ideology of technological progress," that "it is difficult

to determine to what extent he acknowledged the import of his novel," he represses this anxiety by invoking a version of the New Critics' "intentional fallacy," which, not incidentally, was at that time being called radically into question by "worldly" critics such as Edward Said. "In any case," Kasson goes on,

to Mark Twain more than to most writers applies D. H. Lawrence's dictum: "Never trust the artist. Trust the tale." While Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* castigates the economic and social cleavages he believed inherent in industrial capitalism, Mark Twain's *Connecticut Yankee* challenged his society's progressive values on another, still more disturbing level. The book demonstrates how a powerful, supposedly humanitarian republican leader may betray his own ideals as he seeks to extend control over weaker, underdeveloped nations through essentially aggressive use of his technology. This tendency, present throughout the book, explodes into genocidal violence at the end. (Kasson, *Civilizing the Machine*, 215)

And he concludes, "*The inability of reviewers to confront the theme of technological atrocity at the heart of the novel only reveals how deep seated the Yankee's capacity for violence and for the self-deception which supported it was shared by [American] society at large*" (Kasson, *Civilizing the Machine*, 215; my emphasis). The damaging conclusion Kasson draws is indeed true, but what is ironic is that in the very process of articulating this resonant insight in terms of "the theme of technological atrocity" it, like that of the other critics of this second phase, betrays an even deeper self-deception: Kasson's "inability" to confront (read evasion of) the theme of American exceptionalism, which is even more fundamental to the novel than technology, blinds him to the complicity of Twain and American society (past, present, and future) with the genocidal technological violence the Yankee unleashes following his proclaiming Camelot a republic or, to anticipate, in the aftermath of imposing a "regime change" on a feudal state.

Like Howard Baetzhold, Henry Nash Smith, James Cox, and virtually all the other critics of this second phase of *A Connecticut Yankee* Americanist criticism, Kasson shrinks back from the haunting possibility that the mass destructive violence staged by Hank Morgan in the name of establishing a nineteenth-century American-style democracy in feudal England is endemic to the logic Twain brings to his narrative. But this worldly consequence is, I submit, what in fact Twain does posit in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* if, as I have been suggesting by underscoring the New World/Old World opposition that pervades the narrative, it is admitted that his logic is the

unerring logic of American exceptionalism. Indeed, as I will show in chapter 4, Twain, in full sympathy with what we can now call the Yankee's "errand in [the Old World] wilderness," will enact in his narrative the practical political imperatives of the forwarding ("westering") logic of American exceptionalism. That is, in the process of "civilizing"—"cultivating," "improving," "bettering" (i.e., colonizing)<sup>32</sup>—the savages of Arthur's England (in the novel, the Yankee often refers to the natives as "Commanches" or "White Indians"), the exceptionalist state will render the state of exception the norm. To disarm the likely response that such a claim about democratic America is a gross (heretical) exaggeration—and to anticipate further discussion of this delicate matter—I will recall the witness of a resonantly symbolic, though now willfully forgotten, anecdote, one touched upon in passing by Kasson, from the liminal, and disclosive, time of exceptionalist America's war to "win the hearts and minds" of the Vietnamese people:

Our worst dread of yellow peril became realized; we saw them now dying by the thousands all over the country, yet they didn't seem depleted, let alone exhausted, as the Mission was claiming. . . . We took space back quickly, expensively, with total panic and close to maximum brutality. Our machine was devastating. And versatile. It could do everything but stop. As one American major said, in a successful attempt to attain history, "We had to destroy Ben Tre in order to save it." That's how most of the country came back under what we called control, and how it remained essentially occupied by the Viet Cong and the North until the day years later when there were none of us left there.<sup>33</sup>

### Phase Three

The third phase of *A Connecticut Yankee* criticism extends broadly from around 1970 to 2000, from that time of the Cold War that bore witness to the United States' invasion and devastation of Vietnam, and its decisive defeat; to the all too visible effort of the official culture in its aftermath to represent the massive protest movement as a national psychic wound (the "Vietnam Syndrome"); and to the implosion of the Soviet Union, the recuperative "defeat" of Saddam Hussein in the first Gulf War, and the announcement of the "War on Terror" in the aftermath of September 11, 2001. Put in the ideological terms that the discourse of American exceptionalism disavows, this third phase begins with

the time of the John F. Kennedy administration, following the logical dictates of the late nineteenth-century Open Door policy, appropriately named “the New Frontier” to appease the anxiety over the closing of the old one, which extended America’s exceptionalist errand beyond Hawaii into the “wilderness” of Southeast Asia. It extends through the years of “quagmire,” during which the United States, in monomaniacal pursuit of its errand in the Southeast Asian wilderness, destroyed the country its avowed intention was to “save for the free world,” and its humiliating withdrawal from Vietnam. And it arrives at its fulfillment with the recuperative triumphant moment, following the administered healing of the wounded national psyche during the Reagan administration and the loss of the old frontier/enemy, when the United States reasserted its exceptionalism and returned to its self-righteous errand with the “decisive” defeat of the new enemy (Islamic “terror”) at the new frontier in Iraq. In other words, this third phase entailed the period bearing witness to the *self-destruction* of the American exceptionalist ethos: the disclosure of the violence endemic to its “benign” logic at the liminal point of its fulfillment. To put it in the terms I used in chapter 2, it was the period when the American exceptionalist ethos, which had hitherto been a hegemonic discourse that spoke the “truth” of the way things are, became increasingly problematic—an issue of conscious contention. This appeared first in the eyes of left-oriented American historians such as David Noble<sup>34</sup> and then, however tentatively, those of American literary critics such as William Spengerman and Phillip Gura, who were attracted to the New Historicism emerging from Michel Foucault’s genealogical studies,<sup>35</sup> and, more decisively, those such as Donald Pease, John Carlos Rowe, and Amy Kaplan, who came under the influence of poststructuralist theory in general and Edward Said in particular.<sup>36</sup>

I have not been able to track down the first deliberate use of the term “American exceptionalism” in the literary criticism and commentary on Mark Twain and *A Connecticut Yankee*. (The first, to my knowledge, is a peripheral reference in an essay by Sacvan Bercovitch on “What’s Funny about ‘Huckleberry Finn’” (1999).<sup>37</sup> As I have noted, however, the term does not appear in the Norton Critical Edition of the novel edited by the Twain scholar Allison R. Ensor, thus underscoring its remarkable absence from Twain’s time to the time of its publication in 1982. Nor, strangely, is it used in a 1994 volume on Twain’s writing, *Mark Twain: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Eric J. Sundquist, which contains three pieces on *A Connecticut Yankee* and is clearly intended to supersede the outmoded critical perspectives on Twain’s writing

by newer ones such as the New Historicist, the postcolonialist, and the post-structuralist.<sup>38</sup> Given that Twain's writing in general, whether *Innocents Abroad* and *Along the Equator* or *Huckleberry Finn*, *The Gilded Age*, or *A Connecticut Yankee* in particular, is saturated in form, rhetoric, style, and content by the exceptionalist ethos, however, this resonant absence speaks volumes about the limitations of the founding discourse of American studies. When the violence that the benign American exceptionalist discourse disavows begins to surface at the end of the twentieth century to haunt the logic of this American imaginary when American exceptionalism is dehegemonized and comes to be seen as an ideology, a significant change occurs in American studies, in Twain studies, and in the reading of *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. The earlier celebration of America becomes interrogation. But even after the disclosure of the polyvalent repressed of American exceptionalism during and after the Vietnam War, Americanists—including the New Americanists—continue to betray a reluctance to think of the cultural and political implications of this ontological specter for the American literary canon in general.

This reluctance, I suggest, is manifest in the volume of “groundbreaking” essays tellingly entitled *Post-Nationalist American Studies* (2000), the result of the work of a research group sponsored by the University of California's Humanities Research Institute (UCHRI) in 1996 and published in 2000. It is in this volume, intended, as the title suggests, to reconstellate the older “parochial” American studies into a global historical context, that the term “American exceptionalism” is used in literary and cultural studies for the first time in a systematic way. What is inaugural about this volume is not only its New Historicist perspective but also its positing of the postnational in opposition to the national and, more specifically, to “American exceptionalism,” for in thus thematizing its celebratory ideological (Cold War) function, this initiative contributed significantly to the inauguration of a critical momentum that has come to be called “New Americanist studies”:

Despite the paradoxes and dangers of a post-nationalist approach to American Studies . . . that adjective does begin to describe the desire of those in our group to contribute to a version of American Studies that is less insular and parochial, and more international and comparative. In this sense, our efforts to formulate a post-nationalist American Studies respond to and seek to revise the cultural nationalism and celebratory American exceptionalism that often informed the work of American Studies scholars in the Cold War era.<sup>39</sup>

Despite the possibilities for a contrapuntal reading of the American canon promised by the thematization of the American exceptionalist ethos, however, the genealogy the authors of this volume attribute to the concept is limited. Following the directives of the frontier school established by Frederick Jackson Turner, they locate the origins of the American exceptionalism in the era of the Constitution, particularly in “two key documents in the history of the early republic”: Washington’s “Farewell Address” (1796) and the Monroe Doctrine. (1823): the former’s warning to “the young republic against entanglements in the affairs of Europe,” and the latter’s warning to “the nations of Europe to forego claims to their former colonies in North and South America and to end ‘interference’ in the affairs of the Western Hemisphere.” “This turn away from Europe,” they claim, “marks the primary meaning of American exceptionalism—the conviction that the United States marked a break from the history of Europe, specifically the history of feudalism, class stratification, imperialism and war. Puritan tropes such as the ‘City on the Hill’ and the ‘Errand into the Wilderness’ were later *reclaimed* to figure American exceptionalism” (Rowe et al., *Post-Nationalist American Studies*, 3). First, in thus establishing the historical origins of the American exceptionalist ethos in the post-Revolutionary period—which, as I have shown, merely secularized Puritan theology—and reducing the Puritan errand to a trope, the authors of this book greatly minimize the inaugural and polyvalent role that the Puritan figural interpretation of the Old and New Testaments played in the formation of the American exceptionalist ethos, particularly its understanding of American history. Second, they thereby restrict the meaning of exceptionalism to the site of the nation (the polity) at the expense of the deeper ontology on which the nation relies for its justification. Third, they neglect, if not entirely efface, the fundamental role that the anxiety-provoking ritual of the American jeremiad plays in rejuvenating the covenantal force of the American exceptionalist ethos. Finally, not least, in marginalizing the ontological site vis à vis the origin of American exceptionalism (the transcendental *Logos*), they are blinded by their empirical (New Historical) insight to the absolute relationship between the spectacle-oriented exceptionalist state and the (normalization of) the state of exception that, to invoke Giorgio Agamben, reduces politics to biopolitics, human life (*bios*) to bare life (*zoë*), and the polity to the concentration camp.<sup>40</sup> And this reluctance to think the cultural and political implications of the ontological specter that haunts the American literary canon, I suggest, is true of the

recent “postnationalist” Twainians, particularly those who have written on *A Connecticut Yankee*.

Following the productive imperatives of “postnationalism,” the criticism and commentary of this third phase is less nationalistic than that of the first and second phases. That is, it transnationalizes the American space represented by the Connecticut Yankee, opening its hitherto centered and localized borders to include global space. And, in some cases, it even decenters the American center elsewhere. Thus, for example, it acknowledges, in a way that the earlier phases markedly do not, that the Yankee’s “errand” in the medieval British world’s wilderness is in fact an “American exceptionalist” enterprise: that Hank Morgan’s benign purpose masks an imperial agenda; that the land he represents as *terra nullius* in the unerring pursuit of his errand is inhabited; and that these inhabitants, whom he decimates by spectacular technological violence, are not the “hogs” he envisages but human beings. What is noteworthy, however, is that this third phase of *A Connecticut Yankee* Americanist criticism has been remarkably reluctant to name the nationalism to which “postnationalism” critically refers as “American exceptionalism” (it is not, as I have noted, until after 2000 that the term is used to refer to the novel). And, when the criticism of this phase finally does so, it is slow in arriving at this conclusion about American exceptionalism, proffering it more or less tentatively and incompletely; and, most tellingly, given the massive evidence of his own American exceptionalism, attributes its subversiveness to Twain himself.

My reading of Twain’s novel, as will be seen, is generally allied with this third phase of *A Connecticut Yankee* criticism—or, more precisely, with its latest, post-“War on Terror,” manifestation. But it is characterized by a radical difference, *one that has its grounds in the distinctly “American” voice Twain laboriously cultivated and brought to fruition* between his first travel book, *Innocents Abroad*, and his last one, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*. That is, these books narrate a New World American’s visit—in the paradoxical etymological sense of his seeing/representing the “Other” with his “own” (American) eyes<sup>41</sup>—to the Old World. The difference, to put it baldly, is this: Taking its interpretive directives from the second phase’s ambiguity about the relationship between Mark Twain and Hank Morgan instigated by the excessive violence of the Battle of the Sand Belt, this third phase of the criticism and commentary on *A Connecticut Yankee* disregards, if it does not entirely disavow, Twain’s avowed exceptionalist intentions<sup>42</sup> (and the American voice that gave him

the canonical status they would reaffirm). It thus radically distinguishes the author of the novel from his protagonist to render Hank Morgan's republican capitalist project in feudal England the object of Mark Twain's devastating satire. (Symptomatically, as I will show, only in the latest stage of this third phase is the Yankee's project represented explicitly as American exceptionalist.) Taking my interpretive directives from this cultivated American visitor's voice, I, on the other hand, will read Hank Morgan as fundamentally Twain's spokesperson. The story Twain gives Hank Morgan to tell is a story informed by his own deeply inscribed exceptionalist ethos.

This indifference to Mark Twain's general nineteenth-century version of American exceptionalism and, not least, to his avowed specific intention to pit his New World Connecticut Yankee's modern American republicanism against the decadent Old World feudal and divinely sanctioned aristocracy is remarkably evident in John Carlos Rowe's "Mark Twain's Rediscovery of America in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*" (2000), one of the first and most influential studies of this third phase of *Connecticut Yankee* criticism.<sup>43</sup> For Rowe, the relation between the author and the protagonist, which troubled the second-phase criticism, is simply no longer an issue. Taking his point of departure retrospectively from Twain's last phase (his rage over the annexation of the Philippines ("The Person Sitting in the Dark," 1901), he assumes that Hank Morgan and his republican capitalist project is the object of Twain's radically anti-imperial—indeed, ultimately anti-neoimperial—criticism. Nor, despite the fact that the theme of American exceptionalism saturates the body of the narrative right down to its capillaries, from, for example, the protagonist's name (Hank Morgan), the national epithet his author bestows on him (the "Yankee of Yankees"), and the title he appropriates for himself (Boss), to the emphatic American vernacular he speaks and writes (against the florid, highly coded, and labyrinthine Maloryan prose of Arthur's age), does Rowe invoke the term "American exceptionalism" in the process of his commentary. Indeed, Rowe seems committed to collapsing the distinction between America and Europe, the New World and the Old World. This seemingly willful erasure is of course not accidental. It is the consequence of Rowe's theoretically derived (New Americanist) rejection of the parochial nationalist (exceptionalist) ethos of the "Old Americanists" (above all, Henry Nash Smith, Leo Marx, and R.W. B. Lewis) in favor of a "postnationalist" Americanist perspective, which is enabled by its "postness" to perceive that to which the Old Americanists were blinded by their nationalist insight: the violent im-

perialism disavowed by America's representation of its global mission, or, to put it alternatively, the fundamental identity between the New World and the Old World.

In thus exposing the dark underside of the "benign" American national identity, this application of a postnationalist Americanist perspective on *The Connecticut Yankee* constitutes a marked advance over the previous phases of the criticism and commentary of Twain's novel. Its dislocating imperative enables the critic to read American history contrapuntally: to see it from the vantage point of its blamed victims (those it ostensibly would redeem). Thus Rowe writes:

It is just this division between the republican sentiments of Hank Morgan and his bid for despotic power in sixth-century England that organizes the dramatic action and social criticism of *Connecticut Yankee*. In the course of negotiating this fundamental division in his protagonist's character, Twain anticipates most of the explicitly anti-imperialist views in his satires between 1898 and 1905. In exposing the ways that the usual tyrants would learn to disguise themselves as bearers of enlightenment and thus emancipation both from despotic rule and the drudgery of everyday labor, Twain anticipates the more modern critique of neo-imperialist strategies of "winning hearts and minds" in the course of shaping consumers—the sort of neo-imperialism we associate with today's multinational corporations, heirs both of Hank Morgan's late nineteenth century capitalist feudalism and the Euro-American colonial "missions" into the earth's "hearts of darkness." (Rowe, "Rediscovery of America," 125–126)

But in the all too hasty process of dissociating Twain from his protagonist (which marginalizes the American exceptionalist motif) and then establishing the identity of Morgan and "the usual tyrants" (i.e., the New World and the Old World), this postnationalist Americanist perspective overlooks and radically simplifies the unique and polyvalent aspects of the American exceptionalist discourse, thus also obscuring rather than clarifying the *significant difference (within the sameness)* between American imperialism and the imperialism of the Old World: between an essentially cultural imperialism (of the spectacle) that would win the hearts and minds of the benighted Other and an essentially political imperialism enacted primarily by military force on behalf of plunder and exploitation pure and simple.<sup>44</sup> This resonant negation (which also negates the patent difference between the very difference he suggests

Twain is tentatively anticipating) is enacted by Rowe's laborious but all too easy overdetermination of the similarities between the exceptionalist foreign policy of Twain's America and the brutal subjugating imperialism of the late nineteenth-century European powers that were "deciding the future of" (i.e., vying for control over) Africa (Rowe is referring to the infamous Berlin Conference of 1884–1885), an identification epitomized by his absolute equation of Hank Morgan with the Victorian British adventurer Charles George ("Chinese") Gordon (specifically his legendary sacrificial death at Khartoum in 1885). This effacement of the crucial difference (or relay of differences within the same) between American and European foreign relations also effaces that aspect of the promise/fulfillment logic of American exceptionalism that renders the exceptionalist state a national security state, a state in which the state of exception is the norm and life becomes bare life.<sup>45</sup> Both are the consequence of the unwarranted dissociation of Twain from his protagonist and the failure to overtly engage the American exceptionalist ethos—to think its polyvalent worldly implications—that pervades Twain's text. (Strangely, Rowe, I repeat, does not invoke the term in his essay.)

Let me anticipate at this point. After Hank Morgan has established his technologically based industrial society and the means of knowledge production appropriate to it in feudal England, he announces that he is ready to discover America: "We had a steamboat or two on the Thames, we had steam war-ships, and the beginnings of a steam commercial marine; I was getting ready to send out an expedition to discover America." Minimizing the importance of the subtle and polyvalent ideological operations of the discourse of exceptionalism by overdetermining the sameness of America and Europe, the Old World and New World, Rowe (and those, as I will show, like David R. Sewell, who take their interpretive directives from dissociating Twain and his protagonist) reads Morgan's inverted ironic declaration as Twain's prophetic critique of post-nineteenth-century American-style (neo)-imperialism or, rather, of British imperialism that anticipates contemporary American-style neoimperialism:

In addition to Hank's talents with munitions and astronomy, he is adept at the new modes of transportation and communication he introduces into sixth-century England, ostensibly to end feudal provincialism and encourage national unity, *but secretly to secure his power and influence*. What his various mines and factories serve are, after all, the development of telegraph lines,

newspapers and publishing enterprises, and steam-powered transport that enable him to “unite” and, of course, thereby *rule* an “England” soon to become the “British Empire,” as Hank prepares to “send out an expedition to discover America.” (Rowe, “Rediscovery of America,” 136; my emphasis)

I, on the other hand, attend to the polyvalent operations of American exceptionalism that Rowe and those in this third phase who distinguish Twain from his protagonist so curiously slight, not least in its jeremiadic aspect. I thus read the Yankee’s announcement as one intended by an exceptionalist Twain. To be more precise, I mean a Twain who sees the alleged self-reliant, cant- and code-breaking spirit of science and technology not, as in the case of Henry Nash Smith and Leo Marx, as a contradiction to the frontier spirit but as the modern version of it. Twain’s intention is thus to remind his recidivist Gilded Age American audience of the “benignly productive” continuity between the nineteenth-century America symbolized by his exceptionalist—antifeudal republican—Yankee protagonist and the seventeenth-century English Puritans, whose exodus from the Old World to the New World was (according to the myth) an exodus not only from a monarchical tyranny justified by the theology of divine right but also from the overcoded, flamboyant, and erring cant of a decadent aristocratic culture.

A similar disabling deflection of attention from the American exceptionalist center of *A Connecticut Yankee* is enacted by those Americanist critics who pursue the implications of the new postnationalist initiative for Twain and his novel from a postcolonial perspective. Like the Americanist criticism of the second phase of *A Connecticut Yankee* criticism, David R. Sewell, in “Hank Morgan and the Colonization of Utopia,” for example, takes his point of departure from the horrific violence of the Battle of the Sand Belt, but unlike them he, like those of this third phase, bypasses Twain’s avowed intent—including the American disdain for the Old World he demonstrates in his patently Orientalist *Innocents Abroad*—in favor of the “anti-imperialist” point of view, vocally articulated in “To the Person Sitting in the Dark” (1901),<sup>46</sup> at which Twain arrives at the very end of his life. In so doing, Sewell dissociates Twain’s perspective from Hank Morgan’s to render the latter the object of his satirical criticism and thus, like the postnational Americanists, he universalizes—obscures the singularity of—the American exceptionalist ethos that constitutes the driving force of Hank Morgan’s unerring errand in the feudal wilderness of England.

Invoking the spectacular technological violence of the Battle of the Sand Belt staged by the modern Yankee on the English past in this book of time travel, Sewell reads it as the “apparent tendency of the modern imagination to make destructive weaponry the archetypal form of knowledge that the present offers the past in such a time-travel story” and thus is driven to ask the resonantly relevant question: “Why does our awareness of superiority lead us so inevitably to plot a display of force? What turns our knowledge into firepower?”<sup>47</sup> This is, of course, precisely the resonantly relevant question the novel’s overdetermination of the spectacle instigates. But the answer at which Sewell arrives is problematic, if not wrong. Given the preceding formulation, his answer is all too predictable. What turns “*our* [modern man’s] knowledge into firepower” (my emphasis) is the *utopianism* that informs the Western progress-oriented historical consciousness. Though this answer is not unjustified, its generalization deflects attention from “our knowledge”—the *national* particularities that saturate Morgan’s utopian discourse, which is to say it collapses the unique and, as the history of global modernity testifies, epochal difference between the justificatory discourses of New World imperialism and Old World imperialism, between an imperialism that would “win the hearts and minds” of the colonized and one that, assuming the absolute inferiority of the colonized, imposes its will on them primarily by conquest and brute force:

Gatlings against arrows and lances: it is not hard to guess that Mark Twain’s “fable of progress” displaces onto a temporal position the *historical confrontation between Europe and the noncivilized world*. . . . Hank self-destructs not in spite of but *because of* his utopianism. . . . The “what if” postulate of the reverse time-travel plot inherently creates a colonial situation, since it is premised on the time traveler’s superiority to everyone he meets in the past, a pre-eminence in technology, political theory, and even morals, that the traveler believes sanctions his exercise of power. But the time traveler is only a special case of any utopian projector who aims at replacing one system of politics or discourse with a superior one. The most radical implication of *A Connecticut Yankee In King Arthur’s Court* is that utopian narrative is a variety of literary imperialism—that Utopia is always a colony. (Sewell, “Hank Morgan,” 141–142; my emphasis)

It is true, of course, that Sewell includes America in the “historical confrontation between Europe and the noncivilized world.” “The relation between Hank’s progressivism and Camelot’s backwardness,” he writes, “is structurally

identical to the dichotomy between ‘civilization’ and ‘savagism’ that provided nineteenth-century America with an ideology, an anthropology, and a literary myth” (Sewell, “Hank Morgan,” 141). As in the case of Rowe, however, this gesture toward reading the text in terms of the American exceptionalist directives offered by the aesthetic aspects informing its body right down to its capillaries—its structure, rhetoric, language, style, humor, character names, representational perspective, and so forth—is quickly elided in favor of the broader “European” colonialist frame. Thus, instead of locating Morgan’s “missionary” project (145) in the American frontier context it everywhere recalls (and which Sewell himself evokes in passing), Sewell identifies it with classic European texts of the colonial encounter such as Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, and, taking his lead from a reference in Morgan’s text itself, especially Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*:

Hank’s closest symbolic identification is with Robinson Crusoe, and the paradox of the Crusoe story is that it abolishes the distinction between activity and passivity [explorer and castaway] by making the latter an inadmissible category. The moral, for the European imagination, of Defoe’s story was that civilization must and will reproduce itself in whatever locale it appears; explorer and castaway are both powered by the same technology of discovery and taking possession. So Hank, finding himself in a medieval castle lacking necessary commodities, makes a well-known allusion to Defoe in resolving to supply them. “I saw that I was just another Robinson Crusoe castaway 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—invent, contrive, create, reorganize things.” (Sewell, “Hank Morgan,” 144)

Indeed, Sewell’s commitment to universalizing *A Connecticut Yankee* is so great that he broadens the European colonial frame to include the Spanish conquistador Cortez. Using Tzvetan Todorov’s insights into the relation of language and guns in Western imperial conquest in *The Conquest of America*, Sewell writes:

Like Hank, Cortés is a canny showman, concerned “when weak . . . to make others believe he is strong,” given to “*son at lumière* spectacles with . . . horses and cannons” meant to impress the Indians as evidence of his transcendent powers (Todorov, 113, 115). Where language serves ritual functions for the indigenous population, for the Conquistador it is above all “a concrete

instrument of action upon the Other (123). Hank's own most constant endeavor and—temporarily—greatest triumph is to substitute his own discourse for what he finds in the sixth century, attitudes and communicative styles that are satirized throughout the novel. As the speaker of a “strong language,” he bends the Malorian world to submit to his translation until it can give way no farther and erupts in violence. (Sewell, “Hank Morgan,” 146)

In thus identifying explorer/conqueror and castaway as mirror images of European modernity, Sewell collapses one of the most fundamental and pervasive representational distinctions endemic to the justificatory discursive regimes of early British and early American colonialism: that, reiterated by Defoe himself, which contrasts the rapacious mentality of the Spanish conquistadors and the “benignity” of the British and, especially, American colonists in the New World. Meditating on the “cannibals” he has encountered, Crusoe observes:

That this would justify the Conduct of the *Spaniards* in all their Barbarities practic'd in *America*, where they destroy'd Millions of these People, who however they were Idolaters and Barbarians, and had several bloody and barbarous rites in their Customs, such as sacrificing human Bodies to their idols, were yet, as to the *Spaniards*, very innocent People; and that the rooting them out of the Country, is spoken of with the utmost Abhorrence and Detestation, by even the *Spaniards* themselves, at this Time, and by all other Christian Nations of *Europe*, as a mere Butchery, a bloody and unnatural Piece of Cruelty, unjustifiable either to God or man; and such, as for which the very Name *Spaniard* is reckon'd to be frightful and terrible to all People of Humanity, or of Christian Compassion: As if the Kingdom of *Spain* were particularly Eminent for the Product of a Race of Men, who were without Principles of Tenderness, or the common Bowels of Pity to the Miserable, which is reckon'd to be a Mark of generous Temper in the mind.<sup>48</sup>

Sewell, it is true, represents the justificatory discourses of European colonialism, both British and Spanish (and American), as ultimately one, characterized by a benign face (civilization/modernization), not as two antithetical perspectives. Seen in the light of the older, pre-postcolonial, critique of imperialism that represented it as pure and simple brutality (conquest and plunder), his

complication of the history of imperialism as it pertains to Mark Twain constitutes a productive advance in that it points to the *ultimate* sameness—the violence done to the colonized “Other”—of the two forms of colonialism. In other words, it reminds us that exceptionalism is *unexceptional*; put alternatively, that the historical manifestations of Western imperialism—whether the Roman conquest and occupation of Gaul in the name of the “Roman Metropolis,” the British conquest and occupation of Egypt in the name of securing humanity from the rapacity of Napoleonic tyranny, or the American “cultivation” and “settlement” of the “virgin land” (and the removal of the “nomadic” natives) in the name of “betterment”—have been justified by the assumption of exceptionalism. In the process of *overdetermining* the ultimate sameness of the two, however, Sewell’s postcolonialist, like Rowe’s postnationalist, insight is blinded to the very reality—the “worldedness”—of the “surface” or “fictional” difference between Old World and New World imperialism. The consequence of this blindness as it pertains to the reading of *A Connecticut Yankee* is to efface the multiple determining *American* particularities of Morgan’s exceptionalist errand, not least his assumption of election *by History* (a history that naturalizes the supernatural *Logos*); the fundamentally optimistic and unerring logic that informs such a “Manifest Destiny”; the paradoxical need for an anxiety-provoking frontier or enemy to combat recidivism (the jeremiad that always forestalls the gilding of the Golden Age); and, perhaps above all, the normalization of the state of exception—killing with impunity—that the optimistic logic of this secular theology finally demands and justifies.<sup>49</sup>

An equally important consequence of the blindness of this postcolonialist American insight into Twain’s novel is its attribution to Hank Morgan of the American exceptionalism that was at that period of Twain’s career the determining ethos of his life as a public intellectual, meaning its effacement of those exceptionalist characteristics of his writing that won him his canonization as the quintessential American writer: its reduction to non-existence of the specter that haunts Twain’s canonical status as the “Lincoln” of American letters. The answer to the resonant pertinent question Sewell asks at the beginning of his essay—“What turns our knowledge into firepower?”—may be ultimately, as his universalization of the agent implies, Western utopianism, but a more viable worldly answer than those of Sewell, Rowe, and the other critics of this third phase, one that *particularizes* his general agent, is the unerring logic of American exceptionalism.

## Phase Four

Only quite recently, in the wake of al Qaeda's bombing of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, has the phrase "American exceptionalism" come to be used systematically in the criticism and commentary on *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. This, in large part, is because the polyvalent "contradictions" (which are, in reality, not contradictions) between America's allegedly benign exceptionalist intentions vis à vis its foreign relations and its actual inordinately violent practice became unequivocally manifest when the George W. Bush administration unleashed (staged) its (spectacular) "War on Terror," a patently rigged and now unending war that, in the jeremiadic name of the exceptionalist American calling,<sup>50</sup> as I will show at length in chapter 5, justified "preemptive war" and "regime change" against any government in the world it deemed "a rogue state" (an obstacle to the establishment of the *Pax Americana*);<sup>51</sup> the tactics of spectacle ("shock and awe")—the indiscriminate use of technologically sophisticated weapons of mass destruction—to fulfill its benign, History-ordained errand; and, not least, the establishment of the permanent "homeland security state" (i.e., the *normalization* of the state of exception, and the tacit reduction of human life to that which can be killed with impunity). In thus attending consciously to the now problematized theme of American exceptionalism, this most recent—post-9/11—phase of *A Connecticut Yankee* criticism is enabled to bring to center stage many of the ideological aspects of the exceptionalist New World/Old World opposition pervading the novel that previous criticism had disavowed or marginalized, not least the continuity between the Connecticut Yankee's ameliorative mission in feudal England and that American tradition as "redeemer nation" extending back from Twain's time, through the era of "Manifest Destiny," to the Puritans' "errand in the wilderness."

But even in this promising latest phase of *Connecticut Yankee* criticism, in which the term "American exceptionalism" is systematically employed, one finds a studied—and disabling—reluctance to read the text that Twain published in 1889. Instead, like its third-phase predecessor, this criticism, indifferent to the assumptions of the first phase and the strained rationalization of the second, distinguishes Twain from Morgan to render the latter the object of the former's satire. That is, it overlooks (supervises) Twain's avowed and undeviating exceptionalist intention—and the formal (aesthetic) aspects,

not least the quintessential American voice, that underscore it—and reads the novel retrospectively from the dark, “anti-imperialist” perspective Twain arrived at near the very end of his life. Like its predecessors—and, unfortunately, so much recent “cultural criticism” that has superseded close reading under the “politically progressive” aegis of the “worldliness” of literature—it plunders the text to draw from it the conclusion it wants from the outset. That is, it colonizes its object in the very name of decolonization.

This paradox is enacted in an exemplary way in Quentin Youngberg’s “Morphology of Manifest Destiny: The Justified Violence of John O’Sullivan, Hank Morgan, and George W. Bush,” published in *Canadian Review of American Studies* in 2005. As the title underscores, this means in the aftermath of the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq in the name of the Bush administration’s “War on Terror.” The first essay, as far as I know, that invokes the concept of American exceptionalism in a systematic way in a reading of *A Connecticut Yankee*,<sup>52</sup> its goal is, as Youngberg puts it,

to trace the continuity between Hank Morgan’s narrative, with its anti-imperial imperialism and ideas of technological and moral superiority, and the American government’s narrative for today’s war on terror. I want to (re)think the strategies of justification deployed today and narrated in the United States National Security Strategy of 2002, otherwise known as the Bush Doctrine, as the inheritance of a tradition of Manifest Destiny that is also narrated in Twain’s novel, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*. In the process, I will trace the origins of the fixed idea of Manifest Destiny to its Puritan roots, examine its morphology through the nineteenth century, where it finds itself treated in Twain’s fiction and essays, and finally, arrive at a fuller understanding of the legacy that informs foreign policy in the United States today.<sup>53</sup>

In his essay, Youngberg accords primacy to the exceptionalist ideology of Manifest Destiny “circulating in the nineteenth century” (Youngberg, “Morphology of Manifest Destiny,” 317), but he insists on tracing the “genealogical antecedents of that exceptionalism” “all the way back to Europe, through the pilgrims and Puritans” (317). Invoking John O’Sullivan’s “The Great Nation of Futurity,”<sup>54</sup> he underscores that document’s emphasis on the American people’s “absolution from the crimes of Europe” (317) and a “national birth” that implies “the end of history” (318) and the establishment of a “New Order” that “can be equated with progress, which is coterminous with improvement” (318). Thus, according to Youngberg, O’Sullivan’s exceptionalist notion of improvement

constitutes a justification for imperial expansion and the “violence perpetrated toward those ends” (318). More fundamentally, O’Sullivan assumes American democracy, insofar as it is a “natural universal and good,” is “holy” (i.e., a divine dispensation). Thus, as Youngberg points out, O’Sullivan sees the United States as divinely chosen, as

“the nation of many nations” that “is destined to *manifest to mankind* the excellence of divine principles; to establish on earth the noblest temple ever dedicated to the worship of the Most High—the Sacred and the True” ([O’Sullivan,] “Futurity,” 427). Because it calls immediately to mind the expression of God in the flesh of Jesus Christ, the idea of a “manifestation” in this quotation serves as an overt appeal to the fundamental Protestant values of Anglo-Saxon North America. This rhetorical move is a performative consubstantiation of America and the body of Christ. In very literal terms, America becomes the Messiah of nations. O’Sullivan clearly identifies the providential project of the United States as a mission to “establish on earth the . . . salvation of man.” (Youngberg, “Morphology of Manifest Destiny,” 319)

In thus pointing to O’Sullivan’s identification of nineteenth-century America with the Messiah, Youngberg demonstrates the inexorable genealogical continuity between his concept of Manifest Destiny and the American Puritans’ belief that “the continent [was] to be the New Jerusalem—the physical instantiation of God’s promised land for his chosen people” (Youngberg, “Morphology of Manifest Destiny,” 219). Invoking Jonathan Edwards’s “Paradise in America,” he underscores the similarity between the exceptionalism of the Puritans and that of O’Sullivan’s doctrine of Manifest Destiny—the New World break from the Old World in terms of the opposition between Protestant and Catholic Christianity.

Having established the pervasiveness of exceptionalism in the justificatory discourse of nineteenth-century America, Youngberg is enabled to thematize several of its aspects that previous Americanist criticism could not. The consequence of “this decisive break from the past history of the Christian world” was not only “the acquittal of the Protestant church in the New World of the crimes of Europe,” the envisioning of the New World as the “Promised Land,” and the Puritan exodus from captivity as a “providential destiny” (Youngberg, “Morphology of Manifest Destiny,” 320). This break also provided the Puritans, and later O’Sullivan, with two strategies that were fundamental to their and their nineteenth-century descendants’ colonizing mission. One, first articulated

by John Cotton in *God's Promise to His Plantation* (1634), was that the "Promised Land" was a "vacant land" (*terra nullius*): "When he makes a Countrey, though not altogether void of Inhabitants, yet void in that place where they reside. Where there is a vacant place, there is liberty for the Sons of *Adam* or *Noah* to come and inhabit though they neither buy it, nor ask their leaves" (Youngberg, "Morphology of Manifest Destiny," 321; emphasis original).<sup>55</sup> The other, based on the logical imperatives of the first, was that the land could be expropriated if it was not cultivated (*terra nullius*):

The second strategy O'Sullivan employs had to do with husbandry: if they are not tending the land, then it can be rightfully taken away. Again like John Cotton—who states that "in a vacant Soyle, he hath taken possession of it, and bestoweth culture and husbandry upon it, his Right it is"—O'Sullivan legitimates the annexation of Mexican territory on the premise that the Mexican government could not properly care for it and the American government could:

*Imbecile and distracted, Mexico never can exert any real governmental authority over such a country. The impotence of the one and the distance of the other, must make the relation one of virtual independence unless, by stunting the province of all natural growth, and forbidding that immigration [of Anglo-Americans] which can alone develop its capabilities and fulfill the purpose of its creation, tyranny may retain military dominion, which is no government in the legitimate sense of the term. (Youngberg, "Morphology of Manifest Destiny," 322)<sup>56</sup>*

Having established the continuity between the exceptionalism of Puritan providential history and that of nineteenth-century Manifest Destiny, Youngberg turns to Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. Following the directives of Nancy Oliver, who in a 1987 essay had argued that O'Sullivan's concept of Manifest Destiny had morphed into Social Darwinism by the time Twain was writing the novel,<sup>57</sup> he goes on to suggest not only that *A Connecticut Yankee* constitutes a critique of this later phase of American exceptionalism (what I have referred to as the secularization of Puritan theology) but also that Twain's novel is a proleptic critique of a third morphological manifestation of the American exceptionalist ethos: the George W. Bush administration's imperial intervention in Iraq, justified by the "National Security Strategy of the United States," announced in 2002 in the wake of the bombing of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon:

I read the work of Mark Twain as a late nineteenth-century commentary on Manifest Destiny. *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, for example, develops a thoughtful critique of American exceptionalism, which is embodied in the character of Hank Morgan. What is most interesting about the novel, however, is the way that the apparatuses of technology and education come to be the new pillar of a progressive exceptionalism that justifies Morgan's imperial project in medieval Britain. This fundamental shift away from a purely religious justification, both in the novel itself and in the popular imagination of the late nineteenth century, is significant because it represents an important waypoint in the morphology of Manifest Destiny. It lies midway between the religious rhetoric of the fundamental Protestantism of the Puritans and the arrogance of the current American, which would legitimate any unilateral violence on the basis of righteous technological and educational superiority. (Youngberg, "Morphology of Manifest Destiny," 323)

In attending directly to the American exceptionalist motifs saturating *A Connecticut Yankee*, Youngberg is thus enabled to perceive resonant meanings in the novel to which his Americanist predecessors (even those of the third phase) were blinded by their unconscious or vestigial exceptionalist problematic, not least its immensely suggestive anticipation of post-9/11 America and the George W. Bush administration's "War on Terror." But like the earlier critics of the third phase of *A Connecticut Yankee* criticism, Youngberg remains willfully indifferent to both external and internal evidence that patently problematizes his thesis. Instead, he attributes this proleptic critique of American exceptionalism to Mark Twain by identifying Hank Morgan as the object of his satire. Specifically, invoking John Carlos Rowe's reading, he interprets the novel retrospectively from the point of view at which Twain arrived at the very end of his life; that is, from the perspective articulated in "To a Person Sitting in Darkness" (1901), his critique of the United States' occupation of the Philippines in the aftermath of the Spanish-American War:

As John Carlos Rowe noted . . . Twain's essay, "To the Person Sitting in Darkness," formulates . . . a fundamental critique of imperialist appropriation and manipulation of public values to nefarious—and, more often than not, pecuniary—ends. In his truly unique and brilliant way, Twain sarcastically comments on a contemporary manifestation of the dynamics of imperial justification that we have been exploring throughout this paper. Twain claims,

*There have been lies; yes, but they were told in a good cause. We have been treacherous; but that was only in order that real good might come out of apparent evil. . . we have debauched America's honor and blackened her face before the world; but each detail was for the best. We know this. The Head of every state and Sovereignty in Christendom and ninety per cent of every legislative body in Christendom, including our Congress and our fifty State Legislatures, are not only of the church, but also of the Blessings-of-Civilization Trust. This world-girdling accumulation of trained morals, high principles, and justice, cannot do an unright thing, an unfair thing, an ungenerous thing, an unclean thing. It knows what it is about.*

These lines underscore the complex and conflicting interests that have always characterized foreign policy of the United States. Twain interrogates, in this essay and in his novel, the way in which the true, unflattering motives of a “justified” regime are often disguised under the veil of freedom, democracy, and any number of other apparently universal absolutes. We saw the very same tension between universal values and political expediency that Mark Twain identifies here in John O’Sullivan’s tracts on American expansion in the 1840s. It is a similar tension to the one between Christian charity and the impulse for land grabbing we saw among the Puritans. (Youngberg, “Morphology of Manifest Destiny,” 328; emphasis original)

But what is problematic about Youngberg’s interpretation (as well as Rowe’s) is not simply its arbitrary retrospective reading of the Battle of the Sand Belt, which overlooks the evidence that points to the identity of Twain and his protagonist. This retrospective oversight itself, as I have implied and will show more fully later, is the consequence of Youngberg’s (and Rowe’s) too simplistic understanding of the American exceptionalist ethos he is both invoking and criticizing. I am referring to his failure to perceive that Twain’s allegedly “savage” critique of the American imperial project in the Philippines in “To the Person Sitting in the Dark” is in fact, like his earlier critique of the Gilded Age, an American jeremiad, which as Sacvan Bercovitch reminds us, “was the ritual of [an exceptionalist] culture on an errand—which is to say, a culture based on a faith in process. . . . Its function [in the context of inevitable recidivism] was to create a climate of anxiety that helped release the restless “progressivist” [and rejuvenating] energies required for the success of the venture” (Bercovitch, *American Jeremiad*, 23). This crucial aspect of the

American exceptionalist ethos is evident in the insistent contrasts Twain makes throughout this late essay between Old World (British, German, and Russian) imperial rapacity [in South Africa, China, and Manchuria, respectively] and the benignity of *traditional* America's relations to peoples sitting in the heart of darkness that its then-current practice under President William McKinley in the Philippines is betraying:

For, presently, came the Philippine temptation. It was strong; it was too strong, and he made that bad mistake; he played the European game, the Chamberlain game [in the Boer War]. It was a pity; it was a great pity, that error; that one grievous error, that irrevocable error. For it was the very place and time to play the American game again. And at no cost. Rich winnings to be gathered in, too, rich and permanent; indestructible; a fortune transmissible forever to the children of the flag. Not land, not money, not dominion—no, something worth many times more than that dross: our share, the spectacle of a nation of long harassed and persecuted slaves set free through our influence; our posterity's share the golden memory of that fair deed. The game was in our hands. If it had been played according to the American rules.

### The Disavowed Specter

To sum up, the four phases of the history of criticism and commentary on Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* I have thematized articulate a "narrative" whose *Logos* or, more accurately, whose "center elsewhere"<sup>58</sup> is the American exceptionalist ethos and, in the process of fulfillment, self-destructs. It releases a contradiction at the moment of resolution of its dialectic structuring logic, thus calling for a radical rethinking of the novel's meaning. Put alternatively, in showing that the itinerary of this *Americanist* critical history enacts the metamorphosis of an initial story about the relationship between the New World and the Old, in which it is assumed that the author and protagonist are more or less identical in their attitude toward the "errand" in question (phase 1), into one in which the author seems to lose control over his protagonist at the point of "completion" of the errand (phase 2), and then into one in which the protagonist's errand becomes the object of the author's satire (phases 3 and 4), this "summary" paradoxically discloses an "Other" that belongs to the exceptionalist *Logos* of the *Americanist* discourse but has systematically been disavowed. In short, it discloses a specter, as it were,

that not only has come increasingly to haunt this entire history of criticism of Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee* but also—and, finally, more importantly, as I have been suggesting by emphasizing the exemplary character of Americanist Twain criticism—the history of Americanist studies. Given this irreparable disclosure, and the sudden (post-9/11) reappropriation of the term “American exceptionalism” in its celebratory sense by the contemporary American political class (both Republican and Democrat),<sup>59</sup> it becomes an imperative of present Americanist criticism not only to “name” this haunting specter but also to think both the hitherto disavowed negatives to which this visitation of the visited relentlessly reminds us and the positive possibilities to which it points. It will be the purpose of the next chapter to inaugurate this urgent project.



## 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!”<sup>71</sup> 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)<sup>2</sup>—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 “genteel” style (*sermo gravis*) of the overcoded European tradition (and its American imitators like James Fenimore Cooper).<sup>3</sup> “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 transcendently 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” exceptionalist American vocation. Read in this light, Twain’s overdetermined use of the epithet “a Yankee of Yankees” to characterize the Americanness 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 excellence*” 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 . . . ,”<sup>4</sup> and, in thus unerringly fulfilling the imperatives of their exceptionalist 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 Leather-stocking 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.”<sup>5</sup>

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 every where 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.<sup>6</sup>

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.<sup>7</sup> 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 announces 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 accompanied 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'n'head 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 graveyard 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 knowledge 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”<sup>8</sup>—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.*<sup>9</sup>

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)<sup>10</sup>

## 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 transcendently 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—invent, 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

title, translated into modern speech, would be THE BOSS. *Elected by the Nation*. That suited me. (Twain, *Connecticut Yankee*, 43–44; my emphasis)

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.<sup>11</sup> 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.*<sup>12</sup>

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 reformatations 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 respectable; 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; *had 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)<sup>13</sup>

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)<sup>14</sup>

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 reinvigorates 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)<sup>15</sup> 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 indiscriminating 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 *he* 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 tinted 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)<sup>16</sup>

3. And he privileges the idea of a disciplined and productive nation (a covenant 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 luxury, 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 automata 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)<sup>17</sup>

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.<sup>18</sup>

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.”<sup>19</sup>

## 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,<sup>20</sup> 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.<sup>21</sup> 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 *zoé*, political life to bare life) it not only disavows but always attributes to and deplors 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)<sup>22</sup>

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.<sup>23</sup>

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),<sup>24</sup> 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 enchanter 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 murder!” [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 indiscriminating 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,"<sup>25</sup> and the third-phase Americanists, epitomized by John Carlos Rowe, to read the novel as Twain's satire of Morgan's imperialist penchant.<sup>26</sup>

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),<sup>27</sup> 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 structuration, 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*

*the Sabib's wives and children. Then came the Sabib from over the sea and called them to most strict account.*<sup>28</sup>

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,<sup>29</sup> 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 transcendently 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*,<sup>30</sup> 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.”<sup>31</sup> 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 *zoé* (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.*<sup>32</sup>

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)<sup>33</sup>

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 boss-hood 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.<sup>34</sup> 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.<sup>35</sup>

Despite the apparent resemblance, Morgan’s/Twain’s arresting sympathy with the French “Reign of Terror” should not, however, be interpreted as an anticipation 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.<sup>36</sup>

If, to return to the Connecticut Yankee’s response to this last climactic use of shock-and-awe violence, one reads his hyperbolic triumphalist 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."<sup>37</sup>

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 triumphalist 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 “mistimed 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 sleepeth, 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.<sup>38</sup>

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 (*zoē*)—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 paranoically 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 disenchant. 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 techno-scientific 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!"<sup>39</sup>

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.*<sup>40</sup> 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.



## CHAPTER FIVE



# *A Connecticut Yankee* and America's “War on Terror”

## *Thinking the Spectacle*

A bugle? . . . It is the king! The drawbridge, there! Man the battlements!—turn out the—  
He was getting up his last “effect,” but he never finished it.

—Mark Twain, “Final P. S. by M. T.,” *A Connecticut Yankee*

The Bush administration has attempted to supplant the loss of the belief in Virgin Land that underwrote the myth of U.S. exceptionalism with the arrogation of the power to occupy the position of the exception to the laws of the World of Nations. But insofar as the Homeland Security State's exceptions to the rules of law and war are themselves instantiations of force that lack the grounding support of norms or rules, they resemble the traumatic events upon which they depend for their power to rule. As such, these exceptions will maintain their power to rule only as long as U.S. publics remain captivated by the spectacles of violence the state has erected at the site of Ground Zero.

—Donald E. Pease, *The New American Exceptionalism*



As many critics have observed, Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* is, from an aesthetic point of view, a highly flawed novel. But this common negative aesthetic judgment has not prevented it from becoming one of the most read and written about texts in the American literary canon. As the history of commentary and criticism of the novel—both that which acknowledges Twain's ambiguity toward his protagonist and that which claims his satirical distance—bears clear witness, *A Connecticut Yankee* has from the time of its publication in the "Gilded Age" to the present global occasion remained a quintessential "American" novel only slightly less so than *Huckleberry Finn*. And this, as I have shown, is because its narrative, and the language in which it is expressed, perhaps more than any other in the American literary tradition, uncannily epitomizes the American national identity. I mean the "exceptionalism" that had its origins in the Puritans' belief in their election by God and their representation of this divinely sponsored vocation as their errand in the New World wilderness; its adolescence in the period of westward expansion during which the transcendental calling was gradually secularized as "Manifest Destiny"; and its maturation at the end of the nineteenth century, when, faced with the closing of the continental frontier and the possibility of overcivilization (recidivism), the United States inaugurated its quest for global hegemony.

But it is not simply the American past that Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee* illuminates. If one reads the novel in the light of the publication of Twain's official autobiography in 2012, a publication that, typical of his "style" of representation, he deliberately postponed until the hundredth anniversary of his death for the "dramatic effect" that such a staged delay would achieve,<sup>1</sup> one cannot help but realize, as I have been suggesting, that the novel is also uncannily proleptic of the American future—or rather its paradoxical future: not the triumphant Americanization of the planet's wilderness promised by the American exceptionalist *Logos* but, in Adorno and Horkheimer's apt conclusion about the disenchanting itinerary of the Enlightenment, "the triumph of disaster." I mean specifically the paradoxical "fulfillment" of the logic of exceptionalism when, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the announcement of the "end of history,"<sup>2</sup> "the kicking of the Vietnam syndrome,"<sup>3</sup> and the attacks of al Qaeda on American soil, President George W. Bush proclaimed the "War on Terror" as the "calling" of the American people in the twenty-first century and launched his program of "regime change" in the world's wilderness.

It will be the purpose of this brief concluding chapter to bring the paradoxical American future that my reading of the novel has suggested into clearer focus by pointing to the uncanny affiliation between the essentially American language Hank Morgan employs to represent the work of his ameliorative vocation in the Old World wilderness and the American language that, since the publication of *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* in 1889, has increasingly come to be used by the intellectual deputies of the U.S. government—and ventriloquized media—to represent the United States' post-frontier errand in the global wilderness. I suggest it is no accident that the critical process of following Hank Morgan's American exceptionalist pursuit of his vocation in Arthurian England has precipitated an indissoluble relay of key words that have become, like leitmotifs, fundamental to contemporary American cultural discourse, particularly as this discourse pertains to the United States' global geopolitics. I am referring, above all, to the series of terms, endemic to the binary (theo)logic of American exceptionalism and gestating in less official forms during the period of westward expansion in the nineteenth century, that came to maturity and full—*paradoxically disclosive*—deployment in the wake of 9/11 during the George W. Bush administration's imperial "War on [Islamic] Terror": "shock and awe," "preemptive war," "regime change," "homeland security," and "the state of exception." One could, of course, invoke earlier modern manifestations of this spectacular American exceptionalist discourse: the celebratory accounts of the awesome firebombing of Dresden, the mass killing of which hastened the end of the war in Europe against totalitarianism; the awesome atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the mass killing of which ended the war in the Pacific against Japanese imperialism; and, not least, as I have noted, the devastation of Vietnam in the name of "saving it for the free world." Though revelatory of the dark reality that the benign discourse of American exceptionalism exists to disavow, the unspeakable violence of these instances could be—and has been (unjustifiably)—justified by representing their terrible negativity as an unfortunate consequence of patently "just wars": the necessary residue ("collateral damage") of exceptionalist America's mission in a civilized world whose very being was being threatened by an evil and barbarous force. To put it alternatively—in a way, not incidentally, that follows the itinerary of the history of Americanist readings of *A Connecticut Yankee* I have summarized—the violence of these historical instances remained tacitly invisible because they occurred at a time when the logic of the myth of American exceptionalism was still in the process of development. By this

I mean prior to the moment of its fulfillment, the coming to its end (in both senses of the word), when its status as a hegemonic discourse—the “truth of the way things are”—manifested itself as a (conscious) ideology. That disclosive moment—I will call it an “event” in Alain Badiou’s resonant sense of the word—happened in the immediate aftermath of al Qaeda’s attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001. Falsely claiming that Saddam Hussein was building atomic weapons of mass destruction and invoking the jeremiad to recall Americans to their covenantal vocation, the George W. Bush administration<sup>4</sup> invaded Afghanistan and Iraq, launching America’s unending global “War on Terror” (the globe having been rendered a wilderness by “rogue states”) in the name of “the new American Century”—and the *Pax Americana*—announced by his neoconservative intellectual deputies.<sup>5</sup>

What is remarkable about the U.S. government’s collective persona in the post-Cold War era, particularly that of the George W. Bush administration, is how uncannily it resembles Hank Morgan’s, by which I mean that extreme of the American exceptionalist identity—noted proleptically by Herman Melville in the middle of the nineteenth century in the figures of Captain Ahab and “the Indian hater *par excellence*”—echoing the phrase “the nation of nations” adopted by Americans early in their history to convey America’s exceptionalism. Morgan, it will be recalled, introduces himself as “an American . . . a Yankee of the Yankees—and practical; yes, and nearly barren of sentiment, I suppose—or poetry, in other words” (Twain, *Connecticut Yankee*, 8). And in the story that follows it is this austere extreme—liminal—version of American exceptionalism that, with one fatal exception, unerringly determines his cultural and political practice in the Old World. What being a “Yankee of the Yankees” means, as we have seen by attending closely to the unerring logic of Morgan’s narrative—the practical and calculative logic that, having a *Telos* in mind from the beginning, “stages” reality as spectacle—is not simply a calling that endows the called (interpellated) with a sense of superiority over its inferior Other that is so absolute in its truth that it justifies mass killing, the slaughter, if necessary, of anyone that presents him/herself as an obstacle in the way of its transcendently ordained (secularized sacred)<sup>6</sup> errand. Since it is grounded in the American exceptionalist *Logos*, this liminal American superiority—this being a “Yankee of the Yankees”—also means, as I have shown, an understanding of sovereignty that necessarily perceives the inferior-recalcitrant Other as a perpetual threat to the security of the exceptionalist

state. This justifies the *normalization* of the state of exception, which is to say the suspension of the law at home—the establishment of the (permanent) “homeland security state”—and preemptive war abroad in the name of the American peace.

This Twainian, late nineteenth-century image of the American national identity is almost exactly paralleled by that of President George W. Bush, who about a hundred years later, in the wake of al Qaeda’s bombing of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, declared a total “War on Terror” in the name of American exceptionalism. Like Morgan, this Bush of the post-9/11 occasion, it could be said without exaggerating, saw himself (and his administration of practical [can-do] policy experts)<sup>7</sup> as an “American of the Americans,” the latest historical avatar, or, to underscore the paradox, the liminal form, of the logic of American exceptionalism—called by a higher cause to the unilateral task of Americanizing the global wilderness produced by the “savage terrorists.” And like Morgan’s calling *vis á vis* the feudal aristocracy of Arthurian England, this calling, assuming, indeed flouting, the absolute *moral and military* superiority of techno-scientific-military republican America over the undeveloped (“rogue”) states of the world’s wilderness (Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Iran), justified Bush’s proclamation of the United States’ global “War on Terror” and the normalization of the state of exception. As in the case of the Connecticut Yankee’s unerringly sustained American exceptionalist narrative, one could proffer a multitude of President Bush’s (and his government’s) statements—official, public, and private—that bear witness to the otherwise uncanny similarity to which I am drawing attention. For the sake of economy,<sup>8</sup> I will restrict these to a reference to the Homeland Security Act of 2012<sup>9</sup> and an extended excerpt from his State of the Union Address to Congress and the nation delivered on January 29, 2002, following the “successful” invasion of Afghanistan, a “rogue state” or “outlaw regime,” in which, in the overt name of the American calling, he renders the state of exception the (global) norm. I quote at some length not only to suggest how patently, and disturbingly, the “plain” rhetoric (“nearly barren of sentiment”), the staged structure, the totalizing scope, the arrogant certainty, and extreme, indeed paranoid, content of Bush’s exceptionalist speech echoes the liminal rhetoric, structure, scope, and content of Hank Morgan’s sense of vocation and his jeremiadic narrative but also to suggest how present history, in disclosing what the exceptionalist discourse disavowed, underscores this relationship:

What we have found in Afghanistan confirms that, far from ending there, our war against terror is only beginning. Most of the nineteen men who hijacked planes on September the 11th were trained in Afghanistan's camps, and so were tens of thousands of others. Thousands of dangerous killers, schooled in the methods of murder, often supported by outlaw regimes, are now spread throughout the world like the ticking time bombs, set to go off without warning.

Thanks to the work of our law enforcement officials and coalition partners, hundreds of terrorists have been arrested. Yet, tens of thousands of trained terrorists are still at large. These enemies view the entire world as a battlefield, and we must pursue them wherever they are. (*Applause*) So long as training camps operate, so long as nations harbor terrorists, freedom is at risk. And America and our allies must not, and will not, allow it. (*Applause*)

Our nation will continue to be steadfast and patient and persistent in the pursuit of two great objectives. First, we will shut down terrorist camps, disrupt terrorist plans, and bring terrorists to justice. And second, we must prevent the terrorists and regimes who seek chemical, biological or nuclear weapons from threatening the United States and the world (*Applause*) [this assertion points to the Bush administration's calculated plan to invade Iraq on the trumped up charge that Saddam Hussein was building the atomic bomb].

Our military has put the terrorist training camps of Afghanistan out of business, yet camps still exist in at least a dozen countries. A terrorist underworld, including groups like Hamas, Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad, Jaish-i-Mohammed—operates in remote jungles and deserts, and hides in the centers of large cities.

While the most visible military action is in Afghanistan, America is acting elsewhere. We now have troops in the Philippines, helping to train that country's armed forces to go after terrorist cells that have executed an American, and still hold hostages. Our soldiers, working with the Bosnian government, seized terrorists who were plotting to bomb our embassy. Our Navy is patrolling the coast of Africa to block the shipment of weapons and the establishment of terrorist camps in Somalia.

My hope is that all nations will heed our call, and eliminate the terrorist parasites who threaten their countries and our own. Many nations are acting forcefully. Pakistan is now cracking down on terror, and I admire the strong leadership of President Musharraf. (*Applause*)

But some governments will be timid in the face of terror. And make no mistake about it: If they do not act, American will. (*Applause*) . . .

We'll be deliberate, yet time is not on our side. I will not wait on events, while dangers gather. I will not stand by as peril draws closer and closer. The United States of America will not permit the world's most dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world's most destructive weapons. (*Applause*)

Our war on terror is well begun. But it is only begun. This campaign may not be finished on our watch—yet it must be and it will be waged on our watch.

We can't stop short. If we stop now—leaving terrorist camps intact and terrorist states unchecked—our sense of security would be false and temporary. History has called America and our allies to action. And it is both our responsibility and our privilege to fight freedom's fight. . . .

None of us would ever wish the evil that was done on September 11th. Yet after America was attacked it was as if our entire country looked into a mirror and saw our better selves. We were reminded that we are citizens, with obligations to each other, to our country, and to history. We began to think less of the goods we can accumulate and more about the good we can do. . . .

This time of adversity offers a unique moment of opportunity—a moment we must seize to change our culture. Through the gathering momentum of millions of acts of service and decency and kindness, I know we can overcome evil with greater good. (*Applause*) And we have a great opportunity during this time of war to lead the world toward the values that will bring lasting peace. . . .

In a single instant, we realized that this will be a decisive decade in the history of liberty, that we've been called to a unique role in human events. Rarely has the world faced a choice more clear or consequential.<sup>10</sup>

As the preceding juxtaposition testifies, Hank Morgan's extremist American exceptionalist vocation in feudal England—and his staging of its imperatives as spectacle, which is intrinsic to its liminality—is remarkably proleptic of George W. Bush's liminal and spectacle-staging American exceptionalist vocation in the post-9/11 “world's wilderness” *in producing an exceptionalist state in which the state of exception becomes the rule*.<sup>11</sup> Once this general relationship is perceived, the proleptic nature of all the other particular disavowed aspects of the indissoluble relay of ideological imperatives I have shown to be intrinsic to the imperial metalogic of Morgan's American exceptionalist errand becomes

resonantly manifest: "preemptive war," "regime change," the tactics of "shock and awe," "ventriloquized government," and, ultimately, the universal biopolitical reduction of human life to bare life—life that can be killed without the killing being called murder.

## Preemptive War

As I have shown, the secular American exceptionalism of the Connecticut Yankee, not unlike the theological exceptionalism of his Puritan ancestors, does not merely mean superiority over its Other (the Old World). More fundamentally, its binary (teleo)logic necessarily shapes the perception of its inferior Other as an enemy that threatens the security—and the transcendently ordained mission—of the Chosen People. Therefore, as the Old Testament God demanded of his covenantal people vis à vis the Canaanites, who inhabited the land that was the object of the Israelite errand—"thou shalt utterly destroy them . . . as the Lord thy God hath commanded thee: that they teach you not to do after all their abominations"—the exceptionalism of this secular exceptionalism justifies the Chosen People's destruction of this "enemy" to preempt the "threat" to its security and its errand. Thus, as I have shown, Morgan, dramatizing the defense of the "benighted" British nobility—and the "Established Church" on which it was founded—as an imminent offensive against the new true and the good American-style republic, declared a preemptive war against them. Similarly, George W. Bush, obedient to the calling of the American exceptionalist *Logos*, dramatized al Qaeda's attack on American soil on 9/11 as the opening offensive of a vast and amorphous network of fanatical Islamic terrorists aimed at destroying the American way of life. Like the Connecticut Yankee vis à vis his errand in sixth-century England, he effaced the imperial American offensive for control of the Middle East that the United States itself inaugurated at the outset of the Cold War by falsely claiming that this terrorist network was developing the atomic bomb and chemical weapons intended for use in its terrorist war against the United States (civilization). To put it in the appropriate language of Twain's novel, by thus staging the spectacle of an American homeland threatened by an imminent attack from weapons of mass destruction, Bush, in exceptionalist defiance of international law, was "justified" to unleash a horrific war of preemption against this "imminent" "terrorist" "threat," an unending war, not incidentally, that rendered the state of exception (the negation of the law in the name of safeguarding it) the rule.

## Regime Change

Confronted by the resistance of the “irrational” and “benighted” knights of the British aristocracy and the abjectness of its peasantry, the Connecticut Yankee, it will be recalled, after launching his preemptive war, issues a dramatic “Proclamation” (dictated to his ventriloquized man Clarence, not incidentally) in the self-righteous name of his American exceptionalist vocation, which unilaterally—and undemocratically—abolishes the monarchy and establishes a “*Republic*” in England:

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 votes elect representatives and deliver into their hands the government. (Twain, *Connecticut Yankee*, 245; emphasis original)

This fictional liminal manifestation of the American exceptionalist ethos almost absolutely anticipates the George W. Bush administration’s relationship to Afghanistan and Iraq (and other “rogue” or “outlaw” states) in the wake of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon by al Qaeda on September 11, 2001. Bringing to fulfillment America’s exceptionalist Cold War foreign policy—epitomized by the United States’ repeated (but unsuccessful) attempts to *impose* American-style democracy on the resistant inhabitants of geographical space it arbitrarily called “South Vietnam” during its imperial war in Southeast Asia—Bush, like Morgan, undertook, under the aegis of his liminal American exceptionalism, a calculated effort to impose American style (neoliberal) governments on the “threatening” foreign cultures of Afghanistan and Iraq by violence. In blatant contradiction of democracy—and international law—he overtly called this “regime change.”<sup>12</sup> Like the Connecticut Yankee with respect to his man Clarence (and his historical predecessors of the Vietnam War era), moreover, Bush attempted to obscure the imperial violent

arbitrariness of this regime change by installing a ventriloquized native government (under President Hamid Karzai in the case Afghanistan; under Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki in the case of Iraq) as the lawmaking body of these nations. As in the case of the Connecticut Yankee's regime change in feudal England, they were (and still are) governments, it should be emphasized, that are representative of a very small minority and thus intrinsically undemocratic and perpetually unstable.

## Shock and Awe

The normalization of the state of exception intrinsic to the exceptionalist state is not limited in its implications to the justification of preemptive war and regime change. It also renders shock and awe—a radical dislocation of a traditional and at-homing perspective accompanied by abjection before the dislocating agent—as the essential tactics for accomplishing the domination that is the true end of these practices. This is because, in representing being as a hierarchical system of binary opposites (identity/difference), the *Logos* (the Absolute Truth) of the exceptionalist state is enabled to render its Other as an inferior and threatening entity that relies on superstition for its worldly decisions and, in thus demonizing it, to employ its Truth as a powerful weapon of persuasion. This tactic of the spectacle—*the calculated staging for effect*—is, as I have shown, not only a fundamental and decisive aspect of Mark Twain's narrative strategy but also intrinsic to and determinative of the Connecticut Yankee's practice in feudal England. Morgan's late nineteenth-century scientific knowledge (and the awesome technology it produces) enables him to triumph over Merlin's superficial (black) magic (and the Established Church's superstitions). As his triumph over Sir Sagramour and the British nobility by way of the "magical" killing power of his modern weapon (the revolver) repeatedly testifies, it also enables him to achieve dominion (bosssdom) over the sociopolitical world of feudal England. This spectacular strategy of shock and awe enabled by Morgan's exceptionalist knowledge culminates in the Battle of the Sand Belt, in which, as we have seen, the Yankee harnesses the full force (physical power and psychological effect) of the superior "magic" of his scientific/technological knowledge, now transformed into state-of-the-art weaponry of mass destruction—Gatling guns, dynamite, electrically charged wiring—to annihilate his primitive, helpless opponents:

Land, what a sight! We were enclosed in three walls of dead men! All the other 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 instant for me to utilize their immobility in, and I didn't lose the chance. You see, another instant they would have recovered their faculties, then they'd have burst into a cheer and made a rush, and my wires would have gone down before it, but that lost instant lost them the opportunity forever; 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 revolver shots—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 gatlings 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-four were masters of England! Twenty-five thousand men lay dead around us. (Twain, *Connecticut Yankee*, 254–255)

Similarly, as its preemptive wars against the Taliban in Afghanistan and the Baathists in Iraq testify (and the ventriloquized culture industry underscores in its representation of these wars), the George W. Bush administration, assuming the dangerous primitiveness of its Orientalist enemies—their universally

"fanatic" "superstitious" (non-Western) beliefs—unleashed a massive high-tech assault on these countries and their people that employed a spectacular show of firepower, the latest high-tech weapons of mass destruction. It was intended that such a spectacular and destructive display of firepower would, in the actual language of the perpetrators, "shock and awe" them, as Morgan's "magic" bullets at the tournament with Sir Sagramour did his feudal opponents, into abject submission.

Like Hank Morgan's, too, what the spectacular display of technological firepower in fact accomplished, besides wholesale and indiscriminate destruction, was not acquiescence but a renewed will to resist, the consequence of the realization, disclosed precisely by the liminality of the spectacle of violence, of the imperial motives that the exceptionalist state disavows in its representation of its ameliorative democratic errand.

## Bare Life

Finally, as I noted in the conclusion of chapter 4, taking my directive from the ontopolitical writing of Hannah Arendt, Michel Foucault, and Giorgio Agamben, the exceptionalist state, in becoming necessarily a state of exception in which the exception becomes the norm, also inevitably produces an anti-democratic democratic politics (more specifically, a disciplinary biopolitics) the (bio)logic of which fulfills itself in the reduction of human life (*bios*) to bare life (*zoé*), life that can be killed with impunity—or, rather, to foreground, by way of an appeal to Judith Butler, a dimension of this reduction that Agamben's formulation obscures, life that is ungrievable.<sup>13</sup> I repeat the passage on bare life from Agamben's *Homo Sacer* quoted in the previous chapter to underscore the inordinate importance of this culminating disavowed—and *spectral*—attribute of the American exceptionalist ethos, and its unremarked but central relevance to Twain's novel:

What defined the status of *homo sacer* is . . . not the original [Roman] ambivalence of the sacred 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. The violence—the unsanctionable 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 a 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. . . .

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, a life that may be killed but not sacrificed—is the life that has been captured in this sphere.*<sup>14</sup>

One of the most characteristic features of Hank Morgan's comportment toward his enemies in the process of fulfilling the benign imperatives of his exceptionalist vocation in the "benighted" wilderness of sixth-century Britain is, as we have seen, his consistently paradoxical indifference to the wholesale and indiscriminate mutilations and horrific deaths he inflicts on them. There seems to be in fact a causal relationship between his Yankee practicality—his being "nearly barren of sentiment—of poetry in other words"—and this indifference to the pain of others. Indeed, he often seems intoxicated by the spectacle of slaughter he stages:

At last we could make out the details. All the front ranks, no telling how many acres, 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 rags, 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! (Twain, *Connecticut Yankee*, 249)

This indifference (or intoxication) can no doubt be rationalized as the comic effect of the deadpan hyperbolic spectacle of western humor, which, as I have shown, is the signature of Twain's spectacular narrative style. But this exceptionalist mode of American humor is, as I have also suggested, complicit with the biopolitical momentum that produces such indifference, for, in staging human life (and death) as spectacle—in inducing shock and awe—the spectacle as a totalized sociopolitical system of representation reduces its audience to dumb spectators: “the sudden glare paralyzed the host, petrified them you might say” (Twain, *Connecticut Yankee*, 254). The spectacle thus alienates humanity from language—that which all humans have in common—meaning from the realm of the political, where alone one can become a *bios politicos*. Bereaved of language and thrust into this “zone of indistinction” (the biopolitical space Agamben identifies as “the camp”)—“the hidden paradigm of the political space of modernity”<sup>15</sup>—the “shocked and awed” Commons become instead bare life: ungrievable, life that can be killed without the killing being named murder. Commenting on the superstructural (cultural/representational) emphasis of Guy Debord's “Situationist” Marxist masterpiece *Society of the Spectacle* (1967), which, not incidentally, could be read as a direct response to *The Connecticut Yankee's* celebration of the spectacle of techno-scientific capitalism, Agamben writes:

How can thought collect Debord's inheritance today, in the age of the complete triumph of the spectacle? It is evident, after all, that the spectacle is language, the very communicability and linguistic being of humans. This means that an integrated Marxian analysis should take into consideration the fact that capitalism (or whatever other name we might want to give to the process dominating world history today) not only aimed at the expropriation of productive activity, but also, and above all, at the alienation of language itself, of the linguistic and communicative nature of human being, of that *logos* in which Heraclitus identifies the Common. The extreme form of the expropriation of the Common is the spectacle, in other words, the politics in which we live. But this also means that what we encounter in the spectacle is our very linguistic nature inverted.<sup>16</sup>

I have said previously that the socializing momentum that is complicit with Morgan's spectacular style—the educational initiative that produces the inhumane indifference to the horrific pain his exceptionalist regime of truth indiscriminately inflicts on his Others (i.e., renders them ungrievable)—is essentially *biopolitical*. That this is so is, as I have shown in chapter 4, borne witness to by the educational system he calls “Man-Factories,” which he establishes at the outset of his errand. These “Man-Factories,” as the term's emphasis on American practicality itself suggests, and as the Yankee's insistent reference to the education they dispense as “*training*” underscores, have as their essential function to produce not critical *consciousnesses* adequate to the formation of a democratic polity but, in Michel Foucault's apt term, “useful and docile *bodies*” adequate to the disciplinary society. Put alternatively—to *recall* the American exceptionalist (Puritan) origins of Morgan's nineteenth-century “Man-Factories”—they are, whatever the language of democratic equality accompanying his references, ultimately intended to be *vocational*. They are educational institutions that, imitating the American calling, produce obedient—disciplined—bodies in the particular sense of bodies on call, bodies that dedicate themselves slavishly (at the expense of their immediate existential lives) to the service of an always future higher *Telos*: the spectacular American version of the capitalist free-market system that the Connecticut Yankee is unerringly intent on reproducing in feudal England.<sup>17</sup> The ventriloquization and the ideological apotheosis of Clarence and the fifty-two—an infinitely small minority of the British population, who gleefully kill their fellow natives on behalf of Morgan's colonial project—testify to the biopolitics at the heart of the Yankee's democratic errand and its reduction of human life to bare life.

In a way uncannily similar to that of the fictional Connecticut Yankee in feudal Britain, though more overt and complex, the George W. Bush administration's normalization of the state of exception in the name of the exceptionalist state a century later in the wake of September 11, 2001, disclosed the bare life that is intrinsic to but always disavowed in the benign discourse of American exceptionalism. As in the case of Hank Morgan's dehumanized comportment toward his benighted foreign enemy, Bush's exceptionalist establishment of the “homeland security state” was accompanied systematically by the indissolubly related combination of spectacle—the deliberate staging of a massive military campaign the high-tech violence of which was intended to shock and awe the primitive recipient enemy into abject acquiescence—and a representational discourse and political practice that indiscriminately assumed the object of

its spectacular death-dealing violence to be simply "collateral damage" (i.e., nothing more than bare life: life that can be killed with impunity). This latter exceptionalist assumption could, following Hannah Arendt's characterization of Adolf Eichmann, be called the "banality of evil":

Factually, my preoccupation with mental activities has two rather different origins. The immediate impulse came from my attending the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem. In my report of it I spoke of the "banality of evil." Behind the phrase, I held no thesis or doctrine, although I was dimly aware of the fact that it went counter to our tradition of thought—literary, theological, or philosophical—about the phenomenon of evil. Evil, we have learned, is something demonic; its incarnation is Satan. . . . However, what I was confronted with was utterly different and still undeniably factual. I was struck by a manifest shallowness in the doer that made it impossible to trace the uncontestable evil of his deeds to any deeper level of roots or motives. The deeds were monstrous, but the doer—at least the very effective one now on trial—was quite ordinary, commonplace, and neither demonic nor monstrous. There was no sign in him of firm ideological convictions or of specific evil motives, and the only notable characteristic one could detect in his past behavior as well as in his behavior during the trial and throughout the pre-trial police examinations was something entirely negative: it was not stupidity but *thoughtlessness*.<sup>18</sup>

This banal assumption was not only borne witness to by the Bush administration's systematic representation, both private and public, of its exceptionalist project in Afghanistan and Iraq, in which, as in the astonishing case of its National Legal Council's reinterpretation of the U.S. Constitution to adhere to the security imperatives of the state of exception, the humans its reinterpretation would effect are reduced to nothing more than torturable objects<sup>19</sup> or, as in the equally astonishing case of the report entitled *Enlisting Madison Avenue: The Marketing Approach to Earning Popular Support in Theaters of Operations* published by the Rand Corporation on behalf of the Bush administration's Department of Defense, in which the people being killed, mutilated, unhoused, imprisoned, or tortured by the United States' sophisticated weapons of mass destruction are reduced to "targeted" "consumers" of "branded" or, in Guy Debord's term, spectacularized products.<sup>20</sup> This horrific exceptionalist assumption is also borne witness to by the Bush administration's establishment of the policy of "extraordinary rendition" and camps of detention such as Abu

Ghraib and Guantánamo, in which the “enhanced forms of interrogation” justified by the National Legal Council’s reinterpretation of the Constitution could be practiced with immunity. The one significant difference between Hank Morgan’s exceptionalist project in feudal England and Bush’s in modern Afghanistan and Iraq is that he does not establish detention camps. But this is not a qualitative difference for, as I have shown, everything in the novel pertaining to the Connecticut Yankee’s exceptionalist comportment toward his enemies suggests that he would have established such camps if the need for them had arisen.<sup>21</sup>

## Coda

In this very attitude did I sit when I called to him, rapidly stating what it was I wanted him to do—namely, to examine a small paper with me. Imagine my surprise, nay, my consternation, when without moving from his privacy, Bartleby in a singularly mild, firm voice, replied, “I would prefer not to.”

—Herman Melville, “Bartleby, the Scrivener”

In the epigraph of this chapter from Donald E. Pease’s magisterial *New American Exceptionalism*, the author, referring to the Bush administration’s substitution of the “homeland security state” and the exceptional violence it justifies for the earlier belief in the myth of Virgin Land in the wake of 9/11, points directly to the inordinate power of the spectacle over the American people: “These exceptions will maintain the power to rule . . . as long as U.S. publics remain captivated by the spectacle of violence the state has erected at the site of Ground Zero.”<sup>22</sup> My contribution to the New Americanist project of disenchantment in this book has been, by juxtaposing my contrapuntal reading of Mark Twain’s *A Connecticut Yankee* against the history of the criticism of the novel, to suggest that the genealogical origins of this politically disabling spectacle are, however less visible, older than the establishment of the “homeland security state” at Ground Zero. More specifically, it has been to suggest that the debilitating enchanting spectacle is *intrinsic to the (fictional) logic of the American exceptionalist ethos* and thus has its origins in the very founding of America, when, in the wake of their exodus from the Old World, the Puritans spectacularly announced their election and their errand in the “New World” wilderness. Seen in the context of this longer history, the inordinate exceptionalist spectacle’s accumulating power—why it has been

historically so difficult to disenchant—becomes, I think, clearer than the more recent genealogy allows. And, at the same time, as the paradoxical conclusion of *A Connecticut Yankee* itself testifies, it discloses more decisively, precisely by way of focusing on the *cumulative development of that power*, the aporias in the spectacular logic of exceptionalism that in the process of its fulfillment paradoxically rendered the power of the spectacle vulnerable.

More specifically, such a genealogy has not only enabled us to perceive the unerringly continuous development of the spectacular logic of American exceptionalism from its origins in the Puritans' privileging of a providentially ordained vision, through the quintessential American novelist Mark Twain in the "secular" era of spectacular scientific and technological progress, to its fulfillment in the George W. Bush presidency, during which the exceptionalist logic of the spectacle culminated in its banalized totalization—in what Guy Debord aptly called the "Society of the Spectacle":

Where the real world changed into simple images, the simple images become real beings and effective motivations of hypnotic behavior. The spectacle, as a tendency *to make one see* the world by means of various specialized mediations (it can no longer be grasped directly), naturally finds vision to be the privileged human sense which the sense of touch was for other epochs; the most abstract, the most mystifiable sense corresponds to the general abstraction of present day society. But the spectacle is not identifiable with mere gazing, even combined with hearing. *It is that which escapes the activity of men, that which escapes reconsideration and correction by their work. It is the opposite of dialogue. Wherever there is independent representation, the spectacle reconstitutes itself.* (Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, 18; second emphasis is mine)<sup>23</sup>

In enabling us to perceive this itinerary of the spectacular logic of American exceptionalism, this extended genealogy, however, also enables us to perceive the specter that has increasingly haunted the "truth" of this visual logic from the beginning: the language of the Commons that the spectacle strikes dumb in reducing life to bare life; for what we have seen, by way of both the history of the criticism of *A Connecticut Yankee* and my contrapuntal reading of Twain's novel, is that they synecdochically disclose the historical itinerary of the exceptionalist ethos to be one in which the arrival at the fulfillment of its "promise" is also the decisive arrival of its (theoretical) demise *in that it is at the liminal point of its development that the exceptionalist ethos self-de-structs: discloses the violence to its Other that it has hitherto always disavowed.* To put

this eventual (*événementiel*) event alternatively, in coming to its end, the truth of the spectacular logic of American exceptionalism comes to be *recognized as spectacle*, as a totalized system of representation—a “regime of truth,” to appropriate Foucault—that, in separating humans from the world, robs them of language, and thus of a polity, and reduces them to bare life, life that can be killed without the killing being named murder. And, in thus revealing the truth to be spectacle—a *simulacrum* of the world itself—this liminal end discloses (spectrally) the potential of the Other that the spectacle has depotentialized. To appropriate an extension of Giorgio Agamben’s meditations on the “de-potentiating “dynamics of what Debord called “the Society of the Spectacle”:

What hinders communication [under the aegis of the society of the spectacle], therefore, is communicability itself: human beings are beings separated [by the spectacle] by what united them.

This also means, however, that in this way we encounter our own linguistic nature inverted. For this reason (precisely because what is being expropriated here is the possibility itself of the Common), the spectacle’s violence is so destructive; *but, for the same reason, the spectacle still contains something like a positive possibility*—and it is our task to use this possibility against it. The age in which we are living [this is the post-imperial/post-national age that has produced the “refugee” as “the only thinkable figure for the people of our time and the only category by which one may see today . . . the forms and limits of a coming political community<sup>24</sup>], in fact, is also the age in which, for the first time, it becomes possible for human beings to experience their own linguistic essence—to experience, that is, not some language content or some true proposition, but the fact itself of speaking. (Agamben, *Means without End*, 114.4; my emphasis)

Following Donald Pease’s focalizing of the power of the spectacle of violence—“erected at the site of Ground Zero” by way of the George W. Bush administration’s normalization of the state of exception—that has “captivated” the “American public,” he goes on to suggest a paradoxical means of breaking the enchanting spell of this spectacular apparatus of capture and reempowering the disempowered. Taking his directives from Jacques Rancière, he writes:

If the global Homeland has erected an order in which the people have no part, that order has positioned the people in a place that lacks a part in the global order. As the surplus element in the Global Homeland, the people occupy the

place of an empty universal. This place may presently lack any part to play in the Global Homeland's Order. But the very emptiness of this space, the fact that it demarcates the peoples of the Global Homeland included but with no part to play in the existing order, simultaneously empowers the people to play the part of articulating an alternative to the existing order. Because the people are without a part in the order in which the people are nevertheless included, they also constitute a part in an alternative to that order. The part without a part in the given global order constitutes an empty universal in an order to come that the global peoples can particularize differently. That order to come will not begin until the global state of emergency is itself exposed as the cause of the trauma it purports to oppose.<sup>25</sup>

The older genealogy of the American exceptionalism I have proposed in this study is not offered as a refutation of the understanding of American exceptionalism—and the means of overcoming its negative cultural/political consequences—enabled by Pease's more recent one. It is offered, rather, in the spirit of *Auseinandersetzung*, a critical dialogue that, in the name of loving strife, privileges the question over the answer. In demonstrating the proleptic role Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee* plays in the development of the disabling spectacular logic of the American exceptionalist ethos, it is therefore intended to deepen the resonance of the violence that American exceptionalism has always disavowed—to contribute to the task of disenchanting the enchanting force of its captivating spectacular logic, to giving voice to the part of no part.



## NOTES

### Preface

1. Jonathan Arac, *Huckleberry Finn as Idol and Target: The Functions of Criticism in Our Time* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), p. 6: "After Twain's death, *Huckleberry Finn* was admired by avant-garde and oppositional writers as various as Gertrude Stein, H. L. Mencken, Sherwood Anderson, and Hemingway, but for the culture at large it was a beloved boy's book. The several decades after the Second World War transformed the cultural standing of *Huckleberry Finn*. In the 1940s, *Huckleberry Finn* became a universally assigned college text and the focus of a huge amount of academic scholarship and critical discussion. Scholars and critics established terms for valuing *Huckleberry Finn* as a masterpiece of world literature and the highest image of America. This is the process I call 'hypercanonization.'"

2. Arac's critique of the "hypercanonization" of Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* has its point of departure in the tradition inaugurated by Ernest Hemingway, who, in *The Green Hills of Africa*, wrote "All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*," which underscores the innovative dynamics of Twain's American vernacular idiom. This tradition that focuses on the "exceptionalism" of Twain's American writing includes T. S. Eliot and Lionel Trilling. See T. S. Eliot, "Introduction to *Huckleberry Finn* (1950)," in Bradley, Sculley, et al. eds., *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, 2nd ed., Norton Critical Edition (New York: Norton, 1977). See also Lionel Trilling, "Huckleberry Finn," in *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1953; first published as the introduction to the Rinehart College Edition of *Huckleberry Finn* in 1948).

3. See Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992); Richard Haass, *The Reluctant Sheriff: The United States after the Cold War* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1997); and Samuel P. Huntington, *Who Are We? Challenges to America's National Identity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004).

4. Foremost among these New Americanists who against the depredations of the myth of American exceptionalism would transnationalize American studies is Donald E. Pease. See, above all, Donald E. Pease, *The New American Exceptionalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009); and Donald E. Pease, Winfried Fluck, and John Carlos Rowe, eds., *Re-framing the Transnational Turn in American Studies* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2011). See also Wai Chee Dimock and Lawrence Buell, *Shades of the Planet: American Literature across Deep Time* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University

Press, 2006); Russ Castranovo and Susan Gillman, *States of Emergency: The Object of American Studies* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); and John Carlos Rowe, *Afterlives of Modernism: Liberalism, Transnationalism and Political Critique* (Hanover, NH; Dartmouth University Press, 2011).

5. See William V. Spanos, *The Errant Art of Moby-Dick: The Canon, the Cold War, and the Struggle for American Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995); William V. Spanos, *Herman Melville and the American Calling: The Fiction after Moby-Dick, 1851-1857* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008); and William V. Spanos, *The Exceptionalist State and the State of Exception: Herman Melville's Billy Budd, Sailor* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011).

6. William V. Spanos, "American Studies in the 'Age of the World Picture': Thinking the Question of Language," in *The Future of American Studies*, ed. Donald E. Pease and Robyn Wiegman (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), pp. 401-402: "Symptoms [of the overdetermination of the local in American studies] abound besides the relative indifference to the global issues that have been fundamental to the making of the American national identity and that now, in the post-Cold War occasion, when the deputies of the dominant American culture are overtly proclaiming the advent of the American peace, have come irreversibly to the fore. I am referring, for example, to its practitioners' tendency to overdetermine the New Historicism; to restrict their discursive references to others within the hermetic field imaginary of American studies, that is, to other prominent Americans, mostly white; to be relatively indifferent to continental, African, Asian, and Latin American thinkers and critics who contextualize the neo-imperial practices of the postcolonial occasion in terms of the increasingly central and unilateral role of America; to articulate opposition in the terms laid down by the American discourse it would resist; and, not least, to eschew or to reduce and accommodate to the literary discipline the radically antimetaphysical interpretations of being—such as those of Heidegger, Derrida, Lyotard, Deleuze, Bhabha, Lacoue-Labarthe, Nancy, Agamben—in favor of an empirical/pragmatist perspective that, in its origins, is simultaneous with the secularization of the Puritan *theologos*. . . . And even when the interpretive strategies of these antimetaphysical theorists are acknowledged by Americanists as viable instruments of criticism . . . they are invoked to 'teach the conflicts.' Whatever their intentions, this means tacitly the reduction of the very real imbalances of power that exist in the world to equally weighted and free-floating abstract positions to be negotiated, that is, to a humanistic pluralism that occurs outside of history, beyond the specific place and time where power relations are always already imbalanced and so must be construed as relations of injustice. In other words, 'teaching the conflicts' means accommodating them to the metaphysical framework of liberal American democratic thought."

7. Paul Giles, *The Global Remapping of American Studies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011).

## CHAPTER ONE American Exceptionalism

1. Donald E. Pease, *The New American Exceptionalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), pp. 9–10. See also Daniel T. Rodgers, “Exceptionalism,” in *Imagined Histories: American Historians Interpret the Past*, ed. Anthony Molho and Gordon S. Wood (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).

2. In writing about the genealogy of American exceptionalism, Pease tends to privilege the retrospective perspective enabled by the adoption of the Cold War tenets by American scholars and literary critics, who then read American exceptionalism back into American history: “U.S. policymakers depended upon the fantasy of American exceptionalism to authorize their practices of governance, but historians and literary scholars turned the beliefs embedded within the fantasy into the principles of selection through which they decided what historical events they would allow representation within the historical record and which literary works they would include within the U.S. canon. Examining the past became for scholars who were steeped in exceptionalist conviction a romance quest whereby they would understand the meaning of their ‘American’ identity through their uncovering of the special significance of the nation’s institutions. In the early years of the cold war, the proponents of the Myth and Symbol school of American studies constructed an image of the United States out of exceptionalist assumptions. They then propagated this image throughout Europe and the newly decolonized world as a prescriptive model for the construction of political communities that would, like the United States in whose image they were to be remodelled, be defended against the incursions of Marxian socialism” (Pease, *New American Exceptionalism*, 11–12). Without denying the force of Pease’s argument, I want to suggest that the exceptionalist ethos that American scholars of the Cold War period attributed to American history in general was not an imposition but a continuation of the ideological representational process that determined the essence of the American national identity from the beginning, which Samuel Huntington has recently called the dominant “Protestant core culture.” See Samuel Huntington, *Who Are We? Challenges to America’s National Identity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004).

3. Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1975), pp. 35–36. To point to the historicity of the providential concept of time of this American Puritan version of typological exegesis, its spatializing or promise/fulfillment structure—and to its paradoxical continuity with the Catholic exegetical tradition—which Bercovitch does not, I quote Erich Auerbach’s succinct description of Patristic figural interpretation from “Figura,” in his *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature: Six Essays* (New York: Meridian Books, 1959): “Figural interpretation establishes a connection between two events or persons, the first of which signifies not only itself but also the second, while the second encompasses or fulfills the first. The two poles of the figure are separate in time, but both, being real events or figures, are within

time, within the stream of historical life. Only the understanding of the two persons or events is a spiritual act, but this spiritual act deals with concrete events whether past, present, or future, and not with concepts or abstractions; these are quite secondary, since promise and fulfillment are real historical events, which have either happened in the incarnation of the Word, or will happen in the second coming. Of course purely spiritual elements enter into the conceptions of the ultimate fulfillment, since 'my kingdom is not of this world'; yet it will be a real kingdom, not an immaterial abstraction; only the *figura*, not the *natura* of this world will pass away . . . and the flesh will rise again. Since in figural interpretation one thing stands for another, since one thing represents and signifies the other, figural interpretation is 'allegorical' in the widest sense. But it differs from most allegorical forms known to us by the historicity both of the sign and what it signifies."

4. See Deuteronomy 20:17–18. I will return to this ferocity against the Others of the elected Israelites' deity in chapter 4.

5. John Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity," in Perry Miller, ed., *The American Puritans: Their Prose and Poetry* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1956), p. 83.

6. See also Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), especially part 2: "The Murmurings: Slave in the Wilderness," pp. 41–70.

7. Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), pp. 6–7; my emphasis.

8. For a recent prestigious example of this inadequate reading, the failure to perceive the relationship between the Puritan theological version of the American jeremiad and the post-Revolutionary secularism, see Godfrey Hodgson, *The Myth of American Exceptionalism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 99.

9. Exodus 16:2–3: "They set out from Elim, and all the congregation of the people of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt. And the whole congregation of the people of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, and said to them, 'Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out to the wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.'"

10. I am following Michael Walzer's reading of this episode from Exodus (though I am critical of his positive interpretation of the Exodus story as the essential paradigm of liberational revolution): "So I . . . follow the philosopher Philo who says, in his *Life of Moses*, that the people 'fashioned a gold bull, in imitation of the animal held most sacred in [Egypt]'; and I shall follow the Puritan preacher who wrote in 1643: 'out of Egyptian jewels, they made an Egyptian idol . . . they intended to return for Egypt'; and I shall follow Lincoln Steffens, in our own century: 'the children of Israel were going back to their old gods, the gods of the Egyptians.' This is the great crisis of Exodus" (Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, 56–57). For critical readings of Walzer's general thesis about the

Exodus, see Edward W. Said, “Michael Walzer’s *Exodus and Revolution*: A Canaanite Reading,” in *Blaming the Victim: Spurious Scholarship and the Palestinian Question*, ed. Edward W. Said and Christopher Hitchens (London: Verso, 2001), pp. 161–179; and William V. Spanos, “Edward W. Said and Zionism: Rethinking the Exodus Story,” *boundary 2*, vol. 37, no. 1 (Spring 2010), 127–166.

11. See Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt, 1953). In the “Preface,” Turner writes, “The larger part of what has been distinctive and valuable in America’s contribution to the history of the human spirit has been due to this nation’s peculiar experience in extending its type of frontier into new regions; and in creating peaceful societies with new ideals in the successive vast and differing geographic provinces which together make up the United States. Directly or indirectly these experiences shaped the life of Eastern as well as the Western States, and even reacted upon the Old World and influenced the direction of its thought and its progress. This experience has been fundamental in the economic, political and social characteristics of the American people and in their conceptions of their destiny.”

12. As Michael Walzer puts this aspect of the itinerary of the Israelites of Exodus: “The wilderness had to be a new school of the soul. That is why the Israelites had to spend such a long time in the wilderness. They did not march by the most direct route from Egypt to Canaan; instead God led them by an indirect route” (Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, 53–54).

13. William V. Spanos, *American Exceptionalism in the Age of Globalization: The Specter of Vietnam* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008), pp. 198–199 (emphasis original).

14. Paul Giles, in *The Global Remapping of American Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), pp. 29–69, calls for the minimization of the Puritan thesis about the origins of the American national identity sponsored by Sacvan Bercovitch by overdetermining the transnational origins of America—including its multiculturalism—a “progressive” version of the frontier thesis. Though I am sympathetic with Giles’s effort to demonstrate that the origins of America were more geographically open than the traditional focus on New England boundaries and the American national identity more multicultural than that positing the primacy of the Anglo-Saxon Puritans, I think his argument is labored and distorts the reality by maximizing that openness and the multicultural origins of America, or, put alternatively, by grossly minimizing the hegemonic power of the New England Protestant core culture, which, as American history shows, until quite recently (i.e., the 1960s), too easily accommodated these tangential aspects to its center. This assimilative history explains Samuel P. Huntington’s conservative lamentation over the waning of the traditional authority of “the Protestant core culture” in the wake of “the deconstruction of America” in the Vietnam era and particularly in the wake of September 11, 2001. See Huntington, *Who Are We?*

15. This phrase has its origins in Meyer Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1971), p. 66: “But since [the

Romantics, who, reacting to the rationalism of the Enlightenment by reverting to “stark drama and supra-rational mysteries of the Christian story”] lived, inescapably, after the Enlightenment, [they] revived these ancient matters with a difference: they undertook to save the overview of human history and destiny, the existential paradigms, and the cardinal values of their religious heritage, by reconstituting them in a way that would make them intellectually acceptable, as well as emotionally pertinent for the time being.” My use of the term, however, derives from Edward Said’s critical appropriation of it in *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979), pp. 114–115, for the purpose of showing that this studied secularism of humanist (as opposed to Christian) scholars like Ernest Renan, who represented the Orient for the modern Western world, was in fact “theological.”

16. See, for example, George Caleb Bingham, *Daniel Boone Escorting Settlers through Cumberland Gap* (1851–1852); and John Gast, *American Progress* (1872).

17. John O’Sullivan, “The Great Nation of Futurity,” *The United States Democratic Review*, vol. 6, no. 23 (November 1830), 427.

18. Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600–1860* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000; originally published in 1973).

19. Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 92–93: “It may appear strange to speak about something or someone as holding a *textual attitude*, but a student of literature will understand the phrase more easily if he will recall the kind of view attacked by Voltaire in *Candide*, or even the attitude to reality satirized by Cervantes in *Don Quixote*. What seems unexceptionable good sense to these writers in that it is a fallacy to assume that the swarming, unpredictable, and problematic mess in which human beings live can be understood on the basis of what books—texts—say; to apply what one learns out of a book literally to reality is to risk folly or ruin. One would no more think of using *Amadis of Gaul* to understand sixteenth century (or present-day) Spain than one would use the Bible to understand, say, the House of Commons. But clearly people have tried and do try to use texts in so simple-minded a way, for otherwise *Candide* and *Don Quixote* would not still have the appeal for readers that they do today.”

20. Spanos, *American Exceptionalism in the Age of Globalization*, pp. 202–207, 210–214.

21. Francis Parkman, *The Oregon Trail* and *The Conspiracy of Pontiac* (New York: Library of America, 1991), p. 347; my emphasis.

22. Henry Nash Smith reads Parkman’s obsession with the “Wild West” as New England decadence (European Byronism) rather than as a manifestation of the Puritan jeremiadic concern with rejuvenation. That is, he sees the attraction to the wilderness of the West (as opposed to civilization) and the attraction of progress and its comforts (“trail blazing”) as opposites. If, however, one views Parkman’s writing in the context of the American jeremiad, it will be seen that these opposites are in fact related in Parkman.

23. David W. Noble, *Death of a Nation: American Culture and the End of Exceptionalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p. 10.

24. For a powerful critical analysis of the Columbian Exposition of 1893, see the chapter entitled “White City,” in Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), pp. 208–234.

25. Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” in *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt, 1953), p. 1.

26. As in the case of his discussion of Francis Parkman, Henry Nash Smith represents the tradition of the trail-blazing, empire-building Boone and the tradition of the Boone who resisted civilization as contradictory: “By the side of Boone the empire builder and philanthropist, the anonymous popular mind had meanwhile created an entirely different hero, a fugitive from civilization who could not endure the encroachment of settlements upon his beloved wilderness.” See Henry Nash Smith, *The Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1950), p.34. Seen in the context of the American jeremiad, however, these alleged contradictory representations become resolved.

27. James Fenimore Cooper, *The Pioneers*, ed. James D. Wallace (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 456.

28. As Henry Nash Smith has noted, Parkman portrays his guide, Henry Chatillon, in *The Oregon Trail* as another Leatherstocking figure: “a hero of romance—handsome, brave, true, skilled in the ways of the plains and mountains, and even possessed of a natural refinement and delicacy of mind, such as is rare even in women” (Smith, *Virgin Land*, 51). See Francis Parkman, *The Oregon Trail*, ed. David Levin (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), p. 49.

29. Spanos, *American Exceptionalism in the Age of Globalization*, pp. 204–205.

30. Though more complex than Parkman’s representation of the West, Mark Twain’s autobiographical repetition of the westering experience in *Roughing It* (1872) is, I suggest, also exemplary of the “textual attitude” in its echoing of the American exceptionalist/ jeremiadic discourse. See Mark Twain, *Innocents Abroad* and *Roughing It*, ed. Guy Cardwell (New York: The Library of America, 1984).

31. Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, ed. Thomas Cooley (New York: Norton, 1985), p. 296.

32. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 109–110.

33. For the role played by the academy in harnessing an exceptionalist representation of American literature to the Cold War, see Donald E. Pease, “Moby-Dick and the Cold War,” in *The American Renaissance Reconsidered: Selected Papers from the English Institute, 1982–1983*, ed. Walter Benn Michaels and Donald E. Pease (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985); Donald E. Pease, *Visionary Compacts: American Renaissance Writings in Cultural Context* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987); Donald E. Pease, “New Americanists: Revisionist Interventions into the Canon,” *New Americanists: Revisionist Interventions into the Canon*, 1, special issue of *boundary 2*, vol. 17, no. 1 (Spring

1990), 1–37; and William V. Spanos, *The Errant Art of Moby-Dick: The Canon, the Cold War, and the Struggle for American Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995). For the role played by the U.S. government in this ideological project, see especially Francis Stoner Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper: The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (London: Granta, 1999); and Andrew Rubin, *Archives of Authority: Empire, Culture and the Cold War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011).

34. Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (London: Continuum, 2005). For a conveniently simplified definition of “event,” see Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward (London: Verso, 2001), p. 69: “We might say that since a situation is composed by the knowledges circulating within it, the event names the void inasmuch as it names the not-known of the situation. To take a well-known example: Marx is an event for political thought because he designates, under the name ‘proletariat,’ the central void of early bourgeois societies. For the proletariat—being entirely dispossessed, and absent from the political stage—is that around which is organized the complacent plenitude established by the rule of those who possess capital. To sum up: the fundamental ontological characteristic of an event is to inscribe, to name, the situated void of that for which it is an event.”

35. In referring to this blindness as “oversight,” I am, in opposition to Paul de Man’s “blindness of insight,” invoking Althusser’s notion of the “problematic,” which attributes the blindness to its “other” of enlightenment knowledge production to its metaphysical perception: seeing from after or above things as they are. See Louis Althusser, “From *Capital* to Marx’s Philosophy,” in Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital* (London: Verso, 1979), pp. 18–28. See also William V. Spanos, “Althusser’s ‘Problematic’: Vision and the Vietnam War,” in *American Exceptionalism in the Age of Globalization*, pp. 35–56.

36. See Amy Kaplan, “The Imperial Routes of Mark Twain,” in *The Anarchy of Empire: The Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002). Kaplan repeatedly uses the metaphor of spectral haunting to characterize the prevailing imperialist rhetoric of Twain’s 1866 commentaries on Hawaii (which would be annexed to the United States in 1898). Commenting on his exceptionalist horror at the subhuman mourning (“caterwauls,” “dismal howls,” “distressing noises”) at a Hawaiian funeral Twain had attended, she writes, “Throughout Twain’s writing about Hawaii . . . these sounds of grief return to haunt him, breaking through the semantic frame of his nostalgic pictures. Though he approaches the funeral with voyeuristic curiosity about ‘ancient deviltry,’ the sounds that he wished never to hear again revive the spirit of the unburied [colonial] past that rises in the present. Like the diver [who, in the story Twain tells many years later in *Following the Equator*, suddenly retrieves the forgotten Hawaiian language of his youth when confronted by the dead bodies of a sunken passenger ship he is investigating], Twain returned from Hawaii with resurfaced corpses of forgotten languages, corpses that

keep turning their gaze upon him and inviting him to dance” (p. 74). What Kaplan leaves unsaid, however, is that Twain did not accept the invitation.

37. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 83; emphasis mine. See also Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

## CHAPTER TWO *A Connecticut Yankee* as American Jeremiad

1. John F. Kasson, *Civilizing the Machine: Technology and Republican Values in America, 1778–1900* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1999); and Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of American Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982).

2. See, for example, Mark Twain, “The New Dynasty,” reprinted in Paul J. Carter, “Mark Twain and the American Labor Movement,” *New England Quarterly Review*, vol. 30 (September–October 1957), 383–388. The piece was read to the Monday Evening Club, Hartford, Connecticut, March 22, 1886, three years, not incidentally, before the publication of *A Connecticut Yankee*.

3. Lowell was conceived in the pre–Civil War period by Frances Cabot Lowell, an entrepreneur of Puritan descent, as a factory/city that, in a remarkably exceptionalist way, would, in its benign and morally uplifting care for its workers, contrast with Manchester, England, the Old World factory city with its notorious “Satanic mills.” The “solution” to Old World factory conditions envisioned by Lowell and his colleagues, according to Kasson’s remarkable anticipation of Foucault’s genealogy of the disciplinary society, “was to organize the factory as a total institution, so that the company might exercise exclusive control over the environment”: “The special reverence with which Lowell’s name was spoken . . . emerged from the sense that he had conceived a manufacturing system that concerned itself as much with the health, character, and well-being of its operatives as it did with profits. By allegedly protecting the integrity of American workers, he had in important measure safeguarded the character of the republic itself. From the beginning, Lowell and his associates were mindful of the condition of European workers and particularly concerned to avoid a similar fate here. As [Nathan] Appleton recalled their earnest discussions, ‘the operatives in the manufacturing cities of Europe, were notoriously of the lowest character, for intelligence and morals. The question therefore arose, and was deeply considered whether, this degradation was the result of the peculiar occupation, or of other and distinct causes. We could not perceive why this peculiar description of labor should vary in its effects upon character from all other occupations’” (Kasson, *Taming the Machine*, 69). Nathan Appleton is quoted from *Introduction of the Power Loom, and Origins of Lowell* (Lowell, 1858), p. 15.

4. This was, in some degree, true of all too many of the southern European immigrants

who, at the time Twain was writing *A Connecticut Yankee*, were emigrating in massive quantities to “the Promised Land.”

5. As I have noted elsewhere, it is very likely that Melville’s story “The Paradise of Batchelors and the Tartarus of Maids” (1855), which contrasts the luxurious lives of a male elite in modern London with the infernal lives of the women working in a newly automated paper factory in New England, is “alluding to the Lowell, Massachusetts project and, in so doing, provides further evidence of his uncanny anticipation of Foucault’s genealogical critique of the uses to which the triumphant Protestant/bourgeois/capitalist ‘reformers’ of the post-revolutionary period put knowledge in behalf of power.” See William V. Spanos, *Herman Melville and the American Calling: The Fiction after Moby-Dick, 1851–1857* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008), p. 150.

6. In *Innocents Abroad*, Twain’s American exceptionalist superiority to the civilizations of the Old World becomes increasingly pronounced as he moves from West to East. See Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad and Roughing It*, ed. Guy Cardwell (New York: The Library of America, 1984). The following passage from chapter 43, which recounts his ride through Arab lands in Lebanon, is typical:

*There were no walls, no fences, no hedges—nothing to secure a man’s possessions but these random heaps of stones. The Israelites held them sacred in the old patriarchal times, and these other Arabs, their lineal descendents, do so likewise. An American, of ordinary intelligence, would soon wisely extend his property, at an outlay of mere manual labor, performed at night, under so loose a system of fencing as this.*

*The plows these people use are simply a sharpened stick, such as Abraham plowed with, and they still winnow their wheat as he did—they pile it on the house-to. And then toss it by shovel-fulls into the air until the wind has blown all the chaff away. They never invent anything, never learn anything (p. 352).*

7. See, for example, Twain’s extended account of the Great Munity of 1857 in chapter 43 of *Following the Equator: A Journey Around the World* (Hartford: American Publishing), pp. 299–307, which, typical of what Edward Said called “the ‘textual attitude,’” relies almost entirely on the British historian Sir G. O. Trevelyan, who, in turn, relies almost entirely on the representation of the mutiny by British colonials.

8. On the question of Twain’s vision, Hilton Obensinger writes in *American Palestine: Melville, Twain, and the Holy Land Mania* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 251: “But could Mark Twain, who conned his American readers into seeing the Old World ‘through his eyes,’ actually *see* the Crusades—especially the nineteenth century’s ‘Peaceful Crusade’—through Arab (or Turkish or Jewish) eyes? Certainly, all of Twain’s satires of the sanctimonious pilgrim or of the caravan tourist were comic attempts to look at the American from the outside based on an ironic distancing or alienation effect that . . . draws the reader into a circle of confidence, a covenant, so to speak, that the reader like the writer is chosen, even when writer and reader each divide

into two and mock themselves. . . . Still, the miner in Virginia City, the rural reader in Ohio, and the urban (and urbane) reader in Boston could all be convinced that Twain's eyes were their own, assuring themselves that they, too, were objective and truthful and *not* ridiculous (like those *other* tourists). Yet, because Twain's perception—and his own impersonation—of the American Vandal is from a position on the margins of settlement, his outside status is only partial: though Twain can see the violent deformation of the white man, he still cannot fully fathom much less peer through that native's eyes." I agree with this judgment, but in failing to perceive the relatedness of Twain's limited vision and his American exceptionalist Orientalism, it minimizes the sustained violence to which it points.

9. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979), pp. 92–93.

10. See Louis Althusser, "From *Capital* to Marx's Philosophy," in Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital* (London: NLB, 1970), pp. 18–28. See also William V. Spanos, "Althusser's 'Problematic': Vision and the Vietnam War," in *American Exceptionalism in the Age of Globalization: The Specter of Vietnam* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008), pp. 35–56.

11. Kenneth S. Lynn, "The Volcano," in Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, ed. Allison R. Ensor, Norton Critical Edition (New York: Norton, 1982), pp. 383–389; originally published in Kenneth S. Lynn, *Mark Twain and Southwestern Humor* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1959).

12. Perry Miller, ed., *The American Puritans: Their Prose and Poetry* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), pp. 171–172; my emphasis. See also Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950).

13. David W. Noble, *Death of a Nation: American Culture and the End of Exceptionalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p. 8; my emphasis. Noble, however, does not discriminate between Twain's affirmation of technological capitalism and his jeremiadic criticism of capitalist America's overdetermination of the decadent "Gilded Age" culture it enabled. Thus, like so many other critics, he reads the catastrophic end of *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* as one perpetrated by a willfully blinded exponent of the American capitalist spirit: "Believing industrialism to be as artificial as medieval culture, Twain visualized this artful, ephemeral modern disappearing in a violent catastrophe" (p. 17).

14. See William V. Spanos, "Herman Melville's *Pierre; Or the Ambiguities* and Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*: The Imperial Violence of the Novel of Manners," *Symploké*, vol. 19, nos. 1–2 (2013).

15. Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, vol. 5, *The Complete Prose Works*, ed. R. H. Super (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1965), pp. 222–223.

16. For an amplified critique of Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*, see William V. Spanos,

“The Apollonian Investment of Modern Humanist Educational Theory: The Examples of Matthew Arnold, Irving Babbitt, and I. A. Richards,” in *The End of Education: Toward Posthumanism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), pp. 70–78.

17. Mark Twain, “Fenimore Cooper’s Literary Offenses,” <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/HNS/Indians/offense.html>.

18. See Ernest Hemingway, *The Green Hills of Africa* (New York: Scribner, 1963); T. S. Eliot, “Introduction,” in Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (New York: Chanticleer Press, 1950), pp. vii–viii; Lionel Trilling, “Introduction,” in Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (New York: Rinehart, 1948; the first college edition of the novel), reprinted in Lionel Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1950); and Henry Nash Smith, “Introduction,” in Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958), pp. v–xxix.

19. Jacques Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 279.

20. Herman Melville, *Billy Budd, Sailor (An Inside Narrative)*, ed. Harrison Hayford and Merton M. Sealts, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), pp. 127–128; my emphasis. For a reading of Melville’s novel that amplifies on this interpretation of the question of the relation between fact and fable, see William V. Spanos, *The Exceptionalist State and the State of Exception: Herman Melville’s Billy Budd, Sailor* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011).

### CHAPTER THREE *Americanist Criticism of A Connecticut Yankee*

1. As I noted in chapter 1, the Norton Critical Edition of *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* edited by the Twain scholar Allison R. Ensor and published in 1982 includes a number of primary texts on the background and sources of the novel and a large, authoritative selection of later critical essays on it, yet it contains no reference to the term “American exceptionalism.”

2. There is also a small fifth category of *Connecticut Yankee* criticism that transcends the chronology I have established. This is the criticism that universalizes Hank Morgan and his project, representing him as a figure of humanity at large and his project as the operations of history. Examples include Joe B. Fulton, *Mark Twain in the Margins: The Quarry Farm Marginalia and A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2000); and Lydia R. Cooper, “Human Voices: Language and Conscience in Twain’s *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*,” *Canadian Review of American Studies*, vol. 39, no. 1 (2009), 65–84. Since this criticism is indifferent to the question of Twain and his protagonist’s ethnic identity, I do not undertake analysis of this category.

3. From *Mark Twain's Letters*, ed. Albert Bigelow Paine (New York: Harper, 1917), vol. 1, pp. 519–521, reprinted in the Norton edition of Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, ed. Allison R. Ensor (New York: Norton, 1982), p. 302.

4. Mark Twain, *The Autobiography of Mark Twain*, ed. Charles Neider (New York: Harper, 1959), p. 271. Twain's anti-imperialist diatribe against King Leopold of Belgium is remarkably similar to Marlowe's critique of Roman imperialism and Belgian rapacity in the Congo in Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, ed. Robert Kimbrough, 3rd ed. (New York: Norton Editions, 1988), p. 10. For further commentary on this crucial distinction, see note 44, this chapter.

5. Mark Twain, Notebook # 18, typescript, p. 17, quoted in Henry Nash Smith, *Mark Twain's Fable of Progress: Political and Economic Ideas in A Connecticut Yankee* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1964), p. 43.

6. Mark Twain, "The New Dynasty," reprinted in Paul J. Carter, "Mark Twain and the American Labor Movement," *New England Quarterly Review*, vol. 30 (September–October 1957), 383–388.

7. Mark Twain, composite of "Yankee Smith of Camelot," *New York Sun*, November 12, 1886, p. 1, and "Mark Twain's Yankee Knight," *New York Herald*, November 12, 1886, p. 1, reprinted in the Norton Edition of *A Connecticut Yankee*, ed. Allison R. Ensor, p. 295. It is important to note that the wording of Twain's reference to his protagonist as "Yankee of the Yankees" in this reading is almost exactly the same as in the published text.

8. William Dean Howells, "Review of Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*," and Philip Gilbert Hamerton, "French and English: A Comparison," *Harper's Magazine*, vol. 80 (January 1890), 319–321, reprinted in the Norton Edition of *A Connecticut Yankee*, ed. Allison R. Ensor, p. 325; my emphasis.

9. I am referring to the major role played by the Congress for Cultural Freedom (funded by the CIA) in administering and controlling cultural discourse during the Cold War. See Frances Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (London: Granta Books, 1999). See also Andrew Rubin, *Archives of Authority: Empire, Culture, and the Cold War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).

10. Budd goes on to invoke Twain's avowed sympathy with the French Reign of Terror: "Twain finally insisted he was a latter day Sansculotte, indeed a Marat. Without any reservations Hank Morgan hailed 1789 as 'ever-memorable and blessed' and, turning the tables, called life under the Bourbon kings an 'unspeakably bitter and awful Terror which none of us has been taught to see in its vastness or pity as it deserves.' Twain underlined the use of still cheering for the French Revolution by grumbling to Howells that the 'gracious work' of this 'immortal benefaction,' usually clouded by being seen through 'English and other monarchical eyes,' was 'not done yet.'" See Louis Budd, *Mark Twain: Social Philosopher* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962), p.124. To those conversant with contemporary discussions of violence, this resonant comment could be interpreted as proleptic of the "divine," "pure," or "revolutionary" violence it is Walter

Benjamin's purpose to secure for humanity against the violence of the law in his great essay "Critique of Violence." But it is patently clear that Twain's (and Budd's) invocation of terror is not "pure"—that is, oriented toward the possibility of a radically different, decentered, notion of community—but "mythic": tethered to the law, in this case the American exceptionalist *Logos*. For illuminating recent meditations on Benjamin's notion of "divine violence," see Giorgio Agamben, *The State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), pp.52–64; and, above all, Slavoj Žižek, "Afterword to Second Edition: What Is Divine About Divine Violence?" in *In Defense of Lost Causes* (London: Verso, 2009), pp. 467–488. For further discussion of this issue, see chapter 4.

11. Other first-phase readings of *A Connecticut Yankee* can be found in Ernest Lee Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation: the Idea of America's Millennial Role* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968); Nadia Khourie, "From Eden to the Dark Ages: Images of History in the Work of Mark Twain," *Canadian Review of American Studies*, vol. 11 (1980), 151–174; Joseph Jones, "Utopia as Dirge," *American Quarterly*, vol. 2 (1950), 214–226; Donald E. Winters, "The Utopianism of Survival: Bellamy's *Looking Backward* and Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee*," *American Studies*, vol. 21 (1980), 23–38; and Charles S. Holmes, "A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court: Mark Twain's Fable of Uncertainty," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 61 (1962), 462–474. See also Scott Dalrymple, "A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court' and the American Civil War," *American Literary Realism, 1870–1910*, vol. 29, no. 1 (Fall 1996), 1–11. (Though published long after the general chronology of the first phase, this essay assumes the identity of Twain and his protagonist and attempts to justify the Battle of the Sand Belt.

12. Ernest Tuveson, "Appendix: A Connecticut Yankee in the Mystical Babylon," in *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America's Millennial Role* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 226.

13. Tuveson ("Appendix," 230) acknowledges Merlin's defeat of the Boss, but, following the millennialist narrative, explains it (rather confusedly) in the providential terms of this narrative: "In reality it is not Merlin who has laid the spell on this missionary of progress from the New World; the enchantment is the work of destiny, which some call Providence, or God's plan of history. Morgan, a man from beyond the Reformation, is exempt from the curse on all men of the age. 'For God hath put in their hearts to fulfill his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled.'"

14. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p.110.

15. Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)," trans. Ben Brewster, in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review, 1971), p. 182 (emphasis original).

16. See especially Donald E. Pease, “New Americanists: Revisionist Interventions into the Canon,” in *New Americanists: Revisionist Interventions into the Canon*, a special issue of *boundary 2*, vol. 17, no. 2 (Spring 1990), 1–37.

17. See Donald E. Pease, “From Virgin Land to Ground Zero: Mythological Foundations of the Homeland Security State,” in *The New American Exceptionalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), pp. 153–179.

18. Howard G. Baetzhold, “The Course of Composition of *A Connecticut Yankee*: A Reinterpretation,” *American Literature* vol. 33 (May 1961), 195–214; Henry Nash Smith, *Mark Twain’s Fable of Progress* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1964); James M. Cox, “*A Connecticut Yankee* in *King Arthur’s Court*: The Machinery of Self-Preservation,” *Yale Review*, vol. 50 (1960; reprinted with minor changes in 2002). For convenience, I will cite the version of Baetzhold’s text that appears in Howard G. Baetzhold, *Mark Twain and John Bull* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970, reprinted in the Norton Edition of *A Connecticut Yankee*, ed. Allison R. Ensor); and the version of Cox’s text that appears in *Mark Twain: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Henry Nash Smith (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963), pp. 117–129.

19. The influence of Louis Budd’s topical orientation on Baetzhold is fundamental: “As Budd had correctly observed, many of the ‘improvements’ that the Yankee came to propose for Arthurian England were those which Britain’s Liberals . . . were currently advocating. In an unpublished essay of 1888 or 1889, also, Clemens’ listing of major steps in England’s ‘slow climb from chattel slavery’ all but summarized the principles for which the Liberals had been fighting over the years. Yet it was a new sense that the evils of monarchy and aristocracy had continued into the present, even in the England he had loved so well during the 1870s, that accounts for most of the themes in *A Connecticut Yankee* not envisioned in the earlier ‘outline’” (Baetzhold, *Mark Twain*, 248). The reference to “improvements”—the word that more than any other saturates the benign discourse of American exceptionalism from the Puritans to the present—in this passage that topicalizes it is a resonant example of Baetzhold’s exceptionalist will to repress or, in Donald Pease’s term, disavow the dark side of American exceptionalism.

20. The quotation is from Twain, “New Dynasty,” pp. 383–388.

21. Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965). See also R. W. B. Lewis, *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959); John F. Kasson, *Civilizing the Machine: Technology and Republican Values in America, 1776–1900* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976); and Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982).

22. “Part of the difficulty with the story must have been due to the unhappy state of Mark Twain’s personal affairs. His publishing company was in trouble—as he believed,

because of the mismanagement of his nephew Charles L. Webster, but in reality because he was constantly drawing capital out of it to meet the inordinate expenses of perfecting a pilot model of the typesetter that was being constructed by the Pratt-Whitney works in Hartford under the directions of the inventor Paige” (Smith, *Fable of Progress*, 58). Smith, unlike other critics of this second phase who read the failure of the Paige typesetter as the moment of Twain’s disillusionment with technology and technological progress, qualifies the force of this possibility but in the end endorses it: “It is no doubt impossible to determine what effect these anxieties and frustrations had on the last six chapters of *A Connecticut Yankee*. . . . It is clear on the other hand that the composition of *A Connecticut Yankee* brought into play basic contradictions in Mark Twain’s attitudes. In any case, the narrative evidently runs into serious difficulties towards the end” (60–61). What is certain is that Twain maintained faith in both the Paige typesetting machine and technological progress throughout the period of the composition of *A Connecticut Yankee*.

23. I put “exceptionalist” in parentheses to suggest that, despite the fact that he never invokes the term as such, Smith’s “objective” scholarly discourse is saturated by the American exceptionalist ethos; that is, as I noted in chapter 1 about the first two phases of the history of *A Connecticut Yankee* criticism, it is hegemonic. Interpellated by the American calling, what Smith takes to be the truth about the American history in his reading of Twain’s novel is in fact an ideological fiction.

24. Other second-phase readings of *A Connecticut Yankee* include Gladys Bellamy, *Mark Twain as Literary Artist* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1950); Kenneth Lynn, *Mark Twain and Southwestern Humor* (Boston: Little Brown, 1959); Roger Salomon, *Twain and the Image of History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1961); Alan Guttman, “Mark Twain’s Connecticut Yankee: Affirmation of the Vernacular Tradition,” in *Critics on Mark Twain*, ed. David B. Chesterton (Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami Press, 1973), pp. 103–107; Harry B. Henderson III, *Versions of the Past: The Historical Imagination in American Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974); John F. Kasson, “Technology and Utopia,” in *Civilizing the Machine*, pp. 202–215; Chadwick Hansen, “The Once and Future Boss: Mark Twain’s Yankee,” *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, vol. 28 (1978), 62–73; Douglass Robinson, *American Apocalypses: The Image of the End of the World in American Literature* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985); and Lee Clark Mitchell, “Lines, Circles, Time Loops, and Mark Twain’s *A Connecticut Yankee* in *King Arthur’s Court*,” *Nineteenth-Century Literature* (1999), 230–250.

25. James M. Cox, “*A Connecticut Yankee* in *King Arthur’s Court*: The Machinery of Self-Preservation,” *Yale Review* (Autumn 1960), 89–102, republished as “Yankee Slang,” in James M. Cox, *Mark Twain: The Fate of Humor* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002).

26. James M. Cox, *Mark Twain: The Fate of Humor* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966), republished by University of Missouri Press, 2002.

27. As Everett Carter puts this willful imposition of wish over fact in “The Meaning of *A Connecticut Yankee*,” *American Literature*, vol. 50 (1978), 418–440, reprinted in the Norton Critical Edition of *A Connecticut Yankee*, ed. Allison R. Ensor, p. 444: “While admitting that Twain’s disenchantment with the machine did not come until five years after finishing *A Connecticut Yankee*, Cox argued that the successive postponements of the completion of Paige’s typesetter caused the book to become ‘more than a mere prophecy of the disaster toward which the machine obsession was tending; it was an acting out beforehand of the experience itself.’”

28. Kasson, *Civilizing the Machine*, p. 205 (my emphasis).

29. It is a mistake to read Twain’s use of “the Boss” as the equivalent of *Il Duce* or *der Führer* or, for that matter, as an indirect reference to the type of Boss Tweed as so often it is in Twain criticism. The word “boss,” I suggest, is an American expression that is in keeping with Twain’s commitment to the vernacular in opposition to the genteel tradition. As I recall, Twain refers to his wife as “the boss” in a letter to William Dean Howells.

30. As Kasson (*Civilizing the Machine*, 213) puts it, quite correctly, “[Morgan’s] sophisticated weaponry insulates him and his youthful assistants from direct contact with the enemy and as a consequence he loses all sense of restraint. He delights in power to kill efficiently and distantly through his technology and indulges in a feeble military wit what might be called the pornography of destruction.” In Greene’s novel of the Vietnam War, the American exceptionalist Alden Pyle, who, like Hank Morgan, would impose American-style democracy in Vietnam to save it from the tyrannies of both Old World imperialism (French colonial rule) and Soviet communism, also, as the exilic narrator observes, kills at long distance in being determined by the American exceptionalism he derives from reading the Cold Warrior pundit York Harding’s works (*The Role of the West*). See William V. Spanos, “Who Killed Alden Pyle? The Oversight of Oversight in Graham Greene’s *The Quiet American*,” in *American Exceptionalism in the Age of Globalization: The Specter of Vietnam* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008), pp. 57–97.

31. Kasson (*Civilizing the Machine*, 112) goes on to say that “the inventor of the Gatling gun, Dr. Richard J. Gatling, who lived not far from Mark Twain in Hartford and whose gun Mark Twain had delightedly test-fired at the Colt arms work as early as 1868, defended his weapon in just these terms. . . . Because of this increased efficiency, technological innovations in weaponry were particularly celebrated as at last assuring the supremacy of the forces of civilization over their ‘barbarian’ antagonists.” He does not comment on Twain’s delight, however.

32. I am, of course, invoking the archetypal terms, epitomized by the trope of the virgin land, endemic to the discourse of American exceptionalism, but I am also, by recalling the etymology of “civilization” and “cultivation,” exposing the dark side of these honorific terms of the American vocabulary: the complicity between *colon* (Latin:

planter, farmer, cultivator) and *colony/colonization* (earlier in American history referred to as “plantation”). For an extended account of this relationship, see William V. Spanos, “Culture and Colonization: The Imperial Imperatives of the Centered Circle,” in *America’s Shadow: An Anatomy of Empire* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp. 64–125.

33. Michael Herr, *Dispatches* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), p. 71, first published in book form by Alfred A. Knopf in 1977.

34. David W. Noble, *Death of a Nation: American Culture and the End of Exceptionalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

35. The emergence of the term “American exceptionalism” in American literary critical discourse took place between 1980 and 1990, when a small group of critics, under the influence of the New Historicism, began a debate over “the exceptionalism” of early American literature. See, for example, William C. Spengemann, “Review of Michael Davitt Bell’s “The Development of American Romance: The Sacrifice of Relation,” *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, vol. 36, no. 2 (1981), 20–205; Philip F. Gura, “The Study of Colonial American Literature, 1966–1987: A *Vade Mecum*,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, vol. 45, no. 2 (April 1988), 305–341; and Robert Daly, “Recognizing Early American Literature,” *Early American Literature*, vol. 25, no. 2 (1900), 187–199.

36. Pease, “New Americanists,” pp.1–37; John Carlos Rowe et al., eds., *Post-Nationalist American Studies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); and Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

37. The term appears without comment in a footnote referring to Hilton Obenzinger’s *American Palestine: Melville, Twain, and the Holyland Mania* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

38. Eric Sundquist, ed., *Mark Twain: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1994). The readings on *A Connecticut Yankee* are: Richard Slotkin, “Mark Twain’s Frontier, Hank Morgan’s Last Stand,” pp. 113–128; Walter Benn Michaels, “Armies and Factories: *A Connecticut Yankee*,” pp. 129–139; and David R. Sewell, “Hank Morgan and the Colonization of Utopia,” pp. 140–153.

39. John Carlos Rowe et al., eds., “Introduction,” in *Post-Nationalist American Studies*, p.2. Despite the emphasis in the preface on this opposition (the term American exceptionalism is used five times), however, the term appears only eight more times in the rest of the volume and in all cases without extended analysis, suggesting the tentativeness of its meaning.

40. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998); and Giorgio Agamben, *The State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). These assertions will be amplified in chapter 4.

41. I am using the word “visit” with its etymology in mind (from the Latin *videre*, meaning “to see” and “to be seen,” as in a ghostly “visitation”) and associating it with traveling abroad (tourism), which, it should be remembered, is fundamentally a Western activity related to imperialism since, until recently, it was the colonials who visited the colonized and not the other way around. But I am also thinking of the inversion that has occurred in the postcolonial era, when the visited, having made what Edward Said calls “the voyage in”[to the metropolis], have become (spectral) visitors of the erstwhile visitor.

42. As far as I know, the only essay on *A Connecticut Yankee* written during the time of the hegemony of the second phase and intended to reaffirm the conclusion of the first phase about the relationship between the author and his protagonist is that of Everett Carter, “The Meaning of *A Connecticut Yankee*.” Claiming the basic identity between Twain and Hank Morgan, Carter’s essay is substantially documented; yet, surprisingly, no critic of the third phase, who distinguishes Twain from his protagonist, has addressed his persuasive argument. The limitation of Carter’s forceful essay is, in my mind, that, in identifying author and protagonist, it fails to identify their common perspective as American exceptionalist and thus to pass judgment on the violence they enact in its name.

43. John Carlos Rowe, “Mark Twain’s Rediscovery of America in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*,” in *Literary Culture and U.S. Imperialism: From the Revolution to World War II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). This chapter is a revised and expanded version of an earlier essay: John Carlos Rowe, “How the Boss Played the Game: Twain’s Critique of Imperialism in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Twain*, ed. Forrest G. Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 175–192.

44. The distinction Edward Said makes between the two forms of imperialism—British versus Belgian (and Roman)—that Conrad invokes in *Heart of Darkness*, I suggest, is (if one substitutes “the American exceptionalist ethos” for “Idea”) more applicable to the distinction between New World imperialism and Old World imperialism implicit in the myth of American exceptionalism. See Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), pp. 68–69. “In [*Heart of Darkness*] Conrad offers an uncannily suggestive starting point for grappling at close quarters with these difficult matters. Recall that Marlow contrasts Roman colonizers with their modern counterparts in an oddly perceptive way, illuminating the specific mix of power, ideological energy, and practical attitude characterizing European imperialism. The ancient Romans, he says, were ‘no colonists; their administration was merely a squeeze and nothing more.’ Such people conquered and did little else. By contrast, ‘what saves us is efficiency—the devotion to efficiency,’ unlike the Romans who relied on brute force, which is scarcely more than ‘an accident arising from the weakness of others.’ Today, however, ‘the conquest of the earth, which mostly mean the taking it away from

those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretense but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea—something you can set up and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to. . . . In his account of his great river journey, Marlow extends the point to mark a distinction between Belgian rapacity and (by implication) British rationality in the conduct of imperialism. Salvation in this context is an interesting notion. It sets ‘us’ off from the damned, despised Romans and Belgians, whose greed radiates no benefits onto either their consciences or the lands and bodies of their subjects. ‘We’ are saved because first of all we needn’t look directly at the results of what we do; we are ringed by and ring ourselves with the practice of efficiency, by which land and people are put to use completely; the territory and its inhabitants are totally incorporated by our rule, which in turn totally incorporates us as we respond efficiently to its exigencies. Further, through Marlow, Conrad speaks of redemption, a step in a sense beyond salvation. If salvation saves us, saves time and money, and also saves us from the ruin of mere short-term conquest, then redemption extends salvation further still. Redemption is found in the self-justifying practice of an idea or mission over time, in a structure that completely encircles and is revered by you, even though you set up the structure in the first place, ironically enough, and no longer study it closely because you take it for granted.”

45. This is especially evident in Rowe’s (“Rediscovery of America,” 137–138) assessment of the Battle of the Sand Belt: “The boss enacts in the sixth century the special horrors of modern, mechanized warfare as they were revealed in the unequal battles between European imperial powers and preindustrial peoples: ‘Within ten short minutes after we had opened fire, armed resistance was totally annihilated, the campaign was ended, we fifty-four were masters of England! Twenty-five thousand men lay dead around us’ [Twain, *Connecticut Yankee*, 255]. Terrible as the cost of this imbalance of power between colonist and colonized would be throughout the Victorian period, Twain’s criticism barely begins to address what were already becoming the new means of economic imperialism that would employ in far subtler and more pervasive ways the new technologies Twain treats here as mere instruments of military conquest.” What Rowe says here is, of course, true. But this neo-imperial insight enabled by overdetermining the relationality between America and England—this interpretation of the Battle of the Sand Belt as a matter primarily of the type of the means of attaining imperial power—blinds him to the real disclosure of the technologically enacted genocidal Sand Belt massacre: that the logic of American exceptionalism, pursued to its limits, manifests itself in the establishment of the state of exception as the norm and thus, in Giorgio Agamben’s chillingly resonant language, the reduction of human life to “bare life,” life “stripped of every right by virtue of the fact that anyone can kill him without committing homicide.” See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 183.

46. Mark Twain, "To the Person Sitting in Darkness," *North American Review*, (February 1901).

47. Sewell, "Hank Morgan and the Colonization of Utopia," p. 141.

48. Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, 2nd ed., ed. Michael Shinagel (New York: Norton, 1994), pp. 124–125. This distinction, which, it should be noted, is more Puritan than English, eventually becomes more nuanced, determinative—and pervasive—in colonial American literature, particularly of the South and Southwest. See, for example, William Gilmore Simms, *The Yemassee: A Romance of Carolina*, ed. Joseph V. Ridgely (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1964). The pervasiveness of this American trope in early American literature is implied in Herman Melville's critical invocation of the distinction in "Benito Cereno," his savage satire of the American exceptionalist ethos as it is embodied in Captain Amasa Delano's comportment toward the captain of the Spanish slave ship.

49. I am, of course, sympathetic with the recent initiative of the so-called New Americanists to "transnationalize" American studies. In an essay entitled "American Studies in the Age of the World Picture: Thinking the Question of Language," published in the inaugural *Future of American Studies*, ed. Donald E. Pease and Robin Wiegman (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), I complained that the New Americanists who were attempting to transcend the parochial nationalism of the "Old Americanists" were not global enough. Since then, however, in the wake of the publication of several volumes of Americanist studies devoted to this globalizing project, I have come to think that it has gone too far. In pursuing this admirable project—in attempting to demonstrate that the United States is not exceptionalist—it tends to efface *the historical reality of this mythical construct*. For example, in his recent influential book *Global Remapping of American Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), which has its point of departure in calling into question the authority of the Puritan thesis concerning the origins of the American national identity, Paul Giles makes Cotton Mather, the Puritan author of the monumental history *Magnalia Christi Americana*, sound not only like the English Augustan poet John Dryden but also like a contemporary deconstructionist.

50. See President George W. Bush, "Address to the Nation," 2006. Commemorating the fifth anniversary of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon by al Qaeda, Bush said: "Since the horror of 9/11, we have learned a great deal about the enemy. We have learned that they are evil and kill without mercy—but not without purpose. We have learned that they form a global network of extremists who are driven by a perverted vision of Islam—a totalitarian ideology that hates freedom, rejects tolerance and despises all dissent. And we have learned that their goal is to build a radical Islamic empire where women are prisoners in their homes, men are beaten for missing prayer meetings, and terrorists have a safe haven to plan and launch attacks on America and other civilized nations. The war against this enemy is more than a military conflict.

It is the decisive ideological struggle of the 21st century, and *the calling of our generation.*” See [www.usatoday.com/new/washington/2006-09-11-bush-sept-11-text\\_x.htqm](http://www.usatoday.com/new/washington/2006-09-11-bush-sept-11-text_x.htqm) (my emphasis). References to the American calling pervade Bush’s public statements as president of the United States. See, for example, his introduction to *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: White House, 2002), <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html> (accessed October 21, 2005).

51. See the document entitled “Rebuilding America’s Defenses” ([www.newamericancentury.org/statement\\_of\\_principles.htm](http://www.newamericancentury.org/statement_of_principles.htm)), which was authored by the influential neoconservative think tank Project for the New American Century (PNAC) and, in the name of the *Pax Americana*, advocated total global domination by the United States and the unilateral invasion of Iraq long before George W. Bush was elected president in 2000. For amplifications of this neoconservative vision of the global future, see Richard Haass, *The Reluctant Sheriff: The United States after the Cold War* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1997); Samuel P. Huntington, *Who Are We? Challenges to America’s National Identity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004); and Michael Mandelbaum, *The Case for Goliath: How America Acts as the World’s Government in the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Public Affairs, 2005). For an extended critique of this neoconservative agenda, see Spanos, *American Exceptionalism in the Age of Globalization*.

52. Other post-9/11 essays on *A Connecticut Yankee* include Joel A. Johnson, “A Connecticut Yankee in Saddam’s Court: Mark Twain on Benevolent Imperialism,” *Perspectives on Politics*, vol. 5, no. 1 (March 2007), 49–61; Jennifer A. O’Neill, “Twain’s *A Connecticut Yankee* in *King Arthur’s Court* and U.S. Imperialism,” *CLC Web: Comparative Literature and Culture*, vol. 9, no. 3 (September 2007): <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/v019/iss3/>; Christopher D. Morris, “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), 159–185; and Jeffrey Bilbro, “‘The Petrified Laugh’: Mark Twain’s Hoaxes in the West and Camelot,” *Journal of Narrative Theory*, vol. 41, no. 2 (Summer 2011), 205–227.

53. Quentin Youngberg, “Morphology of Manifest Destiny: The Justified Violence of John O’Sullivan, Hank Morgan, and George W. Bush,” *Canadian Review of Americana*, vol. 35, no. 3 (2005), 316–317.

54. John L. O’Sullivan, “The Great Nation of Futurity,” *The United States Democratic Review*, vol. 6, no. 23 (1839), 28–32.

55. The John Cotton quotation is from “God’s Promise to His Plantations,” London, 1634.

56. The O’Sullivan quotation is from “On Texas and ‘Manifest Destiny,’” 1845. <http://hartungpress.com/fyi/manifestdestinytexas.htm> (accessed December 11, 2003). For an extended analysis of the concept of *terra nullius* as it was employed in the colonization of North and South America, see Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492–1797* (London: Methuen, 1986), pp. 156–173. See also William V.

Spanos, *America's Shadow: An Anatomy of Empire* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp. 39–51; and William V. Spanos, *The Legacy of Edward W. Said* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), pp. 144–150.

57. Nancy Oliver, “New Manifest Destiny in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*,” *Mark Twain Journal*, vol. 21, no. 4 (1983), 28–32.

58. See Jacques Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 279: “The center . . . closes off the play which it opens up and makes possible. As center, it is the point at which the substitution of content, elements, or terms is no longer possible. . . . Thus it has always been thought that the center, which is by definition unique, constituted the very thing within a structure which while governing the structure could say that the center is paradoxically *within* the structure and *outside* it. The center is the center of the totality, and yet, since the center does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality), the totality *has its center elsewhere*. The center is not the center. The concept of centered structure—although it represents coherence itself, . . . is contradictorily coherent. And as always, coherence in contradiction expresses the force of a desire. The concept of centered structure is in fact the concept of a play based on a fundamental ground, a play constituted on the basis of a fundamental immobility and a reassuring certitude which itself is beyond the reach of play. And on the basis of this certitude anxiety can be mastered.”

59. According to Jerome Karabel, a sociologist at the University of California at Berkeley, the term “American exceptionalism,” which was first used by Joseph Stalin to name a U.S. Communist Party heresy, ironically has become extraordinarily popular in American political circles since the Ronald Reagan administration—that is, since it has become the object of critical interrogation: “But what is new in recent years is that public expression of belief in ‘American exceptionalism’—which had come to mean in popular parlance that the United States is not only different from, but superior to other countries—has become something of a required civic ritual of American politicians. This new definition of American exceptionalism has coincided with an extraordinary increase in public discussion of the term, with references in print media increasing from two in 1980 to a stunning 2,580 this year [2011] through November. What might be called the ‘U.S. as Number One’ version of ‘American exceptionalism’ enjoys broad popular support among the public. According to a Gallup poll from December 2010, 80 percent of Americans agree that ‘because of the United States’ history and its Constitution—the United States has a unique character that makes it the greatest country in the world.’ Support for this proposition varied somewhat along party lines, but not by much: 91 percent of Republicans agreed, but so, too, did 73 percent of Democrats.” See Jerome Karabel, “American Exceptionalism and the Battle for the Presidency,” [https://mail.google.com/mail/html/compose/static\\_files/blank\\_quirks.html](https://mail.google.com/mail/html/compose/static_files/blank_quirks.html). The Republican and Democratic presidential conventions of 2012, during which leaders of both

parties vied repeatedly and forcefully with each other to claim exceptionalist status for their nominees—with no consciousness that the term has become the subject of interrogation—testify to the validity of this judgment about the American political class.

#### CHAPTER FOUR Staging the Spectacle

1. Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, ed. Allison R. Ensor (New York: Norton, 1982), p. 5.

2. On *die Stiltrennung* (the separation of styles), beginning with the distinction between the “high” classical (Homeric) rhetoric and the “low” realistic rhetoric of the New Testament, see Eric Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953), especially pp. 22–23.

3. Mark Twain, “Fenimore Cooper’s Literary Offenses,” <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/HNS/Indians/offense.html>.

4. Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick; or The Whale*, ed. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle (Evanston, IL and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and The Newberry Library, 1988), p. 184.

5. Herman Melville, *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade*, ed. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle (Evanston, IL and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and The Newberry Library, 1984), pp. 149–150. The Puritan preacher, Father Mapple, enacts, both visually and in words, the exceptionalist vocation in his sermon to the motley congregation gathered below his elevated pulpit (Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 48): “This, shipmates, this [“to preach the Truth to the face of Falsehood”] is that other lesson; and woe to the pilot of the living God who slights it. Woe to him whom this world charms from his Gospel duty! Woe to him who seeks to pour oil upon the waters when God has brewed them into a gale! Woe to him who seek to please than to appall! . . . Yea, woe to him who, as the great Pilot Paul has it, while preaching to others is himself a castaway! He drooped and fell away from himself for a moment, then lifting his face to them again, showed a deep joy in his eyes, as he cried out with heavenly enthusiasm.—“But oh! shipmates! on the starboard hand of every woe, there is a sure delight; and higher the top of the delight, than the bottom of the woe is deep. . . . Delight is to him—a far, far upward, and inward delight—who against the proud gods and commodores of this earth, ever stands forth his own inexorable self. Delight to him whose strong arms yet support him, when the ship of this base treacherous world has gone down beneath him. Delight is to him, who gives no quarter in the truth, and kills, burns, and destroys all sin though he pluck it out from under the robes of Senators and Judges. Delight,—top-gallant delight is to him, who acknowledges no law or lord, but the Lord his God, and is only a patriot to heaven. Delight is to him, whom all the waves of the billows of the seas of the boisterous mob can never shake

from this sure Keel of the Ages.” For an extended reading of Father Mapple’s sermon, see William V. Spanos, *The Errant Art of Moby-Dick: The Canon, the Cold War, and the Struggle for American Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), pp. 87–114. Not incidentally, the ultimate source of this American exceptionalist vocation is the Old Testament, particularly Deuteronomy 20:17–18: “But in the cities of these peoples [of the land of Canaan] that the Lord your God gives you for an inheritance, you shall save alive nothing that breathes, but you shall utterly destroy them; the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, as the Lord your God has commanded; that they may not teach you to do according to all their abominable practices which they have done in the service of their gods, and so to sin against the Lord your God.”

6. Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad and Roughing It*, ed. Guy Cardwell (New York: The Library of America, 1984), pp. 286–287. It is worth noting that the farther east Twain travels the more pronounced his American exceptionalist judgments become. Though Twain satirizes his fellow “pilgrims” “textual attitude” toward the “holy land” (as has been often noted), he is persistently blind to his own Orientalism.

7. See David R. Sewell, “Hank Morgan and the Colonization of Utopia,” in *Mark Twain: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Eric Sundquist (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1994). Following Tzvetan Todorov’s *The Conquest of America* (1982), Sewell (p. 146) writes: “Like Hank, Cortes is a canny showman, concerned ‘when weak . . . to make others believe he is strong,’ given to ‘*son et lumière*’ spectacles with . . . horse and canons meant to impress the Indians as evidence of his transcendent powers. Where language serves ritual functions for the indigenous population, for the Conquistador it is above all ‘a concrete instrument of action upon the Other.’ Hank’s own most constant endeavor and—temporarily—greatest triumph is to substitute his own discourse for what he finds in the sixth century, attitudes and communicative styles that are satisfied throughout the novel. As a speaker of a ‘strong language’ he bends the Malorian world to his translation until it can give way no farther and erupts in violence.”

8. Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black and Red, 1983), first published by Editions Buchet-Chastel (Paris) in 1967.

9. Herman Melville, *Israel Potter: His Fifty Years of Exile*, ed. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle (Evanston, IL and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and The Newberry Library, 1982), p. 48.

10. See the uncanny resemblance of Melville’s verbal portrait of Benjamin Franklin and Daniel Beard’s portrait of Merlin in the Norton Edition of *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*, ed. Allison R. Ensor, p. 22. The “worldly project” I am referring to is, of course, the exceptionalist “errand in the wilderness” of America, which, in unexceptionalist Old World fashion, assumes that land that is not cultivated by those who dwell in it is not inhabited by humans (“*terra nullius*”) and thus expropriatable.

11. For an instance of Morgan’s use of this term, see Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee*,

p. 44. The term “improvement” or its equivalent “betterment” is pervasive in the cultural discourse of colonial America (and beyond), and it is fundamentally affiliated with “clearing,” “husbandry,” and “settlement,” which, in contrast with the natives’ “nomadism,” collectively compose the essence of the colonists’ ideological justification for their expropriation of the natives’ land. See, for example, James Fenimore Cooper, *The Pioneers*, ed. James D. Wallace (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). Ultimately, of course, this American exceptionalism had its origins in the origins of the very idea of Western civilization: the distinction that the Romans made between their sedentary existence and the nomadism of the tribes that roamed the *terra incognita* beyond the borders of their empire. See also William V. Spanos, “American Exceptionalism, the Jeremiad, and the Frontier, Before and After 9/11: From the Puritans to the Neo-Con Men,” in *American Exceptionalism in the Age of Globalization: The Specter of Vietnam* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008), pp.197–241.

12. Raymond Williams, “Hegemony,” in *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 109–110; my emphasis.

13. For similar episodes in which Morgan invokes the buried but latent “manliness” of the multitude with which he comes into contact on his journeys, see chapters 21, 30, and 35.

14. As has often been noted—but overlooked in critical practice—these strong sentiments were also those of Mark Twain. To William Dean Howells he wrote on September 22, 1889: “I am glad you approve of what I say about the French Revolution. Few people will. It is odd that even to this day Americans still observe that immortal benefaction through English & other monarchical eyes, & have no shred of an opinion about it that they didn’t get at second hand. And next to the 4th of July & its results, it was the noblest & the holiest thing & the most precious that ever happened in this earth. And its gracious work is not done yet—nor anywhere in the remote neighborhood of it” (Twain, *Connecticut Yankee*, 301).

15. As a number of critics have pointed out, Morgan’s reference to his errand as “a new deal” has been cited as the source of Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s use of the phrase in his speech accepting his nomination by the Democratic Party for the presidency in 1932: “I pledge you. I pledge myself, to a new deal for the American people.” This is no accident, given the prominence of Twain’s and Warner’s jeremiadic phrase “the Gilded Age” at that time in American history.

16. Another aspect of Morgan’s Twainian male chauvinism is his genteel middle-class sexual morality, which manifests itself in public as modesty. When, for example, Clarence informs Morgan that Alisande will accompany him on his knight errant mission, Morgan says: “Ride with me? Nonsense . . . What? She browses around the hills and scours the woods with me—alone—and I as good as engaged to be married? Why it’s scandalous. Think how it would look” (Twain, *Connecticut Yankee*, 57). In a parenthetical recollection of the circumstances of his marriage to Sandy, Morgan writes

in a similar vein: “I was a New Englander, and in my opinion this sort of [unmarried] partnership would compromise her, sooner or later, she couldn’t see how, but I cut argument short and we had a wedding” (233). Twain exhibits the same genteelness in a number of passages in *The Innocents Abroad*, particularly in his account of the story of Abelard and Heloise (chapter 15). See Twain, *The Innocents Abroad and Roughing It*, pp.111–121.

17. For further references to training, see Twain, *Connecticut Yankee*, chapter 20, pp. 104–105; chapter 28, pp. 158–162; and chapter 30, p. 168.

18. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon, 1977), p. 138. One cannot help but wonder if, in imagining the “Man-Factory,” Twain didn’t have in mind the Lowell, Massachusetts, project inaugurated by Francis Cabot Lowell in the second decade of the nineteenth century. See especially John F. Kasson’s account of the Lowell project in *Civilizing the Machine: Technology and Republican Values in America, 1776–1900* (New York: Hill and Wang 1999; first published in 1976), pp. 75–76: “A policy of strict control, implicit in the residential architecture, enforced this code of factory discipline. The factory as a whole was governed by the superintendent, his office strategically placed between the boarding houses and the mills at the entrance to the mill yard. From this point, as one spokesman enthusiastically reported, his ‘mind regulates all; his character inspires all, his plans, matured and decided by the directors of the company, who visit him every week, control all.’ Beneath his watchful eye in each room of the factory, an overseer stood responsible for the work, conduct, and proper management of the operatives therein. Should he choose to exercise it, an overseer possessed formidable power. . . . Supervision was thus constant. . . . In addition to these powerful institutional controls, corporate authorities relied upon the factory girls to act as moral police over one another.” Note, too, how closely Kasson’s account of the Lowell project anticipates Foucault’s account of Claude Nicolas Ledoux’s plan for the French factory town Arc-et-Senain in Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, pp. 173–177.

19. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998). Further commentary on this text will be presented later in the book.

20. Commenting on the lunatic reverence the commons has for the nobility in “a country of ranks and castes,” where “a man isn’t ever a man, he is only part of a man, he can’t get his full growth,” in introducing chapter 33, “Sixth Century Political Economy,” Morgan underscores his nineteenth-century version of American exceptionalism: “And not only his, but any commoner’s in the land, though he were the mightiest production of all the ages, in intellect, worth, and character, and I bankrupt in all three. This was to remain so, as long as England should exist in the earth. With the spirit of prophecy upon me, I could look into the future and see her erect monuments to her unspeakable Georges and other royal and noble clothes-horses, and leave unhonored the creators of

this world—after God—Gutenberg, Watt, Arkwright, Whitney, Morse, Stephenson, Bell” (Twain, *Connecticut Yankee*, 184).

21. One of the few critics who has interrogated, rather than simply celebrated, the humor of *A Connecticut Yankee* is Everett Carter in “The Meaning of A Connecticut Yankee,” in Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*, ed. Allison R. Ensor (New York: Norton, 1982), originally published in *American Literature*, vol. 50 (1978), 418–440. In this neglected essay (written from the perspective of the first phase of *Connecticut Yankee* criticism though published during the second), Carter (without reference to American exceptionalism and without offering a judgment) calls into question the thesis of the second (“soft”) phase by arguing persuasively that Twain identifies himself with his protagonist from beginning to end. Commenting, in the process, on “the Yankee’s philistinism” and his seemingly inhuman attitude toward the chivalry he is trying to destroy (including the apparent pleasure he takes in the technological violence of that destruction, Carter (pp. 437–438) tellingly writes:

*But there is evidence to support a contention that the author did not consider these actions as fundamentally immoral or as more than occasionally and humanly foolish. In the instance of Hank’s apparently callow actions, Twain either agreed with their necessity or, in less important cases, took it for granted that his audience would understand the comic-epic tone which permits us to laugh unreservedly at the obliteration of Tom in the Tom and Jerry cartoon, without agonizing about the realities of pain. For example, when Hank asks Clarence if some committee members had made their report (they had just walked over a landmine), Clarence answers that it was “unanimous.” Until the final pages, when Twain’s rage against aristocratic privilege got out of hand, Twain was working confidently in the comic world of frontier humor where overstatement about death and destruction was a standard mode of evoking laughter. Many of the seemingly inhuman reactions of Hank take this form, a form linked to the author’s own perhaps tasteless but nevertheless comic hyperbole.*

22. The celebration of Mark Twain’s “American” humor in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*—this quintessentially “American” novel—obscures its complicity with such “classics” of Western imperialist literature as Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, in which the (white colonialist) hero, Crusoe, ventriloquizes his “man,” Friday. See Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, ed. Michael Shinagel (New York: Norton, 1994), p. 149:

*“When he spy’d me. He came running to me, laying himself down again upon the Ground, with all possible Signs of an humble thankful Disposition, making a many antick Gestures to show it: At last he lays His Head flat upon the Ground, close to my Foot, and sets my other Foot upon his Head, as he had done before; and after this; made all the Signs, to me of Subjection, Servitude, and Submission imaginable, to let me know, how he would serve me as long as he liv’d. I understood him in many Things, and let him know, I was very well pleas’d with him; in a little Time I began to speak to him, and teach him to speak to me; and first I made him know his Name should be Friday. . . . I likewise taught him to say Master,*

and then let him know, that was to be my Name; I likewise taught him to say, YES, and NO, and to know the Meaning of them.”

23. For a sense of the indissoluble relatedness of Yankee/Western humor and the American national identity, see Constance Rourke’s classic study, *American Humor* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1931). Rourke, of course, does not refer to American exceptionalism as such, nor to the violence it entails, in this celebration of American frontier humor, since she, like Twain (whose writing is also a topic of her study), is herself inscribed by the American exceptionalist ethos. Read against the grain—contrapuntally—however, what her celebratory prose disavows becomes patently clear.

24. This “dramatic” rescue, not incidentally, is another example of Twain’s patent interference in Morgan’s staging of scenes for spectacular effect (by way of enhancing them). At the end of the episode, in which the king and Morgan are saved from the hanging suffered by two slaves before their turn, by Launcelot’s nick-of-time rescue, Morgan concludes: “I was immensely satisfied. Take the whole situation all around, it was one of the gaudiest effects, I ever staged” (Twain, *Connecticut Yankee*, 219). Read carefully, however, this scene, which is played out in virtual slow motion, is not so much the result of Morgan’s calculations as of Twain’s.

25. Henry Nash Smith, *Mark Twain’s Fable of Progress: Political and Economic Ideas in A Connecticut Yankee* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1964), pp. 94–95.

26. John Carlos Rowe, “Mark Twain’s Rediscovery of America in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*,” in *Literary Culture and U.S. Imperialism: From the Revolution to World War II* (London: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 121–139.

27. Twain’s postfrontier interest in the commercial potential of the islands of the Pacific Ocean is manifest in the letters he wrote during a six-month visit to the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii) in 1866 sponsored by *The Sacramento Union*, which hired him to promote the United States’ sugar trade; in *Roughing It* (1872), where he appends some of these letters to his account of his experiences on the western frontier; and in *Following the Equator* (1895), where he writes of his return to Hawaii only to be prevented from going ashore because of a cholera epidemic. See Amy Kaplan, “The Imperial Routes of Mark Twain,” in *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 52–91, for a reading of Twain’s lifelong interest in Hawaii that traces its itinerary from enthusiastic commitment, to its annexation to the United States, to what, following Renato Rosaldo, she calls “imperial nostalgia,” “the longing to salvage an imagined pristine pre-colonial culture by the same agents of empire—missionaries, anthropologists, travel writers—who have had a hand in destroying it.” My reading of Twain’s continuing interest in Hawaii and the Pacific before, during, and after the publication of *A Connecticut Yankee* has its point of departure in that jeremiadic aspect of the American exceptionalist myth that requires a “new” (perpetual) frontier as the means of rejuvenating and reunifying the

covenantal community. For an extended amplification of this frontier context, see my *The Exceptionalist State and the State of Exception: Herman Melville's Billy Budd, Sailor* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), pp. 14–24, where I claim that Melville's *Billy Budd, Sailor*, constitutes a cautionary tale warning against the United States' post-frontier-closing initiative to open the Pacific Ocean to American-style commerce and conquest.

28. Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), p.147.

29. This sustained ideologically productive irony is tellingly exemplified by Clarence in his answer to Morgan's question as to why he selected boys to accomplish the revolutionary task. His answer, in its diction, rhythm, tone, and content, not only echoes Morgan's (and Twain's) exceptionalist language but even outdoes it: "Because all the others were born in an atmosphere of superstition and reared in it. It is in their blood and bones. We imagined we had educated it out of them; they thought so, too; the Interdict woke them up like a thunderclap! It revealed them to themselves, and it revealed them to me, too. With boys it was different. Such as have been under our training from seven to ten years had no acquaintance with the Church's terrors, and it was among these that I found my fifty-two."

30. See Spanos, *Exceptionalist State and the State of Exception*.

31. Given its absence in contemporary theoretical discussions, it is worth pointing out that the genealogy of Agamben's term "bare life" (*nuda vita*) goes back through Foucault's "useful and docile body," to Hannah Arendt's "superfluous person," to Heidegger's "*Bestand*": the "standing reserve" to which the triumph of technology in "the age of the world picture" reduces humanity.

32. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, pp. 82–83; emphasis mine.

33. Here Agamben is referring not to American democracy but to Western democracies in general. Later, however, as his extension (in *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005]) of his meditation on *homo sacer* to include American global hegemony after 9/11 testifies, he overdetermines American-style democracy, particularly after 9/11, when the president of the United States issued "the 'military order' authorizing the 'indefinite detention' and trial by 'military commissions' . . . of noncitizens suspected of involvement in terrorist activities" (p. 3). "What is new about President Bush's order," Agamben writes, "is that it radically erases any legal status of the individual, thus producing a legally unnamable and unclassifiable being. Not only do the Taliban captured in Afghanistan not enjoy the status of POWs as defined by the Geneva Convention, they do not even have the status of persons charged with a crime according to American laws. Neither prisoners nor persons accused, but simply 'detainees,' they are the object of a pure de facto rule, of detention that is indefinite not only in the temporal sense but in its very nature as well, since it is entirely removed from the law and from judicial oversight. The only thing to which it could possibly be compared is the legal situation of the Jews in the Nazi *Lager*

[camps], who, along with their citizenship had lost every legal identity, but at least retained their identities as Jews. As Judith Butler has effectively shown, in the detainee at Guantánamo, bare life reaches its maximum indeterminacy” (pp. 3–4).

34. Walter Benjamin, “The Critique of Violence,” in *Reflections*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, ed. Peter Demetz (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), pp. 277–300.

35. Agamben, *State of Exception*, p. 53.

36. See Spanos, *Exceptionalist State and the State of Exception*.

37. Michael Herr, *Dispatches* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), p. 71.

38. James M. Cox, “*A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*: The Machinery of Self-Preservation,” in *Mark Twain: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Henry Nash Smith (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963), p. 127.

39. Smith, *Fable of Progress*, pp. 105–106.

40. See also Carter, “The Meaning of *A Connecticut Yankee*.” Carter is one of the very few critics of the second period of *Connecticut Yankee* Twain criticism who identify the author with his protagonist. Taking his point of departure for the reading of Morgan’s death-bed murmurings from Mark Twain’s notebook entry “written very early in the gestation of the work when [he] predicted this Yankee would mourn ‘his lost land’ and would be ‘found a suicide,’” Carter writes: “The early notebook reference to Hank’s longing for a sixth-century, a ‘new’ and a ‘virgin’ England can be read as a reference to the century and the country as Hank had reformed them, a land and a time that held the memories of his wife and child, a time and a land that in the same entry, he contrasts with the degradation not of nineteenth-century America, but a nineteenth-century England” (p. 440).

## CHAPTER FIVE *A Connecticut Yankee* and America’s “War on Terror”

1. Mark Twain, *The Autobiography of Mark Twain*, vol. 1, ed. Harriet Elinor Smith and other editors of the Mark Twain Project (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

2. Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: The Free Press, 1993).

3. George Bush, “By God, we’ve finally kicked the Vietnam syndrome once and for all!” To a group of legislators, reported in *Newsweek*, vol. 117 (March 11, 1991).

4. See Samuel P. Huntington, *Who Are We? Challenges to America’s National Identity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004), p. 64. The American jeremiadic aspect of the exceptionalism of this intellectual deputy of the neoconservative Bush administration is decisively exemplified by the following prelude to his defense of America’s holy “War on Terror”: “The settling of America was, of course, a result of economic and other motives, as well as religious ones. Yet religion still was central. . . . Religious intensity was undoubtedly greatest among the Puritans, especially in Massachusetts. They took the lead in defining their settlement based on ‘A Covenant with God’ to create ‘a city on

a hill' as a model for all the world, and people of the Protestant faiths soon also came to see themselves and America in a similar way. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Americans defined their mission in the New World in biblical terms. They were a 'chosen people,' on an 'errand in the wilderness,' creating 'the new Israel' or the 'new Jerusalem' in what was clearly 'the promised land.' America was the site of a 'new Heaven and new earth, the home of justice,' God's country. . . . This sense of holy mission was easily expanded into millenarian themes, of America as 'the redeemer nation' and 'the visionary republic.'"

5. The term "New American Century" was coined by a group of neoconservative intellectuals, many of them members of the George W. Bush administration, calling itself Project for the New American Century (PNAC). It included William J. Bennett, Jeb Bush, Eliot Cohen, Dick Cheney, Francis Fukuyama, Donald Kagan, William Kristol, Norman Podhoretz, Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, and John Bolton, among others. In an inordinately influential white paper remarkably similar to Hank Morgan's "Proclamation" (of a republic), entitled misleadingly "Rebuilding America's Defenses" (in September 2002, before the invasion of Iraq), it recommended the policy of "preemptive war" and "regime change" in the name of "the Pax Americana," and a "unipolar world" under the aegis of the United States. See [www.newamericancentury.org/statement\\_of\\_principles.htm](http://www.newamericancentury.org/statement_of_principles.htm).

6. Giorgio Agamben, "In Praise of Profanation," in *Profanations*, trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Zone Books, 2007), p. 77: "We must distinguish between secularization and profanation. Secularization is a form of repression. It leaves intact the forces it deals with by simply moving them from one place to another. Thus the political secularization of theological concepts (the transcendence of God as a paradigm of sovereign power) does nothing but displace the heavenly monarchy onto an earthly monarchy, leaving its power intact. Profanation, however, neutralizes what it profanes. Once profaned, that which was unavailable and separate loses its aura and is returned to use. Both are political operations: the first guarantees the exercise of power by carrying it back to a sacred model; the second deactivates the apparatuses of power and returns to common use the spaces that power had seized." See also Giorgio Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory: For a Genealogy of Economy and Government (Homo Sacer II, 2)*, trans. Lorenzo Chiesa with Matteo Mandarini (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), and Agamben, *The Highest Poverty: Form-of-Life*, trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013). Agamben's books were published after I completed this study. In bringing his meticulous genealogical study of the role of acclamation (glory) in the Western theopolitical tradition to its conclusion in secular modernity by citing Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle*, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, in particular, sheds remarkable light on Twain's penchant for staging the spectacle as an intrinsic aspect of American exceptionalism and its consensual politics.

7. This affiliation is epitomized by the “unpoetic” response of a “senior advisor” in the George W. Bush administration to the reporter Ron Suskind’s question about the United States’ use of unilateral force to assure regime change in Iraq: “The aide said that guys like me were ‘in what we call the reality-based community,’ which he defined as people who ‘believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality.’ I nodded and murmured something about enlightenment principles and empiricism. He cut me off, ‘That’s not the way the world really works anymore,’ he continued. ‘We’re an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And we’ll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that’s how things will sort out. We’re history’s actors . . . and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do.’” “Without Doubt,” *New York Times*, October 17, 2004.

8. For an amplified account, see the chapter entitled “American Exceptionalism and the State of Exception after 9/11: Meville’s Proleptic Witness,” in Spanos, *Exceptionalist State and the State of Exception*, pp. 141–163.

9. See Donald Pease, “From Virgin Land to Ground Zero: Mythological Foundations of the Homeland Security State,” in *The New American Exceptionalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), pp. 153–179.

10. 2002 State of the Union Address, <http://stateoftheunionaddress.org/2002-george-w-bush; my emphasis>.

11. For another analysis of the George W. Bush administration’s American exceptionalist “War on Terror” that interprets it as an announcement that renders the state of exception the norm, see Pease’s magisterial “From Virgin Land to Ground Zero,” pp. 153–179. Unlike my reading, which assumes the continuity of the myth of American exceptionalism from its origins in the Puritan settlement of the New World, Pease’s is a psychoanalytic interpretation claiming that the Bush administration’s war on terror constitutes a radical break from “old” exceptionalism hitherto defined by the Myth and Symbol school of Americanist studies. What is especially pertinent about Pease’s reading of the Bush administration’s “new American exceptionalism” to my reading of Twain’s *The Connecticut Yankee* is his insistent reference to the Bush Homeland Security State (the normalization of the state of exception) as the staging of spectacle without placing it in the context of Guy Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle*.

12. For intellectual justifications of the American exceptionalist initiative vis á vis regime change immediately before and after 9/11, see especially PNAC, “Rebuilding America’s Defenses” (see note 5, this chapter). See also, for example, Fukuyama, *End of History and the Last Man*; Richard Haass, *The Reluctant Sheriff: The United States after the Cold War* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1997); Huntington, *Who Are We?*; and Michael Mandelbaum, *The Case of Goliath: How America Acts as the World’s Government in the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Public Affairs, 2005).

13. Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2009), p. 31:

“The shared condition of precariousness implies that the body is constitutively social and interdependent—a view clearly confirmed in different ways by both Hobbes and Hegel. Yet, precisely because each body finds itself potentially threatened by others who are, by definition, precarious as well, forms of domination follow. This standard Hegelian point takes on specific meanings under contemporary conditions of war: the shared condition of precariousness leads not to reciprocal recognition, but to a specific exploitation of targeted populations, of lives that are not quite lives, cast as ‘destructible’ and ‘ungrievable.’ Such populations are ‘lose-able,’ or can be forfeited, precisely because they are framed as being already lost or forfeited; they are cast as threats to human life as we know it rather than as living populations in need of protection from illegitimate state violence, famine, or pandemics. Consequently, when such lives are lost they are not grievable, since, in the twisted logic that rationalizes their death, the loss of such populations is deemed necessary to protect the lives of ‘the living.’”

14. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 82–83; emphasis mine.

15. Agamben, *Homor Sacer*, p. 123; emphasis original.

16. Giorgio Agamben, “Marginal Notes on Commentaries on the Society of the Spectacle,” in *Means without End*, trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 82.2.

17. Recall the Puritan John Cotton’s “Christian Calling,” in Perry Miller, ed., *The American Puritans: Their Prose and Poetry* (New York: Anchor Books, 1956), pp. 172–182. See also Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1930). As Perry Miller puts this relation between the Protestant work ethic and capitalism: “Recently this complex mentality [epitomized by Cotton’s ‘Christian Calling’] has been scientifically analyzed by the great sociologist, Max Weber, and after him is called, for shorthand, ‘the Protestant ethic.’ Actually, it is a logical consequence of Puritan theology: man is put into this world, not to spend his life in profitless singing of hymns or in unfruitful monastic contemplation, but to do what the world requires, according to its terms. He must raise children, he must work at his calling. No activity is outside the holy purpose of the overarching covenant. Yet the Christian works not for the gain that may (or may not) result for his labor, but for the glory of God. He remains an ascetic in the world, as much as any hermit outside it. He displays unprecedented energy in wresting the land from the Indians, trading in the seven seas, speculating in land: ‘Yet,’ says Cotton, ‘his heart isn’t set upon these things, he can tell what to do with his estate when he hath got it.’ In New England the phrase to describe this attitude soon became: loving the world with ‘weaned affections’” (p. 172).

18. Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1978), pp. 2–3.

19. See the eight secret memoranda, written in the aftermath of 9/11, by the Bush administration’s Office of Legal Council (Justice Department), including John Yoo, Jay Bybee, and Robert J. Delahunty, which reinterpret the Constitution to give the executive

branch “plenary executive powers,” including the right to use “enhanced methods of interrogation” (torture). [www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/03/02/secret-bush-memos-release\\_n\\_17122.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/03/02/secret-bush-memos-release_n_17122.html) (accessed May 9, 2010).

20. For an extended analysis of the terrible banality of this relation between the Bush administration and its commodified foreign audience (i.e., the society of the spectacle and its Arab “target”), see William V. Spanos, “The Devastation of Language under the Dictatorship of the Public Realm: Reading Global American with Hannah Arendt,” in *Exiles in the City: Hannah Arendt and Edward W. Said in Counterpoint* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2012), pp. 32–39. See also Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black and Red, 1983), p. 53: “The consciousness of desire and the desire for consciousness are identically the project which, in its negative form, seeks the abolition of classes, the workers’ direct possession of every aspect of their activity. Its opposite is the society of the spectacle, where the commodity contemplates itself in a world it has created.”

21. Anxious to dissociate Twain from his protagonist, the Americanists of the third phase of criticism and commentary on *A Connecticut Yankee* underscore Morgan’s callous attitude toward the spectacle of the wholesale death and mutilation of his enemies during the Battle of the Sand Belt to suggest that it is at this point in the composition of the novel that Twain dissociates himself from his protagonist, willfully forgetting that this indifference to the pain he inflicts in the name of his exceptionalism is, as we have seen, a constant from the beginning. Besides the example of the duel with Sir Sagramour to which I have referred, there is also the telling example of his visit to Morgan Fay’s castle. There, it will be recalled, when, early in the novel (chapter 17), after Morgan Le Fay’s hanging of the musician who played “Sweet Bye and Bye” badly, Morgan, as the king’s deputy, gives the queen permission “to hang the whole band”: “I therefore considered the matter thoughtfully, and ended by having the musicians ordered in to our presence to play the sweet Bye and Bye again, which they did. Then I saw that she was right, and gave her permission to hang the whole band. This little relaxation of sternness had a good effect upon the queen. . . . A little concession, now and then, where it can do no harm, is wiser policy” (Twain, *Connecticut Yankee*, 85–86).

22. Pease, *The New American Exceptionalism*, p. 179.

23. That the spectacle, including its staging, was fundamental to the Bush administration’s—and the culture industry’s—representation of 9/11 and the United States’ “War on Terror” is massively borne witness to by Susan Faludi’s *The Terror Dream: Fear and Fantasy in Post-9/11 America* (New York: Henry Holt, 2007), a thoroughly documented account of the State and its representational apparatus’s immediate response to the al Qaeda bombings of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Though her title derives from the domain of psychoanalysis, the language she uses circulates almost entirely around the spectacle. I quote a resonant passage, also quoted by Donald Pease in *The New American Exceptionalism*, that is not only representative of the United

States' political and ideological apparatus's appeal to the spectacle *but also suggestive of its immediate source in Mark Twain's fiction*: "We reacted to our trauma . . . not by interrogating it but by cocooning ourselves in the celluloid chrysalis of the baby boom's childhood. In the male version of that reverie, some nameless reflex had returned us to the 1950s Hollywood badlands where conquest and triumph played and replayed in an infinite loop. (For some, that play was literal: *High Noon*, *National Review* writer Rob Long told readers, was 'a movie I've been watching every few days since September 11.')

From deep within that dream world, our commander in chief issued remarks like 'We'll smoke him out' and 'Wanted: Dead or alive,' our political candidates proved their double-barreled worthiness for post-9/11 office by brandishing guns on the campaign trail, our journalists cast city firefighters as tall-in-the-saddle cowboys patrolling a Wild West stage set, and our pundits proclaimed our nation's ability to vanquish 'barbarians' in a faraway land they dubbed 'Indian Country.' The retreat into a fantasized yesteryear was pervasive, from the morning of the televised attack (ABC news anchor Peter Jennings called the national electronic conclave 'the equivalent to a campfire in the days as the wagon trains were making their way westward'), to the first post-9/11 supper at Camp David (the war cabinet was served a 'Wild West menu' of buffalo meat), to our invasion of Iraq (which tank crews from the Sixty-fourth Armored Regiment inaugurated with a 'Seminole Indian war dance') to our ongoing prosecution of the war on terror (which *Wall Street Journal* editor Max Boot equated with the small-scale 'savage wars' waged in the republic's earliest days and which *Atlantic Monthly* correspondent Robert Kaplan hailed as 'back to the days of fighting the Indians' and 'really about taming the frontier'" (pp. 4-5).

24. Agamben, *Means without End*, p. 16.6.

25. Pease, *The New Americanists*, p. 179.

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