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# Magic and the Great Trust: The Place of the Intellectual in Mark Twain's and Edward Bellamy's Visions of Distant Societies

Otto Heim

One of the most interesting aspects of the Gilded Age is the apparent discontinuity between the outward manifestations of power and the internal transformations within the structure of power itself. The most visible encounters of power in the last three decades of the nineteenth century took place in public strife and in violent confrontations of massed bodies, such as those between strikers and the police, or the imperialist wars of the end of the century. Meanwhile, a profound transformation was affecting the internal structure of power, which could not be as readily identified or localized. The process which Alan Trachtenberg has described as "the incorporation of America" brought to the fore new means and a new shape of power, which, although they may have been pioneered by state institutions, were elaborated by the industrial forces of civil society. This new form of power was based on energy and effect, rather than on law and command, on speed and communication, rather than on territorial occupation. The transformation was characterized by collusion as well as rivalry between an emergent public bureaucracy and corporate capital.<sup>1</sup> Outward manifestations and internal transformations of power were of course related, but the apparent

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<sup>1</sup> The relationship between imperialist encroachment and economic expansion is very complex. Under the title "The Imperialism of Free Trade," John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson in 1953 advanced the thesis that imperialist government policies should be seen in the context, and as an aspect, of the global expansion of Euro-American economic control. While this thesis plausibly defeats the notion of a shift from formal to informal imperialism, from military occupation to economic domination, its subordination of government strategies to economic expansion still tends to simplify matters. Michael Mann's thesis of a relationship of collusion and rivalry between the (nation) state and the corporate forces of civil society, lying at the heart of transformations in the power infrastructure in modern capitalist societies, seems to offer a more adequate perspective. See also Mommsen's discussion of Gallagher's and Robinson's and related theories of imperialism (70-112).

discontinuity and the ambiguous relationship between government and capital complicated the task of those who would publicly challenge the new power structure and reform a rapidly consolidating system. Thus the agency of government remained a critical focus of various expressions of *laissez-faire*, when its power already appeared increasingly reactive and it at times seemed merely to act the part of a police force at the service of business, both at home and abroad. At the same time, the technological and organizational transformation of power increasingly came to frame every critical intervention and to affect the everyday lives of more and more people, highlighting a loss of critical distance and questioning the very distinction between home and abroad.

This loss of critical space is reflected in Edward Bellamy's and Mark Twain's stories of time travel, which lodge their interventions at a remove from, and in oblique relation to, the present of 1888/89. *Looking Backward* and *A Connecticut Yankee* express the emergent predicament of the modern intellectual, publicly at odds with his society, caught between a critical commitment to change and an inevitable drift towards power. Contrasting and yet strikingly parallel, the two books address, and in part no doubt only reflect, the ideological and psychological conditions affecting the intellectual's position and function. Both books marked something like a turning point in the careers of their authors. Henry Nash Smith has suggested that the writing of *A Connecticut Yankee*, itself accompanied by severe hardship in Twain's private and business life, was a profoundly disillusioning experience that signified his loss of faith in the value system of industrial society, preparing the way for his harsh attacks on "the damned human race" but otherwise paralyzing his imagination (107-8). More obviously, the publication of *Looking Backward* brought its author overnight fame and for a few years propelled Bellamy to the center of public attention.<sup>2</sup>

Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee* addresses the question of power in the metaphor of magic. The blow that the head superintendent at the Colt arms factory receives "during a misunderstanding conducted with crowbars" (8) proves to be a stroke of magic as, instead of killing Hank Morgan, it catapults him across the gulf of thirteen centuries as well as across the Atlantic ocean, into Arthur's kingdom. This double dislocation produces an

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<sup>2</sup> In "How the Boss Played the Game: Twain's Critique of Imperialism in *A Connecticut Yankee* in *King Arthur's Court*," John Carlos Rowe analyzes the lines between Twain's novel and his later, more overtly anti-imperialist writing. My concern in this paper is primarily with the challenges that the infrastructural transformations of power presented to the intellectual as a critic of power.

ambiguity in the target of satire, which Twain's narrative ironically exploits. After his arrival at Camelot, magic soon becomes the field in which Hank confronts Merlin. This contest only superficially enacts a conflict between the modern American self-made man and old-fashioned British monarchical institutions and values. More important is the parallelism that the rivalry between Hank and Merlin emphasizes. Both owe their status and power to an ability to produce spectacular effects and to achieve control over public opinion. Despite his assertions, Hank's superior technological prowess does not so much contrast with Merlin's magic, but turns out to be a variant of the same power, and Hank himself gradually seems to come to believe in his supernatural powers. The Yankee, like Merlin, uses his magic to increase his status at Arthur's court and throughout the kingdom. That the powers of Merlin and Hank are indeed equivalent is indicated at the end of the novel, when Merlin casts an effective spell on Hank, putting him to sleep for thirteen centuries, before tripping over one of Hank's electrified wires.

It is worth noting that in representing technology as magic, *A Connecticut Yankee* promoted a concept of science and technology that differed strongly from the dominant nineteenth-century view. As Jane Gardiner points out, the nineteenth-century public did not view science and technology in such a mystified way, but, in the words of Josiah Warren, saw it as "simple and definite, and easy to comprehend and uniform in its results" (Gardiner 451). It was only with the advent of the electrical revolution, visibly beginning with Edison's "invention" of the light bulb in 1878, that this view shifted. Electricity represented a new form of technology, to be characterized less as progress than as power, and a new form of power at that: invisible, instantaneous, capable of carrying great distances, and deadly. With these qualities, the power of electrical energy could become an image for the new forms of economic and technological power which began to pervade and transform the capitalist world at the end of the nineteenth century. Edison himself, in his role as the "Wizard of Menlo Park," contributed to this endowment of economic power with the magical properties of electrical energy. Carefully protecting his laboratory from public inspection, he made sure that the research of his team of scientists was revealed to spectacular effect, as the fruit of his own Promethean genius, and to his own economic advantage.<sup>3</sup> This is also Hank Morgan's procedure and aim. Hiding his factories from the sixth-century public, he reaches the moment where he has "the civilization of the nineteenth century booming

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<sup>3</sup> On Edison's business acumen and self-promotion, see Trachtenberg (65-68).

under its very nose” and stands “with [his] hand on the cock, so to speak, ready to turn it on and flood the midnight world with light at any moment” (51).

Magic also plays a powerful role in Bellamy's *Looking Backward*. Julian West is sent to the year 2000 not by a blow over his head but by mesmerically induced sleep. When he wakes up, he finds Boston, and indeed apparently the whole world, transformed into an industrial utopia. In the year 2000, all the conflicts and strife that had brought society to the brink of another civil war at the end of the nineteenth century are overcome. The organizational solution involves the synergizing of corporate efforts in a single trust, which makes possible frictionless technology, a system of wasteless industry, and an absolutely rational system of distribution. At bottom, it is the effect of a magical operation of both collective and individual will, as Dr. Leete demonstrates. Dr. Leete not only acts as a spokesman for utopia, introducing Julian West to the various aspects of the new economy. As a physician, he also assists Julian in his persisting insomnia by administering to him a medicine that brings instant relief. This reflects Dr. Leete's role of the intellectual as an expert who controls an invisible and incomprehensible power that is potentially damaging but elicits from the patient an unconditional consent or trust. The relationship between Leete and West, doctor and patient, is symptomatic for the entire new order of utopia, which requires of the public an absolute submission to the Great Trust. At the same time, there is really nothing new about Dr. Leete's power. Sylvia Strauss has pointed out that “Dr. Leete is not unlike Dr. Pillsbury, the ‘quack’ calling himself a ‘Professor of Animal Magnetism,’ who hypnotized Julian West into sleep and forgetfulness in the Boston of old” (80-81). Indeed, as with Hank and Merlin, Dr. Leete does not really contrast with Dr. Pillsbury, but is superior only in his ability to manipulate Julian's consent.

The notion of consent or trust replaces the political antagonisms and the historical processes that would seem to underly such a momentous economic and social transformation as *Looking Backward* represents. The remarkable absence of any description of the work process in the book has been observed by John Thomas (256) and Milton Cantor (25), and this absence parallels the obsolescence of nineteenth-century political processes, which the perfection of the industrial system has made redundant. As Dr. Leete explains to West: “The fundamental principles on which our society is founded settle for all time the strifes and misunderstandings which in your day called for legislation” (156). Similarly, the transition from corporate capitalism to the state capitalism of the Great Trust could take place without

any conflict or drastic change because the problems of the nineteenth century were apparently only based on misunderstandings. The revolution thus arrived as the moment of a great revelation. Some time not long after Julian went to sleep, as Dr. Leete suggests, the organization of the nation as the sole capitalist, the only corporation or the Great Trust, appeared as the inevitable outcome of “a process which only needed to complete its logical evolution to open a golden future to humanity” (65). Given this rationality of corporate industrialism, “[a]ll that society had to do was to recognize and cooperate with that evolution, when its tendency had become unmistakable” (61). Equally naturally, it was the role of the United States to act as “the pioneer of the evolution” (115) worldwide.

The way he envisions the transition to utopia not only suggests Bellamy’s faith in the collusion of corporate capitalism and authoritarian government, which in his time could still hold the promise of a beneficent socialism. It also indicates his profound hostility to actual change. Indeed, John Thomas and Milton Cantor have convincingly argued that *Looking Backward* is the product of a nostalgic imagination and that in conceiving his utopia, Bellamy implanted an idealized industrialization into a pastoral idyll, half dream and half childhood memory.

Hence Boston in the year 2000 was much like pre-1840 Chicopee. Nothing could be seen of 1888 mill towns, the sweatshops, substandard wages, child labor, dreadful home and work environments, or even the “aggressive” and “ubiquitous” drummers. Indeed Boston was much like the Chicopee of his youth – before the mills, before it became a grimy, sprawling city invaded in turn by Irish, French Canadian, and Polish workers, and before the rows of grim tenements in which they lived. It had “miles of broad streets, shaded by trees,” landscaped parks and squares on which fronted homes and cottages with little footpaths and gardens with rustic bowers. (Cantor 25)

A country dotted by scattered villages, all connected to central warehouses by a system of transmitting tubes, such is the image of Bellamy’s ideal world. Not surprisingly, the success of *Looking Backward*, as John Thomas points out, rested largely on its appeal to “farmers and small-town Americans clinging to remembered ways and threatened values” (254).

Seen in this light, it seems as if Hank Morgan, after his arrival at Camelot, turned into a Bellamyite *avant la lettre*, working to bring the industrial revolution to an agrarian world. Hank’s Man-Factories and his army of apprentice boys recall or anticipate Bellamy’s industrial army, not only because they are the engines of industrial development but also as disciplining institutions of training. Similarly, Hank’s system of telegraph

and electrical wires, which gradually spreads all across Arthur's kingdom, resembles the network of pneumatic tubes of the year 2000. Hank's aim is to bring about a quiet and bloodless revolution, similar to that which in Bellamy's book has led to the industrial utopia.<sup>4</sup> His plan, however, fails, due both to the psychological strain on Hank's personality and to the intrinsic despotism of his project.

The strain on Hank's personality results from the tension between his alleged emancipatory intentions and his overbearing seeking of control, which gradually assumes the proportions of a paranoid megalomania. From the start Morgan's attitude to the sixth century is paradoxical in that he measures and values his power to bring progress in terms of his destructive capacity. Thus he hardly conceals his satisfaction at the terrified submission that his prediction of the eclipse draws from the crowd. When he feels that he has the civilization of the nineteenth century ready to be revealed, he imagines it as a volcano, "giving no sign of the rising hell in its bowels" (51). While at first he merely fantasizes his destructive capacity and admits that his conscience bothers him (92), gradually he succumbs to the temptation of confirming his power with real victims and in the end does not hesitate to blow up the barely manifest civilization and to kill 25,000 knights, equally willing to risk sacrificing the lives of his fifty loyal boys. Judith Fetterley has indicated that Hank's increasing aggressiveness is related to his situation as an outsider in sixth-century society. Holding no title or inherited name, Hank has no place in the social system that would ensure respect or even reverence. As he himself observes:

Here I was, a giant among pigmies, a man among children, a master intelligence among intellectual moles: by all rational measurement the one and only actually great man in that whole British world; and yet there and then, just as in the remote England of my birth-time, the sheep-witted earl who could claim long descent from a king's leman, acquired at second-hand from the slums of London, was a better man than I was. (43)

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<sup>4</sup> The parallel between Hank's project and Bellamy's vision is of course at most conceptual and not warranted by the chronology of the composition of *A Connecticut Yankee*. Mark Twain is said to have read *Looking Backward* in March 1889 and to have been impressed by Bellamy's book (Armytage 81), but by that time he had practically finished *A Connecticut Yankee* (Smith 40-41). Smith's observation that "the landscape of Britain is described by means of words and images identical with those Mark Twain would apply in his *Autobiography* to the Quaker Farm near Hannibal that he had known as a boy" (83), suggests that the contrastive setting of *A Connecticut Yankee* expresses a similar nostalgia as *Looking Backward*. Further parallels between the two books are discussed in Donald E. Winters' essay on "The Utopianism of Survival."

The only admiration the Yankee can gain is based on intimidation and spectacular effects, and he is well aware that this ultimately depends on people's gullibility and fear. Thus his isolation is exacerbated by a growing contempt for people and a sense of betrayal by which Hank projects into his world his own failure to use his power to improve people's lives. This isolation culminates in the ultimate confrontation, emphatically conceived as "*All England*" marching against the Yankee and his boys (247).

These psychological contradictions, as Richard Pressman has suggested, also mirror the ideological contradictions between democracy and authoritarianism at the heart of Hank's republican project. Ostensibly, the Yankee wants to establish freedom of trade and equality of opportunity, but his approach, based on management methods of his own time, makes him unwilling to relinquish his control and advantage. Pressman points out that in this Hank's procedure reflects the ideology of what *laissez-faire* capitalism had become in Twain's own day:

The capitalist wants freedom of action in the marketplace for himself, while he wants restriction on the freedom of others. In the war of competitive enterprise, he wants his competitors to be restrained, while he wants an absence of restraint upon himself. He wants to defend the *theory* that everyone should have such freedom (democracy), while he wants to defend the *practice* by which the great majority of people do not (authoritarianism). The contradiction in Hank Morgan's character is innate in capitalism itself. (476)

According to Pressman, in staging a confrontation between *laissez-faire* capitalism and feudalism, Twain misplaced the issues of his own time, where the fight for *laissez-faire* was against an "ascendent monopoly capitalism" (477), which was becoming increasingly autocratic. It is true that *A Connecticut Yankee* largely sidesteps "the conflicts between labor and management so prevalent at the time" (478). Twain indeed seems more interested in the effects of a collusion between corporate capital and emergent "big" government, embodied in Hank Morgan. Yet by showing his protagonist in rivalry with, rather than in true opposition to, the power structure of a feudal society, he highlights the political regressiveness of the economic development of his own time. Hank Morgan himself betrays and destroys the republican civilization he claims to defend. This regressiveness is of course most obvious at the end of the novel, when Hank and his boys are trapped in Merlin's cave by the piled-up corpses of 25,000 knights. Ironically, it is Merlin who "rescues" Hank and sends him back to where he



belongs. But equally significantly, Hank's reemergence in the nineteenth century is stillborn.

In comparison with the ending of Twain's novel, Julian West's rebirth in *Looking Backward* seems rather uncomplicated. Julian's self remains in a precarious state throughout his stay with the Leetes, and he depends on Dr. Leete's medicine and the calming effects of the musical telephone to lull him into peaceful sleep. Above all, however, it is Edith, Dr. Leete's daughter, who rescues Julian when he is on the verge of schizophrenia. It is Edith who accompanies him to the underground chamber from which he emerged after his 113-year long sleep, and it is Edith who helps him build that bridge to the twenty-first century by sharing his schizophrenia and acting the part of her great-grandmother, Edith Bartlett, who was Julian's fiancée in the old Boston. Towards the end of the novel, after Edith has disclosed her true identity and her love to Julian, he goes to sleep without medicine and without the assistance of the musical telephone, and promptly falls into a terrible nightmare in which he finds himself back in the Boston of 1887. For the recent convert to the Great Trust, the return to the nineteenth century becomes a descent to Hell, and his former compatriots appear to him like living dead, unaware of the potential within them:

As I looked, horrorstruck, from one death's face to another, I was affected by a singular hallucination. Like a wavering translucent spirit face superimposed upon each of these brutish masks I saw the ideal, the possible face that would have been the actual if mind and soul had lived. It was not till I was aware of these ghostly faces, and of the reproach that could not be gainsaid which was in their eyes, that the full piteousness of the ruin that had been wrought was revealed to me. (226)

When he finally makes his way to the home of his fiancée, he tries to convey to his former friends the vision of utopia that is still alive in him, but their reaction is only anger and scorn. As they proceed to throw him out of the house, he mercifully wakes up once again in Dr. Leete's house and is received by Edith, who, "fresh as the morning, ha[s] come into the garden and [is] gathering flowers" (231).

Julian's nightmare return to Boston remains disturbing, however, because it highlights the repressive aspects of his salvation. The guilt which he experiences on his second and final awakening in the year 2000, compromises the perfection of the peaceful revolution because it raises anew the question of the cost at which utopia was won, and of the fate of those he has left behind. Indeed, the industrial paradise is the result not so much of a

salvation as of an elimination of the nineteenth-century underclass. Again, the figure of Dr. Leete, the only real representative of the new order in the book, is symptomatic. Not only are his manners and his conversational conventions so similar to West's as to suggest that the comfortable middle-class of the nineteenth century has entered utopia unchanged. As a physician occupying a privileged position in the new society, he also represents the more sinister and repressive methods by which the perfect society is engineered. As Dr. Leete explains to Julian West, the labor organizations of the nineteenth century played no role in the establishment of the new order, "except to hinder it" (182). In the present of the year 2000, dissent is largely prevented by education, but a man who persistently refuses to conform, "is sentenced to solitary imprisonment on bread and water till he consents" (107). Such individuals are also otherwise ostracized and effectively prevented from marrying, which, as Sylvia Strauss has observed, amounts to "a rough form of eugenics, for dissidents would be unable to reproduce themselves and perpetuate their [kind]" (76). Similarly, the Great Trust has abolished the concept of criminals and the institution of the prison. In the year 2000, as Dr. Leete points out, social deviants are considered as "cases of atavism" and "treated in the hospitals" (150). Thus "[b]rutishness is eliminated" (163) in utopia, but the way this is achieved suggests that *Looking Backward* anticipated more of the twentieth century than just its enthusiasm for the perfection of technology.

As the fictional testimonies of two individuals' sudden isolation and their encounters with a power surrounded by an aura of magic, *A Connecticut Yankee* and *Looking Backward* reflect the emergent predicament of the modern intellectual. Edward Said's description of the intellectual "as a representative figure" in more than one sense, and as an individual "with a vocation for the art of representing" (10), applies to both Hank Morgan and Julian West. Both are not intellectuals originally, but representatives of their class or social group. Hank, the practical "Yankee of the Yankees" (8), is more likely to engage in a brawl than in intellectual dispute, and Julian, although exhibiting the symptoms of American nervousness that George Beard diagnosed for the sensitive middle class of the late nineteenth century, is rather complacently at home in his social circle up to the night of 30 May 1887. Stranded in distant times, however, they suddenly find themselves in the positions of representatives of certain norms and values in a crisis of legitimation. This sudden investment with the burden of representation strains their identities to breaking point and moves both Hank and Julian to record their exemplary lives for an uncertainly perceived posterity. Hank's

testimony is based on his diary and, in view of his sense of betrayal and failure, reads like a self-addressed confession. Julian's record meanwhile, although ostensibly written for a twentieth-century audience, more readily seems to serve the purpose of convincing himself of his conversion, thereby allowing him to escape the isolation of a position which, in his own words, "is so much more utterly alone than any human being's ever was before that a new word is really needed to describe it" (209).

Above all, it is tempting to read the isolation of the two protagonists, their homelessness and their drift towards accommodation, as highlighting the tension between critical vocation and professional containment, which, according to Said (49-62), was to become a principal characteristic of the modern intellectual position. Hank Morgan, for instance, never quite stops seeing his outsider position as that of a challenger of the established power structure on behalf of a submissive multitude. His alleged agenda is roughly based on the values of the French Revolution, which he wants to precipitate in the sixth century, avoiding, if possible, a reign of terror. As the former head superintendent of a major factory, however, he perceives his task primarily in terms of management and discipline, and his position as boss. This inevitably leads him more into rivalry with, than into opposition to, the established power. A crucial experience in this process is his failure to persuade Dowley and his companions of the superiority of his economic theory in rational debate. Unable to persuade people with arguments, he henceforth relies only on spectacular effects to ensure consent, and his emancipatory project degenerates into an obsession with control and an overpowering contempt for sixth-century society.

In contrast to Hank, Julian is a rather more passive outsider in utopia. Having experienced a severe personality crisis when venturing into town on his own on his first day in the year 2000, he subsequently is content to listen to Dr. Leete and to accompany Edith on her shopping trips. As a listener to his host, Julian is weak, failing to challenge the doctor on the practice of eugenics and the abolition of legislation. Neither does he criticize Edith's Victorian manners and coquettishness, which are inconsistent with the status of women as represented by Dr. Leete. Nevertheless, he suffers from his exclusion from the industrial army, and his isolation is exacerbated by the guilt which he feels toward nineteenth-century contemporaries. In his dream, Julian gets his chance to confront his complacent society as an uncomfortable intellectual. But although he eloquently urges his listeners to endorse his vision of utopia, he fails to persuade them. At the end of the novel, he gladly accepts his personal salvation. Julian settles down in utopia

and, as the preface suggests, takes up Dr. Leete's offer of a professorship in history, where his function is to teach the gospel of the Great Trust to a society no less complacent than that which he has left behind.

The pressures, psychological and ideological, that move Hank Morgan and Julian West to abandon or avoid reasoned dissent and to seek their success or salvation in a career, indicate the problem of critical agency as it began to confront intellectuals at the end of the last century, when they were increasingly expected to assume positions of professional leadership.<sup>5</sup> As writers in a time when literary production became more and more subject to the vagaries of a mass market economy that transformed public life, Mark Twain and Edward Bellamy had to confront this problem of agency in terms of a waning critical distance and an uncertain audience control. This no doubt in part motivated their choice to rely on particular and similar literary effects to launch their interventions in the political and economic crisis of their day. Both novels highlight the ideological crisis of their time in mythical and utopian forms, and both surround their protagonists' testimonies with ironical frames that increase their symbolical complexity. But this is also where the two books crucially differ: *Looking Backward*, for all its punning on retrospection, is firmly settled in the conventional form of a romance, and while this, for a few years, may have gained the book a phenomenal popularity, it could not make Bellamy's vision enduring. Mark Twain pushes his irony much further. Going far beyond a stable satire, it remains a disturbing and unsettling feature of *A Connecticut Yankee*, which makes it persistently difficult to judge where the text's failure begins and its success ends.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> To suggest that the problem of the compatibility of a critical vocation with a professional career was an emergent problem for the intellectual in this form, is not to say that it could not be solved. As Warren Susman suggests, in the period between 1890 and 1940 the profession of history seemed to offer the intellectual a position in which the disenchanted critique of the official ideology could be brought to the task of cultural leadership. If this development is foreshadowed in *Looking Backward*, it would seem to throw an ironical light on Bellamy's rather anti-historical utopianism.

<sup>6</sup> Henry Nash Smith has suggested that, given the signs of Twain's identification with Hank, Hank's failure also amounts to a failure of the novel as a whole. I rather tend to agree with John Carlos Rowe's recent assessment of *A Connecticut Yankee*, which grants the novel greater critical insight but at the same time questions the author's awareness of it: "Twain did not understand, however, what he had himself written, or perhaps what had been telegraphed by the cultural unconscious that worked so fantastically through Twain" (188).

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