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1. Utopias as Political Poetry

Two poems purporting to be by the poet laureate of Utopia were prefixed to More’s *Utopia* by his Dutch friend Peter Giles, whose house is the setting for the narrative. One of them says:1

Me Utopie cleped Antiquity,
Void of haunt and herborough,
Now I am like to Plato's city,
Whose fame flieth the world thorough;
Yea, like, or rather more likely
Plato's plat to excell and pass.
For what Plato's pen hath platted briefly
In naked words, as in a glass,
The same have I performed fully,
With laws, with men, and treasure fitly.
Wherefore not Utopie, but rather rightly
My name is Eutopie: a place of felicity [21].

I cannot resist first quoting from the original of the other, which is given in the Utopian language and alphabet:

*Bargol he maglomi baccan soma gymnosophaon.*

*Agrama gymnosophon labarem bacha bodamilomin.*

I one of all other without philosophy
Have shaped for man a philosophical city [19].

Both poems make the same point. Utopia surpasses other cities “platted briefly in words” by its actuality. The original of this claim is to be found in Plutarch’s *Lives*, where it is made for the work of Lycurgus, the Spartan polity:

... all those who have written well on politics, as Plato, Diogenes and Zeno, have taken Lycurgus for their model, leaving behind them, however, mere projects and words; whereas Lycurgus was the author, not in writing but in reality, of a government which none else could so much as copy; and while men in general have treated the individual philosophic character as unattainable, he by the example of a complete philosophic city raised himself high above all the other lawgivers of Greece [Lycurgus, ch. xxxi].

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References to works named in the text are by standard divisions.
Now the utterly obvious observation that Utopia is not "actual" in quite the same way Sparta was can serve to introduce the question concerning the way in which a utopia has being.

The answer to the question is not hard to formulate. Utopias are communities constructed in the imagination and expressed in words; they are word pictures, a kind of poetry. Their "reality" is nothing but their imaginative vividness. Or, to put it negatively: What Utopia shares with Sparta is the absence of "naked words"; just as Lycursus "would never reduce his laws to writing" but made Sparta to embody them, so Utopia pictures its polity. Accordingly, Sir Philip Sidney includes the book Utopia among the poetic works in his Defense of Poesie and says of the utopian poet:

... whatsoever the philosopher saith should be done, he gives a perfect picture of it in some one by whom he presupposeth it was done; so as he coupleth the general notion with the particular example. A perfect picture I say, for he yieldeth to the powers of the mind an image of that whereof the philosopher bestoweth but a wordish description, which doth neither strike, pierce, nor possess the sight of the soul so much as that other doth [para. 21].

Utopias, then, may be called political poetry and belong to the faculty of the imagination. It remains to be seen whether Sidney is right in claiming that this "feigned city" of the poet is an image in the particular of the philosopher's city, or whether it is perhaps rather a place in its very nature without philosophy."

2. Utopias as Daydreams

The first kind of imagining that utopias suggest is daydreaming, a sort of exoteric dreaming undertaken by one man in behalf of a band unified by a common desire. In the case of the first utopia this aspect is expressed in the playful web of make-believe factuality spun about the island of Utopia by More and his international circle of friends (3-45, 249-53), such as Peter Giles' mellifluous Utopian language, and so persuasive was this pleasant conspiracy that a certain cleric could be reported to have expressed a longing to be sent to Utopia by the Pope as bishop (43). In just this vein More wrote to Erasmus telling of a daydream in which he had seen himself as the chosen king of Utopia "marching along crowned with a diadem of wheat, very striking in my Franciscan garb" (c. December 4, 1516).

There is a whole class of such utopian daydreams. Among these are the foundation of More's reader Rabelais, the community founded by Gargantua, the son-in-law of the king of More's Utopia, which is called the Abbey of Thélème, the Abbey of Wish (Gargantua and Pantagruel, I, 5), and the commonwealth of simple Gonzales in The Tempest, who, like More, makes himself king of a state. In his realm Gonzales would "by contraries execute all things":

... for no kind of traffic
Would I admit; no name of magistrate;
Letters should not be known; riches, poverty,
And use of service, none; contract, succession,
Bourn, bound of land, tilth, vineyard, none; . . .

. . .
All things in common nature should produce
Without sweat or endeavor. . . [II, 1].

Such utopias, be they more witty or more naive, are as lands wished but not willed.

But this aspect of utopias as Lands of Cockayne, places either of effortless virtue or easy pleasure, is inadequate. In fact, More's Utopia—and almost every subsequent utopian construction—is a sober and disciplined place, which, although More's contemporaries delighted in its virtuous ways (e.g., 29), induces strong misgivings in more recent readers. These misgivings concern, interestingly enough, not the obvious weakness of utopias, that irresponsibly diversionary nature for which they were castigated by Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto* as unscientific and ultimately reactionary (III, 3). On the contrary, the dissatisfaction comes precisely from the apprehension of utopias as practical proposals. Utopias offend because they are felt to be "static": monotonous, regimented, drably uniform, barrenly restrictive. So Mumford, for instance, thinks of every utopia as a kind of human machine, to be regarded as original social evil, as "kakotopia or hell"; while another writer entitles an article on More's *Utopia* "A Detestable State." 

3. More Against His Own Utopia

The most significant fact, however, in considering why utopias are so often unacceptable is More's own relation to his book. I shall give an abbreviated list of items in respect to which More expressed disapprobation of his own Utopian institutions. It includes almost every feature that is fundamental.

He comments in his own behalf both at the end of the first and the second of its two books, in each case after Raphael Hythloday, the discoverer of Utopia, has finished speaking. In the second book he says:

. . . many things came to my mind which in the manners and laws of that people seemed to be instituted and founded of no good reason, not only in the fashion of their chivalry and in their sacrifices and religion and in others of their laws, but also, yea, and chiefly, in that which is the principal foundation of all their ordinances, that is to say, in the community of their life and living without occupying of money . . . [245].

More still opposed Hythloday's most forcefully expressed opinion, that this is "the only way to wealth in a commonality, if equality of wealth should be brought in and established" in his last year in the Tower, when

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he wrote in the *Dialogue of Comfort* that if all the wealth were portioned out equally "it would be on the morrow after worse than it was the day before. . . . For surely the rich man's substance is the wellspring of the poor man's living" (II, 22). In fact, far from regarding communism, with his narrator, as Christian, More condemned it as one of the "horrible heresies" of the Anabaptists in his *Confutation of Tyndale's Answer*.

Even more fundamental than the communism of the Utopians is their love of pleasure: "... they think that all our actions, and in them the virtues themselves, be referred at last to pleasure as their end and felicity," and they regard religious ascetics as holy but not quite sane (167, 227). But More, who is reported in the *Life* written by his son-in-law Roper secretly to have worn a hair shirt next to his skin and to have punished his body with whips, considered, with his model Pico, that "a perfect man should abstain not only from unlawful pleasures but from lawful."²⁵

Again, the Utopians permit free choice of religion, and therefore have no idea of doctrinal heresy (221). More, on the other hand, argues in several places, for instance, in the *Dialogue on Heresies* (IV, 13), that heretical books should not be suffered to go abroad and that the burning of heretics is sometimes "lawful, necessary, and well done." Moreover, one of the first Utopians to be baptized immediately preaches the faith with so much zeal as to show Christianity and toleration in effect incompatible (219).

The Utopian priests recommend suicide to the desperately sick (187) —More regards it as a devilish temptation under all circumstances (*Dialogue of Comfort*, II, 16); the Utopians permit divorce under the condition of incompatibility (191) —More opposed it unto death; the Utopians use no images in their worship (233) —More strenuously defends their necessity (*Dialogue on Heresies*, I, 3).

How then did More manage to conjure up the image of an ideal commonwealth whose institutions were so thoroughly contrary to his own views?

Nicholas Harpsfield, in the first formal biography of More, speaks of *Utopia* as follows:

But the book that beareth the prickt and price of all his other Latin books of witty invention, for profane matters, is his *Utopia*. He painteth me it forth so lively and so pleasantly, as it were an exquisite platform, pattern and example of a singular


good commonwealth, as to the same neither the Lacedaemonians', nor the Athenians', not yet, the best of all others, the Romans' commonwealth is comparable. Prettily and probably devising the said commonwealth to be in one of the countries of the new found lands declared unto him at Antwerp by Hythlodae, a Portuguese, and one of the sea companions of Americus Vespusius, that first sought out and found these lands; such an excellent and absolute state of commonwealth that, saving the people were unchristian, might seem to pass any state and commonwealth, I will not say of the old nations by me rehearsed, but even of any other even in our time.  

Harsfield has put his finger on what might seem to be the answer to the question—the Utopians are not Christians, while More himself was a most devout Christian. But that is not a sufficient explanation, for first of all, More's friends, for instance, the scholar Budé, thought of Utopia as possessing "the true wisdom of Christianity for public and private life" uncorrupted (11). And even if, as will be shown, his friends were deceived, it does not explain why More should have chosen to imagine "the best state of the commonwealth" on the one hand as pagan, but on the other, as pagan of such a sort that it might readily be mistaken for Christian.

Thus, in sum, it appears that the first Utopia is not a mere dream, although it is a complex and characteristic product of the imagination as opposed to the intellect, a city which "without philosophy has shaped for man a philosophical city," a very "witty invention" and subtle almost to the point of perversity.

4. Utopias as Products of the Imagination

Since reflection on such a place ought to begin with a brief inquiry into the imagination itself, it seems justifiable to cite the treatise On the Imagination by Pico della Mirandola, the model of More's life, whose biography More had composed in his youth. Pico's treatise, a Renaissance work, draws on the whole tradition concerning the faculty of the imagination, especially on Plato and Aristotle's De Anima. It is well to note here that as a Christian work of moral intention the treatise deprecates the productive or poetic fantasy, while as a pre-Romantic summary it knows nothing of the "creative" imagination as a faculty for the deliberate innovation of pure "artistic" form. But this will make no difficulty in the case of Utopian genres which will appear to be neither quite poetry, nor, indeed, "art" at all. Pico says:

... the foundation-stone of the discussion we have undertaken... is that there exists a power of the soul which conceives and fashions likenesses of things, and serves, and ministers to, both the cursive reason and the contemplative intellect; and to this power has been given the name phantasy or imagination [ch. IV].

The product of "phantasy" can be called an "arrest of things that have appeared" (Greek: stasis phanthenton) or, as Plato says, a "picture,"

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7 Ibid., p. 110.
because "the various appearances receive form and are fashioned at will, in a manner not unlike that in which painters depict the various and dissimilar forms of things" (ch. I). However, this deliberately constructive and combinatorial productive "phantasy" is not a power separable from the reproductive imagination that fashions a purified but particular likeness of an object of sense no longer naturally present (chs. II, IV). Men's lives are largely governed by this power. For it is to the imagination that the sense consigns, in the form of "perpetual sense impressions," what it has drawn from without; such sense memories become the objects that the imagination, acting as a mean between sense and the rational part of the soul, supplies for recognition by the latter as objects of desire or ends of action (chs. V, VI).

The modes of imaginary communities do indeed seem to be in accord with the imagination so described.

First of all, utopias have the modes of pictures, although of pictures readily expressed in speech. Hence they are usually accompanied by maps, plans, and views. Furthermore, since they are conceived in the world-mirroring power as pictures of perfect and self-sufficient human wholes, they are, or at least the early utopias often are, microcosms, cosmographic miniatures that project the whole world into the island or the city. Thus Andreae calls his island of Christianopolis "a whole world in miniature" (ch. II), and Campanella's City of the Sun is in fact a cosmological model. The island of Utopia itself was once, to signify that it is a world unto itself, called by the occult name "Abraxa," which signifies the highest, all-encompassing heaven. In this, utopias display that world-feigning power of the fantasy, which Tolkien calls "the Sub-creative Art."9 A corroborative contrast to this original, premodern, utopian mode is offered by A Modern Utopia, in which Wells projects the trends of progress onto a whole fictive counter-earth, in contrast to the original utopias, which are small, well-framed, and symbolic place-pictures.

Furthermore, utopian communities, because they are visually conceived, exhibit brightly delineated styles of life, usually leaning to one or the other extreme of possible public form. Some utopias, especially those celebrating technique, like the old Atlantis of Plato's Critias, display a somewhat sinister splendor, or like Bacon's New Atlantis, a mysterious but punctilious ritual magnificence; others, like Houyhnhnm Land in Gulliver's Travels, are depicted as rejoicing in sedate and sober rustic decorousness; Utopia itself, with its Franciscan monastic habits and absence of gilded ornament — gold is used only to make fetters and chamber pots (153)— furnished the first example of the latter style. And indeed, Swift [who numbered More in the unmatchable sextumvirate of statesmen that includes Socrates' name (III, 7)] said of his horses, which are falsely rumored to have "no more existence than the inhabitants of Utopia" (Prefatory Letter), that they have not even a name for the vice of pride (IV, 12); thus they

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are, in their simplicity of life, first cousins of the Utopians, whose essence is, as we shall see, precisely the absence of pride and magnificence. Harpsfield calls "quasi-christalline structures" to because it is in the nature of the imagination, are "arrested appearances," and as such, motionless and fleshless. Hence a static and two-dimensional character does almost invariably pervade utopia; it is flatly formed, an "exquisite platform," in Harpsfield's apt phrase. It is this in utopia that offends those modern critics who regard social mobility and opportunity for experience as necessary conditions for a good society. Utopias are what Lévi-Strauss Circumstantially painted though they may be, utopias, as beings of the imagination to arrest motion.

Secondly, utopias show modes of place and time that are appropriate to their origin in the imagination.

Augustine, in his Confessions, writes of his imaginative memory as containing "the fields and spacious palaces of memory, where are the treasures of innumerable images, brought into it from things of all sorts perceived by the senses." These images can be recalled and reconstructed at pleasure:

All this do I within, in that huge court of my memory. For there have I in readiness the heaven, the earth, the sea. ... Yet did I not swallow them into me by seeing, whenas with mine eyes I beheld them. Nor are the things themselves now within me, but the images of them only [X, 8].

The imagination then is a power of unreal places that can be visited at will. Most utopias appear to have their origin in such voyages within the imagination; they are places of the imagination expressed as imaginary places. Therefore almost all in fact have the form of narrations of voyages of discovery. The Odyssey is the prototype, and the narrator of Utopia is indeed compared to Odysseus (49). In fact, Odysseus' last discovery, Phaeacia, is almost a prototypical utopia: a sea land not of earthly but of nautical beings dispersing themselves, as we shall see the Utopians do, in safe and stable luxury between nature and artifice, and as Scheria, the Sheared-off Land, forever lost to the world once a human narrator has penetrated it (Odyssey, XIII, 146 ff.).

But utopian voyages differ from odysseys in the mode of their fictitiousness. For utopias are not pure inventions but images whose existence is—on one level—ardently desired. Hence their descriptions do not have the ingenious verisimilitude appropriate to tales of adventure. For while they strive "to bear a good countenance of truth" (such as Utopia bore, Harpsfield says, by reason of appearing at a time in which "many strange and unknown nations and many conclusions were discovered"), insofar as utopian accounts are ardently interested in existence, being institutions of desire in the places of the imagination, they intrude the fact of the unreality of their place purposefully and persistently—the very word "utopia" means "no-place."

10 Inaugural lecture at the Collège de France.
But what most intimately characterizes utopias is that they tamper with time.

They do so because the sole source of the imagination is the past; it is stocked with the "perpetual sense impressions" left by what is no longer present, and so is a commemorative power, a power of bringing the past, stamped with the seal of perfection, into the present or into an otherwise empty future. Hence the products of the imagination are often cast in the past tense, in the "once upon a time"; hence the golden age is the paradigm product of this purifying and simplifying imagination. That resurrector of the past, Don Quixote, appropriately paints a picture of it, and it is one that has much in common with the first utopia: no "mine" and "thine," no gold or ornament, no going to law (I, 11). But since utopias invariably stand as accusations against a particular present, they are often resurrections of a particular past, civic myths representing the pristine community "behind" the degenerate actual one. Thus they share the nostalgia, the "aching for a return," which animates their private counterpart, the idyll, a genre that Schiller characterized as putting the end behind rather than before (On Naive and Sentimental Poetry, "Idylls"). An example of this kind of utopia is the never-written tale promised in Plato's Timaeus, the "festivity" prepared for Socrates' pleasure in which the polity of the Republic was to be imaginatively realized in a moving picture, planned as an account of the primeval Athens (st. 24). So also Utopia with its fifty-four cities, corresponding in number to the English shires, its capital Amaurotum, the "Darkling City" built like a foggy but salubrious London, and its unenclosed countryside unspoiled by rampaging sheep and fostered in harmonious balance with the cities, presents the old and merry England behind that of the fallen present.

Sometimes in the later utopias, the past is brought not into the present but into the future, as in Morris' News from Nowhere, which is a revival of a pastoral England in cinquecento garb projected into a future century. Here the device used for tampering with the time sequence is the Odyssean one of translation during sleep (Odyssey, XIII, 187), which projects the narrator, like Rip van Winkle, into the future, having conveniently killed the crucial time of crisis during which the world is converted into utopia; such future utopias are not so much "feigned common-wealths" as half-hopeful plans presented in pictures. Again there is a confirming contrary type of modern "utopia," that in which the past is suppressed and the present projected into the future. Since utopias by their nature arise from dissatisfaction with the present, those that do not draw on the past are utopias of terror, in which the evils incipient in the present are (excepting some products of an invincibly optimistic era like Bellamy's Looking Backward) projected on a magnified scale into the frightening void of the future and there depicted with fascinated and even avid horror, and—that being the nature of the imagination—even glory in their terrors. Such anti-utopias are warnings based on a modern notion of history as progress, but in this case as pejorative progress. The best-known
examples of futurist utopias are Huxley's *Brave New World* and Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and it is significant that both, but particularly the latter, understand the realization of their nightmare to depend primarily on the obliterating of the past.

All this is not to say that as *political* poetry, *Utopia* is not very much a work of the intellect as well as of the imagination, but that thought in this case draws out and carries to their last conclusion the principles specifically appropriate to a product primarily of the imagination.

5. The Special Place and Time of Utopia

More's book shows itself most clearly as a reflection on the political imagination in the special modes of time and place it employs.

"Utopia" (ou-topia) is Greek and means "no-place," or, to render the exact meaning of the negative adverb "ou," "no place actually in existence" (as contrasted with a possible "me-topia," "non-place" or "un-place," that is, not having the property of place). *Utopia* is a place of the imagination worldly in all respects but that it lacks bodily existence, the quality of being there, that is, of real location. More signifies this by having Hythloday fail to specify exact geographic coordinates, although as the counterpart of England, he places *Utopia* as far south of the equator as England is north (197), and as a land reached by a member of Amerigo Vespucci's expedition (51), in the new world (so that ever since the Americas have been the place for the splendidly self-contradictory enterprise of locating *Utopia*). In addition, some of the names, especially the place names of this region, are privative, like the land "Achoria" (Un-country), and the river "Anydrus" (Waterless) (251). More and his friends engaged in much pleasantry concerning this lack of geographic placement, giving each other circumstantial explanations of how the location came to be omitted in the account (23) and earnest commissions to inquire further of Hythloday (43). This game underscores the claim that More's *Utopia*, although feigned in the imagination, is also in its way a place on earth—in deliberate contrast to Plato's polity, a product of the intellect about which Socrates says that "it is a pattern laid up in heaven" (st. 592).

Now, curiously, vague as is *Utopia*'s location in place, its setting in time is very precise. Three exact dates are supplied: the date of its founding, according to the annals of *Utopia* 1,760 years before Hythloday's account in 1516 (121), that is, in 244 B.C.; the arrival of some Romans and Egyptians 1,200 years ago (109), that is, in the beginning of the fourth century A.D.; and the arrival of Hythloday's company, who were left behind during Amerigo Vespucci's last voyage which took place in 1504.

Each of these dates is significant. *Utopia*'s present government was founded in the first year of the rule of King Agis IV of Sparta, who lost his life in an unsuccessful attempt to revive the long-lived—but far short of perpetual—constitution of Sparta's original lawgiver, Lycurgus. Lycurgus had instituted "a common way of life" not unlike that of Utopus except
that land was privately held, though equally shared out, and not within the disposal of the holder; this latter provision had been nullified by a law that, Plutarch says, was "the ruin of the best state of the commonwealth," since it permitted the accumulation of wealth (*Life of Agis*, ch. V). Utopia is thus marked as Sparta's purer and stabler double.

The Romans and Egyptians—note, no Greeks—arrived just before Constantine made Christianity the Roman state religion, so that these bearers of the useful arts and inventions of Rome and perhaps of the sectarian wisdom of Egypt might be understood to have come without either the texts of the waning Greek philosophy (159) or the news of the rising Christian faith. And finally, Hythloday arrives with a light load of humanistic learning (which—a clever touch—a monkey has well chewed into).

The effect of these three dates is to mark the Utopians as being outside of the tragedies and passions, the rises and declines of our, human, history. They have a beginning but no genesis—Utopus simply lifts a "rude and wild people to that excellent perfection in all good fashions, humanity, and civil gentleness, wherein they now go beyond all the people of the world..." (113). Hence they live in natural but not in human times, they are not atemporal but they are, to use a modern term, ahistoric, that is to say, they are not bound by the conditions that arise from prior human action and passion, in particular from that primeval historical event for Christians, *the fall of man*. Hythloday startlingly observes of the Utopians that if their chronicles are to be believed "cities were there before men were here" (107). In other words, the Utopians are not descended from Adam, since they antedate him, nor, it would follow, are they creatures in the sense of *Genesis*, namely such as are capable of rebellion against their creator.

More's friend Budé was therefore right when in his prefatory letter he named Utopia alternately "Udepotía" (No-when) (11), if that is taken to mean something more significant than merely "at no time," namely, "outside the epoch of created humanity." But he was, as we shall see, wrong in naming it also "Hagnopolis" (Holy City) (13), that is, in considering it the New Jerusalem. [Here Bacon's new Pacific, that is to say, peaceful, Atlantis is more in the spirit of More's secular city, as Bacon signifies by calling the Atlantic capital "Bensalem" (*Good Salem*), as opposed to "Hierousalem" (*Holy Salem*].

The diverse treatment of place and time in Utopia rests, of course, on the fact that communities very remote from each other in place yet share the same time. So the land Utopia is sufficiently an imaginary place in being simply a New World, *terra incognita*, but the Utopian inhabitants must be distinguished as being imaginary natures by living through a time precisely parallel to, and hence vividly distinguishable from, ours.

6. More's Utopia as the "First City" of Plato's Republic

A very good way further to define Utopia as a city having its place and time in the imagination is to see it in the light of its ostensible source and
defeated rival, the polity that is preeminently the product of the intellect, namely that set out in Plato's Republic. Plato is the name most frequently in Hythloday's mouth, although he has that reduced view of the Platonic teachings that will turn out to be appropriate to his enterprise. Now when he particularly speaks of "those things that Plato feigneth in his weal-public or that the Utopians do in theirs," he is referring to Utopia's communism.

In Plato's dialogue Socrates raises the question "What is justice?" The way of answering this question assumes that justice is to be found in the relation of the parts of the human soul and that political communities are manifested expressions of these relations. He therefore constructs a sequence of three cities, each arising by the addition of a part of the soul and corresponding to the dominance of that part, proceeding in order from the most supine and common to the most superior and rare constituent of the soul.

Now the city in which a common way of life obtains is only the third city, which is under the dominion of the reasonable part of the soul, that is to say, which is ruled by philosopher kings. And even in this, the "philosophical city," only the rulers and their warrior auxiliaries live communally: "...no one was to have any of the ordinary possessions of mankind. They were to be warrior athletes and guardians, receiving from the other citizens instead of annual payment only their maintenance..." (st. 543). This is the first principle of unity of the philosopher's city; the second, and as Socrates acknowledges, even more offensive one is "that the wives of our guardians are to be common, and their children common and no person is to know his own child, nor any child his parent" (st. 457).

Since the social foundation of Utopia is the family, or rather the extended family or household (135), it certainly does not share the human aspect of Socrates' communism. But neither does it share the economic one.

The actual title of the book referred to as Utopia is On The Best State of the Commonwealth (47). The Latin term translated by "commonwealth" is "res publica." Sir Thomas Elyot, one of More's posthumous circle, in his Book named the Governor, speaks of the implications of this translation, referring to those who "do suppose it so to be called for that, that everything should be to all men in common without discrepancy of an estate or condition" (I, 1). Hythloday more than once alludes to this meaning of shared wealth. And precisely here lies the distinction between the two "repubilics," Utopia and the philosopher's city: The communism of the latter is an ascetic communism of poverty and deprivation (st. 466), while Utopian communism means shared or common wealth or well-being (239). If Utopia has anything to do with Plato's polity, it is not with its third or philosophical city—as Peter Giles' poem had hinted.

The first Socratic city corresponds to the desiring part of the soul and has two stages. In the beginning there arises a "city of craftsmen," a small,
simple, moderate, and merry community based on division of labor for
the purpose of satisfying basic necessities (st. 370). Then, as desires become
more complex and luxurious, the city of craftsmen, which Socrates calls
the "true and healthy city," undergoes a transformation and becomes,
in his word, feverish. To the simple crafts are added the arts of the embroi-
derer, gold and ivory are used, and people devoted to "forms and colors"
are introduced into the city (st. 373). This inflammation of desire makes
the city predatory and brings about the formation of a warrior class,
whose presence will institute the second city.

Now Utopia clearly corresponds to this first city, the "true and healthy
city" of craftsmen. There is a sign of this in the following. When Socrates'
interlocutor Glauclus first hears a description of their simple and healthy
banquets, he exclaims that this is a "city of pigs" (st. 372), by which he
does not mean that they wallow but that they like simple and natural
foods. Accordingly, the lowest official of Utopia, who sits over thirty
families and whose chief function is the control of idleness, is one "which
in their old language is called the Syphogrant, and by a newer name the
Philarch" (123). Both terms are Greek (for the Utopians are said to be
descended from the Greeks); phylarch means "tribal ruler," but syphogrant
means "pig-sty elder." The next higher officials, who rule over ten sties,
are called "tranibors" or "protophylarchs," namely, "first tribal rulers"
or "plain [or clear] eaters," meaning I suppose, that they eat perspicuously
prepared dishes.

Furthermore, the craftsmen of Socrates' city are limited to farmers,
weavers, shoemakers, carpenters, smiths, and merchants (st. 370). The
Utopians also limit their crafts to farming, which all alike do, and to these
special crafts: wool and linen working, masonry and metal working, and
merchandising (125). The Utopians, like the Socratic craftsmen, have
common banquets with converse and music (145).

But the Utopians never become luxurious. With them that sophistication
of the desires that is the occasion for the genesis of the second, the
warrior, city never arises. The part of the soul that dominates in this
second city is called by Socrates "spiritedness" (st. 375), which is a
certain readiness to righteous wrath and a disposition to honor. As we
have seen, the warring element is directly consequent on complexity of
desire, especially on a taste for magnificence and splendor—whence,
Socrates says, arise all evils in cities (st. 373), although it is from this
spirited element in turn that philosophy arises in Socrates' city, a good
alongside evils.

Magnificence, however, is totally absent in Utopia. The sign of this is
that there gold, the material of splendor and property, is debased into
the metal of bonds and baubles (153). This is a consequence of "the
community of their life and living without any occupying of money, by
the which thing only"—to continue More's criticism of Utopia quoted
above—"all nobility, magnificence, worship, honour, and majesty, the
ture ornaments and honours, as the common opinion is, of the common-
wealth, utterly be overthrown and destroyed..." (245). The Utopians
prefer comfort to honor. To be sure, they too make war, though only in defense of their borders or their friends’ rights, for they regard it with loathing as beastly (199), and they have no special class of warriors and no “chivalry”; their soldiers are the citizens of the land supplemented by mercenaries whenever possible. These citizen soldiers fight bravely, but they have no taste for gallantry, and “count nothing so much against glory as glory gotten in war” (201), always preferring to win through calculation and cunning, if possible. Among the Utopians only one class of people is rewarded by a marked display of honor—the virtuous dead (225).

7. The Utopians as a People Without Pride

The next question is what More means to signify by thus truncating the Republic in associating his Utopia with Plato’s city of craftsmen.

Plato’s first city is a natural city that arises naturally and whose citizens are close to nature, if nature is taken as the given and stable appearance within and without men. In this sense Utopia too is a natural city. As a sign of this, Utopians are said to have a language resembling Persian (181). For the description of the Persians in Herodotus’ History (I, 131), which, incidentally, Hythloday brings to Utopia, shows them as worshipers of nature who use no images, and who, unlike the Greeks and Christians, do not believe that the gods have the same nature as men, that is, that they can be imaged or made incarnate in human form. All this holds of the Utopians, of whom some are, to be sure, radical humanists who pray to a man as the highest god, but of whom many are pantheists and many worship the moon or one of the planets, while all agree on the worship of a sun god, who is the artificer of the universe and bears the Persian name Mithras (217)—It is only appropriate that the land that is a nowhere of the imagination [Nusquama, as More called it in Latin (xv)] cannot contain God the Creator, who according to Augustine has “nowhere a place” (nusquama locus) in the imaginative part of memory (X, 26).

So also all the crafts of Utopia are close to nature and, of course, particularly so the universal craft, farming. Sometimes the Utopians themselves act as a force of nature, as when King Utopus, the founder of Utopia, like a more felicitous Xerxes, cut the channel that made Utopia into an island (113), or when the chicks they artificially hatch adopt them as mothers (115), or when they transplant whole forests to have a closer source of wood (179). And they appear natural—their woollen garments, for instance, are natural in color. So even their artifice is an intelligent and familiar adaptation of nature to their own use; Utopia represents a perfect fusion of artifice and nature.

Thus the “unchristian” Utopians are not so much pagans as children of nature. This can be put another way.

To say that the Utopians correspond to the inhabitants of Plato’s first city only, is to say that they are lacking in certain principles of the soul, particularly in that which gives rise to and dominates the second or
warrior city and occasions in it magnificence, honor, and luxury—spiritedness, that is, self-assertion. Now the Christian translation of the faculty of spiritedness is the vice of pride.

Pride, "the craving for undue exaltation," says Augustine in his City of God (XIV, 13), was the origin of our evil will, that corruption of our nature that causes a self-assertive craving for forbidden fruit because it is forbidden. Pride is thus the origin of perversion in the nature of man, and as More says in his Four Last Things ("Of Pride"), "the very head and root of all sins," among which wrath and envy are the first and best known as children of pride, but which include even "gluttony, sloth, and lechery." Now as Hythloday points out, the Utopians have no such perverse feelings and pleasures—a sure sign of which is in their music, which expresses even their strongest affections without that consequent civil disruption that the wise lawgivers of ordinary mortals fear (Plato, Laws II). They have indeed no "taste infected by the sickness of sin"; they never prefer the bitter to the sweet, would never "liefer eat tar than treacle" (Four Last Things, "Infected Taste"); their desires are all satisfied by natural objects; they do not know the inverted pleasure of self-love; they are never unnatural. This is the case precisely because the Utopians were not created and therefore do not know that rebellion of the creature against its creator, called the fall of man, which is the original case of perverse pleasure. Hence they, unlike our pagans, are incapable of salvation by conversion to Christianity, although they absorb easily—for they are facile in absorbing everything profitable (109)—those features of Christianity superficially congenial to them (219). So it is by reason of their Utopian nature that Hythloday leaves them as "unchristian" as before his coming and only ostensibly because there is no priest among his company. It is then merely a consequence of their nature that their own teachings, which simply support their practice, are implicitly in opposition to Christianity on the crucial matter of the origin of sin. For they are, as we shall see in a moment, Epicureans, and a first dictum of the Epicureans is that "nothing comes out of nothing." But Augustine, again in The City of God, explains of fallen humanity "that it is a nature, this is because it is made by God; but that it falls away from Him, this is because it is made of nothing" (XIV, 13). The Utopians, then, not being descended from Adam, do not know the "serpent from hell," as Hythloday calls pride (243), identifying it with the tempter in the tree. "This hellhound," so Hythloday concludes his narration, "... is so deeply rooted in men's breasts, that she cannot be plucked out." Among the Utopians alone "the chief causes of ambition and sedition with other vices be plucked up by the roots. . . ." By this is not meant that individuals do not, somewhat unaccountably, on occasion go wrong (185), but that private crime is rare and political crime absent, so that there is among them an occasional private crime (187) but no large-scale manifestation of sin—they do not share the human condition. They display the characteristic conditionless character of imaginary cities in the form of original sinlessness.

In his youth More read a series of well-attended lectures on Augustine's
City of God, so we may well suppose that he considered the relation of his Utopia to the two cities of Augustine’s work, which “have been formed by two loves: the earthly city by the love of self, even to the contempt of God; the heavenly by the love of God even to the contempt of self” (XIV, 28). He must have conceived of the Utopians as a *tertium quid* whose nature is *nothing but* absence of perversions, who have neither contempt of God nor, as we shall see, contempt of self. Consequently they are made to inhabit an earthly paradise that displays the essential flat character of the painted city of the imagination: The missing dimension of the “exquisite platform” is original human evil, which, as the bas relief of nonbeing, lies beyond the likeness-making imagination. For the pictorial imagination, which in civil poetry touches badness with pleasure and turns terror into magnificence, in political poetry appropriately overlooks evil.

8. Utopia as a Community of Pleasure

But if Utopia is privative with respect to pride, it is positive with respect to pleasure. Freedom from the vices of the will is the particular condition that leaves the Utopians to the enjoyment of their goods, and that enjoyment is the end and center of their community. What is its nature? To answer that question, we must examine their education and their “philosophy.”

All major utopias follow Plato’s *Republic* in being essentially “educational provinces,” transforming Socrates’ deliberately imageless program of learning (st. 529) into vivid pictures of ideal institutions of instruction and inquiry. In the *Republic* itself, education forms both the political beginning and the philosophical end of the city. Campanella’s *City of the Sun* is itself nothing but a large teaching model, a museum for the induction of the citizens into the secrets of the cosmos; Andreea’s *Christianopolis* presents a vivid picture of a perfect Protestant school; and Bacon’s *New Atlantis* is dominated by the College of the Six Days Works, dedicated to the “interpretation of nature” for the sake of its mastery. But in the first Utopia this preoccupation takes a strange, although appropriate, form.

For only in the island of Utopia is education reduced to a pleasure, which, moreover, has pleasure for its object of concern. This view is encouraged by the rule of Utopian life, a firm disposition of time with respect to work and study, similar to that of a monastic order, as found in *St. Benedict’s Rule for Monasteries* (for example, ch. 48, “On the Daily Manual Labor”). Under it, the life of leisure, the classical condition for liberal learning, is replaced by a life of scheduled work with time freed for the election of lecture courses, and almost all of Utopia is indeed up before dawn to indulge in this superior amusement (129). But such activity plays the central role neither in forming rulers—Utopia is governed not by philosopher kings but by learned officials—nor in making citizens—when Utopians say “education,” they do not mean mainly instruction in their doctrines and letters but a rearing among
their own good institutions (159) supplemented by moral training directed by the priests (229). Nor, finally, does it lead to some inquiry whose end is beyond the city. Utopia, which surpasses Plato's city in being a living expression of philosophy, is itself without it—Peter Giles cleverly expresses this in his poem by making the Utopian word for "philosophy" refer to the Egyptian sect of Gymnosophoi, the "Naked Sages," worshipers of the Nile, whose simplicity of life was accompanied by great meagerness of thought and whose antics More and Giles will have found described in Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* (VI, 6 ff.).

The liberal arts are, to be sure, studied in Utopia [the Utopians have, without hearing of a single one of our philosophers (159), made the same discoveries in learning as the Europeans], though Hythloday never mentions a book of their own. Our *trivium*, which deals with the arts of language under grammar, rhetoric, and logic, is reduced by them to one *useful* art, dialectics, "the ways of reasoning which reasoning has observed useful for investigating things" as More defines it in a letter to Dorp.¹¹ Hythloday emphasizes their lack of concern with pure logic. They have no ability at all for speculating on any "second intention" or universal (159), the reflective product of the intellect "which," as More says elsewhere, "is nowhere" (437). No-place has nothing that is nowhere, no intellectual beings.

They possess the full *quadrivium*, which concerns the world of nature, and in it especially pursue astronomy (159), for they regard the world as a spectacle made for man—in fact the whole section on education appropriately comes within the section on sightseeing (145). They—characteristically—regard medicine as among the most useful branches of philosophy.

Now what characterizes this education is clearly the absence of almost all philosophy, and first of all an absence of physics understood as the inquiry into causes; they confine themselves to engaging in desultory and inconclusive debates, inventing new theories to add to those of the ancients (161). Second, there is a notable absence of politics; inquiries concerning "the best state of the commonwealth" are absent in the commonwealth that is the consequence of such interests. Public political debate outside the senate of tranibors is a capital offense (125). This prohibition is borrowed from the *Laws*, Plato's book on the second best but possible city, which, as one might expect, furnishes Utopia with more of its fundamental positive law than does the unrealizable *Republic*. More cites the relevant passage, significantly, in the *Dialogue Concerning Heresies*:

Plato, the great philosopher, specially forbiddeth those as be not admitted thereunto, nor men meet therefore, to meddle much and embusy themselves in reasoning and

disputing upon the temporal laws of the city, which would not be reasoned upon but by folks meet therefore, and in place convenient [III, 16].

And finally, as for metaphysics, that is, inquiries into being or god, they have none, but for their highest inquiry they conduct debates "in the part of philosophy which entreateth of manners and virtue," where they consider not "the good" but the various goods of soul and body. Having thus replaced metaphysics by ethics, their chief question is:

in what thing, be it one or more, the felicity of man consisteth. But in this point they seem almost too much given and inclined to the opinion of them which defend pleasure, wherein they determine either all or the chiefest part of men's felicity to rest. And (which is more to be marvelled at) their defense of this so dainty and delicate an opinion they fetch even from their grave, sharp, bitter and rigorous religion [161].

Indeed they never have any philosophical discussions without resorting to religious principles (161), thus employing the exact converse of More's often repeated contention that reason should and can serve religion (Dialogue Concernning Heresies, I, 23) and that theology is the end of a liberal education (Letter to Oxford University, March 29, 1518). The religious principles that they employ are two: They believe in a wise providence that governs the world and ordains felicity for man and in the immortality of the soul and its reward and punishment after death (161). In all other respects Utopians are free to choose what religious practices please them, but these two principles they are strictly forbidden to deny (221), for, as we shall see, they are the requirements of a communal pursuit of pleasure. In other words, their religious dogma has a political object; again Utopia borrows from the Laws (X).

Beyond this they have a public ritual, but as nature worshipers, no scripture or revelation. They hold their views as the best attainable by man's reason "unless godlier be inspired into man from heaven" (179). But this is not the case, for the Utopians have no revelation of their own, nor does Hythloday—who plays among them the role of a Renaissance scholar, reviving for them the Greek strain of their partly Hellenic and partly Persian heritage by bringing them Plato, Aristotle, Homer, and the Greek tragedians (181)—bring them a Bible or teach them Hebrew. Indeed, in Utopia the Hebrew references characteristic of succeeding utopias, like Solomon's House of the New Atlantis, the island Caphar Salama of Christianopolis, and the cabalistic background of the City of the Sun, are conspicuously absent.

Now the content of their doctrines of pleasure is, as one might guess, what we would call Epicurean, such as is conveniently set out in Cicero's De Finibus (I). It is the notoriously apolitical teaching of Epicurus modified to become the political philosophy of the most unlikely republic ever devised—a stable community of pleasure, "a commonwealth as shall continue and last not only wealthily, but also . . . shall endure for ever" (245).

These are the modifications the Utopians make: The Epicureans believe
that the gods, if there are any, do not guide the world—as mentioned before, the Utopians assert divine providence presumably because without it the natural circumstances of man would not necessarily be conducive to pleasure. The Epicureans believe that the soul dissolves with the body—the Utopians require the immortality of the soul to assure that the calculus of pleasures is not so short term as to admit impermissible or false pleasures. The Epicureans believe in private property (449)—the Utopians hold wealth in common for they regard all wealth as "materia voluptatis," the material of pleasure (165), though they abate their communism to the degree that privacy is necessary to pleasure; this is why they base their society on the family and why the only fixed punishments they have deal with the violation of its privacy (191).

As far as the chief doctrine of Epicurus, that pleasure is the highest good, is concerned, they agree, but:

they think not felicity to rest in all pleasure, but only in that pleasure that is good and honest, and that hereto as to perfect blessedness our nature is allured and drawn even of virtue, wherefo only they that be of the contrary opinion do attribute felicity. For they define virtue to be life ordered according to nature and that we be hereunto ordained by God. And that he doth follow the course of nature, which in desiring and refusing things is ruled by reason [163].

Now they "of the contrary opinion" to the Utopians, who think that the chief good is virtue, are those called among us Stoics, and it is a chief saying among them that the chief good is "to live in agreement and in harmony with nature" (De Finibus, III, 9). It follows that the Utopians find it possible to absorb the Stoic position, which means that they obviate the question of the priority of virtue and pleasure as ends among which a choice must be made, the reflection on which choice was precisely what ennobled the pagan philosophers.

In this they argue as follows. They say that the virtue most peculiarly belonging to human beings is "humanity," implying by this that virtue is simply the realization of man’s essential nature. "Now the most earnest and painful followers of virtue and haters of pleasure exhort you to relieve the lack and misery of others praising such deeds as humanity." Hence the Utopians convert the second Christian commandment (Mark 12:31) into the merry maxim "Love thyself as thy neighbor":

Then, if it be a point of humanity for man to bring health and comfort to man... and... to restore them to joy, that is to say to pleasure, why may it not be said that nature doth provoke every man to do the same for himself... Therefore even nature... prescribeth to us... pleasure, as the end of all our operations [163].

Thus virtue itself is nothing but an argument for and an instrument of pleasure, understood, however, in such a way as to become the basis for a theory of private and social contracts:

But in that nature doth allow and provoke men one to help another live merrily..., verily she commandeth thee to use diligent circumspection, that thou do not so seek for thine own commodities, that thou procure others' incommodities. Wherefore their opinion is, that not only covenants and bargains made among private
men ought to be well and faithfully fulfilled, observed, and kept, but also common laws, which either a good prince hath justly published, or else the people, neither oppressed with tyranny, neither deceived by fraud and guile, hath by their common consent constituted and ratified concerning the partition of the commodities of life, that is to say, the matter of pleasure (165).

In this way the Utopians institute a political community based, not merely on the pursuit, but on the actual procuring, of pleasure. It is a community based on nature, their unhumanly natural nature, and therefore stable—a community that "shall endure for ever," since it knows no political problem. There exists a Latin epigram by More whose title is the name of the Utopian book turned into a question, that is, "What is the Best State of the Commonwealth?" In it More asks what is better, a king or a senate. Having decided in favor of a senate, which "would occupy a position between good and bad," while a king would be either good or bad, mostly the latter, he stops himself and points out the futility of the inquiry:

Is there anywhere a people upon whom you yourself, by your own decision, can impose either a king or a senate? If this does lie within your power, you are king. Stop considering to whom you may give power. The prior question is, whether there is a need to give it at all [No. 182].

In The Best State of the Commonwealth, More gives himself, or rather King Utopus, the pleasure of kingship and duly institutes the senate of trinibors, but the "prior question" of the epigram, the question of power, is obviated in the island of the Utopians. Their first question needs to be only which pleasures are true and which false.

To help their citizens make this discrimination is the one discernible serious object of their education. By false or "counterfeit" pleasures are, of course, meant those that run counter to natural desire, for "pleasure they call every motion and state of the body or mind wherein man has actually delectation." False pleasures are therefore perverse pleasures, namely, those that yield no intrinsically pleasing state, but are pursued mostly for the sake of asserting oneself. First among these are the pleasures that result from a "futile conspiracy" of men, beginning with the mistaken pleasure of magnificence in dress, and going on to the pleasure taken in honor and in nobility derived from property. Thus the prideful pleasure of conspicuous consumption would be the cardinal sin of Utopia (139).

Of the genuine pleasures, the most extensively described are those of the body that are attached to the natural functions, such as elimination, and, in general, health, which is not only considered a positive but the fundamental pleasure (173). Then come the aesthetic pleasures, such as the perception of musical consonance and beautiful forms—natural

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forms, for they apparently have no pictoral art; these too are by them considered pleasures of the body (177).

The pleasures of the soul, although the Utopians are said to value them most highly, are disposed of in three sentences. They consist of the use of the intellect, of the sweetness arising from contemplation of the truth, and of pleasant recollections of a virtuous life. Clearly that activity of the soul about which there can be worthwhile discourse, the pursuit of being, which is at the center of Plato's city and which Hythloday's reading of the Republic omits, is neither painless nor unspirited nor unsubversive enough for Utopia. To put it another way: Utopia knows no happiness.

In sum, Utopian pleasures are reinterpretations of pleasure (voluptas) into pleasantness (jocunditas), and it is with respect to the gentle character of their pleasures that the Utopians can be said (as they sometimes are) to be humanists, namely, in that sense in which humanism means self-cultivation by means of human studies and the pursuit of concomitant urbanities (135). It is in this respect that More paints, with real delight, avocations and tastes close to his own: the growing of gardens, banquets attended by music and kindly conversation between young and old, simplicity of dress and contempt of ornament, the enjoyment of the spectacles of nature, particularly the heavens, the pleasures of erudition, and most characteristically, the study of Greek. But these details are only the froth on the flow of the imaginative narration.

9. The Uses of Utopia

Utopia, then, is a land of pleasure without pride. When Erasmus, in his biographical sketch of More, says of this book entitled On the Best State of the Commonwealth, that in it More "proposed to illustrate the source and spring of political evil," he must mean just this—that More in his Utopia has disclosed and eradicated the root of all evil in pride. Erasmus goes on to say that More first, at his leisure, wrote the second book (which contains Hythloday's narrative of Utopia) and "recognizing the need for it" hastily added the first (Letter to Hutten, 1519). Where was the need to prefix this latter book, which at first sight seems to contain merely the obverse of Utopia, an account of the particular political evils of More's England together with the specific cures Hythloday had found among the Polylerites, the Achorians, and the Macarians, peoples that he had visited before he found the radical cure in his last discovery, Utopia?

The answer is in this: It is "utopian" in the derogatory sense of the term to paint a pattern of a political community from which human evil is radically removed, and it is culpably futile to do so if the plan is set out as a straight political proposal. But when Hythloday solemnly closes, saying that all the world would long ago have been brought under the laws of Utopia "were it not that one only beast, the princess and mother of all mischief, Pride doth withstand and let it," he is taking a fierce pleasure in vitiating the book by underscoring precisely the futility of his narrative. Hence the first book was written to rehabilitate the second and contains directions for the proper use of utopias.
That More was intensely sensitive to the use to which political writings might be put is shown by the fate of his *History of King Richard III*, a book written just before the *Utopia* and in the same year that Machiavelli wrote *The Prince*. Richard III and his cohorts, especially the wickedly well-spoken Buckingham, are the perfect and vivid incarnation of tyranny presented with all the vigorous beauty of a still fresh language—for this history, written almost simultaneously in Latin and in the vernacular, is the first such undertaking composed in English. There is reason to think that it was intended for the instruction of the young English monarch on whose business More was when he wrote the *Utopia* and with whose praise it begins, Henry VIII. But as eagerly as More forwarded the publication of the Latin *Utopia* abroad, so carefully did he suppress the English *History* at home, leaving it unfinished and unpublished, presumably because he had begun to fear that Henry would use it, not as intended, for a horrible example, but as instruction in the perfection of wickedness, in the manner of *The Prince*. For in contrast to Machiavelli, who, in a chapter inveighing against “imagined republics and principalities” (for very un-Morean reasons), threatens with ruin him “who abandons what is done for what ought to be done” and advises the prince “to learn how not to be good” (ch. XV), More thought that in counseling a king one must “ever tell him what he ought to do, but never what he is able to do” (Harspsfield, *Life*, “After his resignation”).

Furthermore, More was at the time of the writing of *Utopia* (1516) in his own behalf intensely concerned with the problem of giving political advice. Averse as he was to court life, he was being urgently invited to join the king’s council—an invitation he was, after working out the first book of the *Utopia*, bound to follow.

This first book is sometimes, appropriately, called a “dialogue on counsel” (xxxvii). For the occasion of Hythloday’s relation of the evils of England is his decided refusal of Peter Giles’ suggestion that he should get into a king’s court to instruct him with examples and help him with counsel (55). Hythloday allows that he has learned in his travels of institutions that would cure the conditions he had so acutely observed in England, but he shows by serious and comical examples how his solutions would never be taken seriously at court.

Raphael Hythloday’s first name is Hebrew for “the physician of health,” and his last name is Greek for “knowing in babble.” Hythloday brings salvation, which is, first, in itself impossible, and which he, secondly, even refuses to advocate in the places that matter. He is a babbler on two counts.

More himself now attacks Hythloday, pointing out to him his mis-construction of Plato:

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For whereas your Plato judgeth that weal-publics shall by this means attain perfect felicity, either if philosophers be kings, or else if kings give themselves to the study of philosophy, how far, I pray you, shall commonwealths then be from felicity, if philosophers will not vouchsafe to instruct kings with their good counsel? [87].

Hythloday objects that philosophy can have no power among kings. More counters:

Indeed, quoth I, this school philosophy (philosophia scholastica) hath not which thinketh all things meet for every place. But there is another philosophy more civil (philosophia civilior), which knoweth, as ye would say, her own stage. . . . And this is the philosophy you must use [99].

The “Citizen and Sheriff of the Famous City of London”(1), king’s councillor to be, and future Lord Chancellor of England then gives the content of this “more citizen-like philosophy,” tacitly transmuting Plato’s most radical proposal into practical wisdom:

If evil opinions and naughty persuasions cannot be utterly and quite plucked out of their hearts, if you cannot even as you would remedy vices which use and custom has confirmed, yet for this cause you must not leave and forsake the commonweal. You must not forsake the ship in a tempest because you cannot rule and keep down the winds. No, nor you must not labor to drive into their heads new and strange information which you know well shall be nothing regarded with them that be of clear contrary minds. But you must with a crafty wile and a subtle train study and endeavor yourself, as much as in you lieth, to handle the matter wittily and handsomely for the purpose, and that which you cannot turn to good, so order it that it be not very bad. For it is not possible for all things to be well unless all men were good, which I think will not be yet this good many years.

Many books on counseling princes, such as Erasmus’ Education of a Christian Prince and Machiavelli’s Prince, were written in More’s age; from these the Utopia differs in being a book of counsel for subjects and citizens, and its first advice to them is not to inject utopia into their counsels. It is an attack on radical politics among the advisors of rulers. It is a condemnation of Hythloday’s impatience with conservative obtuseness (59), and of his interpretation of human sinfulness as social conspiracy (241). But what then is the profit, not in the book Utopia, but in the land Utopia of the second book, the ideal commonwealth, the place of absent evils, itself?

First of all it seems to me that Utopia negatively (only negatively, since this imagined country has no clearly identifiable polity—it is not even possible to say whether it is a monarchy) proposes a great political principle, true in fact and potent as a conviction: that originally and fundamentally communities are expressions of human nature and that the converse is not so much the case. This understanding of the book is, of course, at variance with what Utopia appears to exemplify, namely the reconstruction of human nature through a perfectly planned society—and what the utopias, particularly of the last century, like those of Fourier, Cabet, and Bellamy, which were programs seriously proposed for realiza-
tion, did in fact intend. Utopia is then a surreptitious conversion of the study of politics into the study of human nature.

And secondly, in pointing to human perverseness as the spoiler of politics and naming it pride (in which opinion More concurs with the author of the book named after the serpent of pride and the "King of the Proud," the Leviathan, II, 28) and by painting an "exquisite platform and pattern" of a prideless community, More shows positively, by means of ostensibly delightful detail, what it would mean to live in Utopia, what the life of pleasure in abstraction from the original human condition looks like, a lesson he drives home in his deeply ironical closing words: "In the mean time, as I cannot agree and consent to all things he said... so must I needs confess and grant that many things be in the Utopian weal-public which in our cities I may rather wish for than hope for" (247). Utopia, he means, is no more to be wished for than hoped for. The student of Utopia will, then, become very sensitive to that in proposals for supposedly viable societies based on gratification of desire, which really implies at once an alteration of human nature and the imposition of an unexpected new discipline. Utopia is, thus, an exemplary exercise in carrying out in all vividness the life implied in certain perennial political dreams and, conversely, in drawing forth the abstractions from the human condition that those dreams imply. In short, it is an education in recognizing inadvertent utopias, that is, political proposals based on false views of human nature.

Finally, Utopia, again by the negative influence of its imaginative realization, effects a kind of celebration of, and satisfaction in, the given human condition; it is an oblique praise of folly and fall contrasted with shallow joviality. In his last long work written in the Tower of London, and called A Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation, More argues that tribulation is the condition of salvation (I, 5), a truth that, even when it is not taken in its precise Christian meaning, exercises a powerful influence on the politics of those who believe it. The social eudemonism of Utopia, its most peculiarly "modern" aspect, turns out to be an edifying trompe l'oeil, vividly presented to be thoughtfully declined.

And last, Utopia is the convivial occasion for a kind of civic festivity, the communal game of making communities, a game for statesmen such as More and Bacon. More, who resembles Socrates both in many particulars of the mode of his life and the crucial parts of the manner of his death—on account of which Harpsfield calls him "our noble, new, Christian Socrates"—resembles him in nothing so much as in his serene playfulness. It was said of More that he "looks sadly when he means merrily," and he said of himself in his Apology that "a man may say full soth in game." The "Island of Utopia" is a "trifle" (letter to Tunstal, November 1516) written in that dissembling spirit, the spirit of irony. One of More's favorite writers, whom he and Erasmus had translated in his youth, was the ancient writer of comic and fantastical dialogues, Lucian. Hythloday brings his dialogues to the Utopians, who take special delight in him for "his many conceits and jests." Lucian wrote two accounts, the Icarome-nippus and the True Story, of voyages to the moon, whence the foibles of
earth come into sharpest focus. The Utopians, that “facile and facetious” people, sober in pleasure and shallow in thought, equipped with golden chamber pots and followed about by loving chicks, are just such mat, reflected moon people—in fact the first thing Hythloday mentions about the island is that it is moon-shaped (111) and that before being isolated it had the occult name Abraxa, signifying “the highest heavens” (585). More can afford such jocosity, for, although like Socrates, himself a participant in dialogues, he is, unlike the latter, also their author—a writing Socrates. This effects a difference in the form of Socratic and Morean irony; the latter, being writer and interlocutor in one, can by sober speech from the inside of the dialogue control what merriment he has set afoot from the outside by inditing it. Consequently, the very form of the Utopian dialogue tends to turn it into a grand game.

More’s book is, therefore, an invitation to a common exercise of wit and imagination, intended to draw together a secular band in a merry and melancholy inquiry—a band distinct from, and yet not without reference to, the communion of saints representing the City of God on earth, a band of those who would like to be citizens of the best commonwealth. Just this is conveyed in the full title of the book as printed in the first edition:

A Truly Golden Booklet, as Salutary as it is Mirthful, on the Best State of the Common-Wealth and the New Island of Utopia.

10. Utopias as a Genre

If, then, it is true that the book Utopia, a dialogue concerning a narration, contains views from which the author distances himself, that the land “Utopia” is a place of the imagination in which the roots of evil in human nature have been excised, and that the enterprise “utopia” yields a product of the imagination that is a community pictured “apart from philosophy,” what must be said of the many works commonly assigned to the “utopian tradition” that are quite different in character? In respect to the lineage of works of human art, as distinct from the growths of nature, it is a defensible claim that the first of a kind should be acknowledged as the truest of that kind. More’s Utopia is literally the original of the utopian tradition, a tradition that by now is so remote that it is quite justly said that “Utopia is dead.”14 Indeed, one might argue—somewhat seriously—that Utopia had but two true successors, the community of pleasure called Thélème and the community without pride found in Houyhnhnm Land.

Nevertheless, the name is alive and the way its matter has changed is a perfect paradigm of the course of modernity. To summarize: The utopian

mode ceased to be *ironical* and became *oppositional*.\(^\text{15}\) Utopias, instead of being peculiarly imaginary products, that is, political poetry, became rational discourses, that is, social theory; instead of being images of a small, self-sufficient, well-ordered political community, they became tracts advocating theoretical societies; and instead of being exercises in the understanding of human nature, they became *instruments of action*, proposed for universal realization—no-place instituted in the world (though it is only fair to point out that the term "utopian" is usually applied only from the outside, in a derogatory spirit, to such blueprints for future ideal communities).

But since even this transformed utopian enterprise, at its height in the last century, has worn thin, a revival of the utopian tradition has recently been proposed. A yet newer kind of utopia is demanded as a part of a new discipline sometimes called "futurology," the art of conjectures concerning the future:

The lack of any clear images of the style of life we are building is a cause of anxiety. . . . It is time that experts represented the many different outcomes which can be obtained by many different uses of our many and increasing possibilities. This representation should be in pictures, according to the utopian tradition. . . . Plot, as it were, the sequence of [the ordinary man's] pleasurable and unpleasurable impressions and now imagine what "a good day" should be. Picturing this "good day" is the first step into a modern utopia; then you will have to seek the condition which can bring about this "good day."\(^\text{16}\)

Such new utopias would be *neither* ironical *nor* oppositional. They would differ by a world from the work that begins the tradition to which they are assigned and to which they do, by reason of being pictures of ostensibly desirable lives, belong. It is instructive to articulate the poles of opposition.

The new utopian enterprise would be a project proposed for experts by experts on the basis of a theory of social change—the original utopia was the felicitous find of a learned statesman at leisure, submitted to his friends for their delight. Hence the former is a program for making utopian programs and the latter a serious amusement for reflective citizens. The former is to be a project of the "creative" imagination, the deliberate

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\(^{15}\) So K. Manheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (New York: Harcourt Brace & World, n.d.), p. 192: "A state of mind is utopian when it is incongruous with the state of reality within which it occurs. . . . Only those orientations transcending reality will be referred to by us as utopian which, when they pass over into conduct, tend to shatter, either partially or wholly, the order of things prevailing at the time." I cannot resist pointing out that this definition also holds of insanity. On the other hand, the following relevant definition is to be found in Robert Musil's *Man without Qualities*: "Utopia signifies that experiment in which are observed the possible alterations of an element and the effects which it would call forth in that composite appearance which we call life" (I, ii, 62).

\(^{16}\) B. de Jouvenel, "Utopia for Practical Purposes," *Utopias and Utopian Thought*, *op. cit.*, pp. 226 ff.
innovation of a variety of "life styles"—the latter was a work of the imaginative memory bringing up pictures of a purified past and unifying these into a unique polity based on settled principles. Hence the former is a matrix of plans for the future, of ways of directing the profusion of present possibilities, while the latter deliberately posited the impossible. And finally, the newest utopias will assume the "good day" to consist of the ephemeral pursuit of private pleasure, while More, in depicting a community of pleasure with permanence, holds his truth concerning the human condition, his Christian faith, in reserve, implying that the good life lies elsewhere than in the pleasures of Utopia.

As a recognized genre, utopian writing has, then, grown very remote from its beginnings, and thence arises an urgent question: Which form of the effort makes for a better state of the commonwealth?
And they go to trial on a charge on account of which men hate each other most, but go to trial about least, that is, ingratitude. And him who they know to be able to return a favor, but does not return it, they also punish severely. For they think that the ungrateful would also be most neglectful about gods, about parents, about country, and about friends; and what seems to follow upon ingratitude most of all is shamelessness, and it is this indeed which seems to be the greatest leader towards every baseness.

—Xenophon, Cyropaedeia [1.2.7]

I

In the fourth act of King Lear the cruelly blinded Duke of Gloucester is saved and guided by a man disguised as a mad beggar. The strangeness of beggar guiding duke is compounded by the fact that Gloucester’s unknown guide is his son Edgar, who had assumed this wretched disguise to escape the sentence wrongfully laid upon him by his gullible father. Edgar serves not only as his father’s eyes, he becomes his provider, the nurse of his broken spirit, his teacher, and the saviour of his life. He saves him from Oswald’s murderous attack and from a more formidable foe, despair. He concocts what for Gloucester is a divine miracle, to arouse within him the strength to live; and he preaches the lessons that enable Gloucester to avail himself of that strength. Edgar fulfills parental offices, and more, for his father. The once masterful father, helpless as a babe, is, as it were, fathered, sustained, and educated by his own son. This unsettling reversal of normal stations is pitiful and thought-provoking.¹

Small debts of gratitude can be paid without much difficulty. But what recompense can be made to those who are the very sources of one’s being? Does not every recompense fall short, is not every recompense simply disproportionate to what is owed? Since one is always in their debt, the command “Honor thy father and thy mother” can be invoked almost without any reservations.² Although this debt of gratitude is normally impossible to discharge, Edgar either did discharge it or came as close

¹ Oedipus in a questionable way assumes his father’s position through violence. Shakespeare’s Edgar behaves as a father to his father with perfect justice. Cp. the beginning of this scene, 4.6, with Matt. 4.5-11, and with Prospero’s “miracles” in The Tempest.
² Cf. Aristotle Nicomachean Ethics 1161a 20 and 1163b 12-29.
to doing so as any man could. The story of Edgar and his father seems to have been designed to show what would be required for such a debt to be paid in full.

The mercantile aspect of the language of gratitude—debits, payments, owing—is vaguely offensive, but apparently unavoidable. Lear, raging in the storm, calls out:

... Spit, fire! spout, rain!
Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire, are my daughters:
I tax you not, you elements, with unkindness;
I never gave you kingdom, call'd you children,
You owe me no subscription: ... [3.2.14-18].

The hunted Edgar, consoling himself with the thought that “The lowest and most dejected thing of Fortune,/Stands still in esperance,” goes on to say:

... Welcome, then,
Thou unsubstantial air that I embrace:
The wretch that thou hast blown unto the worst
Owes nothing to thy blasts [4.1.3-9].

Nothing good received, nothing owed. But what if just being itself is good?

Although we prosecute and punish those who buy or borrow and do not pay, such offenses do not evoke the gravest condemnations. But “sharper than a serpent’s tooth it is to have a thankless child.” And ingratitude is a “marble-hearted fiend, more hideous when thou showest thee in a child than the sea-monster.” The seriousness of the wrong can also be reckoned roughly by its effect. Kent speaks of “how unnatural and bemoaning a sorrow” is the filial ingratitude that Lear suffers. When that sorrow has nearly done its work, Gloucester addresses Lear as “O ruin’d piece of nature.”

Gratitude is akin to grace and graciousness, as their etymologies indicate. Capacities or incapacities for gratitude seem to be direct reflections of character; the obligation when regarded as genuine is self-incurred. It becomes suspect when external compulsion is in the background, when it does not “come from the heart.” To pay one’s bills grudgingly is not gracious but does not violate the spirit of commerce. Can gratitude be paid grudgingly? Coming from within, it seems to be a natural movement in the sense of the Aristotelian distinction. In this way it is akin to love.

Gratitude might be thought of as being between justice and love. Like

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3 Cf. 2.4.179 ff. and .252, 3.4.20, and Regan's (!) morally indignant words to Gloucester, “Ingrateful fox” (3.7.28). She probably means that he is ungrateful to his country: he is referred to as a traitor twelve times. All line numbers are from the Arden Ed., ed. Kenneth Muir. Harvard, 1959.


Gratitude, Nature, and Piety in King Lear

commutative justice, which seeks arithmetic equality in exchanges of goods and services, gratitude involves an element of calculation.\(^6\) Gratitude should be proportionate to benefits or favors bestowed.\(^7\) But unlike the demands of commutative justice, these obligations are unenforceable, at least by any human court. Unlike commercial and contractual obligations, here there is no explicit promise to return an equal value for what has been received.\(^8\) What occurs depends entirely upon the grace of the benefactor. The beneficiary cannot be forced to pay this kind of debt, which is also a debt that he was in no way responsible for incurring. Whether he pays or not depends upon the kind of man he is. Is he to be held responsible for the kind of man he is? Gratitude then, in so far as its payment is unenforceable, in so far as it must be rendered willingly, and in so far as it reflects the character of those engaged in it, is like love.

Where benefits causing gratitude and where love depend essentially on the personal merits of the benefactor or the beloved, distributive justice, which concerns itself with the proportionality of rewards to personal merit, comes into consideration.\(^9\) Despite their connections or parallelism, gratitude and love, at least noble love, may be distinguished. Lear's failure to appreciate this difference seems to have been an important part of what led to his downfall.\(^10\)

II

Lear introduces what has been called his love test with the following words:

Tell me, my daughters,
(Since now we will divest us both of rule,
Interest of territory, cares of state)
Which of you shall we say doth love us most?
That we our largest bounty may extend
Where nature doth with merit challenge\(^11\) [1.1.48-53].

\(^6\) Xenophon's Socrates defines ingratitude as a certain kind of pure injustice: \textit{Memorabilia} 2.2.3. See also \textit{King Lear} 1.1.183.

\(^7\) Cf. Aristotle \textit{NE} 1163a 10-24.

\(^8\) In circumstances where either rejection or acceptance is possible, acceptance could in some contexts be understood as implying such a promise.

\(^9\) Cf. Aristotle \textit{NE} 1160b 23-62a 9, 1163a 24-63b 27, 1167a 15-22, 1167b 16-68a 27. The subject abounds in difficulties. Cp., for example, 1161a 20-23 and 1162a 4-9 (where it is shown why, in accordance with justice, children, like subjects in relation to their kings, should love parents more than parents should love children), with 1161b 18-30 and 1167b 16-68a 27 (where it is shown why, generally speaking, parents love children more than children love parents). Cf. \textit{Eudemonic Ethics} 1241a 35-b 11; and Thomas Aquinas \textit{Summa Theologica} I-II, Q. 100, A. 5, ad 4. Cf. also Plato \textit{Republic} 330c, 457c end-458b, 462a-c, 463c-465c, 472b 3-6.

\(^10\) Cp. Kent's love for Lear with Cordelia's. The love between Kent and Lear seems inseparable from "service." Cf. 1.4.4-7 and 1.4.92-93.

\(^11\) The last line is difficult. Nature here could refer to filial or to paternal affection; merit correspondingly could refer to good deeds, that is, obedience and
He will give most, he says, to that daughter that loves him most, and the implication is, each daughter will receive a share of bounty proportionate to her love for her father. If Lear intended to test or to measure the amounts of his daughters' loves by their speeches, he would have waited till each daughter had spoken and each speech could have been compared with the others before making his distribution. But after each speech, before hearing those remaining, he disposes of a share in accordance with what appears to be and is once explicitly referred to by him as a rearranged plan (1.1.37-38). Moreover, the plan, which had been discussed with, or at least presented to, his advisors and council, seems to have been a sagacious one. The love test then may first have been thought of by Lear as a mere formality, staged for the sake of a public ratification of a well-thought-out succession scheme. The question as to why this form was used still remains. It is through Cordelia's actions that the love test becomes decisive for Lear and for the play as a whole: For Cordelia's love and being sure of her love were, more than he knew, overwhelmingly important for Lear. Cordelia's experience in scene 1, in important respects, preforges Lear's.

The Duke of Burgundy and the King of France are in Lear's court to sue for the hand of Cordelia, Lear's favorite daughter. When Lear strips Cordelia of all her inheritance, of her dowry, and of his paternal favor, the difference between Burgundy's and France's loves becomes plain. Burgundy will take Cordelia only with the portion first proposed by Lear. Lear says:

... Sir, there she stands:
If aught within that little-seeming substance,
Or all of it, with our displeasure piec'd,
And nothing more, may fitly like your Grace,
She's there, and she is yours.

Burgundy replies, "I know no answer." Lear intensifies his condemnation and urges France not even to consider his former suit. France wonders what Cordelia's offense could have been. She replies; and he addresses himself to Burgundy:

... My Lord of Burgundy,
What say you to the lady? Love's not love
When it is mingled with regards that stand
Aloof from th' entire point. Will you have her?
She is herself a dowry.

After Burgundy applies to Lear again for her dowry, is rejected, and withdraws his suit, Cordelia says:

Peace be with Burgundy!
Since that respect and fortunes are his love,
I shall not be his wife [1.1.247-49].

France speaks again:

Fairest Cordelia, that art most rich, being poor;
Most choice, forsaken; and most lov'd, despis'd!
Thee and thy virtues here I seize upon:
Be it lawful, I take up what's cast away.
Gods, gods! 'tis strange that from their cold'est neglect
My love should kindle to inflam'd respect.

"Inflam'd respect" might well serve to characterize noble love.13

After being stripped of the accoutrements of power, wealth, and favor, Cordelia does learn who loves her for herself, for herself and her virtues, as France puts it, and who loves her for what she possesses, whose love "is mingled with regards that stand/Aloof from th' entire point." The dismantling of "so many folds of favor," including the favor of gods and fortune, not only reveals the qualities of her suitors' loves, but, more importantly, reveals what she is herself, reveals her lovability. France, as Kent conjectures (3.1.28-29), may have some political reasons for wanting to marry Cordelia: these, however, need not be incompatible with those manifest reasons that lead him to love her for her own sake. To believe that she could have deserved the condemnation she received from Lear, France says, "Must be a faith that reason without miracle/Should never plant in me." Positively put, reason without miracle confirms Cordelia's virtue and her lovability. France's love then could be described as a kind of rational faith based on what he has learned about her character.

It is not easy for a king, a princess, or anyone with large and evident powers to bestow benefits and ills, to learn what people truly think of them. Lear finally learns who loves him and what those about him think of him, but like Cordelia, he must be stripped and must strip himself of the trappings of majesty first.14

13 In Cordelia's speech (1.1.248) respect probably means "looking again" or "looking back," respectare, to something else beside herself, to her fortune, that is, comparison and calculation. In France's speech (1.1.255) the word means honoring or esteem, but also involves an element of "looking," of calculation, or estimation, of personal worth. The sense of distance suggested by the admiration, estimation, and deference usually associated with "respect" makes the unusual conjunction with "inflam'd" all the more poignant. Cf. also 2.4.24.

14 Cf. 4.1.19-21, and n. to 1. 20, Arden Ed., K. Muir, ed.
III

Private and public interfere with each other for Lear: The very proposing of a love test evidences a certain confusion about the properly public and the properly private. To command public declarations or testimony in the execution of one's office is certainly appropriate for a judge, magistrate, or king; but Lear seems to have tried, as it were, to absorb the private into the public, to have confused what can be demanded and enforced by right of law and majesty with what can only arise naturally, what is beyond all external command or control.\textsuperscript{15}

However one conceives of the Lear of the love test,\textsuperscript{16} his vulnerability with respect to Cordelia is crucial. Lear deserved gratitude from his daughters, perhaps especially from Cordelia. And gratitude, or thankfulness, should be proportionate to how much one has to be thankful for. But Lear demands professions of love. He fails to appreciate how demeaning it would be for Cordelia to allow her love to seem to be proportionate to the magnitude of the fortune he bestows on her. The preciousness of her love is tied necessarily to its proud independence from mercenary influences or threats. It cannot be bought, not with fortune, power, sensual pleasure, protection, or anything else less than virtue. Cordelia's refusal

\textsuperscript{15} See notes 5 and 9 above. Cf. Immanuel Kant, "The End of All Things," in \textit{On History}, ed. Lewis W. Beck, Library of Liberal Arts, 1963, pp. 81-84. \textit{Ausgewählte kleine Schriften}. Taschenausgaben der Philosophischen Bibliothek, pp. 89-92. [The end of the second paragraph, p. 82, Beck ed., should read: "for it is a contradiction to command someone not just to do something but also that he should like to do it" (auch gern tun solle.) Should not the "love" referred to by Kant, p. 84, 1.5, be, more strictly, gratitude?

\textsuperscript{16} There is great division among the commentators. We may distinguish four alternatives:

1) Lear is a weak, senile, old man in his dotage. Can this be reconciled with the deep and powerful Lear of the rest of the play, with the man whose favorites had been Kent and Cordelia, who wisely favored Albany over Cornwall, who killed the man (probably a captain, 5.3.27) hanging Cordelia?

2) Lear is a sagacious, though not a wise, king. He is not altogether incognizant of his elder daughters' characters and hypocrisy; he never accuses them of violating their love oaths. He could have regarded the love test at first as primarily a ceremony to ratify and to sanctify the succession; but being particularly vulnerable in relation to Cordelia, he allowed "her most small fault" to wrench his "frame of nature from the fixed place." It was this vulnerability, he rebukes himself, "that let thy folly in, and thy dear judgement out." Why then did Lear in Act 2 seem to think that he could rely on his elder daughters?

3) Shakespeare simply took over the old story and did not concern himself with consistency here.

4) There is no inconsistency: A man can be a weak, foolish dotard and under great suffering reveal heretofore untapped great depths of passion and powers of insight.

The argument of this essay is most compatible with the second of these alternatives.
to participate in Lear's ceremony, her disobedience (and Kent's also), is correctly diagnosed by Lear as rooted in pride.17 Lear, however, fails to see how that pride with its occasionally offensive honesty, necessarily goes along with the love for which he craves. In its critical pride such a love reflects the lover's estimate of the intrinsic merits of the beloved.18 If Lear had succeeded in humbling Cordelia, he might have destroyed what he loved most.

Lear never accuses Cordelia, as he does his other daughters, of ingratitude. Her love, or certain evidence of her love, is what he wants. He loved her most, he says, as if this gave him the right to command her to love him most. But even if love, or noble love, could be deserved, it cannot be commanded. There does not seem to be any court competent to grant compensation for the "pangs of dispriz'd love."19 Lear, it seems, needs Cordelia's love because it would be evidence for himself (and for others) of his own excellence. If he were a wise man or a philosopher, he would "know himself" and perhaps not need such confirmation.20 But Lear is not a philosopher. Regan is not the best witness, but she is not entirely wrong when she says of Lear, "He hath ever but slenderly known himself" (1.1.294, cf. 1.4.238 and .260). In commanding, or expecting love where he could only rightly expect gratitude, in thinking that he could simply disclaim "Propinquity and property of blood," in expecting full honors of kingship, after having relinquished power and responsibility, Lear presumes upon an intrinsic authority and self-sufficiency that he does not, and perhaps no man could, possess.21

IV

"In none of the fifty or sixty versions of the Lear story in existence before Shakespeare's play does the old king go mad."22 Gloucester and Lear suffer most in this play. Reflecting on the madness of the king, Gloucester says to himself:

Better I were distract:
So should my thoughts be sever'd from my griefs,
And woes by wrong imaginations lose
The knowledge of themselves.

17 It may be that her fault is "small" only when compared with ingratitude, for, as Don Quixote says, "There are those who will tell you that one of the greatest sins man can commit is pride, but I maintain that ingratitude is worse." Part 2, ch. 58, Putnam trans., Viking, p. 889. See also Ulrici, in Variorum Ed., ed. Furness, p. 456.
18 Cf. Aristotle NE 1159a 22-25, 1167a 11 21, 1170b 8-14, 1172a 10 14.
20 Aristotle NE 1177a 12-79a 32; and Jaffa, op. cit., pp. 133 ff.
And yet the contrast between the two shows rather how much more pathetic Lear's suffering in the mind is:23 The loss of eyes—the way-finders for physical movement, the conditions for independent action—is not so pathetic as losing the light of reason, the intellectual guide that lets us grasp the general meanings of things.24

There is a connection, it has been observed, between pride and madness.25 Proud men do not like to justify and explain themselves. Their rectitude, they feel, should be taken for granted. They balk at the inferiority, or equality, implicit in being required to explain themselves, for example, Lear before Albany, Kent before Cornwall, Gloucester and Regan, and Cordelia before the court (1.4.248 ff., 2.2.61 ff., and 1.1.87 ff.). The proud see or feel themselves to be within a definite hierarchical order. They prize their place within the order and, accordingly, the order itself. They are most sensitive to insult and most prone to the passion most consequent upon insult, anger. Anger, unlike grief, contains within itself a desire to strike back. And, most importantly for our argument, the desire to strike back for most men, if not for all men, exists even when there is nothing to strike back against. Men derive relief from cursing the table or bench they have knocked against. When loved ones suffer some grave and irremediable illness or misfortune, men can speak, not of misfortune, but of "affliction," thus, as it were, striking back in speech against the causes of the suffering. All the affections of what is poetically called the "heart"26 may tend to personify, and thus obscure, the difference between the living and the dead, but anger seems peculiarly prone to personification. Something similar often happens in love. It seems that men desire what they love, or what they think they love, to love them in return, whether such love is capable of being returned or not. Hope rises from desire. Hope and desire find fulfillment in fact or in fantasy.

23 Cf. 3.4.6-25.
24 Cf. 4.1.27-28.
26 The word heart occurs rather often in King Lear (about fifty times). In general it seems to refer to what is responsible for coordinating men's appetites, passions, desires, thoughts and wills, their loves and hates. Cp. Dante's "animo" in Purgatorio, Canto 17. The word heart enters into Thomas Aquinas' discussion in the Summa Theologica, usually when citations from the Bible or Church authorities need explication. Sometimes he interprets it as practical reason or conscience (e.g., II-I Q. 94, A.6. Cf. A.5 ad 1, A.2, and I, Q. 24, A.1) and frequently as will (e.g., II-I, Q. 4, A.4; Q. 6, A.4 ad 1; Q. 19, A.8 ad 1, A.10 ad 1 sed con; Q. 24, A.3). Nonmetaphorically he speaks of the heart as that organ that initiates all bodily, all vital movement, the "instrument of the soul's passions" (e.g., I, Q. 20, A.1 ad 1; II-I, Q. 17, A.9 ad 2; Q. 37, A.4; Q. 38, A.5 ad 3; Q. 40, A.6; Q. 44, A.1 ad 1; Q 48, A.2-4). Cf. Plato Republic, the discussion of Θυμός 439e-442d; and Timaeus 69d end-72c 1.
In some of its extreme forms this personification is what is called madness. Lear insists that it must have been the unkindness of Poor Tom's nonexistent daughters that brought him to such lowness (3.4.48 ff.). He will take a joint-stool for his daughter and Poor Tom and the Fool for Justices, if that is the only way he has to bring his daughters before the bar of justice (3.6.20 ff.). Lear's pride, his self-respect, his sense of where he belongs in the hierarchical order of things, is, so to speak, the point of origin for his orientation in the world. As his self-respect is assailed, he finds it increasingly difficult to be objective, as Edgar says to Gloucester, to "Bear free and patient thoughts," that is, thoughts free from the presumption that everything that happens in the world has been personally directed with a view to its effect upon himself. His pride and his love of justice lead him to refuse to accept the existence of the world where his worth is denied. He will try to see the world as it is only if the world makes place for his pride. And yet one of the measures of his worth is the intensity with which he struggles to save his sanity. If his pride did not have some basis in truth, even his own love of truth and justice, his madness could not be as significant as it is.

V

In the early acts of the play Lear swears by those specific divinities, the sun, the night, Hecate, Apollo, and Jupiter; he also calls on the heavens and calls nature goddess. He seems to see himself and his kingdom as part of one grand natural and divine order, a just hierarchical order, with the heavenly powers, the gods, especially Jupiter, at the summit of the cosmic hierarchy and himself correspondingly at the summit of that subordinate order, his kingdom. When his daughters, his fool, and his shame, the correlate of his pride, destroy his self-respect, "abuse," "subdue," "oppress," "ruin," and "bemad" his nature, what is bemadding is that at the same time they are destroying the basis of his orientation in the world, driving his soul into a storm of questions, doubts, and partial insights too heavy for his patience and judgment to bear.27

The disorder in the moral and political world is associated in Act 3 with tumult in the cosmic order, the rage in Lear's soul with the raging

27 Cf. Robert B. Heilman, This Great Stage, Image and Structure in King Lear, University of Washington, 1963, pp. 72-74. Cf. also Laurence Berns, "Aristotle's Poetics" in Ancients and Moderns, Essays on the Tradition of Political Philosophy in Honor of Leo Strauss, ed. Joseph Cropsey, Basic Books, 1964, p. 82. In that essay the division on p. 82 should be marked "Epilogue"; part II begins on p. 72 and part III on p. 79; p. 70, last line, first paragraph, "man" should read "men" and "his" should read "their"; p. 72, eighth line from bottom, "Book" should read "chapter"; p. 80, 11.7 and 23 should each have a comma after "for the most part"; p. 85, n. 16, 1.6, "flow" should read "flaw"; p. 86, 1.14, in n. 16, "what lies beneath" should be inserted between "civilizing" and "politics"; p. 86, n. 23, 1.2 "Politics" should read "Poetics."
of the heavens. The gentleman who meets Kent speaks of how the "impetuous blasts with eyeless rage" catch Lear's white hair in their fury. But for Lear lightnings are "thought-executing fires," and the elements are addressed as seeing and thinking beings. At first he bids them, "Let fall your horrible pleasure." They owe him no subscription. However, that soon changes:

   But yet I call you servile ministers,
   That will with two pernicious daughters join
   Your high-engender'd battles 'gainst a head
   So old and white as this. O, ho! 'tis foul.

His outrage seems to turn toward the gods themselves. But his faith is not yet entirely destroyed. He realizes that patience is what he needs. Perhaps his suffering is some divine affliction, later to be redeemed? He calls out as if the storm were herald to a day of judgment when justice and honesty will prevail and he will be revealed as a man more sinned against than sinning.

   Let the great Gods,
   That keep this dreadful pudder o'er our heads,
   Find out their enemies now. Tremble, thou wretch,
   That hast within thee undivulged crimes,
   Unwhipp'd of Justice; hide thee, thou bloody hand,
   Thou perjur'd, and thou simular of virtue
   That art incestuous; caitiff, to pieces shake,
   That under covert and convenient seeming
   Has practis'd on man's life; close pent-up guilts,
   Rive your concealing continents, and cry
   These dreadful summoners grace. I am a man
   More sinn'd against than sinning28 [3.2.49-59].

Later, after he has agreed to enter a nearby hovel, he says, "I'll pray and then I'll sleep." But he does not pray, if praying means addressing divinities.29 He directs his words not to the high, to the gods, but to the poor, the wretched and the low:

   Poor naked wretches, whereso'er you are,
   That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
   How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
   Your loop'd and window'd raggedness, defend you
   From seasons such as these? O! I have ta'en
   Too little care of this. Take physic, Pomp;
   Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
   That thou mayst shake the superflux to them,
   And show the Heavens more just [3.4.27-36].

29 Cf. 1.5.47-48, 2.4.192, and 2.4.273-80.
Like thoughts are expressed later by Gloucester, as he gives a purse to the man he believes to be Poor Tom:

Here, take this purse, thou whom the heav'ns' plagues
Have humbled to all strokes: that I am wretched
Makes thee the happier: Heavens, deal so still!
Let the superfluous and lust-dieted man,
That slaves your ordinance, that will not see
Because he does not feel, feel your power quickly;
So distribution should undo excess,
And each man have enough [4.1.64-71].

Lear's statement goes further: The very justice of the heavens is called into question.30

The decisive point in this process is reached when Lear strips off his royal garments, after he has encountered Poor Tom, the exemplar of human wretchedness in the extreme.31 Gratitude, its bonds, its cosmic and divine implications, have proved snares and delusions for Lear. Here, with Poor Tom as his model, undeceived by a groundless reliance on gratitude and the flattery of pomp and majesty, he thinks that he can see the truly fundamental situation of man.

Is man no more than this? Consider him well. Thou ow'st the worm no silk, the beast no hide, the sheep no wool, the cat no perfume. . . . Thou art the thing itself; unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art. Off, off you lendings! Come; unbutton here [3.4.105-12].32

Tom owes the worm no silk because he has no silk, the sheep no wool because he has no wool. Lear takes Tom, the unaccommodated man, as the "natural man." But does Tom have nothing? He has his life and he has his misery; and as gratitude is one of the chief roots of natural piety, so fear and wretchedness can theologize and moralize as well. Tom has his catechism:

Take heed o' th' foul fiend. Obey thy parents; keep thy word's justice; swear not; commit not with man's sworn spouse; set not thy sweet heart on proud array [3.4.80-83].

Each of these six commandments corresponds to one of the Bible's Ten Commandments: the last most tenuously to the Bible's Tenth, Tom's fifth to the Bible's Seventh, his fourth to the Bible's Third, his third to the Bible's Ninth, and his second to the Bible's Fifth.33 Lear has proclaimed

30 "And show the Heavens more just" is the last line Lear speaks before madness overcomes him. See 3.4.48. In Aristotelian terms this is the point at which the reversal, or peripety, occurs in King Lear; Poetics 1452a 21-52b 13. Cf. also Laurence Berns, op. cit., n. 27 above, pp. 75 and 82.
31 The extreme must include madness.
32 Cf. 2.3.7-9.
33 Tom's replacement of the Fifth Commandment's "Honor thy father and thy mother" by "Obey" corresponds to a replacement of gratitude by fear.
twice in this play that "nothing can be made out of nothing." If nothing comes from nothing, everything that does come to be must come from something, something which itself does not come to be, that is, is unchanging. It is not altogether unreasonable for Poor Tom and anyone who would take him as the man himself to regard what most men call God, the ultimate source of his misery, as a foul fiend. Tom's first commandment corresponds to the Bible's First Commandment: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." The question about filial gratitude, about what children owe to their parents, to the sources of their being, is here extended to the limit: What is owed, or due, to the guiding principle, or principles, of life as a whole, to the sources, or source, of all being?

When Lear strips himself of his royal garments, those "lendings," he tries to strip himself of every vestige of royalty. When Kent asks him, "How fares your Grace?" he does not even acknowledge that the term could be meaningful and replies, "What's he?" His divestment of his royal garments is the outer sign of his soul's divestment of its former protections and supports, of those beliefs and convictions that heretofore had sustained and guided his activity in the world. He thinks that now he is in a position to come to know man, to know himself, to philosophize (1.4.238 and .259). But the conditions required to make him want to philosophize are those that he declared earlier would make a truly human life impossible. "O! reason not the need," he replies to his daughters' questioning his need for attendants of his own:

our basest beggars
Are in the poorest thing superfluous:
Allow not nature more than nature needs,
Man's life is cheap as beast's. Thou art a lady;
If only to go warm were gorgeous,
Why, nature needs not what thou gorgeous wear'st,
Which scarcely keeps thee warm. But, for true need,—
You Heavens, give me that patience, patience I need!—

Not only does Poor Tom become the representative of humanity for Lear, but because he of all men is least likely to have been blinded by gratitude or flattery, he becomes after Lear's divestment the philosopher for Lear. "First," before accepting fire, food, and shelter, "let me talk

34 See 1.4.134-39, 1.1.90, and 1.2.31-35. Shakespeare's presentation of the "Angstphänomen," Lear's "eye of anguish" (4.4.15), seems to have been unnoticed by Martin Heidegger, Sein und Zeit, Niemeyer, 1957, p. 190; cf. n. on 199.
35 Exodus 20.1-17, Deuteronomy 5.6-21, and King Lear, 3.4.80-83. The statement following the Second Commandment tells of God visiting the iniquity of fathers upon their children; Shakespeare, less mysteriously with a view to considerations of justice, visits the iniquity of children upon fathers. See 3.4.74-75. Cf. A. C. Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy, Macmillan, London, 1961, pp. 222 ff.
36 Cf. 3.6.4-5. Edith Sitwell suggests that these lines were written under the influence of Plato's Phaedo 64d-e 1; A Notebook on William Shakespeare, Macmillan, 1965, pp. 75-76.
with this philosopher,” he says. His first question is: “What is the cause of thunder?” Shortly before divesting, he apparently had no doubts about the cause of thunder, that is, Jupiter.

I do not bid the thunder-bearer shoot,
Nor tell tales of thee to high-judging Jove [2.4.229-30].

But now such questions have become open. He never addresses a god by a personal name again. During all the time of his madness he speaks of the divinities (“Gods,” 4.6.128) only once. Lear seems now to be in a position to see deeper into the nature of things than he ever was before.

The word nature and words with nature as their root are used fifty times in what has come to be the generally accepted text of King Lear. The word unnatural occurs seven times, more than twice as often as it occurs in any other play of Shakespeare. Lear uses words with nature as root more than twice as often as any other character in the play.37 These usages could be classified under five, not always clearly distinguishable, headings. Nature sometimes means (1) the general order of the social, political, and cosmic whole within which the activity of any one person or group can only be a part; (2) the constitution, or character, of an individual as a whole, that is, the unity arising from both endowment and habit; (3) the original endowment of an individual with the powers directed, though not necessarily compelled, toward definite ends, or purposes. This is the meaning expressed most often by Lear. Nature also means (4) the original endowment of an individual with powers supplied to be used howsoever their possessor wills. This is the meaning expressed most powerfully by Edmund. (5) Nature is twice personified as goddess: once by Lear conflating meanings 1 and 3, and once by Edmund conflating meanings 1 and 4. The play has often been understood as presenting the world as a great arena where the principles of ethical and unethical nature contest for dominion over the whole.38 The disagreements of the commentators are just one more reflection of the fact that Shakespeare has been far more explicit about raising the question of nature,

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37 Nineteen times. Gloucester is next with nine times. (Unnaturalness occurs once.)


Heilman's careful work is a fundamental book, perhaps the fundamental book, for any serious study of King Lear. By carefully and searchingly tracing out and relating the amazingly intricate patterns of imagery in the play, Heilman lets Shakespeare's philosophy speak for itself. The book's deficiencies, deficiencies generally shared by critics of pre-nineteenth-century literature, stem from an insufficient understanding of certain key notions of classical philosophy, especially the notion of natural right (see Leo Strauss, Natural Right and History, Chicago, 1953, chs. 3 and 4) and the notion of "intuitive reason," that is, nous (see Jacob Klein,
raising the question about the relation between nature and morality, than he has been about presenting any definite solution.

There is more clarity, however, about who is wrong: The transgressions of Edmund, Goneril, Regan, and Cornwall lead ultimately to their own destruction. Nature repels simple viciousness. And about the meeting of Lear and Gloucester in Act 4, scene 6: "What could better point the transcendent issues Shakespeare has developed . . . than this encounter of the sensual man robbed of his eyes, with the wilful man, the light of his mind put out."39 Royal Lear's understanding of how morality is effected within nature is certainly not adequate. He conceives of the relation between morality and nature as being more organic than it is (3.4.14-16); he overestimates the power of law; he is insufficiently attentive to the limits set by nature to what authority and law can command. He relies overmuch on divine enforcement of nature's directives, and consequently is unaware of the extent to which the accomplishment of nature's purposes is left to chance and, on the basis of the conditions provided by nature and chance, to human prudence. In other words, the substitution of divine intervention for chance leads to an underestimation of the possibilities for evil and an insufficient awareness of the need for prudence. Lear's faith in the rightness of the divine and natural order is shattered by his suffering. But what does his shattering experience open him to?

VI

In his madness Lear becomes estranged, not only from the divinities he swore by before, but from nature as a whole, especially from nature as the source of generation.40 From the outset in Lear's mind the themes of generation, gratitude, and justice are intertwined. In his first great storm scene he bids the thunder, as if it were a divinity with authority and power over nature, to:

Strike flat the thick rotundity o' th' world!
Crack Nature's moulds, all germens spill at once
That makes ingratitude man! [3.2.7-9].

Destroy the world's pregnancy, he cries: Destroy nature's means for producing man, who shows by his failure to appreciate rightly the sources

“ Aristotle, An Introduction,” Ancients and Moderns, Essays on the Tradition of Political Philosophy in Honor of Leo Strauss, ed. Joseph Cropsey, Basic Books, 1964). Thus Heilman tends to identify “reason” with calculation, so that insight and the perception of “value,” that is, the good according to nature, are attributed to a “non-rational” imaginative awareness. See pp. 161, 170, and King Lear, 4.6.132-33, 177, n. 13, and pp. 30-31 above.

39 H. Granville-Barker, Prefaces to Shakespeare, quoted in Edith Sitwell, op. cit., n. 36 above, p. 47. In later editions Granville-Barker has apparently substituted, less aptly in our view, “despot” for “wilful man.”

40 Cf. 4.6.115-16.
of his being how undeserving he is of the gift of life. What Edmund can speak of as "the lusty stealth of nature" is, for Lear, associated with:

hell... darkness,
... the sulphurous pit—burning, scalding,
Stench, consumption; fie, fie, fie! pah, pah!
Give me an ounce of civet, good apothecary,
To sweeten my imagination [4.6.129-33].

Mad Lear comes to a view of nature somewhat similar to Edmund’s, nature as the primitive, undeveloped beginnings of things. But his anguish and revulsion indicate how much more he originally expected from nature: He feels and suffers the absence of what he can no longer believe in.

Like Jesus he speaks against the Old Testament sentence for adultery. He goes to extremes and, as if all possibility of redemption were lost, declares: “Let copulation thrive.” Jesus was more sober: After delivering the adulteress from condemnation, his last words to her were “go and sin no more” (John, 8.1-11). Lear, however, condemns women generally, confounding sex with Biblical, mostly New Testament, images of hell.

In his condemnation of the world’s justice, Lear cries:

Thou rascal beadle, hold thy bloody hand!
Why dost thou lash that whore? Strip thine own back;
Thou hotly lusts to use her in that kind
For which thou whipp’st her. The usurer hangs the cozener [4.6.162-65].

Again we are reminded of the New Testament: “But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart” (Matt. 5.27-28) and “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her” (John 8.7).

Yet universal sainthood failing, decency requires that offenses be punished whether the intentions of the punishers be pure or not. Should thoughts and actions be equally punishable? Do men have as much control over their thoughts and desires as they do over their actions? Are others harmed by thoughts directed against themselves when those thoughts are neither divulged nor acted upon? If in the New Testament, as some would claim, these are deliberate rhetorical exaggerations, Lear seems to have lost the capacity to make the required qualifications.

In a farmer’s dog chasing a beggar, Lear says:

There thou might’st behold
The great image of Authority
A dog’s obey’d in office.
...
Through tatter’d clothes small vices do appear;
Robes and furred gowns hide all. Plate sin with gold,
And the strong lance of justice hurtless breaks;

41 Lev. 20.10. He “pardons” an adulterer rather than an adulteress. Cf. 2.4.129-33 and .233-35.
Arm it in rags, a pygmy's straw does pierce it.
None does offend, none, I say, none;... 

If none does offend, and consequently none can rightly accuse, at least none who are not themselves spotless, perhaps none could ever rightly accuse: "Judge not, that ye be not judged." 42 Edgar's commentary on this speech is: "O! matter and impertinency mix'd; / Reason in madness." An attempt should be made to separate some of the reason from the madness. The farmer's dog does often chase away the thief, but the dog cannot, unfortunately, distinguish between villainous and innocent, not to speak of undeserved, lowness.

Authority and law are usually more rigorous with the poor and weak, partly because they are less capable of protecting themselves, and partly for less simple reasons. Wealth, power, and authority usually go together. And just as the unsuccessful can exaggerate the part played by chance and accident in human affairs, so the successful can flatter themselves by exaggerating the extent to which their good fortune is owed to their merits. By reasoning obversely about the misfortunes of others, they can allow themselves to become obtuse and callous to the miseries of the unfortunate, smothering charity in self-complacent rigor. 43 Such is the man "that will not see / Because he does not feel..." When Gloucester in the fourth act asks the disguised Edgar who he is, Edgar replies:

A most poor man made tame to Fortune's blows;
Who, by the art of known and feeling sorrows,
Am pregnant to good pity.

The sufferings of Lear, Gloucester, and Edgar would seem to be the remedy for this, the occupational disease of greatness. 44 Yet if suffering of such magnitude is required, the price of sufficiently educating authority in mercy or equity is hopelessly high. Few can do as much, perhaps, as the educator Shakespeare, who by his art, his presentations of feigned experiences, has made it possible for some to feel, without fully suffering, what they might need to feel in order to see.

Lear's suffering, however, and the perspective he has come to adopt, have not prepared him for governing more responsibly, but rather for a renunciation of the "world." His suffering has completely destroyed him as a political man. Perhaps the most poignant expression of Lear's death as a political man is his reception of Kent in the last scene. Kent's affection for Lear is never severed from a political context. He always approaches Lear, even in defiance and in death, as servant to master, never simply as man to man. 45 At the end, although other explanations are possible, Lear's

42 Romans 3.1-18; cp. 3.10-12 with Psalms 14; and Matt. 7.1-5. Lear is open to the charge the Apostle Paul said was made against himself, loc. cit. 3.8.
43 Cf. Laurence Berns, op. cit., n. 27 above, pp. 75-77.
44 For another approach to the problem see 1 Henry IV, 1.2 and 3.2; and Henry V, 4.1.
45 Cf. n. 10 above.
cold reception of Kent indicates that Kent and what he stands for have faded into almost complete insignificance for Lear. Yet his renunciation of the world is not complete. The desire for vengeance remains: "And when I have stol'n upon these son-in-laws, / Then, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill!" (4.6.188-89).

VII

When Lear awakes after his long sleep, "Our foster-nurse of Nature" (4.4.12), "the great rage," the doctor reports, "... is kill'd in him" (4.7.78-79). Clad in new garments, the images Lear uses are resurrection from the grave and entry into a new life, a life characterized by the interchange of blessing (from Lear) and forgiveness (from Cordelia) and mutual love.46 After the battle and their capture, Lear is given over almost entirely to love, the love of Cordelia.

Come, let's away to prison;
We two alone will sing like birds i' th' cage:
When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down,
And ask of thee forgiveness: so we'll live,
And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
As if we were Gods spies: and we'll wear out,
Talk of court news; and we'll talk with them too,
Who loses and who wins; who's in, who's out;
And take upon 's the mystery of things,
As if we were God's spies: and we'll wear out,
In a wall'd prison, pacts and sects of great ones
That ebb and flow by the moon.

...

Upon such sacrifices, my Cordelia,
The Gods themselves throw incense. Have I caught thee?
He that parts us shall bring a brand from heaven,
And fire us hence like foxes [5.3.8-23].

Lear seems to be perfectly fulfilled. He has no lingering regrets. The worth of being reconciled in love with Cordelia is beyond price: It cannot be measured by any of the measures Lear used in the first scene. No sacrifice, be it rule, extent of territory, honor, even freedom itself, seems too great, or even comparable with what Lear has gained. And with his love and the prospect of love's joy that he holds before himself has come patience. His patience and his love go together with his renunciation of the world. His desire for revenge is as dead as his pride. When Cordelia proudly says:

For thee, oppressed King, I am cast down;
Myself could else out-frown false Fortune's frown.
Shall we not see these daughters and these sisters?

Lear answers, "No, no, no! Come, let's away to prison." And at the

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46 Cf. also 4.6.33-80.
moment of his death, with the dead Cordelia before him, it is clear that Lear can live no longer in the world where even these last hopes are dashed. He dies in a vision of reunion with Cordelia living once again.

There has been extensive debate about whether these scenes are to be understood in a Christian sense or not.\textsuperscript{47} Was Lear's moment of joy at his death "based on an illusion"?\textsuperscript{48} Or, was it the triumphal culmination of his purgatorial, his redemptive suffering, a loving glimpse into that better world to come where all righteous hopes will be fulfilled?

What we have been describing is the development of attitudes and a perspective that Shakespeare has presented in terms that are recognizably Christian.\textsuperscript{49}

This development in \textit{King Lear}, however, is presented as a natural development. What was Shakespeare's perspective, as distinct from Lear's? The dramatic poet does not speak in his own name. His perspective can be inferred only from the play as a whole. "Hard were it for me, as if I were a god, to tell of all these things," says Homer.\textsuperscript{50} The poet stands as a god over the world of his play, but a god limited to what nature leaves to possibility and to chance: For nature, or the poet's understanding of nature, provides the framework. "Is there any cause in nature," Lear asks, "that makes these hard hearts?" (3.6.78-79). Shakespeare seems to have asked: "Is there any cause in nature that makes these Christian hearts?" Nature, or the problem of nature, as articulated by classical philosophy, we suggest, provides the framework for \textit{King Lear}.\textsuperscript{51}

The major classical philosophers, Plato and Aristotle, of course, never elaborated an answer to what we suppose was Shakespeare's question. This could be due to historical accident. The serious question is: Are the principles and the framework they first articulated adequate to comprehend such an account? Must not the rise and triumph of Christianity be explained? Can the decision about the best way of life be compelling unless all fundamental alternatives have been examined? It is incumbent upon classical philosophy to try to see whether the revealed religions and the souls formed by them can be rendered intelligible to natural reason. Shakespeare seems to have been exploring this possibility, especially in \textit{King Lear}.

Yet, it could be argued, nature has its place also within the Christian


\textsuperscript{48} K. Muir, \textit{loc. cit.}, p. lix.

\textsuperscript{49} Cf. Heilman, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 78; n. 11, p. 309; and esp. n. 1, p. 331.

\textsuperscript{50} \textit{Iliad} XII, 1.176.

cosmos. Could not Shakespeare have been showing rather how God's invisible law might, "from the creation of the world," have been written by nature in men's hearts? Might he not have been showing what would have to be endured by a "natural man," that is, a man with no knowledge of Jesus Christ and the Bible, for that law to begin to become visible to him?52

If the issue were to be put in terms of the primacy of compassionate love as compared with the primacy of insight, Shakespeare may have provided a clue to his own opinion in Act 4 of King Lear. An unnamed gentleman describes Cordelia's tears while she reads of her father's sufferings as "pearls from diamonds dropped." "Tears of compassion are pearls; eyes are diamonds...": Tears of compassion are compared to rare and precious stones, but eyes, that is, insight, are more precious still.53

"Hath not God," wrote the Apostle Paul, "made foolish the wisdom of this world?"54 For Paul the "foolish" of faith possess a wisdom far deeper than anything accessible to natural reason. Is this what Shakespeare suggests by echoing this language about wisdom and folly in his articulation of the problem of morality and justice in King Lear? The Fool tells Kent:

That sir which serves and seeks for gain,  
   And follows but for form,  
Will pack when it begins to rain,  
   And leave thee in the storm.  
But I will tarry; the Fool will stay,  
   And let the wise man fly:  
The knave turns Fool that runs away;  
The Fool no knave, perdy [2.4.78-85].

In this play the word fool moves through a range of meanings.

The official Fool in motley is "foolish," funny, and privileged because he seems, or is licensed to pretend, not to know the most ordinary conventions.

In general, a fool is a man who does not know what every man is expected to know. Somewhat less generally, assuming that in everything a man chooses to do, some benefit to himself is intended, a fool is a man who does things that harm himself, who lacks judgment about what benefits himself. This is the elementary meaning of the word in the play that is presupposed by the four meanings following.

The honest fools, best exemplified by Gloucester and by Edgar of the

52 Cf. Romans 1.20, 2.14-15; and I Cor. 2.14.
54 I Cor. 2.20 and ibid. chs. 1-4. But cp. A Midsummer Night's Dream, 4.1.10-26; and cf. ibid., 4.1.218-21 with I Cor. 2.9: ibid. 1.2.22-99 with I Cor. 9.22: ibid. 1.2.8,15; 3.1.1-81; 4.2.30-end with Galatians 2:11 ff.: also ibid. 5.1.195-96, 311, and 360-62.
Interpretation

eyearly scenes, are overtrusting and, as in Gloucester’s case, overcredulous about heavenly influences on human actions. They fail to understand people unlike themselves, to understand vice and malice. They are easily gullied by those clever and unscrupulous enough to exploit and betray their trust.

The loyal and dutiful are “moral fools.” So Albany is regarded by Goneril and Kent spoken of by the Fool. The same could be said of the servant who mortally wounds Cornwall and is killed by Regan. Lear in acting on the expectation that his elder daughters would be bound by filial gratitude and duty is another kind of “moral fool.” The moral fools tend to act as if moral laws were as inviolable as natural laws, as if moral laws were natural laws. They are regarded as fools by the “worldly wise” for not appreciating sufficiently the arbitrary and conventional factors in morality, the bestial elements in human nature, and for not appreciating sufficiently how self-seeking usually masks itself in moral guises. For the worldly wise self-seeking is the only kind of seeking sanctioned by nature. What the moral fool senses or sees and the worldly wise are blind to is the extent to which the humanity of any one man’s life is a function of the larger moral, social, and political orders of which that individual life can only be a part.

Examples of what we might call the “noble fool” are France, the Fool, Edgar, Cordelia, and Lear: those capable of being touched and moved by noble love, by “inflam’d respect.”55 By their willingness to risk themselves and everything that could be subject to calculations of worldly success, they exhibit their own conviction, and rouse admiration and hopes, in those capable of appreciating them, that mankind is capable of attaining states of being that are simply good in themselves. The worldly wise are blind to this possibility.

In the light of what the moral fool and the noble fool see, the knavery of the worldly wise reveals itself as the final folly. By their blindness to what raises man above the beasts, the “wise” knaves finally bring themselves down with those whose justice they violate. By their blindness to what directs men toward the divine, to what is good in itself, they are deprived of nature’s graces, the love and friendship of the noble.

But do the love and insight that Lear and Gloucester attain fully redeem what they have suffered? What is to be inferred from the disproportion between their sins and their terrible suffering?

“We glory in tribulations,” wrote the Apostle Paul,

knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience experience; and experience, hope. And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. [Romans 5.3-5].

And from the Apostle James:

Be patient therefore brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he

55 Cf. section II above.
receive the earlier and the latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.

It is Cordelia, her love, "The holy water from her heavenly eyes" (4.3.31), that near the end sustain Lear's patience. The gentleman describes how she read Kent's letters recounting Lear's ordeal:

Ay, sir; she took them, read them in my presence; And now and then an ample tear trill'd down Her delicate cheek; it seem'd she was a queen Over her passion; who, most rebel-like, Sought to be king o'er her.

"O! then it mov'd her?" Kent asks.

Not to a rage; patience and sorrow strove Who should express her goodliest. You have seen Sunshine and rain at once; her smile and tears Were like, a better way; those happy smillets That play'd on her ripe lip seem'd not to know What guests were in her eyes; which parted thence, As pearls from diamonds dropp'd. In brief, Sorrow would be a rarity most belov'd, If all could so become it [4.3.12-24].

Later Cordelia prays:

All bless'd secrets, All you unpublish'd virtues of the earth, Spring with my tears! be aidant and remediate In the good man's distress! [4.4.15-18].

In the reconciliation scene, Lear asks, "Be your tears wet?" He answers himself, "Yes, faith." These scenes too are often taken as argument that "King Lear is a Christian play about a Pagan world. . . ."56

Sunshine and rain, however, suggest natural growth, that Cordelia's smiles and tears were nature's means for curing Lear's abused heart. It does seem, however, to be a most Christianlike use of nature. But, unlike Lear, Cordelia, whose patience is so movingly described, is proud to the end. She never asks for forgiveness. She is prepared to "outfrown false Fortune's frown." Is she prepared to live out her life "in a walled prison"? She has not renounced political life: She calls Lear king and queenlike puts down her rebel passions. She is ready to confront her sisters: "Shall we not see these daughters and these sisters?" Yet what is perhaps most significant, though obvious, for the question of Christianity in King Lear is that there is no promise or expectation "for the coming of the Lord."

The word patience is ambiguous. In the Christian sense it seems to mean bearing tribulations in the loving faith that their promised miraculous reversals will surely come to pass. In the classical, or stoic, sense of the

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56 J. C. Maxwell, quoted in Muir, op. cit., p. lvi.
word it seems to mean endurance: endurance that does not anticipate miraculous change, that accepts evil in the world as a necessity, that bases itself only on rational hopes and the conviction that what is itself good deserves loyalty whether that loyalty receives any other reward or not. The unforeseen mischances of the world that bring down the just and innocent too often with the guilty, in the classical view, engender the wish for particular providence at the same time that they constitute evidence for its absence. It is not incompatible with the love of truth to respect the love of justice that is the father to that wish.

VIII

Who is the paradigm of virtue in this play? The gentleman says, addressing himself to absent Lear:

Thou hast one daughter,
Who redeems nature from the general curse
Which twain have brought her to.57

Why then was Cordelia killed? Cordelia's honesty, her proud refusal to join her sisters in their demeaning hypocrisy, precipitated the catastrophe of this play. Her death raises the question about what the moral limits of proud honesty in an imperfect world might be.58 Pisanio and Cornelius in Cymbeline avert tragedy by, as they put it, being false (to the bad) in order to be true (to the good) (1.5.43-44 and 4.3.42). In Sonnet 94 those "who rightly do inherit heaven's graces / And husband nature's riches from expense" are also those "that have pow'r to hurt and will do none, / That do not do the thing they most do show." This last line could never apply to Cordelia.

Edgar is the character in King Lear who most of all does not do the thing he most does show. He successfully assumes six different guises in the play. During the play from

a brother noble,
Whose nature is so far from doing harms
That he suspects none; on whose foolish honesty

the practices of a confirmed villain ride easily, he develops into a model of virtue armed and resourceful.

Edgar seems to be a mean between his father and his bastard brother. Their opinions about heavenly influences over human affairs are at opposite extremes. The father is overcredulous, Edmund undercredulous.

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57 Does this indicate that ingratitude more than prideful disobedience is chiefly responsible for the "general curse"? See n. 17 above.

Gratitude, Nature, and Piety in King Lear

Both are perhaps equally at fault intellectually, but the moral fault is clearly more the son's. In Shakespeare's world he who scorns all idea of heavenly influence on human affairs rarely comes to much good. Edgar's speech to his dying brother gives the last word of the play on the adultery theme and constitutes an answer as well to Gloucester's "As flies to wanton boys, are we to th' Gods; / They kill us for their sport."

The Gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
Make instruments to plague us;
The dark and vicious place where thee he got
Cost him his eyes [5.3.170-73].

Edmund replies, "Th' hast spoken right, 'tis true. / The wheel is come full circle; I am here." Edgar spoke of the gods, but Edmund speaks of fortune's wheel. Lear preaches to Gloucester, drawing lessons from man's beginnings:

Thou must be patient; we came crying hither:
Thou know'st the first time that we smell the air
We wawl and cry. . . .

... When we are born, we cry that we are come
To this great stage of fools [4.6.180-85].

Edgar preaches to his suicidal father on the same theme:

Men must endure
Their going hence, even as their coming hither:
Ripeness is all [5.2.9-11].

This sermon is more adequate because it is more comprehensive. It considers not only the beginnings but the middle and the end as well. Man's chief concern, the image suggests, should be not with what happens when the fruit falls and dies, nor especially the beginnings, but rather with coming to fullest maturity in the world.

IX

King Lear is based on two stories, the Lear story and the Gloucester story. Critics have long been concerned by the apparent lack of complete unity between them. The unity of King Lear comes to sight on the level of reflection, reflection on the one philosophic theme underlying both stories, of which both stories are necessary and complementary parts:


60 All the world's a stage in Shakespeare for him who, like Lear, Jaques, and Antonio, is coming to feel himself to be an "exile in 'this' world." Macbeth (5.5.25) is a special case.

61 I am indebted for this observation to Hilail Gildin of Queens College, N.Y.

namely, that nature, while constituting the ground and limits of convention and law, requires in man the cooperation of law and convention for its fulfillment.

Lear in trying to command love and gratitude fails to see that the natural growths of noble love and gratitude are beyond the control of law and political authority. The Lear story illustrates the natural limits of legal and political authority and the tensions that arise between nature and law when those limits are not rightly observed. The Gloucester story, the adultery theme, and the stories of Lear's elder daughters illustrate the other side of the same coin: how certain natural passions and powers, most manifestly the power of procreation, need to be controlled by conventions, laws, and authority. Ordinary love and passion, not to speak of base love and passion, need to be controlled by law and authority. Being conceived outside the "order of law" (1.1.19), Edmund was banished from the family circle. He is, not altogether "unnaturally," devoid of family feeling. As the bodies of Goneril and Regan are brought in, the dying Edmund exclaims, "Yet Edmund was belov'd: / The one the other poison'd for my sake, / And after slew herself." Goneril and Regan as well as Lear seem to have died for "love."

How would nature and convention, or law, be related when cooperating harmoniously? Nature provides the materials, the human materials and powers, and ordains, or manifests to natural reason, what purposes and ends would perfect the materials and fulfill the powers. But the accomplishment of nature's purposes is left to chance and to men: On the basis of the conditions provided by nature and chance, the responsibility for forming the materials and developing the powers so as to function in accordance with those ends is left to men themselves through custom, habituation, training, law, art, and education. Human nature is so constituted as to require the formation of conventions and laws for its fulfillment.

Edgar does represent the natural man in this play, not as the poor, bare, forked animal Lear saw, but as he is in himself, the man of many disguises, the educable man, whose heart does not enslave his mind and whose mind does not silence his heart, whose heart and mind remain sound no matter how his outward trappings change. He is the natural man, not in that sense of nature that means only primitive beginnings, but where "nature" includes fulfillment, "ripeness."

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64 The control is, of course, guided by other natural powers, such as reason and judgment. France, the king, acknowledges the law's authority even over his noble love for Cordelia (1.1.253).
65 Cf. Plato Meno, esp. beginning; and Aristotle NE Book ii, ch. 1.
The same consummate irony that led him, correctly, but for the wrong reasons, to be called "the thing itself," that is, the natural man, by Lear may be at work also in his being called "philosopher." Edgar, though not the most tragic, nor the most pathetic, character in the play, is the true hero of patience in *King Lear*.

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68 This is not contradicted by the fact that Edgar is the only major character in the play who never uses the word nature or any word with nature as its root. Cf. n. 1, above.
ON THE INDUCTION OF THE TAMING OF THE SHREW

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Although The Shrew is a long-standing theatre favorite, critics have not thought it anything more than good farce. I shall risk adding to the laughter by suggesting that the play also has a serious, even a philosophical side. My purpose is to discuss the main acknowledged difficulty of the play, the relation of the Induction to the body.

The action begins with the drunken Sly being cast out of an inn. He is abducted by a lord who deludes him into the belief that he is a lord recovering from a long derangement and illness. The taming play is presented to him as part of the cure prescribed by his physicians. But Sly and company are dropped at the end of Act I, scene 1, with the result that the Sly episode is left without a conclusion. This incongruous feature, abetted by the bad condition of the folio, has led to patching and tinkering by editors and producers. The division between Induction and body was introduced by Pope and has been ratified by all subsequent editors.¹ Although it has no basis in the folio, the division in effect asserts the independence of the play from the Induction. Directors, at a loss to understand how the two parts fit together, sometimes omit the Sly episode (as Burton's movie version did); and sometimes a denouement is invented and placed at the end of the taming play.²

Such measures are no doubt meant to correct the apparently defective coherence of the play rather than its dramatic quality, which is sound. The transition from the Induction to the body merely follows the convention of the "play within the play," which Shakespeare used successfully on several occasions. But the problem of coherence is that the play within replaces the original play; that is, a play initially about Sly is transformed into a play about the shrew. Moreover, the conventional taming idea is given a novel and puzzling twist when the express audience of the taming play, Sly, is shown sleeping through the play. It is improbable that such a striking feature, however odd it might seem, is not ultimately essential to the coherence of the work. Our task, then, is to find an interpretation that shows the Induction to be integral to the sense of the taming play.

I

The lord tells his servants that the trick on Sly is merely for amusement.

¹ Pope gave no reason for his emendation, which Theobald accepted without comment.
Sly is told by the lord and his servants (who speak and act entirely according to the lord’s instructions) that he is a lord who has forgotten his identity owing to a delirium provoked by some “foul spirit” (Ind. ii.13-16). This explanation leads to the presentation of the taming play as part of the cure. Since the explanation is an aspect of the hoax, it is not trustworthy. But is the explanation given to the servants trustworthy? Apart from the evident deviousness of the lord, there are two specific reasons for doubting it. Since the lord’s pastime is fox hunting, the name “Sly” hints at some underlying appropriateness in the relation between them. It is just visible in the circumstance that corresponding to the joke about his being possessed by a foul spirit is Sly’s genuine weakness for alcohol. Perhaps in his playful way the lord is serious about Sly’s not being himself; perhaps the “cure” is intended to have some real effect. By considering the matter in this way, a marked parallel between the Induction and body comes into view. The lord is to Sly as Petruchio is to Kate, because both are tamers who undertake to reduce persons of violent dispositions to manageable docility. What then is Sly’s malady?

The page says that his “frenzy” feeds upon melancholy, which the comedy is supposed to remedy (Ind. ii. 131-32). In view of the theme of the taming play, the melancholy ought in some way involve failure with women. This anticipation is confirmed; the Induction opens with Sly being driven from an alehouse by the hostess. His humiliation is paralleled in Lucentio’s humiliation by Bianca. Since the taming play presents two ways of wooing, one of which ends in failure and the other in success, presumably it would teach Sly how to distinguish the right from the wrong way to woo. It would thus appear that the lord contrives to make Sly recognize his faults by presenting them in Lucentio, the cure taking effect at the moment he realizes this. But such an interpretation is rendered doubtful by the fact that Lucentio’s wooing is inseparable from his gentility, whereas Sly is surely no gentleman. Besides since Sly falls asleep, it would be inappropriate to imagine a cure for him that involves instruction and therefore wakefulness.

Sly resists with great vehemence the attempt to foist the new identity upon him. He rails at the servants for addressing him as “lordship” and “honour.” He refuses elegant food, drink, and attire as unsuited to himself. To refute the claim that he is a lord, he asserts that he is a menial of the lowest sort: “by birth a pedlar, by education a card-maker, by transmutation a bear-herd, and now by present profession a tinker.” He apparently thinks of himself as a humble but honest man without ambition or claim on the world, which he is content to “let slide.”

Missing from Sly’s self-appraisal is any indication as to why he is both abject and indifferent to the world, yet defiant, as he is toward all those he encounters. His defiance, and indeed intransigence, makes its appearance in the opening lines of the play:

*Sly:* I’ll feeze you, in faith.

*Hostess:* A pair of stocks, you rogue!
Sly: Y'are a baggage, the Slys are no rogues. . . .
Look in the chronicals, we came in with Richard
Conqueror. . . .
Hostess: You will not pay for the glasses you have burst?
Sly: No, not a denier. . . .

Sly is belligerent, surly, and unjust in refusing to mend the damage he has caused—in short, a rogue without doubt. 3 This tinker, who later rejects the least suggestion of his nobility, now introduces as confused evidence of his quality the association of his family with "Richard Conqueror," that is, William the Conqueror and Richard the Lion Heart, both of whom were famed for pious deeds of great magnitude. Sly is not without some pride and, hence, not without some belief in his own goodness. This is perhaps most evident when he answers the hostess' threat to call the police by saying that he "will not budge an inch" but will answer the charge "by law." A servant reports that during his drunken stupor he even threatened to bring the hostess to court (Ind. ii.87). Sly talks like an innocent man. He also uses the formulas of piety, swearing twice by saints and praying once. In his brief speeches there are altogether six mentions 4 of things connected with Christianity, whereas none of the other characters of the Induction mention any but pagan deities. Indeed, Sly's given name, Christopher, seems to hint at the missing element of his self-identification: Might he be a Christian of fanatical Puritan persuasion? A number of disparate details fall into place upon this interpretation. His violent rejection of titles and refinements answers to fanatical humility and simplicity. He is content to let the world slide because he believes in another world. His confused genealogy argues less his esteem for royalty than for crusading and reforming zeal. And it provides a connection between Sly's belligerence and his stout belief in his own innocence. Since Sly believes that the hostess is at fault, to him his anger is not bluster and menace but anger in service of justice, or indignation. When indignation goes unchecked, it easily transforms itself into fanatical zeal. The "foul spirit" that caused his distemper would thus appear to be the frenzy of the zealot. Let us consider whether these conjectures correspond to the lord's diagnosis and treatment.

On first inspection it is easier to characterize the healthy state, lordship, to which the lord wishes to bring Sly than the diagnosis. Since the lord does not prevent Sly drinking, but on the contrary has his servants offer him sack, it is reasonable to assume that the alcoholism is a figure of his frenzy. There are indications that the lord diagnoses Sly's condition as beggary. This makes some sense. Beggars entreat, while lords command; the transformation from beggar to lord would thus be a "transmutation"

3 The Elizabethan audience would probably have identified Sly as a vagabond, who were common at the time and who usually followed Sly's professions. Charles Whibley, "Rogues and Vagabonds" in Shakespeare's England (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1917), II, pp. 484-510.
4 Ind. i.9; ii.1, 24, 98, 137.
to an opposite. The treatment would perforce arouse in Sly a desire for command and contempt for his base conditions. The exhibition of Petruchio's successful campaign against Kate is well suited to that purpose. Once more, however, we note a theme struck in the Induction and continued in the body, but which is not applicable to Sly because he sleeps. Furthermore, the treatment administered to Sly in the Induction has no obvious connection with transforming him into a lord. The treatment does not instruct but arouses a passion; and the passion is not love of glory, but erotic desire.

The whole treatment of Sly is geared to this purpose. It begins when the lord directs that Sly be quartered in his most voluptuous bedroom. The cure, including the taming play, is staged here. (This setting is complemented in the taming play by the conclusion, which sends brides and grooms off to the marriage bed.) The treatment entices Sly to indulge in various pleasures; he is especially exposed to some "wanton pictures," which prepare him for the more lifelike image of the page disguised as his lady. The efficacy of the treatment is apparent when, immediately upon being persuaded that he is a lord, Sly calls for his wife. Throughout the remainder of the episode his one desire is to make love to her.

Interest in women is a *volte face* for Sly. His indifference to sex is so great that he calls the hostess "boy" and tells her to warm herself on her "cold bed," while he himself sleeps on a cold hearth. He is so unaccustomed to women that he does not know the proper form of address to wives, nor does he suspect the page's disguise even though they sit together.

The lord explains the way in which Sly's treatment proceeds: He is to "recall" the "ancient thoughts" that lie submerged in his alcohol-frenzied mind (Ind. ii.31). The wanton pictures all depict "ancient" characters, namely, pagan gods and heroes. The lord's use of pagan divinities, together with Sly's frequent mention of Christian pieties, all point to Christianity as the "novelty" that has obscured Sly's original nature. If Sly's malady is religious fanaticism, we need but grasp how loosening Sly's desire would restore his health.

Sly vacillates between self-abasement ("beggary") and the intransigence peculiar to righteous indignation. (Notice that Sly's list of occupations argues his instability.) His appeal to law and justice show that he understands himself as subject to the law; exaggerated or fanatical submission to law tends toward servility. The conviction of his own righteousness will grow in Sly to the extent that he is conscious of his submission to law. And to the degree that his submission is greater than that of other men, he will come to believe in his superior piety. Hence, Sly is both defiant and abject. Of all the virtues, justice is the most severe; it upholds Shylock's contract with Antonio and sends soldiers to face death in the field. Justice is ranged against the natural appetites insofar as it divides them into those that are lawful and those that are not, whereas desire as desire recognizes no such distinction. The natural ally of justice in its struggle with desire is spiritedness or anger. But if spiritedness grows
beyond what is needed for the support of justice, if, like desire, it becomes emancipated from reason, it will produce its own injustice—the injustice of the righteous. Such is perhaps the root of the combination of piety and ferocity in Sly. The right treatment of that condition would attempt to restore justice by tempering his spiritedness. The taming of Sly’s virulence would accordingly be accomplished by “recalling” the desire that has retreated before the surging floods of anger. Love, in short, softens the heart.

II

We are now prepared to confront the frequently mentioned fact that Sly after all nods during the taming play. Shakespeare goes out of his way to call this incident to our attention. It is apparent that his sleep is induced by boredom (I.i.251-52). What is there in the opening scene that would be tedious to Sly? It opens with two long speeches on Lucentio’s plan to study philosophy. If from the almost universal silence of critics about this striking passage it may be inferred that even they doze through it, how much more a man of Sly’s stripe?® Lucentio’s man Tranio utters what Shakespeare perhaps thought would be the displeasure of the audience with Lucentio’s musings, for the subject is dropped and is not heard again. We nevertheless suggest that the speech is not an idle, faulty start, but the true beginning of the taming play.

Lucentio says that he has come to Padua to study “Virtue, and that part of philosophy / Will I apply that treats of happiness / By virtue specially to be achiev’d.” His choice of cities is deliberate, being governed by his opinion that the wisdom of his native Pisa is a “shallow splash” compared to the depth of Paduan wisdom (I.i.21-24). The wisdom for which Padua was then renowned was the so-called “Latin Averroism,” which asserted, contrary to the dominant view in the Middle Ages, the independence of philosophy from theology. Lucentio apparently anticipates a secular wisdom.

Certainly he has a good deal to learn. The changeability of his opinions is underscored by his dependence on Tranio’s advice. It is typical of him that he abandons his plans for study when he falls in love, at first sight, with Bianca. Yet Lucentio continues to be a student. His humiliating bet with Petruchio teaches him that he has misjudged Bianca’s character; that beneath her mild exterior there lies a nature as refractory as Kate’s (V.ii.182, 189). The play concludes with Lucentio resolving to attend Petruchio’s taming school. The opening theme of the taming play is therefore dropped only in appearance. It is continued, so to speak, on another level, a level invisible to Sly. This bifocal character of the play is anticipated and prepared by the Induction. The lord applied a twofold

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® The incongruity of Sly as the audience for Lucentio’s speech has been remarked only by William Hazlitt (Complete Works, IV, pp. 342, 344) and E. P. Kuhl ("Shakespeare’s Purpose in Dropping Sly," MLN XXXVI (1921), p. 326), but neither offers an interpretation of it.
remedy for Sly's malady. His ferocity is to be tamed by arousing his desire, and his abjectness cured by transforming him into a lord. In order to effect these different cures, the taming play must present an action appropriate to each. Now the taming play is called both a comedy and a history (Ind. ii.129, 140). As a comedy it is a salty piece appropriate to dispelling Sly's melancholy and virulence; it addresses the same passions that the lord treats in the Induction. Viewed as history, the taming play is about lordship. We suggest that Sly's nodding and his sham transformation into a lord indicate his inattention to this theme, since its effectiveness presupposes a teachable "patient." At the level of history, Lucentio replaces Sly as the addressee of the play.

As history, Lucentio's courtship of Bianca, whom he calls "Minerva," is the pursuit of wisdom. He conducts his courtship in the guise of a pedant. The disguise reveals Lucentio's understanding of the pursuit of wisdom. In changing places with his man Tranio, he becomes, by his own description, a "slave" (I.i.218), quite in keeping with his dependence on Tranio and his suppliant approach to Bianca. As befits his literary education, he woos with poetry and music rather than by deeds. Wisdom for Lucentio is something like the life of the ideal courtier as portrayed by Castiglione, that is, a mixture of classical and Christian notions. From Petruchio's perspective, Lucentio's modesty, compliance, and civility must appear as "beggary."

Petruchio's understanding of wooing as taming is likewise consistent with his education, which was war (I.ii.197-208). He pays court to Kate like a general fated to conquer an enemy. Yet his subtlety is missed if one mistakes his rough, boisterous, whimsical manner as the vulgarity of the fortune seeker. His conduct is controlled by "policy," which is to kill Kate in her own humour; he adopts Kate's character as the means of taming her. The genuine center of Petruchio's character, which is also his genuine ruthlessness, is an inflexible determination to succeed at whatever he undertakes. That enables him to appropriate a certain kind of rationality, the calculation of means. He does not woo Kate for her beauty but for her dowry. When Lucentio discovers that his beautiful Bianca is no less refractory than Kate, he learns Petruchio's lesson that fine feelings ought to be replaced by calculation.

Petruchio reminds one of a Machiavellian "captain." Shakespeare seems to be experimenting with the Florentine's teaching, perhaps in order to determine the extent to which it might be useful as a corrective for certain defects in men like Lucentio. By that I mean that the play exhibits the

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6 This has been clearly seen by Schomberg, who wrote that Petruchio "erfasst das Leben wie es ist, ohne Illusionen." The Taming of the Shrew: Eine Studie zu Shakespeare's Kunst (Halle: Niemeyer, 1904), p. 99.
7 See II.i.131-37, 170-80; IV.ii.178-201.
8 Petruchio's long commentary on why Katherina must be called "Kate" (II.i.185-95) suggests that he thinks of her as Fate, which parallels Lucentio's regard for Bianca as "Minerva."
desirability of a kind of controlled or muted Machiavellianism rather than Machiavelli’s own doctrine. The difference is visible in the play’s dramatic structure. Petruchio makes his appearance as a character in the lord’s play, and hence in service of ends determined by the lord. The teaching is muted by the un-Machiavellian restraint with which it is communicated. Indeed, the settings of the Induction and play (Burtonheath, a few miles from Stratford, and Padua) seem to indicate that the dramatic relationship between the lord and Petruchio is an image of Shakespeare’s own understanding of Machiavelli.9 Whereas Petruchio, despite his flamboyance, is at bottom unpoetic, the lord, as author of the taming play, knows how to combine poetry with calculation. Whereas Petruchio acts exclusively for his own advantage, and claims that in so doing he benefits his fellows (IV.ii.200-01), the lord’s playfulness bespeaks a mind free from the constraints of needs, which enables him to minister, in very different ways, to Sly and Lucentio. Perhaps Shakespeare thought that poetic play is a higher form of lordship than Machiavellian mastery, not because its results are more certain, but because they are more humane.

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“AND IN ITS WAKE WE FOLLOWED”
The Political Wisdom of Mark Twain

CATHERINE AND MICHAEL ZUCKERT

I

Mark Twain’s *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* is an obviously political book in which the Yankee—the knight of progress and democracy—challenges the superstitions and cruel injustices of feudal England. Since this encounter is, at least initially, as obviously humorous as it is political, questions are apt to arise when critics begin to treat this novel seriously. Nevertheless, *A Connecticut Yankee* has become the focus of serious Twain criticism in recent years, because according to these critics, *A Connecticut Yankee* is the first major work in which Twain’s humor gives way to his final despair and, thus, this novel reveals the final inadequacy of Twain’s art and/or understanding.\(^1\) *A Connecticut Yankee*, the critics assert, is an essentially flawed work because the initial lighthearted humor of the first part gives way to the horror of the second. We, on the contrary, wish to show that this shift from humor to horror is by no means an accidental product of Twain’s confusion or despair but is central to Twain’s meaning and that once the reader comes to

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\(^1\) Cf. Henry Nash Smith, *Mark Twain’s Fable of Progress* (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1964); James M. Cox, “A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court: The Machinery of Self-Preservation,” reprinted in H. N. Smith, *Mark Twain: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963), pp. 117-129; Robert A. Wiggins, *Mark Twain Jackleg Novelist* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1964), pp. 77-82; Henry Seidel Canby, *Turn West, Turn East* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1951), pp. 161-173; Gladys Carmen Bellamy, *Mark Twain as Literary Artist* (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1950), pp. 311-316; Thomas Blues, *Mark Twain and the Community* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1970). Ever since Van Wyck Brooks’ watershed study of the *Ordeal of Mark Twain*, critics have tended to view Twain in light of his “defects,” so that current interpretations of *Connecticut Yankee* represent, essentially, mere “variations on a theme.” Twain was a “character”—everyone knew that “Mark Twain” was in fact Samuel Clemens—and that character was a distinctively American phenomenon. It is precisely this fact that gave such impetus to the Brooks school of criticism—Twain seemed so obviously a cultural phenomenon that a purely literary study seemed inappropriate. We suggest, however, that Brooks reversed the proper relation when he proceeded to study Mark Twain merely as a reflection of the American cultural situation. Twain’s tremendous success indicates that he had identified something distinctively American; at least he knew how to appeal to Americans. We hope to show that he also sought to improve them. That is, Twain not merely reflected the American character but intentionally sought to form it.
Interpretation

understand why the humorous becomes horrible, he will have acquired some insight into the character and problems of modern politics.

Despite the near universal condemnation of Twain's "confusion," the novel has a clearly defined structure: a preface by the author, a "frame" in which Twain receives the manuscript from the Yankee, and the Yankee's tale itself, which comprises the greatest part of the novel. That tale is, further, divided into five major parts: the Yankee's first visit at Camelot (chapters 1-10), his first journey with Sandy (chapters 11-20), his sojourn at the Holy Fountain (chapters 21-26), his second journey with Arthur (chapters 27-38), and his return to Camelot (chapters 39-44). As this general outline suggests, there are distinct parallels between the first half of the Yankee's tale and the second. For example, the central incident in the Yankee's initial stay at Camelot is his "saving of the sun," through which he comes to power and commences his Enlightenment civilization, whereas the turning point in the Yankee's fortune during his final stay at Camelot comes with the Church's interdict that shuts off the electric lights and with them the Yankee's civilization; where the Yankee learns to don armor, King Arthur dons a commoner's pack; where the Yankee tells the freemen of the evils of monarchy, the woman in the smallpox hut documents the misery of common life in Arthurdom; where the Yankee and Sandy visit Morgan, Hank Morgan and Arthur visit Marco; where the Yankee saves the "noble ladies," who are in fact pigs, by purchasing them, the knights on bicycles rescue the king and Boss, who were but a moment before slaves condemned to die. And so on. The parallels are indeed numerous, because Twain wrote a tightly constructed novel. In each parallel, moreover, what is funny in the first version is most often horrible in the second. A final example: Where the Yankee subdues knights, who mistake him for a dragon as a result of his puffing smoke from his pipe through his visor on his first journey, he blows to bits with a bomb the first knights he and Arthur encounter during his second journey and so foreshadows the conclusion of the novel.

In order to understand this repeated shift from the comic to the horrible, it may be helpful to consider the Yankee's initial and repeated metaphor: the circus. When Sir Kay first accosts him, the Yankee concludes that Sir Kay must be from a circus, if not a lunatic asylum. But the Yankee quickly discovers that it is he and not the knight who is, so to speak, the freak in Arthurdom. The Arthurians, he states, wondered at him as people do at an elephant in a zoo. Now the particular character of a freak is that he is both funny (or at least curious) and horrible; he is funny because of the exaggerated proportions, yet horrible because unnatural. And that is precisely the character of the shift in the tone of the

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2 Each of these five parts, in turn, divides roughly in two: at Camelot, before and after the eclipse through which the Yankee comes to power; on his first journey, before and after he visits Morgan; at the Holy Fountain, before and after Arthur joins him; during the second journey, before and after Marco; and during his final visit, before and after his journey to France.
book. The comedy of the first half often consists in exaggeration because it arises from an implicit contrast of pretension with nature; and because it deals primarily with pretensions, the humor deals primarily with illusions or unrealities. The Yankee does not really save the sun, he is not really a knight or a dragon, the ladies are not ladies but pigs, and so on. By means of the parallels between incidents in the first and in the second half of the tale, Twain shows the often harsh reality underlying the humor. Thus he reveals in the structure the character of his humor in general: The jokes are jokes and most often very funny, but at the same time these jokes point to a not-so-funny reality beneath the humor. In the second half of this novel we see the misery inflicted upon the common people by the nobles' pretensions, which the Yankee so often ridicules in the first half. Yet, at the same time, we are forced to recognize the true nobility and excellence of Arthur and Lancelot. Contrary to the Yankee's initial assertions, the nobles possess a factual superiority on which to base their claim to rule. While Twain partially rehabilitates the legitimacy of aristocratic rule, he also reveals the Yankee's own very crude pretensions. More fundamentally, he exposes the true requirements for the realization of the Yankee's nobler dream—instution of a republic within his own lifetime—in the total war at the end. Exaggeration is the appropriate form of humor for the Yankee, we finally see, because the Yankee is characterized by his lack of restraint, that is, his immoderation.

Is the Yankee's dream of a republican manliness then merely that—a dream? Is the destruction of humanity by its own technological power an inexorable process once begun? That is the conclusion represented by the Yankee, who on his deathbed appeals to his Arthurian wife Sandy to save him from those horrible dreams—including not only the culmination of sixth-century revolution but his modern life as a whole. But are we justified in identifying Twain and his narrator? It is precisely this identification that has led the critics to conclude that *A Connecticut Yankee* finally represents a confused product of Twain's semiconscious despair, because the Yankee is somewhat confused and does not completely understand the grounds and/or implications of his democratic theory and revolutionary project.

Identification of Twain and his Yankee narrator is possible only by ignoring the introduction and "frame" in which Twain speaks to the reader in his own voice; it is, therefore, to a careful examination of these two sections that we now turn. Once one ceases simply to identify Twain and his Yankee narrator, one is able to see the Yankee as the vehicle of Twain's strenuous, if deeply sympathetic, critique of America.

In the Preface Twain appears as the author of all that is to follow. He begins with a statement that seems to shed light on the intention of

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the novel: "The ungentle laws and customs touched upon in this tale are historical."\(^4\) There is a certain ambiguity since the "laws and customs touched upon in this tale" include those not only of Arthur's sixth-century England but also those of the Yankee's nineteenth-century America. Twain seems to clarify the ambiguity in the sequel, however:

It is not pretended that these laws and customs existed in England in the sixth century; no, it is only pretended that inasmuch as they existed in the English and other civilizations of far later times it is safe to consider that it is no libel upon the sixth century to suppose them to have been in practice in that day, also. One is quite justified in inferring that whatever one of these laws or customs was lacking in that remote time, its place was competently filled by a worse one.\(^5\)

The implication seems clear: The ungentle or even bad laws and customs are those of the sixth century. We may infer this from the principle Twain states that he used in writing his tale—a more distant past is worse than a more recent past. History is progressive. Twain, in other words, seems to agree with the Yankee of his story.\(^6\)

Twain continues, however: "The question as to whether there is such a thing as divine right of kings is not settled in this book"\(^7\)—a question most strange to be raised in light of the preceding affirmation of progress and with it of the nineteenth century. Moreover, though not settled in this book, Twain claims that "it ought to be settled"; that is, it remains a question of importance.\(^8\) Therefore, we cannot conclude Twain is committed to progress and shares the Yankee's view of political things. This is corroborated by the Yankee himself who asserts that the Roman Catholic Church "invented 'divine right of things'"; that is, the Yankee believes the question is easily settled in the negative.\(^9\) Not only does Twain raise the issue of divine right, he presents an argument for it which, he claims tentatively, makes it an "unavoidable deduction." That argument provides the key to understanding his curious procedure in the Preface. Twain supports the divine right of kings with an argument for divine providence, an argument with the following features: (a) An assertion that man knows the good, but (b) is unable to effectuate it. However, (c) what ought to be is, and (d) therefore God (the effectively ruling principle of the whole) guarantees or effectuates this conjunction of the "is" and the

\(^4\) Ibid., n.p.
\(^5\) Ibid.
\(^6\) Ibid., p. 330.
\(^7\) Ibid., n.p.
\(^8\) Ibid. Twain says he will "go into training and settle the question in another book." Since he does return to it in his massive *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc* [(29 vols.; Author's National Edition; New York: Harper and Brothers, 1912), I, 166] where he has Joan tell the Dauphin that he is king appointed by God, we might be less inclined to dismiss the whole business as a mere joke between Twain and his enlightened readers.

\(^9\) Connecticut Yankee, p. 65.
"ought." This argument differs both from the traditional arguments for
divine right of kings\textsuperscript{10} and from the traditional conceptions of providence.
Twain's argument differs from the traditional conceptions of providence
in that it affirms a scrutable God and therefore of necessity falls to
evidence of an imperfect world—for example, "the Pompadour, Lady
Castlemaine, and other executive heads of that kind."\textsuperscript{11} It is not merely
a strange argument then, but a patently ineffective and inappropriate one.
At this point, Twain apparently retreats to the more traditional conception
of providence in holding the question open, unsettled.\textsuperscript{12}

Twain indicates his intention here by claiming "to take the other
tack" on divine right in this book, that is, to make the assumption that the
argument from divine right or providence is not of itself sufficient to
uphold the claims of the Arthurian regime. By extension, the same holds
for progress also. Thus he lays the foundation for the political comparison
between Arthurdom and Yankeeedom, a comparison that is only possible
on political grounds if assumptions of progress and providence are, at
least at the outset, put aside.

Twain's raising the issue of divine right is not a merely arbitrary way
to signal his readers about his relation to his Yankee. Twain is led almost
necessarily from the affirmation of progress to the consideration of
providence as the peculiar form of the argument indicates. Twain is led
to providence in search of the grounds for that progress he affirms. Prog-
ress, too, entails the necessary conjunction, in this case over time, of the
"is" and the "ought," that is, the effective realization of the good.\textsuperscript{13} But
whence comes the necessity? The consideration of that problem is what
makes Twain not only take up, but be favorably disposed toward, the
argument for providence. Ironically, it thus leads him to undercut his
commitment to progress itself.

Twain's irony suggests that his Yankee and his audience perhaps, in
their easy commitment to progress, make a deep-going assumption, even
an act of great faith in the beneficent ordering of the whole, an assumption
of faith they are not only not quite aware of, but even opposed to, or
disposed to ridicule—after all, the argument for divine right is a joke.
In the order of his considerations in the Preface, Twain simply raises
to self-consciousness in a comic way what remains implicit in the opinions
of the Yankee and his audience. In the final analysis, it is this duality

\textsuperscript{10} Cf. John Neville Figgis, \textit{Divine Right of Kings} (New York: Harper and
Brothers, 1965).

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Connecticut Yankee}, n.p.

\textsuperscript{12} The fact that Twain leaves the question open means, of course, that Twain's
complete teaching is not contained in this book. This is merely explicitly to
recognize what should be obvious; this essay does not deal with the totality of
Twain's thought and must be supplemented by analyses of his other works. The
eminently political character of this work makes it a good place to begin, however.

\textsuperscript{13} That is, progress as a principle legitimizing a particular political regime.
of progress and providence, and their underlying affinities, that lies beneath Twain's presentation of the conflicting regimes.

Twain's indication in the Preface that he is not an unabashed partisan of the present is strengthened by his "Word of Explanation" in which he presents himself as a character, the person who acquires the manuscript that constitutes the main part of the novel, rather than as the author of the novel itself. Twain here appears to be an unabashed lover of the past. He and the Yankee meet during a guided tour through an old English castle. After the Yankee leaves him, Twain goes to his room at Warwick Arms (probably a hotel in the medieval style to match the castle). In his room, he sits "steeped in a dream of the olden time. . . . From time to time [he] dip[s] into old Sir Thomas Malory's enchanting book, and [feeds] at its rich feast of prodigies and adventures, breathe[s] in the fragrance of its obsolete names, and dream[s] again."14 We meet, in fact, two Mark Twains: the Twain of the Preface who is most familiar to us as a humorist and skeptic, and the Twain of the "frame" who is a reader and a dreamer.

Just as we encounter two Twains, we also meet two Yankees in "A Word of Explanation." The Yankee Twain meets appears also to be a lover of the past. Though an American, he never returns to America after his adventure in Arthur's kingdom; he remains in England where he, too, can be near relics of the past. He tours the old castles and looks at the old armor. He appears to hunger for the opportunity to tell of what he has done, but at the same time he is reluctant and ashamed, or too terrified of reliving his experience in speech, to do so. He comes close to telling Twain in the castle when the cicerone points out the bullet hole in the armor: "'Wit ye well, I saw it done.' Then, after a pause, added: 'I did it myself.'"15 The order of his speech is telling; so is the pause. And so is the Yankee's disappearance after his admission of the deed. The Yankee's desire to confess is great, however; so great that he troubles to find Twain's room and finally, after midnight, brings himself to call on Twain. Twain knows the power of whiskey to loosen men's tongues, and after four drinks the Yankee tells his tale. He begins, but is interrupted by sleepiness. He is relaxed, his soul is relieved. He can complete his confession by letting Twain read the rest of the story.16 The sources of his anguish now seem to have been dreams:

It was awful—awfuller than you can imagine. . . . 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.17

14 Connecticut Yankee, pp. 2-3.
15 Ibid., p. 2.
16 We should note that the Yankee has probably spent much time mulling over his own experience. He is able to recite the first part of his narrative from memory, so it appears that he has read it, perhaps "worked on it," often.
17 Ibid., p. 449.
The Yankee has been released, and with that release he commits himself totally to that past he has left; even his origin in modern times seems part of his awful dreams.  

Although the story the Yankee tells hardly appears "dreamlike," Twain clearly suggests in "A Word of Explanation" that the story, too, represents at least a twofold dream: What the Yankee sees as the result of a stiff blow to the head, Twain envisions as a result of his reading of Malory. Twain, it seems, even dreams in manuscript form. In any case, the utter unreality of a twofold dream is clearly in line with the historical inaccuracy Twain warned his readers about in his Preface. Only by suggesting that the Yankee's tale is a dream can he make the juxtaposition of historical details from different periods plausible.

Certainly, the effect of the Yankee's story goes well beyond that to be expected of a "mere dream." As a result of his experience, the Yankee undergoes a complete change of character. From the hardheaded entrepreneur who seeks to introduce nineteenth-century "civilization" into Arthur's realm, he becomes the nostalgic wanderer we meet in the "frame" who is driven by his bad dream to seek comfort by surrounding himself with relics of his beloved past. Upon hearing (reading) the Yankee's tale, Twain, on the other hand, awakens from his romantic slumber to become the skeptical author of this volume, whom we meet in the Preface. The two transformations are related, because the Yankee's initial stance as an

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18 This is reflected even in his manner of speaking. At one point, he said to Twain: "Wit ye well"; later he says, "Give you good den, fair sir." (Ibid., pp. 2, 8.) He speaks as a Malory Arthurian. This acquires special significance in the light of a comment the Yankee once made to Sandy about her narrative technique: "Sir Marhaus, the King's Son of Ireland talks like all the rest; you ought to give him a brogue, or at least a characteristic expletive; by this means one would recognize him as soon as he spoke, without his ever being named. It is a common literary device with great authors." (Ibid., pp. 124-125.) The Yankee believes that a man's way of speaking is an indication of his identity. Thus the Yankee's adoption of Arthurian speech is an indication that he now identifies himself with the past.

19 He suggests even that the Yankee's midnight visit is a dream; and he reminds us later in the story of its dreamlike character by occasionally reproducing whole sections from Malory. The most important case is perhaps "Sandy's tale," during which the Yankee dreams as well. Further, the story as a whole follows the tale Twain quotes in his "Word." Cf. ibid., pp. 2-5, 10, 34, 47, 60, 115, 408, 417, 430, 449. See also Arthur's dream in Thomas Malory, Le Morte d'Arthur, I, xix.

The overall structure of A Connecticut Yankee reminds one very much of another classic of which Twain was a known admirer. [Cf. Delancey Ferguson, Mark Twain: Man and Legend (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1942), p. 26.] Don Quixote also depicts a series of both harsh and humorous adventures produced by a combination of reading and dreaming and conveys a caustic critique of the chivalry of the romances through its ridicule. In Connecticut Yankee the characters are reversed; it is Twain who reads the romances, not his Yankee knight. The first object of Twain's burlesque is the knight, that is, the Yankee, not King Arthur's court.
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entrepreneur and his later romantic nostalgia are essentially related phenomena. As an entrepreneur the Yankee looks away from present deprivations to a future of plenty when technology will have enabled men to overcome physical restrictions, whereas the romantic, doubting first that technology can overcome all physical limitations on men (in the most important case, death) and second that all deprivations are physical in essence, looks back from the Yankee's present to a past stripped of all its harshness because stripped of all immediacy. Both constitute attempts to escape the present, when what is needed is a critical look at the present in order to identify the character and source of its defects. Thus both the modernistic prejudices of the present and the romanticism that was its most common alternative become targets of Twain's humor. It is appropriate that the book is a fantasy—one cannot openly and seriously challenge all the opinions of one's readers—as it is appropriate that the story is a manifold of dreams, for our dreams make manifest the truths hidden by our opinions.

The Yankee's tale induces Twain to attempt to play an active role in determining future history. In the very conception of the Yankee's tale, we see Twain at least threaten to alter the course of history, first in fiction by juxtaposing factual details from different periods in a comic and fantastic manner but second and ultimately in fact by reforming his Yankee audience's conception of history—both the reality of the past and the direction of the future. He can do this, however, only in the context set by his Preface, because the precondition for man's taking an active role in determining history is that there is no necessary course of history, either of progress or providence. And Twain at least comically asserts this possibility at the very beginning of his novel.

II. The Yankee

The Yankee begins his tale by introducing himself:

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.21

The Yankee stands for modern America; he is a type. So little is he an individual that he fails to tell us his name until much later, and in fact he goes unnamed throughout most of the book. Only once is his full name even mentioned.22 The fact that the Yankee is a type is responsible for much of the humor of the story, as well as the source of its importance as a reflection upon the American character.

The Yankee proclaims himself an American, practical and unsen-

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20 Malory, too, put something of his present with a rather different immediate intent into his tale.
21 Connecticut Yankee, p. 5.
22 Ibid., p. 383.
timental. His chief and only concern as he first appears to us is his occupation—making "anything a body wanted." The only thing that he tells us about his family concerns their occupations, and he does this in a context that suggests that he holds them in something like contempt. He draws our attention to the fact that he has risen from the positions of his father and uncle and thus implies that he is superior to his parents. His career is, in fact, the ideal American career: The Yankee is the American self-made man. He has transcended his lowly family origins to become the head superintendent of the arms factory. He embodies the highest ideals of America, the successive rise of each generation over the previous one, and in so doing indicates that America is founded on impiety. The preservation of ancestral ways, of the old, the traditional, and the revered, is explicitly rejected by the Yankee and his America. This would seem of a piece with his rejection of the sentimental and the poetic. The Yankee's highest concern is his own personal, social, and economic rise.

It is striking, in fact, how lacking in explicitly political subject matter this most political book is for the first eight chapters. After an initial period of disbelief and despondency, the Yankee reaches a conclusion about his future course of action:

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, I would boss the whole country inside of three months; for I judged I would have the start on the best educated in the kingdom by a matter of thirteen hundred years and upwards.

He sees his present position as merely an extension of, and a far greater opportunity than, his previous job as head superintendent of the arms factory.

For a time, I used to wake up, mornings, and smile at my "dream," and listen for the Colt's factory whistle; but that sort of thing played itself out gradually, and at last I was fully able to realize that I was actually living in the sixth century. . . . After that, I was just as much at home in that century as I could have been in any other, and as for preference, I wouldn't have traded it for the twentieth. Look at the opportunities here for a man of knowledge, brains, pluck and enterprise to sail in and grow up with the country. The grandest field there ever was and all my own; not a competitor; . . . whereas, what would I amount to in the twentieth century? I should be a foreman in a factory, that is about all. . . .

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23 Ibid., p. 5.
24 Eric Goldman, for example, characterizes "the day's credo" as follows: "In worn-out, king-ridden Europe, men must stay where they are born. But in America a man is accounted a failure and certainly ought to be, who has not risen above his father's station in life." Rendezvous with Destiny (New York: Vintage, 1955), p. 8.
25 Connecticut Yankee, p. 16.
26 Ibid., pp. 60-61.
His aims have not the broad significant political interests they later acquire. He does not want to rule the country, but to “boss” it; and the title he finally takes in Arthur’s realm is “The Boss.” At this point the Yankee does not question the legitimacy of the present regime; nor does he concern himself with the public good that might accrue should he gain power. He shows no concern for justice. When the Yankee gains power during the eclipse, he indicates the character of his venture as he sees it: He is concerned with the rise in revenue he could produce and the rise in his own income that would result.

The Yankee appears first as the preeminently private man; yet he appears to be singularly unable to participate in the satisfactions of a private life. In his initial speech, where he recounts those things he considers most important about himself, he fails to mention a fiancee, Puss Flannigan, he left back in the nineteenth century. Later he informs us that this Miss Flannigan is fifteen years old. All the evidence—that initial omission, the young lady’s name, her age, and what the Yankee says of her—indicates that this was no romance of the flesh, nor for that matter of the soul. The Yankee is, in fact, downright prudish. Nor does the Yankee find satisfaction in the pleasures of the soul that a private man might enjoy. He tells us explicitly that he lacks poetry: and his comments on art are a further confirmation of his lack of love for the beautiful. Other possible grounds for the primacy of the private life—philosophy, family, religion—are most conspicuous by their absence. One aspect of the Yankee’s politicization has to do with his bankruptcy as a private man.

The claims for the private life have usually been cast in terms of the primacy of pleasure and the freedom the private gives for the pursuit of pleasure. But the Yankee is not primarily interested in pleasure per se. Rather, the Yankee seeks to avoid pain. Early in his tale he comments

27 The first words said to the Yankee, by Sir Kay, on his arrival in Arthur’s realm were: “Fair sir, will ye just?” (Ibid., p. 6.) The Yankee does not understand the question. Perhaps the play on joust-just here makes that misunderstanding more important than it immediately seems.

28 See also his remark prior to the eclipse: “Besides in a business way I knew it would be the making of me.” (Ibid., p. 43.)

29 The Yankee is offended by all dinner conversation except that at Marco’s. Cf. ibid., pp. 32, 69, 88, 100, 138, 183, 192-198.

30 “There was not a chromo. I had been used to chromos for years, and I saw that without my suspecting it a passion for art had got worked into the fabric of my being. . . . It made me homesick to look around over this proud and gaudy but heartless barrenness and remember that in our house in East Hartford, all unpretending as it was, you couldn’t go into a room but you would find an insurance chromo, or at least a three-color God-Bless-Our-Home over the door. . . . But here, even in my grand room of state, there wasn’t anything in the nature of a picture except a thing the size of a bedquilt, which was either woven or knitted (it had darned places in it), and nothing in it was the right color or the right shape. . . .” (Ibid., pp. 51-52.)
on life at Camelot: "As for conveniences, properly speaking, there weren't any. I mean little conveniences, it is the little conveniences that make the real comfort of life."31 The comfort the Yankee seeks is not so much positive pleasure as it is freedom from inconveniences.

Yet the man who seeks comfort must exert and so inconvenience himself; he must keep himself busy working for change in an environment in which comfort is lacking. Ending his catalog of missing conveniences, the Yankee concludes:

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.32

The Yankee's comfort seeking itself cuts very far in the direction of change or reform and thus accounts in part for the Yankee's politicization.33 But comfort does not in itself constitute a satisfactory end of political reform. First, comfort forever eludes attainment by its seekers; its pursuit forces the pursuer to deny himself the very thing he seeks. Second, comfort is not so much a positive pleasure as an absence of pain or inconvenience; that is, its attractiveness in and of itself is weak.

The Yankee's politicization occurs in a chapter that begins with his reflections on the summit of power he has reached:

I was no shadow of a king; I was the substance; the king himself was the shadow. My power was colossal; and it was not a mere name, as such things generally have been, it was the genuine article.34

He finds his position totally unique in the annals of world history. He compares himself with others who have wielded such great powers and finds them all inferior to him in some respect.35 Yet the Yankee is

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31 Ibid.
32 Ibid., p. 53.
33 The Yankee here displays the essence of bourgeois psychology. Cf. John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, II, 21-22, for the emergence of avoidance of pain as the primary motive force, and the whole of Locke's works for the origin of the bourgeois order.
34 Connecticut Yankee, p. 61.
35 "There was nothing back of me that could approach it, unless it might be Joseph's case and Joseph's only approached it, it didn't equal it quite. For it stands to reason that as Joseph's splendid financial ingenuities advantaged nobody but the king, the general public must have regarded him with a good deal of disfavor, whereas I had done my entire public a kindness in sparing the sun, and was popular by reason of it." (Ibid.) The Yankee strains to establish the importance and satisfactoriness of his position. His understanding of Joseph's activities, and the popularity that accrued to Joseph, is at the least distorted. Joseph did not, in fact, benefit nobody but the king, but through his prudent provision of store for the present famine and future ones as well, he benefited all. The explicit testimony of the
not quite so satisfied with his own position as he would have us believe. The explicit piercing of his reveries comes immediately:

Yes, in power I was equal to the king. At the same time there was another power that was a trifle stronger than both of us put together. That was the Church. I do not wish to disguise that fact, I couldn't, if I wanted to.\(^{36}\)

Moreover, the Yankee admits:

... those people had inherited the idea that all men without title and a long pedigree, whether they had great natural gifts and acquirements or hadn't, were creatures of no more consideration than so many animals, bugs. ... The way I was looked upon was odd, but it was natural. You know how the keeper and the public regard the elephant in the menagerie. ... They speak with pride of the fact that he can do a hundred marvels which are far and away beyond their own powers. ... But does that make him one of them? No; the raggedest tramps would smile at the idea ... Well, to the king, the nobles, and all the nation, down to the very the idea. ... Well, to the king, the nobles, and all the nation, down to the very admired, also feared; but it was as an animal is admired and feared. The animal is not reverenced, neither was I; I was not even respected. I had no pedigree, no inherited title; so in the king's and nobles' eyes I was mere dirt; the people regarded me with wonder and awe, but there was no reverence mixed with it. ...\(^{37}\)

From having power that he told us was "enormous" and "colossal," the Yankee now admits that there is one power equal to his and another more than twice as great. Not only is his power circumscribed, but he also does not receive the respect and reverence he wants.

Initially, the Yankee wanted "to boss" the country in order to make money; but it now appears that he wanted to make money because "where he comes from" money differentiated men; that is, money was the source of respect. This is not true in Arthurian England; and when the Yankee discovers this, he becomes dissatisfied with his position. Lacking any inward aims or activities by which to define himself, the Yankee must look to his job (foreman) or position (boss); he is an externally defined

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Bible (Genesis 48:25, 50:20, 26) confirms Joseph's popularity also, whereas the Yankee's proves questionable. The Yankee bases his conception of his greatness, moreover, on a deed he knows was a fraud—his "saving" of the sun. Likewise, the other adventurers the Yankee cites—De Montfort, Gaveston, Mortimer, Villiers, and unnamed others (p. 61)—are not especially apt for his purpose. All did in truth rise to heights of power through their close relations with their kings, but all maintained their power only a short time; and all suffered rather untimely deaths at the hands of political rivals. The Yankee's choice of examples is a foreshadowing of his own fate. He shares a certain irreverence and imprudence with one. Gaveston, an "upstart" and "foreigner" had no prudence, for he gave nicknames to the leading barons. In return he lost his life. [George Macaulay Trevelyan, A Shortened History of England (Hamondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1959), p. 158.] The Yankee calls Sir Gareth, "Garry," and Sir Sagramor le Desirous, "Sir Sag," although never to either knight's face. (Connecticut Yankee, pp. 72, 384.)

\(^{36}\) Ibid., p. 62.

\(^{37}\) Ibid., pp. 63-64.
man whose self-esteem depends very largely on what other men think of him. That means in Arthurian England that the Yankee becomes merely an elephant. In order to become a man, he must overthrow the regime. He is forced to examine the nature and grounds of the present regime, because something about that regime prevents him from finding the respect and reverence he desires. In questioning the present regime, he is forced to consider all regimes. By raising the specifically political questions, the Yankee makes possible the contrast and comparison of laws and customs. In this sense, the Yankee’s politicization represents a new beginning for the novel. One might even call it the beginning, for it is with the question of regime that political thought begins.

After his politicization the Yankee hardly again speaks openly of his own rule for his own sake. That does not mean that his ambitions disappear. Late in the book he announces his long-range plans:

I had two schemes in my head which were the vastest of all my projects. The one was to overthrow the Catholic Church and set up the Protestant faith on its ruins—not as an Established Church, but a go-as-you-please one; and the other project was to get a decree issued by and by, commanding that upon Arthur’s death unlimited suffrage should be introduced. . . . Arthur was good for thirty years yet, he being about my own age . . . and I believed that in that time I could easily have the active part of the population of that day ready and eager for an event which should be the first of its kind in the history of the world—a rounded and complete governmental revolution without bloodshed. The result to be a republic. Well, I may as well confess, though I do feel ashamed when I think of it: I was beginning to have a base hankering to be its first president myself.

The Yankee’s reluctance here to admit personal ambition stands in marked contrast to the unabashed frankness with which he expressed his ambitions earlier. That most casual readers are not taken aback by this contrast is testimony to the extent to which the Yankee’s personal ambition has been submerged. Yet in seeming most open, the Yankee is, in fact, dishonest with both his readers and himself. If he and Arthur are the same age, any change taking effect after Arthur’s death would be unlikely to allow the Yankee to become president. Either the Yankee must give up his ambition or the revolution must be a bloody one. There is no time for a gradual transition.

It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that the Yankee’s ambition and his public program are thoroughly incompatible. The Yankee does not

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39 The title of Chapter 8 points to a new beginning. The title, “The Boss,” refers to the incident in which the Yankee acquires a new name in Arthur’s realm. It was a title “which fell casually from the lips of a blacksmith, one day.” (Connecticut Yankee, p. 67.) The Yankee is renamed by a blacksmith as he was originally named by his blacksmith father.
40 Connecticut Yankee, pp. 399-400.
want merely to rule or to have a recognized position in the kingdom; he receives such a position from the king following the eclipse, but he will accept a title only from the people. He wants to be loved, respected, revered by the people—the more, the better. If that love and reverence are to mean anything to him, they must come from beings whose respect he can value, and he could not value the honor of a "race of rabbits." In order to satisfy his desire for love and honor, he has to raise the people to be his equals, and thus transform the regime. Thus the Yankee speaks upon occasion of the manliness of classical republicanism. Yet, if the people truly become the Yankee's equals, there will no longer be reason for them to honor him. (They might be grateful to their teacher and political founder, but the democratic and revolutionary character of their education makes this unlikely.) This irreconcilable contradiction in the Yankee's goal, which makes the satisfaction of his desire impossible, produces his dishonesty and a severe problem in his political project.

The Yankee comes to power by "saving the sun." Through his historical and scientific knowledge, he is able to predict an eclipse and then to bargain, not merely for his life, but for half the political power in the kingdom during the relatively brief period of darkness. In other words, he uses his knowledge to play upon the superstitions of the Arthurian people in order to gain power. Twain implicitly questions, not only the Yankee's use of his knowledge, but the accuracy of that knowledge. The exact timing of the eclipse is crucial; but it is precisely the question of time that becomes most vexed at this point in the novel. If, as the

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41 Thus the Yankee shows why all demagoguery is essentially egalitarian in doctrine; it is not merely a matter of flattering the masses or breaking down distinctions.

42 On the Yankee's unwillingness to "face facts," see ibid., p. 171.

43 This may be a metaphor for the commencement of the "Dark Ages" in the sixth century.

44 The whole incident of the eclipse is confusing and difficult to understand. There are at least the following curiosities: (a) How is it that the Yankee "just by luck" knew about the "only total eclipse of the sun in the sixth century," especially when total eclipses are visible only at certain places? (b) What is the point of the great definiteness on the time of the eclipse, June 21, 528, when it is known that there were, in fact, three eclipses in England in the sixth century, in 528, 540, and 594? (c) A curiosity more internal to the story concerns the timing of the eclipse within the novel. The Yankee is informed by Clarence on his day of sentencing in Arthur's court that it is June 19, 528 (p. 15). At that time Arthur sets the Yankee's execution for June 21 (p. 31). The next morning, according to Clarence June 20, the Yankee and Clarence talk of the execution coming the day after. But then by noon of that second day, the Yankee on the basis of Clarence's "lie" to Arthur, is taken to his execution on what appears to all, including Arthur, to be one day early. When the eclipse does, in fact, occur, the Yankee discovers from a monk that it is really June 21 after all and that Clarence had been in error as to the dates. But this does not dispel the problem of Arthur's setting the date of the execution for June 21 and then executing the Yankee on what turns out to
confusion in the time seems to suggest, the Yankee did not in fact predict the eclipse accurately, he both saved his life and came to power essentially by chance; and that means that the foundation of both the Yankee's claims to the respect and reverence—even the love and gratitude—of the people and his right to rule are shaky indeed. The dubious aspects of the Yankee's behavior tend to become lost, however, in the larger question of regimes—democracy versus aristocracy—that the Yankee's ascent to power introduces and in which Twain's readers naturally tend to sympathize with the Yankee.

The Yankee does not claim the right to rule in his own name. Rather he claims the right to rule in the name of the people on the basis of the principle of equality; and on that ground he attacks the justice of rule by the king and nobility. But the Arthurian people believe that the rule of the titled nobility is both natural and just. The Church, that power twice as great as Arthur and the Yankee combined, is responsible, according to the Yankee, for this opinion:

Before the day of the Church's supremacy in the world, men were men, and held their heads up, and had a man's pride, and spirit and independence; and what of greatness and position a person got, he got mainly by achievement, not by birth. But then the Church came to the front... and she was wise, subtle, and knew more than one way to skin a cat—or a nation; she invented "divine right of things" and propped it up... with the Beatitudes—wrenching them from their good purpose to make them fortify an evil one; she preached (to the commoner) humility, obedience to superiors, the beauty of self-sacrifice... and she introduced heritable ranks and aristocracies and taught all the Christian populations of the earth to bow down to them and worship them.45

The Yankee is not explicitly anti-Christian; he only opposes a united Church, which he understands in purely political terms:

I was afraid of a united Church; it makes a mighty power, the mightiest conceivable, and then when it by and by gets into selfish hands, as it is always bound to do, it means death to human liberty and paralysis to human thought.46

be June 21 but is still thought by Arthur to be one day earlier than scheduled. In every respect there is something wrong with the times involved in the eclipse incident, and this adds to the dreamlike quality of the whole. One cannot just accept the explanation that Twain erred in writing this section—the whole question of the timing of the eclipse is so central to the plot here that even a much less careful writer than Twain would be unlikely to commit such errors unintentionally. Also consider: "Twain most probably knew about the very popular King Solomon's Mines (1885) which got further publicity from an argument over whether an eclipse that its heroes exploited the way Hank did was astronomically on time." [Louis Budd, Mark Twain: Social Philosopher (Bloomington, Ind.: University of Indiana, 1962), p. 134.]

46 Ibid., p. 77.
If the Yankee is to free the people from their bondage to the nobility and found a republic, he must educate them. Thus for the Yankee the "beginnings of civilization" consist in the beginnings of enlightenment. After establishing a patent office, the Yankee founds his industries, schools, and communications systems in secret.

I stood with my hand on the cock, so to speak, ready to turn it on and flood the midnight world with light at any moment. But I was not going to do the thing in that sudden way... The people could not have stood it; and, moreover, I should have had the Established Roman Catholic Church on my back in a minute.47

Again the Yankee brags of his power only to retract. He has laid the foundations but only that. He must temporize in order to let his civilization "sink in" before he comes out into the open. So he accedes to court pressure and embarks upon a journey of knight-errantry in the company of Demoiselle Alisande la Carteloise. The Yankee's first trip in search of adventures provides the occasion for the most happy and open humor of the novel. Nevertheless, this "frivolous" trip gives rise to the second much more serious "fact-finding" tour with the king, because incidents on the first trip force the Yankee to question some of the assumptions upon which his projected reform rests.

His breakfast with the "freemen" challenges his ability to persuade the people of the, to him, obvious superiority of a republic to the present monarchy; and this demonstrated inability to persuade has two consequences. For the first time the Yankee admits the need for violence and terror; the nobles will not relinquish their power voluntarily. (The Yankee's deepest secret was his military academy.) Second and more important, the Yankee is forced to account for the resistance of the people to his "popular" teaching. Up to this point, he had looked at the Arthurians as less than men, as "white Indians," "rabbits," or "worms,"—in a word, as stupid. They are "stupid," because they lack the thirteen hundred years of education the Yankee possesses, but they are not incapable of learning. Thus if he presents them with the modern understanding of things, they will, of course, immediately see its advantages. They are men and will listen to reason. This proves not to be the case—at least over the short run. At the castle of Morgan le Fay the Yankee learns, moreover, that an obviously degenerate member of the nobility can be extremely attractive, can even evoke his compassion. Morgan is beautiful and chatters gaily along. She evokes the Yankee's admiration, especially after she flatters him. As a result he attempts to explain her resistance to his "sense" and thus far to excuse her depravity:

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 merely heredity and training.48

47 Ibid.
48 Ibid., p. 150.
Thus the Yankee moves from the politics of the Enlightenment to the romantic, revolutionary politics originating in the writings of Jean Jacques Rousseau. (The Yankee states his intention to hang Morgan anyway two paragraphs later.) Reason is not natural. On the contrary, men are completely malleable, which means, however, that they are equal potentially and can, therefore, be made equal again. His task is much more difficult than he first imagined, since it requires eradicating "inherited opinions" and habits. Once achieved, his feat (and so his renown) will be so much greater, for he will have changed not merely men's opinions but the men themselves.

As a result of his first journey, the Yankee decides that he must see the country for himself, so he and Sandy join a group of pilgrims. In this manner we are introduced to the group of chapters concerning the Yankee's activities in the Valley of Holiness, which form the center of the novel. Here he gives his second great performance as a magician.49 The Yankee again uses his practical knowledge of the principles of nature to fix the well (he had used a lightning rod to detonate the explosion of Merlin's domicile); but he "dresses up" his performance by means of his knowledge of the art (technology) of war with flares and explosions to make the natural look supernatural.50 Again he competes with and vanquishes Merlin. This renewed competition would seem to be a product of petty spite on the part of the Yankee did we not see his power almost immediately challenged by another, unnamed magician, whose word is preferred to that of the Yankee by the monks and others, despite the Yankee's so recent demonstration of power. Neither he nor his power can make a lasting impression on the Arthurians, so the Yankee has to prove himself again and again.

Incidents in the Holy Valley thus point back to the problem the Yankee posed in Chapter 8. In repairing the fountain, the Yankee demonstrates both superior force and superior knowledge, but he cannot maintain his preeminence; and as a result, he cannot maintain himself in power. The impression the Yankee's power makes on the people is so fleeting because they cannot understand it. For the Arthurians, power has either a good or an evil source; that is, there is no power that is "morally neutral." Thus the abbot warns the Yankee: "And see thou do it with enchantments that be holy, for the Church will not endure that work in her cause be done

49 If one disregards the eclipse over which the Yankee had no control, the first test of his power was blowing up Merlin's tower in response to Merlin's spreading of rumors casting doubt upon the enduring character of the Yankee's magical abilities.

50 Cf. ibid., pp. 212-213: "When you are going to do a miracle for an ignorant race, you want to get in every detail that will count; you want to make all the properties impressive to the public eye... and play your effects for all they are worth. I know the value of these things, for I know human nature. You can't throw too much style into a miracle."
by devil’s magic.” The Yankee agrees to work only with God’s creations, but he proceeds to use techniques of war and destruction as well as to pronounce the name of the ineffable. To the Yankee, all power is natural and thus morally neutral.

Arthur awakens reverence where the Yankee does not. The Yankee explains the people’s worship of the king and nobility as a product of the machinations of the Church, which invented “divine right of things” in order to support the rule of a hereditary aristocracy. To the Yankee, the Church merely constitutes a “political machine.” Although the Yankee desires “reverence,” he does not understand it or its source: he has never truly revered anything himself. To him religious belief consists of mere superstition. But he sees in Arthur’s realm, for example in the “king’s evil,” that this belief has very real effects. As a result of his experience with the “superstitions” of the Arthurians, he comes increasingly to believe that it is necessary in politics to deceive, to “dress up.” It is the only way, the Yankee surmises, that the Arthurian people will understand him; but, of course, they do not really understand his work when they understand it as magic. Thus the Yankee moves decisively away from the “Enlightenment” position with which he explicitly began.

The move is, nevertheless, somewhat natural. Early in his narrative, the Yankee refers to the “circus side” of his nature, which stands in tension with his calculating “sense” and urges a different kind of politics:

The thing that would have best suited the circus side of my nature would have been to resign the Boss-ship and get up an insurrection and turn it into a revolution; but I knew that the Jack Cade or the Wat Tyler who tries such a thing without first educating his materials up to revolution grade is almost absolutely certain to get left.

What the Yankee calls the “circus side of his nature” is connected in his mind with the Arthurian regime; he supposes Sir Kay to be a fellow from the circus at their first encounter; and the longer the Yankee remains in King Arthur’s court, the stronger this side of his nature becomes. We see him endure the cruelty and harshness of slavery months longer than necessary for the sake of making a “picturesque” escape, and then

51 Ibid., p. 195.
52 Cf. ibid., p. 149: “Concentration of power in a political machine is bad; and an Established Church is only a political machine; it was invented for that; it is nursed, cradled, preserved for that. . . .”
53 The Yankee’s frame of mind has been well expressed in a recent study: “The invasion of technique desacralizes the world in which man is called upon to live. For technique nothing is sacred, there is no mystery, no taboo. . . . Technique worships nothing, respects nothing. It has a single role: to strip off externals, to bring everything to light, and by rational use to transform everything into means. . . . Technique denies mystery a priori. The mysterious is merely that which has not yet been technized.” [Jacques Ellul, The Technological Society (New York: Vintage, 1964), p. 142.]
54 Connecticut Yankee, p. 108.
recaptured because he chose a "picturesque" way of evading the officer rather than a simple one. "[I]t is the crying defect of my character."

If reason is not natural and if men are therefore completely products of their training, the Yankee as that product of thirteen hundred years more education is certainly superior to all the Arthurians and so definitely entitled to rule them. After his performance at the Holy Fountain, he concludes:

When I started to the chapel, the populace uncovered and fell back reverently to make a wide way for me, as if I had been some kind of superior being—and I was. I was aware of that.

The Yankee comes to regard the Arthurians less and less as men like himself; and his inhuman view of them very largely determines his later inhumane treatment of them.

III. King Arthur's Court

I... expose to the world only my trimmed and perfumed and carefully barbered public opinions and conceal carefully, cautiously, wisely my private ones.

_A Connecticut Yankee_ reminds one of nothing so much as Tocqueville's _Democracy in America_. The parallels between the two works are numerous and deep; they range from the general themes of each—the comparison of democratic and aristocratic political orders—to the formats of the books. In the one an aristocrat visits the democratic country par excellence, seeking there "the image of democracy itself"; in the other the American democrat visits the feudal aristocracy par excellence. One mirrors the other even to such details as an opening invocation, more or less ironical, to progress or providence. More particularly to our immediate point, the two books use an identical technique in revealing their respective, though differing, evaluation of aristocracy. According to a recent study of the French thinker:

Tocqueville's judgment of aristocracy is only gradually disclosed in the Democracy. In the introduction he observes that "the nobles, placed high as they were above the people, could take that calm and benevolent interest in their fate which the

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55 Ibid., p. 376. This "circus side" seems to be not merely a peculiarity of the Yankee but seems to belong to his world, as we see in Tom Sawyer. There is a great deal of truth in James M. Cox's suggestion that the Yankee is Tom Sawyer grown up (op. cit., pp. 137, 220). Tom, too, assimilates the feudal past and the circus, the showy; and the Yankee's "picturesque escape" calls to mind the concluding sequence in _Huckleberry Finn_ where Tom devises an elaborate scheme to free the already free Jim.


shepherd feels toward his flock..." This highly favorable judgment is qualified later:

“When an aristocracy governs, those who conduct the affairs of state are exempted, by their very station in society, from any want; content with their lot, power and renown are the only objects for which they strive; placed far above the obscure crowd, they do not always clearly perceive how the well-being of the mass of the people will redound to their own grandeur. They are not, indeed, callous to the sufferings of the poor; but they cannot feel those miseries as acutely as if they were themselves partakers of them.

“Provided that the people appear to submit to their lot,” the nobles take no further interest in improving their subjects' condition. Democracies tend to promote the interests of the people, but aristocracies have a “natural defect”, a “capital fault”, of tending to “work for themselves and not for the people.” With this judgment Tocqueville actually reverses his initial assessment; now, aristocratic shepherds are simply indifferent toward their charges, and incapable of perceiving the true condition of the people: “The men who compose [an aristocratic caste] do not resemble the mass of their fellow citizens; they do not think or feel in the same manner, and they scarcely believe that they belong to the same race. They cannot, therefore, thoroughly understand what others feel nor judge of others by themselves. . . . Feudal institutions awakened a lively sympathy for the sufferings of certain men, but none at all for the miseries of mankind.”

Tocqueville's presentation is germane to Twain's in a dual sense—both as to the method of revealing his judgment on the aristocracy and as to the substance of his argument. Twain’s reversal is, of course, the contrary of Tocqueville’s. Whereas Tocqueville primarily addresses a nation with strong aristocratic traditions, Twain speaks to “the image of democracy itself.” Each opposes the deep prejudices of his audience only after a great deal of preparation—and even then with reluctance and some obliqueness.

The most obvious reason, however, for the difficulty of extracting a complete teaching on the aristocracy consists in the fact that King Arthur's court is presented to us only through the Yankee's tale, and the Yankee is neither a sympathetic nor perhaps a fully understanding commentator. Nor is he without motives of his own in his reporting. Arthurian Britain

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59 One example of the Yankee's selective reporting and how it colors the presentation of the regimes: In Morgan's dungeon, the Yankee came upon a priest who was anxious to report the overzealousness of the torturer. "Something of this disagreeable sort was turning up every now and then. I mean, episodes that showed that not all priests were frauds and self-seekers, but that many, even the great majority, of those that were down on the ground among the common people, were sincere and right-hearted, and devoted to the alleviation of human troubles and suffering. Well, it was a thing which could not be helped, so I seldom fretted about it, and never many minutes at a time. . . . But I did not like it, for it was just the sort of thing to keep people reconciled to an Established Church" (*ibid.*, p. 148).
itself has no direct spokesman, nor could it, for the Arthurians are characterized by a very low level of self-consciousness. The Yankee reflects the Enlightenment, that is, the injection of philosophy into political life in contrast to the more "natural" untheoretical political understanding of the Arthurians. This difference accounts for one of the major artistic difficulties of the book. By using the Yankee as narrator, Twain was able to achieve unity in the novel and at the same time to exploit the prejudices of his readers. The Yankee as narrator thus presented great gains but it also created great difficulties for the proper completion of the comparison through a non-Yankee presentation of Arthur's court. To achieve this non-Yankee presentation, insofar as it is achieved, Twain had to rely heavily on action and had to leave much to the reader. Yet the asymmetry of the book is consistent with Twain's ultimate aims, to say nothing of his prudence, for those aims do not call for the same completeness in presentation of the Arthurians as is necessary of the Yankee.

On the one occasion when Arthur is moved to speak to the nature of his regime, he proves himself a theoretical ignoramus. "All places of honor and profit do belong," claims the king, "by natural right, to them that be of noble blood." Arthur, at least, accepts the condition set by Twain in the Preface of "taking the other tack," that is, abstracting from the claims of the divine. But the absurdity of his response, if not of his whole position, is manifest from the context. The Yankee has provoked Arthur's defense by challenging a "rule requiring four generations of nobility, or else the candidate is not eligible." The rule recognizes something for which Arthur's claim does not provide. "Them that be of noble birth" are not naturally so. Noble lines fail somewhere. How then do those who are not of noble blood become noble? The examiner's next question supplies the obvious answer:

By what illustrious achievement for the honor of the throne and state did the founder of your great line lift himself to the sacred dignity of the British nobility?

For service to throne and state, men are ennobled by the king whom they have served. Arthur's original claim of natural right by blood ac-

Likewise, the Yankee, apparently innocently, suppresses evidence of Arthur's moral excellence. For example, recounting the effects of the slave master's efforts to make Arthur more slavish and therefore more salable, the Yankee says: "to undertake to reduce the king's style to a slave's style—and by force—go to! it was a stately contract. Never mind the details—it will save me trouble to let you imagine them" (pp. 274-275).

To omit the "details" will perhaps "save the Yankee trouble" in more ways than one.

60 Ibid., p. 244.
61 Ibid., p. 243.
62 Ibid., p. 245.
tually points in two directions—the power of Arthur on the one hand, and the practice of the regime on the other. The claims of the nobles rest on the power of the king to elevate men above their fellows. The question of the origin of the nobility is ultimately the question of the king's origin. But there must also be a first king whose father was not a king. Since the king's and the aristocracy's explicit claim to rule rests on their ancestry, and since this ancestry must eventually fail them, the king and aristocrats must keep their origins unknown. At best the origins can be traced back to a race of gods, divine heroes, or in a Christian regime, to an appointment, direct or indirect, by God. Given natural assumptions, the truth about the origins is destructive to rule based on heredity. The first kings generally came into power by means of force and perpetuate their rule through religion, that is, given naturalistic assumptions, fraud. The first kings may be superior in a sense and so perhaps entitled to rule by nature, but they are not legitimate. Thus the Yankee, otherwise much less interested than the aristocrats in the past and tradition, recurrently calls our attention to the origins of the aristocracy. Arthur cannot account for his origins. As his beginning is defective, so is he a defective origin—we are reminded at the end of the novel that he has no legitimate heir. Despite the defective foundation of Arthur's regime, the king is, nevertheless, able to arouse and maintain the loyalty and respect of his people in a way the Yankee cannot. There is some wisdom and/or power in tradition. Arthur and his knights recognize the importance and need for a legitimate use of force, where the Yankee does not. For Arthur and his knights, the Yankee's competitive examination for entry into the army replaces an eminently practical test of their skills, the tournament.

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63 Twain does not explicitly refer to Arthur's origins in *A Connecticut Yankee* except implicitly to incorporate Malory's account through Merlin's tales and predictions; and in Malory, Arthur's legitimacy in several senses is questioned.

64 Given Twain's abstraction from the divine, the argument raised by, for example, Robert Filmer, *Patriarch*, ed. Peter Laslett (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1949), on the basis of *Genesis* is not available here to Arthur.


66 Thus for the Yankee, kings and nobles are no more than frauds and thieves; but precisely for that reason, they exert an attraction similar to that of a circus side show. (Frauds might be considered exceedingly clever businessmen.) The comic equivalent of this is to be seen in the Duke and the Dauphin of *Huck Finn*. The Yankee admits that Americans are particularly attracted by titles (*Connecticut Yankee*, pp. 65-66).

67 Ibid., pp. 62, 103, 237.

68 Here again, by abstracting from the divine or pious element in the Arthurian regime, Twain makes that regime even harsher: God was supposed to guarantee that justice triumphed in trials by battle. The Yankee's desire to substitute competence in military science, that is, a strictly rationalized criterion, for Arthur's concern for individual merit as shown in the tournaments and other war games, reflects not only an irrational application of an irrelevant technique on the part
rules of the tournament, moreover, put conventional limitations upon competition for honor and prestige in addition to the restrictions placed by the Christian faith upon its knights. The difference in the modes of competition points to a more general difference between Arthur and the Yankee politically. Where Arthur looks to the four-generation rule, a tradition, as a source of consent and legitimacy, the Yankee looks to nature, in particular the natural right and ability of each man to rule himself.

The Yankee undertakes his second journey to show Arthur the true situation of his subjects, to extend Arthur's sentiments and sympathies, and thus to further the democratic revolution, perhaps to foster a "revolution from above." Arthur indeed is touched—at least momentarily. Yet the chief lesson of the trip concerns Arthur's greatness. On the grounds of natural equality, slavery constitutes the worst abuse of the Arthurian regime. A king who becomes a slave—what better way to show the merely conventional character of slavery and nobility. The Yankee summarizes the results of the test:

I had found it a sufficiently difficult job to reduce the king's style to a peasant's style, even when he was a willing and anxious pupil; now then, to undertake to reduce the king's style to a slave's style—and by force—go to! it was a stately contract. Never mind the details—it will save me trouble to let you imagine them. I will only remark that at the end of a week there was plenty of evidence that lash and club had done their work well; the king's body was a sight to see—and to weep over; but his spirit?—why, it wasn't even phased.89

At the smallpox hut the Yankee and Arthur confront the harsh reality of the life of the commoners that the Yankee criticized in his breakfast conversation with the freemen. Yet the same incident proves Arthur's true nobility. Hank, who has had smallpox and thus has nothing to fear, urges Arthur, who has not, to leave. Arthur refuses: "[I]t were shame that a king should know fear, and shame that belted knight should withhold his hand where there be such as need succor. Peace, I will not go."70 The Yankee's admiration reaches a peak:

Here was heroism at its last and loftiest possibility, its utmost summit; this was challenging death in the open field unarmed, with all the odds against the challenger, no reward set upon the contest, and no admiring world in silks and cloth-of gold to gaze and applaud; and yet the king's bearing was as serenely

of the Yankee, but also introduces a whole other understanding of the nature and meaning of war and fighting. That feudalism did not use rationalized military methods is not so much a product of stupidity or backwardness as of a very different concept of the purpose of war.

89 Ibid., p. 355.

70 Ibid., p. 282. In contrast, the Yankee seems to feel shame only about things relating to sex. Cf. ibid., pp. 32, 69, 88, 100, 138, 183, 197-198.
brave as it had always been in those cheaper contests where knight meets knight in equal fight and clothed in protecting steel. He was great now, sublimely great.71

Just as incidents on the second journey reveal Arthur's true nobility, so they prove the inadequacy of the Yankee's political understanding. The three chapters depicting the Yankee's visit with Marco parallel those describing his encounter with Morgan. Again there is a meal followed by conversation. Where the Yankee (or Sandy for him) first impressed and then subdued Morgan with his name (his reputation) and subsequently that of Arthur, here he uses only money. Unlike a name, money is neither personal nor intimately related to individual behavior. Since it is alienable and the right to its possession is often unclear, it easily becomes a source of envy and resentment. It does not give its possessor inherent superiority or authority over otherwise equal men. When the Yankee fails to convince the small company of the superiority of his economy with reason, he resorts to force and fraud in the form of a threat. The threat backfires. The Yankee can claim to have authority on the basis of his superior knowledge, a possession of the few, but when the confrontation becomes a matter of force, he and the king must eventually cede to the power of the many. Traveling incognito, the Yankee and king deprive themselves of both name and position in society. They are strangers, and when the Yankee attacks the existing order, they, as a result, come into a state of nature vis-à-vis that society, which hunts them down as dangerous threats to its existence and sells them as slaves in exchange for sparing their lives.72

Twain shows here that the Yankee and the Arthurian commoners are, in fact, very much alike in both their character and their concerns. The Yankee has difficulty persuading them of his position not so much because of their "training" as the fact that men do not always and immediately listen to reason; and one reason that they do not is that they are not only accustomed to but also take pride in their own way of doing things. The Yankee misunderstands the lesson of his encounter with Morgan, because he overestimates the power of reason, and as a result he does not recognize the role of either law or force in political society. He does not understand the role of law and/or tradition because of his theoretical position, which, as expressed in the Connecticut Constitution, for example, appeals to nature against convention. But the appeal to nature that Twain indicates in the Marco scenes constitutes an appeal to the force

71 Ibid., p. 284. Cf. A. Kojève, Introduction to the Reading of Hegel (New York: Basic Books, 1969), and Tocqueville, op. cit. II., p. 245. In understanding and evaluating both Arthur's courage and the Yankee's admiration of it, it is important to note the irrational aspects of Arthur's act. He endangers his own life—that of the king—and thus the stability of the regime completely unnecessarily. The Yankee could have brought the sick men down without endangering anyone.

Cf. Aristotle, Ethics III, where "courage" is presented as the lowest of the virtues and its place as, in a sense, "threshold of the virtues" elucidated.

72 John Locke, The Second Treatise of Civil Government, IV.
of the multitude standing behind the consent. (In order to retain their privileges, we learn, the Arthurian nobles have forbidden the commoners to bear arms.) The Yankee's unwillingness to recognize the violence in human nature and the need, therefore, to restrain men with force at times is related, obviously, to his easy conclusion (particularly in the case of Morgan) about the malleability of nature. But there are deeper grounds for the Yankee's lack of any substantive understanding of what human nature might be. If one can speak of a substantively defined human nature, it becomes very difficult to believe in continual progress or, for that matter, to maintain the absolute degeneracy of the past with respect to the present. And if one question progress, one must question the legitimacy and viability of the Yankee's project, especially in light of his own faulty understanding of the grounds and revolutionary implications of that project. To be sure, the Yankee does receive support for his conclusion about the importance of heredity (heredity here understood in an almost Lamarckian sense of inherited opinions and place in society) and training during his second journey in the person of Arthur, who proves his nobility as a slave. There is, however, a decisive difference between recognizing the importance of education and concluding that education is everything. After the knights rescue Arthur and the Yankee from the hangman's noose and the commoners go down on their knees before the ragged king they had hooted and jeered but a moment before, even the Yankee thinks to himself that "there is something peculiarly grand about the gait and bearing of a king, after all." Arthur's performance as a slave thus finally forces the Yankee to retract his earlier endorsement of a commoner's statement:

He said he believed that men were about all alike, and one man as good as another, barring clothes. He said he believed that if you were to strip the nation naked and send a stranger through the crowd, he couldn't tell the king from a quack doctor, nor a duke from a hotel clerk.74

The Yankee's growing awareness of the superiority of Arthur is paralleled by a growing awareness of the inferiority of the commoners. "Arthur's people were of course poor material for a republic." But he finds this condition to be neither necessary nor by accident; they are poor material, "because they have been debased so long by monarchy."76

73 Connecticut Yankee, p. 382.
74 Ibid., p. 157.
75 Ibid., p. 237.
76 Ibid. The Yankee expands on this theme while trying to teach Arthur to bear himself like a peasant. "Your soldierly stride, your lordly port—these will not do. You stand too straight, your looks are too high, too confident. The cares of a kingdom do not stoop the shoulders, they do not droop the chin, they do not depress the high level of the eye-glance, they do not put doubt and fear in the heart and hang out the signs of them in slouching body and unsure step. It is the sordid cares
The commoners are as they are (and they are factually inferior), not by nature, but because they have been trained, by the circumstances of their lives if nothing else, to be so.

Above all else, the Yankee's reforms aim at instilling this missing manliness; in his factories the Yankee intends to turn "groping and grubbing automata into men." All the other education of a more technical sort is subordinated to this aim. There is the following difficulty, however. The Yankee himself and those he has trained in his Man-Factory have in fact been raised just as the Yankee wished. Neither he nor they have the manliness of the aristocracy. The Yankee praises Arthur most highly for his courage—because the Yankee-narrator lacks precisely that virtue. Like the commoners of Arthur's realm, the Yankee builds his life on the ground of comfort seeking, and thus fundamentally on the fear of death. The Yankee admires Arthur because Arthur is free from that burden that rules the Yankee's life. Manliness requires the overcoming of the fear of death. What more it may require, and how courage is related to other virtues, is not, or only imperfectly, presented in the novel, for the Yankee cannot help but be dazzled by the courage of the Arthurian nobles and thus sees little further.

The Yankee is never able to understand the Arthuriens' virtue, and most especially he is never able to understand the relation between their "manliness" or "heroism" and their political regime. He wishes to institute a regime that might be called a universal aristocracy on the foundation of the rights of man and equality, rather than on the basis of the rigid class system of Arthurdom. The Yankee's failure points to the need to raise the question of why the aristocratic regime is necessary to produce aristocratic virtue—anther way of raising the question of the limits of politics. As with the nature of nobility, the Yankee both sees the question

of the lowly born that do these things. You must learn the trick: you must imitate the trademarks of poverty, misery, oppression, insults, and the other several and common inhumanities that sap the manliness out of a man and make him a loyal and proper and approved subject and a satisfaction to his masters" (ibid., pp. 274-275).

77 Ibid., p. 147. There is a delightful irony in the fact that the Yankee makes this statement with respect to Hugo, who has just braved not only the rack but eternal damnation in order to spare his wife and child.

78 For instance, the Yankee, unlike Arthur, had no difficulty carrying himself like a peasant, or a proper slave. Both in word and deed the Yankee shows that he is more like the commoners than the nobility. His difficulties with his armor, for example, led him to distinguish himself from the knights in an important respect: "but as for me, give me comfort first, and style afterward."

Even more explicitly, at Marco's the Yankee states: "The King got his cargo aboard, and then, the talk not turning upon battle, conquest, or iron-clad duel, he dulled down to drowsiness and went off to take a nap. . . . And the rest of us soon drifted into matters near and dear to the hearts of our sort—business and wages, of course" (ibid., p. 323).
—and its answer—and he doesn’t. The Yankee is certainly not blind to certain ethical, that is, character, correlates of the political regime. For example, he easily relates the nobility’s cruelty, insensitivity, and “blunted feelings” toward the commoners to the political order.

One need but to hear an aristocrat speak of the classes that are below him to recognize... the very air and tone of the actual slaveholder; and behind these are the slaveholder’s spirit, the slaveholder’s blunted feeling. They are the result of the same cause in both cases: the possessor’s old and inbred custom of regarding himself as a superior being. 79

The Yankee does not see how that “old and inbred custom of regarding themselves as superior beings” produces the nobles’ virtue as well as their cruelty. Aristocrats require a class beneath them embodying a baseness to which they cannot stoop. Thus Arthur, in his most eloquent self-revelation, said, “It were shame for belted knight to show fear...” What especially, or at least initially, must differentiate the exceptional from the common is the negation of the strongest drive of the many, the overcoming of comfort seeking and the fear of death.

Training can, Twain shows, achieve a great deal; but training does not extinguish human nature. That contempt for mere human life necessary to produce the nobles’ courage also produces their cruelty. They treat the commoners as “swine” because they do not perceive that the commoners are men like themselves. Aristocrats think they are superior by nature when they are, in fact, superior as a result of an essentially conventional class structure. Insofar as the aristocrats’ manliness rests upon this class structure, the Yankee’s dream of creating a universal aristocracy is illusory. But insofar as this class distinction rests on convention rather than nature, it is fundamentally unjust. Twain is no romantic. Arthurian class differentiation comes to sight first and most massively as cruelty through a contraction of the natural source of compassion. One advantage of the rigid class system lies in the limitations it puts upon political expectations; that is, such an order will not generate a “politics of hope” that seeks to raise all men. But the effect of the Yankee’s recognition of the real virtue of the Arthurian knights upon his political ambition is precisely the reverse. It frees him from the only remaining restraint upon his ambitions, the moderating, if low caution imposed by his calculating and somewhat fearful reason.

The Yankee seeks to replace what he sees to be arbitrary distinctions

79 Ibid., p. 234. Emphasis added. The Yankee here echoes Tocqueville’s final account of the aristocracy: “The men who compose [an aristocratic caste] do not resemble the mass of their fellow citizens; they do not think or feel in the same manner and they scarcely believe that they belong to the same race. They cannot, therefore, thoroughly understand what others feel, nor judge of others by themselves” (Alexis de Tocqueville, op. cit. II, pp. 172-173).
among men with the general principle of human compassion. But in the scene at Morgan le Fay's, where the theme of compassion is most evident, Twain indicates the difficulties with compassion as a principle of political society. To relieve suffering, the Yankee freed from the queen's dungeons at least one guilty man and many others whose guilt was quite possible. When Sandy reveals the Yankee's identity in order to save the old grandmother of the slain page boy, the Yankee observes that:

... the poor queen was so scared and humbled that she was even afraid to hang the composer without first consulting me. I was very sorry for her—indeed, anyone would have been, for she was really suffering; so I was willing to do anything that was reasonable; and had no desire to carry things to wanton extremities. I therefore considered the matter thoughtfully, and ended by having the musicians ordered into our presence to play that Sweet Bye and Bye again, which they did. Then I saw that she was right, and gave her permission to hang the whole band.80

Dedicated to the relief of suffering as suffering, compassion does not distinguish among the sources of that suffering. The Yankee's compassion depends as much upon his own identification with one group of men as against another as does the injustice he attributes to Arthur. For example, the Yankee leaves one prisoner locked in Morgan's dungeons—a nobleman. At the beginning of his tale he attempts to explain away the ability of the Arthurian nobles to bear extreme pain stoically by calling them "White Indians."81 Finally, he can justify his slaughter of the entire Arthurian nobility only by denying them membership in the British nation. The Yankee's compassion is, moreover, very much related to his comfort seeking. He frees Hugo from the rack, not because Hugo is innocent—he is not—but because the Yankee admits that he, the Yankee, cannot stand to hear Hugo's groans and so even vicariously bear the pain of torture. The Yankee's compassion, and by extension the compassion inspiring a great deal of modern politics, Twain indicates, is the product not of the strength but of the weakness of modern man.82 Ultimately the Yankee's attempt to replace justice with compassion depends on a commitment to the possibility of overcoming pain and so his technology.

The most extreme instance of cruelty we see in the entire novel is nothing imposed on the people by the Arthurian characters. Rather it is the horrible war the Yankee wages at the end of the novel. Using the most modern and scientific weapons, the Yankee kills the whole of the feudal nobility. In a war professedly waged against barbarism and inhumanity, the Yankee leads us to wonder whether even a political cause that takes its bearings specifically against cruelty can avoid being cruel, whether cruelty can ever be exorcised from political life. The Yankee and his pupil Clarence commit an even graver crime against humanity in the

80 Connecticut Yankee, p. 140.
81 Ibid., p. 20.
spirit in which they undertake the final battle. They contemplate mass killing with such matter-of-factness that they discuss the subject primarily in terms of the technical efficiencies of their particular arrangement while at the same time they exult in the fact that this killing can be done in such an efficient manner. This technique enables the Yankee to avoid facing the consequences of his deeds; it thus feeds his moral and physical cowardice. His "detached" attitude toward mass murder is a product, moreover, of his adoption of equality as the only political principle, that is, an abstraction from substantive distinctions. Where he once attributed absolute value to men, he now attributes none whatsoever. While he initially stated, "I stood with my hand on the cock, so to speak, ready to turn it on and flood the midnight world with light at any moment," he finally "touched a button and set fifty electric suns afame on the top of one precipice" as a prelude to flooding his now artificially lit world first with water and then with corpses. So the dream becomes nightmare.

IV. Mark Twain

Through the conclusion of the novel, Twain forces his readers to question the very possibility of progress. Upon his return to the nineteenth century, the Yankee renounces his whole attempt, not merely the timing of it. His forces are destroyed not by their feudal enemies but by the rotting carnage they and their weapons had created; they were killed (as he, too, would have been) by their own wastes. The Yankee's enterprise does not fail as a step on the road to a better life. His project simply fails; his new order is not a viable political condition.

83 The ending of Connecticut Yankee foreshadows not only nuclear weapons and their potential for destruction but even more strikingly the technological frame of mind as found in the Nazi "final solution." Cf. Hannah Arendt, Eichmann in Jerusalem (New York: Vintage, 1964), and Jacques Ellul, op. cit.
84 Connecticut Yankee, p. 443.
85 Miss Gladys Carmen Bellamy, op. cit., the one critic who has tried to view the ending as an integral part of the novel, finds that "the outcome of the book shows that so-called 'progress' has no real chance against superstition; but, beyond that, it shows that if real progress is to be made, another sort of advancement must keep pace with technical advancement" (p. 314). She continues: "Instead of the popular interpretation as solely a celebration of American progress, the book may conceivably be viewed as a fictional working out of the idea that a too-quick civilization breeds disaster." Miss Bellamy is properly impressed with the ending of the book. She sees, as most other critics do not, that in writing a conclusion in which the Yankee and his whole enterprise fail, Twain meant that ending to bear some relation to the Yankee and his scheme for reform. But she refuses to go one step further and recognize that the book speaks not only of the "rate of progress" but questions the very possibility of progress itself. The Yankee is not destroyed by mindless superstition or "too-quick civilization" but only by the wastes created by his own technology.
The collapse of the Yankee’s project at the end by no means leaves Arthur’s intact. Twain incorporated, by directly quoting, the tale of the concluding battles from Malory. Arthurian England collapses as a result of its own defects without the direct interference of the Yankee. Arthur’s rule can easily be compared to that of a family; the nobles rule on the basis of their “blood.” The Arthurian regime would seem, therefore, to be in a certain sense “natural.” But if Arthur’s rule is paternal, the mother is absent except in the form of the “Mother Church,” which is, by definition, a super-, if not un-natural spouse; and if, on the contrary, Arthur’s relation to his nation is, as the Yankee states, like that of a mother to her own children and others, the father is in heaven, if not absent from earth altogether. Both aristocratic households that the Yankee visits are out of order: In Camelot there is the affair between Guinevere and Lancelot, and in his sister’s abode, the wife Morgan rules King Uriens. Arthur himself is of questionable legitimacy and his only “heir” is the illegitimate product of incest. Beginning with the separation of the slave girl and child from the father, we view a series of mothers and babes bereft of paternal care as a result of a combination of superstition and law. In the regime built upon the family structure, the family is disordered. Knights must leave their families to go in search of adventure, and the purest of them, Galahad, is chaste. This “natural” regime stands on a supernatural or unnatural foundation. Behind its reflection in the knight stands the monk.86

Generative nature does not provide a sufficient foundation for political rule. King Arthur rules not as the father of the family but as the representative of the divine Father. Arthur’s is the government about which the Yankee reflects:

Unlimited power is the ideal thing when it is in safe hands. The despotism of heaven is the one absolutely perfect government. An earthly despotism would be the absolutely perfect earthly government, if the conditions were the same, namely, the despot the perfectest individual of the human race, and his lease of life perpetual. But as a perishable perfect man must die, and leave his despotism in the hands of an imperfect successor, an earthly despotism is not merely a bad form of government, it is the worst form that is possible. 87

Arthur’s regime is modeled on the divine. Arthur’s rule is perhaps the rule of the “perfectest individual” and so just; but Arthur is still a man, hence perishable. Nature does not guarantee that good men have good sons; it does not guarantee that they have sons at all. Because kings do not necessarily have acceptable heirs, the succession comes into question, and war is the almost inevitable result.

Things may occur according to divine dispensation, but the human

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86 Cf. Matthew 10: 34-40; Mark 3: 31; Luke 14: 26-27; also cf. supra with regard to the general tendency of aristocracies or aristocrats both ancient and modern to seek to transcend human political limitations in imitation of the divine.

87 Connecticut Yankee, p. 78.
beings involved cannot know the intention of their Father and cannot, therefore, act accordingly. Given a belief in providence, success becomes the only criterion of political right. That is, in human terms the foundation of Arthurdom becomes mere force; and the injustice in the origins (or the tension between divine perfection and imperfect human nature) produces a necessary corruption at the heart of the regime. This corruption emerges first through a necessary confusion between the prerequisite of virtue and virtue itself. The Arthurians claim an excellence by nature that is, in fact, an excellence resulting from a certain kind of training; but that very training depends paradoxically upon the erroneous belief that aristocrats are better by nature. Yet the belief that aristocrats are simply better by nature tends to destroy their striving to live up to any of the extrinsic standards of virtue and hence to undermine the justice of their claim to rule. When the superiority of the nobles is no longer evident, the Arthurian regime must finally posit the rule of providence as a guarantee for the conflation of the natural aristocracy and the conventional aristocracy, of the given and the perfected—a rule of providence that in fact comes closer to the crude doctrine of providence ridiculed in Twain’s Preface than to the more sophisticated doctrines of theology. The Arthurian regime ignores the defective character of nature and thus, like the Yankee, depreciates the role of politics.

When the Yankee compares the justice of Arthur’s rule to that of a mother distributing milk to children in time of famine, he points, moreover, to a second kind of defect in the “natural” regime. The natural condition is one of scarcity. If one distributes the nation’s wealth evenly and equally in conditions of scarcity, all will be depressed economically, and as a result all will try to seize goods from others by force or fraud, whereas if one sternly imposes order and regulates economic production, a few men can live well and through their magnificence relieve the harsh bleakness of the general human condition. The cruelty and injustice of inequality arise partially from conditions of scarcity; a mother would, the Yankee suggests, distribute milk equally in times of plenty. The Yankee’s democracy depends, therefore, upon alleviating conditions of scarcity.

As scarcity accounts for some of the harshest aspects of the Arthurian regime, so technology provides the necessary condition for the worst abuses

88 “The king’s judgments wrought frequent injustices, but it was merely the fault of his training, his natural and unalterable sympathies. He was as unfitted for a judgeship as would be the average mother for the position of milk-distributor to starving children in famine-time; her own children would fare a shade better than the rest” (ibid., p. 234).

89 We should note in this respect the Yankee’s first action after gaining power: “the very first official thing I did, in my administration—and it was on the first day of it, too—was to start a patent office, for I know that a country without a patent office and good patent law is just a crab, and couldn’t travel any way but sideways or backwards” (ibid., p. 68).
of the Yankee's rule—his tyrannical use of both his physical and political power. The Yankee does not explicitly model his rule on that of God, but he does believe that he can overcome nature with his science and that this science makes him a "superior being." There is, in fact, a tension at the core of the Yankee's political project between the natural rights and equality of men he hopes to institute and his "supranatural" technological power to transform nature (and the ambition to which that power gives rise) similar to that between the divine and natural foundations of Arthurdom. If nature can be completely transformed by technology, the natural equality of men would no longer seem to provide a source of a moral standard for or restraint upon the Yankee's action. (When the Yankee finally declares the republic, it is, in the context, merely a declaration of war.)

Technology (both his "magic" and arts of war) seems to become the primary ground for the Yankee's action. But technology is only a means for the Yankee. He remains champion of reason to the very end:

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.90

Force is necessary because, the Yankee thinks he has learned, men believe what they are taught from birth; and these opinions are politically determined by the regime in power. The Arthurians as firmly believe that men are unequal as the Yankee believes they are equal. Conflict between the two regimes becomes inevitable; and thus Clarence tells the Yankee:

Well, if there hadn't been any Queen Guenevere, it wouldn't have come so early, but it would have come anyway. It would have come on your own account by and by; by luck, it happened to come on the Queen's.91

Because the Yankee still believes in the fundamental equality of men and their potential reasonableness, he cannot use force against them with a good conscience. He knows, as the Arthurians do not, that his "superiority" consists in technical knowledge in principle available to all men. Thus, toward the end of the novel, when his public project seems nearest completion, he seems to draw back. For example, he never admits any intention of unseating Arthur, even to himself, although that is required in order to fulfill his own ambition to become president of the republic. Although prepared for war, he wages it only when forced to defend his "civilization" from the interdict of the Church. Despite his statements about the malleability of nature and "inherited opinions," he is surprised when all but fifty-two boys desert him at the end. Clarence asks his boss:

"Did you think you had educated the superstition out of these people?"
"I certainly did think it."

90 Ibid., p. 386.
91 Ibid., p. 398.
"And in Its Wake We Followed"
*The Political Wisdom of Mark Twain*

"Well, then, you may unthink it... [they] were born in an atmosphere of superstition and reared in it.... We imagined we had educated it out of them; they thought so too; the Interdict woke them up...."

To the very end, the Yankee overestimates the "reasonableness" of human nature as well as his own abilities of persuasion.

Just as his public project seems nearest success, moreover, the Yankee discovers for the first time a private life that might satisfy him. He becomes a devoted husband and father and, as a result, virtually retires temporarily from public life into the confines of domesticity. Yet this retreat could be held responsible for the failure—at least the particular form of failure—of the Yankee’s public project. The Yankee’s new-found domesticity represents in part a response to his lessons about Arthurian nobility as well as the discovery of a dimension of life he had heretofore totally missed. Fundamentally, it reveals his bad conscience. Technology is only a means, and when the means destroys the very end it is to serve—humanity—it has to be abandoned.

Unlike both the Yankee and the Arthurians, Twain recognizes the limits of human nature. Both the Yankee and the Arthurians favor their own view of things, naturally, since they have no other, but neither set of opinions, Twain reveals, is simply true or rational. Both parties compete for status, whether defined in terms of money or honor—the terms are set by the opinions. The conjunction of this natural drive for precedence with the faulty understanding of most men makes political life necessary and yet limited in its possibilities. Most satisfaction for most men must be private. Twain affirms the goodness of family life both through his Yankee and in his critique of the Arthurian regime, which destroys the family by attempting to make it the foundation for political rule. Only in the family does the Yankee satisfy the desire for love and respect that initially propelled him into politics. Yet, as Twain shows in his critical presentation of the Arthurian regime, the family is not in itself sufficient. Because men are not perfect, they cannot simply love each other. The necessary underlay of force cannot be overcome by any regime, though both regimes presented here strive to do so. The danger is more serious with the modern regime, however, both because its political aspirations are more likely to lead it to desperate ventures and because its technological powers make those ventures destructive without precedent.

Twain is thus less concerned with an adjudication of the regimes than with using his understanding of political life to improve the regime within which he lives by reminding his readers of the limits human nature

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93 The illness of Hello-Central and the trip to France for the child’s health are the climactic events in the Yankee’s withdrawal of attention from political affairs in favor of domestic ones. His inattention and absence pave the way for his undoing.
Interpretation

ought to set on their political aspirations. Indeed, the oft-decried conjunction of humor and horror so characteristic of the novel comes from Twain's contrasting the claims of both regimes with the facts of human nature. The comical arises in the case of the Arthurian regime, because the nobles claim to be what they are not—superior by nature. In this respect, they are pretentious and deserving of the ridicule the Yankee and Twain heap upon them. The horrible arises because that injustice that makes the nobles what they are also makes the peasants what they are. Conversely, the Yankee is a source of comedy insofar as he, too, is pretentious. His pretentiousness is precisely his leveling or denial of excellence, and thus, much of what appears to be burlesque reflecting on the knights in fact reflects upon the Yankee and reflects comically precisely because the Yankee believes that he is deflating other pomposities and is thus superior. Similarly, the horrible side of the Yankee, in particular the ending of his tale, has its source in his denial of nature, which leads him to believe that anything is possible.

Yet, Twain indicates, a great deal is possible. The Yankee is conquered only by his own deadly power, but he is conquered. He is saved only by Merlin, the magician of words, who puts him to sleep and sends him back to the nineteenth century. Merlin, through his art, does the same thing that Twain does through his art in structuring this novel—he overcomes the limits of both space and time. In words and only in words is there, perhaps, hope. If the words of Malory and other romancers can make Twain and his Yankee dream, the words of Twain can perhaps awaken real Yankees by showing them where their civilization leads and thus giving them cause to reflect critically upon their enterprise, and by reminding them of the nature and conditions of human excellence. Technology has provided modern men with more power and more freedom to use it than ever contemplated earlier; they can now exercise their passions, particularly that for precedence, virtually without restraint (except the force of others). This is the problem: Those things—faith, honor (word and/or reputation), and scarce natural conditions—that formerly restrained men no longer operate effectively; and the modern substitute, law, does not serve, because to a man such as the Yankee, the law is always questionable. Compassion is too arbitrary and indistinct a criterion for politics. The only hope for self-control seems then to lie in self-criticism, which Twain may have furthered by presenting this gross image of the American Yankee.

But here we confront the heart of Twain's problem. How can a novelist reach such a man and shake him out of his self-satisfaction? In his Preface, Twain states explicitly that he abstracts from the question of the divine governance of the world. There is, however, another force abstracted from the tale as presented by the Yankee: This is the force of poetry or fiction. At the very beginning the Yankee announces that he is a man "without sentiment, i.e., poetry." There is little in the Yankee to which a poet may appeal with much hope of success if we, like the Yankee, identify poetry with romantic poetry. But where romantic poetry has no appeal
to the Yankee, humor does. His extreme reaction to the old joke of Sir Dinadan forces him to meet the challenge of Sir Sagramor; and his first act of tyrannical power following his victory in the tournament is to hang Sir Dinadan for publishing the same joke. Humor appeals to the Yankee through its novelty; like his own "practicality" and technology, it requires ever new devices to maintain its effect. It appeals also to his democratic instincts, not only because of its novelty, but because humor debunks. If humor is to debunk pretensions, is not one of the greatest pretensions of modern man the very view that he can or does live without pretensions? Twain also ridicules the Yankee, and thereby perhaps moderates him. Twain's sentiments on the importance of humor as a debunker and soberer are well-known and often cited. We suggest, however, that this is not a sufficiently deep understanding of Twain's humor. Humor, especially Twain's humor, depends on contrast, in particular contrast between the high and the low. Rather than being a debunking humor, Twain's humor is meant to restore the restraints on human passion by reminding men of their nature—both its heights and its depths. Whether Twain, despite his popularity, succeeded at this is a question indeed.
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